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*Beyond the Fitting Medium of Desire:  
Feminist Readings of Prose Writings by Men  
in the Romantic Period*

*Thesis submitted to the University of Glasgow*

*by Amanda Gilroy*

*in fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy*

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## Abstract

In this thesis I focus on the canonically-marginalized genre of non-fictional prose written by men during the period 1750-1850, and I argue that in this fluid genre, gender, too, is unstable. I trace the congruences between recent theories of "gynesis", that is, "the putting into discourse of 'woman'", and the use of the trope of woman in Romantic texts. Borrowing Shoshana Felman's rewriting of Freud's famous question, I ask of various texts, "what is femininity - *for men*?" The texts I consider (in Part II) are: Edmund Burke's A Philosophical Enquiry, Shelley's A Defence of Poetry and some of his shorter essays, Keats's Letters and De Quincey's essays, especially The English Mail-Coach, Suspiria de Profundis and material included in Recollections of the Lakes.

In my introductory material (Part I), I contextualize the readings that follow, first by surveying the ways in which feminist theory is changing the boundaries of Romanticism, and then by discussing the issues of gender, genre and gynesis. I pay special attention to the trope of fashion in critical discourse, which, I argue, displays the constructedness of gender, and inscribes the potential mobility, rather than the fixity, of gender positions.

For feminist writing, style matters: I have tried to enact in this study another aspect of "gynesis", that is, the creation of new feminist epistemologies that are subversive of patriarchal discourses of mastery. I read "improper[ly]", in Burke's terms, foregrounding moments of textual 'trouble'.

In Chapter Three, I analyze moments of masquerade and of the destabilization of the male gaze in Burke's Enquiry; I suggest that Burke speaks *through* femininity without appropriating it. In the following chapter, Shelley's use of the tropes of the mirror and the veil comes under scrutiny; I argue that, from a Lacanian perspective, these are the signifiers of a non-mastery that identifies Shelley with the feminine. Chapter Five deals with metaphors of the body in Keats's Letters, and in criticism of Keats's work; both discourses represent him as 'unweaned', as insufficiently distinguished from the (m)other. Finally, in Chapter Six, I listen to the language of flowers that blooms in De Quincey's texts and which figures the bisexuality of the subject.

My focus on the circulation of the meanings of femininity, as seen from a masculine perspective in these texts, reveals the fragility of sexual identities. The fascination with femininity throws masculinity into crisis. Desiring the other, these speakers transgress the positionalities defined as "masculine" or "feminine", revising, in the process, the very notion of 'otherness'. The issues of textual transvestism that I discuss make an issue of gender in romantic prose, filling in some detail on the new maps of Romanticism.

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*[An] attitude towards that which is critiqued, the giving of assent without excuse, so much that one inhabits its discourse - a short word for this might be 'love'.*

*Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*

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## Preface

[Freud's] question: "what is femininity?" in reality asks:  
 "what is femininity - for men?"

Shoshana Felman

Shoshana Felman's rereading of Freud suggests the difference it makes when one reads a male text from a female perspective ("Rereading Femininity" 21). To "read as a woman" (in Jonathan Culler's deconstructive sense)<sup>1</sup> is to read from the place of the other, to make visible the subjectivity of the woman critic - Felman's full question is "what does the question - 'what is femininity - *for men?*' - mean *for women?*"; but it is also, I would argue, to investigate the traces of otherness in the text, to problematize the construction of the male subject. Felman's insight into Freud could be applied to (at least) two other historical moments: Romanticism and late twentieth-century critical theory. In Acts of Inclusion, Michael Cooke argues that Romanticism produced "a breakdown in the grammar of opposites - and opposition - that had defined the situation of the sexes", with the intention of substituting a new ideal, "a male-*and*-female principle" where both modes of being were "*included* in each other" (xix). He claims that the "feminine" is "the crux of value in Romanticism". Cooke is not concerned with women writers or with actual women in the historical period, but rather with the "inclusion", or absorption, of feminine values in the male poet.<sup>2</sup> This concern with the feminine, with woman as trope, finds its contemporary analogue in the work of theorists such as Jacques Derrida and others who have appropriated and romanticized another version of the "feminine" - woman as absence, potentiality, the locus of a desire inexpressible in patriarchal terms, the 'nonknowledge' that eludes the master narrative - making of it a condition to which

men might aspire. Alice Jardine coins the term "gynesis" to name "the putting into discourse of 'woman'", that is, "the transformation of woman and the feminine into verbs at the interior of those narratives that are today experiencing a crisis in legitimation (Gynesis 25; I discuss this phenomenon, and the feminist critique of it, in more detail in Chapter Two).

In this thesis I attempt to combine my interest in Romanticism and in post-structuralist literary theory by analysing the trope(s) of woman, the figure on which these two discourses converge. My choice of texts has been influenced by feminist criticism which has foregrounded the question of marginality: many feminist critics, particularly in their analysis of women's writing, have turned away from high-literary forms to marginal genres - diaries, letters, journals, travel accounts and the like - as part of the project of making gender a central issue.<sup>3</sup> I focus on the canonically-marginalized genre of non-fictional prose written by men during the period 1750-1850, and I argue that in this fluid genre, gender, too, is unstable. This study maps what might be described as an episode in the genealogy of gynesis. I ask of various texts Felman's question, "what is femininity - *for men?*".

It is necessary that I should say something at the outset about my use of the terms "feminine", "female", "male", "masculine".<sup>4</sup> In common with most feminist critics, I use the terms feminine and masculine to refer to culturally-constructed gender differences, while female and male refer to biological differences. In terms of writing, masculine is often used to refer to writing which promotes closure and self-authority, while the feminine, according to Julia Kristeva, connotes a position of marginality (as a place from which to write, it is open to both males and females). Without getting involved here in the thorny post-structuralist problem of the signature,

when I say that my concern is with 'male' texts I do not mean to suggest that these texts necessarily uphold patriarchal values - indeed, I will contend in many instances that they are subversive of such values - but simply that they were written by men. In the following chapters, "woman" names both a trope and experiential figures, such as the woman reader, who reads from a feminist perspective. There remain slippages between the terms I use, both in my own and other texts, though I trust the particularities of context help to clarify matters. I have tried not to burden my text with an excessive use of inverted commas: the reader may perhaps silently supply them for these difficult gender terms. The most important point is that I have tried to avoid an essentialist approach, for I do not assume any clear continuity between the gender of a body and the gender of a text; indeed, I emphasize the culturally-fabricated nature of this connection, focussing more on the disjunctions than the continuities between these entities (disjunctions that are both historically and reader specific).

## Notes to Preface

Throughout this thesis, all italics are the author's and all ellipses mine, unless otherwise stated. Further references to a cited text will appear with page references after quotations and unless otherwise stated refer to the same text; passages without page references are from the last-cited page. A word - somewhat ironically placed here - about endnotes: I have used the notes as the place for the articulation of other voices; they function as gloss, as chorus, and as gestures towards 'elsewhere' (especially in Part Two). In them, I discuss issues related to, but not contained within the frame of, the text. I hope they will be read as interactive rather than merely secondary.

1. Jonathan Culler, On Deconstruction 64 (Culler is quoting Peggy Kamuf's formulations about women's writing in "Writing like a Woman").
2. In the "Postscript" to his text, Cooke turns briefly from Romantic poetry to Romantic prose, focussing on De Quincey's "impassioned prose", though he does not recur to the issue of the significance of the feminine. Leslie Brisman has recently developed Cooke's insights about gender and romanticism; see his article, "Maud: The Feminine as the Crux of Value".
3. New Historicism has effected a similar shift of critical attention: "in new historicism, distinctions between a privileged category of the literary and other, nonliterary forms of cultural practice no longer hold. New historicists read the texts of legal, political, historical, and popular-cultural discourse alongside literary texts, as well as the texts of such sociopolitical events as revolutions" (Nussbaum and Brown, "Revising Critical Practices" 20).
4. I should perhaps also say something about my use of the first person pronoun, which functions as a deliberate marker of particularity. Borrowing Benveniste's categories of *Histoire* and *Discours*, a feminist critical work might be likened to the discursive text, which inscribes a subject, a point of view, and a sense of an addressee, rather than the conventional historical text, which represses both the authorial "I" and the narratorial point of view, and offers a putatively objective account. I take up the question of feminist textual 'style' in Chapter Two.



*Part I*

## Chapter One

### Romantic Revisions: The Role of Feminist Theory in the Study of British Romanticism

In a recent article entitled "The Current Canon in British Romantic Studies", Harriet Kramer Linkin documents the results of a survey of American universities which she conducted in the fall of 1989, in which teachers of Romanticism were asked to identify the writers included in their Romanticism courses. The survey unsurprisingly demonstrates the continuing hegemony of the 'Big Six', though Linkin records that Mary Shelley, Dorothy Wordsworth, Jane Austen and Mary Wollstonecraft are strong contenders in an expanded Romanticism canon. Linkin reminds us that, apart from Austen, these writers "always suffer the potential ignominy of being treated as poor relations" (556), and their inclusion in Romanticism remains problematic, for various reasons which I will outline later. Significantly, though Romanticism has "masquerade[d] as a period" in English Studies (Linkin 556), it is, in fact, better described, *pace* Jerome McGann, as an ideology.<sup>1</sup> The Romantic Ideology is arguably a masculine ideology, underwriting the poetic and economic interests of the canonical male poets. The blindness of post-war Romantic Studies to the insights of feminist theory is grounded in the masculinist assumptions encoded in the work of Romanticism's most famous poets, and reproduced in the commentary of its best-known critics.<sup>2</sup> However, this dystopian narrative of canonical stability is not the whole story. The belated recognition of the gendered ideology of English Romanticism opens a space for resistance to the Romantic tropes which shore up patriarchal power, as well as the possibility of locating subversions of the Romantic

ideology - or an alternative ideology - in women's writing of the early nineteenth century.

This chapter is a survey of feminist readings of Romanticism.<sup>3</sup> It provides an introduction for my subsequent readings of male Romantic prose, placing them in the context of feminist redefinitions of the map of Romanticism. I suggest that the intersections of feminist theory and Romanticism, which have been taking place over the last fifteen years or so, may be mapped according to Elaine Showalter's influential paradigms of feminist criticism. The first type of criticism she outlines is 'the feminist critique', which "is concerned with *woman as reader* - with woman as the consumer of male-produced literature"; "Its subjects include the images and stereotypes of women in literature, the omissions of and misconceptions about women in criticism, and the fissures in male-constructed literary history" ("Toward a Feminist Poetics" 128). In addition, I invoke Judith Fetterley's famous figure, the "resisting reader", in my discussion of the feminist critique.

For the second critical approach, Showalter coins the term 'gynocritics' to describe criticism which focusses on "*woman as writer* - with woman as the producer of textual meaning, with the history, themes, genres, and structures of literature by women" (128). I will detail the increasing critical attention given to women writers during the period of Romanticism.

Finally, I consider a third position in current feminist approaches to Romanticism, which advocates the deconstruction of sexual difference, the dismantling of the hierarchical binary opposition masculine/feminine. Clearly, Kristeva's tripartite model of the development of feminism, outlined in her article "Women's Time", is pertinent here. I will return to Kristeva at the end of this

chapter; in the first two sections, however, I will make use of the clarity and familiarity of Showalter's paradigms.

\* \* \* \* \*

*He for Poetry only, she for the Poetry in him.*  
Taylor and Luria

"Whose heart does not stammer with the ecstasies of Keats's odes? Whose intellect is not stirred by the amorous insurrections of the Four Zoas?", asks Patricia Yaeger (Rev. of Romanticism and Feminism 499). She goes on to deflect the universalising tendency of these questions through the introduction of gender difference: "But what does this ecstasy mean for women? Can Keats's stammer and Blake's insurrections still be exalted by the feminist critic?". Yaeger directs our attention to the "uncomfortable role" that women have played in romantic poetry. The 'feminist critique' has analysed the oppressive images of femininity constructed by the male romantic poets, and a number of critics, following Judith Fetterley's vision of male-authored classics as texts which require the female reader to "identify against herself", have struggled to perceive the patriarchal "designs" of male texts (493,492). Irene Taylor and Gina Luria in their article "Gender and Genre: Women in British Romantic Literature" argue that women writers played a significant role in shaping the novel as a genre, but that "women's importance in Romantic poetry was not as writer, but rather muse for the male poet" (106); as they wittily put it, "He for Poetry only, she for the Poetry in him was ever the case" (115). As Taylor and Luria point out, women are often placed as "mirror image[s] of the poet", simultaneously functioning as inspiration and self-projection, providing a space where the yearnings of male subjectivity can be worked out. They remind us that "in Blake woman is the prophet's emanation", that William's sister Dorothy Wordsworth "'maintained for

[him] a saving intercourse / With [his] true self' and 'preserved [him] still / A poet'", and that Byron's Astarte is a figure for Manfred's form - "'She was like me in lineaments'" (116). To these one might add all those silent, sleeping or dead women addressed by Wordsworth and Coleridge (poems in which the unconsciousness of the 'other' demarcates the difference of the speaking subject), as well as the fairy figures of Imagination who lead Keats back to "[his] sole self", and Emilia in Shelley's "Epipsychidion", who is a blank page on which the poet may inscribe his desire to "pierce / Into the height of love's rare Universe," (ll.588-89), so blank indeed that we never know the colour of her hair or eyes.<sup>4</sup>

Taylor and Luria's article dates from 1977, and though there was a relatively long gestation period before a more concerted feminist critique of Romanticism in the late 80's, several critics do take up their concerns. Margaret Homans, in her study Women Writers and Poetic Identity (which deals with the poetry of Dorothy Wordsworth, Emily Bronte and Emily Dickinson) outlines the "masculine tradition" within which women were denied activity and creativity and were located as passive, quasi-natural objects, "objectified as the other" and made "property" by the male subject (37). Like Homans, Meena Alexander is concerned primarily with women writers, though she devotes some space in her book Women in Romanticism to arguing that Romanticism is the realm of the transcendent male ego, which allows the female only as "an otherness to which desire could be directed" (22). Anne Mellor divides the influential anthology Romanticism and Feminism into three sections, the first two of which are significantly entitled "Silencing the Female" and "Writing the Female". In his essay in the first section, Alan Richardson exposes the subtle ways in which romantic poets colonise femininity. He argues that the shift from an 'Age

of Reason' to an 'Age of Feeling' involved the male poets in a process of revalorising traditional female qualities such as emotional intensity, empathy, and intuition, and entailed a new perspective on previously denigrated bodily acts, such as breastfeeding and crying. Although this may seem to subvert conventional ideals of masculinity, in fact, Ross suggests, men resurrected androgenous fantasies in order to colonise traditionally female domains. He tracks the Romantic tropes of mother and child, especially the image of nursing, which shadow the dim regions of male identification with the mother, in order to demonstrate that "the Romantic tradition did not simply objectify women. It also subjected them, in a dual sense, portraying woman as subject in order to appropriate the feminine for male subjectivity" ("Romanticism" 22).<sup>5</sup>

Richardson is one of what Jane Moore has described as the 'new men' of Romantic studies.<sup>6</sup> It is worth noting that all the essays in the first section of Mellor's anthology are by male critics, a risky strategy in that it again foregrounds the masculinity of Romanticism (within the very text that is attempting to change the contours of Romanticism). The involvement of men in feminist studies of Romanticism (and more generally the involvement of men in feminism - an issue dealt with in more detail in the following chapter) raises the questions: how are they speaking? to whom are they speaking? and on behalf of whom are they speaking?<sup>7</sup> Jane Moore, for example, sees Richardson's use of Chodorowian theories as reenacting the colonizing gestures he critiques, an appropriative move which underwrites the construction of a 'politically correct' image of himself. Marlon Ross, in the essay which follows Richardson's in Mellor's collection, argues that "critics - even feminist critics - have tended to overlook [the] first published female poets"

because they have internalised the Romantic ideology ("Romantic Quest" 50); by implication, feminist critics should not be so easily seduced.

Most of the critics working in the mode of feminist critique assume that a bad faith was operative in male British Romantic texts. For them, poem after poem demonstrates male appropriation of the female, grounding masculine subjectivity in the marginalisation and silencing of the female.<sup>8</sup> In other words, "writing poetry can become a means for enforcing the boundaries of gender" (Ross, Contours 157). This is not to suggest a transcendent view of patriarchy: Marlon Ross, for example, contextualises his analyses by outlining the changing cultural conditions that inaugurate the shift from Enlightenment to Romantic ideology, a change marked by a new male defensiveness against what was perceived as the feminization of literary value in the eighteenth century. What these critics do not contemplate, however, is the possibility that the male Romantics inscribe subversive 'woman' in their texts in order to deconstruct a binary opposition of voice, that it is precisely such moments of ventriloquism which transgress the self/other boundaries of gender.<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, Marlon Ross inadvertently enacts this confounding of binary opposition in his formulation of a resisting reading: he argues that we should "question Wordsworth's terms" which "means to refuse to become the aggressive [sic] male reader who is inscribed in each of the lyrics and tales that has determined Wordsworth's status in our literary canon and his influence in our cultural history", but this injunction follows his statement that "Wordsworth's best readers [who] ... have accepted Wordsworth's terms" are "[l]ike the women in his poems, who are unable to dispute the inheritance they help to promulgate" ("Naturalizing Gender" 392). To produce a resisting reading, then, is to avoid being fixed on one side of the binary opposition of gender.

However, there remains a problem about Ross's addressee: perhaps he is addressing a community of men who wish to dissociate themselves from a phallogocentric pose without adopting the passivity of Wordsworth's women. Moreover, while producing an idealized, feminized version of himself, Ross deals with the anxiety of influence - his belatedness after Hartman and Bloom - by troping these father-figures as women, impregnated by the Wordsworthian ideology.

The paradigm of the 'resisting reader' remains a useful strategic tool, especially in the classroom, and particularly where the hypothesis of a woman reader is employed. Like Karen Swann, "the knowing feminist reader might resolve to collude with the Romantic woman" ("Harassing the Muse" 87). We can, for example, examine Dorothy Wordsworth's gendered role in William's poetry, annotating the Romantic usury by which Imagination is generated; in a recent seminar on Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" (part of a course on Romantic Poetry), a female student reported how angry the poem made her, using this anger to point to the oppression of women and to the 'lack' in Wordsworth's project which could only be assuaged by Dorothy's presence - Wordsworth's Imagination may be an "unfathered vapour" but it depends on maternal feminine figures.<sup>10</sup> Elaine Showalter writes of "the way in which the hypothesis of a female reader changes our apprehension of a given text, awakening us to the significance of its [the text's] sexual codes" ("Toward a Feminist Poetics" 128). The hypothesis of a woman reader for Coleridge's "Christabel", for example, can expose the sexual politics of its sexual poetics. Christabel's striptease may exhibit the pornographic potential of the lesbian scene for a male reader (ll.245-254), but a woman reader might want to note the passivity of the male observer in this scenario (he is both empowered and shut out). The poem



foregrounds the power of the female gaze ("And on her elbow did recline / To look at the lady Geraldine", Christabel "eyes the maid and seeks delay", ll.243-44, l.259).<sup>11</sup>

Karen Swann's essay "Harassing the Muse" is an exemplary instance of resisting reading. Swann calls into question the knight's innocence in Keats's "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" and insists on a feminist reading of the complicity between the naive knight and his knowing poetic master. She argues that Keats's hero is not to be pitied at the end of the poem; she suggests that the knight, who "spends the rest of his days wandering in a landscape of signs that resist translation" becomes a modern everyman who "enacts a currently popular account of every subject's history" (91). The poem prefigures psychoanalytic theorising that "identity is imaginary" and subjects "the effects of the symbolic", but turns this paradigm "into a thrilling romantic game of risk and capture" (92). As Swann reminds us, "the lady gets 'nothing' from this encounter", it effects her disappearance, "while the knight who encounters her, and the poet who knowingly exploits ...are enabled to experience a certain inevitable 'fatality', not simply as submission to the law of the father, but as accession to a community of poetic masters, 'pale kings and princes' who are already translated into text" (92). Swann is properly aware of the provisionality of meaning which depends on our sense of who knows what. For instance, the reader's intertextual knowledge of romance plots could foster the interpretation that the knight attempts to domesticate the lady, as Swann puts it, "the lady makes the knight supper" (88), a strategy of containment which la belle dame ultimately eludes. Swann's most radical suggestion is that perhaps the knight does not wish to capture the lady in the first place, as he is finally rewarded with the exclusive masculine community of the

enthralled "pale kings and princes" (90); in other words, he finally becomes "one of the gang". Swann asks, "Could this community, and not the ideal or even the fatal woman, be the true object of his quest?"

Swann produces a provocative reading which nevertheless, to my mind, fails to recognise that both the lady and the knight lose out in this poem (she is harder on the knight than I would be - his fault seems to me to be more a lack of courage than a will to power). But, significantly, she deploys the insights of current theory - she draws on, and critiques, the work of Jane Gallop, Stephen Heath and Jacques Lacan - in the service of 'images of women' criticism.<sup>12</sup> Her strategic 'harassment', therefore, blurs the misleading opposition which has shadowed feminist criticism in recent years, that "opposition of bluff, blunt Yankees and wanton, witty Gauls [that] relies on simplistic stereotypes" (Morris 466).<sup>13</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

*Survey with me what ne'er our fathers saw,  
A female band despising NATURE'S law.*  
Richard Polwhele

Jane Austen's Anne Elliot has something to say about male images of women which are fixated on female fickleness; she informs Captain Harville that,

Men have had every advantage of us in telling their own story.

Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree; the pen has been  
in their hands. (Persuasion 230)

Austen's feminism is to the point: women were marginalized in the patriarchal society of her time and their ability to tell their own stories repressed. Ironically, however, the pen is in her hand and the success of women novelists was perceived as a sign of the increasing feminization of literature during the late eighteenth century. Certain

women novelists have always found a place - albeit a problematic one - within Romanticism. Austen made it into Leavis's 'Great Tradition' of English classics, and into our schools and classrooms, while Mary Shelley is taught on 59% of the courses surveyed by Harriet Linkin, a result supported by the proliferation of editions of Frankenstein. The recent appearance of Betty Bennett's Mary Shelley Reader, and the anthology of essays, The Other Mary Shelley, should help to direct attention to other Shelley texts. Dorothy Wordsworth, who writes in the non-canonical form of the journal, is also increasingly popular, and no longer just as 'background' for interpretation of her brother's poems. Pamela Woof has produced a new edition of The Grasmere Journals while Paul Hamilton has edited Selections from the Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth; she has been well-served by criticism, including Susan Levin's book Dorothy Wordsworth and Romanticism, and articles by Susan Wolfson ("Individual in Community") and others.<sup>14</sup> Linkin writes that "[g]iven the near majority for D. Wordsworth (49%), our next quorum could easily mandate her inclusion as the eighth Romantic writer in a changing British Romantics canon" (560). The novels of Mary Wollstonecraft and Mrs. Radcliffe are frequently taught and written about, and the latter has the advantage of appearing on courses and in books on the Gothic. Taylor and Luria argue that "whereas the period provided such important women novelists as Austen, the Bronte sisters, and even Mrs. Radcliffe and Mary Shelley, no woman was a major poet" (100).<sup>15</sup> They explain this phenomenon by arguing that "[g]enre was ... to some extent a function of gender, and a major cause of that situation lay in contemporary assumptions about women's education". Denied the classical education that was regarded as a prerequisite for writing poetry, women turned to the more accessible genre of the novel.

But how do these texts fit into the movement - or ideology - we call Romantic? Marlon Ross contends that "[i]f one of Romanticism's definitive characteristics is the self-conscious search for poetic identity, how can Wordsworth, who tended not to conceive of herself as a poet, be considered a 'Romantic?'" ("Romantic Quest" 29).<sup>16</sup> Ross proposes that "Mary Shelley's writing, besides being in 'prose' (the 'lower' form of expression), dissents with Romanticism, and Mary's loving devotion to the editing of Bysshe's poems displays a confidence in his work that she does not seem to have in her own" ("Romantic Quest" 30).<sup>17</sup> Anne Mellor takes up the point about dissent with Romanticism in her essay, "Why Women Didn't Like Romanticism"; in her view, women writers "responded negatively, very negatively" to "romanticism's celebration of the creative process and of passionate feeling" (277-78). Taking the cases of Jane Austen and Mary Shelley, both she argues committed to the rationality extolled by Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, Mellor proposes that:

The male writers promoted an ideology that celebrated revolutionary change, the divinity of the poetic creative process, the development of the man of feeling, and the "acquisition of the philosophic mind". In opposition, the female writers heralded an equally revolutionary ideology, what Mary Wollstonecraft called "a REVOLUTION in female manners." This feminist ideology celebrated the education of the rational woman and an ethic of care that required one to take full responsibility for the predictable consequences of one's thoughts and actions, for all the children of one's mind and body. The failure of the masculine romantic ideology to care for the created product as much

as for the creative process, together with its implicit assumption that the ends can justify the means, can produce a romanticism that, as Mary Shelley showed, is truly *monstrous*. (285-86)

Thus Mellor proposes that "in the future when we speak of romanticism, we will have to speak of at least *two* romanticisms, the men's and the women's" (285).<sup>18</sup> The problems with this line of argument are fourfold. Firstly, Mellor elides the "passionate feeling" that persists through the texts of the women writers, self-evidently in Shelley, though flickers of desire also traverse the pages of Dorothy Wordsworth's journals; Cora Kaplan has listened to the discourse of pleasure in Wollstonecraft's work, while Wollstonecraft's A Short Residence prompted some readers to fall in love with her.<sup>19</sup> This work can help to characterize the second problem, for it contains many of the tropes we associate with Romanticism 'proper' - it's full of mountains, waterfalls, sublime sights, and is permeated by the yearning of the romantic traveller.<sup>20</sup> Thirdly, the male Romantic poets are not an homogeneous group, and to characterise their work as monolithically patriarchal is to misrepresent its diversity. Finally - and most importantly - this notion of two romanticisms creates an inaccurate gender/genre paradigm: this bipartite canon invites readers to recognise male Romanticism as pursuing the transcendent and the universal in poetry and female Romanticism as locating the contingently real in prose.<sup>21</sup> The rediscovery of successful female poets working during the period is crucial to the deconstruction of this disabling opposition, and it is to this part of the romantic terrain that I will now turn.

Richard Polwhele's The Unsex'd Females: A Poem (1798) invites the (male) reader to "Survey with me, what ne'er our fathers saw, / A female band despising

NATURE'S law" whose "vengeance smothers all their softer charms" (ll.11-12,14).<sup>22</sup> Polwhele's anxious invective reminds us that by the turn of the century the literary scene had been colonized by female poets, who have subsequently been erased from, or marginalized within, literary history. As recently as 1989, Gilbert and Gubar proposed that "given the received chronology of romanticism [they cite the dates 1798-1832], it is possible to decide that women did not have a romantic period at all; at least, there are no female poets in this age who are equivalent to Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley and Keats" ("Mirror and the Vamp" 164). However, in 1988 Stuart Curran's trail-blazing article, "The I Altered", recovered the lost voices of many women poets; the following year, Marlon Ross, in his book The Contours of Masculine Desire: Romanticism and the Rise of Women's Poetry, charted this region extensively. The availability of primary texts is, of course, crucially important, some writers appear in Roger Lonsdale's Eighteenth-Century Women Poets, while 1992 saw the appearance of Jennifer Breen's anthology Women Romantic Poets, 1785-1832.<sup>23</sup> I want to make some general observations - on the question of canonicity and on periodization - before commenting briefly on Ross's work, and then in more detail on Breen's anthology.

To recognise, and indeed to spotlight, women as readers, writers or textual figures - as feminist criticism of Romanticism is now doing - does more than merely provide a new critical perspective, or add a few names to the existing canon. Romanticism does seem in many ways to have been the last bastion of masculinity masquerading as universality, but this feminist practice acts as a type of Derridean 'supplement', changing the very contours of the received canon.<sup>24</sup> 'Woman' and women are not merely an accessory; feminist readings are not simply the latest critical

fashion item. To recognise women writers exclusion from the canon demystifies the notion of the canon as somehow a 'natural' (inevitable) selection of texts, and exposes it as a cultural construct, serving particular interests. What is appreciated in literature, and the modes by which it is analysed, can no longer be regarded as impartial since it is grounded in institutions which have silenced women writers. Though I have no wish to set up a new or counter canon, and though my own critical desires are bound up with the male Romantic prose writers, I think that it is strategically crucial to displace the emphasis from the male to the female poets. This in order both to redress the years of critical oblivion endured by these female voices, and to work towards a sense of the historical specificity of the revolutionary period. An important function of feminist criticism of Romanticism in the 1990's is to get the women poets into our books, conferences and classrooms, and I am prepared to displace male writers in order to do this.<sup>25</sup>

The rediscovery of these women poets raises again the question of periodization, reminding us that literary movements do not have fixed beginnings and endings. The Romantic 'period' has always been critically fluid, with various starting and finishing dates chosen by the academy according to its canonical agenda(s). In Britain, the period popularly begins either in 1789 (The French Revolution) or 1798 (Lyrical Ballads)<sup>26</sup> - and ends in 1832 (The First Reform Bill) or as late as 1850 (the publication of The Prelude, the same year as Tennyson's great Victorian poem, In Memoriam). This problem seems particularly acute in attempts to classify the women poets, many of whom seem alienated from the concerns of the romantic ideology. Thirteen of the twenty-six poets who appear in Breen's anthology also appear in Lonsdale's Eighteenth Century Women Poets, while Angela Leighton includes

chapters on Felicia Hemans and Letitia Elizabeth Landon in her book Victorian Women Poets, though as she admits they "are not historically Victorians at all" (2). Stuart Curran argues that Hemans's preoccupation with female and domestic concerns marks her work as an early "transition into the characteristic preoccupations of Victorian verse" ("I Altered" 188). Leighton refines this position, suggesting that though Hemans writes "'Romantic' poems about exile" and "'Victorian' poems about female passion", her significance in literary history is that "she makes a bridge between the theatrical, extrovert pathos of eighteenth-century sentimentalism and the sincere, socially responsible pathos of Victorian sentimentality; between femininity as an aesthetic pose and femininity as a saving religious morality" (26-27).

Marlon Ross takes another perspective on the question of periodization, arguing less that the women poets are, for example, proto-Victorian (though he traces the genealogy of women's writing), than for a recognition that Romanticism itself is only one aspect of literary activity during the Revolutionary period. Emphasizing the growing popularity of women's poetry and women reviewers in the late eighteenth century, Ross documents the anxiety which this phenomenon aroused in male poets; he argues that the female voices helped to determine the formation of Romanticism, which was in part a defensive reaction against this encroaching feminisation of literature. Ross traces the ways in which Wordsworth and others constructed an ideology of 'self-possession' and conquest in order to constitute the male poet as self-originating, master of, rather than mastered by, the affections, and that this gender-biased aesthetics has determined the map of Romanticism; in other words, the narrative that has been constructed to tell the story of Romanticism adheres to the contours of masculine desire. I have attended to this aspect of the romantic ideology



- the inscriptions of sexuality in textuality - in the first section of this chapter; here I want to look at the second half of Ross's book which follows the development of women's poetry from the mid-eighteenth century.

Ross begins his history of 'feminine' poetry with the "the female Augustan scribbler", such as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, and moves on to the first generation blue-stockings - Elizabeth Vesey (1715?-1791), Elizabeth Carter (1717-1806), Frances Boscawen (1719-1805), and Elizabeth Montagu (1720-1800) - who herald the age of sensibility within the salons where male and female intellectuals discuss the importance of feeling.<sup>27</sup> Though these blues do not make fixed discriminations between masculine and feminine discourse, Ross describes how the move "from the Augustan coffeehouse to the bluestocking parlor, from the parlor to nature" helps to engender the development of a 'proper' female discourse with the transitional figures of Hannah More and Anna Barbauld, which in turns leads into the confident poetry of domestic affections of Felicia Hemans, L.E.L., and Joanna Baillie (Contours 189). These 'affectional' poets are forced to foreground their femininity in order not to transgress the boundaries of propriety. Literary history has perceived this poetry as secondary to the macho versions of sensibility, despite the fact that increasing numbers of women supported themselves and their families through their writing, and constituted real financial competition for male poets (though, with the exceptions of Byron and Scott, few of the 'canonical' male writers lived off their work). Ross suggests that the 'affectional' poets formulate an ideology of their own, one which prioritizes a collective voice of 'other-centred' desire, in opposition to the male preoccupation with self-centred power (the Wordsworthian "egotistical sublime").

Ross provides fascinating material on the conditions of literary production, the

female networks of support which nurtured women writers, as well as much-needed analyses of individual texts. However, Anne Mellor has taken issue with Ross's attempt to "construct a generational model of influence and development among these three groups of female poets"; she wonders if this model "doesn't commit the very mistake he so eloquently warns us against". In other words, she questions whether Ross is in fact:

...reading them [the female poets] within a critical discourse derived from masculine experience, from developmental - even oedipal - models of father-son and brother-brother rivalry and influence? Had he begun with Katherine Philips (the "Divine Orinda") as the originator of female poetry rather than Elizabeth Montagu, the difference between the first and the later generations of female poets would have been negligible. Similarly, if he had included the self-consciously "radical" tradition of female poetic discourse - that located in the writings of Charlotte Smith and Helen Maria Williams [both appear in Breen's anthology] - his picture of feminine romanticism might have been coloured rather differently. (Rev. of Ross 104)

In addition, though he reveals that 'classic' romanticism is only part of the literary activity of the period, as well as attending to differences between the women writers and their similarities with male writers, Ross comes close to re-establishing the notion of two distinct Romanticisms, essentially demarcated along gender lines.

Jennifer Breen's anthology provides an opportunity for us to make our own decisions about the place of the women poets, and the contours of Romanticism. Breen's Introduction and the poems themselves, both explicitly and implicitly, suggest

a number of points that are pertinent to a gynocritical reading of Romanticism. For example, although Romanticism is associated with the use of popular forms and of the vernacular, scholars have neglected women's contribution to this trend. It is worth remembering that Joanna Baillie produced a seventy page polemic arguing for naturalness in language two years before Wordsworth's famous "Preface", while Baillie, Barbauld, Hannah More and Carolina Oliphant [Nairne] experimented with oral forms, such as ballads, and with Scottish dialect (in the cases of Oliphant and Baillie). In articulating his poetic aim of adopting the "'language really used by men'", Wordsworth "was merely endorsing theoretically a change in poetry-writing that had already taken place" (Breen xxiv-v). Women also contributed to the revival of the sonnet form that we associate with Romanticism: "on Christmas Eve 1802 Wordsworth, reading sonnets, chose a telling list of authors -- Milton, himself, and Charlotte Smith" (Taylor and Luria 105; see Wordsworth, D. Journals 164).<sup>28</sup> Women made a significant contribution to children's literature, and Breen rightly suggests that Mary Lamb's "poetry should be read in comparison with William Blake's Songs of Innocence" (xxiii). Some poems expose the fettering ideology of femininity (see Landon's "Lines of Life"). One aspect of this constraint is felt in the poets' uneasy relation to traditional love poetry (Breen theorises a split between public expectations and private imperatives), for many adopt a male point of view (though L.E.L. and Amelia Opie wrote love poems from a female perspective).

Feminist criticism's increasing attention to differences - for example, of race, nationality, religion, class, and sexual preference, as well as of gender - will enable readings of these poems which are sensitive to the ways in which a range of social positions and cultural discourses inflect the perspectives of gender; servant women,

for example, "usually wrote from the perspective of a double subservience to men and women" (Breen xvi). A feminist reading practice, while it may locate subservience to and subversions of the patriarchal construction of 'Woman', need not elevate ideological innocence as a critical idol - these poems may be analyzed in terms of their collusion with prevailing ideologies: Hannah More's impassioned critique of imperialism, "Slavery" (Breen 10-20), nevertheless patronizes the "benighted soul[s]" of the "sable race", using conventional colonialist imagery whereby freedom is synonymous with light (and, by association, with white).

Anna Barbauld's "To Mr. [S.T.] C[oleridge]", in which she criticizes an "unearthly" Romanticism divorced from the contingent "things of life", sets a keynote of these poems. Mary Robinson, in "London's Summer Morning", provides an urban documentary in which the "din" of the city is a signifier of life and fit subject for the poet (in contrast to Wordsworth and Keats, for example, who prefer to poeticize out of the hearing of the city's din). Robinson's lists celebrate and particularize the human life of the city:

...Now begins

The din of hackney-coaches, waggons, carts;  
 While tinmen's shops, and noisy trunk-makers,  
 Knife-grinders, coopers, squeaking cork-cutters,  
 Fruit-barrows, and the hunger-giving cries  
 Of vegetable-vendors, fill the air. (ll.9-14)<sup>29</sup>

This is not emotion recollected in tranquillity, nor a transcending of the life of things; rather, it demonstrates a loving attention to the ordinary. No hierarchies of significance are set up, and the poet does not turn from the scene to the question of

subjectivity: sight is allowed to be itself without having to generate insight (into the poet's self).

Many of the poets turn to domesticity as a subject, which allows them to valorise traditionally marginalized women's work. Anne Grant's heroic couplets, for example, mock the exclusivity of masculine poetic "Invention", affirming the poetry in prosiness:

And as for the friend of all poets, Invention,  
 'Tis a thing, of late years, I scarce think of or mention:  
 Or of useful inventions alone make my boast,  
 Such as saving potatoes and turnips from frost;  
 Or repulsing whole armies of mice from my cheese;  
 Or plucking the quills without paining the geese.

"A Familiar Epistle to a Friend" (ll.29-34)

Similarly, Barbauld's "Washing Day" subversively invokes a "domestic Muse, / In slip-shod measure loosely prattling on" (ll.3-4 - an ironic revalorization of Popean rhetoric) and addresses a woman reader in colloquial language, what I would call 'the real language of [wo]men'.

One point this revival of names raises is the question of biography. In this era of the 'death of the author', it is perhaps hard to emphasize the signature of the writer. The situation is especially acute for the feminist reader: Teresa de Lauretis asks, "why would feminists ... want author-ity and authorship when those notions are admittedly outmoded, patriarchal, and ethically compromised?" (Technologies 113). However, as Rosi Braidotti points out, women are in a different position to men, for "one cannot deconstruct a subjectivity that has never been fully granted" ("Envy"

237), while, as Nancy Miller puts it, "[o]nly those who have it [authority, the signature, the phallus] can play with not having it" (Subject to Change 75).<sup>30</sup> This is not to suggest that feminist critics should use biographical information in any simplistic way to determine the 'meaning' of the poems; instead one might look for the traces and inscriptions of materiality in these texts, that is, in Miller's words, for "the marks of a producing subject' (16). Mary Jacobus reminds us that "the category of 'women's writing' remains as strategically important in classroom, curriculum or interpretive community as the specificity of women's oppression is to the women's movement" ("Is There a Woman" 108).<sup>31</sup> It is worth noting that, though the critical industry may employ the techniques of deconstruction, semiotics, psychoanalysis or new historicism to produce readings of male Romantic poems (in other words, theories which eschew 'naive' biographical interpretation), it does in fact know a huge amount about the lives of Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley, et al. Information is also available about the reception of their poems, and another crucial scholarly project is a feminist version of Donald Reiman's The Romantics Reviewed, for the evidence of early reviews would help to reinstate the women poets to their central place within the period.

Another question the anthology as a whole raises - again - is whether the term 'Romantic' carries too much phallogentric baggage (particularly the paradigm of the "egotistical sublime" whereby subjectivity is generated in opposition to, and through the appropriation of, feminized 'Nature') to be a useful description of women's poetry. Breen implicitly sets this vision of male poetry against, for example, Baillie's precise and non-appropriative, descriptions of the natural world and rural workers. I would argue that the term needs to be reassessed if it is regarded as exclusive, that

is, setting boundaries which keep women out. On the other hand, recent critics have deconstructed the binary paradigms of gendered writing, unravelling the 'feminine' inscribed within 'male' writing of the period (as I discuss in the next section). The poems collected by Breen demonstrate that women writers, for socio-cultural reasons, emphasize certain possibilities within Romanticism. The developing ideologies of femininity made it unlikely, for example, that any female poets would espouse the role of "unacknowledged legislators of the world". Interestingly, however, in their emphasis on the quotidian - that buzz-word of current Romantic studies - the female poets are likely to become central to our accounts of Romanticism. Though the term Romantic cannot be divested of its historical baggage, it can be opened to the effects of 'otherness' (though the risk is that it becomes so amorphous as to be meaningless). It may, of course, also be the case that critical sensibilities nurtured by postmodernism simply revel in local analyses rather than the pursuit of explanatory clarity.<sup>32</sup>

It is worth noting that many of the women poets were more popular in their own time than their male contemporaries. There were more than a thousand subscribers to Ann Yearsley's first volume of poetry. In 1835, William Wordsworth placed Felicia Hemans with Scott, Coleridge, Lamb and Crabbe as writers to be mourned:

Mourn rather for that holy Spirit,  
 Sweet as the spring, as ocean deep;  
 For Her who, ere her summer faded,  
 Has sunk into a breathless sleep. ("Extemporare Effusion", ll.37-40)

By 1840, John Lockhart in his review article, "Modern English Poetesses", could

record - to his chagrin? - that the writing women of his country are an "emancipated race": "they can, and they do, write, print, and publish whatever they like"; he continues, "Are publishers wanting? There is Mr. Henry Colburn. Are they underpaid? They obtain thousands. Are they without readers? We wish Milton had as many" (375). This is not to suggest that there are no grounds left from which a male reviewer might criticise a female poet: if, in an earlier era, she could be criticised for straying outwith the boundaries of poetic propriety, now she can fail by staying too securely within them, by adhering too scrupulously to the ideology of femininity. Lockhart advises that Mrs. Norton "ought ...to break through the narrow circle of personal and domestic feelings, and adventure herself upon a theme of greater variety and less morbid interest. There is a great difference between writing always from the heart and always about the heart, even the heart of a beautiful woman of genius" (382). Lacking the buccaneering poetic spirit, Mrs. Norton is fixated on the heart, giving way to innumerable Victorian poetesses who will focus on that organ of poetic generation.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Refusing the coercion of the social word.*  
 Laura Claridge

The third strand of feminist theory that is reshaping the map of Romanticism depends on the insights of deconstruction, Lacanian psychoanalysis and French feminism. Literary critics have teased out the "warring significations", to use Barbara Johnson's phrase, in the construction of Romantic subjectivity, locating the inscriptions of femininity which traverse the work of male writers. Male romantic subjects are no longer seen as 'self-sufficient' but as complex, exoticised terrains wherein patriarchal hegemony is destabilised through voicing the feminine. In Chapter Two I will



analyze these theories in more detail; moreover, they are part of the texture of this thesis (and will often be the subject of reflexive comments). For these reasons, I devote less space to them here than to the other romantic revisions already detailed, providing only a short survey of relevant critical works.

Jane Aaron explores Charles Lamb's atypical masculinity in A Double Singleness: Gender and the Writings of Charles and Mary Lamb. She reads his whimsical irony and feminine 'negative capability', which upset critics as diverse as Carlyle and Leavis, as subversive critiques of Wordsworth's and Coleridge's masculinist claims to transcendence. She makes use of Kristeva's theories to illuminate the construction of Charles/Elia's feminized subjectivity. While Lamb still lacks (feminist) readers, Keats, unsurprisingly, has attracted a great deal of feminist attention, from critics including Adrienne Rich and Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi, and Margart Homans.<sup>33</sup> In Chapter Five, I trace the lineaments of the body of sensibility in Keats's letters, especially those to/about Fanny Brawne, reading the inscriptions of a type of *écriture féminine*. In terms of Keats's poetry, Barbara Johnson has posed the question of the 'undecidability' of "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" in terms of gender: "By the end of the poem, it becomes impossible to know whether one has read a story of a knight enthralled by a witch or of a woman seduced and abandoned by a male hysteric" (World 37). Susan Wolfson traces the process of "Feminizing Keats", analysing how the language of gender operates in his own poems and in the work of his readers and reviewers. According to Wolfson:

Keats's marginality [in terms of literary style, personal appearance, class origin] typically tempts critical extremes: he either triggers efforts to stabilize and enforce standards of manly conduct in which he is the

negative example, stigmatized as 'effeminate', or 'unmanly'; or he inspires attempts to broaden and make more flexible prevailing definitions, so that certain qualities, previously limited to and sometimes derided as 'feminine', may be allowed to enrich and enlarge the culture's images of 'manliness' - even to the point of androgyny.

("Feminizing Keats" 318)<sup>34</sup>

Keats himself shifts between "contempt and condescension" towards women, and figuring himself as feminine (Wolfson 326). Critics from Hazlitt to Swinburne castigated Keats for his enervated effeminacy, while women readers during the Victorian period were protective and sympathetic: Mrs. Oliphant happily declared, "In poetry his was the woman's part" (qtd. in Wolfson 321). Rather than indicating a period in which gender opposition is fixed, this debate suggests an era in which gender characteristics are in flux, in which policing is necessary to enforce 'natural' boundaries.

Laura Claridge, in several stimulating essays, brings Lacanian theories of desire to bear on the poetry of Wordsworth, Byron and Shelley. She argues that the silence of the women in many of their poems may be a plenitude, a rebellious "refusing the coercion of the social word" ("Liminal Gender" 161).<sup>35</sup> She argues that Shelley's Epipsychidion records the "*penetration of the male* through female fullness - the light; and through absence - the lack of patriarchal linguistic signifiers" ("Romantic Potency"). Claridge reverses the terms of what I have described as the 'feminist critique' of this poem, suggesting that though "Emily can be the virgin, the blank script that woos the poet's silent tongue, ... she is also the occasion of this poem, its language holding to earth the same poet who would soar with her beyond

its prisonhouse. Without her 'chaining' his 'flight of fire' there would be no Epipsychidion". In another essay she summarizes her project as the "wish to posit that Shelley explores ways to escape 'maleness' through trying to articulate that part of 'femaleness' which remains (he mythologizes) outside the 'benefits' of the patriarchal language that he would disavow" ("Bifurcated Female Space" 93). Claridge inverts the trend in feminist criticism which sees Romantic poetry as appropriating the feminine: "We must acknowledge, in all fairness, that to 'use' ... something or someone that appears outside as a newly experienced space that liberates the subject from the claustrophobia of his ... own gaze, is not necessarily a co-optive, possessive gesture" ("Liminal Gender" 170-71).<sup>36</sup>

John Barrell, too, turns to Shelley, locating in his work "a politics of gender" which reveals affinities with the Kristevan "semiotic" rather than with "the phallogocentric character of the symbolic order" (Flight of Syntax 14-15). Barrell argues that the language of Epipsychidion may be called 'feminine' because it interrupts the monologic language "which seems ... to protect the power of the masculine" (15). Interestingly, Barrell deals with the issue of specificity, of particularizing the feminine, within the poem, but in terms other than that of the feminist critique: Barrell reminds us of a passage near the beginning of the poem, which has "been describing Emilia's eyes, apparently as wells, fathomless impossible to conceive, and impossible to perceive, except as light dances on their surface", and then he quotes the following lines:

The glory of her being, issuing thence,  
Stains the dead, blank, cold air with a warm shade  
Of unentangled intermixture, made

By Love, of light and motion: one intense  
 Diffusion, one serene Omnipresence,  
 Whose flowing outlines mingle in their flowing,  
 Around her cheeks and utmost fingers glowing  
 With the unintermitted blood, which there  
 Quivers, (as in a fleece of snow-like air  
 The crimson pulse of living morning quiver,)  
 Continuously prolonged, and ending never,  
 Till they are lost, and in that Beauty furled  
 Which penetrates and clasps and fills the world;  
 Scarce visible from extreme loveliness. (ll.91-104)

"Are lines like these", asks Barrell, "attempts to describe Emilia, ... or are they attempts not to describe her?" Where Drummond Bone argues that Shelley's 'descriptions' despecify Emilia, in effect, empty her of meaning in the service of male desire, Barrell proposes that "we can see them as effecting a refusal of mastery, a negation of descriptions of the body" which would fix and delimit it as the object of the male gaze. Barrell "see[s] a relation in these lines between a refusal of ... monologic utterance", which privileges closure, and "a negation of the kind of description of woman which attempts to represent her as passive object". However, Barrell then shifts his perspective, recognising that the improvisatory and supplementary quality of these lines could be ascribed to the fact that "the things they are tracking, femininity and the body of woman, are all over the place, too fugitive to be caught up with or too fidgety to hold a pose". From this perspective, Shelley reproduces a stereotype of woman.

I've quoted Barrell's article at length - partly because its own refusal of mastery is so appealing (to me), the undecidability of choosing between these two readings - but also because it helps to highlight the risks (and pleasures) of deconstructive feminist reading: for some critics, this mode of reversible reading may seem to displace questions of politics and power, in a process by which the feminist reader (the woman reader?) becomes merely "a wallflower at the carnival of sexual pluralities".<sup>37</sup> There is no solution sweet to problems of politics and poetics, but I would argue that to refuse to join the carnival is to risk creating a monolithic feminist criticism, a new orthodoxy that is exclusionary rather than inclusive.

In a broad sense, the critics discussed in this section may be seen as occupying the third position in Kristeva's three-tiered history of feminist thought, purveyed in her influential article "Women's Time". The first two positions correspond roughly, in terms of literary criticism, to the 'feminist critique' and 'gynocritics' outlined above (equality and difference, according to Kristeva's scheme). In the third position, Kristeva writes:

...the very dichotomy man/woman as an opposition between two rival entities may be understood as belonging to *metaphysics*. What can "identity", even "sexual identity", mean in a new theoretical and scientific space where the very notion of identity is challenged?  
 ("Women's Time" 214-15)

In this deconstructive mode, the feminine is viewed in terms of positionality rather than biological essence. As Toril Moi puts it, "[i]f femininity then can be said to have a definition at all in Kristevan terms, it is simply as 'that which is marginalised by the patriarchal symbolic order'" ("Feminist, Female, Feminine" 126). Both men

and women can be constructed as marginal to the symbolic order, and these positions can change according to shifting power structures. Kristeva herself advocates this third position, which has deconstructed the opposition between masculinity and femininity, producing not 'identity' but a 'subject-in-process'.

\* \* \* \* \*

Throughout this chapter my focus has been on the ways in which feminist criticism is displacing Romantic boundaries; I would like now to gesture towards another angle of vision. The role of feminist theory in the study of Romanticism has tended to be diffuse - operating on several planes at once - rather than linear, with critiques of male images of women, uncovering the archeology of women's writing, and the deconstruction of sexual difference taking place more or less simultaneously. Romantic feminism bypasses the temptation to reify the modes of feminist critique, gynocritics and deconstructive feminism into a teleological plot (the risk involved in Kristeva's framework).<sup>38</sup> The feminist reader and teacher of Romanticism is well-placed to adopt these paradigms strategically, according to local contingencies. Feminist theory is revising Romanticism, not as a master discourse, but in a dialogic process whereby Romantic texts speak back to the critic, reconstructing (my) feminist theories. Feminist critics (and Romanticists) may gain, I think, by recognizing that Romanticism may play a role in feminist theory, both as a way of disrupting teleological paradigms, and as a means of historicizing recent feminist literary theory. It would be interesting to investigate, for example, Gilbert and Gubar's claims for the Romantic origins of *écriture féminine* ("Mirror and the Vamp" 155); or Caroline Franklin's insight that, "Kristeva's theory of the semiotic, by its romanticization of the marginal in the politics of desire, itself owes something to this strand of Romantic

libertarianism", that is, those philosophies (advocated by William Godwin, for example) that proclaim "sexuality as a potentially liberatory force, repressed by a corrupt civilization which has increasingly sought to regulate the private life of the individual" ("Juan's Sea Changes" 69).<sup>39</sup> In other words, as well as feminizing Romanticism, my project involves romanticizing Feminism.

## Notes to Chapter One

1. See his article, "Romanticism and Its Ideologies", and The Romantic Ideology.
2. As various critics have noted, much romantic criticism replicates and sustains the preoccupations of the texts it analyses. Clifford Siskin sees his work, The Historicity of Romantic Discourse, as "a new literary history" that clarif[ies] the scope of our entanglements with the past" (7). He "show[s] that whenever we designate certain texts as 'literature,' or valorize that distinction in terms of 'creativity,' 'imagination,' or 'expressiveness,' or analyze those qualities as variables of individual development, we have joined Wordsworth in taking the 'mind of Man' to be the 'main haunt and region' of our 'song'. The traditional six-poet, 1798-1832 Romanticism of the anthologies and most criticism is itself a product of that haunting: a transformation of history into a short, and therefore sweet, developmental narrative (7-8).
3. Cynthia Chase provides a brief introductory section on "Feminist Criticisms" in Romanticism (27-31). She reprints feminist articles by Cathy Caruth, Mary Jacobus, Karen Swann and Margaret Homans.
4. See Drummond Bone: "John Bayley once remarked that he didn't know what James' Isabel Archer liked in bed; after 600 odd lines of Epipsychidion we don't even know the colour of Emily's hair" ("Detail of Nature" 4). Diane Long Hoeveler provides the only book-length study - Romantic Androgyny - of "images of women" in Romantic poetry. There are many accounts of the female in Blake; see, amongst others: Anne K. Mellor, "Blake's Portrayal of Women" and David Punter, "Blake, Trauma, and the Female" (see Mellor for a more extensive bibliography, Romanticism and Gender 217-218).
5. Clifford Siskin notes the gender imbalance involved in male assumption of female qualities: "When ...the Romantic artist 'full' of 'female softness' is physiologically female, her activities and production are developmentally judged to be invariably limited and ultimately arrested" (174).
6. See her sophisticated critique of this phenomenon in her essay "Plagiarism with a Difference".
7. These questions are adapted from Mary Eagleton, Feminist Literary Criticism 5.
8. Caroline Franklin explicitly sets out "[t]o avoid the pitfalls" of the feminist critique, that is, "the automatic berating of the male author's sexism, or the obsessive chronicling of women's oppression" (Byron's



Heroines 14). She "contextualize[s]" Byron's "patriarchalism", locating it in "the current debate in Regency Britain on the role of woman", and she considers "the heroines of Byron's tales ... in the context of the ideology of the gender of the genre [of romance] (1,14).

9. For a fascinating argument along these lines, see Laura Claridge, "The Bifurcated Female Space of Desire".
10. Several critics have recently analysed Dorothy Wordsworth's role in William's poetry; for interesting readings from a feminist perspective, see: Marlon Ross, "Romantic Quest and Conquest" and "Naturalizing Gender"; Margaret Homans, "Eliot, Wordsworth, and the Scenes of the Sisters' Instruction"; John Barrell, Poetry, Language and Politics. In Chapter Six, I touch on De Quincey's recognition of Dorothy's role in filling the 'lack' at the heart of William's writing.
11. For a feminist approach to this poem, see Karen Swann, "'Christabel'" and "Literary Gentlemen and Lovely Ladies"; also on Coleridge, see Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, "The Mirror and the Vamp", in which they read "Kubla Khan" from the perspectives of empirical feminist criticism and 'French' Feminism.
12. See also David Punter, "Blake, Trauma and the Female", for a good example of how the feminist critique and psychoanalytic interpretation can function in the reading of romanticism.
13. Unfortunately, this is precisely the simplistic binary redrawn in Mellor's Introduction to Romanticism and Feminism, though the essays themselves demonstrate the inadequacy of categorising the multiplicity of feminist criticisms in this way.
14. See articles by Anita Hempill McCormick; Ingeborg M. Kohn; Alan Liu; and chapters on Dorothy Wordsworth in Margaret Homans, Bearing the Word and Meena Alexander, Women in Romanticism. Paul Hamilton's new edition unfortunately includes only tiny extracts from texts other than the Alfoxden and Grasmere Journals. Carol Kyros Walker is currently retracing Dorothy Wordsworth's steps on her 1803 tour of Scotland; her book, for Yale University Press, will reprint (most of) Shairp's edition, with revised notes and photographs.
15. Leslie Rabine analyses the significance of women writers in France, arguing that "these women [Marie d'Agoult, Hortense Allart, Flora Tristan] ...challenged ...the Romantic concept of the self" ("Feminist Writers" 491).
16. Ross's line of argument lends itself to Showalter's call for "a female framework for the analysis of women's literature" ("Toward a Feminist Poetics" 131).

17. This self-effacing role has been questioned by Mary Favret, who rightly points out that Mary Shelley's editorial labour of love was also "an effective strategy of self-promotion" ("Mary Shelley's Sympathy and Irony" 18). Susan Wolfson notes how through her editorial privilege Shelley constructs audiences for her husband's poetry, and her own position as his best reader ("Editorial Privilege"). E.B. Murray's new edition of The Prose Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley is dedicated to Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, who made the present edition possible.
18. In her most recent work Mellor acknowledges the problems of this binary model of difference, the limitation of grouping women writers under the heading of "feminine" Romanticism, and contrasting this with the material of traditional "Romanticism", now rechristened as "masculine" Romanticism. She argues that this structural model reveals the hidden "difference that gender makes to the construction of British Romantic literature" (Romanticism and Gender 3). Mellor's definitions of gender are more fluid than in her previous work, moving towards the positional model espoused in this thesis (for example, according to Mellor, John Keats and Emily Bronte produce ambivalently-gendered texts); like Elaine Showalter, Mellor shifts from "feminism" to "gender" (I discuss Showalter's critical realignments in Chapter Two, and recur to the significance of the move from feminism to gender in my "Afterthoughts").
19. See, Cora Kaplan, "Wild Nights"; unlike Kaplan, Mary Poovey concentrates on what she sees as Wollstonecraft's ideological commitment to the repression of female sexuality (Proper Lady 78). For other feminist readings of Wollstonecraft, see Miriam Brody, Laurie A. Finke, and several articles by Mitzi Myers; Janet Todd surveys readings of Wollstonecraft (and suggests ways of contextualizing her writing) in Chapter Six of Feminist Literary History. Of A Short Residence, William Godwin writes: "If ever there was a book calculated to make a man in love with its author, this appears to me to be the book" (Wollstonecraft and Godwin 249).
20. However, Marilyn Butler has recently discussed the female discourse of this text in her paper, "Making the World Female". For another stimulating feminist reading of this text, see Moore, "Plagiarism with a Difference".
21. My argument here is indebted to Harriet Linkin 560. This is a binary opposition that Janet Todd, among others, accepts, though she does qualify her elision of women poets: "there are no women Romantic poets, giving that phrase all the privileged force it has acquired within later literary studies" (Feminist Literary History 111).
22. See Vivien Jones 186; Jerome J. McGann, Romantic Period Verse 137.

23. Andrew Ashfield's anthology of women's romantic poetry is forthcoming from Manchester University Press. In addition, the latest Norton Anthology of English Literature (Vol.2) includes several women poets, though they are still hugely outnumbered by the men. This has crucial implications at institutions where the Norton is used as the primary teaching text. Jerome J. McGann's The New Oxford Book of Romantic Period Verse aims "to make a fair representation of the work ... being read in the period" (xxiv), but the women poets remain underrepresented.
24. This is not to suggest that this destabilization of the literary canon is confined to Romanticism: the question of the literary canon has been at the forefront of critical debate in recent years. Nor is it to suggest that the Romantic canon was immutable before the work of feminist critics; see "How It Was" in Studies in Romanticism 21 (1982), for the reminiscences of several major Romantic critics on the different versions of Romanticism they have experienced during their careers (ten critics contribute to this 'celebration', none of whom are women). It is, perhaps, premature to claim the revisioning of Romanticism: as Susan Wolfson, in her 1993 review of two collections of essays published in 1990 (Gene W. Ruoff, ed., The Romantics and Us, and Kenneth R. Johnston et al., eds., Romantic Revolutions), notes, "It is striking that, in the 800 hundred pages of these two volumes ... there is scant attention to the many women writing and publishing in the age that both volumes designate as the 'Romantic'" (130). Derrida's theory of the 'supplement' is outlined in Of Grammatology, esp. 141-64, 165-268.
25. On a course I taught in 1993 on Romantic Poetry, I sacrificed Coleridge (except Christabel; in future years I may 'lose' other major poets). A revised Romantic canon remains a dilemma for me, since I find it hard to abandon the pantheon of six men who have meant so much to me for so long.
26. Another popular alternative is 1770, the year of Wordsworth's birth. An early starting date for Romanticism has the advantage of including the poets of sensibility, such as Gray and Collins. I would suggest Charlotte Smith's birthdate in 1749 as another alternative.
27. For a detailed account of 'the bluestocking circle', see Sylvia Harcstock Myers.
28. On Smith's sonnets, see the fine article by Stella Brooks, "The Sonnets of Charlotte Smith". She reprints and analyses ten sonnets in terms of their Romantic preoccupations and their specificity. Significantly, she writes: "I do not ... wish to praise Charlotte Smith's work by using that of her male contemporaries as model and measure. Most of the poems discussed here were written in or before 1784, so they predate those of

the more well known Romantic poets. Properly speaking we should speak of her influence on them, particularly with regard to her virtuosity in the sonnet form" (13-14).

29. This is in the tradition of Swift's "After a Shower of Rain". Wordsworth did not ignore the city, but his preference is for a Whisterlesque sleeping city (see the sonnet "Composed Upon Westminster Bridge").
30. Equally, one might argue that only those who don't have it can play with having it - but the symmetry of the rhetorical reversibility is not matched by an equality of power play. On feminist criticism and the premature 'death of the author', see Cheryl Walker. Jo-Anna Isaak observes that, "The death of the author and the consequent failure of narcissistic fantasies about the self-procreating artist have wholly different implications for those who have never been 'cocksure' in this manner of credulous man" (12).
31. To emphasize the category of "women's writing" is, as I suggested above, a politically strategic move. If we believe that there is no 'essential' subjectivity, for men or women, yet we may still want to equalize the historical imbalance that has resulted from the fact that patriarchal culture has not allowed the 'female subject' to exist.
32. A recent reviewer for the British Association of Romantic Studies Bulletin and Review wittily suggested changing the Association's name to the British Association of Georgian Studies: this would mean getting rid of the macho-sounding acronym BARS and replacing it with the more feminine BAGS (Aaron, Rev. of Ross 10). Janet Todd emphasizes, "When I use the term 'Romantic poets' or 'Romanticism', I am referring both to an element within male poetry of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, rarely found in female writing, and to the construction that has been made from this element by later literary criticism" (Feminist Literary History 112). She offers no alternative terminology for women's writing. For pragmatic and theoretical reasons for retaining the term "Romanticism", see Anne K. Mellor, Romanticism and Gender 210-212. See also Penelope Fielding's review article in which she asks, "Is the very term 'Romanticism' so bound up with contemporary views of the self, power and language as to be by definition a male discourse?" (129), and Susan Wolfson's review ruminations in Studies in Romanticism on the continuing utility of the term (130). One move might be to cease capitalizing (and thereby reifying) the term; David Punter records his preference for the small 'r' in his article on Don Juan (150).
33. Rich and Gelpi praise Keats's "negative capability", comparing it to Chodorow's work on the "so-called 'weak ego boundaries of women'", which they suggest "might be a source of power" (Gelpi and Gelpi,

Adrienne Rich's Poetry 115). Margaret Homans, less sympathetic to Keats, argues that he "habitually makes the apparent femininity of his negative capability enhance masculine power and pleasure" ("Keats Reading Women" 345). See Chapter Five for further consideration of these views.

34. The move towards androgyny is not necessarily a feminist gesture; for extensive discussion, see Diane Long Hoeveler, Romantic Androgyny. It is worth noting that though Wolfson's work could be described as deconstructive, it is historically detailed in ways that mark it off from some of the other critics considered here.
35. It is, of course, always possible to invert this proposition: rather than refusal and silence being interpreted as plenitude, they may be seen simply as emptiness.
36. See also Claridge's Lacanian reading of Don Juan, "Love and Self-Knowledge".
37. This wonderful phrase is not mine, but after an extensive search I still cannot discover where I read it.
38. In fact, Kristeva is careful to emphasize that the phases are simultaneous, and Toril Moi states that they have to be worked on at the same time ("Feminist" 129). In one sense, the possible hegemony of the third position in Romantic studies has already been displaced by 'new historicism'.
39. Franklin's essay is a socialist-feminist reading of Don Juan, which takes up the question of sexuality in the poem's discourse of orientalism. She reads the poem through the lens of Cora Kaplan's article, "Pandora's Box". For further feminist readings of Byron, see Franklin's "'Quiet Cruising O'er the Ocean Woman'" and Byron's Heroines. See also my note "Lord Byron Borrows a Figure", and Malcolm Kelsall's focus on Byron's female figures in his article "The Slave-woman in the Harem". I would like to take this opportunity to cite a couple of other influential feminist readings of Romantic texts not previously discussed: Mary Jacobus's wonderfully detailed study of sexual politics, Romanticism, Writing and Sexual Difference, and Gayatri Spivak, "Sex and History in The Prelude".

## Chapter Two

### Dressing Up: Feminist Approaches to Gender, Genre and Gynesis

#### *Genre*

Though issues of gender and genre provided an important starting point, this thesis does not deal in any detail with questions of genre. The texts on which I focus may be grouped under the generic heading of non-fictional prose, but there are, of course, great differences between, for example, Edmund Burke's A Philosophical Enquiry and Thomas De Quincey's The English Mail-Coach: they are separated in time by almost a century (published in 1757/59 and 1849/1854, respectively); Burke's Enlightenment discourse (and ideological commitments) contrasts with De Quincey's "impassioned prose" (Cooke 242); the Enquiry was published in book form and reprinted approximately every third year for thirty years, while The English Mail-Coach, like other of De Quincey's writings, appeared in Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine. Equally between these and Shelley's A Defence of Poetry and Keats's letters, a huge generic chasm yawns (without beginning to consider differences between *these* texts). As is well known, Shelley's text was written (at least partly) in response to Peacock's The Four Ages of Poetry, but it was dislocated from this immediate context, finding a readership only in a later age. Keats's letters were written for private, if at times communal, perusal not for public consumption, and were not published until Milnes's Biography of 1848, while the letters to Fanny Brawne were first published in 1878. For the purposes of this thesis, I have worked with a flexible notion of the historical boundaries of Romanticism, an extended Romanticism that encompasses Burke's treatise, since his categorization of the sublime and the beautiful had far-reaching

effects, and De Quincey's essays from the middle of the next century, which are so often fixated on an earlier period.

The definition of these prose texts as "marginal" is also open to question. Certainly, as I discussed in the previous chapter, within the received version of Romanticism, the limelight has been hogged by six male poets. But, Burke, Shelley, Keats and De Quincey are hardly non-canonical names.<sup>1</sup> It remains the case, however, that in university courses on Romanticism, Burke's Reflections on the Revolution in France is far more likely to make an appearance than his aesthetic treatise; De Quincey is most likely to be represented by Confessions of an English Opium-Eater, while the prose of Shelley and Keats has historically been valued as an heuristic device for the reading of their poems. In this sense, the texts I read may be seen as marginal to the Romantic canon.<sup>2</sup>

It is worth noting that genre is not an essential category, but is highly reader specific: certain genre distinctions will only be clear to certain classes of readers (with the added variable of careless or careful reading), while critical perceptions of genre change over time.<sup>3</sup> Caroline Franklin recognizes that "as a genre itself consists of the coexistence of overlapping modes, a rigidly schematic approach is not appropriate, but the value of broadly indicating ...generic parameters ...has a mediatory function, allowing a diachronic perspective both on the literary forms themselves and the specific historical context of the texts under consideration" (Byron's Heroines 10).<sup>4</sup> To speak of the gender of genre, as I will do in the following pages in order to contextualize my interpretations of romantic prose, is not to retrieve an essential gender identity of particular genres; rather, I foreground the reception of texts, and the critical industry that marks out the gendered boundaries of reading and writing.<sup>5</sup>

The novel is, from its beginnings in the early eighteenth-century, associated with the feminine. Tom Jones and Robinson Crusoe notwithstanding, novels are full of female voices, whether ventriloquized, as in the case of Richardson's Clarissa, or issuing from the female pen. The novel of sensibility's "man of feeling" is marked by the signs of femininity, such as tears and other displays of emotion, which are becoming newly-acceptable for men. Increasing literacy, the decreasing cost of book production, and the rise of the circulating libraries made novels available to a relatively wide range of people.<sup>6</sup> Female authorship remained circumscribed: according to B.G. MacCarthy, "To venture safely into print a woman should be either morally didactic, dilettante, or distressed" (II:40).<sup>7</sup> The novel was at times decried because of its association with women: appropriating Pope's dictum, the Monthly Review, 20, 1759, declared "Most *novels* have no character at all" (Jones 176), and women were not encouraged, or even permitted, to read (all) novels.

Moralists, educationalists and conduct-book writers sought to limit the genres deemed appropriate reading matter for the female gender. This is part of the ideological project of circumscribing female education in order to produce an ideal, domestic woman. Political and scientific tracts, philosophy, anything radical or controversial, was out of bounds for women readers, as were certain types of novels.<sup>8</sup> James Fordyce, in Sermons to Young Women (1776), warns of "that fatal poison to virtue, which is conveyed by Profligate and Improper Books" (I:144). Hannah More finds novels "dangerous", for they are "employed to diffuse destructive politics, deplorable profligacy, and impudent infidelity" (28). Novels are seen to be 'naturally' more attractive to the female mind than other more high-brow genres. The problem with novels (and poems) is that they can be consumed in private, and therefore there



is no way of controlling their influence on impressionable minds, other than prohibition. John Bennett's Letters to a Young Lady (1789) makes this point: "Plays, operas, masquerades, and all the other fashionable pleasures have not half so much danger to young people as the reading of these books. With *them*, the most delicate girl can entertain herself, in *private*, without any censure; and the poison operates more forcibly, because unperceived" (II:72). "[L]oose and luscious" narratives are "improper" material for female readers: "she who can bear to peruse them must in her soul be a prostitute"; young women are encouraged to read Richardson's novels because he presents models of "female excellence" (Fordyce I:147-149). These books can be used in the same way as conduct-books, providing ideal models to be imitated, as is suggested by Bennett's comment: "If ...I wished a girl to be every thing, that was *great* I would have her continually study his Clarissa. If I was ambitious to make her every thing, that was *lovely*, she should spend her *days and nights*, in contemplating his Byron" (II:102). Mary Wollstonecraft, while criticizing conduct-book discourse, and urging women to free themselves from such ideological shackles, nevertheless makes clear the anxiety about mimetic behaviour that is at the heart of such discourse: she writes of women who read novels that they will "plump into actual vice" (Rights of Woman 306).<sup>9</sup>

Some writers, such as Hester Chapone in Letters on the Improvement of the Mind, addressed to a Young Lady (1773), consider reading poetry to be the best way of cultivating the "charming" faculty of female imagination (Jones 106).<sup>10</sup> But Poetry, like novels, attracts censorship, for both reading and writing it distracts women from their domestic duties: "It heightens [a woman's] natural sensibility to an extravagant degree, and frequently inspires such a romantick turn of mind, as is

utterly inconsistent with all the solid duties and proprieties of life" (Bennett I:208). "[S]hort but spirited essays", however, "convey the rules of domestic wisdom and daily conduct" (Fordyce I:279). Such essays as appear in the Guardian, Tatler and Spectator are "proportioned to the scope" of young ladies's "capacities" (Fordyce I:281-82).<sup>11</sup> Ellen Messer-Davidow sums up the appeal of such texts: "Short, topical, uncomplicated, lively, and familiar, these essays, like the extracts that young ladies study, put edifying information into the form most comprehensible to the untutored female intellect" (48).

If novels were both associated with women and proscribed to them, the continuing hegemony of the male Romantic poets fosters the view that poetry was a masculine form, the hegemonic form, both sublime and social, making a difference in its world. In her discussion of the ideological work of Victorian society, Mary Poovey, however, suggests "the extent to which what may look coherent and complete in retrospect was actually fissured by competing emphases and interests" (Uneven Developments 3). In this respect, William Wordsworth's famous dictum that a poet is "a man speaking to men", and Percy Shelley's triumphant defense of "the unacknowledged legislators of the world" may be read against the grain as revealing often unacknowledged truths:<sup>12</sup> William's use of "man" and "men" is perhaps not (or not merely) unconscious phallogentrism, a blithe acceptance of the male as the universal, but a deliberate masculinization of the genre (or a masculinization of the language in which poetry is discussed - even metre is "manly" [609]), while Shelley's comment exposes the marginality of poets to the actual events of political life.<sup>13</sup> It is interesting that both poets express and anchor their claims for poetry in prose. In the Preface to Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth affirms "that there neither is, nor can be,

any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition" (though he does want to keep the distinction at the level of ideas);<sup>14</sup> he uses organic metaphors ("They both speak by and to the same organs ... the same human blood circulates through the veins of them both") to reclaim poetry (which is gendered as "she") as solid (602). Because he wants to assert the social and political efficacy of poetry, Wordsworth gives it a 'body', a palpable presence in the 'real' world.<sup>15</sup> The "very language of men", which is engendered by, and grounded in, experience, makes the poet a man of action as well as words.

As I have already suggested, in an increasingly feminized marketplace, with increasing numbers of women both writing and reading poetry, the male poets turned to "masculine metaphors of power", tropes of conquest for example, "to reassert the power of a vocation that is on the verge of losing whatever influence it had" (Ross, "Romantic Quest" 29). That this is a battle that needs to be fought throughout the period is suggested by Hazlitt's view that Burke's "prose never degenerates into the mere effeminacy of poetry" (7:229). Mary Wollstonecraft, in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, pits her plain prose against the pernicious artificiality of the language of the novel, that debased and feminized genre consumed in vast quantities by languishing ladies. Where Wordsworth wants to make poetry more like prose (his version of Professor Higgins's "Why can't a woman be more like a man?"), Wollstonecraft wants to separate two types of prose. At issue here, as Mary Favret points out, is the "struggle over the gendering of genre and its political effects" ("Mary Shelley's Sympathy" 24).

Wordsworth and Wollstonecraft, in different ways, could be seen as claiming prose as masculine. Conversely, Hazlitt tells us that he is indebted to Coleridge's

description of "poetic prose" as "the second hand finery of a lady's maid" ("On the Prose-Style of Poets" 12:15).<sup>16</sup> Julie Ellison, however, points out in her discussion of Coleridge, that "much of the argumentative and figurative language of The Friend tries to insist that nonfictional prose is to fiction as masculine is to feminine" (191). The gendering of genre in the Romantic period was a process of "uneven developments" (to borrow Poovey's phrase), but in general terms it is possible to assert that the very heterogeneity of the texts that we group under the heading of non-fictional prose raises the spectre of sexual, as well as textual, fluidity.

In this study, I do not consider in detail the tradition of the Spectator-type essay, continued during the period by Charles Lamb, for example, but I would like to make some observations here on other types of prose. The addition of prose prefaces (and notes), for example, was a strategy used by poets to secure the sexually-ambiguous genre of poetry within an authoritative framework.<sup>17</sup> Such paraphernalia locates the poem in the tradition of the edited text, giving it an academic/theological lineage. Caroline Franklin notes that Byron, Scott and Southey prided themselves on the historical accuracy of their romances, and enveloped these texts, which were considered feminine, in a "paraphernalia of prose dedications and notes ...directed not at the female readership but at a small circle of predominantly male friends and literati"; in this way they could "capitalize on the new middle-class and largely female readership [by producing romances], yet also be recognized as literati, addressing a mainly male, classically-educated, and aristocratic elite (as in the eighteenth century)". Shelley's A Defence of Poetry bears the signifiers of class, as much as of gender, for it is in the mode of the gentleman's conversation, while De Quincey's essays are in the tradition of the continental fragment, the organic, subversive, and insecurely

gendered form of Schlegel, for example.<sup>18</sup> The chiasmic symmetry of De Quincey's 'poetic prose' to Wordsworth's 'prosaic poetry' marks out an area of debate about gender as much as genre. Indeed, the hybrid genre of 'poetic prose' (a description which, despite differences in tone fits the texts considered in this thesis), perhaps provokes the most acute insecurities about gender. In Mary Wollstonecraft's words, the mixture of verse and prose produces "the strangest incongruities" (Rights of Men 65).<sup>19</sup> I want to emphasize that I offer no comprehensive theory of the gender of Romantic non-fictional prose. I have focussed on a limited number of texts that, in my opinion, put pressure on the contours of gender, that possess the potential to reveal and displace the binary paradigms that structured the Romantic symbolic economy.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Gender: The composition of Man's woman.*<sup>20</sup>

It is difficult to map the contours of gender within the period in the confines of this chapter, but I will make a few preliminary comments in an attempt to 'place', in an historical context, the ideologies of gender that concern me in this study. Diane Hoeveler argues that "sexual difference first became an obsessive concern ... during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries" (xvii). This concern, which is expressed as a binary model of difference, is evident in the changing scientific representation of the body. Indeed, notions of biology increasingly anchor theories of social roles, but biology, like other discourses, is not outside of ideology. Anatomy may be destiny, but it is cultural, not natural. As Thomas Laqueur has demonstrated in fascinating detail, there is a shift between ancient and Renaissance accounts of the body and those of late eighteenth and early-nineteenth century medical

men.<sup>21</sup> The former are influenced by Galen's writings, which stress the physiological homology between men and women, that is, women's reproductive organs are exactly like men's except that they are internal rather than external. This interiority was connected with the 'fact' that women were positioned lower in the hierarchy of "heat" than men: lacking the generative heat that would cause their reproductive organs to extrude, women remain imperfect men. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, women were seen as fundamentally similar, though biologically and socially inferior, to men. In the latter writings, bodily differences come to be seen in terms of binary oppositions. The foregrounding of women's reproductive system underlined the difference rather than the similarities between the sexes, while, at the same time, it marginalized differences between women, concentrating on their common childbearing capacity.<sup>22</sup> In other words, a hierarchical system based on homology - a difference in degree between men and women - is replaced by a hierarchical system that is based on a difference in kind.

Why should this shift towards a binary model of sexual difference take place in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-centuries? One way of understanding this change is to connect it with the dislocation of social roles experienced in a period of revolutions (French and American), industrialization and urbanization, socioeconomic changes and the growth of dissenting religions. The revolutionary events which shattered the stability of the eighteenth-century inspired "a revolution in the 'manners and morals' of the nation" (Davidoff and Hall 82).<sup>23</sup> Davidoff and Hall foreground the 1780's and 1790's (and, later, the 1830's and 1840's) as "decades of acute social, political and economic disturbance and disruption associated with significant shifts in class relations and political power" (75).<sup>24</sup> To summarize it crudely, the

bourgeoisie attempted to preserve a realm of tranquil domesticity, untainted by public problems; woman presides over, and comes to represent, this domestic space. This is a long and complex process, for as Davidoff and Hall demonstrate the ideology of separate spheres purveyed in late eighteenth-century texts does not exist in widespread material form until the 1830's (earlier in the period women are likely to have been involved in their husband's or family's business, and home and workplace were frequently combined). John Bennett's Letters to a Young Lady (1795) provides evidence of the domestication of the feminine: in this conduct manual, Bennett, locating gender roles within domestic space, casts men as architects, or labourers, they "build the house", while women merely add a 'feminine' touch to the interior design (they "are to fancy, and to ornament the ceiling" and to "dispose [the furniture] with propriety"). Tropes of surface and depth figure the difference between men and women: men and masculinity are associated with solidity, discrimination and depth ("to examine a subject to the bottom"); women and femininity are all surface gloss, adding to a subject "its brilliancy and all its charms" (I:168-69). This ornamentation is always secondary to the main structure.

As the nineteenth-century progresses, the Angel in the House comes to be seen as the ideal female figure. There is a broad shift from seventeenth and early eighteenth-century writing on women, which emphasized their voracious sexual desires, to the late eighteenth-century suppression (partly under the influence of Evangelicalism) of this trait in favour of an emphasis on female modesty. Women are essentially sexually passive, such feelings only evoked within the context of marriage and motherhood (Davidoff and Hall 170).

Moralistic discourses, as well as legal and economic structures, constrain

female agency and support a gender hierarchy. Thus, John Bennett instructs young ladies in Miltonic dichotomies:

*His* Eve reveres her husband. She listens to his conversation, in order to be instructed. In *him*, she feels herself *annihilated* and absorbed. She always shows that deference and consciousness of *inferiority*, which, for the sake of *order*, the all-wise Author of nature *manifestly*, intended. (II:90)

His Eve displays none of the subversiveness of Milton's, and is no more than a passive cipher who confirms the superior status of masculinity. The legal status of married women in England at this time reinforces Bennett's representation. William Blackstone's Commentaries on the Laws of England (1765) reveals that, "The husband and wife are one person in law; that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband: under whose wing, protection and *cover*, she performs everything" (qtd. in Taylor and Luria 98).<sup>25</sup> The woman is "annihilated", "absorbed" or "incorporated" into the man.<sup>26</sup> Interestingly, as I have already noted, the men of Romanticism incorporate certain feminine qualities into their male psyches: Adam's dream is more often androgyny than Eve.<sup>27</sup>

I would like to connect this male absorption of femininity with moralizing discourses about female purity, for the attributes to be appropriated should not taint their new 'host'. Davidoff and Hall point out that,

The concept of purity had taken on a special resonance for women partly because of fears associated with the polluting powers of sexuality. One of the distinguishing characteristics of the middle class



was their concern with decorum in bodily functions and cleanliness of person. Thus, maintaining purity and cleanliness was both a religious goal and a practical task for women. (90)

To go back to Felman's reading of Freud, the question "what is femininity - *for men?*", leads me to analyse the masculine construction of otherness, but also to examine the feminine *within* men. One trajectory that could be read into this thesis is the story of increasing anxiety about the lack of distinction between self and other, the absorption of the one by the other. It is paradoxical that while definitions of masculinity and femininity become increasingly rigid as the nineteenth-century progresses, the very notion of women as secondary, dependent, legally incorporated into men, lends itself discursively to a blurring of distinctions. A further premise of this study is that male fears about female sexuality, and, more broadly, about the security of sexual difference, are not so much suppressed as displaced; the readings in the following chapters annotate this manoeuvre.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Gynesis: Post-structuralist theories in a Feminist Context*

In speaking of the construction of the male subject, and in referring throughout this study to questions of subjectivity, I draw on particular feminist theories about the relationship between subjectivity and language. Jane Gallop outlines the difference between French and American approaches to this issue: "Americans - like Nancy Chodorow - speak of building a 'strong core of self', whereas French - like Josette Feral - talk of the 'subversion of subject' ... The 'self' implies a centre, a potentially autonomous individual; the 'subject' is a place in language, a signifier that is already alienated in an intersubjective network" (Gallop and Burke 106).<sup>28</sup> Gallop herself

has emphasized that "French" and "American" do not necessarily denote the nationalities of the critics, so much as the intellectual traditions within which they work.<sup>29</sup> Though I draw on a range of theoretical paradigms, I would certainly locate my work within the 'French' tradition.

This post-structuralist emphasis on the "subject" as "a place in language" fosters a view of sexual difference as positional rather than fixed and natural (or even experiential).<sup>30</sup> Such theories are predicated ultimately on Saussure's account of difference: Saussure argued that individual words do not possess intrinsic meaning, but that they become meaningful only by being distinguishable from other words, for "in language there are only differences *without positive terms*" (120). Saussure's insight has influenced deconstructive and psychoanalytic theories, and, without attempting to summarize these wide-ranging and complex bodies of writing, I would like to articulate those aspects that are most important to this thesis, and to briefly outline the advantages and the problems of poststructuralist theory for feminism.

Derrida, following Saussure, argues that "difference inscribes itself without any decidable poles, without any independent, irreversible terms" (Dissemination 210), but he radicalizes Saussurean difference by doing away with the notion of a stable signified. Difference is rewritten as differance, the spelling inscribing a difference within difference, both temporal and spatial, both "differing" and "deferring". It is a difference that is seen but not heard, a way of marking the slippages, gaps and undecidabilities that punctuate our knowledge of the world. Experience itself is always already textual, which undermines the potentially oppressive truth claims of unmediated experience. Deconstructive difference also undermines traditional Western concepts of identity, which are structured around a series of binary

oppositions, pre-eminently the opposition man/woman (I discuss these binaries in more detail in subsequent chapters). The appeal of deconstruction for feminism is its attempt to dehierarchize and dismantle these dichotomies; deconstruction displays that the seeming priority of the privileged term is a fraud, and Derrida argues that the primary term is fissured by otherness - difference is "supplementary" rather than oppositional. Phallogocentric logic displaces and projects this internal otherness onto an external, secondary term (such as woman) in order to maintain the fiction of its own self-presence.<sup>31</sup>

Deconstructive ideas have been taken up by many feminist critics, such as Hé\lène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva amongst others, who deploy a strategy of reversal, celebrating the marginal term as a way of subverting hierarchical difference(s).<sup>32</sup> A major problem with poststructuralist theories is their perceived lack of a political programme; as Michèle Barrett notes, deconstructive politics "tend towards the textual and the local" and are thus of limited value in instituting social reform ("Concept of Difference" 35). Many feminists consider that the emphasis on textuality, and textual resistance, marginalizes the important social struggle over meanings.<sup>33</sup>

According to Sally Alexander, psychoanalysis offers feminism "a reading of sexual difference rooted not in the sexual division of labour (which nevertheless organises that difference), nor within nature, but through the unconscious and language" (132). Both Freud and Lacan stress the bisexuality of the drives and the mobility of desire, arguing that sexuality at the fantasmic level is not fixed and is only stabilized through societal conventions. Lacan's oft-quoted statement that "The unconscious is structured like a language" gives access to the argument that

subjectivity and sexuality are not stable, but constituted by discontinuous differences. Samuel Weber describes the Freudian unconscious in a way that emphasizes its affinities with Derridean differance:

If the unconscious means anything whatsoever, it is that the relation between self and others, inner and outer, cannot be grasped as an *interval between polar opposites* but rather as an irreducible dislocation of the subject in which the other inhabits the self as the condition of its possibility. (32-33)

I will take up in subsequent chapters aspects of psychoanalytic, especially Lacanian, thought (such as the notorious Lacanian "phallus"); for the moment, I will simply state that psychoanalytic discourse, like deconstruction, is open to charges of ahistoricism. Moreover, it is hard to forget that though Freud argued that "pure masculinity and femininity remain theoretical constructions of uncertain content", he also tended towards the essentialism of "Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes" (19:241-58).<sup>34</sup>

Some feminists also suffer from the anxiety of influence, worrying that in imitating male theory (theory itself comes to be coded as male) feminist critics lose their way. According to Elaine Showalter,

For some pioneering feminist critics ...the glittering critical theories of Derrida, Althusser, and Lacan seem like golden apples thrown in Atalanta's path to keep her from winning the race. In the adaptation of continental theory to feminist practice they see the dictatorship of the dominant, the surrender of hard-won critical autonomy to a reigning language and style. The post-structuralist feminist ... is a rhetorical

double-agent, a little drummer-girl who plays go-between in male critical quarrels. ("Women's Time, Women's Space" 36)

There remains much room for debate about the usefulness of deconstruction and psychoanalysis for feminism, but I want to focus more specifically here on the role of woman in (as) the subject matter of poststructuralism. I will examine the phenomena of "gynesis" and "men in feminism", and ask why male critics want to occupy the cultural space of woman, however provisionally, and how female critics have responded to this desire.

Alice Jardine analyses the metaphorization of Woman that subtends much postmodern French philosophy; the process she describes as "gynesis" is brought about by the questioning occasioned by the breakdown of the paternal "Master Discourses" of religion, history, science and philosophy:

In France, such rethinking has involved, above all, a reincorporation and reconceptualization of that which has been the master narratives' own "non-knowledge", what has eluded them, what has engulfed them. This other-than-themselves is almost always a "space" of some kind (over which the narrative has lost control), and this space has been coded as *feminine*, as *woman*. (Gynesis 25)

The poststructuralist woman is "neither a person nor a thing, but a horizon ... a reading effect, a woman-in-effect that is never stable and has no identity" (25). She becomes the trope for the other of phallogocentric discourse.<sup>35</sup> This "putting in discourse of 'woman'" has less to do with the writing of women, than with, for example, Derrida's terminology of the "invaginated text" and the "hymen" and the process of "becoming woman" in the work of Barthes and Baudrillard, Deleuze and

Lyotard (to name of some of Jardine's examples).<sup>36</sup>

Jardine argues that "at the heart of gynesis" is the project "[t]o give a new language to these other spaces" and that this project is "filled with both promise and fear", because, as she points out,

[T]hese spaces have hitherto remained unknown, terrifying, monstrous: they are mad, unconscious, improper, unclean, non-sensical, oriental, profane. If philosophy is truly to question those spaces, it must move away from all that has defined them, held them in place: Man, the Subject, History, Meaning. It must offer itself over to them, embrace them. (73)

It is worth noting that this passage articulates in microcosm my own analyses of male Romantic prose writing, which chart precisely the oscillation between rejection of the space of gynesis as other, as monstrous, improper (Jardine's vocabulary echoes Romantic gothicism), and the embrace of these spaces in ways which disarticulates phallogocentric meaning.<sup>37</sup>

Jardine draws attention to the fact that many women writers are participating in the process of gynesis. One might cite Luce Irigaray's argument in Speculum of the Other Woman that woman in patriarchal discourse is constructed as the negative mirror-image of man; the corollary of this is that man is not a clearly bounded entity but is traversed by difference since the coherence of his identity depends on the supplement of the female. However, Jardine primarily addresses the texts of male writers of gynesis, and it is these that feminist critics have found most problematic. At stake, as Cary Nelson has pointed out, is the "struggle[s] over who will keep possession of the metaphysical body of woman" ("Men, Feminism" 168).

Jardine sees the writers she discusses as "women's *compagnons de route*" (38)<sup>38</sup>; other feminist critics are not so sure that they want to take this journey at all, and they worry that men are tagging along (or overtaking) opportunistically because feminism is fashionable, the margin is the trendy place to be seen. If the predominantly male use of the trope of woman is viewed with distrust, so too is the related phenomenon of "men in feminism", of men practising feminist criticism.<sup>39</sup> Both might be seen as instances of what Marguerite Waller has memorably called the "TOOTSIE trope" (2).

Elaine Showalter turns to the Tootsie trope in her influential essay, "Critical Cross-Dressing", in which she exposes the motivations of male critics who dress up in the accoutrements of feminism and suggests why women should worry about these transvestite hero(in)es. Showalter argues that the 1982 film Tootsie does not reveal Dustin Hoffman to be an ideal feminist but rather a phallic woman. According to Showalter, "Playing Dorothy is an ego trip" (for Michael Dorsey/Dustin Hoffman), and "[t]his success comes ... from the masculine power disguised and veiled by the feminine costume" (123). There is a comic gap between the female disguise and the masculinity underneath, as when Dorothy lowers her voice to hail a cab. For Showalter, the implication of Dorothy's "feminist" speeches "is that women must be taught by men how to win their rights".

Having analysed this paradigm, Showalter applies her insights to a number of male critics who use feminist theory. In particular, she sets up Jonathan Culler (the good male feminist) against Terry Eagleton (the bad usurper of feminism). For Showalter, Culler in On Deconstruction avoids "the flamboyant self-promotion of Tootsie" (123), he resists "female impersonation", "[t]hat is to say he has not read as

a *woman*, but as a man and a feminist" (126). Eagleton, on the other hand, participates in "the Rape of Feminist Theory"; his book, The Rape of Clarissa, "is meant to have the dash and daring of a highwayman's attack" and "Eagleton's 'feminist criticism' is ... [a] well-barricaded preserve to be penetrated by the daring Marxist Macheath" (127). Eagleton appropriates feminist theories but ignores feminist readings of Clarissa; he fails to acknowledge his own gender position, and ultimately mirrors the Lovelace of his own interpretation, who rapes Clarissa in order to recover the lost phallus: Showalter reads Eagleton as "'possessing' feminist criticism", appropriating its "phallic" power, as a way of recuperating his fears that "writing (rather than revolutionary action) is effeminate" (128). Eagleton's book is contrasted unfavourably with Terry Castle's Clarissa's Ciphers: the polarity Showalter constructs is between a woman critic who "responds to the silences in Clarissa" and a male critic who "silences ... feminist criticism by speaking for it" (129).<sup>40</sup>

At the end of her essay, Showalter recounts a dream of "the feminist literary conference of the future", inspired by the covergirl of a recent Diacritics special issue on gender (132). The front cover shows an androgenous figure in high heels and tuxedo, without head or hands, while the back displays items of female fashion ("a dress, hat, gloves, and shoes arrange themselves in a graceful bodiless tableau in space"). Her nightmare features a demonic, mutating woman, the headless Diacritical woman, and a third speaker, a man who is "forceful", "articulate" and "wearing a dress" (132). What Showalter fears is that the search for woman (the summer 1982 Diacritics to which she alludes is titled "Cherchez La Femme: Feminist Critique/Feminine Text") will yield only "the ephemera of gender identities, of gender signatures".



I have dwelt on Showalter's essay because it encapsulates, memorably and wittily, a moment in recent feminist thought when the question "what do men want" was very much in vogue, and when certain feminist critics perceived male fascination with femininity and feminism as a mode of colonization. Showalter is by no means a lone voice: Rosi Braidotti finds herself "viscerally opposed to the whole idea [of men in feminism]" ("Envy" 233). Some critics in Men in Feminism worry about the penetrative connotations of the preposition, while the misciting of the anthology as Men on Feminism suggests the missionary-position hermeneutics potentially encoded in male feminism (De Lauretis, Technologies 29).<sup>41</sup> Braidotti observes that male critics unfortunately lack lack, that is, they lack "the historical experience of oppression on the basis of sex", and they are therefore denied full participation in the "ferment of ideas that is shaking up Western culture" ("Envy" 235). She sees the feminization of male thinkers as "a contemporary version of the old metaphysical cannibalism" (237-38). In their introduction to their anthology Out of Bounds, Laura Claridge and Elizabeth Langland discuss the implications of men writing against patriarchy, which is not necessarily disinterested:

A male writer may simply need the space of what he or his culture terms the feminine in which to express himself more fully because he experiences the patriarchal construction of his masculinity as a constriction. He may, that is, appropriate the feminine to enlarge himself, a process not incompatible with contempt for actual women.  
(3-4)<sup>42</sup>

What is most interesting about Showalter's essay, however, is her use of the trope of fashion. She dislikes disguises, men dressing up as feminists or otherwise

feminized, for her theories, of gynocritics, for example, are grounded in the ontological stability of gender, the security of the signature. Clothes which mix up the semiotic message figure the possibility that there may be no essential gender difference under the surface signs. In an earlier essay, "Toward a Feminist Poetics", Showalter declares that feminist theory "cannot go around forever in men's ill-fitting hand-me-downs, the Annie Hall of English studies" (139): she believes that feminist theory needs to cast off its masculine accoutrements, get its act together and dress like a woman. Showalter patrols the boundaries of sexual definitions, legislating against transvestism (and transsexuality) which disturb the propriety of gender identity.<sup>43</sup>

There is another way of looking at cross-dressing, one which sees it as productively destabilizing the fixity of gender identities (I have paid attention to the dysphoric version precisely because it is not the one that is crucial to my thesis; I do not mean to suggest that the counter voices are not worth listening to). In Shoshana Felman's words,

if it is clothes, i.e., a cultural sign, an institution, which determine our reading of the sexes, which determine masculine and feminine and insure sexual opposition as an orderly, hierarchical polarity; if indeed clothes make the *man* - or the woman - are not sex roles as such, inherently, but travesties? ("Rereading Femininity" 28)<sup>44</sup>

Judith Butler asks, "Is drag the imitation of gender, or does it dramatize the signifying gestures through which gender itself is established?" (Gender Trouble x). Where Showalter worries about the erasure of sexual identities, of the specificity that grounds feminist interest in women writers and readers, Butler shifts the angle of vision: "Does being female [or male, for that matter] constitute a 'natural fact' or a cultural

performance, or is 'naturalness' constituted through discursively constrained performative acts that produce the body through and within the categories of sex?" It is, I would claim, the reification and essentializing of various characteristics as masculine or feminine that secures the patriarchal sexual hierarchy. Thus, a critical emphasis on the constructedness of gender is one way of undermining this hierarchy and of putting in question humanist theories of the stable subject.<sup>45</sup>

For feminism, style matters: the project of "gynesis" is, at the level of a woman writing criticism, the attempt to write a different kind of text, "the putting into discourse of 'woman'" as a different modality of textuality. Jane Gallop speaks of an "epistemological revolution" which might be effected through reading strategies that subversively undermine the patriarchal illusion of mastery. In Reading Lacan, in response to an anonymous reader who thought that she demonstrated an inadequate command of her material, Gallop writes: "I was and am trying to write in a different relation to the material, from a more unsettling confrontation with its contradictory plurivocality, a sort of encounter I believe is possible only if one relinquishes the usual position of command, and thus writes from a more subjective, vulnerable position" (19).<sup>46</sup> Gallop concocts innovative strategies of reading, flirting with the master discourses she analyses and analysing her own anxieties. Similarly, Luce Irigaray interrupts the history of western philosophy, by speaking back to its architects and asking impertinent questions (see, for example, her dialogue with Freud's lecture, Femininity, in Speculum).<sup>47</sup> The present text is an attempt to write from the position of the female other; its form and style are part of my feminist project.

In A Philosophical Enquiry, Edmund Burke addresses his reader: "I only desire one favour; that no part of this discourse may be judged of by itself and

independently of the rest" (54); "This manner of proceeding" he judges "very improper" (4). My methodological principles in this study are deliberately "improper". I foreground particular passages, or images, even (or especially) when they might seem marginal to the text as a 'whole'.<sup>48</sup> I abandon the traditional (or new critical) search for cohesive patterns of meaning in favour of a focus on moments of 'trouble'.<sup>49</sup> In a symptomatic reading, the text, like the speech of the analysand in the psychoanalytic situation, can be made to reveal what it attempts to conceal. Freud suggested a parallel between his work and Morelli's connoisseurship, for both are "accustomed to divine secret and concealed things from unconsidered and unnoticed details, from the rubbish-heap, as it were, or our observations" ("The Moses of Michelangelo" 8:222).<sup>50</sup> Feminist theory over the last couple of decades has encouraged reading 'against the grain', as a way of revising cultural narratives and creating new spaces of discourse, what Teresa de Lauretis, using a metaphor drawn from cinema, calls the "space-off", that area that is not always represented but is inferable from the frame (*Technologies* 25). The encounters between text and reader - the reading subject who is in part constituted by these encounters - may not always run smoothly. Institutionally-authorized readings, as well as the text's own signposts to its preferred reading, may be rejected or negotiated by the feminist critic. Interpretation, like the connection between sexuality and textuality, has to do with fabrication. Edmund Burke's *Enquiry* is concerned with the maintenance and enforcement of an ideology of gender;<sup>51</sup> perhaps interpretative impropriety - along the lines of the "useful and scrupulously fake readings" that Gayatri Spivak suggests should take the place of "the passively active fake orgasm" - may upset the socio-sexual order patriarchy tries to uphold ("Displacement" 186).<sup>52</sup>

## Notes to Chapter Two

1. There are some recent studies of the prose essay in the Romantic period: see, Annette Wheeler Cafarelli, Prose in the Age of Poets: Romanticism and Biographical Narrative from Johnson to De Quincey; John C. Whale, Thomas De Quincey's Reluctant Autobiography; Thomas McFarland, Romantic Cruxes: The English Essayists and The Spirit of the Age; David Bromwich, Hazlitt - The Mind of a Critic, and Jane Aaron's feminist study, A Double Singleness: Gender and the Writing of Charles and Mary Lamb.
2. Joel Haefner provides another perspective on marginality: he suggests that "the Romantic essay is central in the development of this flexible genre because the essay became, under the hands of Hazlitt, Lamb, De Quincey, and others, an experiment of self, a trial of human memory, dream, imagination, reason and emotion", so that "[e]ven as an embryonic experiment, the essay insists on its marginality" (196,204). Since the essays appeared in journals and periodicals, they could also be seen as central: recent historicized accounts of Romanticism stress the crucial role of the periodical in constructing and sustaining an audience for literature during the period (see Jon Klancher, The Making of English Reading Audiences, and Marilyn Butler, "Culture's medium").
3. See Clifford Siskin's discussion of his choice "to write a *generic history*" of romantic discourse, rather than a history of genre which tends to produce an "organic" narrative of development (10). Stuart Curran's Poetic Form and British Romanticism provides an overview of the multiplicity of poetic genres during the period.
4. With regard to the essay form, and the romantic essay in particular, Joel Haefner points out that it "is an almost ideal example of *intergenreality*: the conflation, consumption of genres into a single genre that, in the process of fusion, assumes traits and characteristics different from those from which it drew its initial forms. ...Derrida ... calls this process 'invagination'" (197).
5. I do not deal here with other genres, such as drama. Several of the Romantic poets wrote plays, which could be seen as a public, and therefore implicitly masculine, forum for their concerns (though, of course, several of the plays they wrote are 'closet' dramas, never performed in their lifetimes). On the other hand, the theatre has long associations with femininity, and male writers in the Romantic period would have had to deal with the fact that the most important dramatist of the time was a woman, Joanna Baillie. On Romanticism and the theatre, see Julie Carlson.

6. On these issues, see Terry Lovell, Consuming Fiction 49-53.
7. As Vivien Jones points out, "[t]hrough the gendering of mental qualities associated femininity with imagination and creativity ... publishing exposed an essentially private activity to the public gaze, blurring the conduct-book delineation of separate spheres" (140). Women's writing was seen as a socially transgressive act, and was even associated with a loss of chastity; for this reason, "women's texts [and by extension the authors] were judged according to strict moral criteria" (Jones 140).
8. Laetitia Matilda Hawkins, writing in 1793, places the study of politics in "the climax of unfitness" for "so strongly does it appear to [her] barred against the admission of females, that I am astonished that they ever ventured to approach it" (Jones 120).
9. Wollstonecraft writes the rationalist, feminist reply to, amongst others, Fordyce and Gregory (whose work figures in this thesis); see, especially, Rights of Woman 111-122, 191-200.
10. When citing Vivien Jones's anthology, here and elsewhere in this thesis, I usually also mention the title of the text in question and the original publication date.
11. See Kathryn Shevelov for a discussion of the role of the periodicals in constructing gender difference; she comments in detail on the representation of femininity guided by Addison and Steele, which involved "the systematic naturalization of a normative, domestic figure" (52).
12. Shelley's desire to make poets matter is marked by his reuse of the phrase from "A Philosophical View of Reform" (Clark 240).
13. On Wordsworth's attempts to recapture poetry for men by masculinizing the language in which it is discussed, see Susan Matthews, "The Sexual Theory of Metre".
14. The real distinction, according to Wordsworth, is between "Poetry and Matter of Fact, or Science" (602). For Shelley's deconstruction of the difference between prose and poetry, see Defence 484-85.
15. Wordsworth declares, "I have wished to keep my Reader in the company of flesh and blood" (600). In contrast, Shelley often eschews this anchorage, claiming, flippantly, that he does not deal in flesh and blood (Letters II:363). In traditional western thought, the body is frequently associated with the feminine, as we will see in my discussion, in Chapter Five, of Keats's rhetoric of embodiment.
16. This figure calls up Cora Kaplan's insight that, "Masculinity and feminity do not appear in cultural discourse, any more than they do in

mental life, as pure binary forms at play. They are always, already, ordered and broken up through other social and cultural terms, other categories of difference. Our fantasies of sexual transgression as much as our obedience to sexual regulation are expressed through these structuring hierarchies. Class and race ideologies are, conversely, steeped in and spoken through the language of sexual differentiation." ("Pandora's Box" 148)

17. This is, of course, a gross generalization: in Chapter Four, I refer to some of Shelley's prefaces wherein the exploration of love and desire does not necessarily uphold masculine paradigms; moreover, as Jane Stabler has pointed out Byron's glosses tend to be subversive, fragmenting the act of reading the poem and often contradicting, or digressing from, the content. On prose prefaces and romantic poets, see John F. Schell; on Shelley's prefaces, see Elise M. Gold.
18. Going forward on the diachronic axis, in their "juxtaposition of the psychological and the philosophical, the empirical and the imaginative", De Quincey's essays "resemble ... some of the writings of the modern French critics" (Haefner 203).
19. See Joshua Wilner, who analyzes "a sequence of nineteenth-century texts by three male writers [Wordsworth, De Quincey, Baudelaire] whose work worries the distinction between poetry and prose"; with special reference to Baudelaire, Wilner argues that "the subversion of the hierarchical distinction between poetry and prose is bound up with a subversion of gender hierarchies" (1086). His article does not support this claim in convincing detail.
20. I take this phrase from Mary Hays, Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in behalf of the Women, 1798, extracts from which are included in Vivien Jones, Women in the Eighteenth Century, 231-237 (231).
21. See his "Orgasm, Generation, and the Politics of Reproductive Biology", especially 18-19, 23-24; the historical changes in thinking about the body are discussed at book-length in Laqueur's Making Sex.
22. I paraphrase Mary Poovey's formulation of this revised hierarchy of difference and sameness (see, Uneven Developments 6). The question of female "heat" continues to be debated during the period, with women figured either in terms of excess or of lack. 'A Physician' in an early sex-manual writes: "some Physicians have maintained, that Women were hotter than Men, because they are sooner ripe for Business, for if generally speaking, say they, they have more Blood, they have also more Heat, because the natural Heat resides after a more eminent manner, where there is most of that Humour. .... I think, I might without any manner of difficulty prove the contrary of what is said of the Constitutions of Women. I could show, that the great quantity of Blood proceeds rather from the Mediocrity than any Excess

of Heat; that Women are rather fickle and light than ingenious; that if they Engender and grow old sooner, it shows the weakness of that Heat: That Excess of Love cannot be particularly ascribed to the force of this same Heat, but to the Inconstancy of their Imagination, or rather to the Providence of Nature, that has made them to serve us for Playtoys after our more serious Occupations." (The Pleasures of Conjugal Love Explained. In an Essay Concerning Human Generation, [1740], in Jones 81-82)

23. It is a crude generalization to see the eighteenth-century as "stable", but it is perhaps reasonable to assert that it was perceived as comparatively stable by succeeding generations.
24. Davidoff and Hall provide the most detailed and readable account of changing gender roles in the period 1780-1850 that I have come across. They are particularly concerned with what happens when you insert women into socio-economic accounts of history. They pay special attention to the centrality of various religious beliefs to the consolidation of the middle-class (see, especially, chapters 1 and 2 of Family Fortunes).
25. The writer of The Hardships of the English Laws in relation to Wives, 1735 petitions the King and Parliament "for an Alteration or a Repeal of some Laws, which, as we [wives] conceive, put us in a worse Condition than *Slavery* itself" (Jones 217). Throughout the period analogies are drawn between the state of marriage and that of slavery; for a full discussion of women's relation to the slave-trade and the use of slavery as a trope for marital bondage, see Moira Ferguson, Subject to Others. Male writers also recognize, though they tend to justify, the unequal position of women in marriage: George Savile, Marquis of Halifax, writes that, "the *Laws of Marriage*, run in harsher stile towards your *Sex*. *Obey* is an ungentle word, and less easie to be digested, by making such an unkind distinction in the Words of the Contract" (Jones 17). Savile's The Lady's New Year's Gift: or, Advice to a Daughter was first published in 1688, and was "reprinted at least fourteen times throughout the eighteenth century" (Jones 14).
26. Though under certain circumstances husbands could obtain a divorce, women could not do so until the bill of 1857 that reformed the marriage and divorce laws of England.
27. On Romantic androgyny, see Diane Hoeveler's "Introduction" to The Woman Within.
28. As critics have pointed out, the discrediting of the unitary self is not a recent invention; the historicity of this concept is discussed by Terry Eagleton in the television series Talking Liberties (Channel Four, 1992).



29. See Toril Moi, Sexual/Textual Politics xiv, and Naomi Schor, "Introducing Feminism" 95.
30. This does not mean that the meanings of sexual difference are not effected by cultural experience, or that they do not vary in different societies and historical periods, but it is to mark the distinction between theories which foreground experience and see the categories of masculinity and femininity as relatively unproblematic, and those theories which consider sexual identities as the products of a continuous process of differentiation. See Michele Barrett's helpful surveys of the concept of "difference" in feminist theory ("Some different meanings" and "The Concept of Difference").
31. I discuss the failed suppression of the "dangerous supplement" of woman in Chapter 6.
32. I retain the traditional spelling rather than the reformation of this word, since I don't wish to mark the texture of my work as exclusively Derridean.
33. For detailed discussion of the complicated and often fraught relationship between feminism and deconstruction, see, amongst others, Elizabeth Meese, Crossing the Double-Cross, and, with Alice Parker, The Difference Within; Gayatri Spivak, "Feminism and Deconstruction, Again"; Barbara Johnson, World of Difference and Jill Marsden, "Strange Alliances".
34. All references to Freud are to the Standard Edition, ed. James Strachey, cited by volume and page number(s).
35. In other words, what seems to happen in practice is that the liminality of a "horizon" stabilizes into an "other".
36. Cary Nelson discusses Derrida's use of the trope of woman and his sexualized vocabulary; he argues that Derrida's terms, such as "hymen" and "double, chiasmic invagination", are "contaminated by the same system they would critique", while to use the metaphor of woman to connote undecidability is "to make a certain libidinal investment in the image of woman in one's own work" ("Men, Feminism" 169). Jonathan Culler notes that "Feminists are rightly disturbed that in this deconstructive paleontology 'woman' may no longer refer to actual human beings defined by historical representations of sexual identity but serves rather as the horizon of a critique identifying 'sexual identity', 'representation', and the 'subject' as ideological impositions"; "But", he argues, "this is the other front of a struggle that also involves the celebration of the work and writing of women" (On Deconstruction 175). I am much in sympathy with Culler, but the gap between these positions remains a problem.

37. For a lucid analysis of the destructuring of Western society purveyed in Jardine's book, see Barbara Creed, "From Here to Modernity". Drawing her examples from movies, Creed focusses on five areas that are of particular relevance to the relation between feminism and postmodernism: "the collapse of the master narratives of the West; the breakdown of the paternal metaphor; the crisis in representation; the decentring of the subject; the critique of binarism" (50).
38. Jardine takes up this image again in her article "Men in Feminism", though she is less sanguine at this point about the status of men in feminism: the present travelling-companions are shifted into the future tense, as both desire and possibility ("We need you [men] as traveling *compagnons* into the twenty-first century" [61]). I am indebted to my colleague Duco van Oostrum for stimulating conversations about men in feminism.
39. This issue has been hotly debated in a number of texts, notably in the following edited collections: Alice Jardine and Paul Smith, Men in Feminism; Linda Kauffman, Gender and Theory; Laura Claridge and Elizabeth Langland, Out of Bounds.
40. Showalter praises Eagleton's Literary Theory, finding him in this instance "self-aware" rather than "self-interested", "here he accords it [feminist criticism] a full measure of autonomy and respect" ("Critical Cross-Dressing" 130).
41. It is possible to invert my argument: in other words, the symptomatic prepositional shift annotates a change from a penetrative ("in") to a non-penetrative ("on") textual position, a type of textual safe-sex for the '90's.
42. Claridge's own critical positions fluctuate; see her comments quoted in Chapter One (34-35).
43. In "The Problem of Definition", Jane Gallop turns to Showalter's use of territorial metaphors in "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness". Ever with her finger on the critical pulse, Showalter has in her most recent work shifted from fixed notions of sexual identities to "Speaking of Gender".
44. See Mary Jacobus's wide-ranging and provocative essay, "Reading Woman (Reading)" in her book Reading Woman which analyses, amongst other texts, Woolf's Orlando, Felman's article and the Showalter essay discussed above. Janet Todd comments on Showalter's "Critical Cross-Dressing" in Feminist Literary History 122-125, and adds to the latter's criticism of Eagleton. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar examine transvestism as metaphor in No Man's Land, Vol.2 (Chapter 8). They argue that male modernists' use of the trope of cross-dressing is conservative, while for women writers it is

revisionary; they take Showalter's side in the 'men in feminism' debate. Other critics have used the trope of fashion in discussing feminist literary theory. For example, analysing "the question of an effective feminist practice", Nancy Miller characterizes the polarities of French and American criticism: "This problematic may also be understood in relation to *shoes*: as in the sturdy, sensible sort worn by 'American' feminists, and the more frivolous, elegant type worn by Cixous" (Subject to Change 69; as Miller notes, Cixous herself uses this metaphor). Miller tries to imagine some sort of alliance between ludic and materialist feminisms: "What we might wish for ... is a female materialism attentive to the needs of the body as well as the luxuries of the mind. Can we imagine, or should we, a position that speaks in tropes and walks in sensible shoes?" (76).

45. I have a - true - story that speaks to the constructedness, and mobility, of gender/identity: in February 1992, I was on my way to a job interview at the University of Groningen in The Netherlands. On the train from Amsterdam, a man stopped as he was walking through the train and spoke to me. "You must be Amanda Gilroy", he said. I asked how he knew, and he replied: "You're reading Men in Feminism". (The man is Fred Botting - both of us had been told the names of the other applicants, but we had not met before).
46. On Gallop's 'voice(s)', see Jane Moore, "An other space" 71-72. It is easy to see how "negative capability" might come in here, but, because it has generated different readings, I have deferred discussion of this concept until Chapter Five.
47. See also This Sex, especially 199-169, for further discussion of a new feminine syntax. Shoshana Felman employs an impertinent strategy in the essay with which I began this study - by ventriloquizing Freud's question, she displaces and disrupts the "misleadingly self-evident universality of its male enunciation" ("Rereading Femininity" 21).
48. To focus on the part rather than the whole is also, of course, to be an unPopean critic.
49. My use of this word is meant to evoke the title of Judith Butler's book, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity.
50. The analogy between Freud and Morelli is discussed by Jane Gallop, Thinking Through the Body 135-148, and, adding Sherlock Holmes to the scenario, by Naomi Schor, Reading in Detail 65-67, and Carlo Ginzburg.
51. Though, as I argue in Chapter 3, this gender ideology is disrupted by his own fascination with femininity.

52. Nancy Miller similarly suggests a strategy of "overreading" (Subject to Change 83).

## *Part II*

## Introduction to Part Two

*Tropes are the dreams of speech.*  
Nabokov, Ada (416)

Each of the subsequent chapters is clustered around a trope (or tropes), figures which, as Nabokov suggests, are like dream-scripts revealing more than they seem to tell. But they are "dreams", too, for the feminist critic in that they expose the constructedness of gender and thus open spaces for new ways of fabricating sexual identities. In Chapter Three, I examine Edmund Burke's A Philosophical Enquiry; I use the category of the masquerade to point up the inherent instability of the male gaze. I argue that the "beautiful" is (re)produced as a female figure, whom the male speaker both desires and identifies with. Chapter Four takes a selection of Percy Bysshe Shelley's prose texts, especially A Defence of Poetry and his essays "On Love" and "On Life", and analyzes Shelley's use of the tropes of the mirror and the veil. The male gaze is again an issue as I comment on the discourse of specularly in Shelley's writing. Using Lacanian theories of the construction of subjectivity, I trace Shelley's self-divisions, his failure to project division onto women - the strategy of patriarchal culture - and thus the failure to maintain the illusion of his own wholeness. The traditional feminine connotations of the figure of the veil further complicate the texture of Shelleyan subjectivity. In Chapter Five, I turn to Shelley's contemporary, Keats, reading him alongside Julia Kristeva. The cross-over between these two writers is their interest in the body, in metaphors of the body. In reading Keats's letters, I am interested in moments that display a type of boundary confusion, especially confusion at the level of the gendered body. Finally, Chapter Six listens

to the language of flowers in the work of Thomas De Quincey, particularly The English Mail-Coach, the Suspiria de Profundis and the episode dealing with the death of Kate Wordsworth in Recollections of the Lakes and the Lake Poets. I argue that flowers figure the bisexuality that is at the heart of De Quincey's writing, and I enlist Freud and Derrida, amongst others, to support my contention that that which is figured as feminine, as exotic, alien, outside an entity, is ultimately a self-fissuring, and self-fashioning, difference.

My focus on the circulation of the meanings of femininity, as seen from a masculine perspective, in the texts under consideration reveals the fragility of sexual identities. The fascination with femininity throws masculinity into crisis. Desiring the other (within a Lacanian economy of desire), these speakers transgress the positionalities defined as "masculine" or "feminine", revising, in the process, the very notion of 'otherness'.

## Chapter Three

### **"Observe that part of a beautiful woman": Masquerade and the Male Gaze in Edmund Burke's A Philosophical Enquiry**

*...a very pretty treatise on the Sublime.*  
David Hume<sup>1</sup>

In an attempt to theorize the cultural construction of sexual difference, Laura Mulvey analyzes the significance of the (en)gendered gaze:

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*. Woman displayed as sexual object is the *leit-motif* of erotic spectacle: from pin-ups to strip-tease, ... she holds the look, and plays to and signifies male desire. ("Visual Pleasure" 19)

In this theory of sexual difference, male scopophilia is focussed on the female form. Men perform as active agents; women are passive, frozen as objects of erotic contemplation. These arrested images of beauty (which derive, as John Berger has argued, from the tradition of western easel painting) are staged to secure male pleasure. However, Mulvey speculates that this pleasure is endangered by the very image of woman which evokes castration anxieties in the male spectator. In Mulvey's formulation, men are the makers of meaning, women merely the bearers of



meaning; women signify sexual difference, and the female body, perceived by men as lacking a penis, bears the threat of castration. Fetishism and voyeurism are the two main strategies, according to Mulvey, by which the male viewer disavows this threat, and sustains the availability of visual pleasure. In other words, "patriarchy must first flaunt women as lacking [so that it appears full of power] and then try to contain that lack" (Saper 37).

The cultural equation between the beautiful image and the beautiful woman<sup>2</sup> - between the production of aesthetics and the production of femininity - is found in paradigmatic form in Edmund Burke's treatise A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful (1757/1759).<sup>3</sup> Mulvey's critique of masculine investment in the aesthetic of female beauty provides a frame in which to analyse Burke's treatise.<sup>4</sup> The feminine is produced as a passive erotic image contained within the parameters of the male gaze. However, I will argue that Burke's text cannot attain a single, seamless economy of looking along John Berger's lines that "men act and women appear" (47). Mulvey's article, though it provides useful paradigms, has been criticized for, among other things, its binary opposition of masculine and feminine, and for its homogeneous model of the spectator as masculine and heterosexual.<sup>5</sup> One important question raised by Mulvey's work on the cinematic gaze is, why should the male viewing position be so much simpler than the female? Tania Modleski, in her book The Women Who Knew Too Much, argues that it is not: feminist critics might now turn their gaze on the heterogeneity of the male spectator. Psychoanalysis offers a model of an unstable, divided subject, propelled by 'bisexual' drives so that both male and female subjects are fissured by otherness. Poststructuralist theories have worked to blur the boundaries between the

text and its reader/spectator: if 'meaning' is created in the space between these two entities, both are involved in the instabilities of the other. In other words, though I will retain the notion of the "male gaze", that seeing of the world through male eyes that structures and supports an oppressive (for men and women) patriarchal system, I am most interested in this chapter, as elsewhere in this study, in those moments of slippage that blur the binary opposition of gender, clearing space(s) for a mobile subject who moves between positions socially constructed as masculine or feminine.<sup>6</sup> My main focus is the discourse of the "beautiful" in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and the role of this discourse in the construction of gendered subjectivities. As Teresa de Lauretis suggests, "the representation of woman as image (spectacle ... vision of beauty ...) is so pervasive in our culture that it necessarily constitutes a starting point for any understanding of sexual difference and its ideological effects in the construction of social subjects" (Alice Doesn't 37).

This chapter, perhaps more than the others, is marked by a type of "double vision", in that the female subject subversively undermines male constructions of femininity, and is seen to be a maker as well as a bearer of meaning. Before turning in detail to the Burkean category of the beautiful, I will outline two critical contexts: first, the ways in which Burke's treatise enforces eighteenth century cultural assumptions about gender difference, especially the ideology of femininity,<sup>7</sup> and second, the continuing hegemony of the sublime in critical discourses.

\* \* \* \* \*

In a footnote to his essay "A Brief Appraisal of the Greek Literature", Thomas De Quincey notes that the idea of "the sublime by way of polar antithesis to the Beautiful ... grew up on the basis of *sexual* distinctions - the Sublime corresponding to the

male, and the Beautiful, its anti-pole, corresponding to the female" (Masson 10:300-301).<sup>8</sup> Though the category of the Sublime was used as a critical term from the end of the seventeenth century, and the Beautiful had come to be seen as its feminine opposite, Burke expounded most clearly the gendered distinctions of his society. The qualities of sublime objects are culturally masculine ones: vastness, ruggedness, hardness, roughness. The sublime is associated with infinity and power, both in terms of the scale of the object and the effect on the observer.<sup>9</sup> "[F]ortitude, fidelity, and firmness" are sublime attributes, which Burke, in his Speech on American Taxation calls "the great and masculine virtues" (105). The sublime is located in "[w]hatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror", though importantly this takes place "at certain distances" from danger, when fear is aestheticized as delightful pain (Enquiry 39,40).<sup>10</sup> As W.J.T. Mitchell sums up: "Sublimity, with its foundations in pain, terror, vigorous exertion, and power, is the masculine aesthetic mode" (129). Conversely, the features annotated by Burke as defining objects experienced as beautiful are conventionally 'feminine' ones: smallness, smoothness, fragility, lack of resistance, quietness, as well as soft colours and curviness. If the sublime implies the transgression of boundaries, that is, vast objects which have an overwhelming effect on the spectator, the beautiful is associated with contained form, and the experience of "reliefs, gratifications, and indulgences" (Enquiry 111). In accordance with the ideology of separate spheres, beautiful virtues operate in the private sphere rather than the public arena of "strong virtues". Hazlitt sums up the two categories in terms of "contrast" and "conformity" ("Outlines of Taste" 20:390).<sup>11</sup>

The gender distinction that grounds the sublime and the beautiful exposes these categories as a hierarchical rather than a neutral system of difference: the "softer virtues" are described as "subordinate" ones, and the sexual politics of Burke's aesthetics are clearly revealed:

There is a wide difference between admiration and love. The sublime, which is the cause of the former, always dwells on great objects, and terrible; the latter on small ones, and pleasing; we submit to what we admire, but we love what submits to us; in one case we are forced, in the other we are flattered into compliance. (111,113)

Burke reproduces conventional gender alignments in his scenario of diminutive damsels whose submissive deference gratifies the male subject (and the implied male reader).<sup>12</sup>

If Burke marginalizes the beautiful, and women, recent critics have tended to perpetuate this system of privilege in "their rush to ... the sublime" (Ferguson, "Sublime" 68).<sup>13</sup> In their well-known books, Thomas Weiskal, Neil Hertz and Peter de Bolla all focus on the sublime. Frances Ferguson observes that "this indifference to the beautiful ... draws a certain authority from prominent eighteenth and nineteenth-century accounts of the sublime and the beautiful. Burke, for example, has repeatedly been observed to droop in his discussion of the beautiful; and Kant, similarly treats the beautiful as a more limited area of perception than the sublime". Similarly, James Boulton argues that the binary hierarchy established by Burke may explain the neglect of the beautiful: "The principal weakness in Burke's theory arises from the sharp distinction he draws between the sublime and the beautiful. He reserves to sublimity all that is awe-inspiring and powerful in its impact and by contrast reduces beauty to

a weak and rather sentimentalized conception." (xxv); Boulton quotes Dugald Stewart's disparaging observation that "the idea of *female beauty* was evidently uppermost in Mr Burke's mind when he wrote his book".

Feminist critics, disenchanted with 'the beauty myth',<sup>14</sup> have begun to explore the differing relationships of male and female Romantic writers to the Sublime (a category conceived in general terms, but indebted to Burke). Patricia Yaeger argues that "[t]he Romantic sublime is a genre that is, historically and psychologically, a masculine mode of writing ...concerned with empowerment, transport, and the self's strong sense of authority" ("Toward a female sublime" 192); in her view, the "feminine" experience is of the "failed sublime", whereby the female subject is disempowered (201). Jane Moore finds the "failed sublime" enacted in Mary Wollstonecraft's A Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark: the woman writer's experience of the sublime (rocks and waterfalls) involves a loss of "self-orientation" or a forgetting of the experience ("Plagiarism" 153). However, the male writers' relation to the sublime is not as secure as one might suppose (indeed, it is worth noting that the "egotistical sublime" is intentionally oxymoronic in that the sublime and the self are not the same thing). Moore interprets Coleridge's plagiarism, in "Kubla Khan", of Wollstonecraft's text as a "failed attempt" to consume and erase the traces of the feminine, and attain "sublime oneness" (158,157).<sup>15</sup>

Meena Alexander gives a positive slant to Yaeger's notion of the feminine "failed sublime": in women's writing, she argues, "there is a crossing back, at the brink of visionary revelation, to the realms of ordinary, bodily experience - whether that experience is rendered subtle and elusive, as with Dorothy Wordsworth, or imaged in almost brutal excess, as with Mary Shelley" (167). The significance of this

gesture is that it "chooses to preserve rather than forget the materials of ordinary female life. And this choice, implicit, even covert at times, restructures a new feminine sensibility". In other words, the resistance to sublimity is a resistance to cooption by masculine structures, and the traditionally devalued ('female') side of a series of binary oppositions - domesticity/sublimity, body/spirit, earthly/visionary - is given precedence.<sup>16</sup>

Other critics have found in the Sublime an aesthetic category which is more directly disruptive of patriarchal paradigms. These critics draw on the sublime as "a signifier of the transgression of boundaries" (Mattick 294).<sup>17</sup> Because the Sublime, as Burke and Kant recognized, does not depend on form (it is associated in Burke with obscurity, which blurs the definition of boundaries), it is an arena where uncertainty and deviance may be enacted.<sup>18</sup> In two essays on the female nude, Lynda Nead argues that "[t]he sublime is not simply the site for the definition of masculinity but is also where a certain deviant or transgressive form of femininity is played out. It is where woman goes beyond her proper boundaries and gets out of place." ("Art, obscenity and the female nude" 219). The female nude becomes either obscene or grotesque if it exceeds the harmonious contours of beauty, if it challenges the containment of the 'frame'; for example, Nead reads Jo Spence's photographic series "Narratives of Dis-ease" as making visible the unrepresentable female body (in exposing a body marked by cancer and surgery) and, in its mode of direct address, as disrupting the boundaries between self and other ("The Female Nude"). This turn towards the grotesque appropriates for feminist ends the anxiety about the confusion of categories evident in Burke's Reflections on the Revolution in France. The high point of horror in this text, the moment which cannot be framed for aesthetic

contemplation, is the moment when the king and queen are forced from their palace "amidst the horrid yells, and shrilling screams, and frantic dances, and infamous contumelies, and all the unutterable abominations of the furies of hell, in the abused shape of the vilest of women." (85) In 'manhandling' Marie Antoinette, the epitome of beauty, these "swinish" and "vile" women transgress both the proper role of women and the ordered separation of the social classes.<sup>19</sup> Patriarchal privilege, in the person of the king, is dethroned, and the division within the sign "Woman" undermines the secure polarity sublime/beautiful, masculine/feminine. This experience "press[es] too nearly" (Enquiry 40) for Burke to experience the thrill of sublime delight (it poses too great a threat to the British political system).

The association of the sublime and masculinity has also been subverted, providing another lever for the destabilization of Burke's oppressive hierarchies. One of Burke's earliest and most effective readers, Mary Wollstonecraft, rejects "libertine notions of beauty" that degrade women, comparing such women to soldiers who are "attentive to their persons, fond of dancing, crowded rooms, adventures, and ridicule." (Vindication of the Rights of Woman 106) These feminized men cannot attain the sublime which is relocated in heroic (but as Mattick points out "desexualized" [300]) women. More recently, Vivien Jones takes another perspective on this gender-bending. She notes that women "are implicitly excluded as subjects from Burke's text" but that "[o]ne of the effects of this male exclusivity is actually to complicate gender stereotypes by describing the possibility of acceptable "feminine" behaviour for men" (4). Jones quotes a passage in which Burke speculates about the place of the grandfather in the family structure: "we generally have a great love for our grandfathers, in whom this authority [of the father] is removed a degree from us, and

where the weakness of age mellows it into something of a feminine partiality." (Enquiry 111) It is worth recalling also the passivity of the male figure in the face of the sublime, which compromises the association of masculinity and activity. These slippages in Burke's categories site the 'feminine' as a position that can be occupied by men, and they would repay further feminist analysis. However, I would like to move on to consider the category of the beautiful in more detail.

\* \* \* \* \*

*We know that women are meant to look perfect.*

Jacqueline Rose

Focussing on female beauty within a masculine economy of vision, Jacqueline Rose writes, "we know that women are meant to *look* perfect, presenting a seamless image to the world so that the man, in the confrontation with difference, can avoid any apprehension of lack" (Sexuality 232). Rose suggests that only a feminist project can demand the renunciation of this perfection of form.<sup>20</sup> Burke himself, however, argues against the notion that "[p]erfection is the constituent cause of beauty" (Enquiry 110). He writes that beauty,

where it is highest in the female sex, almost always carries with it an idea of weakness and imperfection. Women are very sensible of this; for which reason, they learn to lisp, to totter in their walk, to counterfeit weakness, and even sickness. In all this, they are guided by nature.<sup>21</sup>

The renunciation of the perfection of female form (by a 'male' author) remains open to a feminist critique; to use Judith Butler's formulation, this might be an example of women "signify[ing] the Phallus through 'being' its Other, its absence, its lack, the dialectical confirmation of its identity" (Gender Trouble 44).<sup>22</sup> Burke's discourse



is certainly not exempt from this critique; however, it is necessary to reintroduce here the question of historical difference, in other words to assess the (subversive) force of Burke's text within its particular historical context. In embracing imperfection as the mark of female beauty, Burke rejects the neo-classical ideals of beauty current during the period. Reynolds, for example, in the Third of his Discourses (delivered in 1770) posits the artist's task as that of correcting imperfections. In terminology close to Burke's, he argues that "[t]he most beautiful forms have something about them like weakness, minuteness, or imperfection" but the trained eye of the (male) artist "being enabled to distinguish the accidental deficiencies, excrescences, and deformities of things, from their general figures, he makes out an abstract idea of their forms more perfect than any one original" (106). The devalorized nature which needs to be both pared down and made complete is feminine: the artist "corrects nature by herself, her imperfect state by her more perfect".<sup>23</sup> The neo-classical aesthetic betrays a distrust of and disgust for the human - implicitly the female - body, which is to be regulated through the discipline of artistic form.

This aspect of neo-classical ideals (and the tenacity of this discourse, which extended into the nineteenth-century) may be revealed through a brief glance at the career of Emma Hamilton. Emma Hamilton was the mistress, and then the wife, of Sir William Hamilton, the British ambassador to Naples and the connoisseur whose collection of Roman coins, Greek vases and other archeological remains was influential in shaping Neoclassical taste (Fothergill 64). Emma cultivated a remarkable and uncanny skill in impersonating classical statues. Horace Walpole called her the "Nymph of the Attitudes", and these "attitudes" perversely illuminate a central tenet of neoclassical aesthetics, the desire "to transfer living charms to an

inanimate surface" (Hazlitt, "On Sitting" 12:112-113). Emma Hamilton constituted herself in the process of posing in the frozen forms of classical statuary, making for herself another 'purer' body, purged of the deformities of life: her flesh valorized by reference to the marble statue which she imitated.<sup>24</sup> A few days after her marriage to Hamilton (in 1791), Walpole wittily observed that "Sir William Hamilton has actually married his Gallery of Statues, and they are set out on their return to Naples"; the World newspaper proposed that Sir William should have gone abroad with some of Romney's portraits of Mrs. Hart [Emma Hamilton] rather than the living model, "a piece more cumbrous and changeable than any of the foregoing" (qtd. in Fothergill 251,218). The work of art is privileged over the model, though in this latter instance the 'real' woman has first provided the matter for the ideal: Walpole's witticisms suggest the minimal ontological distance between art work and model, and point, albeit in a light-hearted way, to the hierarchies of neo-classicism. The uncanny transference between the real and the ideal repeats commonly held beliefs in the art world: there is a long tradition for works of sculpture serving as models - until the latter part of the nineteenth-century, academic drawing was taught in three phases, with students learning the rudiments of drawing, then moving on to drawing casts taken from figurative statuary, before finally studying the human model in the Life Room. Even in the Life Room models were frequently required, like Emma Hamilton, to adopt the poses of famous statues, for models embodied the subordinate state of the Real rather than the authority of the Ideal (represented by casts and statues). In the 1830's, Turner, teaching in the Life Room at the Royal Academy, placed the living model next to a cast of the Venus de Medici and instructed students to draw one beside the other (William Etty's drawing Female Nude with a Cast of the

Venus de Medici was one result). His pedagogic purpose was "original and very instructive: it showed at once how much the antique sculptors had refined nature", the living model "looked common and vulgar" in the comparison (Redgrave 93-94).

I will return to a consideration of statuary later in this chapter; for the moment I will consider another important aspect of neo-classical aesthetics - the privileging of metaphysical beauty, that of valuing 'inner' qualities (though with an implied correspondence between inner and outer perfection) which continues into the nineteenth century. William Hazlitt cites Flaxman's dictum that "the most perfect soul is the most perfect body" (10:347).<sup>25</sup> Leigh Hunt provides a good illustration of this elision of the material and the spiritual in his essay "Criticism on Female Beauty": "The first step in taste is to dislike all artifice; the next is to demand nature in her perfection; but the best of all is to find out the hidden beauty, which is the soul of beauty itself, to wit, the sentiment of it" (236). The female body is dematerialized in favour of an ideal figure without history or desire whose 'depth' ("hidden beauty") is valorized over her surface. The perfect surface paradoxically redirects attention to inner beauty. The ideological project of this discourse bolsters essentialist concepts of subjectivity, that is, female identity is based on the assumption of a seamless (though nonetheless hierarchical) continuity between inner and outer. The exterior is viewed as the 'natural' image of the self. This theory produces both an oppressive ideal of Woman to which women must aspire, and attempts to endow the sign "Woman" with semiotic stability (I discuss at the end of the next section the way language frustrates this project).

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*Misled by these trope and figure ladies.*  
Hannah More<sup>26</sup>

Burke's gaze, focussing on the material rather than the metaphysical, is located in the margins of contemporary thought.<sup>27</sup> This is not to say that Burke's aesthetics should necessarily be read as a feminist subversion of the ideology of the Ideal, but his emphasis on femininity as a *construct* makes his text available to a feminist rereading. It is worth reiterating that conduct manuals and fiction, as well as political and educational tracts, also provide perspectives on the ways in which female nature is imag(in)ed in this culture. I have dealt briefly with these discourses in Chapter Two, and will return to them subsequently. My reasons for foregrounding Burke's text are that his categories of the sublime and the beautiful are crucially influential throughout the Romantic era, and, as we will see, Burke puts the male gaze under the spotlight.

For Burke, the weakness of the 'weaker sex' is artificially produced, though he adheres to the commonplace that artifice is paradoxically 'natural' to women ("In all this, they are guided by nature", Enquiry 110). In taking pleasure in the demonstration of female weakness (lispng and tottering), Burke, as Naomi Schor notes, "fetishizes women's displays self-mutilation" (Reading in Detail 151). Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Men (1790), written in response to Burke's Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790), presents a feminist critique of this ideology, exposing its contradictions and analyzing its debilitating effects on women. Wollstonecraft reads Burke's Reflections through the lens of his aesthetic treatise,<sup>28</sup> in a critical move which reveals the interdependence of the discourses of aesthetics, politics and sexuality. Her most explicit and extended reference to Burke's Enquiry concentrates on the passage quoted above. Addressing Burke directly, Wollstonecraft writes of those "ladies [who] may have read your Enquiry into the

Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful, and, convinced by your arguments, may have laboured to be pretty by counterfeiting weakness" (111-112). Wollstonecraft notes ironically that women must labour in order to fabricate the appearance of delicacy, and she continues:<sup>29</sup>

You may have convinced them that *littleness* and *weakness* are the very essence of beauty ... Thus confining truth, fortitude, and humanity, within the rigid pale of manly morals, they might justly argue, that to be loved, woman's high and great distinction! they should 'learn to lisp, to totter in their walk, and nick-name God's creatures'. (112)

The cosmetic refinements, or mutilations, advocated by Burke "makes those beings", as she writes earlier in this first Vindication, "vain inconsiderate dolls, who ought to be prudent mothers and useful members of society" (54).<sup>30</sup>

I want to suggest that Wollstonecraft's reading of this passage may function as an heuristic device for excavating the subversiveness of Burke's text. I will examine, in particular, the significance of Wollstonecraft's hybrid reference to the Enquiry and to Hamlet, and of the example she offers of those women who may have read Burke's treatise. Wollstonecraft's argument is directed at the ideology that enforces and perpetuates the desirability of doll-like women; Thomas Love Peacock uses the same metaphor to criticize the reduction of women to passive objects in a male system of exchange: "But how is it that their [women's] minds are locked up? The fault is in their artificial education, which studiously models them into mere musical dolls, to be set out in the great toy-shop of society" (Nightmare Abbey 42). To be doll-like is to be objectified, commodified, decorative. Yet Wollstonecraft's allusion to Hamlet is taken from a speech which conflates the slipperiness of women

and art and which poses the woman-as-artist (rather than the material to be modelled into shape) as a threat to male power: Hamlet tells Ophelia, "I have heard of your paintings too well enough. God has given you one face, and you make yourselves another: you jig, you amble, and you lisp, and nickname God's creatures, and make your wantonness, your ignorance. Go to, I'll no more on't, it hath made me mad" (3.1.147-49). A woman's art, the ability to make and remake herself through the media of cosmetics and performance makes men mad for it cannot be controlled by them (or even by the ultimate patriarchal authority, God).<sup>31</sup> Burke, as I have noted, savours the very artifice that Hamlet abhors, but a similar reversal of conventional gender/power relations is encoded in his text: he tells us that "to be affected [by a fine woman], there is no need of the concurrence of our will" (Enquiry 110). Indeed, Leigh Hunt annotates just such a reversal in his description of Marie Antoinette, who, "in her triumphant days, ... swam through an antechamber like a vision and swept away the understanding of Mr Burke" ("Criticism" 257-58). Here the woman's fluid/fluent power cannot be contained by the male gaze, and the male spectator is rendered passive, an aspect of his masculinity ("understanding") negated.

According to Wollstonecraft, "the fair ladies" who are the products of Burke's aesthetic are those "whom ... the captive negroes curse, in all the agony of bodily pain, for the unheard of tortures they invent" (Rights of Men 111). She suggests that after watching a flagellation, these women "compose their ruffled spirits and exercise their tender feelings by the perusal of the last imported novel". Since manners act as "a painted substitute for morals", women are only required to maintain the *fiction* of delicacy. Enmeshed in the destructive ideology of femininity, these women lack "the dignity ... of sensibility" and fail to attain "manly morals".<sup>32</sup> Though Wollstonecraft

is vilifying the tyranny of certain women, her startling picture - of ladies who take sadistic pleasure in the pain of those less powerful than themselves and yet who produce tears for fictional suffering - empowers a feminist reading of both her own and of Burke's text. If conventional femininity is not innate, but culturally constructed; if "women of fashion" are fashioned by costume and customs (48); if women are manipulated by current discourses of 'female excellence', nevertheless, the image of femininity is also manipulable by them.

Interestingly, Hannah More may be invoked to lend support to my argument here. Though Richard Polwhele, in a footnote to his poem The Unsex'd Females (1798), writes that "Miss Hannah More may justly be esteemed, as a character, in all points, diametrically opposite to Miss Wollstonecraft" (Jones 91), the conservative More nevertheless cites the same passage from Hamlet in her discussion of female sensibility (More 52).<sup>33</sup> More criticizes the "standard of feebleness" which is held out to women when they "are complimented with being 'Fine by defect, and delicately weak'"; she argues that "softness and indolence can easily act up [to this standard], or rather *act down*, if I may be allowed the expression" (260). She likens the life of a young woman to that of an actress, "the morning is all rehearsal, and the evening all performance" (73-74). She sees "dissimulation" as "the result of weakness", "the refuge of doubt and distrust", that is, as the product of an unreasonable ideology of femininity (262). Nevertheless, the potential for male anxiety and the subversive possibilities of female submissiveness are evident in her account of contemporary femininity:

The beauty of simplicity is indeed so intimately felt and generally acknowledged by all who have a true taste for personal, moral, or

intellectual beauty, that women of the deepest dissimulation often find their account in assuming an exterior the most foreign to their character, and exhibiting the most engaging naivete. It is curious to see how much *art* they put in practice in order to appear *natural*; and the deep *design* which is set at work to display *simplicity*. And indeed this feigned simplicity is the most mischievous, because the most engaging of all the Proteus forms which artifice can put on. For the most free and bold sentiments have been sometimes hazarded with fatal success under this unsuspected mask. And an innocent, quiet, artless manner has been adopted as the most refined and successful accompaniment of sentiments, ideas, and designs, neither artless, quiet, nor innocent. (262)

There is no necessary correlation between inner and outer. More suggests that ideal femininity may be an accessory (an "accompaniment") worn to captivate unsuspecting men, and which gives them the power to both invite and evade the epistemological penetration of men. If women are constituted by duplicity, if they are, as Burke says, "guided by nature" in the counterfeiting of weakness, it is impossible to isolate a core of 'truth', or determine if such a core exists.

More's strictures are grounded in the conduct literature that flourished in the eighteenth-century and which provided a set of guidelines for female behaviour. While seeking to control the female body, to domesticate it, these texts nevertheless frequently deploy traditional imagery which figures the body as double or deceptive.<sup>34</sup> Wetenhall Wilkes, in A Letter of Genteel and Moral Advice to a Young Lady, which ran through eight editions between 1740 and 1766, writes of the



disappointment of "the amorous youth, who, endeavouring to plunder an outside of bloom and beauty, finds a treasure of impenetrable virtue concealed within!" (Jones 30). The images of virtuous femininity depict an essence of Woman, an ideal figure in whom there is no distortion of the relationship between inside and outside. Though her foppish admirer may think she is all surface, this is merely the mirror of her inner beauty, and the continuity between body and soul makes her impenetrable. However, the image of virtue as a type of buried treasure unavoidably refigures the female body as double (as well as introducing the question of female sexuality, that is, inscribing the body as penetrable at precisely the point when Wilkes would like to argue that it is "impenetrable"). The ornamentation of the body, especially in terms of dress, provokes particular anxiety and feeds a discourse that tries to regulate the disguise facilitated by female fashions, and to marginalize the cultural contingency and change, of which fashion stands as a symbol, as opposed to the unchanging essence of womanhood.<sup>35</sup> Wilkes censures "that girl, who endeavours, by the artifice of dress, to attract the admiration, to stir up languishing desires, and to provoke the wanton wishes of her gay beholders"; he counsels the modest woman: "Therefore be not industrious to set out the beauty of your person; but, ...let your dress always resemble the plainness and simplicity of your heart" (Jones 30). Again, Wilkes privileges inner beauty, an essence without artifice ("plainness and simplicity") that apparently manifests itself as a readable surface (we can see here the continuity between neo-classical aesthetic theory and conduct material).<sup>36</sup> Or, to look at this from another perspective, the very notion of a readable surface (and hermeneutic stability) depends on the positing of an unadulterated core of meaning. Yet Wilkes, cautioning the female reader against "an affected modesty" argues that "[t]he part of virtue may be

over-acted" (Jones 29): the implicit theatrical metaphor, which will be developed at length by Hannah More, perversely casts the modest woman as a consummate actress who gives a subtle performance of a 'part' which presumably has to be rehearsed.

The ideal woman is required to construct a self which will attract admiration, a body to be consumed by the male gaze, but, equally, she is to appear self-effacing. The female 'object' is curiously both passive and self-exposing, or "exhibitionist", as Laura Mulvey puts it. Dr James Fordyce praises feminine skill in unselfconscious self-presentation:

Amongst many other advantages resulting from female meekness, I must not omit to mention how much it will conduce to Personal Attraction. ...Imagine a circle of handsome young women, where one is distinguished above the rest by a flowing yet composed affability; ...in which there appears no consciousness of beauty, no return upon herself, no study to become the object of the company, no visible attention to her dress or person ... what superior pleasure and respect will her presence necessarily inspire! (II:283-84)

The important thing is that she should not "appear" conscious of her charms, for "[t]here is nothing so engaging as bashful beauty" (I:96). In another sermon, Fordyce writes of the "transports" of those parents whose modest, flower-like daughter is the object of general admiration, yet "like that same flower, she appears unconscious of her opening charms" (I:14).

Dr John Gregory, in A Father's Legacy to His Daughters (1774) celebrates the charm of a girl who "is disconcerted even at the gaze of admiration" (26). Like Fordyce, he is concerned with the relation between (apparent) female modesty and

male admiration, recognising that these subject positions depend on female dissimulation:

Dress is an important article in female life. The love of dress is natural to you, and therefore is proper and reasonable. Good sense will regulate your expence in it, and good taste will direct you to dress in such a way as to conceal any blemishes, and set off your beauties ... to the greatest advantage. But much delicacy and judgment are required in the application of this rule. A fine woman shows her charms to most advantage, when she seems most to conceal them. The finest bloom in nature is not so fine as what imagination forms. The most perfect elegance of dress appears always the most easy, and the least studied. (55-56)

The processes of production (the industry that achieves "perfect elegance") are obscured to create the impression of effortless ease. Gregory claims: "I do not want to *make* you anything: I want to know what Nature has made you, and to perfect you on her plan" (54-55). Gregory's pragmatic advice makes clear that all this feminine activity is for the benefit of the male 'consumer', and he details the imaginative surplus which results from female concealment.<sup>37</sup> This point is also explicit in Hogarth's Analysis of Beauty (an important source for Burke's Enquiry), wherein women are advised to display "modesty in dress, to keep up our expectations, and not suffer them to be too soon gratified"; Hogarth observes that "the body ... would soon satiate the eye, were it to be ... constantly exposed ... But when it is artfully cloath'd and decorated, the mind at every turn resumes its imaginary pursuits concerning it" (53).

It is clear that conduct books sought to instil an image of femininity in men, as well as in women. In defining the genre, Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse propose a double subject/object dichotomy:

[I]n determining what kind of woman a woman should desire to be, these books also determine what kind of woman men should find desirable. Thus the genre implies two distinct aspects of desire, a desired object, and a subject who desires that object. (5).

I want to make two observations here which are pertinent to my reading of Burke's concept of beauty. Firstly, for all the patriarchal privileging of female simplicity, it is male fascination with the tricks of femininity, their investment in a duplicity that confirms the difference of masculinity, that is constantly emphasized in these texts; secondly, as eroticized objects women are framed by the possessive male gaze but they must not be indifferent to this gaze (though they are usually encouraged to feign indifference). Male 'looking', which is supported by social, economic and physical practices, is supplemented by female reception of the gaze. This narcissistic consciousness of the gaze may be another "mechanism of oppression", women "must have internalized a certain assignment of positions" (Devereux 341).<sup>38</sup> Alternatively, this feminine 'acting for the gaze', woman's participation, indeed, at times in these texts, orchestration of the seduction scenario, potentially subverts the active/passive, male/female binary oppositions on which definitions of the sublime and the beautiful depend.

Sarah Kofman asserts that, "Because with 'woman' men never know for sure *with whom* they are dealing, they try to overcome her lack of 'proper' nature and propriety by making her their property" (207). The aestheticization, and covert

commodification, of femininity is one 'property-owning' strategy employed by a range of eighteenth-century writers, when outlining female behaviour or admiring female beauty.<sup>39</sup> Hannah More has a wonderful little narrative which reveals the problems of this commodity ethic, and which returns us again to the issue of women's doubleness, of the potential gap between inside and outside:

If, indeed, woman were mere outside, form and face only, and if mind made up no part of her composition, it would follow that a ball-room was quite as appropriate a place for choosing a wife, as an exhibition room for choosing a picture. But, inasmuch as women are not mere portraits, their value not being determinable by a glance of the eye, it follows that a different mode of appreciating their value, and a different place for viewing them antecedent to their being individually selected is desirable. The two cases differ also in this, that if a man select a picture for himself from among all its exhibited competitors, and bring it to his own house, the picture being passive, he is able to fix it there: while the wife, picked up at public place, and accustomed to incessant display, will not, it is probable, when brought home, stick so quietly to the spot where he fixes her; but will escape to the exhibition-room again, and continue as if she were not become private property, and had never been definitively disposed of. (279)

In Chapter Six I will suggest that More's brand of conservative feminism aims to promote the interests of women by demarcating a domain of unassailable propriety.<sup>40</sup> Here she deploys traditional metaphors of surface and depth, to ascribe a valuable depth in women which is lacking in portraits (as discussed above, this figure

reinscribes notions of female duplicity). However, her parable invites a subversive reading, one which undercuts the security of the male gaze: More locates the unfixing of conventional femininity, that which is owned and controlled by men (the picture of their desire), in the notion of the display of that femininity, the very display that is paradoxically purveyed in conduct manuals, and manifested in the consumer ethos of late eighteenth-century society. At this point, I would recall that Burke's ladies do not transgress the boundaries of the beautiful by, for example, aping masculinity or by appropriating sublime attributes (as the unruly mob of women described in the Reflections do), but they in fact guarantee Burke's category of the Beautiful through displaying, even faking, femininity.<sup>41</sup> The implications of this gender masquerade will be further considered in the next section.

Burke is seemingly untroubled by the epistemological (indeed, ontological) problems unleashed in the cultural production of the fashionable woman, but this component of his aesthetic theory troubles the security ("we love what submits to us") of his sexual politics. Perhaps the traces of anxiety may be located in the desire for precise definitions of the sublime and the beautiful, in the obsessive concern to keep these categories rigorously separate (a desire that notably mirrors the ideology of sexual difference). In his Preface to the first edition, Burke outlines the motives that prompted him to write the Enquiry, chiefly his observation that "the ideas of the sublime and the beautiful were frequently confounded; and that both were indiscriminately applied to things greatly differing, and sometimes of natures directly opposite" (1).<sup>42</sup> He tells us that "the abuse of the word *Beauty*, has been still more general [than of the sublime], and attended with still worse consequences." In the third part of the treatise, Burke observes:

It is my design to consider beauty as distinguished from the sublime;  
 ...But previous to this, we must take a short review of the opinions  
 already entertained of this quality; which I think are hardly to be  
 reduced to any fixed principles; because men are used to talk of beauty  
 in a figurative manner .... (91)

Women represent the paradigm of beauty, but they also colour the discourse *on* beauty, for this figurative "loose" language is femininely indirect, all over the place, misleading its male speakers (112).<sup>43</sup> Burke's theory of language, the medium of differentiation, is precisely that which frustrates the desire for certainty and determinacy. According to Burke, words have no innate essence, their meanings are conventional, cultural not natural (Enquiry 163-65). The property/propriety of language, and of discursively constituted gendered bodies, is subject to the contingencies of a system in which meaning is only ratified by consent.<sup>44</sup> Like language whose meaning can never be fixed, the female body can never be simply, as it is for Kant, "the proper reference point" of the beautiful (Kant 77): the body is an object to be defined and manipulated, that is, an aesthetic/erotic object framed by male makers of meaning, but this 'trope lady' may have her own ideas about the frame-up.

\* \* \* \* \*

*[W]e are watching a woman demonstrate the representation  
 of a woman's body.*  
 Sylvia Bovenschen

The masquerade of femininity is a play with the paradigms that conventionally construct the woman as superficial, as when Hannah More, differentiating male and female modes of education, describes the latter as the "appliquée of the embroiderer"

and the former as knowledge which has been "burnt in" (218-19). These tropes, which align the female with surface, the decorative and the domestic, and the male with depth, pain and endurance reproduce conventional gender stereotypes, and are close to Burke's formulations of the sublime and the beautiful. The question which then arises is, Why might a woman want to flaunt the applique of femininity, to foreground the masquerade, as she does according to Burke's treatise?

There have been different readings as to what exactly, if anything, is masked by the masquerade, and it has provoked contradictory responses even within the work of individual critics.<sup>45</sup> Joan Rivière's influential account theorizes the masquerade of femininity as a defensive reaction to the female identification with, and appropriation of, masculinity. Rivière analyses the case of a university lecturer who usurps the position of subject rather than object of discourse, giving an "exhibition in public of her intellectual proficiency" (37). The woman then compensates for this transsexual performance by a display of feminine flirtation, which Rivière interprets as "an unconscious attempt to ward off the anxiety which would ensue on account of the reprisals she anticipated from the father-figures after her intellectual performance". Rivière defines "womanliness" as something that "could be assumed and worn as a mask, both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it" (38).<sup>46</sup> Luce Irigaray argues that "the masquerade ... [is] what women do in order ... to participate in man's desire, but at the price of renouncing their own" (*This Sex* 133). The woman confirms her bondage to the patriarchal system through her masquerade of femininity; her self-commodification secures her status as the object and symbol of masculine desire within the economy of circulation. However, Irigaray's notion of 'mimeticism' could be interpreted as



another version of masquerade, but in this instance woman's repetition of masculinist ideas and images of the feminine has a subversive effect that points to an "elsewhere" (*This Sex* 76). This logic has proved seductive for many feminist critics, for the masquerade fractures the assumed identity between image and self and undermines patriarchal assumptions of an essentially passive femininity.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, if we return to Rivière, we find that she equates femininity and masquerade:

The reader may now ask how I define womanliness or where I draw the line between genuine womanliness and the 'masquerade'. My suggestion is not, however, that there is any such difference: whether radical or superficial, they are the same thing. (38)

In one sense Burke's dissimulative "beauty in distress" serves the male ego: "we love what submits to us", and, according to Burke, men are "flattered into compliance" by the submissive performance of femininity which massages and shores up the illusion of male superiority (flattery makes these men feel good). Yet, the gendered hierarchy of active male and passive female cannot be secured so easily. Like Rivière's intellectual woman, these women make a spectacle of themselves, they give a performance of femininity which holds open the possibility of a critical distance (for them, and for the feminist reader) from the tropes of femininity, such as passivity and flattery. The masquerade fashions a speculative distance from the motif of proximity to the body, that "claustrophobic closeness" which has characterized some recent theories of feminine specificity (Doane, "Film and the Masquerade" 80).<sup>48</sup> The concept of masquerade foregrounds the body as a third term between woman-as-image and feminine identity; women must fashion themselves to fit the ideology of femininity, the body is trained to lisp and totter, and this illusionistic skill undermines

the cultural and disciplinary ascription of a feminine 'essence'. These are women dressed up in the accoutrements of 'Woman'. As Sylvia Bovenschen observes of Marlene Dietrich's performances: "we are watching a woman demonstrate the representation of a woman's body" (129).<sup>49</sup> This theory of the masquerade reacts against the paradigms of voyeurism and fetishism that posit a generic masculine spectator and opens up the question of female pleasure and agency in the production and consumption of images/texts.

The recuperation of female duplicity (discussed in the previous section), that quality which is historically a cause of women's marginalization, and the valorization of masquerade or mimicry, remains a risky strategy for the feminist critic, for it potentially reinscribes traditional representations of women. Domna Stanton, among others, takes issue with Irigaray's ascription of a ludic or subversive impact to female miming: "The adoption of the mimetic function, traditionally assigned to woman, may freeze and fixate the feminine at the mirror stage, rather than lead to a difference beyond the same old binary plays" ("Difference on Trial" 172). Yet the self-reflexivity of recent feminist theories, the stealing and self-conscious reworking of male images of women, does, I think, provide a way out of the prisonhouse of language and opens up new discursive spaces. Reading influential earlier texts through the lens of such theories is one way of viewing differently the historical baggage we have carried into our present moment.<sup>50</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

*Observe that part of a beautiful woman ...*  
Edmund Burke

If, from one perspective, Burke's aesthetic of the beautiful produces the female body as fetish to serve the male gaze, from another it produces the feminine as masquerade,

whereby women mime and make strange, the gestures of femininity. This scandalous performance blurs the male image of Woman (the passive, contained, perfect form) and threatens the whole "masculine structure of the look" (Montrelay 93; Doane, "Film and the Masquerade" 82). It is necessary to consider here the implications of the traditional masculine gaze, in order to appreciate the subversion of this system of viewing in Burke's treatise. As Hilde Hein argues, "[s]ince Plato's glorification of the 'eye of the mind' vision has been regarded as the noblest and most theoretical of the senses, and indeed the propaedeutic to the highest form of 'seeing,' which is non-physical" (287). In modern aesthetics, the certainty and security of vision has continued to be privileged over the other senses, valorized because of its detachment from its object. Vision is a less intimate sense than touch, taste or smell; it is considered a more civilized, more philosophical sense. In his Lectures on Aesthetics, Hegel claims that "vision ... finds itself in a purely theoretical relationship with objects, through the intermediary of light, that immaterial matter which truly leaves objects their freedom, lighting and illuminating them without consuming them" (qtd. in Heath, "Difference" 84). Moreover, this mode of looking produces a certain bounded spectacle of the ideal, and legislates the spectatorial position as one of measured detachment, the steady eye that confirms the stability of the 'I', the viewing subject. As Joshua Reynolds explains in his discussion of aesthetics, "[W]e must take care that the eye be not perplexed or distracted by a confusion of equal parts, or equal lights" (VII:126); in another of his Discourses, he writes: "Where objects are scattered and divided into many equal parts, the eye is perplexed and fatigued from not knowing where to rest. The piece wants repose" (VIII:147).<sup>51</sup> In his essay "On Beauty", Hazlitt writes that Burke "has very admirably described the bosom of a

beautiful woman, almost entirely with reference to the ideas of motion. Those outlines are beautiful which describe pleasant motions" (4:72). The theory of "pleasant motions", which Hazlitt illustrates with reference to Burke, follows his discussion of Grecian beauty:

The head of the girl in the *Transfiguration* (which Raphael took from the *Niobe*) has the same correspondence and exquisite involution of the outline of the forehead, the eyebrows, and the eyes (circle within circle) which we here speak of. Every part of that delightful head is blended together, and every sharp projection moulded and softened down with the feelings of a sculptor, or as if nothing should be left to offend the touch as well as the eye ... the whole of the Grecian face blends with itself in a state of the utmost harmony and repose. (4:70)

In other words, Hazlitt's reading of Burke traces the melting lines of the object as serving spectatorial composure; nothing offends or disturbs the viewer.<sup>52</sup>

In his essay "On Sitting for One's Picture", Hazlitt includes a provocative comment on a section of Burke's treatise that will be central to the argument of this chapter. Hazlitt unsurprisingly invests in the look, but he usefully, for my purposes, locates the male gaze at a beautiful woman within a particular viewing scene and power dynamic: "Mr Burke, in his Sublime and Beautiful, has left a description of what he terms the most beautiful object in nature, the neck of a lovely and innocent female, which is written very much as if he had himself formerly painted this object, and sacrificed at this formidable shrine" (12:112-13).<sup>53</sup> Hazlitt gives voice to the erotics of production (and, by implication, consumption, since the artist metonymically represents the spectator), and he exposes the threat to the phallogocentric

gaze:

The relation between the portrait-painter and his amiable sitters is one of established custom: but it is also one of metaphysical nicety, and is a running *double-entendre*. The fixing an inquisitive gaze on beauty, the heightening a momentary grace, the dwelling on the heaven of an eye, the losing oneself in the dimple of a chin, is a dangerous employment. The painter may chance to slide into the lover - the lover can hardly turn painter. (112)

There is no way back to the public sphere of employment once the artist has succumbed to the charms of beauty; to be a lover is to relinquish the mastery of the painter. Hazlitt isolates the nude as a particular problem ("a temptation to gallantry"), rapturously possessed by the eye of the artist; however, fortunately for the artist (and the sitter), his "pencil acts as a non-conductor to the grosser desires". Hazlitt offers a (still) familiar paradigm of sublimated, because aestheticized, desire:

There is no doubt that the perception of beauty becomes more exquisite ... by being studied and refined upon as an object of art - it is at the same time fortunately neutralised by this means, or the painter would run mad. It is converted into an abstraction, an *ideal* thing ... (113)

Transforming the real into the ideal, the artist resists the temptations that might lead to a loss of self. He preserves the social proprieties (Hazlitt tells us that "the sense of duty, of propriety interferes" in the trajectory of desire) and protects himself against the dangerous proximity of exposed femininity.

The artist can now gaze endlessly, safely, at his possession, which, vampire-like, seems to drain the life from the real model: "The health and spirit that but now

breathed from a speaking face, the next moment breathe with almost equal effect from a dull piece of canvas ...the eye sparkles, the lips are moist there too: and if we can fancy the picture alive, the face in its turn fades into a picture, a mere object of sight". Focussing on the naked figure, Hazlitt argues that "the painting *A Diana and Nymphs* is like plunging into a cold bath of desire: to make a statue of a *Venus* transforms the sculptor himself to stone". In Hazlitt, the real, the woman, is immobilized as ideal, while the distance between male and female is doubly inscribed by the imagery which speaks of the artist's masculine solidity.

What feminist critics have done is to expose the politics of this epistemology by questioning the purely theoretical gaze. Luce Irigaray critiques the masculine gaze:

Investment in the look is not privileged in women as in men. More than the other senses the eye objectifies and masters. It sets at a distance, maintains that distance. In our culture, the predominance of the look over smell, taste, touch, hearing, has brought about an impoverishment of bodily relations. It has contributed to disembodiment of sexuality. The moment the look dominates, the body loses its materiality. (qtd. in Owens 70)

Freud's theory of the supplanting of a matriarchal by a patriarchal society involves just such an "impoverishment", for the immediacy of olfactory sexuality is replaced by a mediated, visual sexuality.<sup>54</sup> Burke's discourse of beauty apparently presents an implied male subject who gazes, with a disinterested detachment couched in Enlightenment metaphors, at female (or feminized) objects, investing precisely in the mode of looking critiqued by Irigaray. He writes of his aim "to establish a clear and

settled idea of visual beauty" and that "the diversities of the several senses ...will ... help to throw lights from one another to finish one clear, consistent idea of the whole"; "By this means," Burke argues, "nature is ... scrutinized; and we report nothing of her, but what we receive from her information" (Enquiry 122-23). Like Reynolds, he advocates the avoidance of lines "that may weary or dissipate the attention" (156).

We are now in a position to turn to that passage in Burke alluded to by Hazlitt wherein woman's threat to the masculine structure of the look is displayed:

Observe that part of a beautiful woman where she is perhaps the most beautiful, about the neck and breasts; the smoothness; the softness; the easy and insensible swell; the variety of the surface, which is never for the smallest space the same; the deceitful maze, through which the unsteady eye slides giddily, without knowing where to fix, or whither it is carried. (Enquiry 115)<sup>55</sup>

The emphasis falls differently in Burke with regard to each of the interconnected hegemonic paradigms I have drawn attention to, that is, the disembodiment (of both surveyor and surveyed) held in place by the phallogentric gaze; the discursive construction of beauty as Ideal, a refining or transcending of reality; and the stability of the masculine gaze. Firstly, Burke's spatial emphasis produces a type of embodied space, while his obsession with exploring the objectified body's meanings in terms of its surface qualities runs counter to the masculinist project of neo-classical aesthetics (as well as other types of coercive discourse, such as conduct writing). Burke inherits the preoccupation with surface in part from Hogarth. In the Analysis of Beauty, Hogarth's "line of beauty" is the serpentine line (rechristened by Burke,

the "waving surface" and "the winding surface"); though line would not normally suggest the multiple properties of surface, Burke does seem to want both the sense of contour and surface. Hogarth, too, advocates the advantage of "considering solid objects as only thin shells composed of lines, like the outer-coat of an onion" (Analysis 8-9). Burke is particularly seduced by "*Smoothness*", "[a] quality ... essential to beauty" (114).<sup>56</sup> This quality of beauty incites a tactile pleasure, analogous to the visual: "All bodies that are pleasant to the touch, are so by the slightness of the resistance they make. Resistance is either to motion along the surface, or to the pressure of the parts on one another; if the former be slight, we call the body, smooth; if the latter, soft" (120). Unlike that of Hazlitt's artist, Burke's desire is not "neutralised" for he cannot resist the temptation to touch, and so compromises the pure distance of vision.<sup>57</sup>

Moreover, Burke reverses the conservative trajectory from the real to the ideal (exemplified in Hazlitt's writing): just before his description of a beautiful woman, in the section entitled "Gradual VARIATION", Burke outlines "the view of a beautiful bird" which "agrees very well with most of the conditions of beauty" (its lines are "perpetually changing", "its parts are ... melted into one another"). He writes: "In this description I have before me *the idea of a dove*" (115, my italics). Then comes the passage beginning, "Observe that part of a beautiful woman ...". In other words, Burke shifts from a phrase that invokes the Platonic Ideal, to the texture of the contingent real. The shift from the ideal to the real does not necessarily connote a move *away* from art (indeed, as I have argued, Burke's perception of beauty is intimately entangled with the notion of artifice, with the feminine as masquerade); rather, I would say that the artifice of art comprehends the ideal and the



material (I will argue that Canova's Borghese statue is an appropriate visual analogue). For the purpose of constructing a feminist aesthetics, what is significant about Burke's refusal of the ideal is that it involves a refusal to objectify the female body, to set it at a distance.

Most significantly, far from ensuring spectatorial repose, the beautiful woman, whose pose both conforms to and helps to construct the image of ideal womanhood, disorients the spectator. Note the semantic emphasis on the ever-changing surface which frustrates the attempt of the eye to "fix" its position, to repose in one place (this shiftiness is carried grammatically by the short subclauses). Disobedience and entanglement are suggested by the reference to "the deceitful maze", while the excess of alliteration and assonance produces an insidious seepage of meaning from phrase to phrase, blurring the contours of the vision. The effect of the mutability of line and surface - "the unsteady eye slides giddily, without knowing where to fix, or whither it is carried" - is similar to that of Hogarth's line of beauty which "leads the eye a wanton kind of chace" (Analysis 25). Male vision is disarticulated and spectatorial possession of the object of the gaze continually deferred.

In the essay cited above ("On Sitting for one's picture"), Hazlitt provides a summary of the masculine mode of looking: "We take rapturous possession with one sense, the eye" (12:113).<sup>58</sup> The third person plural pronoun inscribes the 'universal' view of the male artist/spectator which masters the female object of sight. In contradistinction, the contemporary feminist Michèle Montrelay writes of how in women's texts the emphasis on the appropriative look is displaced: "[N]o contour is traced on which the eye could rest" (qtd. in Heath, "Difference" 84). Burke's text, in this sense, maps a feminine aesthetic. In the passage I have been analysing, the

male gaze is disordered, the male subject is not in control of the gaze, he is shifted out of the security of the voyeur's look. What happens in this revised specular economy is that the boundaries between male and female, subject and object, active and passive become fluid: the giddy gaze is produced by and mimics the mazelike surface of the woman's body.<sup>59</sup> The lack of separation between male and female engendered by this mimicry, which I will discuss in more detail in the following section, points, as I will argue, to a masculine identification with woman as spectacle.<sup>60</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

*[T]hat sinking, that melting, that languor, which is the  
characteristical effect of the beautiful.*  
Edmund Burke

Hannah More, upholding conventional gender alignments, proposes that the male "will ... attain his object by direct pursuit, by being less exposed [than the female] to the seductions of extraneous beauty" (203).<sup>61</sup> Burke, however, fails to keep to the direct male path, precisely because he is exposed to, and seduced by, beauty. The Beautiful refashions the the viewer in its own unsteady, feminine image. Throughout the *Enquiry*, in defining beauty, Burke constantly recurs to the notion of "melting", which suggests uncontainability, a blurring of boundaries: beautiful objects should have "a variety in the direction of the parts" and "to have those parts not angular, but melted ... into each other" (117). The contemplation of the melting curves of "beautiful bodies" engenders a mimetic melting of the spectator's body (116). Burke writes of "that sinking, that melting, that languor, which is the characteristical effect of the beautiful, as it regards every sense" (123). Anne Mellor observes that "[h]undreds of upper-and middle-class women in England in the Romantic era aspired to become the

languorous, melting beauty that Burke envisioned" (Romanticism and Gender 109),<sup>62</sup> though we should not, of course, lose sight of the intrication of beauty and domestic ideology, I would reiterate my point that this image is manipulable by women, and that Burke is crucially concerned here with what happens to the male subject.

Beautiful objects inspire love, which manifests itself physically in the erotic relaxation of the body:

When we have before us such objects as excite love and complacency, the body is affected ... much in the following manner. The head reclines something on one side; the eyelids are more closed than usual, and the eyes roll gently with an inclination to the object, the mouth is a little opened, and the breath drawn slowly, with now and then a low sigh ... All this is accompanied with an inward sense of melting and languor. These appearances are always proportioned to the degree of beauty in the object, and of sensibility in the observer. ... from this description it is almost impossible not to conclude, that beauty acts by relaxing the solids of the whole system. ....Who is a stranger to that manner of expression so common in all times and in all countries, of being softened, relaxed, enervated, dissolved, melted away by pleasure? (149-50)<sup>63</sup>

Activity is replaced by passivity; it is notable that the five verbs in the last sentence quoted above, all emphasize bodily dissolution (there are only marginal differences between the meanings of these words, and what amounts to repetition enacts the idea of erosion). The proprietorial gaze is foreclosed ("the eyelids are more closed than usual"), refracted into bodily experience, solidity is transmuted into softness and

fluidity. That the issue is one of gender is clear from Burke's own polarities of sublime/beautiful, optical/tactile, objectivity/subjectivity which, as I pointed out early in this chapter, invite comprehension by analogy with the couple masculine/feminine. The male viewer is so fascinated by the spectacle of femininity that he comes to identify with it. If the mirror stage classically confirms subjectivity, with the m/other playing a support role, at issue here is that seeing the self as the other that undermines the coherence of the gaze, of subjectivity, and of gender, for it is not merely the body, but subjectivity itself that is jeopardized: in Mary Wollstonecraft's words, "beauty relaxes the solids of the soul as well as the body" (Rights of Men 115). Burke postures as an autonomous subject but the dangerous curves of female beauty deconstruct him.

Before going on to discuss the significance of the theatricality of Burke's posturing, I will mention some alternative readings of male 'melting'. John Gregory speaks of "the effects of love" on men: "If the fascination [with a woman] continue long, it will totally depress his spirit, and extinguish every active, vigorous, and manly principle of his mind" (87). The enervating effects of beauty continue to provoke debates which are couched in gender terms through into the Victorian period. W.J. Courthope argues that Keats demonstrates how the "pursuit of mere Beauty of Form ... involves a relaxation of all the nerves and fibres of manly thoughts, the growth of affectation, and the consequent encouragement of all the emasculating influences that produce swift deterioration and final decay" (qtd. in Wolfson, "Feminizing Keats" 333). In this scenario, the male subject is divested of his traditionally masculine attributes and decays into the negatively-coded condition of effeminacy.<sup>64</sup> Frances Ferguson and Tom Furniss have recently discussed the enervating effects of the

beautiful on the male subject of Burke's writing. Furniss reminds us that Burke figures beauty in terms of "luxury", and that "luxury was typically associated with effeminacy and figured as feminine" (69). Indeed, in the Vindication of Natural Society (1756), the debauched aristocracy are mired in "effeminate luxury" (41).<sup>65</sup> Furniss points out that the allure of luxury and the feminine is "physically and politically dangerous", debilitating the individual body (in Burke's words, "beauty acts by relaxing the solids of the whole system") and the body politic (Helen's "fatal" beauty leads to the destruction of Troy). Both critics cite examples of the negative effects of beauty, in case we should be misled into thinking that Burke celebrates these sensations: Ferguson writes that Burke "aligns bodily entropy with the beautiful quality of sweetness, which appeals to the sense of taste yet finally 'very much enfeebles the tone of the stomach'" ("Sublime" 75; Enquiry 154); Furniss quotes the following passage: "[I]n this languid inactive state, the nerves are more liable to the most horrid convulsions, than when they are sufficiently braced and strengthened. Melancholy, dejection, despair, and often self-murder, is the consequence of the gloomy view we take of things in this relaxed state of the body" (70; Enquiry 135). These critics, then, focus on the dysphoric, emasculating effects of the beautiful, whereby the male subject is stripped of the accoutrements of masculinity - solidity, activity, rationality, and even a good digestive system.

Carole Fabricant provides an alternative reading which is more generous in its treatment of the deconstruction of masculinity in Burke's text. She suggests that,

[P]ublished shortly after his marriage to Jane Nugent in 1756, the Philosophical Enquiry reveals in part the sensibility of a bridegroom, of a man very much concerned with the joys of surrender and release,

and very aware of the extent to which all pleasure, aesthetic as well as sexual, requires a relinquishing of control, a yielding up of oneself to wondrous and mysterious forces whose value lies precisely in their independence of man's mastering will. (75-76)<sup>66</sup>

Though she fits Burke within the parameters of masculine sexuality ("the joys of surrender and release"), and reproduces (or remystifies) the feminine as "wondrous and mysterious", Fabricant does gesture to an 'elsewhere' in which gender roles are not fixed. In particular, she notes the productive dialectic of male submission and female independence, and she presents us with a proto-Keatsian Burke in her reading of his passive "receptivity" (his "observing [of] the world ... from the perspective of a lover"), which engenders aesthetic, sexual and textual pleasure.

In the Enquiry, the sublime intervenes to arrest this slide towards effeminacy. The beautiful emasculates, "relaxing the solids" of the body and making it femininely fluid; it "not only disables the members from performing their functions, but takes away the vigorous tone of fibre which is requisite for carrying on the natural and necessary secretions" (135). Burke's "remedy" for "these evils" is labour, that is, the salutary sublime "pain" caused by "an exertion of the contracting power of the muscles" (135). Pain and terror are the means of "self-preservation", by which the sinews of masculinity are reinscribed (136). However, this reinscription is never absolute: the Burkean voice is dialogic, oscillating between gender positions, identifying with and speaking the discourse of the sublime and the beautiful.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Even the ladies, Sir, may ... retail in theatrical attitudes  
many of your sentimental exclamations.*

Mary Wollstonecraft

Burke's mirror-play, his mimicking of the melting curves of the beautiful object, which destabilizes the boundaries between the masculine and the feminine, may be interrogated further by placing it in the context of critical responses to Burke during the Romantic period. Though I consider mainly responses to the Reflections, I am most interested in those which illuminate aspects of the Enquiry. One interesting feature is the critical focus on the place of spectacle in Burke's work, a criticism that often rests on assumptions about gender difference. Burke's contemporaries, as well as more recent critics, have been quick to point out that Burke presents the revolution as a theatrical performance, the apotheosis of which is, in Ronald Paulson's words, "the double scene of the king being led in triumph by his rebellious subjects and the queen attacked in her bedroom as the mob cuts down her guard" (Representations 60).

Thomas Paine writes of "the tragic paintings by which Mr Burke has outraged his own imagination, and seeks to work upon that of his reader"; such paintings are "very well calculated for theatrical representation", they are "a dramatic performance" which produces "a stage effect". Paine links this theatricalization with Burke's clothing imagery, arguing that "[h]e pities the plumage, but forgets the dying bird" (Rights of Man 71-73). We recall that Burke tells how Marie Antoinette fled "almost naked" (this is Burke's addition to other contemporary accounts) from the mob who violated her bedchamber, and that this literal stripping of the queen grounds the metaphorical assertion that "[a]ll the decent drapery of life is to be rudely torn off", exposing "our naked shivering nature" (Reflections 171). Paine's metaphors respond to Burke's language, but also to the rhetoric of Wollstonecraft's reply to Burke,

Vindication of the Rights of Men, which, as I noted earlier, illuminates Burke's aestheticization of politics. In her first *Vindication*, Wollstonecraft feminizes Burke, turning his clothing metaphors against him: addressing Burke directly, she writes that she wishes "to strip you of your cloak of sanctity" and "to show you to yourself, stripped of the gorgeous drapery in which you have enwrapped your tyrannic principles" (56,88). Wollstonecraft's strategy of gender transference implicitly responds to the gender instabilities *already* present in Burke's text(s), as, for example, the "melting" of the male subject in the Enquiry, or Burke's ambivalent staging of his relation to Marie Antoinette, which comprehends his role as chivalric defender and his emotive identification with "beauty in distress", or the disconcerting split *within* Woman, symbolized by the difference between the etherealized vision of the French queen and the mob of "harpies" who assall her.<sup>67</sup>

Wollstonecraft writes of Burke's fashionable discourse that "[e]ven the Ladies, Sir, may repeat your sprightly sallies, and retail in theatrical attitudes many of your sentimental exclamations" (5). This comment may be read as a summary of the carnivalesque possibilities inscribed in Burke's texts. We recall that in the Enquiry femininity is represented as a type of masquerade, and that Burke is feminized through his identification with the spectacle of woman; in Wollstonecraft's plot we find women mimicking the gestures of a male figure who is already marked by the 'femininity' of the theatrical.<sup>68</sup> Gender identity is caught up in a series of transferences, it has to do with performance, a matter of 'attitudes' rather than essence. The economic resonances of the verb "retail" are not insignificant, for Burke's discourse is precisely a commodity which is outwith his control (he can't, for instance, prevent women from reading his texts, appropriating his words and turning



them against him).

In his essay "The Character of Mr Burke", Hazlitt also associates Burke with the theatrical, observing that "[h]e constructed his whole theory of government ...not on rational but on picturesque and fanciful principles; as if ...the whole of society [were] a theatrical procession" (7:228). After aligning Burke with the "fanciful" (or feminine) rather than with masculine rationality, Hazlitt goes on to discuss the engenderment of Burke's prose style. I quote from this interesting passage at length:

It is his impatience to transfer his conceptions entire, living, in all their rapidity, strength, and glancing variety, to the minds of others, that constantly pushes him to the verge of extravagance, and yet supports him there in dignified security -

'Never so sure our rapture to create,

As when he treads the brink of all we hate.'

He is the most poetical of our prose writers, and at the same time his prose never degenerates into the mere effeminacy of poetry; for he always aims at overpowering rather than at pleasing; and consequently sacrifices beauty and delicacy to force and vividness. (7:229)

Hazlitt raises, and then forecloses, the idea that Burke's poetic writing is effeminate; similarly, he introduces the notion of "extravagance" but places this excess on secure foundations ("dignified security").<sup>69</sup> In other words, he suggests a dangerous sliding towards femininity, but then contains this gender threat by reinscribing masculinist boundaries. However, the intertextual allusion (the adapted citation from Pope) is, I think, radically destabilizing.<sup>70</sup> There is an odd effect of transvestism as Burke is cast in Calypso's part but with the pronominal signifiers of masculinity. It is worth

recalling here the linguistic travesty/transvestism of both the portrait of Martha Blount as a "softer man" which concludes "Epistle to a Lady", and the "vile Antithesis" which constitutes the Sporus portrait in the "Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot" (the negative version of the androgenous ideal). Burke is pushed towards the margins of conventional masculinity, to the very brink of effeminacy, hovering (like Marie Antoinette) between the sublime and beautiful, prose and poetry, masculinity and femininity.

Hazlitt presents himself as part of a male audience enraptured at Burke's performance. Burke's writing, which metonymically stands in for his person, constitutes a spectacle for the male gaze. In another essay, Hazlitt writes of Burke's behaviour in the public, political arena: "he seems fond of conquering with the House of Commons, and is perpetually calling the Speaker out to dance a minuet with him" (7:302). To read Hazlitt's account alongside the Enquiry is to see Burke as mimicking his own theorizations of the feminine. Burke's posing constitutes a masquerade of femininity. It is, of course, important to note the structural differences between male and female performances, or masquerades, of femininity; as Nancy Miller puts it, "only those who have it can play with not having it" (Subject 75). However, it is clear that Burke's gender is not culturally secure: Hazlitt's flirtatious actress is of most interest to me, but Kramnick also points out that rumours of homosexuality circulated amongst Burke's contemporaries, fuelled partly by his protest in the House of Commons in 1780 against the treatment of two homosexuals, and this during a period of increasing persecution of sexual non-conformity (Kramnick 83-87).

In his discussion of (aestheticized) erotic spectacle, Hazlitt draws national as well as gender boundaries, or, more accurately, he marks the difference between the domestic and the foreign which takes place over the body of a woman (and is signified by that body):

[T]he heedless, unsuspecting licence of foreign manners gives the artist abroad an advantage over ours at home. Sir Joshua Reynolds painted only the head of Iphigene from a beautiful woman of quality: Canova had innocent girls to sit to him for his Graces. The Princess Borghese, whose symmetry of form was admirable sat to him for a model, which he considered as his master-piece and the perfection of the female form. (12:112-113)

In the final section of this chapter I will suggest that we may read this statue as revising the passive "*to-be-looked-at-ness*" of the woman posited by Laura Mulvey; notions of display and of mastery are complicated here in ways that resonate with, and extend, my reading of Burke's aesthetic of the beautiful. The feminist critic can intervene in the static scenario male/female, subject/object, active/passive, that has so often determined the parameters of the gaze: to see the female nude as always already a "master-piece", the object of the appropriative male gaze, is to elide the potentialities of multiple viewing positions, and to turn away from the possible subversion of monolithic gender identities. As in the cases of Burke's view of a beautiful woman and his own posturing, the crucial questions are, What is being posed here and for whom?<sup>71</sup>

Fred Licht analyses the Canova statue (1804-08) in the context of three other images of reclining female figures from the early nineteenth-century. For the record,

they are Goya's Nude Maja (c.1800), David's portrait of Madame Recamier (1800) and Ingres's Grande Odalisque (1814). Licht argues that "of the four artists who first describe the various incarnations of modern womanhood, Goya, David, and Ingres see their subjects from a deeply entrenched masculine point of view. Only Canova seems to have been able to spy behind enemy lines. There is a slightly unsettling complicity between him and the woman that allows him to state from a female point of view subtleties that one can recognize but that defy description" (135). These other figures will not form part of my discussion, though it is worth noting that they are all painted images and that in each case the figure looks out towards the viewer. It would probably be possible to destabilize the masculine point of view which Licht ascribes to the artists, and implicitly the gender position they create for the spectator;<sup>72</sup> one might also analyse the significance of Licht's metaphors of sexual warfare. What interests me here, however, is that Licht, whose own rhetoric bears the marks of a certain masculinity ("caressing rhythm", "everything rises to the blossoming climax of the bosom", "the fullness of the bosom stands revealed as a supple flower") is unsettled by the perceived, but unarticulable ("defy description") "complicity" between male and female points of view. The statue engenders a troubled gaze which involves seeing it from two points of view, belonging to the male and female body. This double vision can be examined in terms of the context of the sculpture's production and of the formal details which help to 'produce' the spectator.

Paolina Borghese, Napoleon's sister who had married into a respectable aristocratic family, wanted a nude portrait of herself. Canova's dilemma was how to satisfy her exhibitionist desire without scandalizing society (a scandal that could have affected both sculptor and sitter). Canova's first solution was to allegorize the figure

by portraying Paolina as Diana. She resisted this decorous disguise, refusing the emphasis on chastity rather than beauty along with the drapery that could preserve "Diana's" propriety. She agreed to pose as Venus Victorious (a motif which is almost unknown in classical sculpture). Licht argues that "which disguise she was to assume was relatively unimportant to Canova's strategy"; he argues that "the real issue was between the idea of a portrait of Paolina Borghese as Paolina Borghese and the idea of a portrait of Paolina Borghese as a goddess in classical guise" (139). History seems to have minimized Canova's strategic gain: the portrait is rarely referred to by its full title, and the statue, we are told, "unlike any other naked statue in the Borghese museum, still evokes uncomfortable feelings today" because it figures "a recognizable individual to whose intimacies we are in no way entitled".<sup>73</sup>

Canova and Paolina Borghese collude in the ordering of the female body; their competing, and ultimately entangled, desires, may be read as a narrative which tells of the spatial relationship between sculptor and model. In a wonderful essay Elizabeth Hollander explores "the model's perspective on making pictures [which] has not had a place in the standard discourse on art" (133). She comments on different media, but in particular notes the "strain of posing for sculpture", of having to endure "the sculptor's voracious, demanding, often clinical scrutiny" without the security of a "frame" (a single perspective and distance); but the sculptor is similarly 'unfixed', "continually moving around the model (or moving the model around), and continually varying the distance between them" (138). Though this seems, in one sense, to replicate the hierarchical gendered opposition activity/passivity, this binary is reinflected by the perceived absence of a frame for both participants: the work of art emerges from the combined authorial role of the artist and "[t]he model's authority

of embodiment" (145). Sustaining their encounter across time and space, artist and model are involved in a process of construction that attests to the materiality, the physicality, of both subjects.<sup>74</sup>

The Borghese statue speaks to the traditional positioning of the male body as spectator: the female body is posed as landscape, a geographical span to be consumed by the male gaze.<sup>75</sup> The gaze is defined as an issue because the woman's is averted (from the spectator, and from her own body): the figure is presented frontally but the head is in profile (this revises Canova's painting *Venus and Satyr*, c.1792, which has been seen as a progenitor of the sculpture). Licht proposes that this "sudden counterpoise ...snaps us out of the planar presentation of the body" (138). The turn of the head deflects the gaze of the viewer; if the statue is viewed frontally, the gaze is directed to the unoccupied space between Paolina's feet and the end of the bed. This space helps to fund an oscillation between embodiment and disembodiment: it leads the spectatorial gaze out of and away from the body, but it nevertheless remains in dynamic relation with the body. Curiously, though sculpture is a spatial presence, Licht does assume a single viewing perspective. Since the bodily syntax of the female figure is disarranged when viewed from any of the possible viewing perspectives (in one position she would look towards us, but her body would be turned away), the viewer is deprived of any single-point fetishistic position: the subjectivity of the (male) body is multiply dislocated in the very act of viewing. To return to Burke's scenario: the eye/I is unsteady, the viewer can neither fix his gaze nor turn away, but is compelled to yield to the image.

The feminine refusal of the gaze, a refusal of the signifier of the erotic appropriation of the female body, may be viewed from yet another, but similarly

destabilizing, perspective. The turn of Paolina Borghese's head could be seen to ironize the gaze on the body, by suggesting a mental attitude, another plane from the physical display. This gesture towards female autonomy is supported formally by the inward curves of Paolina's arms and of the drapery, which suggest interiority and self-containment. There is also a certain self-reflexivity, whereby the pose fashions the exterior contours of arm and torso as interior spaces. The physicality of the female body is displayed, but made inaccessible. The traditional male gaze is deprived of the security of its own exteriority, the confidence of a subjectivity defined against an object.

This is a scene that offers subversive spectatorial possibilities. The ground for viewing the female body shifts, en-gendering new perspectives. Subjectivities are produced in the space(s) between the eye and the sculpture, between the model and the sculptor, the 'I' and the other. Gender identities are in process in these in-between spaces, literally positional rather than essential.

\* \* \* \* \*

I have argued that the eighteenth-century cultural discourse of "beauty in distress", the debilitated femininity purveyed in novels, conduct manuals, and aesthetic treatises, is an image that may be manipulated by women. Burke's Enquiry contributes to the shaping of middle-class domestic ideology which kept women in their proper place, but because these man-made images of women depend on female artifice, a space is held open for female subjectivity. I have suggested that "beauty in distress is [indeed] the most affecting form of beauty", for the male viewer, whose language constructs this vision, is affected to the extent that he is himself feminized (Enquiry 110). Burke is seduced by the spectacle of feminine beauty: gazing at a beautiful woman (or, if

I may fantasize another scene, at the statue of Paolina Borghese) Burke's own body mimics the object of perception, and the boundaries of subject and object dissolve.

The question remains - and it is one that recurs throughout this thesis - whether this destabilization of gender boundaries is an appropriative move, whereby the characteristics of femininity are absorbed by the male subject. Does this revisionary moment continue to give the 'masculine' subject, however deconstructed, all the speaking parts? After all, both the aesthetic treatise and the statue which have been my concern in this chapter are the creations of men out of the material of femininity. According to Irigaray, the problem for woman is that, because she is the material used in the construction of men's 'house of language', this linguistic domain is not available to her. In "When Our Lips Speak Together", Irigaray ponders how to reinvent the phrase "I love you", which entails nothing less than creating a new language of the body, a mobile language that resists the stasis of a patriarchal frame of reference, the petrification signified by statues (This Sex 214; I return to this new choreography at the end of Chapter Six). As others have suggested Irigaray's use of "statue" here may be a subversive intertextual reference to Lacan's infamous comment on the jouissance of Bernini's St. Theresa: "you only have to go and look at Bernini's statue in Rome to understand immediately that she's coming, there's no doubt about it" (Mitchell and Rose 147). Irigaray asks, "What pleasure are we talking about? Whose pleasure" (This Sex 91). As opposed to the arrogant certainty of Lacan's reading of Bernini's statue, Burke and Borghese offer other pleasures. Towards the end of his essay "On Sitting for One's Picture", after alluding to the "license of foreign manners" and to the fact that the Princess Borghese posed naked for Canova, Hazlitt recounts an anecdote: "when asked if she did not feel uncomfortable while it



was taking, she replied, with great indifference, 'No: it was not cold'" (12:114).<sup>76</sup> Though she may pose as a pin-up, Paolina Borghese cannot be pinned down;<sup>77</sup> her voice, like her body, resists fixed definitions: is this an aristocratic put-down line? an assertion of the literal over the figurative (the sexual innuendo of her questioner)? is she indifferent to the male gaze because it is her own fascination with femininity that is being staged (and this would make a difference)?<sup>78</sup> Similarly, at precisely the moment in Burke's text when we might expect appropriation, female beauty unexpectedly provides us with a new way of looking at the masculine subject. Joseph Boone asks, "even when the male writer focuses on the 'feminine', might there be alternatives beyond 'appropriation'?" (18) The passages in the Enquiry on which I have focussed are instances, I suggest, when the male writer "has let femaleness transform, redefine his textual erotics, allowed himself *to be read through* femininity and femaleness, rather than seeking to become the authorizer speaking on behalf of it" (Boone 18).

### Notes to Chapter Three

1. Cited in Wichelns 646.
2. Elisabeth Bronfen's reading of this connection adds death to the equation: she argues that "[t]he beauty of Woman and the beauty of the image" are "analogously positioned in relation to death"; providing "the illusion of intactness", both seem to offer an impossible transcendence of "death's ubiquitous 'castrative' threat to the subject." (64) She argues, further, that "Beauty ...always also includes death's inscription, because it requires the translation (be it in fantasy or in reality) of an imperfect, animate body, into a perfect, inanimate image, a dead 'figure'." The connections between "Death, femininity and the aesthetic" within a male scopic economy are traced in detail throughout her wonderful and wide-ranging book, Over Her Dead Body.
3. All references are to the edition by James T. Boulton, which is based on the second edition of 1759 (subsequently cited as Enquiry followed by page numbers).
4. Though Mulvey is concerned with twentieth-century cinematic discourse, her gender paradigms in many ways reproduce the traditional opposition of the sublime and the beautiful. Thus, I hope I am not merely imposing contemporary theory on a text from another historical era; rather, I see the two discourses - though bearing the marks of their historical contexts - as mutually illuminating.
5. It is curious that a stable male gaze could be predicated on 'moving pictures'; this has a lot to do with the fact that Mulvey based her theories on what she perceived as classic, realist cinema, wherein though the camera moves, the point of view does not necessarily do so. With regard to the female spectator, Mulvey in her more recent work offers alternative positions. In "Visual Pleasure", the female spectator is theorized as either identifying masochistically with the passive screen image of woman, or transsexually assuming the gaze of the male voyeur, or as oscillating between these positions in a form of psychic transvestism. In "Afterthoughts", Mulvey argues that the female spectator's identification with the male allows her to return imaginatively to the Freudian "early masculine period" of the female child (37). Though this formulation gives a more positive slant to female spectatorial pleasure, the problem remains that in order to experience this the viewer must revert (or regress) to an earlier stage of psychosexual development. On anxieties in current theories of the gaze, see Craig Saper.
6. As Norman Bryson points out, Mulvey's theory does not address the question of men looking at other men: while Mulvey's theory is

"particularly probing of issues to do with the male's perspective on the female, as pre-ordained object of its looking, it may be relatively underdeveloped in dealing with what is at stake in the male gaze upon another male" (3). This is not an area that I deal with in the present work, but I concur with Bryson that what is at stake is the question of the continuous production of gender, the "anxieties of producing the masculine".

7. I do not mean to suggest that Burke's text merely mimetically reproduces a differential system inherent in society: borrowing Nancy Armstrong's comment on novels, I would say that Burke's treatise is "both the document and the agent of social change" (Desire and Domestic Fiction 5). It records and itself helps to construct gendered hierarchies.
8. Though De Quincey proposes that the gendered binary opposition of the sublime and the beautiful is "an idea altogether of English growth" (Masson 10:300), it is also evident in the work of European writers, notably Kant (in both his Observations, a text which I discuss in more detail in Chapter Six, and in the Third Critique) and Rousseau. In particular, we find the oppositions activity/passivity, power/love; according to Rousseau, the differences between the two sexes are necessary to the order of society: "One ought to be active and strong, the other passive and weak." (Emile 214) Woman "is made to please and to be subjugated," while man's "merit is in his power; he pleases by the sole fact of his strength. This is not the law of love". Burke's work is preceded in Britain by John Baillie's Essay on the Sublime, published ten years before the Enquiry; Baillie distinguishes between sublime passion and the limited love of "a narrow Object", such as "a *Child*, a *Parent*, or a *Mistress*" (23).
9. In the second edition of his treatise, Burke acknowledges a sublime of the supremely small (72).
10. See also Enquiry 136.
11. References to Hazlitt are to essay title, volume number and page number(s).
12. Burke's use of the third person plural pronoun always implies a generic male reader, while the status of his text as 'philosophy' types it as masculine, and out of bounds for female readers. All the contemporary reviews discussed by Wichelns are by male writers. Mary Wollstonecraft, whose comments I will discuss in more detail, is a notable exception to the policing of this boundary. On the elision of "softer" and "subordinate", see Vivian Jones (4).

13. A recent (1985) issue of the journal New Literary History, entitled The Sublime and the Beautiful: Reconsiderations, basically reconsiders the sublime. Two notable exceptions are Ferguson herself and Tom Furniss. Ferguson sees the sublime as a self-preserving defence against the dissolution effected by beauty, but she is not concerned with differentially gendered subjects. In Furniss's impressive article "Gender in revolution", the beautiful remains marginalized because Furniss (following Mary Wollstonecraft) uses the Enquiry as an heuristic device for reading the Reflections, giving most emphasis to the categories of the sublime and the grotesque.
14. On beauty as a patriarchal lie which oppresses women, see Naomi Wolf, The Beauty Myth.
15. See also Meaghan Morris who analyses, within a feminist framework, the reverberations of the category of the sublime in Lyotard's version(s) of postmodernity (The Pirate's Fiancée 213-39).
16. See Susan Levin for a reading of Dorothy Wordsworth that analyses at length the significance of domestic detail as the trace of a non-appropriative female aesthetic.
17. Mattick's article is a succinct and insightful account of the use of Burke's gendered categories in art theory and criticism.
18. Ronald Paulson cites an interesting comment from Bosenquet, "[the Sublime] may depend on "Unform", a useful idiom which may cover both formlessness and deformity'" (Representations 169).
19. For discussion of this episode, see Paul Mattick 299, and Tom Furniss, "Gender in Revolution".
20. As I noted earlier, feminist critics have been rewriting the oppressive paradigm of the 'perfect image', especially in their preoccupation with the grotesque body. See, in particular, Mary Russo, "Female Grotesques".
21. Paul Mattick also quotes this passage, but he seems to read "weakness" and "imperfection" as synonymous terms (294). See Nicholas Roe on the subversive connotations of the word "lispings" as used by contemporary critics of Keats.
22. Tania Modleski explains how in Lacanian theory the female body is imaged as both perfect and imperfect: "On the one hand, then, there is the anticipation of bodily 'perfection' and unity [at the mirror-stage] which is, importantly, first promised by the body of the woman; on the other hand, the fantasy of dismemberment, a fantasy that gets disavowed by projecting it onto the body of the woman, who, in an interpretation which reverses the state of affairs the male child most

fears, eventually comes to be perceived as castrated, mutilated, 'imperfect.'" (The Women Who Knew Too Much 80) I discuss the significance of the phallus in feminist theory in Chapter Four.

23. On the alignment in Reynolds of woman and nature, and of woman and the deficient detail, see Naomi Schor, Reading in Detail 15-16. The male analysis of feminized Nature continues to propel the "religious, commercial and scientific ideologies" of the early nineteenth century; "In all these endeavours, a male intelligence analysed a feminized 'Nature'. Men frame rational scientific practice just as they pushed forward quantitative thought; it was their birthright, seen as an inborn, natural quality of masculinity." (Davidoff and Hall 27)
24. My focus on what we might call, after Elisabeth Bronfen, "death's inscription" in the beautiful image, is not to deny the kitsch theatricality of this tableau vivant.
25. On the Ideal in Hazlitt's work, see Leonard M. Trawick, III. He argues that though for Hazlitt "the essence resides in the particulars", nevertheless "his own concept of the ideal seems hardly more than a revamping, in a new vocabulary, of selected parts of [Reynold's] Discourses" (247).
26. The quote appears in Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education (143).
27. See, though, Terry Eagleton's rewriting of aesthetic history: "Aesthetics is born as a discourse of the body" (The Ideology of the Aesthetic 13); Eagleton discusses Burke (along with Shaftesbury and Hume) in Chapter Two of his book.
28. I am indebted to Tom Furniss for this insight (66); on Wollstonecraft's critique of Burke, see also Mitzi Myers, "Politics from the Outside" and Terry Eagleton, The Ideology of the Aesthetic 56-59.
29. Davidoff and Hall make a different point about female labour: "women's domestic tasks which took place in the private sphere of the home have been unacknowledged as *work*. The contribution which married women made ...to the family enterprise through their labour, their contacts and their capital was equally obscured. As long as 'production' is narrowly defined, such connections literally cannot be seen" (33). In A Letter to the Women of England, on the Injustice of Mental Subordination (1799), Mary Robinson ('Anne Frances Randell') acutely places the question of physical labour within the context of the ideology of delicate femininity in order to point up the internal contradictions of such thinking: "If woman be the *weaker* creature, why is she employed in laborious avocations? why compelled to endure the fatigue of household drudgery; to scrub, to scower, to labour, both late and early, while the powdered lacquey only waits at the chair ...of his

employer? ... Are women thus compelled to labour, because they are of the WEAKER SEX?" (Jones 240).

30. Wollstonecraft is not the only feminist writers of the period to castigate this debilitating ideology: Mary Hays's heroine in the novel Memoirs of Emma Courtney laments, "Why have I been rendered feeble and delicate by bodily restraint, and fastidious by artificial refinement?" (31). Emma labours to convince the tedious Mrs. Melmouth "that to be treated like *ideots* (sic) was no real compliment, and that the men who condescend to flatter our foibles, despised the weak beings they helped to form" (32).
31. For a discussion of male anxiety about cosmetics during the eighteenth century, see Roy Porter, "Making Faces".
32. It is interesting that Wollstonecraft sees sensibility as an attribute of masculine morality; on the shifting significance of sensibility during the Romantic period, see Janet Todd, Sensibility: An Introduction. On the complex relation between women and slavery, especially the female colonial treatment of slaves, see Moira Ferguson, Subject to Others, esp. 161-62.
33. As Harriet Guest has recently pointed out, writers of the period use a common language in which to describe the corruptions of femininity ("The Dream of a Common Language").
34. On the metaphors of feminine duplicity in eighteenth-century texts, especially Richardson's Pamela, see Tassie Gwilliam, "Pamela and the Duplicious Body of Femininity"; for an extended discussion of conduct material, see Nancy Armstrong, Desire and Domestic Fiction.
35. The sermons of James Fordyce are punctuated by his concern about female apparel, an anxiety about ornamentation that cannot, I think, be wholly contained within the Christian parameters of his discourse.
36. Wilkes, as Leigh Hunt will do later, uses the trope of the female body in the service of valorizing inner beauty - the discourses of metaphysics and morality coincide over the woman's body. See also James Fordyce's Sermons to Young Women (1766): in the context of describing a young man surveying a number of young women in a public place, he declares, "it is the soul we seek ... That which is presented to our eyes attracts us merely as an image of that which they cannot perceive" (II:101).
37. In Vindication of the Rights of Woman, Mary Wollstonecraft criticizes the modes of conduct purveyed by Gregory and Fordyce; alluding again to Hamlet, she writes: "It is this system of dissimulation, throughout the volume [Gregory's Legacy], that I despise. Women are always to *seem* to be this and that - yet virtue might apostrophize them,

in the words of Hamlet - Seems! I know not seems! Have that within that passeth show! (199).

38. Like Mulvey, Devereux is concerned with the cinematic gaze.
39. I have already noted that English marriage laws made women subject to their husbands. Catherine Macaulay Graham, in her Letters on Education (1790), explains the sexual double-standard in terms of male 'property-owning': "I shall intimate, that the great difference now beheld in the external consequences which follow the deviations from chastity in the two sexes, did in all probability arise from women having been considered as the mere property of the men; and, on this account had no right to dispose of their own persons: that policy adopted this difference, when the plea of property had been given up; and it was still preserved in society from the unruly licentiousness of the men" (Jones 115).
40. Having been neglected by feminist critics in favour of her revolutionary contemporary, Mary Wollstonecraft, More's contribution to feminism is currently being reassessed; see, Lucinda Cole, "(Anti)feminist Sympathies"; Kathryn Sutherland, "Hannah More's counter-revolutionary feminism"; Mitzi Myers, "Hannah More's Tracts for the Times", and Davidoff and Hall, Family Fortunes 167-172.
41. See Burke's account of the "furies of hell", in the abused shape of the vilest of women" who march on Versailles (Reflections 165).
42. In the Preface to the Second Edition, Burke again insists on the project of differentiation, though, interestingly, the philosophic enquiry of the Enlightenment man, who "direct[s] the lights we derive from such exalted speculations" illuminates a curiously bisexual programme, for the taste is endowed with "philosophical solidity" while "the severer sciences" accrue "some of the graces and elgancies of taste" (6).
43. Though Margaret Homans, in Bearing the Word, argues that women are associated with the literal, there is also a long parallel tradition that links femininity and figurality. In her Introduction to Romanticism, Cynthia Chase discusses both these positions in feminist criticism of Romantic texts (27-31).
44. On this issue, see Tom Furniss, who draws a parallel with Burke's notions of property-ownership and government, both of which are legitimated through "longevity of possession" (86). Jacqueline Rose argues that, according to post-Lacanian thought, "[t]he divisions of language are in themselves arbitrary and shifting: language rests on a continuum which gets locked into discrete units of which sexual difference is only the most strongly marked. The fixing of language and the fixing of sexual identity go hand in hand; they rely on each other and share the same forms of instability and risk" (Sexuality 228).

45. The most insightful and detailed reading of the phenomenon of the masquerade is Mary Ann Doane's "Film and the Masquerade". For an intriguing account of eighteenth-century masquerades, and their subversive potential in fiction of the period, see Terry Castle, Masquerade and Civilization. Castle deals with a different type of masquerade to that analysed by Doane, but both forms are associated with scenarios of seduction.
46. Riviere draws on Nietzsche's conception of the Feminine as enigma, self-adornment, in her notion "of womanliness as a mask, behind which man suspects some hidden danger" (43).
47. It is worth recalling here that Burke himself was suspicious of essentialism, his whole concept of the state, and his epistemology, is that of a dynamically-evolving organism. There is, of course, a world of difference between the artificial and the organic, though in Burke's Enquiry "woman" mediates between the two, destabilizing the opposition (see note 56).
48. In Chapter Five (on Keats), I make use of precisely these tropes of proximity, but in relation to a biologically male author.
49. Also quoted in Mary Ann Doane, "Film and the Masquerade" 82, and Stephen Heath, "Joan Rivière" 57. See Heath's comments on Marlene Dietrich's performance in Sternberg's Morocco: Dietrich, he argues, "wears all the accoutrements of femininity *as* accoutrements, does the poses as poses, gives the act as an act". Heath sees this as "not a defence against but a derision of masculinity".
50. Hélène Cixous famously advocates the feminist theft of masculine discourse on women, in order to fly beyond the old phallogentric order, in her article "The Laugh of the Medusa". Tania Modleski suggests that we abandon the term "masquerade" with its compensatory connotation and disavowal of the self, and replace it with the term "performative" ("Some Functions" 23). She defines a performative feminist criticism as follows: it "aims at seizing authority from men at the same time that it seeks to redefine traditional models ... of authority, power, and hierarchy" (22), and she suggests that Virginia Woolf's prose is a good example of performative writing. Though I take Modleski's point, "masquerade" remains, for me, a usable - and sexy - term.
51. Pronouncements on sculpture, especially, emphasize the qualities of stability, universality and repose, in both object and spectator. According to Reynolds, "sculpture is formal, regular, austere; it disdains all familiar objects, as incompatible with its dignity" (X:187). Hazlitt, reviewing Flaxman's Lectures on Sculpture, confirms the continuing hegemony of this discourse of non-particularity in referring to "the purity, the severity, the abstract truth of sculpture" (10:353).



52. The sense of touch is invoked, but only negatively ("nothing should be left to offend the touch"); this does not, therefore, signal the type of rhetoric of embodiment that I will discuss below.
53. This is the same passage to which Hazlitt alludes in "On Beauty". Innocence is Hazlitt's own addition to Burke's beautiful woman, a move that is congruent with the spirit of his age: Davidoff and Hall point out that the "gendered connotations" of Burke's model of the beautiful "were later attached to moral qualities" (28).
54. This theory is outlined in Civilization and Its Discontents, and discussed in Owens 70-71. The Freudian theory of castration depends on the visible (or its lack) as the mark of sexual difference.
55. After revising this chapter, I discovered that this passage has recently caught the gaze of other feminist critics; see, Julie Carlson 154 and Anne K. Mellor, Romanticism and Gender 108-109.
56. In his meditations on beauty, Burke places women between the organic and the ornamental: "In trees and flowers, smooth leaves are beautiful; smooth slopes of earth in gardens; smooth streams in the landscape; smooth coats of bird and beast in animal beauties; in fine women, smooth skins; and in several sorts of ornamental furniture, smooth and polished surfaces" (Enquiry 114). The persistence of Burke's paradigms is evident in the work of John Claudius Loudon, for example, whose books, according to Davidoff and Hall, "dealt with every aspect of home life, from the planting of garden seeds to the appropriate authors to display on a dining room bookshelf" (189). Loudon was concerned with educating, and designing for, the gentrified commercial class, and he thought that women played a crucial role in inculcating good taste. Moreover, "[t]hey were themselves the ultimate expression of taste, for beauty was best expressed in the female form. ...In an appendix to a treatise on country residences, he saw beauty as associated with love of possession and considered those qualities as most beautiful, 'which approach nearest to that of woman: thus gentle undulations, insensible transitions, smooth and soft surfaces, circular or conical forms'" (191). The point is that Burke's theories lend themselves to the reification of female beauty in nineteenth-century middle-class ideology; the difference is that beauty for Burke lacks the moral charge it has for later writers.
57. It could be argued that the pleasure gained here, the erotic frisson of resistance, simply extends the domain of masculine power. However, it is worth considering another possibility, that is, that Burke's interest in articulating the beautiful in relation to all the senses refracts the hegemony of the visual. The beautiful in taste, in smell and in sound is a translation of the alluring surface into other media. For example, Burke admires "the smoothness and slippery texture" of liquids (152),

the "sweet" smell of flowers (he remarks "that in some languages soft and sweet have but one name" [154]), and he quotes from Milton's L'Allegro to describe the beautiful in sounds, focusing on those those in which the speaker desires to be enveloped in "soft Lydian airs", by "The melting voice through mazes running" (122). In researching the chapter on Keats, I came across David Masson's speculations on the traditional (and continuing) privileging of visual over other pleasures. In an article, "The Life and Poetry of Keats", published in Macmillan's Magazine in 1860, he writes: "Now, though it may be admitted that, in so far as ministrations of material for the intellect is concerned, sight is the most important of the senses, yet this all but absolute identification of love of nature with sensibility to visual pleasures seems erroneous. It is a kind of treason to the other senses - all of which are avenues of communication between nature and the mind, though sight may be the main avenue. In this respect I believe that one of the most remarkable characteristics of Keats is the universality of his sensuousness." (Matthews 379).

58. For an insightful reading of this essay, which in many ways dovetails with my own, see Peter De Bolla 220-222.
59. Moreover, to construct the surface as a "deceitful maze" is also to deconstruct the opposition of surface and depth. While I am interested in highlighting the subversiveness, or sublimity, of beauty in the de/construction of gender ideology, as I noted earlier the engendering of the sublime is by no means stable: the passivity of the male spectator in the face of the sublime, for example, upsets the alignment of activity and masculinity.
60. According to Ronald Paulson, while Burke redefined current definitions of the sublime by producing it as an alienating experience, beauty for him remained in the Addisonian mould, and is characterized by "repose" (Representations 69). Analyzing the passage about a beautiful woman, Paulson writes that Burke refers to "the mother's breast, and the experience of beauty is quiet, passive, and regressive, a return to childhood experience" (132). Rather than emphasizing the erotic aspect of Burke's beautiful woman, Paulson is interested in the construction of the ideal woman as a nurturing mother. As social historians of the period argue, a new domestic ideology developed during the eighteenth-century which constructed an idealized mother who breastfed and cared for her children, and who constituted the cornerstone of the nuclear family, presiding over domestic, affectional space. Tracing an oedipal narrative, Paulson disavows the disconcerting potential of female beauty (69; this strategy of erasing women is spectacularly displayed in the De Quincey criticism analysed in Chapter Six). He contrasts this "regressive" experience of beauty, which we might describe in current terminology as the conservative closure of the Lacanian Imaginary, with the sexy subversiveness of

Hogarthian beauty. Hogarth, he argues, "declines to accept [the] categorization that separates the beautiful and the sublime, and consistently emphasizes the connotations of disobedience, rebellion and entanglement as well as beauty" (132). However, Burke seems closer to Hogarth than Paulson will allow. Interestingly, it is precisely at this point (the description of a beautiful woman) that Burke acknowledges his debt to Hogarth: in the second edition of the Enquiry, Burke added a section on the pleasure it gave him to find that he could strengthen his theory by reference to Hogarth's line of beauty (115). On the politics of the family in the eighteenth-century, see Lawrence J. Stone, and the work of Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall.

61. More, like Elaine Showalter, turns to the story of Atalanta to exemplify her argument (see my discussion of Showalter in Chapter Two).
62. Mellor suggests that Letitia Landon "constructed both her life and her poetry as an embodiment of Burke's female beauty", with fatal consequences (110).
63. The last sentence here (and those, not quoted, that follow it) was an addition made for the second edition in response to criticisms in the Critical Review: it was suggested that the pleasure caused by love might be considered "an exertion of the nerves to a tension that borders upon pain" (qtd. in Wichelns 658). This would break down the polarities of the sublime and the beautiful, pleasure and pain, which Burke was anxious to maintain.
64. I have been troubled by my slippage between the terms 'effeminate' and 'feminine' as ways of characterizing a man who accrues the characteristics traditionally ascribed to women. I have allowed both terms to remain, for in a sense they represent the problem that besets any act of criticism, how to negotiate between two historically specific contexts, then and now. The term 'effeminate' (or 'effeminacy'), most famously used in Hazlitt's essay, sums up the mainstream/malestream response to this type of transgression during the historical period under consideration, while my use of the term 'feminine' is the mark of my own position of enunciation. It is worth noting, however, that female critics, of Keats for example, used transgressive terms positively: Mrs. Oliphant declares that "[i]n poetry his was the woman's part" (qtd. in Wolfson, "Feminizing Keats" 321). Burke's best-known woman critic, Mary Wollstonecraft, since she upholds the benefits of 'masculine' Reason, tends to see Burke as failing to attain proper masculinity.
65. In this early work, Burke criticizes a "degenerate" aristocracy which is parasitical on the poor; his class predilections undergo a sea-change between this text and his more famous Reflections. Burke added a preface to the second edition of the Vindication, explaining that it was an ironic text (that is, it was intended to ridicule the beliefs of

Bolingbroke whom Burke allowed people to assume was its author). Isaac Kramnick questions this ironic reading in The Rage of Edmund Burke (88-93). More generally in his book, he traces Burke's ambivalent stances in the social, sexual and political realms, basing his readings on an Oedipal framework. Though I am often not in agreement with his reduction of texts to psychobiographical symptoms, Kramnick provides a wealth of information which illuminates this complex figure, as well as readings of neglected texts (such as the Vindication).

66. Kramnick, too, writes of Burke's marriage, which he sees as stabilizing Burke's sexual and social life: Burke "emerged from his years of self-discovery by resolving his crisis [over career - law or public, political life] and fixing on his identity, choosing the masculine alternative in both cases" (79). In marrying Jane Nugent, Burke apparently confirms his heterosexuality after years of intimate friendships (not necessarily homosexual) with men, especially Will Burke (Will, however, continued to live as part of the new household). Kramnick argues that Burke's treatise "provides interesting indications of his sexual ambivalence" (94); "For Burke the sublime is Will and the beautiful Jane, and both are essential to peace and well-being"; Burke "seems to assert his masculine identity in his marriage to Jane and to repress his feminine identity and his attachment to Will" (97). I remain uncomfortable with the one-to-one equation of life and text, and with the elision of femininity and homoeroticism (or homosociality), though I am fully in agreement that the Enquiry is full of shifts in the representation of sexuality.
67. It could be argued that both Marie Antoinette and the female mob exhibit sublime qualities, and therefore participate in the masculine order, the Queen because she is disembodied, transcending matter and glowing above the horizon, while the other women could be seen to be sublime in their unfeminine rage and violence. On the implications of the "disembodied splendour" of Marie Antoinette, see Julie Carlson (152-53). Carlson's fine article was published as I was doing the final revisions to this chapter, and my arguments about Burke intersect with hers in various respects. We are both interested in the question of theatricality, and use Hazlitt as our 'bridge' into the Romantic age. Carlson then focuses on the career of Sarah Siddons, while I turn to Canova's Borghese statue. On women in the Reflections, see also Linda M.G. Zerilli, who argues that Burke's beautiful Queen is a defensive screen against the "unfamiliar, sublime image of [revolutionary] women" (50).
68. The theatre is traditionally devalued as a 'feminine' form, associated with ideas of display (increasingly, during the Romantic era, the display of women's bodies), and seen as the venue of prostitution. For the male Romantics, the theatre provided a public forum for the poetic

voice, a wider audience than that of the inwardly-turned lyric, but it entailed the risk of feminization (we might recall that the most successful playwright of the period was Joanna Baillie). On the "dangerous liason between theater and 'femininity'", see Carlson (151). Wollstonecraft's personal mode of address and her mimicry of Burke's own flirtatious discourse mark her as a forerunner of the likes of Luce Irigaray and Jane Gallop.

69. Hazlitt's notion that poetry is effeminate may seem a curious alignment within Romanticism. Previously, I might have been inclined to argue that this is the defensive gesture of a prose writer within an age of Poets; however, as I suggested in Part 1 of this study, the recent 'rediscovery' of the huge number of women poets writing during the period suggests that it is an historically accurate gender/genre observation (in which case, Hazlitt's comment remains defensive, but in a different sense).
70. On Hazlitt's ambivalent attitude to Burke (aesthetic appeal versus political antagonism), see John Whale, "Hazlitt on Burke". Tom McFarland also discusses Hazlitt's fluctuating opinion of Burke, and Hazlitt's use of quotation (70-75). The particular intertext here reminds us of Pope's own critique of the perceived feminization of culture in The Dunciad, wherein Dulness is a figure for femininity, chaos, and a hybrid writing that erases the proper boundaries between prose and poetry (see, esp. ll.273-274).
71. I am indebted here to the questions Elisabeth Lyon's poses about photography (169).
72. See, for example, the work of Wendy Leeks on Ingres.
73. Licht is right that recognizable individuality frustrates easy scopic appropriation, but always assumes a heterosexual, male gaze: viewed from other positions of gender and sexuality, the statue might evoke feelings other than "uncomfortable" ones.
74. Though I am indebted to Hollander's argument, I have emphasized the relationship between model and artist, whereas she argues that this dynamic is displaced into "a more problematic relationship between the model and the sculpture itself" (139). I have not been able to ascertain exact details of the production of the Borghese statue (art criticism has tended to focus on product rather than process).
75. See Carol M. Armstrong's insightful essay on the ways that Degas's nudes revise the gendered syntax of viewing.
76. This narrative recurs in Thomas Love Peacock, Nightmare Abbey.

77. I paraphrase Craig Owen's memorable observation on the photographer Cindy Sherman (though she "may pose as a pin-up, she still cannot be pinned down" [75]).
78. It remains a problem that though I want to talk about the 'female voice', it is still spoken by a male writer.

## Chapter Four

***"Man's desire finds its meaning in the desire of the other":  
Mirrors and Veils in Shelley's Prose Writings***

*I have read Shelley a little more with more love.*  
Ralph Waldo Emerson<sup>1</sup>

An alternative way of reading this thesis would be to move now to Chapter Six, for De Quincey, like Burke, inscribes sexual instability in the space of the subversion of the polarity sublime/beautiful; De Quincey himself comments on Burke, giving hints of a connection between them.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, in turning to Shelley's writing I continue the theorizing of the male gaze that preoccupied me in the previous chapter. As I have already suggested, the demystification of the patriarchal and ideological motives of the male gaze risks occluding the dynamics of 'looking'. Paradigms of surveillance may ignore the undecidability and power of images of women (Burke's "beautiful woman" and the statue of Paolina Borghese), as well as the identification with the feminine that such figures suggest. In this chapter I will analyze the deconstruction and double-gendering of the 'Subject' in Shelley's prose. My discussion focusses primarily on the shifting significances of two paradigmatic Romantic tropes, the mirror and the veil, as they appear in Shelley's essays "On Love" and "On Life" and in A Defence of Poetry.<sup>3</sup> Some reference will be made to other prose writings, including letters, and to certain poems. I am particularly interested in extending my discussion of the male gaze to include those elements that elude vision, as such, that is the discourse of desire in Shelley's texts. The desiring subjects under analysis include the reader: I will attempt to outline those readerly

positions, inscribed within the texts, that invite a feminist reading practice.

\* \* \* \* \*

*The mirror must remain intact.*

Sidonie Smith

In her Introduction to the recent collection of critical essays, Romanticism and Feminism, Anne Mellor briefly discusses what she views as the implicit phallogentrism of the Romantic ego, in the poetry of Blake, Coleridge and Shelley, the three major poets of the Romantic canon who are absent from the volume itself. She argues that "Percy Shelley carried to an extreme [the] dual strategy of deifying the male ego even as it cannibalized the attributes of the female", citing Shelley's essay "On Love", in which "he defined the beloved female as the antitype of the male, 'a miniature as it were of our entire self, yet deprived of all that we condemn or despise, the ideal prototype of every thing excellent or lovely that we are capable of conceiving as belonging to the nature of man'" (7). Mellor asserts that this "image of the beloved woman as the perhaps unattainable reflection and completion of the male ego recurs obsessively in Percy Shelley's poetry, from the veiled maidens of 'Alastor' and 'The Witch of Atlas' and the fleeting glimpses of Intellectual Beauty to the radiantly revealed Asia of 'Prometheus Unbound'" (7-8). Mellor focusses on what she calls the "narcissistic dimension" of Shelley's thought.

William Ulmer eschews the narcissistic in favour of the "egocentrism" of "On Love", which he discusses in order to outline the parameters of "Shelley's Poetics of Love". Placing the essay in its Platonic context (it was written in July 1818, between Shelley's translation of The Symposium and his Discourse on the Manners of the Antient Greeks Relative to the Subject of Love), he argues that "'On Love' and the androgenous myth of The Symposium concur in viewing desire as an impulse to



reunify sundered psychic complements", but that the differences between these two accounts of love "can be summed up by observing that the words 'likeness', 'portrait', 'mirror', and 'correspond' - so crucial to Shelley's sense of the relationship of self and antitype - are entirely missing from the relevant passage of The Symposium as he translated it." (6) Ulmer is concerned with the relation between Shelley's "insistence on the likeness of lovers" and the role of metaphor in his work; what attracts me is the rhetoric of (self)representation, the terminology of the mirror.<sup>4</sup> To enter Shelley's text(s) is to enter a hall of mirrors, portraits and miniatures. These mirror figures may be viewed from a number of angles. I propose first to turn on them the sort of feminist gaze implicit in Mellor's argument, that is, that woman is framed as the mirror which reflects man back to himself, and by which male subjectivity is (apparently) enabled while female subjectivity is disabled.

Shelley proposes that the self sees itself "dimly" in the desired other, who acts as a mirror in which "all that we condemn or despise" is obscured while "every thing excellent or lovely" is illuminated ("On Love" 473); this is "a mirror whose surface reflects only the forms of purity and brightness" (474). The other is a "miniature" whose smallness serves to emphasize, in effect, to magnify, the lover's stature.<sup>5</sup> Shelley's looking-glass prefigures Woolf's magic mirrors in A Room of One's Own: "[W]omen 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." (35)<sup>6</sup> This "enlarge[ment]" is predicated on "the inferiority of women", and is put at risk if the woman "begins to tell the truth" (36). More recently, in Speculum of the Other Woman, Luce Irigaray has revealed the "plane mirror" which focusses 'Woman' as the objectified other by which man confirms his position as knowing subject; the

plane mirror privileges sameness, symmetry and visibility. Though she is unable to see herself, woman reinforces and reassures man's vision of himself, safeguarding his narcissistic investment of the penis which is threatened by the discovery of the female sexual organs.<sup>7</sup> To castrate woman by denying her difference is to inscribe her in the economy of the same; at the same time, as the image of what man is not, she confirms what he is. As Sidonie Smith puts it, "In order to sustain the idea of man as that which is not woman, the mirror must remain intact; the slick, artificial surface of specularly cannot crack" (48).

Shelley links the desire "within us which ... thirsts after its likeness" to the relation between mother and child: "It is probably in correspondence with this law that the infant drains milk from the bosom of its mother; this propensity develops [sic] itself with the development of our nature." ("On Love" 473) Twentieth-century critical theories have echoed Shelley's implied link between mirrors and mothers: we recall that in object-relations theory the role of the mother is to reflect the child, giving it first security and then emancipation from her; in Lacanian theory, the mother is the privileged mirror before which the child performs the drama of subjectivity. Note that, like Woolf's, the Lacanian mirror-image is a mirage: it provides an illusory identity through the process by which subjects misrecognize a construct for an absolute (I will come back to the congruences between Shelley and Lacan). Kristeva also aligns mirrors and mothers: "we direct towards the mother not only our needs for survival but above all our earliest mimetic aspirations. She is the other subject, an object that guarantees my being as a subject." (Powers of Horror 43) As Kristeva's syntax reveals, the mother as subject rapidly inverts to object, as mirror of the child's desire.

The notion of mirroring is important as a subject of Shelley's essay, but also as a formal principle.<sup>8</sup> This is particularly evident in the recurrence of rhetorical structures governed by the logic of repetition, as in the following example: "If we reason, we would be understood; if we imagine, we would that the airy children of our brain were born anew within another's; if we feel, we would that another's nerves should vibrate to our own" ("On Love" 473). The predicate of desire ("we would") - the desire to validate the self through the reciprocity of an/other - is grounded in the wishful-thinking of syntactical and grammatical mirroring.<sup>9</sup> The Defence of Poetry is, in some ways, a mirror image of "On Love": in the earlier essay, love is "that powerful attraction [which] ...seek[s] to awaken in all things that are, a community with what we experience within ourselves" (473); in the Defence, "[t]he great secret of morals is Love; or a going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person, not our own" (487). In the first instance, in Donald Reiman's words, "the external world [must] respond or conform to the ideal within the self", in the second, "the self seeks the beautiful without" (Shelley and His Circle 6:645): either the outer becomes inner, or the inner becomes outer in a form of rhetorical reciprocity.<sup>10</sup> This mirror play, which elides the differences between entities, is encapsulated in a sentence from Shelley's essay "On Life": "Those who are subject to the state called reverie feel as if their nature were dissolved in the surrounding universe, or as if the surrounding universe were absorbed into their being. They are conscious of no distinction" (477).

I will discuss later the effects of this lack of consciousness of distinction(s), the attempt to reconcile subject and object and assert "the one Life within us and abroad" that Rene Wellek has defined as central to European Romanticism. Here I

want to suggest that from one feminist perspective, Shelley's speaker, like Narcissus, endlessly contemplates his own reflection in this play of mirrors, but that the figures who guarantee his subjectivity - and as "beautiful" figures they are implicitly feminine (explicitly in many of the poems)<sup>11</sup> - lack even Echo's fading presence. Shelley's letters, especially those written in the early days of his relationship with Mary Godwin, would seem to confirm this reading of the male subject. Writing to Thomas Jefferson Hogg early in October 1814, Shelley speaks of "Mary's character": "so intimately are our natures now united, that I feel whilst I describe her excellencies as if I were an egoist expatiating upon his own perfections" (Letters 1:402). In a letter to Mary Godwin written towards the end of the month, he exults: "How divinely sweet a task it is to imitate each other's excellencies - & each moment to become wiser in this surpassing love - so that constituting but one being, all real knowledge may be comprised in the maxim [know thyself]"; "Your thoughts alone", Shelley tells his correspondent, "can waken mine to energy" (Letters I:414). If we appeal again to Woolf, we find that "the looking-glass vision is of supreme importance because it charges the vitality; it stimulates the nervous system" (Room 36). Later, as Woolf's narrator looks along the bookcase at the biographies of "great men" (one of whom, significantly, is Shelley), she speculates upon male dependence on women: there is "some stimulus", she asserts, "some renewal of creative power which is in the gift only of the opposite sex to bestow" (82); the sight of a woman in the "drawing-room or nursery, ...among her children perhaps, or with a piece of embroidery on her knee ... would at once refresh and invigorate" the male spectator (83). Shelley's desire may not have had such a domestic focus - perhaps a volume of Wollstonecraft substituted for the embroidery - but nevertheless, the illusion of the mirror is

integrative, constituting the male subject as "an whole accurately united" (Letters 1:403), self-knowing, and stimulating his creative energy.

Compare Mary Godwin's reply:

Goodnight my love - tomorrow I will seal this blessing on your lips  
 dear good creature press me to you and hug your own Mary to your  
 heart perhaps she will one day have a father till then be every thing  
 to me love - & indeed I will be a good girl and never vex you any  
 more I will learn Greek and - but when shall we meet when I may tell  
 you all this & you will so sweetly reward me - oh we must meet soon  
 for this is a dreary life I am weary of it - a poor widowed deserted  
 thing no one cares for her - but - ah love is not that enough - indeed  
 I have a very sincere affection for my own Shelley -

(Mary Shelley, Letters I:4-5)

Her epistolary prose is characteristically fluid, with only dashes and spaces punctuating the flow of thought. Theories of *écriture* feminine have extolled this sort of writing as figuring a self jubilantly untrammelled by the hierarchy of grammar, a diffuse textuality that mimics the rhythms of the female body. But this letter disturbingly enacts a dystopian version of this paradigm, the overwhelming impression is of disintegration: sentences collapse, unfinished, into the gaps which demarcate them; Shelley alternates between the first and the third person, suggesting a self radically divided; she refers to herself by the abstract noun "thing", as though she were an inanimate object. Most distressing is the rhetoric of 'Daddy's girl', the promise to be "a good girl" for Percy Shelley, the father/lover, the desire to be the image of his desire ("I will learn Greek").<sup>12</sup> "Imitat[ing] each other excellencies"

seems to entail more work on the woman's part than on the man's. Mary Shelley presents herself through the lens of masculine ideology as secondary, as other, exposing the female 'lack' that confirms male wholeness. Traditionally denied the right to be 'subjects', women do not have the same access to even the illusion of (self-)mastery. John Bennett promotes this female self-effacement in Letters to a Young Lady; his comments, in a passage already quoted in Chapter Two, expose the gender ideology that shaped Shelley's self-presentation: "She listens to his [her husband's] conversation, in order to be instructed. In *him*, she feels herself *annihilated* and absorbed. She always shows that deference and consciousness of *inferiority*, which, for the sake of *order*, the all-wise Author of nature *manifestly*, intended" (II:90). Shari Benstock points out how stylistic discontinuities may be a function of gender, so that "[i]n identifying the 'fissures of female discontinuity' in a text ... we also point toward a relation between the psychic and the political, the personal and the social, in the linguistic fabric" ("Authorizing" 21).<sup>13</sup>

It is perhaps worth noting at this point - as a prelude to the following in which I suggest an alternative reading of the Shelleyan 'mirror stage' - the inherent instability of Percy's "integrity" which I have thus far implicitly polarized in opposition to Mary's disintegration. If we return to the letter to Hogg cited above, we find Shelley's confident assertion: "I never before felt the integrity of my nature, ... & learned to consider myself as an whole accurately united rather than as an assemblage of inconsistent and discordant portions" (Letters I:403). Shelley's language attempts to seal the fissure between the self as "whole" and the self as an "assemblage" of parts: the word "integrity", used in the Defence, for example, in the context of Imagination's production of thoughts, "each containing within itself the

principle of its own integrity" (480), carries resonances of the organic. It suggests, therefore, a DNA-like reduplication and development, a series of connections rather than discontinuity. The "inconsistent" "portions" are like seeds which come to fruition in Mary's presence, this "future [self] is contained within the present as the plant within the seed" (Defence 481).<sup>14</sup> The paradox remains that the subject can only be whole if construed by itself as an object, if it perceives itself, from outside as it were, as "an whole accurately united", and differentiates itself from a previous disintegrated self. Wholeness, thus, is grounded in the enabling project of differentiation.<sup>15</sup> As Coleridge puts it in the Biographia Literaria, "the spirit must in some sense dissolve this identity [between object and subject], in order to be conscious of it", it cannot "be a subject without becoming an object" (I:274). The self is always already self-alienated, doubled, even before it seeks the other, the external double who will seal its split.<sup>16</sup>

Though it is important to note conformity to traditional gender paradigms, to read only the image of male self-mastery and female objectification is to succumb to ideological closure and the fixing of the terms "male" and "female". I want to return, therefore, to Percy Shelley's texts and analyze the ways in which the mirror may act as a destabilizing device, simultaneously constructing and questioning both gender and selfhood. My reference above to the 'mirror stage' emphasizes that the angle of vision here will be along the lines of Lacan's disruptive paradigms of subjectivity and desire.

\* \* \* \* \*

*The chasm of an insufficient void.*  
P.B. Shelley, "On Love"

In the following I will draw on Lacan's notoriously difficult theories of the

construction of human subjectivity, especially his terminology of the "Real", the "Imaginary" and the "Symbolic", suggesting the usefulness of these concepts in reading Shelley, wherein they are pre-emptively mirrored. In this I follow Paul Fry's provocative conviction that "[i]n the Defence, and everywhere in the poetry too, there is much that could be called a Lacanian psycholinguistics in embryo" ("Made Men" 451).<sup>17</sup>

The Lacanian mirror stage is initiated by, and perpetuates, the acknowledgment of lack, of "insufficiency" (Ecrits 4): the Real, the order that precedes the ego, is the realm of pure plenitude, what Lacan calls "the lack of a lack" and is that which is "unassimilable" in representation (Four Fundamental Concepts 55). The Real can only be conceptualised retroactively: "Let us *recollect* our sensations as children. What a distinct and intense apprehension had we of the world and of ourselves. ... We less habitually distinguished all that we saw and felt from ourselves. They seemed as it were to constitute one mass." ("On Life" 477, my italics). Shelley's nostalgia here - and most famously, in "Ode to the West Wind" in which he remembers that, as a "comrade" of the wind's "wanderings", "to outstrip [its] skiey speed / Scarce seemed a vision;" (49-51) - is close to the Lacanian Real. Plenitude is always already lost: consciously annotated, it is inscribed as appearance ("seemed") not substance. The Lacanian mirror-stage is salutary for the child's identity, providing a moment of jubilation as the infant sees an image of completeness which denies the helplessness of the actual body. However, the moment when the child (mis)recognizes itself in the mirror as a (potential) totality coincides with the moment when it recognizes that it is not 'one', that is, whole, needing no supplements, merged with the world and the (m)other, "constitut[ing] one mass". The mirror is the locus of an imaginary



wholeness and the site of self-alienation: "The specular constitution of the subject alienates the subject, providing a selfhood that, mediated by the otherness of the transposed image, remains riven by otherness." (Ulmer, W. 115).

Jacqueline Rose has helpfully discussed the complex roles of the mirror and the mother:

For Lacan, ...the very image which places the child divides its identity into two. Furthermore, that moment only has meaning in relation to the presence and the look of the mother who guarantees its reality for the child. The mother does not (as in D. W. Winnicott's account ...) mirror the child to itself; she grants an image *to* the child, which her presence instantly deflects. Holding the child is, therefore, to be understood not only as a containing, but as a process of referring, which fractures the unity it seems to offer. (Mitchell and Rose 30)<sup>18</sup>

The image splits the child's identity - just as I noted above that Shelley's "integrity" depends on division - while the mother doubles this process: imaged in the mirror along with the child, her presence is similarly split, so the child has to negotiate the contradictions of the tactile (her embrace) and the visual (her image), as well as the gap between being corporeally contained and mentally complete (that is, identifying with the mirror-image).<sup>19</sup> The state of satisfaction in which the child merges with the mother, "conscious of no distinction" ("On Life" 477), which Lacan construes as deadlock rather than idyllic dyad, is replaced by a mode of being characterized by lack, gap and splitting. In Elizabeth Grosz's words, "It will attempt to fill its (impossible, unfillable) lack ... This gap will propel it into seeking an identificatory image of its own stability and permanence (the imaginary), and eventually language

(the symbolic) by which it hopes to fill the lack" (Jacques Lacan 35). If we look back at the mirror figures with which I began, they seem from this perspective more the anxious signifiers of lack seeking stability, than, *pace* Mellor, the masterful appropriation of the feminine.

The mirror holds out the possibility that the self may coincide with the other, but it simultaneously marks the cleavage of self and other, constructing the subject in a dialectic in which it depends on the other's recognition. In the Defence, Shelley praises Athenian drama: "The tragedies of the Athenian poets are as mirrors in which the spectator beholds himself", and, replicating the magic mirrors of "On Love", these looking glasses present an image of "ideal perfection" (490). Significantly, Shelley acknowledges that "[n]either the eye nor the mind can see itself, unless reflected upon that which it resembles" (491). The pun on "eye", as well as the reference to "the mind", emphasizes that it is subjectivity that is at stake here. Lacan's insight that the aim of desire is not fulfilment but recognition is pertinent: "man's desire finds its meaning in the desire of the other, not so much because the other holds the key to the object desired, as because the first object of desire is to be recognized by the other" (Ecrits 58). Lack, "the chasm of an insufficient void", crystallizes as desire, the search "to awaken in all things that are a community with what we experience ourselves" ("On Love" 473).

It is perhaps worth summarizing at this point the significance of the dialectics of desire that subtends the Romantic subject. Desire is predicated on the existence of an object, something outside the subject, differentiated from the self, an other. Though it is not an issue that I will go into here, I should note that the typical Romantic manoeuvre is to make of a possible plurality an essential 'other' (this is

related to the question of conceiving gender as a general abstract). This difference exposes the subject to 'lack', and s/he attempts to seal the gap between self and other: "Be thou me", Shelley's speaker implores the West Wind, just as he assures Emilia "We shall become the same, we shall be one / Spirit within two frames" ("Epipsychidion" ll.573-4). Such plenitude would be the death of desire. The erasure of the object, its introjection by the self (or the absorption of the self into the object), paradoxically also negates the self for it negates difference. The subject is constituted in the dialectic of plenitude and difference, in the oscillation between the Imaginary and the Symbolic.<sup>20</sup> As Lacan puts it, "when the subject appears somewhere as meaning, he (sic) is manifested elsewhere as 'fading', as disappearance" (Four Fundamental Concepts 218); shifting the Lacanian emphasis slightly, I would say that the Shelleyan subject lives in the fading, that is, in the ellipses of desire.

The rhetoric of dissolution is the characteristic mode of Shelleyan desire. Shelley's speakers want to dissolve all the boundaries separating the loving subject from the loved one, to erase the barrier between the self and the ideal other, to collapse the two sides of the mirror and heal the split within the self. "[I]f we feel," writes Shelley, "we would that another's nerves should vibrate to our own, that the beams of their lips should kindle at once and mix and melt into our own" ("On Love" 473; the erotic resonances of Shelley's verbs corporealize - unavoidably solidify - the rhetoric of dissolution). Shelley uses the image of the circle to figure this totalizing desire, "a soul within our soul that describes a circle around its proper Paradise which pain and sorrow and evil dare not overleap". (474) This circle which encompasses self and ideal antitype would seem to correspond to Lacan's "Real", that hermetically sealed circuit of paradisaal completeness; but the Real is what is 'impossible'. This

is what Malcolm Bowie calls "the indefinitely receding goal towards which the signifying chain tends; the vanishing point of the Symbolic and the Imaginary alike" (134), or, as Shelley poignantly recognises, "the invisible and unattainable point to which Love tends" ("On Love" 474). It can only be conceptualized retroactively, always out of the reach of the subject who is constituted in the Imaginary/Symbolic dyad. In the realm of representation, the meaning of the circle is not immanent, but subject to interpretation, and, like a mirror-image, its significance may be inverted. The circle both includes and excludes, it may be full or empty, the "circumference of bliss" desired in "Epipsychidion" (l.550) or the "void circumference" acknowledged in "Adonais" (l.420).<sup>21</sup>

In a letter to John Gisborne in 1821, Shelley makes reference to his reading of Plato and of the Greek dramatists, praising, especially, Sophocles's Antigone. "Some of us", he writes, "have in a prior existence been in love with an Antigone, & that makes us find no full content in any mortal tie" (Letters II:364). Presumably part of the allure of Antigone might be that she privileges her brother over her future husband (it is also, as Irigaray has suggested in Speculum, that Antigone, the difficult Oedipal daughter, defies patriarchal law [in the figure of Creon] as the assertion of her maternal lineage: she buries Polyneices because he is her mother's son, and thus she pays tribute to their shared connection to the mother against the edicts of the surrogate father). In other words, in posing the brother - biologically related to the self (and the mother) - as 'other', the play works to minimize the gap between self and other. Shelley argues that because of this anterior attachment to a "sublime" Ideal, it is impossible to find "full content" in any present "mortal" relation. The word "content" derives from the Latin "contentus" (con + tenere, to hold), and the

dictionary tells us that it means "contained, hence satisfied" (OED). Thus, complete satisfaction is predicated on a figure of enclosure, an encircling which completes the self. As well as the obvious sexual connotations, the secondary resonances of the word are textual, gesturing towards achieved meaning, the satiation of signification, full utterance. In the same letter, Shelley writes - he is talking about "Epipsychidion": "As to real flesh & blood, you know that I do not deal in those articles, - you might as well go to a ginshop for a leg of mutton, as expect anything human or earthly from me" (363). Apart from constituting a wittily prescient parody of Arnold's "ineffectual angel" caricature,<sup>22</sup> this comment suggests that there is no 'real' origin for Shelleyan desire: Antigone is already a representation, a linguistic construct, a "sublime ... *picture of a woman!*" (my italics). Shelley is not concerned with "flesh and blood", but with other "articles", a grammar of desire which traces the relations between love and language.<sup>23</sup>

To talk of a 'grammar' of desire is to suggest a generative grammar, those patterns which constitute the textual enactment of desire. I realise that the connotations of this word for Shelley are nearly always negative and prescriptive, but I want to argue that Shelley's very attempts to evade the Symbolic - at the least, to escape the limitations of language - produce the desiring and desirable texture of his prose. Demonstrating the role of the "I" in language, Benveniste argues that subjectivity is linguistically generated: "'Ego' is he who *says* 'ego'" (224). The personal pronoun is a "shifter", a position to be occupied rather than stable entity, and one which has meaning in relation to other linguistic positions ('you', 'it', etc). "What then is the reality to which *I* or *you* refers?" asks Benveniste, "It is solely, 'a reality of discourse', and this is a very strange thing. *I* cannot be defined except in

terms of a 'locution', not in terms of objects as a nominal sign is. *I* signifies the 'person who is uttering the present instance of the discourse containing *I*' (218). Moreover, the subject is split - in a grammatical analogy of the mirror stage - between the "I" who speaks and the "I" who is spoken. Shelley writes: "The words, *I, you, they*, are not signs of any actual difference subsisting between the assemblage of thoughts thus indicated, but are merely marks employed to denote the different modifications of the one mind" ("On Life" 477-78).<sup>24</sup> Shelley's attitude to language is marked by the desire to suture the split within the self, and between the self and others. Linguistic mobility can lead to the type of bliss envisaged by Hé<sup>l</sup>éne Cixous: "Languages pass into my tongue, understand one another, ... blend their personal pronouns together in the effervescence of differences" (qtd. in Defromont 119); but it also threatens subjectivity: "We are on the verge where words abandon us, and what wonder if we grow dizzy to look down the dark abyss of - how little we know" ("On Life" 478).

Shelley recurs throughout his prose and poetry to the topos of the inadequacy of language, the weakness of words to realise the self or 'truth'. To Elizabeth Hitchener, he laments: "Methinks words can scarcely embody ideas - how wretchedly inadequate are letters." (Letters 1:191); in "Epipsychidion", "The winged words on which my soul would pierce / Into the height of love's rare Universe, / Are chains of lead around its flight of fire" (ll.588-90): words frustrate the realization of the divine Emilia, and, significantly, they also defer penetrative sexual satisfaction ("*would pierce*"). In "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty", an "awful LOVELINESS" is invoked to "give whate'er these words cannot express" (ll.71-72). Words can only mediate the "truth": "Flowers, ruins, statues, music, words, are weak / The glory they transfuse

with fitting truth to speak" ("Adonais" 467-68). In "On Life", Shelley asserts: "How vain it is to think that words can penetrate the mystery of our being. Rightly used they may make evident our ignorance to ourselves, and this is much" (475-76). The examples proliferate; however, perhaps the most poignant evocation of the inadequacy of language occurs in the margins (a footnote) of the fragment on love, and it is the 'love language' of this essay that I want to turn to again.

In "On Love", the speaker tells us how his spirit, enfeebled through its "tenderness", seeks "sympathy", correspondence, with others, a quest that is fissured by failure: "I ...have found only repulse and disappointment" (473). Specifically, he tells us: "I have found my language misunderstood like one in a distant and savage land." Keats's knight in "La Belle Dame Sans Merci", wandering in an alien land(scape) and facing problems with the linguistic medium of desire, asserts hopefully: "She looked at me as she did love / And sure in language strange she said, 'I love thee true.'"<sup>25</sup> Shelley's speaker is more radically estranged, for his own language is an alienating medium. He desires another being on whom to transfer all his thoughts and feelings. This Other is, in Lacanian terms, 'the locus of the signifier's treasure', "the subject supposed to know" (Mitchell and Rose 139); his/her discourse is not alienated and s/he knows the meaning of the subject's own language. Shelley's anxious footnote on the inadequacy of language, "These words are inefficient and metaphorical - Most words so - No help -" ("On Love" 474), is located between his comment that the ideal other is the "portrait" of our external being, and the reference to this antitype as an idealizing mirror, in other words, between two figures supposed to guarantee subjectivity. Lack is engendered at the point where words become inadequate for expressing an authentic subjectivity, but this coincides

with the recognition that there are no words beyond these weak words, no language that can close the gap between sign and referent, and no self which is lacking the lack and non-satisfaction to which the subject is condemned in the symbolic order.<sup>26</sup>

What Shelley in the Preface to "Alastor" calls "the vacancy of [the spirit]" (70), or, in "On Love", "the chasm of an insufficient void" "within our own thoughts", is the precondition of desire (473). The mirror provides the necessary illusion of self-possession, the fiction which sustains the thirst to "resemble or correspond" with the other, to have one's desire recognised (474). It is this desire which generates the Romantic text.

\* \* \* \* \*

*... the power of awakening in others sensations like  
those which animate my own bosom.*

P.B. Shelley

Shelley frequently uses the mirror trope to figure both poetry and poets. His enigmatic pronouncement in the Defence is perhaps the most radically disorientating of these statements: "Poets are ... the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present" (508). In acting as "mirrors" for "shadows", poets reflect an image of something that is already a type of mirror-image; any possibility of (logocentric) 'presence' is doubly deferred. The adjective "gigantic" ascribes, as Tillotama Rajan argues, "a mythic status to what the text portends", as though the adjective can overwhelm the noun it qualifies (Rajan, Supplement 294). These are shadows cast by the future, which makes of the present an "insufficient void" whose meaning can only be anticipatory, and which requires the reader to fill in the gaps in the text. The poet is like the Lacanian subject who is constituted by anticipating what it will become: the jubilation of the infant in the face of the illusion of mastery



provided by the mirror is tied to a dialectical temporality. Jane Gallop describes the child as "being captivated by an analogy and suspending his disbelief" (Reading Lacan 78). For Shelley, the words of poets "unveil the permanent analogy of things by images which participate in the life of truth" (Defence 485). The poet is captivated by an analogy which is grounded in representation, in images reflected in the dark mirror of language. Specularity both promises and defers closure, and renders reading an indeterminate (and interminable) activity.

The phenomenology of reading in Shelley partakes of the looking-glass vision that constructs the relation between self and other *within* the texts.<sup>27</sup> The poet's sensations are to be reflected, reanimated, in the reader. Shelley's characteristic rhetoric establishes correspondences between writers and readers via the metaphor of textual mediation: poems are "[t]he sacred links of that chain ... which descending through the minds of many men is attached to those great minds [the poets], whence as from a magnet the invisible effluence is sent forth, which at once connects, animates and sustains the life of all" (Defence 493). In the Preface to The Revolt of Islam, Shelley wonders:

How far I shall be found to possess that more essential attribute of Poetry, the power of awakening in others sensations like those which animate my own bosom, is that which, to speak sincerely, I know not; and which, with an acquiescent and contented spirit, I expect to be taught by the effect which I shall produce upon those whom I now address. (Hutchinson 35)

The power of poetry is connate with the subjectivity of the poet, and both depend on reader response to guarantee them, on the poet's sensations being mirrored by the

reader. Significantly, Shelley's speaker is passive ("acquiescent"), opening the self to readerly instruction / construction in a reversal of the normative power dynamic (writer/reader: teacher/pupil). The relationship between texts and bodies, and between poets and readers, is explicitly both specular and erotic. Particularly in the Defence, Shelley recurs again and again to the "pleasure" of poetry, in language which cumulatively suggests sexual pleasure ("excess", "intensity", "delight", "mingling"): the "faculty of approximation to the beautiful ...exists in excess [in] poets" and this produces a representational order "from which the hearer and spectator receive an intenser and purer pleasure than from any other" (Defence 482, 481). "The pleasure resulting from the manner in which they [poets] express the influence of society or nature upon their own minds communicates itself to others and gathers a sort of reduplication from that community" (482); in this sense, poetic pleasure is the effect of the interaction between self and other(s) and which is then reproduced in these others, in a series of unending involutions. "Poetry is ever accompanied with pleasure: all spirits upon which it falls, open themselves to receive the wisdom which is mingled with its delight." (486) In this final quote, the reader is (sexually) receptive to the text, inverting the mirror-effect alluded to in The Revolt of Islam in which the poet is open to the reader's reading. Shelley destabilizes the positions of writer and reader, and, in imag(in)ing the diffuse delights of openness and reversibility rather than an economy of penetrative pleasure (I will discuss this paradigm in more detail in relation to Shelley's use of the figure of the veil), his writing moves towards a type of jouissance in which gender identities are potentially unfixed.

Part of the disjunctive potential of the mirror for the reader is that there is always (at least) a double image, that is, a spectator reading his (or her) image within

the text, and a reader outside the text interpreting this scene of reading (and searching for her/his own image). I would like to look briefly at two scenes that frame the reader's gender improperly, or perhaps, that tell a truth about gender, but tell it slant.<sup>28</sup> In the Defence, Shelley argues that "[t]he story of particular facts is as a mirror which obscures and distorts that which should be beautiful: Poetry is a mirror which makes beautiful that which is distorted" (485). The chiasmus suggests the (illusory) jubilation of the mirror image, but the rhetorical reversibility also hints at how difficult it is to maintain the separation of the beautiful and the distorted, the possibility that poetry (or prose, for "[t]he distinction between poets and prose writers is a vulgar error" [484]) may invert into a particularity that blurs the ideal image. One such instance occurs in the short essay "Even Love is Sold". Shelley personifies "society", or conventional morality, as "the pure and virtuous matron" who rejects the prostitute as monstrous, "an abortion" to be cast "from her undefiled bosom" (Clark 117). He proposes an ethical reading which turns the lens on the matron: "How would morality, dressed up in stiff stays and finery, start from her own disgusting image should she look in the mirror of nature!". Here, a figurative "woman" looks at herself in a mirror ("nature") which is also conventionally feminine. How is the 'real reader' en-gendered? I suggest that this image of a woman posing in front of a mirror in corsets and "showy adornments", which collapses the difference between the prostitute and the matron (presumably Shelley's moral point), has a pornographic frisson. Though the main point is that the woman is repelled by the image in the mirror, another effect is that the reader is produced as the possessor of a second, controlling gaze - the gaze of a voyeur, whose safe distance (and mastery) is emphasized by the mirror-displacement *within* the scenario. In other words, the

reader here is placed in a conventionally masculine role. A woman reading is likely to find herself in the uncomfortable position of a woman reading as a man.<sup>29</sup>

According to John Barrell, "the imagination ...seems to become phallicised in the Defence. It is 'the great instrument of moral good', the 'organ of the moral nature of man'; and it is the task of the poet or of poetry, as Shelley tells us twice, to 'enlarge' that organ" (Flight 17).<sup>30</sup> However, along with this phallic rhetoric is another which may be more disorientating for the male reader. For Shelley, poetry is "a strain which distends and then bursts the circumference of the hearer's mind" (Defence 485); though this suggests a type of phallic violence, the verb "distends" has other gender possibilities. "The imagination is enlarged by a sympathy with pains and passions so mighty, that they distend in their conception the capacity of that by which they are conceived" (490): to distend is to swell, and along with the reference to conception, the word modifies the phallic effect by gesturing towards the pregnant female body. We recall that Dante's words are "pregnant with a lightning which has yet found no conductor" and that the work of art is imaged as "a child in the mother's womb" (500,504). Both these latter examples are part of the long philosophical tradition which understands creation as (male) reproduction, and whose texts teem with male mothers and midwives and their immaculate progeny. Yet if this is a colonization of the female domain, it is complicated in reading Shelley by the fact that the reader mirrors the writer's pregnancy: the "mirror[s] in which the spectator beholds himself" reveals a distended, pregnant, female body, an image of the 'other'. Sexuality becomes positional rather than essential, positions which take their significance from the symbolic differentiation of gender and which are available to all subjects. As Jacqueline Rose comments in her reading of Lacan: "All speaking

beings must line themselves up on one side or the other of this division [the division of gender enacted in language], but anyone can cross over and inscribe themselves on the opposite side from that to which they are anatomically destined" (Mitchell and Rose 49).

\* \* \* \* \*

*It is by our fragility that we seduce.*

Baudrillard

Laura Claridge has argued recently that "[i]n some ways , Shelley may well be one of our least phallic writers, if we understand Lacan's rendering of the phallus to mean all-knowing, all-powerful, promising closure" ("Bifurcated" 103). Lacan argues that the phallus is what everyone wants and no-one has, that the subject, regardless of biological sexuality, is subject to castration. This castration is symbolic: it is the lack of the power to generate and control meaning, for language is like "a distant and savage land" which we cannot master; we "can only signify ourselves in a symbolic system that we do not command, that, rather, commands us" (Gallop, Reading Lacan 20). Both Lacan and Shelley seem to me to be 'feminine' writers to the extent that they relinquish, or at least recognise, the impossibility of phallic mastery.

The confusion between the phallus and the penis is at the root of the problem of using Lacanian theory to read Shelley, and other male writers. "[F]eminists find that central, transcendental phallus particularly hard to swallow", as Jane Gallop puts it (Thinking 125). Lacan insists that the phallus does not equal the penis, that it is not an organ, but an attribute (the possession of an unalienated language, Humpty Dumpty's ability to make words mean what he wants them to mean); it takes on meaning only in relation to castration. But the phallus does also refer to the penis, which is often seen as the representational mark of the phallus (and it is for this

reason that some feminist critics are unhappy with the Lacanian genealogy of desire).<sup>31</sup>

Shelley's texts inscribe a "desire endlessly impossible to speak as such", a stammering discourse that I find endlessly seductive (Rose 45). According to Baudrillard, "It is by our fragility that we seduce, never by powers or by strong signs" (qtd. in Gallop, "French Theory" 114). The politics of seduction remain a problem for many feminist critics. Just who is being led astray here? Traditionally, feminists have found much to resist in Lacan, the ladies' man, and in other male theorists who flirt with the feminine (the putting of "Woman" into discourse, discussed in Chapter Two of this study). Mellor remains unmoved by Shelley, designating his interest in the feminine a sign of his "harem mentality". Vulnerability may be yet another male ruse: perhaps feminist readers, in succumbing to these Cartesian orphans, are simply - in Meaghan Morris's memorable phrase - "being thoroughly screwed" (55).<sup>32</sup> Alice Jardine admits to being seduced the vulnerability displayed in Stephen Heath's article "Male Feminism", but says: "I wasn't necessarily seduced as a theorist; I was seduced as a feminist reader and listener" (Men in Feminism 248). This odd alienation is a sign of the feminist anxiety about seduction: in her splitting of the self, Jardine retains a part of herself that will not take male feminism lying down. While I recognize Jardine's dilemma, I would give equal weight to Jane Gallop's notions of the subversiveness of seduction, as a paradigm (of reading, of relationships) that deconstructs the binary opposition active/passive.<sup>33</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

*Veil after veil may be undrawn and the inmost naked beauty  
of the meaning never exposed.*

P.B. Shelley

In discussing the mirror trope in Shelley, I have argued that it marks the site of a split subject, fissured by the lack that engenders desire, and that the articulation of this desire in language gestures towards a space outside conventional masculine parameters. In theorizing the poetics of the veil, I will suggest that its associations with femininity move Shelley further and further away from teleological, monologic utterance, towards the production of a text that, in Kristeva's words, is "an *intersection of textual surfaces* rather than a *point* (a fixed meaning)" (*Desire* 65).

Before analysing Shelley's usage, it is worth rehearsing some of the functions of the veil: it acts as a protective screen, against the sun, for example, and also, of course, the gaze. Traditionally, it is women who need this sort of veiled protection (think of all the 'screens' that surround Edna Pontellier at the start of *The Awakening*); "it is the woman who exists behind the veil in patriarchal society, inhabiting a private sphere invisible to public view" (Gilbert and Gubar, *Madwoman* 474).<sup>34</sup> Nuns 'take the veil', enclosing and concealing themselves in a convent. The veil connotes concealment, perhaps the hiding of a secret. Gilbert and Gubar note the "long gothic tradition which embraces the veil as a necessary concealer of grotesque revelations of sin and guilt, past crimes and future suffering" (469).<sup>35</sup> The concealing veil is opaque, it shuts out the gaze. Yet though "the veil resembles a wall, ... even when it is opaque it is highly impermanent, while transparency transforms it into a possible entrance or exit. Unlike a door, which is either open or shut, however, it is always potentially both" (Gilbert and Gubar 468). It is this quality of simultaneous concealment and revelation, the provocation and the blocking

or deferral of the gaze, that fits the veil to its role in representing the seductive tease of femininity. Salome epitomizes the erotic and mysterious female otherness behind the veil. Gilbert and Gubar argue that women writers demystify the iconography of the veil which has been in male hands, so that the veil is either "a symbol for women of their diminishment into spectral remnants of what they might have been", or the insight and duplicity of "a veiled lady becomes a strategy for survival in a hostile, male-dominated world" (472,473). Maria Edgeworth's statement in Letters for Literary Ladies (1795) reveals the place of this figure in the burgeoning ideology of femininity: "[W]omen must always see things through a veil, or cease to be women" (qtd. in Hoeveler 262).

According to Alice Jardine, "[t]he image of the veil is a Romantic one. Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Emerson, and Shelley, for example, make extensive use of it as something to be 'lifted' rather than 'played with'" (Gynesis 198). These Romantic veils are implicitly opposed to Derrida's deconstructive veils (in texts such as Spurs and Glas). In the iconography of the romantic veil, the moment of unveiling is privileged, it is what is behind the veil that is significant, the signified rather than the signifier. The romantic veil is enmeshed in the discourse of metaphysics; its presence seems to guarantee profundity, a significant depth concealed behind the trivial surface of things. William Wordsworth writes, in a phrase that suggests that this movement becomes pathological, of "penetrating the unsightly and disgusting surfaces of things" (671). The veil holds out the promise of revelation, a transcendence of the quotidian by "burning through the inmost veil of Heaven" ("Adonais" 1.493). The metaphysical desire remains grounded in the feminine genealogy of the veil, and this emphasis on the lifting of the veil or the penetration



of the surface, underwrites an imperialist epistemology.

There is much in Shelley to support the notion that the stripping of veils is an ascendent 'striptease' towards the 'Idea'/Woman, a progression controlled and consumed by the active male subject. Poetry is frequently presented as the medium by which veils, or coverings, are lifted. "Poetry lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world" (Defence 487); "It strips, as it were, the painted curtain from this scene of things" ("On Life" 476). It performs a type of Brechtian defamiliarisation in "mak[ing] familiar objects be as if they were not familiar" (Defence 487) and helping us to see more clearly into the life of things: poetry "purges from our inward sight the film of familiarity that obscures us from the wonder of our being" (505). Poetry is the discourse of inspired masochism: "Poetry is a sword of lightning, ever unsheathed, which consumes the scabbard that would contain it" (491).

In his "Notes on Sculptures in Rome and Florence", Shelley is fascinated with the drapery of statues: "A Venus Genitrix" is "[r]emarkable for the voluptuous effect of her finely proportioned form being seen through the folds of a drapery, the original of which must have been the 'woven wind' of Chios" (Clark 346). These feminine "folds" are provocative, especially in the evocation of transparency suggested by wind-like drapery. Contemporary female fashions may have been as much in Shelley's mind as classical statues: among the "corrupt consequences" of the cultivation of "pernicious modes of artificial gratification", Hannah More ranks "the unchaste costume, the impure style of dress, and that indelicate statue-like exhibition of the female figure, which, by its artfully disposed folds, its seemingly wet and adhesive drapery, so defines the form as to prevent covering itself from becoming a veil" (59).<sup>36</sup> Similarly, "the sinuous veil / Of woven wind" reveals the veiled maid's

"glowing limbs" to the poet in "Alastor" (ll.176-77). Whether floating or clinging, these veils are revealing. The desire for transcendence is figured through images of translucence, but even absolutely transparent veils act as erotic membranes, which both invite and bar access to the (feminine) body.

The sexual resonances of unveiling are exposed in the description of the paradisaal isle in "Epipsychidion" (the topographical analogue of the veiled Emily):

Veil, after veil, each hiding some delight,  
 Which Sun or Moon or zephyr draw aside,  
 Till the isle's beauty, like a naked bride  
 Glowing at once with love and loveliness,  
 Blushes and trembles at its own excess: (ll.472-76)<sup>37</sup>

The "unsculptured image" behind the veil is revealed to be a Galatea, a bride stripped bare and illuminated by the semiotics of sexual promise ("glowing", "blushes", "trembles"). However, as I noted earlier, the speaker's desire to merge with the blushing bride is always anticipatory, not achieved ("We shall become the same, we shall be one"). Language itself defers and reveals the vision, for "[t]he winged words ... / Are chains of lead" (ll.588-90), which impede the poet's flight. As Jerome McGann recognises, "'Epipsychidion' is [Shelley's] veiled vision" ("Shelley's Veils" 208).<sup>38</sup>

Poetry "strips the veil of familiarity from the world, and lays bare the naked and sleeping beauty, which is the spirit of its forms" (Defence 505). Here again Shelley's rhetoric is (deliberately) oxymoronic, but the materiality of "naked" and "sleeping" resists assimilation to "spirit"; "Poetry ... appears as a less than charming prince who takes a mean advantage of the Sleeping Beauty" (Barrell, Flight 17). Yet

this removal of the veil does not bring us into privileged contact with what lies beneath or behind it, for poetry itself is imaged as a veil. Critics have noted "the constant and troubling vacillation of aesthetic representation between surface and depth which takes place within the essay's imagery" (Rajan, Dark Interpreter 28). "And whether it spreads its own figured curtain or withdraws life's dark veil from before the scene of things, it equally creates for us a being within our being. It makes us the inhabitants of a world to which the familiar world is chaos" (Defence 505). Poetry connotes the withdrawal of "life's dark veil" to reveal a core of beauty, a depth unstained by historical contingency and corruption, but it is also itself a "figured curtain". The veil embodies and stimulates contradictory desires - for the truth behind the veil, and for its surface. Moreover, the (positive) "figured curtain" recalls the (negative) "painted veil" of the sonnet "Lift not the painted veil", behind which Hope and Fear ("those sisters wild", in "Epipsychidion", 1.380) weave a covering - another veil - over the dark chasm. The "painted curtain" of "On Life" is, like "life's dark veil", something to be stripped away.<sup>39</sup> The play of this self-perpetuating costume drama ("the alloy of costume ...temper[s]" the "splendour" of poetic "conceptions" for mortal apprehension [487]) remains entangled with traditional gender paradigms, particularly the logic of the male gaze. Shelley can not unchain language from its familiar moorings. In the Defence, he argues that:

...a poet considers the vices of his contemporaries as the temporary dress in which his creations must be arrayed, and which *cover without concealing* the eternal proportions of their beauty. ....The beauty of the internal nature cannot be so far concealed by its accidental vesture, but that the spirit of its form shall communicate itself to the very disguise,

and *indicate the shape it hides* from the manner in which it is worn.

(487, my italics)

The writer's desire is veiled by periphrasis: though Shelley does not explicitly gender the figure which is tantalizingly concealed and revealed, "beauty" suggests the feminine (as opposed to sublime masculinity) and the whole scenario smacks of voyeurism within a heterosexist economy. The sartorial seductions of poetry are:

...like the diaphanous

Veils, in which those sweet ladies oft array

Their delicate limbs, who would conceal from us

Only their scorn of all concealment:

("The Witch of Atlas" ll. 562-65)

Yet I would suggest that Shelley revitalises the tired trope of the veil - femininity as dissimulation - giving it a positive value, and thereby destabilizing metaphysical hierarchies. The vacillation of imagery (especially within the Defence) disrupts the hierarchizing of depth over surface in its relation to truth, engendering a space in which binary oppositions cannot easily be maintained. The 'male' subject is lost in a tissue of veils, a play of surfaces; he - and the reader - can no longer see, or know or decide what is or isn't there. The text dissimulates; it is the fabric of its own unweaving, a succession of veils continually withdrawn and reweven which generate meaning as a process not as a system.<sup>40</sup> Veils to be "played with" rather than merely "lifted" or penetrated.

Veils have figured prominently in certain texts of philosophy and psychoanalysis; within these discourses they are signs of truth under analysis, and the disorientating shifts noted in Shelley's essays are reproduced here. I want to look at

some of these texts, particularly from Lacan and Derrida, in order to demonstrate more clearly what is at stake in Shelley's usage of this trope.<sup>41</sup> In the work of both Lacan and Derrida, the veil is weighted by its metaphysical baggage, its connotations of a dissimulating surface, behind which the profundity of truth is waiting to be revealed. Like Shelley, Derrida attempts to rework the trope, by focussing on suspension and deferral, a point between veiling and unveiling:

'Truth' can only be a surface. But the blushing movement of that truth which is not suspended in quotation marks casts a modest veil over such a surface. And only through such a veil which thus falls over it could 'truth' become truth, profound, indecent, desirable. But should that veil be suspended, or even fall a bit differently, there would be no longer any truth, only 'truth' - written in quotation marks. (Spurs 59)<sup>42</sup>

The veil has the same function as woman in Derrida's texts:

There is no such thing as the essence of woman because woman averts, she is averted of herself. ... And the philosophical discourse, blinded, founders on these shoals and is hurled down these depthless depths to its ruin. There is no such thing as the truth of woman, but it is because of that abyssal divergence of the truth, because that untruth is 'truth.' Woman is but one name for that untruth of truth. (Spurs 51)

Woman as truth is a split subject, without integrity, "averted" - veiled - from herself. She embodies the suspension of truth. The veil conceals/reveals only undecidability, an "uncertainty of vision" that, for Derrida, is affirmative and that he privileges as "feminine" (Jardine, Gynesis 198).

In an interview published as "Women in the Beehive", Derrida negotiates some of the questions which feminists have posed about the place of the "feminine" in his work, that is, the way woman is treated as the unconscious material of signification.<sup>43</sup> Mary Ann Doane asks, "The question is why the woman must always carry the burden of the philosophical demonstration, why she must be the one to figure truth, dissimulation, *jouissance*, untruth, the abyss, etc., why she is the support of these tropological systems, even and especially antimetaphysical or antihumanistic systems" ("Veiling" 139). She theorizes that philosophy defuses its own insecurities in relation to truth by projecting them onto the woman, and that poststructuralist discourse is attracted by the same trope, though here woman is revalued as the object of desire at the limits of theory. I want to give as much weight to Doane as to Derrida, though I admit that I am seduced by Derrida's answer to the question: "Of course, saying that woman is on the side ... of undecidability and so on, has only the meaning of a strategical phase. In a given situation, which is ours, which is the European phallogocentric situation, the side of the woman is the side from which you start to dismantle the structure" ("Beehive" 194). Derrida advocates the use of the "feminine force" to reverse and undermine the opposition man/woman, after which the term "woman" will no longer have the same meaning and will no longer be the best trope to refer to undecidability, etc. Both Derrida's and Shelley's veils remain intricately in the patriarchal discourse they try to find ways to evade, but the desire to speak outside this discourse appeals as a feminist gesture.

The Lacanian trope of the veil is invested in the phallus not in the woman, and from this perspective - that it is not parasitic on the feminine - it might be seen as more amenable to feminist theory. One of Lacan's most famous and oft-quoted

pronouncements is that the phallus "can play its role only when veiled" (Ecrits 288).<sup>44</sup> I have already alluded to the phallus/penis confusion that has alienated some feminist readers of Lacan; here I want to refer to the counter argument that the Lacanian phallus is feminized. Mary Ann Doane reminds us that, "[t]he woman's relation to the phallus is that of 'being' rather than 'having'" ("Veiling" 128), while the 'phallic mother' has become a familiar figure in feminist discourse. Jane Gallop returns us to a Shelleyan grammar of desire in her analysis of the transvestite grammatical articles which modify the phallus ("la" rather than "le" in a revealing slip of the type), and the sexual indeterminacy of Lacan's veils in "The Signification of the Phallus" which she links with the sails which appear in "The Agency of the Letter". Lacan offers "thirty sails" as an example of metonymy for thirty ships, telling us that "the disquietude [he] felt" over this classic illustration "obscured (*voilait*) not so much those illustrious sails (*voiles*) as the definition they were supposed to illustrate." (Ecrits 156).<sup>45</sup> Gallop observes that "[t]he 'voile' in 'Agency' (sail) is feminine, whereas 'voile' meaning 'veil' is masculine. But 'voile' for sail is derived from 'voile' for 'veil,' and it may be just this sort of slippage between a masculine and a feminine term that is at play in Lacan's notion of the phallus, which is a latent phallus, a metonymic, maternal, feminine phallus" (Reading 131). Interestingly, the Derridean veil, too, is epicene: in Spurs, it is *le viol, la viole, le viole, la viole*.

The full sentence in which Lacan's famous proposition appears is: "All these propositions merely conceal the fact that it can play its role only when veiled, that is to say, as itself a sign of the latency with which any signifiable is struck, when it is raised (*aufgehoben*) to the function of signifier" (Ecrits 288). The veiled phallus

interposes a screen between the signifier and the signified: the signifier can never close definitively on a signified, which always remains latent, concealed. This split in language mirrors, indeed constructs, the split in subjectivity: the subject is self-divided, desiring that full utterance which is always out of reach in a linguistic system dependent on differences.<sup>46</sup> The phallus, as a signifier perpetually in search of a signified, unveils the perpetual deferral of meaning. "Veil after veil may be undrawn and the inmost naked beauty of the meaning never exposed" (Defence 500): in Shelley's logistics of the veil, unveiling is always non-coincident with the exposure of truth. Yet it is the promise of meaning that draws us, and constitutes us as desiring subjects: "For the signifier, by its very nature, always anticipates meaning by unfolding its dimension before it. As is seen at the level of the sentence when it is interrupted before the significant term: 'I shall never ...', 'All the same it is ...', 'And yet there may be ...'. Such sentences are not without meaning, a meaning all the more oppressive in that it is content to make us wait for it" (Lacan, Ecrits 153, ellipses in original). Meaning becomes a demanding lover.

\* \* \* \* \*

In interpreting the text, the reader takes her or his place in this involuted series of veils. Charles Sander Peirce provides a theory of interpretation which echoes Romantic language and which speaks to the experience of reading Shelley:

The meaning of a representation can be nothing but a representation.

In fact, it is nothing but the representation itself conceived as stripped of irrelevant clothing. But this clothing can never be completely stripped off; it is only changed for something more diaphanous. So there is an infinite regression here. Finally, the interpretant is nothing



but another representation to which the torch of truth is handed along; and as representation, it has its interpretant again. Lo, another infinite series. (I:77)<sup>47</sup>

Pierce's metaphor of (impossible) unveiling mirror's Shelley's veiled discourse. Interpretation is an erotic process in which the reader (or the reader's reading/interpretation) becomes in turn a "diaphanous" veil be reinterpreted, revealed, revealed by another reader. The traces of metaphysical desire remain in the figuring of truth as light, but this desire is reinflected as communal, not solitary but other-centred. The critic eschews imperialistic desires, that drive towards mastery of the text which depends on origins and ends, and gains instead the pleasures of promiscuous interpretation. The texture of Shelley's prose suggests that a poem, or text, is not an object with a core or kernel of meaning to be triumphantly uncovered, but something analogous to Roland Barthes's and Nancy Miller's tropologies of the text: the text is "an onion, a construction of layers ... whose body contains, finally, no heart, no kernel, no irreducible principle, nothing except the unit of its own surfaces" (Barthes qtd. in Miller, Subject 3).<sup>48</sup> This multi-layered body is mirrored by the "unending involutions" of interpretation. Unveiling Shelley's *Witch*, for example, reveals only that "love" which "becomes idolatry" (1.48). "The sympathetic reader", as Jerrold Hogle acknowledges, "should put aside all the priestly sanctions of the critics and give into a worship of graven images for their own sake that breeds an endless desire for images to come" ("Metaphor and Metamorphosis" 330). Shelley's texts reserve a space for the reader, they call for a complicity between writer and reader, a relationship that is non-authoritarian. This readerly, and writerly, humility, a position of non-mastery in relation to a text, may be interpreted, as I

argued in Chapter Two, as a feminist practice: several recent critics have suggested that a criticism which speaks "a discourse of hesitancy" rather than "a discourse of knowledge" (Barbara Johnson in Salusinsky 173) may unsettle the uprightness of phallogocentrism.<sup>49</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

*The desire to linger or dilate.*

Patricia Parker

The following passage resonates with my discussion of Shelleyan desire; it speaks to that particular pleasure which provoked me to write about Shelley in the first place. It is taken from a letter to Thomas Jefferson Hogg written in December 1817, in which Shelley justifies his reluctance to use a lexicon when reading Greek literature in the original:

I am not at this moment very classically employed, nor have I summoned courage to accept Scapula as my mentor and guide thro' the bowers of Greek delight.

Might I not, by a confidence in Scapula, lose the end while busied about the means; and exchange the embraces of a living and tangible Calypso for the image of a Penelope, who, though wise, can never again be young. (Letters I:569)

The first part of the second sentence, about "ends" and "means", might well be read as the 'essence' of Shelleyan thought, at least, that aspect which has been foregrounded in much Shelley criticism. If we cast this privileging of the end in terms of the veil metaphor, we might uncover the risk that "to lay too much weight on poetic forms is to be trapped by the texture of the veil (or its many colours as he [Shelley] often images it) and distracted into seeing it as end rather than only as

means" (Bone, "Contemporary Poetry" 76). The texture of the veil is the formal features of language, the surface particularity of words, the contingent, the artificial, the feminine; in other words, all those seductive detours from the eternal and the universal. However, the second part of the sentence, though apparently adding to and amplifying the first, is oddly disjunctive, reversing the established hierarchy. In privileging Calypso over Penelope, Shelley privileges the mistress rather than the wife, infidelity over marriage, youth rather than the security of wisdom, the journey rather than the homecoming, that is, the means rather than the end, but a means perceived as affirmative in their own right. Shelley as Odyssean reader enjoys a sexy encounter with the text, taking pleasure in the *process* of reading itself while resisting epistemological certainty. Shelley casts himself as a feminist reader.<sup>50</sup> I am drawn to this episode - and I admit in advance that I make this brief encounter do a lot of work - because it is a pressure point where Shelley both risks the charge of a "harem mentality" *and* the loss of the traditional, masterful male subject. It is a moment when the instability of the text generates multiple meanings, when it opens itself to the reader.

At first, then, Shelley eschews the precision and distracting piecemeal quality of a lexicon; he wants his experience of the text to be unmediated, for to attend to the mechanics of translation is necessarily to alienate the 'real' meaning (translation is "the act or process of turning from one language into another" [OED]; the word derives from the Latin, to transport or transfer).<sup>51</sup> However, with the Odyssean analogy Shelley embraces the sensuous tangibility of the alien words, the arousing texture of the veil rather than the Platonic image.<sup>52</sup> Thus, Shelley first resists translation, but then succumbs to seduction, another form of transport (literally it

means "to lead astray"). Etymologically, Calypso's name derives from the Greek word for "covering" or "veil".<sup>53</sup> We are back with a play of veils. Perhaps Odysseus is feminized by this "covering".<sup>54</sup> In a provocative comment, Patricia Parker suggests that our first view of Odysseus at the enchantress's dwelling is of a "latent hero" (12). The encounter with Calypso, for Shelley-as-Odysseus, displaces the teleological quest for legitimate or univocal meaning; as a paradigm of reading and writing, it suggests the excitement of textual infidelity, a prose dedicated to pleasure, the plural and the improper. As Parker suggests of Roland Barthes, "the properly narrative desire to reach an end and the properly hermeneutic desire to penetrate a text's meaning are countered by the desire to linger or dilate" (12). In terms of gender, the desire to reach an end has been perceived, textually and sexually, as masculine, whereas feminine sexuality, and by analogy, feminine textuality, has been conceived as 'jouissance' - "sparks of pleasure ignited by *contact* at any point, ... not waiting for a closure, but enjoying the touching" (Gallop, Feminism 30-31). This definition of jouissance resonates with Shelley's open-ended prose, his emphasis on the tangible, the body, the sparks of pleasure ignited throughout the Defence (though these sparks remain, of course, entangled with the Promethean). Shelley's preference for Calypso constitutes a slightly perverse reading of The Odyssey, in which, for all his dilatory progress, Odysseus retains the desire to return home to Penelope. Yet, it is worth remembering that The Odyssey is an open-ended text: we are told that Odysseus, after his return home, will set out again.<sup>55</sup> Recall, too, that Penelope is also a veil-maker, who deploys her own delaying tactics: weaving by day and unweaving by night, she strategically suspends the masculine privilege of her suitors in a temporal void. All these veils tend to destabilize the difference between

Penelope and Calypso, between means and end. We reach towards a feminine 'sexuality', a realm where, in Wallace Steven's words, "the bride / Is never naked. A fictive covering / Weaves always glistening from the heart and mind" ("Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" VIII).

\* \* \* \* \*

*[T]he poet is distinguished ... by having what other men want.*  
W.S. Walker

The rhetoric of Shelley's contemporary reviewers tends to support my contention that Shelley is not a phallic writer, indeed, that his writing disrupts the symbolic, patriarchal order. There is, of course, no contemporary criticism of the Defence, so I must content myself with references to reviews of the poetry, taking them as representative of the construction of 'Shelley'. Interestingly, "On Love" was well-received by the press on the left, though to describe it as an "exquisite morceau" (as did the The Monthly Review in 1829) is to locate its author on the margins of masculinity (this tallies with the 'pruned' Shelley which flourished in the gift-books for middle-class women).<sup>56</sup> However, many reviewers registered complaints which reveal the hidden politics of language. In an unsigned review in The Lonsdale Magazine or Provincial Repository, the critic asserts that:

...when writers, like ... Shelley, envelope their destructive theories in language, both intended and calculated to entrance the the soul by its melodious richness, to act upon the passions without consulting the reason, and to soothe and overwhelm the finest feelings of our nature; - then it is that the unwary are in danger of being misled, the indifferent of being surprised, and the innocent of being seduced.

(Barcus 249)

Shelley seduces his (female? male?) readers through the glittering surface of his texts; he subverts the hegemony of (male) reason over passion, luring his readers "to wander" from the straight patriarchally-demarcated "paths of virtue and innocence" (Barcus 248; here the reader seems more certainly feminine). Yet this reviewer has just devoted a paragraph to the seductive allure of the "Syrens", of whom Shelley is the contemporary example. No longer even the feminized Odysseus outlined above, Shelley is here the archetypal femme fatale, whose "flowers of rhetoric" lure 'her' male (or lesbian) readers into sexual and textual "indulgence", away from fidelity, settled meanings, and the secure demarcations of gender difference (Barcus 248).

Many other critics pick up on the siren-like surface of Shelley's writing, which frustratingly fails to yield a significant 'deep' meaning. W.S. Walker in The Quarterly Review (October 1821) asserts that:

The want of meaning in Mr. Shelley's poetry takes different shapes. Sometimes it is impossible to attach any signification to his words; sometimes they hover on the verge between meaning and no meaning, so that a meaning may be obscurely conjectured by the reader, though none is expressed by the writer .... (Barcus 255)

In other words, Shelley's meaning is 'suspended'; it is a marginal discourse which affronts the symbolic order by refusing to meet the "demand [for] clear, distinct conceptions" (which Walker regards as 'our' "right"), offering only an unsettling "confusion" of "forms". Shelley is frequently criticized for his disruption of conventional grammar and syntax and for his non-referential language; W.S. Walker refers to "the absurdities" which are "accumulated ... in defiance of common sense, and even of grammar" (Barcus 257); in "Seraphina and Her Sister Clementina's

Review of *Epipsychidion*" in The Gossip (July 14, 1821), the two sisters and a gentleman friend satirize the strange "coupl[ing]" of adjectives and nouns and the endlessly supplementary quality of Shelley's imagery, which leads the reader "through a crowd of disjointed figures that darkened the subject they were intended to illumine" (Barcus 290, 294).<sup>57</sup> As John Barrell points out, with reference to this review, the "oppressively knowing gentleman will do to remind us of the phallogocentric character of the symbolic order, only too liable to denounce whatever threatens to interrupt it as typically feminine" (Flight 14-15). Walker suggests that Shelley's "poetry is in general a mere jumble of words and heterogeneous ideas, connected by slight and accidental associations, among which it is impossible to distinguish the principal object from the accessory." (258) Shelley's text may be heavily metaphoric, yet this quote might suggest that metonymy is the guiding principle of his writing, which is a chain of contingent "associations". As I will suggest in my reading of De Quincey, "the principal object" and "the accessory" are a disorientating intermixture. Shelley's language accords well with Kristeva's notion of the rhythmic pulsions of the semiotic which disorder the symbolic.<sup>58</sup> His rhetoric is apparently "unintelligible" (254) within the symbolic order.

"We would wish to persuade him," writes Walker, "that the poet is distinguished from the rest of his species ... by having what other men want." (Barcus 263). On the contrary, it seems to me that the mark of Shelley's distinction (for the feminist critic) is his inscription of lack, precisely of his not-having what other men want, that is, transcendental meaning, authority, the phallus.

## Notes to Chapter Four

1. From a letter to Margaret Fuller Ossoli, June 7 or 8, 1840; this line only quoted in Barcus 374.
2. See my reference in Chapter Three (81-82). There is another curious connection in that De Quincey lived for a time in what had been Burke's house in Bath.
3. All references to "On Love", "On Life" and A Defence of Poetry, and to Shelley's poems (and prefaces) are to Reiman and Powers, eds., Shelley's Poetry and Prose. Since this text includes only a limited selection of the prose, other references are to David Lee Clark's edition, which, though unreliable, remains widely-used (references to such texts will be cited as Clark). The most recent edition is E.B. Murray's The Prose Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley; Volume One takes us up to 1818.
4. Mirrors and metaphors are not, of course, unconnected. A metaphor is a type of self-representation, in that it is a generated representation of the thing first represented: a metaphor enacts the idea of representation which it supports. For Shelley, "Poetry ...reproduces all that it represents" (Defence 487). The mirror and the metaphor share a number of traits or effects: transference, displacement, division, deferral, that is, if we read from a deconstructive, rather than an idealist, perspective. Jerrold Hogle convincingly argues that Shelleyan metaphor generates meaning(s) "from a process of transfer and substitution rather than from a first Unity or grounding Presence." ("Shelley's Poetics" 159) See, also Hogle's tracing of the decentering metaphoric processes of "The Witch of Atlas", a poem in which he suggests that "every image comes less from a 'seed' or 'cause' and more from the ways that metaphor shifts beyond or beside itself into new analogies ...." ("Metaphor and Metamorphosis" 330). William Ulmer places more emphasis on Shelley's idealist rhetoric, on his desire to "unveil the permanent analogy of things by images which participate in the life of truth" (Defence 485; qtd. in Ulmer 7). Though my own emphasis is on the deconstructive version - which I find strategically more productive for a feminist reading - I acknowledge that some readers will consider that this engenders a distorted image of Shelley.
5. This is an 'otherness' which is also *within* the self: "We dimly see within our intellectual nature a miniature as it were of our entire self," (473), while the mirror reflects both the inner and the outer self: "Not only the portrait of our external being, but an assemblage of the minutest particulars of which our nature is composed". There is a long literary tradition which sees the miniature as a pure, distilled essence



of the self; see, especially, the poems of the Metaphysicals, in which, often, a purified version of the viewing subject is perceived in the lover's eyes.

6. It is worth recalling that, though the Shelleyan 'other' is generally assumed to be feminine, "On Love" was written, as I have mentioned, between Shelley's translation of Plato and his Discourse on the Manners of the Antient Greeks. It is thus framed by texts which privilege the relations between men; from this perspective, it might be seen as an 'hom(m)age' to love. On the homoerotic tints of Shelley's Discourse (discussed with the "delicate caution" he ascribes to Shelley), see Chapter One of Nathaniel Brown's, Sexuality and Feminism.
7. For a reading of Irigaray which takes up the question of specularity, see Josette Feral, "Antigone or The Irony of the Tribe". For wide-ranging discussions of women and mirrors, see Jan Montefiore, Feminism and Poetry, esp. Chapter Four, and Jenijoy La Belle, Herself Beheld.
8. On "the specular dimension of everything associated with the name of Percy Bysshe Shelley", see Gary Farnell, "Rereading Shelley".
9. Though the mirror is absent from the Platonic text, it is, similarly, rhetorically inscribed through repetition: "the soul of each [of the androgenous beings] manifestly thirsts for, from the other, something which there are no words to describe, and divines that which it seeks, and traces *obscurely* the footsteps of its *obscure* desire." (Notopoulos 432, my italics) The repetition foregrounds the signifier, casting a material aspect over the soul's desire.
10. Reiman's phrase "the self seeks the beautiful without", that is outside of the self, enables the wonderful semantic - and very Shelleyan - possibility of a beauty without attributes. Like Reiman, Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi notes that "Shelley posits two possibilities: one that the boundary around the perceiving consciousness is dissolved, the other that the boundary expands to include all that it perceives." She goes on to examine the terrifying aspects of this euphoric-sounding experience (Shelley's Goddess 14).
11. Though "Beauty" is apparently a masculine quality in "Epipsychidion", "Which penetrates and clasps and fills the world" (l.103).
12. Mary Devereaux, in her analysis of feminist aesthetics, provides a summary of this position: "As de Beauvoir explains, women, unlike men, do not learn to describe the world from their own point of view. As the 'other', woman learns to submerge or renounce her subjectivity. She finds her identity in the subjectivity of the men to whom she is attached (father, husband, lover). In the eyes of men, she finds her identity as the object of men's desire. (340)

13. Mary Jean Corbett provides an alternative reading of Mary Shelley's Journals. She argues that a feminist interpretation needs to move away from the privileging of the journal as confessional, a space for the construction of individuality; instead, "Shelley's Journals [construct] a space in which the mutual is privileged over and above the individual, in which the self cannot be a self without the familial context that shapes identity in particular ways, not all of them necessarily either liberating or constraining". Corbett proposes that "we need to hold onto some part of the feminist ideology that values community over isolation" and in this way we "can open a new direction in our writing of the history of women's subjectivity" (86). On the same issues, see Susan J. Wolfson's interpretation of Dorothy Wordsworth's texts ("Individual in Community"). Corbett's detailed reading of the Journals is convincing, but I would argue that the particular epistolary moment I examine displays "intersubjectivity" as "constraining".
14. On this complex issue, see J. Drummond Bone, "Organicism and Shelley's A Defence of Poetry", from whom I borrow the DNA image. David Punter takes up the question of parts and wholes from another angle: in his essay, "Parts of the body", he analyzes "some instances of dismemberment and healing" in romantic texts (from Blake, Burke, Coleridge, Keats) through the lens of Melanie Klein's work on the role of the part-object in the process of maturation.
15. Another aspect of the letters to Mary Godwin discussed above that destabilizes male mastery is that the subject is decentred, literally displaced: written in late October/early November 1814, when Shelley was on the run from the bailiffs, the letters - presumably for pragmatic reasons - are merely superscribed "London" (followed by the date) and are unsigned. The effect is that the subject haunts a blank space, lacking any particular origin or marker of identity.
16. Interestingly, the OED defines "integrity" negatively: "The condition of having no part or element taken away or wanting" (OED1), "The condition of not being marred or violated; unimpaired or uncorrupted condition" (OED2); that is, it is a condition which takes its significance only from what it is not.
17. See Laura Claridge "Romantic Potency" and "Bifurcated Space" for readings of Shelley's poetry which amplify this insight.
18. My use of Lacan is indebted to Rose's extraordinarily helpful guide through the Lacanian labyrinth in her Introduction to Feminine Sexuality. Other insightful texts are Jane Gallop, Reading Lacan, and Elizabeth Grosz, Jacques Lacan.
19. To describe "holding the child" as "a process of referring", provides an image of signification itself, in which each entity (or word) refers to another, but in which signifier and signified can never completely

coincide.

20. See Catherine Belsey on the role of desire in "The Romantic construction of the unconscious". On the significance of the 'unconscious' of Romanticism, see David Punter, The Romantic Unconscious.
21. The circle is an ambivalent image in many romantic texts, though writers such as Blake tend to represent it as negative. Hannah More's use of this figure makes it clear that it is also inscribed in a socio-sexual context: "Women in their course of action describe a smaller circle than men; but the perfection of a circle consists, not in its dimensions, but in its correctness" (Coelebs in Search of a Wife, qtd. Davidoff and Hall 455).
22. This phrase occurs in his essay "Byron". Arnold was not the first to 'angelicize' Shelley: Mary Shelley and others of his circle start to construct this mythological creature soon after his death. Percy Shelley himself thought that a poet "is more delicately organized than other men" (Defence 507). Mary Favret and Susan J. Wolfson discuss Mary Shelley's role as her husband's editor, and the self-construction and reproduction of 'Shelley' that this involved (see their articles in Fisch et al, The Other Mary Shelley).
23. On the relation between love and language, see Frances Ferguson's essay "Shelley's Mont Blanc", in which she uses the essay "On Love" as an heuristic device for reading Shelley's famous poem, tracing the poet's effort "to convert epistemological language into love language." (208)
24. Shelley's anxiety about being constrained by grammar is suggested by the fact that he almost immediately repeats his observation about pronouns: "The words *I*, and *you*, and *they* are grammatical devices invented simply for arrangement and totally devoid of the intense and exclusive sense usually attached to them." ("On Life" 478)
25. See Barbara Johnson's wonderful essay (in her World of Difference) on gender in romantic criticism, in which she argues that the balance of undecidability in the poem - specifically, what we think about the lady - depends on the "as" here.
26. My formulation here is indebted to Laura Claridge, "Bifurcated Female Space" esp. 103-104.
27. See William Ulmer's discussion of Shelley as an "unacknowledged legislator" attempting to reform the reader through his texts (esp. 18-24). Ulmer argues that "Shelley intended his texts to transmit resemblances by which the reader's consciousness would be linguistically reshaped to accord with the poet's consciousness, to

reflect the poet's emotions and values as mirrored in turn by the words of his poem. Poets and readers are lovers in Shelley, and the text, ... 'no better than a go-between.'" (19) I am in full agreement with Ulmer that Shelley's political project is inseparable from his rhetoric of love; where I take issue with him is his contention that "[d]espite his avowed feminism, ... Shelley accepted models of poetic creation that regard the author as 'a father, a progenitor, a procreator, an aesthetic patriarch whose pen is an instrument of generative power like his penis.'" (23; Ulmer is quoting Gilbert and Gubar, Madwoman 6). Quite apart from the fact that the pen/penis analogy has been overworked of late, the en-genderment of Shelley's writing is not nearly as certain as this essentialist metaphor suggests.

28. Elizabeth Ann Dobie has written from a feminist perspective about new paradigms of the relationship between text and reader: "The recognition [through psychoanalytic theory] that a subject's intentions are not purely present to herself, has led to a rejection of the theory of interpretation that held (the true) meaning to be conveyed by authorial intentions. Instead, meaning is produced at the site of intersection between work (text or image) and the audience" (388). Dobie argues that this "has empowered the recipient, thus upsetting the hierarchical authority of the producers". This new relationship can be seen as an aspect of the feminist epistemologies discussed in the final section of Chapter Two. Dobie, however, cautions that "the focus on audience has brought to light the frequency with which reception positions have been forced into masculine postures". In other words, as feminist critics we need to interrogate the gendered (re)production of meaning, practising the 'resisting reading' advocated by Judith Fetterly.
29. I realise that my interpretation of this gendered process occludes the differentials of class, race, etc, as well as aligning itself with a heterosexist perspective. Gay men and lesbian women may well have a different angle of vision, though I would still argue that voyeurism - where the object of the gaze is female - is a predominantly heterosexual male activity.
30. I should note that Shelley's usage of the word "organ", though available to a phallic reading, depends on the Greek word 'organon', meaning 'tool'. His usage of 'organized' is an attempt to collapse the difference between the mechanical and the life-like, for the word organic derives from the same root (on this issue, see J. Drummond Bone, "Organicism").
31. Given the confusion between the terms "phallus" and "penis", I should note that I (usually) follow Lacan's rendering of the phallus, that is, the notion that both men and women are castrated, lacking the phallus, which then becomes the very signifier of desire, the promise of fulfilment and closure. Jacques-Alain Miller outlines the function of

the phallus for Freud and Lacan:

It has scandalized feminists that Freud said there is only one symbol for both sexes, one symbol of reference, and that is the phallic symbol. He was not choosing between men and women to give the advantage to men. The problem is that this symbol is exterior to both sexes. Freud himself referred to that as a symbol and also spoke of what you could find at the entrance of the Ancient Roman bordellos. The phallic symbol was at the entrance. There, it is, I must say, for men. Nobody would think that men are equal to this symbol. It's rather the measure of their impotence ....[T]he question of the phallic symbol is not only 'to have or to have not', biologically speaking .... [I]t's a question of the meaning it takes on. (qtd. in Saper 45)

The phallic function is not the penis, but the mark which stands between the sex, defining each in terms of the other. I take Miller's point (though I could do without his dismay at "scandalized feminists" and the dismissive assurance of "Nobody would think that men are equal to this symbol"), however, as I suggested, the penis tends to erect itself as the visible mark of phallus. Rita Felski suggests that "Lacanian theory ... tends to ontologize existing social and cultural relations in such a way as to suggest a necessary and inherent connection between the structures of symbolic language [terms such as the 'phallus' and 'Name of the Father'] on the one hand and patriarchal power on the other, and thus to rationalize existing systems of domination by making them appear as the natural and inevitable extensions of the constraints imposed by linguistic structures" (41). For a full discussion of the issue, I refer the reader to Jane Gallop's informative and thought-provoking chapter "Beyond the Phallus" in her Thinking Through the Body (119-133).

32. See the debate about male fragility which is conducted in Jardine and Smith, Men in Feminism. In "A Conversation" with Alice Jardine (reproduced in the text), Paul Smith complains that the women critics responded sympathetically to Stephen Heath's article ("Male Feminism"), while he and other male readers clearly found Heath's "abjection in regard to feminism" (246) rather distasteful, suspecting Heath's vulnerability as being a pose, implicitly a seductive wile to please women.
33. See Gallop's Feminism and Psychoanalysis, and "French Theory and the Seduction of Feminism". For an alternative view of the politics of seduction, see Linda Kauffman, Special Delivery. She is briskly dismissive of this paradigm: "I do not endorse the hyperbolically sexualized rhetoric which describes feminists as being 'seduced' by 'male' theory, for this rhetoric falsely refigures the feminist as Clarissa, virtuous victim who must vigilantly ward off the masculine seductions

of loveless, disembodied 'Theory'. Those who perpetuate this rhetoric may (like Clarissa) end up starving to death" (xxiii). Kauffman makes the sensible point that poststructuralist theories have been transformed by feminism (rather than feminist theory having been stolen by men).

34. I want to emphasize that I am concerned with the function, and trope, of the veil in western discourse; there are no doubt other factors to be considered outside of this context (the veiling of Muslim women, for example).
35. They cite Poe's "The Case of M. Valdemar", Dickens's "The Black Veil" and Hawthorne's "The Minister's Black Veil" in which "the veil is a symbol of secret guilt" (469-70). For an insightful discussion of the veil in film texts, see Mary Ann Doane, "Veiling over Desire".
36. James Laver documents the emphasis on fashionable simplicity in women's clothes in the wake of the French Revolution, and for the first two decades of the nineteenth-century. "[W]omen wore a *robe en chemise*, which did indeed look like an undergarment, for it consisted of a white, high-waisted muslin cambric or calico garment falling to the feet and sometimes so transparent that it was necessary to wear white, or pink, tights underneath. Sometimes the material was dampened so that it clung to the body in imitation of the folds of the Greek dresses represented in antique statues" (Laver 152; as I suggested in Chapter Three, with reference to the female body life often imitates art). The Lady's Magazine in 1803 observes that "with the ladies, it is the object to shew how little will do for a dress", and La Belle Assemblée in 1807 notes that "the dress of women should differ in every point from that of men. This difference ought even to extend to the choice of stuffs; for a woman inhabited in cloth is less feminine than if she were clothed in transparent gauze, in light muslin, or in soft and shining silks" ("On Modern Taste and Style" 375, "Fashion" 196; qtd. in Gelpi, Shelley's Goddess 54). Richard Polwhele writes of those fashionable ladies who "Scarce by a gossamery film carest, / Sport, in full view, the meretricious breast" (Jones 187). Barbara Gelpi notes that "the contradiction enunciated by Davidoff and Hall between 'claims for women's superiority and their social subordination' informs the significance of Regency fashion: women's flimsy, revealing garments encode a sexual vulnerability and socioeconomic dependence prescribed by a contractual system arranged among men; yet by their allusion to the drapery outlining ...[the] form of goddesses in antique statuary, these garments also serve as exhibitions of female autonomy and fertility. They are power clothes" (Shelley's Goddess 60).
37. See also "The Sensitive Plant" ll.29-32.

38. J. Hillis Miller, in his comments on "Epipsychidion" and "The Triumph of Life", argues that: "Shelley's poetry is the record of a perpetually renewed failure" to "destroy the barriers between sign and signified" because "the language which tries to efface itself as language to give way to an unmediated union beyond language is itself the barrier which always remains as the woe of an ineffaceable trace" ("The Critic as Host" 236-37, 245-46).
39. On the doubling of the veil figure in the Defence, see William Keach's detailed reading, which revolves, like my own, around the tropes of the mirror and the veil. He reads the essay as an "uncertain triumph over ... the linguistic skepticism which pervades Shelley's other writing" (Shelley's Style 33). Where I see these tropes as bound together in the drama of subjectivity, Keach locates a movement from one to the other: "Language in the Defence begins as a mirror and ends as a veil of the poet's thoughts. The veil reveals as well as conceals; it makes meaning infinite and inexhaustible for the reader by hiding the original conception of the poet; it gives articulate form to pure thought which would otherwise elude mortal perception. But in the end the veil of language remains as evidence of 'the limitedness of the poetical faculty', in spite of Shelley's wondrous capacity to make a virtue of that limitedness." Keach remains closer to an 'idealist' Shelley than I do; gender does not figure in his reading.
40. Jerome McGann's wonderful essay "Shelley's Veils" is an affirmative reading of this trope: "The song of the poet is a veil of imagery. In this case there is no stripping away of obscuring veils but only a successive process of re-reveiling. The process is itself the crucial thing, for if words are helplessly ineffectual and metaphorical, the activity of continuous and related image-making reveals the self-creative powers of the mind" (206). I differ from McGann in his implication that this process underwrites self-identity, and see it rather as enacting the perpetual construction and deconstruction of the subject. On Shelley's veils, see also Peter Butter, and Carol Jacobs.
41. The difference between them is surely a question of intention - if I may be allowed the use of that word in these post-structuralist days: Derrida's deconstruction of metaphysics (and his use of veils and "Woman" in this process) is self-conscious in a way that Shelley's project is not.
42. Derrida's theorization of the veil is based on his reading of Nietzsche; see Mary Ann Doane on the significance of Nietzsche's veils ("Veiling" esp. 119-126). His use of "blushing" here plays with the uncertainty about femininity that punctuates eighteenth century conduct texts: is the blush real or fake, is it a signifier of guilt or innocence? See, for example, John Gregory, 26-27.

43. As Mary Ann Doane points out, there are problems for a feminist with Derrida's abyssal, feminine 'truth'. The woman's dissembling is unconscious; its significance is as the voyeuristic object of the male gaze: "It is impossible to resist looking for her" (Derrida, Spurs 71). She is the representation of a truth she herself cannot understand, once again object not subject (though the 'subject' is in any case a problematic term in psychoanalysis): "Closing her eyes to herself she becomes the pure construct of a philosophical gaze" (Doane, "Veiling" 123).
44. This essay, "The Signification of the Phallus", also appears in Mitchell and Rose, Feminine Sexuality; their translation differs slightly: "the phallus can only play its role as veiled" (82).
45. Ironically, there is a typographical slip at this point in Sheridan's translation of "The Agency of the letter in the unconscious" - "obscured" appears as "obsured".
46. As I pointed out in Chapter Two, the idea that any signifying system depends on differences - between words, sounds, phonemes, etc. - has been a founding principle of linguistics and semiotics since de Saussure: "in language there are only differences *without positive terms*" (120). Saussure also argued that the sign is split into a signifier and a signified, and that the relationship between them is arbitrary rather than natural (in other words, their relationship is differential).
47. Also quoted in Naomi Schor, Reading 129. Here is how Peirce explains his term "interpretant":  
 A sign, or representamen, is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, it creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the *interpretant* of the first sign. (2:228)  
 For a discussion of Peirce's theories, in a feminist context, see Teresa de Lauretis, Technologies of Gender, esp. 58-62.
48. Miller uses the figure of the artichoke (which she sets against an older view of the text figured as an apricot). She distances herself from the implications of Barthes's tropology: "For me, a supplement of experience comes to check a critical politics dependent for its practice on the free-play of signifiers" (Subject 3; Miller's onion ends up in the kitchen).
49. My use of the terms "phallogocentrism" and "phallocentrism" may be confusing, given that elsewhere I appropriate the Lacanian "phallus" for feminist purposes. However, since the term "phallocentrism", for example, is widely used to connote the cultural privileging of masculinity, I refer to it in this context. Tania Modleski, amongst



others, is critical of feminist readers who want to give up "authority" before they have really been granted equal textual rights ("Feminism" 127).

50. I realise that other interpretations are possible here: to privilege youth may be simply a sign of the egocentrism of a youthful subject; to valorise the mistress and infidelity might be seen as a male privilege. Other feminist critics may take exception to my own privileging of a textual encounter that allows the (male) subject to have it all.
51. The locus classicus on 'translation' in Shelley is Timothy Webb's The Violet in the Crucible.
52. Compare Peter Finch's analysis of this passage: Finch maps Shelley's reading practice as an erotic journey, and though he perceptively observes that this (sexual) excitement is the result of infidelity "to language's distant prospect of settled and legitimate wisdom", his rhetoric nevertheless reinscribes a masculinist and metaphysical teleology: in the reading process, "the mind, seeking ...that second self far dearer and more fair, penetrates the text's shifting, glimmering surface, that flow of signifiers both alluring yet alien, and discovers beneath them a deeper and more intimate realm" (32). Finch's own signifiers enable the hegemony of the signified, of depth, of penetration, to reassert itself.
53. I was delighted with this find - as though I had discovered the signifier's treasure.
54. See Susan Wolfson on how Byron's Don Juan is feminized by Haidee's coverings ("Their She Condition" 600).
55. Some classical scholars regard this as a later ending, the original text supposedly finishing with Odysseus and Penelope in bed.
56. I am indebted to a footnote in Susan Wolfson's article "Editorial Privilege", in which she documents the existence of reviews of "On Love". She notes that "The Athenaeum declared that it [the essay] demanded atonement from those who have 'wronged [Shelley's] memory' with the brand of 'infidel', for it revealed him as 'one of the most earnest, affectionate, truth-seeking, humble, and self-denying men that ever lived on this earth' (55 [Nov. 12, 1828], 864)" (70). Here, though 'manly', Shelley (like Keats) is implicitly cast in the feminized role of wronged maiden. On the culture of the annual gift books, see Sonia Hofkosh, "Disfiguring Economies".
57. For negative responses to Shelley's language, see, amongst many possible examples, the unsigned review of The Cenci in The British Review and London Critical Journal (June 1821) and the comments on "Alastor" and "The Revolt of Islam" by 'J.W.' in The Champion

(December 23, 1821), in *Barcus* 217-223 and 287-88. The twentieth century reception of the Defence (until recently) largely recapitulates the contemporary reaction to Shelley's poetry: Earl Wasserman observes that "[r]unning through most of the commentaries is the assumption not only that the essay is unusable [as a practical theory of poetry] but also that it repeatedly shifts its grounds" (204).

58. I follow John Barrell's invocation of Kristevan paradigms in his reading of "Epipsychidion" (Flight 14); see Chapter One of this thesis (35).

## Chapter Five

### *"Such a never ending still beginning sort of a Body": Keats's Letters and the Boundaries of Gender*

The quotation in this chapter's title comes from Keats's letter of 16 May 1817 to Taylor and Hessey (Letters I:145).<sup>1</sup> The body, or more accurately, the bodies in question are the importunate creditors whom Keats has metamorphosed into a many-headed Hydra (I:145). "[S]uch a never ending still beginning sort of a Body": the phrase appeals to me because it figures a body with shifting boundaries, a body improperly defined, while the temporality of "never ending still beginning" evokes what Kristeva has called the "questionable subject-in-process" (Desire in Language 125). Keats uses the masculine pronoun in referring to this "body", but he also tells us that it is "like my Landlady of the Bell" (I:146). It is, then, both masculine and feminine, multiple, monstrous, a body that dissolves its form and melts the contours of gendered subjectivity.

In traditional Western thought, mind and body are perceived as two separate entities. The body is associated with nature, with instrumentality, passivity, the palpable; as an organic object, the body is subordinated to the mind. The mind is associated with culture, reason, agency. As Hélène Cixous has pointed out in her essay "Sorties", these binary oppositions, these "couples", come back to "the" couple man/woman (102). Cixous argues that woman's place in the history of Western thought has been at the negative pole of a series of binary oppositions, whereby male privilege is sustained by ascribing to women passivity (and thereby powerlessness), and through maintaining the oppressive Cartesian mind/body duality. "This

association of the body with the female," as Judith Butler explains, "works along magical relations of reciprocity whereby the female sex becomes restricted to its body, and the male body, fully disavowed, becomes, paradoxically, the incorporeal instrument of an ostensibly radical freedom" (11). To read Keats (as I do in this chapter) in terms of a feminist body politics is to attempt to move *through* the binary thinking that privileges mind over body, male over female. This is not to disavow the mind, but to rethink the hierarchy; nor is it to suggest that there is any body outside of discourse, for I concur with Mary Ann Doane that "[t]he positing of a body is a condition of discursive practices" ("Woman's Stake" 226).

Feminist theory, especially Kristeva's notion of the "semiotic", provides a terminology for analysing the structuring concepts of Keats's letters, a way of naming those 'traversable boundaries' or 'threshold' sites between order and its subversion, inside and outside, body and culture, as well as between mother and child, and masculine and feminine.<sup>2</sup> Though in this chapter, as in the rest of this book, I am interested in the intersections between contemporary feminist theories and Romantic texts, I have tried not to simply erase the specificities of the historical context, and to this end I make reference to Keats's earliest readers and to nineteenth-century discourses of gender in my analysis of "the 'fantasmatics' ... of the correspondence" (Bossis 69).

\* \* \* \* \*

*A collective obsessing about an idea called "woman".*  
Peggy Kamuf

A few preliminary comments on letters in general, and Keats's letters in particular, are necessary here. Keats's letters have always been culled by critics for biographical information and used as a source of poetic theories to illuminate his poems; recently,

critics such as David Luke and Susan Wolfson have examined the aesthetic qualities of the letters, that is, read them as 'texts' in their own right. Susan Wolfson and Anne Mellor have turned to Keats's letters to examine the gender ideology of the period. To shift the critical gaze from Keats's poems to his letters is in itself a political, and potentially feminist, gesture, for, as Anne Mellor remarks, it "contest[s] the traditional academic assumptions that poetry and fiction are superior genres of literary discourse, more deserving of analysis and propagation than other kinds of writing such as journals and letters" (Romanticism and Gender 186).

In contrast to the other texts examined in this study, most of which were written for publication, or at least circulation, this chapter deals with an essentially private discourse made public. To read a published private correspondence is to transgress the boundary between public and private; but a letter, of its very nature, deconstructs this opposition. As Terry Eagleton argues,

[I]n the very heart of anguish or confession, the letter can never forget that it is turned outwards to another ... The other to whom the letter is addressed is included within it, an absent recipient present within each phrase. As speech-for-another, the letter must reckon that recipient's likely response into its every gesture. .... The letter is the sign doubled, overhearing itself in the ears of its addressee; and in this sense 'public' and 'private' are inseparably interwoven within it.

(Rape of Clarissa 52)

The letter is itself an ambiguous 'body', both intimate and exposed, self-centred and other-directed. The letter can never be self-identical, can never figure a singular self, as is demonstrated by Keats's letters to Fanny Brawne. Keats urges Fanny Brawne:

"[Y]ou must write to me - as I will every week - for your letters keep me alive" (II:131). It seems that his subjectivity can only be validated through correspondence with an other. But to send a letter is also to risk being (mis)construed by the addressee, to compete for the control of meaning. Keats's anxieties about self-identity surface in his attempts to control Fanny's writing (like Richardson, the "editor" of Clarissa, Keats authorizes elisions and revisions that will shore up his position): "I enclose a passage from one of your Letters which I want you to alter a little - I want (if you will have it so) the matter express'd less coldly to me" (II:312). The force of authorial desire is carried in the reiterated "I want"; Fanny is invited to concur with Keats's desire, to read him according to his script. Fanny's desire is parenthesized, contained, though the conditional inscribes the possibility of non-concurrence. Sonia Hofkosh sums up the scenario: "Keats's love letters demonstrate that 'the love of a woman' involves competition over who writes the story of the poet's desire" ("The Writer's Ravishment" 106-107).

The epistolary subject is constructed relationally (or competitively) with his/her addressee, and is subject to perpetual revisions during a correspondence. Susan Wolfson argues that "[t]he flexibility of letter-writing ... appealed to Keats" because it enabled him to annotate the "compositions and decompositions" of the mind, and she distinguishes this record of the self from the life-writing of other Romantic figures:

[T]hough a sum of letters may in effect constitute a version of autobiography, the epistolary composition of self is conditioned primarily by the immediate occasion, compared to the retrospective self-fashioning refined by the autobiographer. In the overall processes

of letter-writing, self-representation is for the moment, to be cast and recast on subsequent occasions. ("Keats the Letter-Writer" 44-45)

Letter-writing is the activity of a subject-in-process.

Traditionally, the literary history of letters is associated with women: the eighteenth-century epistolary novel (whether by male or female writers) marks "a collective obsessing about an idea called 'woman'" (Kamuf, Fictions ix).<sup>3</sup> Mary Favret has recently reminded us that the "fiction of the letter's 'femininity'" is precisely that, a fiction, and as such it figures only one possible, though privileged, narrative about epistolarity (Romantic Correspondence 15). It is worth recalling the range of eighteenth-century 'letters': the century that witnessed Clarissa's voluminous correspondence, which turned on the preservation of the integrity of the female self, in other words an ostensibly private discourse about sexuality, also saw Burke's Reflections on the Revolution in France, a public discourse about the security of the state and its institutions.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, the femininity of the letter and the (ef)feminization of the letter-writer, are paradigms that are still evoked in the theories of Derrida and Barthes, in an on-going correspondence with the epistolary genre.<sup>5</sup> As Derrida points out, the letter is a paradigmatic text: originating out of a lack of presence, it substitutes for the body of the writer, and in this sense, too, it may be perceived as feminine, lending itself to comprehension by analogy with the female body. For Ruth Perry, the confessional quality of letters marks out a private space that, "like virginity, invites violation" (Women, Letters 70). Letters are doubly at risk, in that as physical artifacts which stand as metonyms for the body of the writer, they may be tampered with: think of Lovelace, unable to keep his hands off Clarissa's letters - the violation of her letters is a prelude to, and analogue of, the violation of

her body; or recall De Quincey's advice to his male readers if they "desire to read our noble language in its native beauty": "steal the mail-bags", he tells them, "and break open all the letters in female handwriting" (Jordan 66-67).

Letters memorialize the absence of the other; Barthes has explored the implications of this lover's discourse:

Historically, the discourse of absence is carried on by the Woman ...

It is Woman who gives shape to absence, elaborates its fiction, for she has time to do so; ... in any man who utters the other's absence *something feminine* is declared: this man who waits and who suffers from his waiting is miraculously feminized. A man is not feminized because he is inverted but because he is in love. (A Lover's Discourse

13-14)

The question that must be asked, at least in the terms of this discussion, is whether a man can articulate this amorous absence from the place of the woman? Is the male letter-writer, the writer of love letters (and I'm thinking here, in particular, of Keats's letters to Fanny Brawne), merely in drag, or is he, in Anne Mellor's more favourable terminology, an "ideological cross-dresser", who embraces a feminine ideology (Romanticism and Gender 171)?<sup>6</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

*A poet ... has no Identity - he is continually  
in for - and filling some other Body.*

John Keats

Margaret Homans is a resisting reader of Keats; she acknowledges that "[a]t first glance, it might seem that women readers, then and now, would be especially sympathetic to Keats above the other high romantics. His lower-middle-class origins



and lack of university education - he couldn't read Greek and kept getting the pronunciations of classical names wrong - make him a candidate for honorary membership in Virginia Woolf's 'Outsider's Society' ("Keats Reading Women" 341). She argues, however, that this reading is ultimately misguided, and that Keats's letters and poems demonstrate an "assertion of masculinity" which makes him "a member of the male club" of high literature (368). Homans contends that Keats's quest for identity involves a characteristically Romantic colonization of the "other" through "acts of self-aggrandizing appropriation", which is Homans's description of "negative capability" (352).<sup>7</sup> I will come back to the details of Homans's argument; I would place my own reading, however, in the genealogy of women readers, like Mrs. Oliphant, who align Keats with "the woman's part".

Throughout the nineteenth-century Keats was marketed as especially appropriate for female readers, and denominated "The Daintiest of Poets" by a woman writer in the Victoria Magazine (May 1870). As Wolfson notes, Keats's poetry flourished in publications such as The Young Lady's Book of Elegant Poetry (1835) and The Ladies' Companion (1837); The Girl's Second Help to Reading (1854) claimed to present "such passages as referred specially to the high duties which woman is called upon to perform in life", though it curiously included three stanzas (xxiii-xxv) from "The Eve of St. Agnes" (Matthews, Critical Heritage 10).<sup>8</sup> While male readers frequently castigated Keats's character and work as "effeminate", women readers bonded with Keats in the sympathetic identification of mother and child. Susan Wolfson has documented the way "[a]ll those expressions of 'poor Keats!' [the phrase is used, for example, by Elizabeth Barrett Browning] evoked responses conventionally deemed 'feminine', activating impulses to pity, nurture, and protect"

("Feminizing Keats" 324).<sup>9</sup> The post-Adonais perception of Keats as a fragile flower aroused the chivalric feelings of male defenders but appealed primarily to women.<sup>10</sup> Mrs. Oliphant's heartfelt defence of the "poor young poet ... savagely used by the censors of literature" is paradigmatic (qtd. in Wolfson 324). Oliphant's sympathetic feminization/infantalization of Keats continues through Amy Lowell's characterization of the "Poor little shaver, so pitifully unable to cope with his first great sorrow" (I:14). Recent feminist critics have reinflected Victorian ideologies of the maternal and the feminine through the use of Chodorowian theories, valorizing those aspects of Keats's work that seem to avoid the egotistical sublimity of much male Romanticism.<sup>11</sup> In particular, several critics have appropriated Keatsian "negative capability" for feminism. I would like to look in some detail at the rhetoric of these claims, and at Keats's own definitions of poetic identity, as a way into the body of my argument about the destabilization of gender boundaries.

Keats defined "*Negative Capability*" as "when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason" (I:193). David Masson describes this as "a power of remaining, and, as it were, luxuriously lolling, in doubts, mysteries, and half-solutions, toying with them, and tossing them, in all their complexity, into forms of beauty, instead of piercing on narrowly and in pain after Truth absolute and inaccessible" (Matthews 374). For Masson, writing in 1860, Keats fails to take the sublimely painful path of masculinity. If Beauty is Truth and Truth Beauty, this comment tells us all we need to know about the rhetoric of violence that encodes the male poet as an explorer penetrating and colonizing beauty and truth.

Erica Jong rejects this masculine mode:

[F]eminism *means* empathy. And empathy is akin to the quality Keats called 'negative capability' - that unique gift for projecting oneself into other states of consciousness. (qtd. in Wolfson 349)<sup>12</sup>

In the eighteenth-century, empathy was marked as a feminine quality, though, like tears and other emotional reactions, it was increasingly appropriated by the "man of feeling" purveyed in the literature of sensibility. Jong perceives Keats's "negative capability" as feminist in that it involves the identification of the self with other[s], thereby destabilizing Aristotelian hierarchies. This empathetic identification is resistant to a monolithic, masculinist construction of identity. However, Jong's formulation focusses on consciousness-raising at the expense of consciousness-risking: the self-confidence of the term "projecting" suggests that, unlike Keats, Jong has no fear of flying over the abyss of identity. In an interview between Adrienne Rich and Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi, Keats's phrase is again invoked to underwrite the revalorisation of feminine sensibility.<sup>13</sup> Rich suggests that the

so-called 'weak ego boundaries' of women might be a negative way of describing the fact that women have tremendous powers of intuitive identification and sympathy with other people. And, yes, a woman could get totally lost in that - she can lose all sense of her own ego, but that is not necessary - it might be a source of power.

BCG: John Keats had weak ego boundaries.

AR: Negative capability. Exactly. Any artist has to have it to some extent. ... The male ego, which is described as the strong ego, could really be the weak ego, because it encapsulates itself. (Gelpi and Gelpi, Adrienne Rich's Poetry 115)

Rich's comments (in contrast to Jong's) articulate precisely the double drift of Keatsian subjectivity. The male ego, that "wordsworthian or egotistical sublime" is "a thing per se, and stands alone", as Keats puts it (I:387); it "encapsulates itself" in Rich's words, and she perceives these strong boundary lines as a limitation, weakness masquerading as strength. The permeable ego boundaries of women are valorized over the unitary male self, though Rich's use of modals ("might", "could") suggests the power of the hegemonic ideologies of gender within which this reversal of values must operate.

In a letter to Woodhouse (27 Oct.1818), Keats proposes that,  
 [T]he poetical Character itself ... is not itself - it has no self - it is everything and nothing - It has no character - it enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated. ... A poet ... has no Identity - he is continually in for - and filling some other Body. (I:387)

Identification with the other enables a potential plenitude ('filling some other Body'), the pleasures of the polymorphously perverse "camelion poet"; but on the other hand, this decentredness carries the risk of loss, of emptiness (the overall semantic and grammatical emphasis is negative). Anne Mellor suggests that Keats's fluid sense of self is similar to Dorothy Wordsworth's, especially as imaged in her "Floating Island" poem, but this poem itself may be read from contradictory perspectives, as either figuring the positive expansion of the self (the female subject as capacious, nurturing, plural) or the dispersal of any sense of identity.<sup>14</sup>

In the letter to Richard Woodhouse in which he theorises about the "poetical character", Keats reproduces a scene of self-erasure:

When I am in a room with People if I ever am free from speculating on creations of my own brain, then not myself goes home to myself: but the identity of every one in the room begins to press upon me that, I am in a very little time annihilated [sic] - not only among Men; it would be the same in a nursery of Children. (I:387)

Jong and Rich claim Keats for feminism because of his malleable ego boundaries. These ego boundaries are also bodily boundaries, as is suggested by the double signification, psychic and physical, which is felt in the verb "to press".<sup>15</sup> Barbara Gelpi, adapting the work of Carole Pateman, points out that "men interact with one another through an individuality established in the capacity of their bodies as their own bounded property to possess the 'permeable', unbounded bodies of women" (Shelley's Goddess 11).<sup>16</sup> In his comments that "[a] poet ... has no Identity", Keats tellingly shifts from "It" to "he" precisely at the moment when the poet is "filling some other Body": this phrase and the pronomial slippage irresistably suggests an appropriative (hetero)sexual matrix, the penetration of the weak-boundaried feminine by the strong male ego and the cannibilization of those qualities it desires.<sup>17</sup> But this colonization is unstable for Keats cannot remain self-identical ("not myself goes home to myself"): in the same letter, he occupies the feminine position, pressed upon, permeable, possessed by others, the body over which other men (or even children) assert their identities.

Hazlitt's critique makes explicit the cultural resonances of Keats's anxiety of authority. He cites the latter's poetry as an example of "effeminate style", a poetry deficient "in masculine energy of style ... there was a want of strength and substance ... All is soft and fleshy, without bone or muscle" ("On Effeminacy of Character"

8:254-55). Hazlitt invokes the material sexuality of the female body (lacking definite boundaries, matter without form) to characterise the textual body of Keats's poetry. Hazlitt consigns Keats to 'otherness', to the marginal (or liminal) position of effeminacy. For Virginia Woolf, Keats is an example of the ideally "androgenous" writer ("man-womanly ... and woman-manly"); "The androgenous mind is resonant and porous", writes Woolf (Room 94). Though their value judgments are diametrically opposed, Woolf and Hazlitt deploy a rhetoric which suggests the instability of bodily parameters, Woolf's "porous" mind proleptically figuring the "shapeless" woman without "a bone in her body" who is overshadowed by the egotistical rigidity of the male "I".<sup>18</sup>

The emphasis on the somatic dimension of the self, in Keats's own comments and in the cultural critique of his work, involves a telling gender reversal along the lines suggested by Judith Butler above (see 194-5); the implications of patriarchy's dualist engendering of the body are perhaps most clearly expressed by Patricia Yaeger:

[I]f *somatophobia*, or fear of the body's fleshliness and mutability, characterizes our conflicts with women's bodies, then *asomia*, or bodilessness, characterizes our way of describing and thinking about the father. ("The Father's Breasts" 9)

To trace the perpetual construction and deconstruction of the subject in Keats's letters is to traverse the no man's land of "Negative Capability", that area of doubt, which, far from being disembodied, is an uncertainty inscribed in a rhetoric of embodiment, a discourse that that figures the (male) subject's fear of his own (female) fleshliness.<sup>19</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

*A gordian complication of feelings.*

John Keats

Some feminist critics might not wish the critical focus to shift quite so quickly to "the woman within" the male writer (in Diane Hoeveler's phrase). How can my reading deal with the traditional distinctions of gender and corresponding sexist, even misogynistic, judgements that litter Keats's letters? We remember Keats's "opinion ...of the generality [sic] of women - who appear to me as children to whom I would rather give a Sugar Plum than my time" (I:404; this accords with the view of Byron's Don Juan, who thinks that a looking-glass and a few plums will satisfy a woman). Or, consider this misogynist ascription of lack and erasure of differences:

This same inadequacy is discovered ...in Women with few exceptions  
- the Dress Maker, the blue Stocking and the most charming  
sentimentalist differ but in a Slight degree, and are equally smokeable.

(II:18-19)

He insists that he does not write for women but for men, and that "[he] dislike[s] the favour of the public with the love of a woman", both are "cloying treacle" (II:163,144). He writes of his ambition "to upset the drawling of the bluestocking literary world", a comment that trivializes women's writing as mere "drawling", though the ambition itself suggests that the male writer must compete within a feminized literary market-place (II:139).<sup>20</sup> Diane Hoeveler asserts that Keats's "poems ...reflect his own sense of castration at the hands of a feminine marketplace, increasingly dominated by women as both readers and writers of literary texts" (238).<sup>21</sup> Keats, then, defensively reinscribes the dominance of male over female, classing women with "roses and sweetmeats", and constructing heroines (so he believed) who "never see themselves dominant" (I:327). We could not expect Keats

to be unentrained by the gender ideologies of his period, but the "gordian complication of [his] feelings" towards women issues as an oscillation between gendered subject positions (I:342). Against Keats's masculinist stance, I would like to set some examples of his shifting between gender roles, though I am especially interested in instances of the attraction / repulsion of self-feminization. The following analyses will support my contention that the rhetorics of engenderment and of embodiment are entangled in a gordian knot.

\* \* \* \* \*

*You have maimed me again.*  
John Keats

In his letters, Keats frequently figures himself as feminine. In a letter to Taylor and Hessey (10 June 1817) in which he requests a loan, Keats declares: "I must endeavour to lose my Maidenhead with respect to money Matters as soon as possible - and I will to[o] - " and, suspecting that they would prefer 'plain' speaking to his circumlocutions, Keats explains, "I am a little maidenish or so - and I feel my virginity come strong upon me" (I:147,148). He uses the same figure in writing to Dilke about the scenery on the Isle of Wight:

I have been so many finer walks, with a back ground of lake and mountain instedd [sic] of the sea, that I am not much touch'd with it, though I credit it for all the Surprise I should have felt if it had taken my cockney maidenhead - But I may call myself an old Stager in the picturesque, and unless it be something very large and overpowering, I cannot receive any extraordinary relish. (II:135)

Keats appropriates the feminine as an ironic manoeuvre: this is an identification that is adopted in order to be rejected (by the reader), yet the terms of the identification



destablize the strategy. Keats uses the word "maidenhead" to connote innocence, integrity, self-sufficiency, but it is a word, too, which refers to a physical boundary, the unbroken hymen that marks the intact female body. To accept money from another is to place oneself in a position of feminine dependence (I'll come back to the intersecting economies of class and gender in Keats's writing), to prostitute one's identity. Keats, the reluctant whore, writes himself into a liminal space, the unhappy hymen between masculinity and femininity, and this issues as wayward style, precisely the type of indirect discourse which Hazlitt finds so offensively effeminate. In the Isle of Wight letter, Keats's gender positions are erratic: Keats's concern for his "[un]touch'd" "cockney maidenhead" places him as virginally feminine, while the "old Stager" performs the part of masculine maturity; then this role is destabilized by the comically pornographic desire for "something very large and overpowering" (here is the phallic sexiness of the Sublime rather than the prettiness of the picturesque), which recasts this narrative as the memoirs of a woman of pleasure (or, alternatively, suggests the dynamics of homoeroticism). The insecurities of a culturally-marginalised male issue in the rhetorical slippage between male and female bodies, between the internal and the external, and are mediated by the performative self-consciousness of the "old Stager".

Keats's "maiden" tendencies are perhaps most famously figured in the simile comparing "human life to a large Mansion of Many Apartments" in which he charts the progress from "the infant, or thoughtless Chamber" to "the Chamber of Maiden-Thought" (I:280-81). The latter is a curiously doubled space: it succeeds the infant chamber and yet seems to constitute a regression to a womb-like space; its "maiden" status is compromised by the aura of sexual promise (the subject is "intoxicated",

"delaying ... in delight"); it is a maternal space with paternal effects ("among the effects this breathing is father of..."). The chamber produces a bisexual being: "sharpening one's vision into the heart and nature of Man", it incisively defines the penetrating gaze of masculinity; but another effect is "of convincing ones nerves that the world is full of Misery and Heartbreak, Pain, Sickness, and oppression". Here the appeal is to female sensibility, drawing on the extensive body of poetry, philosophy and criticism which hystericized the female body, turning the body into a text which signified its experiences literally, that is, physiologically. Keatsian poetic theory must be tested on our pulses: "axioms in philosophy are not axioms till they are proved on our pulses" (I:279), Keats tells us, proleptically echoing the bodily ground of much feminist theory, as well as disrupting the masculine codification of philosophy by mapping it onto the (implicitly female) body.

In other letters this bodily ground radically disturbs Keats's sense of selfhood, as Keats ascribes to, and finds himself marked by, the ideology of female 'lack'. Replying to a letter from Haydon, in which Haydon reproaches Keats for falsely raising his financial hopes, Keats writes suggestively: "[Y]ou have maimed me again; I was whole I had begun reading again - when your note came I was engaged in a Book" (II:55). Phallic wholeness, the closed, classical body (to use Bakhtin's terms) is for Keats always provisional, its boundaries have to be constantly resecured ("you have maimed me *again*"). As a "maimed" body, it is akin to Bakhtin's and Kristeva's account of the grotesque [feminine] body (the body which melts, leaks, dissolves).<sup>22</sup> Significantly, bodily parameters are connected with reading (and implicitly, with writing): the feminine body may not be able to express itself in the language of the Symbolic, but the connection also reminds us that the body is always the body in

discourse. Many of Keats's commentators, whether their critique is positive or negative, describe Keats in terms of the body, especially a penetrable, or maimed, body. In the preface to Adonais, Shelley writes that "Keats's [heart was] composed of ... penetrable stuff" (Shelley 391). James Russell Lowell, who like many other critics contrasts Wordsworth and Keats, writes that "Poesy was his [Wordsworth's] employment; it was Keats's very existence, and he felt the rough treatment of his verses as if it had been the wounding of a limb" (Matthews 361); David Punter places his comments on Keats under the heading "Keats and the wound" (Romantic Unconscious 57). In a letter to Fanny Brawne, Keats declares: "I hold that place among Men which snub-nos'd brunettes with meeting eyebrows do among women" (II:133). Keats is arguing at this point that he is "not a thing to be admired", that, unlike Fanny, he cannot be the object of the other's gaze.<sup>23</sup> But the analogy he uses, though motivated by the desire to place himself "among Men", equates him with "snub-nos'd brunettes with meeting eyebrows" who do not fulfil cultural ideals of female beauty. The surfaces of these female bodies are inscribed with modalities of imperfection: Keats and these brunettes are marked by a kind of cultural 'graffiti' as inadequately gendered. The "snub-nos'd brunettes" function as both Other and self-image, the site onto which anxieties about physical and social status - cultural boundaries - are displaced, and the mirror image that marks precisely the blurring of these boundaries.

In a letter to Reynolds (19 Feb. 1818), Keats figures himself as a flower, flirtatiously feminizing the Wordsworthian epistemology of "wise passiveness"<sup>24</sup>. This passage has drawn the attention of several recent feminist critics:

It has been an old Comparison for our urging on - the Bee hive -

however it seems to me that we should rather be the flower than the Bee - for it is a false notion that more is gained by receiving than giving - no the receiver and the giver are equal in their benefits - The flower I doubt not receives a fair guerdon from the Bee - its leaves blush deeper in the next spring - and who shall say between Man and Woman which is the most delighted? Now it is more noble to sit like Jove tha[n] to fly like Mercury - let us not therefore go hurrying about and collecting honey-bee like, buzzing here and there impatiently from a knowledge of what is to be arrived at: but let us open our leaves like a flower and be passive and receptive - budding patiently under the eye of Apollo and taking hints from eve[r]y noble insect that favors us with a visit ... . (I:232)

Keats subverts the gendered hierarchies male/female, active/passive, aligning himself with the productive sexual passivity and receptivity of women and flowers rather than the busy masculinity of the bee. He deflects attention from a linear teleology ("a knowledge of what is to be arrived at"), substituting process for progress. Though flowers, women and poets bud "under the eye of Apollo", they also elude the Law of the Father, promiscuously receiving/giving pleasure from/to "eve[r]y noble insect that favours us with a visit" and producing a bodily script, a surface "blush". Earlier in the letter, Keats aligns himself with the "beautiful circuiting" of the spider which is spun from her own body, and he thereby implicitly associates himself with the 'feminine' activities of spinning and weaving.<sup>25</sup> Anne Mellor argues that in the flower and spider analogies, and in his privileging in the same letter of "hints" and "whispers", "Keats has anticipated the categories of what modern 'feminist

philosophers have called 'women's ways of knowing', ways that cannot be comprehended within the boundaries of analytic reasoning (Romanticism and Gender 178).

However, to return to the details of the passage above, Keats then extends the flower/bee analogy to take in the figure of Jove, and "[n]o one", as Margaret Homans points out, "could be less passive or flower-like than Jove" ("Keats Reading Women" 345). Homans expounds that "Keats habitually makes the apparent femininity of his negative capability enhance masculine power and pleasure"; the suggestion here is that he appropriates aspects of femininity, while avoiding the threat of emasculation by invoking the figure of Jove, whose passivity is the solidity and immovability of power. The male poet can therefore receive a double measure of delight (if Tiresias thought that woman was more "delighted" than man, here the 'woman' in question is Jove). I would suggest that socio-cultural imperatives urge Keats towards reinscriptions of masculinity, but that this project cannot be seen in absolute terms.<sup>26</sup> Masculinity itself is not presented as an homogeneous category, but is fissured by differences within, the gap between manly Jove and boyish Mercury. At the end of the letter, Keats shifts from privileging either feminine receptivity or Jovean sublimity: "I am sensible all this is a mere sophistication, however it may neighbour to any truths, to excuse my own indolence - so I will not deceive myself that Man should be equal with jove - but think himself very well off as a sort of scullion-Mercury or even a humble Bee" (I:233). Finally, he evades the politics and poetics of engenderment: "It is [no] matter whether I am right or wrong either one way or another". Rather than appropriating femininity in order to underwrite masculine identity, this seems to me the most striking example of Keats as a Kristevan "subject

in process". The oscillation between male and female destabilizes any concept of bounded identity, as the subject "traverse[s]" sexual differences (Kristeva, "Oscillation" 165).

\* \* \* \* \*

*Touch has a memory.*  
John Keats

If Keats at times inscribes himself "on the opposite side from that to which [he] is anatomically destined" (Mitchell and Rose 49), yet the signifiers of the body that punctuate his letters remain bound to the female 'other'. In A Lover's Discourse Roland Barthes writes that "the lover - the one who has been ravished - is always implicitly feminized" (188-89). From early in its history, the verb "to ravish" takes a female object and denotes a male subject (famously, in Keats, the "still unravished bride" portrayed on the Grecian urn), yet, in a reversal of classical gender positions, Keats writes to Fanny Brawne in October 1819: "You have ravish'd me away by a Power that I cannot resist" (II:224).<sup>27</sup> Keats attempts to maintain the illusion of self-possession by framing Fanny as the object of his gaze (focusing on her beauty, while emphasizing that he is "not a thing to be admired"), but his visual rhetoric is engulfed by the discourse of dissolution.<sup>28</sup> He succumbs, for example, to "a swooning admiration of [Fanny's] beauty" (II:133). Keats exhibits the symptoms of sensibility, the quality that, from the late eighteenth-century, was more and more associated with women. According to Janet Todd, sensibility was generally regarded as being "physically based, a quality of nerves turning easily to illness and described in contemporary medical treatises in terms of movements within the body"; the noun is disparagingly qualified by "'acute' in Austen, 'trembling' in Hazlitt, 'mawkish' in Coleridge, and 'sickly' in Byron" (Sensibility 7-8). "[Y]ou might almost say", muses

James Russell Lowell, that "he could feel sorrow with his hands, so truly did his body, like that of Donne's mistress, think and remember and forebode" (Matthews 360). Keats writes from the Isle of Wight to his "sweet Physician" that he has recovered from illness "only to feel the languor I have felt after you touched with ardency", for touch has a memory which engenders a bodily script (II:129).<sup>29</sup> As he writes to Fanny, "my mind is in a tremble, I cannot tell what I am writing", an admission in which the Cartesian dichotomy of mind and body is transgressed by the verb "tremble" (II:224). He returns again and again to the process of absorption: "You absorb me in spite of myself"; "[I]t seems to me that a few more moments thought of you would uncrystallize and dissolve me" (II:133,142). Fanny absorbs all thoughts of others, blotting out thoughts of his sister, for example; "Every hour I am more and more concentrated in you", as though the self were dissolved and reconstituted as an/other essence. The cutting edge of masculinity is transferred to the female figure, who has a "crystal conscience". To Joseph Severn, Keats confesses that "[he has] been so very lax, unemployed, unmeridian'd, and objectless"; without a coherent object, the subject lacks a stable centre, as is exposed in the very grammar of the ravished lover which is characterised by negative prefixes and suffixes which erode the borders of words and concepts (II:227). In the letter to Fanny in which he refers to being "ravish'd ...away by a Power I cannot resist", ravishment connotes not the violent penetration of rape but a dangerously seductive dissolution:

My love has made me selfish - I cannot exist without you - I am forgetful of everything but seeing you again - my Life seems to stop there - I see no further. You have absorb'd me. I have a sensation at the present moment as though I was dissolving - ...I should be affraid

(sic) to separate myself far from you. ...I have no limit now to my love - Your note came in just here. ...I could die for you. ...My Love is selfish - I cannot breathe without you. (II:223-24)

The traditional metaphor of poetic inspiration through the female muse is rewritten as an inability to breathe without the lover. The first person pronoun punctuates this passage, but it exists in a liminal position, always already under erasure, absorbed by the other, dissolving, merging, expiring. Here is what Roland Barthes calls "the gentleness of the abyss", or what Shelley described as "that verge where words abandon us", the domain where, despite wishful repetition, signifier and signified, and self and other, can never coincide (Barthes, Lover's Discourse 11; Shelley 478).

Keats indulges in the erotic possibilities of the letter as a physical artifact which metonymically stands in for the body of the (necessarily) absent writer: he asks Fanny, for example, to "write the softest words and kiss them that I may at least touch my lips where yours have been"; the adjective "softest", with its connotations of tactility, is a signifier of the desire to close the gap between language and the body (II:123). "Do not call it folly," Keats begs Fanny Brawne, "when I tell you I took your letter last night to bed with me. In the morning I found your name on the sealing wax obliterated": the signature of the feminine literally melts onto the body of the male, blurring the boundaries between them (II:129).<sup>30</sup> In another letter to Fanny, Keats reveals: "I kiss'd your writing over in the hope you had indulg'd me by leaving a trace of honey" (II:127).<sup>31</sup> Keats kisses the letter, producing a bodily reaction to language, a gesture which blends the corporeal and the mental. Keats shares with Hélène Cixous a grounding of reading and writing in the erotic body, which is figured through images of proximity. In her essay, "La Venue a l'écriture",



Cixous writes: "Texts I ate them, I sucked them, I kissed them" (qtd. in Gallop, Thinking 165). Cixous promotes a "feminine" textuality that is defined by analogy with the plurality of female sexuality ("a feminine textual body" is like "a *female libidinal economy*"); "There's *tactility* in the feminine text, there's touch, and this touch passes through the ear. Writing in the feminine is passing on what is cut out by the Symbolic, the voice of the mother, passing on what is most archaic" ("Castration or Decapitation" 53-54).<sup>32</sup> Keats's ingestion of female language and female bodily fluid remakes the boundaries between bodies: masculine solidity slips into feminine fluidity. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have theorized that in the masculine literary order the pen is analogous to the penis, and it inscribes a female blank page; the male relation to textuality is, in other words, mediated through an instrument. Byron famously shifts the focus of this instrumentality in accusing Keats of solipsistic onanism: he described Keats's work as "*p-ss a bed* poetry", "a sort of mental masturbation" produced by "f[ri]gg[in]g his *Imagination*" (Byron's Letters and Journals 7:200,225,217). Oral sex, however, might be a more accurate (and generous) paradigm of Keatsian textuality than onanism. Keats is in direct oral/tactile contact with the texts he receives and reads, and, by implication, with those he sends; he is "writing [and reading] in the feminine".<sup>33</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

*Would you wean a man from sensuous excesses by the  
inevitable consequences to which they lead?*

William Hazlitt

Keats's language, especially in those letters to or about Fanny, is characterized by repetitions, ellipses, the breathless syntax created by the frequent use of dashes, and a semantic emphasis on fluidity. Keats frequently plays self-consciously with the

possibilities of language, for example, in his frivolous comment to the Dilkes: "my modest feathered Pen frizzles like baby roast beef at making its entrance among such tantrum sentences - or rather ten senses" (II:35-36); or, to Fanny Keats about a clergyman: "a great deal depends upon a cock'd hat and powder - not gun powder, lord love us, but lady-meal, violet-smooth, dainty-scented lilly-white, feather-soft, wigsby-dressing, coat-collar-spoiling whisker-reaching, pig-tail loving, swans down-puffing, parson-sweetening powder" (II:56). In a letter to the George Keatses, he addresses his sister: "I very much want a little of your wit my dear sister", and then proceeds with a breathless outpouring of questions, matched only by Laura's at the end of Beppo. Most interesting, I think, are the provocative misspellings and unconscious puns of the later letters. If, as Lacan says, 'the unconscious is structured like a language', there are some telling linguistic slips. "[A]stonished" at Fanny's "luxurious power over [his] senses", Keats writes that "Even when I am not thinking of you I receive your influence and a tenderer nature steeling upon me" (II:126). In the following month (August 1819), in a "flint-worded Letter", he tells Fanny Brawne, "My heart seems now made of iron" (II:142,141). To Reynolds, he confesses that "all my thoughts and feelings which are of the selfish nature, home speculations every day continue to make me more Iron", and this manly solidity bolsters the conviction that "fine writing is next to fine doing the top thing in the world" (II:146). Though Keats admits, "I feel my Body too weak to support me to the height", yet if the body is a discursive construct, perhaps language can solidify bodily boundaries (II:147). It's as though a slip of the pen ("steeling") engenders the defensive iron-clad metaphors that will protect him against feminine fluidity, and prioritize writing over women.<sup>34</sup> Yet this trifling with language (whether conscious or unconscious) also reveals the

arbitrariness of the linguistic sign system: according to Jonathan Culler, "puns represent the disquieting spectacle of a functioning of language where boundaries - between sounds, between sound and letter, between meanings - count for less than one might imagine and where supposedly discrete meanings threaten to sink into fluid subterranean signifieds too indefinable to be called concepts" (On Puns 3). In other words, language offers only a shifting ground (though there is no other) for the construction of subjectivity; the language that demarcates bodily boundaries also dissolves them.

As I have suggested, Keats's letters, in their inscription of the body, seem to approximate to the language for speaking the feminine, the *écriture féminine* gestured towards by certain French feminists. As well as anticipating Gallic 'body-talk' (and thereby giving credence to Gilbert and Gubar's claims for the romantic origins of *écriture féminine*), Keats's language (like Shelley's) evokes Kristeva's work on poetic language. It is possible to describe Keats's puns, self-contradiction, oscillation, and repetitions as disrupting the linear logic of the signifying chain. A few comments on Kristeva's influential concept of the semiotic (or the semiotic chora) are necessary here.<sup>35</sup>

The semiotic is conceptualized as "a psychosomatic modality of the signifying process, for which the maternal body is seen as the site" (Bronfen 194). It is understood as a pre-verbal moment when the child is symbiotically connected with the mother's body, the site where instinctive drives and rhythmic pulsions develop. The acquisition of language involves the repression of the semiotic relation to the mother's body, yet since this repression is fundamental to the constitution of the symbolic order, the semiotic and the symbolic exist in a dialectical relationship in the

construction of the subject. Rita Felski observes that "[t]he semiotic ...constitutes its [symbolic discourse's] other face, the link between language and the body, embodying the materiality of the sign as a source of pleasure" (34). While remaining "inherent in the symbolic", the semiotic "also [goes] beyond it and [threatens] its position"; Kristeva draws analogies between avant-garde textuality, psychotic discourse and infantine babble, all of which disrupt the homogeneity of coherent discourse (Revolution 81). The restless, outlawed pulsions of the semiotic disrupt the normative ordering of the language of communication. In other words, although the symbolic works to repress the semiotic, the power of the maternal chora persists in the oral or instinctual aspects of language, in the form of puns, verbal slips, evasions, intonation, even silences, that disturb the symbolic order. That this bodily language threatens the hegemony of monologic language, that is, language of the mind, which seems to represent and defend the power of the masculine, is demonstrated by Sir William Watson's dismissal of Keats's letters in the early 1890's as "the veriest infantine prattle and babble", a comment which interestingly prefigures the characteristics of Kristeva's semiotic chora.<sup>36</sup>

In the letter (to the George Keatses, 21 April 1819) in which he articulates his notion of "the world" as "'The Vale of Soul-making'", Keats writes that "the Heart ...is the teat from which the Mind or intelligence sucks its identity" (II:102,103).<sup>37</sup> In Chapter One I discussed Alan Richardson's argument that the male poets supplemented masculinity with the attractive aspects of femininity. Typically, these "fantasies of incorporation" take the form of images of the mother's body whereby the male speaker identifies with the mother's body in pre-Oedipal fantasies (Richardson, "Romanticism" 15). Richardson details a range of poetic images of

maternal nursing which allow the male speaker to incorporate 'female' values of sympathy and nurture, and he argues that behind this apparent revaluation of the female body lies a strategy of appropriative androgyny which seeks to place female qualities, and the female body, as merely secondary to, and supportive of, the male subject. The image of nursing in Keats's letter could be interpreted, from this perspective, as supporting male poetic identity, while the mother remains a fetishized figure (symbolized by her breast), without a voice or a desire of her own. Without wishing to completely suppress this interpretation, I would nevertheless suggest that the emphasis in Keats falls differently. Kristeva suggests that "the superego and its linear language ... are combatted by a return of the oral, glottic pleasure", of suction, expulsion, fusion, rejection (Polylogue 74).<sup>38</sup> Keats's emphasis on the oral and the tactile (detailed above), and here the topos of the child at the breast, work to deconstruct the boundaries between bodies, the security of self-identity. If the male writer speaks the maternal, this is less, I would suggest, *pace* Richardson, a figurative "cannibalizing" of the m/other, than the production of a self-subverting discourse. Rather than self-aggrandizement, Keats's maternal rhetoric bears the risk of self-annihilation.

The threat to self-identity is most clear in the rhetoric of maternal symbiosis which characterizes Keats's relationship with Fanny Brawne. "I have been endeavouring to wean myself from you", he writes to her in September 1819; "I am not strong enough to be weaned", in February 1820 (II;160,257). The desire for separation is a mark of the dysphoric implications of the nurturing maternal relation. Keats is "absorbed" by/in Fanny; he is unable to breathe without her: the relationship seems to collude with his physical illness in depleting his strength. The (not-

yet)subject is possessed by the m/other, unable to mark himself off from her, drawn into a confusion of bodily limits that results in the death of the (male) author.<sup>39</sup>

Hazlitt provides the best contemporary gloss on Keats's language. Though his critique is, of course, directed at Keats's poems (and the person revealed by these texts), the convergence between his rhetoric and Keats's own comments in his letters tells us a lot about the cultural construction of gender, and in particular about the anxieties provoked by the womanly man (or manly woman) in a society that has institutionalized oppositional sexual identities. As I noted earlier, Hazlitt cites Keats as an example of "an effeminacy of style in some degree corresponding to effeminacy of character"; he argues that such effeminacy "arises from a prevalence of the sensibility over the will", in other words, from an excess of feminine sensibility, which during this period, as I have remarked, denotes a set of physiological responses ("On Effeminacy" 8:254,248).<sup>40</sup> Alternatively, "it consists in a want of fortitude to bear pain or to undergo fatigue" (8:248). Represented as lack (of masculinity) rather than excess (of femininity), effeminacy in both instances manifests itself in bodily behaviour. Hazlitt writes that "Ease, vanity, pleasure, are the ruling passions" of the effeminate character, and he demands, "How will you conquer these, or wean their infatuated votaries from them?", and again, "Would you wean a man from sensual excesses by the inevitable consequences to which they lead?" (8:250,251). Hazlitt figures effeminacy, the transgression of proper gender boundaries, in terms of a closeness to the mother's body. Twice he uses the metaphor of weaning, as though he is drawn obsessively to a scene of impropriety, an incestuous, emasculating merging with the mother's body. He exhorts the effeminate male, who constantly demonstrates the failure of identity ("their identity expires with the whim, the folly,

the passion of the hour"), to "[s]hake off the heavy honey-dew of thy soul", the cloying liquidity which connects him with the female body. Hazlitt declares that "[t]here is nothing more to be esteemed than a manly firmness and decision of character" and of such a person he produces the accolade, "There is stuff in him, and it is of the right practicable sort" (8:253).<sup>41</sup> The 'right stuff' is the solidity and separateness of the phallogentric which engenders a corresponding "masculine energy of style"; the "manly" character is straight-talking, he "knows his own mind and sticks to it" and "sees at once what is to be done in given circumstances and does it" (8:254,253). Hazlitt eschews writing which is 'unweaned', which bears the "soft and fleshy" traces of the [female] body (8:255).

\* \* \* \* \*

*As a man, and viewed in relation to social objects,  
Keats was nothing.*  
Thomas De Quincey

Like Hazlitt, other nineteenth-century male critics deprecated Keats's 'feminine' sensibility. From Hazlitt's characterization of Keats's writing as "soft and fleshy" onward, male criticism has returned obsessively to a discourse of the body as a way of talking about Keats's writing and character. Catherine Clement, who, along with other French feminists has reinscribed the physiological emphasis of sensibility, locates a language of the body which is outside of patriarchal comprehension or control; her comment that "Men watch but do not understand" could stand as a summary of the history of mainstream criticism of Keats, which is characterized by male aggression or embarrassment at the spectacle of Keats's "convulsive" body/language ("Enslaved Enclave" 133-34). In the London Magazine (Apr.1820), Peter George Patmore characterizes Endymion as "an involuntary out-pouring"; like

the skylark's song, Keats's poetry "involuntarily gush[es] forth" (Matthews 136). De Quincey declares that "As a man, and viewed in relation to social objects, Keats was nothing"; the sexual resonances of the word "nothing" inscribe Keats with the 'lack' of the female body (Masson 11:388). De Quincey also accuses Keats of "licentiousness in the treatment of his mother-tongue" (Masson 11:393).<sup>42</sup> Aubrey de Vere, writing in 1849, compares Shelley and Keats: "Shelley admired the beautiful, Keats was absorbed in it, and admired it no more than an infant admires the mother at whose breast he feeds. The deep absorption excluded all consciousness of self" (Matthews 342). Though I would want to question de Vere's polarization of Keats and Shelley, as well as the secure objectivity of Shelleyan "admiration", what interests me here is that in de Vere's formulation, Keats's proximity to the mother's body, which is figured through the physical act of breastfeeding, connotes the collapse of coherent subject/object boundaries, an absence of the safe distance between subject and object implied by the term "admiration".<sup>43</sup>

The critical response to the publication of Keats's letters to Fanny Brawne (1878) provides a particularly acute display of body politics. Swinburne is outraged at both the editor of the letters and the poet himself: "[T]hey ought never to have been published ...they ought never to have been written"; he blusters "that a manful kind of man or even a manly sort of boy in his love-making or in his suffering, will not howl and snivel after such a lamentable fashion". Arnold lamented in 1880 that the letters show "the abandonment of all reticence and dignity". For Sir William Watson "they bring out in strong light a poor and vulgar side of his nature", and are marked by "an incontinent gushiness which is neither manly nor properly boy-like, but simply hobbledehoyish".<sup>44</sup> The absorption of breast-feeding, howling and



snivelling, incontinent gushiness: the rhetoric suggests that Keats's writing - his *écriture* feminine - flows from a convulsed, visible body which has abandoned the dignity of masculinity.

Marginalizing Keats through representing him as a baby, not yet independent of the mother's body and thus subject to the fluidity of the female body (an example of "babyish effeminacy", according to Alexander Smith [Matthews 365]) his critics hope to distinguish themselves from this inadequately gendered figure, to relegate him to a wild zone outside the properly defined boundaries of gender (Matthews 365). As Susan Wolfson points out, "In the nineteenth-century he [Keats] has the curious but striking effect of making everyone who knew him or wrote about him acutely sensitive to definitions of manhood - that is, what it is to fulfill the conventional figure and behaviour of fully empowered citizenship in patriarchal society" ("Cross-Dressing" 615). Keats himself was, of course, sensitive to these definitions. His comments provide a salutary reminder that the cultural discourse of gender does not operate in isolation from other discourses, such as that of class. He records his resentment at being described as "'quite the little poet'": "You see what it is to be under six foot and not a lord" (II:61). Keats links cultural expectations about masculine physique with the hegemony of class position, aware that these constitute mutually supportive boundary lines. Keats is marginalized in both senses, belittled by hostile reviewers as a "weaver boy" and "cockney poet" encroaching improperly into the terrain of poets and poetry, and perceived physically as insufficiently masculine.

The term "cockney", applied to Keats by contemporary reviewers, is worth looking at in more detail in this context, particularly as it reveals some of the

problems of definition. The Oxford English Dictionary has the following entry:

COCKNEY - egg: lit. "cocks' egg" (noun):

1. hen's egg, or perh. one of the small or misshapen eggs occasionally laid by fowls, still popularly called in some parts "cocks' eggs".
2. "A child that sucketh long," ...a mother's darling; pet; minion; "a child tenderly brought up"; hence a squeamish or effeminate fellow, "a milksop". ... Sometimes applied to a squeamish, overnice, wanton, or affected woman.
3. A derisive appellation for a townsman, as the type of effeminacy in contrast to the hardier inhabitants of the country.
4. One born in the city of London ... used to connote the characteristics in which the born Londoner is supposed to be inferior to other Englishmen.

One of the 'Cockney School'.

(adj.): effeminate, squeamish. Cockney School: a nickname for a set of 19th century writers belonging to London, of whom Leigh Hunt was taken as the representative.

The term "cockney" is used, especially by John Lockhart in his Blackwood's attack on the "Cockney School of Poetry", to shore up class and gender hierarchies.<sup>45</sup> Lockhart makes fun of lower-class and female poetic desire, resisting the encroachment of inappropriate figures into what he considers the terrain of male aristocratic pursuits:

The just celebrity of Robert Burns and Miss Baillie has had the melancholy effect of turning the heads of we know not how many

farm-servants and unmarried ladies; our very foot-men compose tragedies, and there is scarcely a superannuated governess in the island that does not leave a roll of lyrics behind her in her band-box.

(Redpath 519)

Because Lockhart wants to consign all those who lack what Hazlitt calls "the right stuff" to a single ghetto, he uses the umbrella term "cockney", but the word's very plurality creates problems of definition, of demarcating boundaries. It is a term which is insufficiently weaned; it remains, we might say, at a pre-Oedipal, pre-Symbolic level of identification, unable to differentiate coherently between child and adult, between an effeminate fellow and a wanton woman. The well-defended territory of the definition is subverted from within; to adapt Audre Lord, the master's tools can dismantle the master's house.<sup>46</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

*A truly manly man [and] a truly womanly woman.*  
Coventry Patmore

The "definitions of manhood" alluded to by Wolfson draw attention to gender as a cultural construct rather than a natural fact: the body is always already the body in language, in representation. Coventry Patmore divides poets by gender "into two distinct classes" of sensibility: the first, masculine, class is dominated by the intellect, while the second, feminine class, of which Keats is representative, is governed by "beauty and sweetness"; feminine poets "are separated from the first class by a distance as great as that which separates a truly manly man from a truly womanly woman". Interestingly, though Keats is definitively located, Patmore does acknowledge "a border-line at which these [two classes] occasionally became confused" (Principle 61-62). The figure of the "border-line" concedes both the

possibility of transgression, and the necessity to police the categories. What fascinates me about Patmore's attempt to define, to separate, to establish territories, is that language slips from his grasp: in his effort to specify the difference between entities, he inadvertently subverts the notion of monolithic identity and of polarized identities through the use of tautology. Rhetorically, the "truly manly man" and the "truly womanly woman" are mirror images, each a looking-glass figure for the other. Moreover, the tautologous constructions expose the gap between man and masculinity, woman and womanliness. We might recall that Swinburne, too, can only define masculinity through repetition: "a manful kind of man". Tautology can be seen as self-cancelling, or as tracing a difference within, rather than between, entities. Jonathan Culler's and Peggy Kamuf's deconstructions of a 'ground' of identity in their formulations of writing and reading as a woman are relevant here. I quote Kamuf's version:

- "a woman writing as a woman" - the repetition of the "identical" term splits that identity, making room for a slight shift, spacing out the differential meaning which has always been at work in the single term. And the repetition has no reason to stop there, no finite number of times it can be repeated until it closes itself off logically, with the original identity recuperated in a final term. Likewise, one can find only arbitrary beginnings for the series, and no term which is not already a repetition: "...a woman reading as a woman reading as a .."  
 ("Writing" 298)

The series leads us in to an infinite regression, in which singular identity is always deferred. Tania Modleski argues that these repetitions work to diminish the female

figure, while they stabilize the concept of masculine identity, "since this kind of tautology irresistibly suggests that man is equal to himself and his deeds"; the attempt to subvert the notion of "origin", according to Modleski, "works best when 'woman' is the (vanishing) subject" ("Feminism and the Power of Interpretation" 134). I cannot address Modleski's anxieties in detail here; I have allowed them to stand as a way of gesturing towards other territories of debate, other dissenting voices which need to be heard in the process of defining both Romanticism and feminist theory. My own feeling is that the pleonasms cited above rhetorically hollow out a lack at the heart of masculinity, inscribing insecurity about the 'essence' of masculinity. If definitions of what it is to be male (or female) were so certain, there would be no need to supplement the nouns with qualifiers: the "truly manly man" and the "truly womanly woman" are the self-fissured constructs of the Symbolic order, cultural rather than natural, and therefore open to revision.

## Notes to Chapter Five

1. All references to Keats's letters are to Hyder Edward Rollins, The Letters of John Keats, 2 vols., subsequently cited by volume and page numbers.
2. These concepts are developed in Desire in Language (esp. 78-79) and Powers of Horror (esp. 2-11).
3. My thinking about letters has been much influenced by various studies of relations between the epistolary genre and the feminocentrism of the eighteenth-century; see, in particular, Terry Castle, Clarissa's Ciphers; Terry Eagleton, The Rape of Clarissa; Peggy Kamuf, Fictions of Feminine Desire; Nancy K. Miller, The Heroine's Text. Informed by recent critical theories, these studies use Barthes, Derrida and Lacan (to name only the most prominent theorists) in constructing their analytical frameworks.
4. Though, of course, this apparent polarity becomes blurred when put under any pressure: Clarissa is, after all, published, and exerts an influence in creating and sustaining ideals of femininity, while Burke's politics are also sexual.
5. See, Roland Barthes A Lover's Discourse, and Jacques Derrida The Post-Card and "The Law of Genre". Shari Benstock's comments illuminatingly on Derridean epistolarity in "From Letter to Literature"; see also Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Love Me".
6. This is currently a buzz-word in Keats criticism: Alan Bewell, for instance, writes of "Keats's stylistic cross-dressing", that is, Keats draws on "the language of contemporary women's poetry" (93). See also Marlon Ross, Contours 155-72. In citing Roland Barthes, I have ignored the homosexual matrix that displaces a heterosexist framework in his writings.
7. In her earlier work, Women Writers, Homans located Keats outside the dominant "masculine tradition". The article under discussion in which she reinscribes Keats within masculine boundaries is an illuminating, brilliantly-written polemic which continues to make me feel a bit uncomfortable about 'feminizing Keats'.
8. All references to writers included in Keats: The Critical Heritage, will be cited as Matthews, followed by page number(s).
9. Elizabeth Barrett Browning's comments are in Matthews 295.

10. The male defence gives Keats 'the woman's part': Reynolds in his critique of "the Quarterly Reviewers" in 1818 moves straight from his observation on their treatment of Lady Morgan ("a woman is the best prey for its malignity, because it is the gentlest and most undefended") to "the unmerciful condemnation that has been passed on Mr Keats" (Matthews 118). Shelley in a letter to Lord Byron notes that "if [he] has erred" in his judgement of Hyperion, "[he] can console [himself] by reflecting that it is in defence of the weak" (Letters II:308-09). George Gilfillan, in language evocative of sexuality, sadism and slavery, finds "the Quarterly critic" was "surely cruel ... who stripped, and striped, and cut, and branded the muse's Son" (Matthews 304).
11. Chodorow's theories are outlined in her book, The Reproduction of Mothering. Like Dorothy Dinnerstein and Jane Flax, Chodorow argues that the differing relationship of the male and female child to the mother during the pre-Oedipal period results in a differing configuration of identity. The daughter's pre-Oedipal attachment to the mother does not have to be repressed in order for her to turn her libinal impulses to the father. Thus, her experience of herself is characterized by "more flexible and permeable ego boundaries" (127). On the other hand, the boy's accession to masculine power requires the repression of desire for the mother. According to Chodorow, "the basic feminine sense of self is connected to the world, the basic masculine sense of self is separate" (169). See also, Judith Gegan Gardiner who "picture[s] female identity as typically less fixed, less unitary, and more flexible than male individuality, both in its primary core and in the entire maturational complex developed from this core. These traits have far-reaching consequences for the distinctive nature of writing by women" (183).
12. Jong is clearly also thinking here of Keats's comments on "the poetical Character".
13. Margaret Homans and Susan J. Wolfson cite this interview in their recent essays on Keats; see Homans, "Keats Reading Women" 344-45, and Wolfson, "Feminizing Keats" 348.
14. See alternative readings by Margaret Homans, Women Writers and Poetic Identity 83-85; Susan Levin, Dorothy Wordsworth and Romanticism; Anne K. Mellor, Romanticism and Gender 155-57; Susan J. Wolfson, "Individual in Community" 145. In her more recent work, Homans argues that Keat's concept of identity shifts between his "Negative Capability" (Dec.1817) and "no identity" formulations (Oct.1818) and his use of the term "identity" in his account of "the vale of Soul-making" (April 1819); she suggests that the self-dissolution involved in Keats's love for Fanny Brawne makes him self-defensive ("Keats Reading Women" 352-54). Susan Wolfson argues, similarly, that Keats "realized that his love for Fanny had made him

exceptionally conscious of himself, or 'selfish'; "Keats is now aware that his easy self-annihilation [of negative capability], though a creative asset, is an existential liability" ("Composition and 'Unrest'" 57,66). Marlon B. Ross provides a recuperative reading of "negative capability": "What is 'negative capability', after all, but [the] very process of self-crystallization through self-dispersal? It is the ability to lose the self in another object - the song of a nightingale or an urn or a woman's peerless eyes - and therefore to reaffirm the previous reality of self-identity" (Contours 177). This is a reading supported by Patricia Yaeger (Honey-Mad Women 53).

15. Keats is "on the verge of non-entity" (like Blake's Oothoon). Charles Lamb makes an observation very similar to Keats's: in a letter of 26 April 1816, he writes that "If I lived with him [Coleridge] or the Author of the Excursion, I should in a very little time lose my own identity, & be dragged along in the current of other peoples thoughts, hampered in a net" (Letters III:215). Lamb is more specifically concerned with his literary identity.
16. See Carole Pateman, The Sexual Contract 96.
17. Alan Richardson in his article "Romanticism and the Colonization of the Feminine" and Diane Long Hoeveler in Romantic Androgyny, both argue that the male Romantic poets 'cannibalize' the feminine. While accepting many aspects of this argument, I have argued throughout this thesis that the male Romantics are more vulnerable than this figure suggests. For a critique of the premises of this argument, see Barbara Gelpi, Shelley's Goddess 42.
18. Interestingly, H.W. Garrod uses Woolf's figure, though he reverses the gender terms: "[U]pon whatever page of Keats's poetry there falls the shadow of a living woman, it falls calamitously like an eclipse" (57).
19. As far as I know, this rhetoric of embodiment has not been studied by other critics, though the somatic dimension of the self has always received critical attention: critics have either reviled or revelled in the oral/tactile quality of Keats's work; from Byron onwards the metaphors of masturbation has been part of Keats's critics' vocabulary; several recent commentators (notably, Wolfson and Mellor) have studied the implications of Keats's physical stature. Janet Wolff provides a good account of the status of the body, the move towards reinstating corporeality, in recent feminist theory (Feminine Sentences, Chapter 8).
20. Conversely, Byron capitalizes on the female readership: Medwin quotes Byron's pleasure at the fame of his Corsair, and his playful comment, "Who does not write to please the women?" (206).



21. On Keats's relation to women writers, see Sonia Hofkosh, "The Writer's Ravishment" 106-110. Anne Mellor argues that "[d]uring the early 1800s in England, the production of the less prestigious forms of poetry - of sonnets, odes and romances - was dominated by women"; in choosing to write in these forms Keats aligns himself with women (despite the number of other men who produced poems of these types), and this was "a source of anxiety for Keats" (Romanticism and Gender 179). On the feminization of the literary marketplace during the second half of the eighteenth-century, and through the Romantic period, see Hofkosh (above); Stuart Curran, "Romantic Poetry: The I Altered" and "Women readers, women writers"; Marlon B. Ross "Scott's Chivalric Pose".
  
22. Bahktin's "grotesque body" is not necessarily female, but it is connotatively feminine. See, Bahktin, Rabelais and His World, 25-26, and Kristeva, especially Powers of Horror. The grotesque body is the body of becoming (the body-in-process); unlike the closed, classical body which figures the aspirations of bourgeois individualism, it is connected with the rest of the world. In this sense it connects with the theories of feminine identity purveyed by Nancy Chodorow and others.
  
23. Like his reference to his "maidenhead", Keats's identification with "snub-nos'd brunettes" is intended to be ironic.
  
24. As Diane Hoeveler points out, the Romantic emphasis on new ways of knowing, especially the mode of "wise passiveness", is connected with the rise of the domestic woman and the Romantic privileging of the maternal (33).
  
25. I refer the reader to the shifting and destabilizing pronouns Keats uses in the unfolding of this analogy (Letters I:231-32).
  
26. Susan Wolfson, commenting on this same passage, writes similarly that "Keats often finds it necessary to circumscribe this playful androgyny" ("Feminizing Keats" 328-29). For an alternative reading of the passage, see Alan Bewell, "Keats's Realm of Flora" 85-86.
  
27. The OED provides examples from as early as 1300 of the slippage between ravish and rape: "To carry away (a woman) by force (sometimes implying subsequent violation)" (OED 2); "To commit rape upon (a woman), to violate" (2b; the range of examples cited is from 1436 to 1782). The OED also notes that the word may be used figuratively of death (an obsolete, but interesting usage, in the present context).
  
28. I am indebted to Margaret Homans's comments on Keats and admiration: "Keats cannot bear the thought of her [Fanny] admiring him, because in his view admiration transforms its object into a 'thing'. But to turn *her* into an eternally beautiful thing, a star or planet,

enhances his sense that he himself could never be reified in this way" ("Keats Reading Women" 351). Interestingly, David Masson recounts a scene in which Keats is the object of the female gaze: he notes that the fame of Endymion "made Keats's name more widely known ... when he attended Hazlitt's lectures, ladies to whom he was pointed out looked at him instead of listening to the lecturer" (Matthews 371; this might help to explain Hazlitt's animosity to Keats).

29. Keats's languoriness repeats the somatics of Burke's absorption in beauty, discussed in Chapter Three. I borrow the evocative phrase "touch has a memory" from Keats himself (see the ode "What can I do").
30. I realise that this scene invites a counter interpretation, that is, that Fanny's name, or subjectivity, is erased in this nocturnal encounter; this would accord with the reading of male romanticism as appropriative, even cannibalistic. (I would like to know whether Fanny took Keats's letters to bed with her).
31. Patricia Yaeger defines honey as a 'liminal' substance (Honey-Mad Women 4 and 35; for her discussion of Keats, see 41-43, 52-53).
32. For critiques of Cixous's *l'écriture féminine*, which point out the risks of essentialism and the lack of cultural specificity, see Rita Felski, Beyond Feminist Aesthetics 35-40; Mary Jacobus, "The Question of Language" 37. For an insightful and detailed discussion of French feminists' use of metaphors of maternity, see Donna Stanton, "Difference on Trial".
33. This regendering of Keats through aligning him with contemporary French feminists is open to the criticism that Susan Wolfson makes of other recent feminist appropriations of Keats. She argues that, "[a]lbeit with a different emphasis, these readers [Homans, Rich, Jong] perpetuate Victorian discriminations, for they have, in effect, regendered Keats by naming as 'feminist' those capacities which they find anomalous to their ideology of the 'male' character and the 'masculine' tradition, rather than studied him as an opportunity to investigate the multiple and often conflicting interests that animate men's writing within patriarchal culture" ("Feminizing Keats" 349). Though I try to pay attention to these conflicts, it remains, I believe, as I argue in Chapter Two, important to deconstruct gender hierarchies through strategic critical cross-dressing.
34. On Keats's "suggestive misspelling", and the way in which "[t]he 'steeling' of the self emerges in the ode" entitled "What can I do ...?", see Susan Wolfson, "Composition and 'Unrest'" 72-74.

35. As Elisabeth Bronfen points out, "Kristeva's use of the word 'semiotic' runs counter to the more general use of the term ... employ[ed] to designate the semantic value of a signifier" (Over Her Dead Body 202, n.23). I trust the context makes clear in which sense I am using the term.
36. Watson is cited in Hyder Rollins's "Introduction" to Keats's Letters 7. Many critics have commented on Kristeva's theories; in addition to Bronfen and Felski, see useful discussions in Toril Moi, Sexual/Textual Politics 150-173; Elizabeth Grosz, Sexual Subversions; Shuli Barzilai, "Borders of Language"; Kelly Oliver, "Kristeva's Imaginary" and Pam Morris, "Re-routing Kristeva". Elaine Millard discusses Kristeva's work and applies her theories to produce a reading of Wuthering Heights in Sara Mills et al., Feminist Readings/Feminists Reading (ch.5). Rita Felski questions the essentialist argument that the semiotic is the site of contact with the mother's body, as well as the "relevance to a feminist theory of language or literature" of the homology between the feminine and the semiotic on the grounds of their marginality to patriarchy and to language, respectively (35). I concur with the many critics who argue that we are constrained to use available images, and that revalorizing maternal figures is one way of subverting patriarchal attitudes (as is the application of these images to 'male' figures).
37. In Buxton Forman's edition of Keats's letters, the phrase reads: "the Heart ... is the text from which the Mind or Intelligence sucks its identity" (II:54). He is picking up Keats's own analogies of the heart as a hornbook or bible, but the substitution provides a succinct demonstration of the body as text (the body as a linguistic construct).
38. My translation; the French text reads: "Le surmoi et son langage lineaire ... sont combattus par un retour du plaisir oral et glottique."
39. My formulations here are influenced by Kristeva's theory of abjection, outlined in her Powers of Horror, a text which is nevertheless of limited heuristic value because of the difficulty of Kristeva's prose. Kristeva defines abjection as "what disturbs identities, systems and orders. Something that does not respect limits, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the mixed" (12). Like the semiotic, the abject involves the relation of the 'subject' to the mother, but it signifies the archaic attempts to demarcate the self from the maternal entity. Paul Smith rightly points out that the abject differs from Kristeva's earlier notion of the semiotic in that it involves "the recognition of psychical pain", "it is the mark of the painful difficulty for the 'subject' of being constituted in the symbolic/semiotic dialectic" (Discerning 127). For a stringent critique of Kristeva's book, see Jennifer Stone, "The Horrors of Power".

40. "Sophia", writing in the middle of the previous century in the tradition of replies to anti-female satire, exposes the arbitrariness of such terms: "When they [men] mean to stigmatise a *Man* with want of courage they call him *effeminate*, when they would praise a *Woman* for her courage they call her *manly*. But as these, and such like expressions, are merely arbitrary, and but a fulsome compliment which the *Men* pass on themselves, they establish nothing" (*Beauty's Triumph*, 1751, from Part One, *Woman not Inferior to Man*, 1739; Jones 230). As Davidoff and Hall observe, the views held by Cowper, who "argued for a more modest male demeanour, valuing reflection, peace, the protection of the weak and of animals", were regarded as "dangerously effeminate" (164). Unsurprisingly, Hazlitt thinks that Cowper "shrinks from and repels common and hearty sympathy". Many other critics describe Keats in terms of effeminacy: Louis Etienne in 1867 writes that "Keats is perhaps the least English of the poets produced by Great Britain during our century. He lacks that *manliness* [the English word is used] whose first impulse is to emerge from sterile dreams and effeminate lamentation, to accept what cannot be altered and make the best of it" (Matthews 34). Leigh Hunt writing in mid-century thought that "Mr Keats's natural tendency to pleasure, as a poet, sometimes degenerated, by reason of his ill health, into a poetical effeminacy" (Matthews 251). According to George Gilfillan, "A curious feature of Keats' mind was its elegant effeminacy" (Matthews 305). De Quincey (1846) alludes to "fantastic effeminacy", while William Howitt (1847) notes that "his unworldliness was effeminacy" (Matthews 309,311).
41. Coventry Patmore writes about Keats and masculinity in a similarly aphoristic vein: "A man without a belief is like a man without a backbone" (Matthews 332).
42. This reference comes from a footnote to De Quincey's essay "Notes on Gilfillan's 'Gallery of Portraits'"; to be fair, De Quincey is partially recanting his earlier comments on Keats's "licentious" language, suggesting instead that he shows "too little reverence" for the mother-tongue.
43. Some commentators use a vocabulary that implicitly figures Keats as a breast-feeding infant: Leigh Hunt praises Keats for "sucking the essence out of them [his feelings on a subject] into analogous words" (*London Journal*, 21 Jan. 1835; Matthews 278).
44. Swinburne, Arnold and Watson cited in Rollins's "Introduction" to Keats's *Letters* 4,7.
45. Lockhart's article appears in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* III (August, 1818) 519-524; repr. in Theodore Redpath, *The Young Romantics Reviewed* 467-472. Marjorie Levinson analyses the class aspects of Lockhart's comments in her *Keats's Life of Allegory*, 1-25.

Nicholas Roe examines "the subversive function of Keatsian childishness"; he suggests that Keats is seen as being "unwilling to 'bid farewell' to the joys of early sensual experience at his mother's breast", that he is "the 'new brood' of a treacherous sensibility that had formerly been associated with the French Revolution" ("Keats's Lispering Seditious" 50,51). The "cockney" tag, with its connotations of effeminacy and childishness, is a way of depoliticizing Keats. On the liberal politics of Keats's poetics, see William Keach, "Cockney Couplets", and David Bromwich, "Keats's Radicalism". Anne Mellor turns to the OED definitions to support her claim that "Lockhart ... was engaging in a politics of both class and gender", a point also made by Susan Wolfson, who details how "Lockhart's language attached itself to Keats with adhesive force" (Romanticism and Gender 172-73, "Feminizing Keats" 319-321).

46. My thoughts on definition have been much influenced by Jane Gallop's terrific article, "The Problem of Definition".

## Chapter Six

### "*Some horrid alien nature*": De Quincey's Flowers of Rhetoric and Contagious Femininity

*Heaven in a Wild Flower*  
Blake: "Auguries of Innocence"

In an essay on William Wordsworth, published in Tait's Edinburgh Magazine during the early months of 1839, De Quincey tells us that Wordsworth describes his sister Dorothy "in a philosophic poem ...as one who planted flowers and blossoms with her feminine hand upon what might else have been an arid rock" (Recollections 201).<sup>1</sup> According to De Quincey, it was Dorothy who "first *couched* his [Wordsworth's] eye to the sense of beauty - humanized him by the gentler charities, and engrafted with her delicate female touch, those graces upon the ruder growths of his nature, which have since clothed the forest of his genius with a foliage corresponding in loveliness and beauty to the strength of its boughs and the massiness of its trunks" (132). Dorothy's "mission" in relation to Wordsworth was "above all other ministrations, to ingraft, by her sexual sense of beauty, upon his masculine austerity that delicacy and those graces which else ... it would not have had" (201). De Quincey's gender configurations are nothing if not conventional, based on Burke's paradigms of the Sublime and the Beautiful: the feminine is floral, delicate, associated with loveliness, beauty, graces; it has a softening, civilizing and decorative effect on rude and massy masculinity, on that "ascetic harsh sublimity" of which De Quincey perceives Wordsworth to have been "enamoured" (132).<sup>2</sup> Yet there is an interesting suggestion of male 'lack' ("arid rock", "would not have had"), to which flowers and women are

the necessary supplement. De Quincey himself emphasizes the role of the feminine as "complement": "I have thought that it would be a proper *complement* of the whole record, to subjoin a very especial notice of his sister" (206). Michael Cooke bases his claims for the feminine as the crux of value in Romanticism on the 'complementary wholeness' of the sexes desired by the male poets, arguing that the feminine thereby accrues power and that the parameters of masculinity are changed. However, this idea of complementariness in fact functioned conservatively, especially in the nineteenth century: to demarcate the difference between, but to accord equal value to, men's and women's virtues, was to effectively keep women in their properly subservient place and to frustrate demands for equality. Within the terms of a gender economy, the notion of complementarity posits women as the appropriate 'other' for man, that "old dream of symmetry", in Irigaray's phrase.<sup>3</sup> Lacan reminds us of "Freud's often repeated warning not to reduce the supplement of feminine over masculine to the complement of passive to active" (Mitchell and Rose 93). Though De Quincey uses the term "complement", I would argue that the grain of his text lends itself to the substitution of the Derridean term "supplement", a term which connotes the disruptive difference that deconstructs binary systems (it is, undecidably, that which is added on and that which substitutes and supplants). In this chapter, I attempt to trace the 'graft' of the subversive feminine supplement in various De Quincey texts, that language or graffiti (sic) of flowers that De Quincey ascribed to Dorothy Wordsworth.<sup>4</sup>

The chapter is broadly divided into five sections. Firstly, on the principle that De Quincey's rhetoric is not purely personal but is enmeshed in the discourse of the period, I look briefly at the clustering of the feminine, the floral, ornamentation and figuration in some texts of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Then I look in

some detail at the gendered narratives encoded in the parasitical flowers of rhetoric of the "Introductory Notice" of the Suspiria de Profundis. In the third section, I focus on De Quincey's account of the life and death of Kate Wordsworth, tracing the roots of what he calls his "nympholepsy". Then I comment on the uncontrollable arbitrariness of the figure of the rose in De Quincey's narrative of the transformation of Miss Fanny of the Bath Road (in The English Mail-Coach). Finally, I situate my discussion within the context of recent feminist theory. I read De Quincey alongside Freud, especially the essay on "Fetishism" and the Studies on Hysteria, and suggest that the rhetorical parallels between both sets of texts facilitate a feminist deconstruction of the hierarchical opposition, male/female. I will argue that a principle of contamination is at work in De Quincey's texts, and that they enact the feminization of the male subject. I read the feminine here as that which is alien, extrinsic, exotic, outwith the boundaries of male knowledge and control, but which is refigured, particularly through the trope of flowers as inner, as a foreignness *within* the male subject.

\* \* \* \* \*

*[The] flowery diction which has slid from essays into novels,  
and from novels into familiar letters and conversations.*  
Mary Wollstonecraft

In "Epistle to a Lady", Pope yokes the feminine and the irrational, using the trope of flowers to 'naturalize' his cultural construction: "Ladies, like variegated Tulips, show, / 'Tis to their changes half their charms we owe" (ll.41-42); in his misogynist formulation, "Women are fine by defect, and delicately weak" (l.44). Pope wittily displaces the disruptive collorary of locating woman outside of Reason, that is, that she may be a 'dark continent', unexplored and potentially unknowable, by ascribing



to her an absence, or lack, of meaning: "Woman and Fool are two hard things to hit; / For true No-meaning puzzles more than wit" (ll.113-114). Woman is merely puzzling, trivialized and contained in a couplet. Edmund Burke's Enquiry posits that, "it is the flowery species, so remarkable for its weakness and momentary duration, that gives us the liveliest idea of beauty, and elegance"; like flowers, "the beauty of women is considerably owing to their weakness, or delicacy, and is even enhanced by their timidity" (116). I have discussed Burke's treatise in detail in Chapter Three; what is significant in terms of the present chapter is the particular polarity that Burke sets up between a feminized and floreated beauty and the sublime masculinity of a robustly phallic "tree of the forest". Certain qualities, such as weakness and the ephemeral, are troped as feminine through the use of the floral figure. Women are represented, again, as anti-rational, their perfection, from the male point of view, residing in their 'imperfection'. Burke attempts to shore up his subject position by representing women, in Popean rhetoric, as defective; however, as I have noted in Chapter Three, Naomi Schor observes that "the weakness of the 'weaker sex' is ...an *artificial imperfection*. Recognizing the aesthetic appeal of the weak, women, 'learn to lisp, to totter in their walk, to *counterfeit* weakness, and even sickness'" (Reading in Detail 151, Enquiry 110).<sup>5</sup> The woman's body is fetishized, that is, fragmented, idolized, and isolated from its historically contingent context but - to summarize a scenario explored at length in Chapter Three - the safety of the spectatorial position is threatened by this *masquerade* of femininity, which both defamiliarizes the gestures of femininity and reinscribes the body as a site of materiality. "The unsteady [male] eye slides giddily" over such theatrical display, "without knowing where to fix" (115). Significantly, Burke's flowers mimic the feminine which they signify for they are

presented in language which emphasizes the constructed rather than the organic; like tropes, flowers are "turned and fashioned into an infinite variety of forms" (94). What is interesting in terms of the configuration of gender is that at this particular historical moment, on the the cusp of Romanticism, the bisexuality of the floral in literary history (in Christian discourse, for example, the rose is associated with both the feminine and with godhead) is repressed in order to gather flowers to the feminine side of a male/female binary opposition.

The whole enterprise of defining the sublime and the beautiful reflects a collective obsession about what constitutes masculinity and femininity.<sup>6</sup> Kant, like Burke, deploys a vegetal metaphoric: "Tall oaks and lonely shadows in a sacred grove are sublime; flower beds, low hedges and trees trimmed with figures are beautiful" (Observations 47). Kant devotes one section of his treatise specifically to gender distinctions (Section Three, "Of the Distinction of the Beautiful and Sublime in the Interrelations of the Sexes"), and he extols the virtue of *'neatness ...in the fair sex'* (84). Like Burke, Kant's discourse foregrounds the activity of cultural construction: femininity, like flower beds, must be cultivated.<sup>7</sup> Earlier in the century, 'Philogamus', writing on the state of marriage, urges that women should be "cultivated to Virtue from their tender Infancy", for "[t]he more tender a Plant is, the more capable of being formed to any Shape; though perhaps not so capable of retaining it, as a more stubborn one, without proper Ways and Means to keep it in it's primary Bent" (Jones 80). Women, like malleable plants, are in need of "Restraint". Laetitia Matilda Hawkins in Letters on the Female Mind (1793) implicitly invokes the tradition of the sublime and the beautiful in her demarcation of the domain of "subjects fitted to their [women's] exertions": "Let not the advocate for female

excellence be alarmed", she writes, for "the field is ample, and little is excluded from its boundary; every shrub, every flower of literature is contained within it; forest trees only are excluded [that is, abstruse subjects]: and surely no woman, who has ever contemplated the oak, will complain that she is not permitted to bear it away from its native soil" (Jones 119).

Hannah More's Strictures in one sense tend towards the enfranchisement of women from certain ideologies of femininity; she proposes that women should cultivate every study, which, instead of stimulating her sensibility, will chastise it; which ... will bring the imagination under dominion; will lead her to think, to compare, to combine, to methodize; which will confer such a power of discrimination, that her judgement shall learn to reject what is dazzling, if it be not solid. (188)

However, although she wants women to cast off the shackles of sensibility, they are not to assume the mantle of masculine intellect: "Both in composition and action they [women] excel in details; but they do not so much generalize their ideas as men, nor do their minds seize a great subject with so large a grasp" (202). "[S]umming up the evidence ... of the different capacities of the sexes", she asserts "that women have equal *parts*, but are inferior in *wholeness* of mind, in the integral understanding"; in particular, "they seem not to possess, in equal measure, the faculty of comparing, combining, analyzing, and separating ... ideas; that deep and patient thinking which goes to the bottom of a subject" (202-3). More, then, reinscribes women as secondary complements to men; excelling in details, they will no doubt ornament their houses and cultivate their gardens as fit objects for the encompassing, incisive male gaze. More remains within the confines of "propriety", which is itself a keyword in her

discourse. She valorizes "propriety", "the centre", "proportion", the "proper path", "a regular, orderly, undeviating course" (14); More appropriates the rational discourse of the eighteenth century, and furnishes, as Marlon Ross argues, "the ideological stance and the tone that will characterize women's presence in literary discourse for the duration of the nineteenth century" (Contours 206).<sup>8</sup>

Hegel's Philosophy of Right (1821) presents women as 'plant-like', complacent, placidly content, lacking any desire for the Ideal, lacking what Mary Ann Doane calls 'the desire to desire'. As the irrational 'other', woman gives definition to "[t]he status of manhood ... [which] is attained only by the stress of thought and much technical exertion", her immobility ("Men correspond to animals, while women correspond to plants") provides the still point which produces meaning for another (263-64). According to Hegel,

[W]omen regulate their actions not by the demands of universality but by arbitrary inclinations and opinions. Women are educated - who knows how? - as it were by breathing in ideas, by living rather than by acquiring knowledge.

Hegel's marginalization of the feminine encodes the sublimated threat (witness his anxious parenthesis "who knows how?") that the "arbitrary" might overrun the universal, jeopardizing the grounds of the male subject. In other words, the apparently oppositional relationship between the neat (ordered, bounded) and the arbitrary is unstable: 'neatness' is an imposed categorization designed to corset and domesticate the arbitrariness of the feminine, but the unpredictable, that which is outside the parameters of masculine knowledge, may deconstruct man-made boundaries from inside the universal order.

Hazlitt inveighs against the flowers of rhetoric in his essay "On Familiar Style" (1821): "The florid style ... is resorted to as a spangled veil to conceal the want of [ideas]. When there is nothing to be set down but words it costs little to make them fine. Look through the dictionary, and cull out a *florilegium*, rival the *tulippomania*. Rouge high enough, and never mind the natural complexion" (8:246). This traditional (neo-classical) metaphoric equates rhetorical ornaments with the artifices of painted ladies. Hazlitt's vision of (Huysmanesque) rouged tulips figures a femininity that stands for rhetoric, ornament, deception, for all the shameless seductions of language which transgress the boundaries of propriety, and by which nature itself becomes unfamiliar.<sup>9</sup>

Mary Wollstonecraft's Rights of Woman is a counter-text to those that inscribe a debilitating aesthetic of decorative flowers and weak women. Moreover, while many of the writers I have looked at associate woman with the tropological, Wollstonecraft privileges the literal. She aims to "rouse [her] sex from the flowery bed, on which they supinely sleep life away" (227). The metaphor of the flowery bed and the adverb "supinely" pose women as passive and prostrate creatures, contained within the borders of the bedroom. For her, women are "like the flowers which are planted in too rich a soil, strength and usefulness are sacrificed to beauty"; the result is a fecundity deprived of force, a kind of sterility, in Wollstonecraft's words, "a barren blooming" (79). She rejects all flaunting figures, "those pretty feminine phrases, which the men condescendingly use to soften our slavish dependence ... I shall try to avoid that flowery diction which has slid from essays into novels, and from novels into familiar letters and conversations"; at the utopian margins of her project, she proclaims, "I shall be employed about things, not words!" (82; Mary

Astell had earlier claimed that "it is not intended she [woman] shou'd spend her hours in learning *words* but *things*" [Jones 204]). Other women writers of the period employ similar diction to Wollstonecraft. Martha Mears, a 'Practitioner in Midwifery' gives "Candid Advice to the Fair Sex" in 1797: "I do not mean to amuse them [her countrywomen] with an idle parade of learning: I do not come dressed out in a rich wardrobe of words, to dazzle their attention: such pomp, such ornaments would ill become the humble handmaid of nature" (Jones 94).<sup>10</sup> In pursuit of philosophic clarity, the plain prose of masculine power, Wollstonecraft attempts to outlaw metaphors and thereby excise traditional femininity, to weed out what she calls "a romantic twist of the mind" (305). But, as should be apparent from my citations, the flowers of rhetoric cannot be suppressed: they flourish in the text which attempts to banish them. The Vindication teems with tropes, often metaphors which specifically use flowers as their vehicle, for example, "Modesty must be equally cultivated by both sexes, or it will ever remain a sickly hot-house plant, whilst the affection of it, the fig leaf borrowed by wantonness, may give a zest to voluptuous enjoyments" (233). Clarity is lost in "a mist of words" (92); this phrase, itself a metaphor, suggests that words are inevitably metaphoric in a generalized sense for they are not "things" (that is, referents). Jane Moore argues persuasively that the Vindication is subversive precisely *because* it disrupts the opposition between philosophic and literary uses of language, between genre and gender difference ("Promises" 167). The tenacity of flowers, and thus, of the feminine and of figurality, upsets the neatness of binary schemes.

It is worth noting that during the historical period under consideration, women were not only characterized in terms of plants and flowers but they played a special

domestic role in relation to the garden. As Davidoff and Hall point out,

'the language of flowers', originating in France, had been taken up and forwarded by romantic and nature poets and is reflected in commonplace books ... Women became responsible for decorating mantles and tables with flowers, a practice introduced in the 1820s, overcoming earlier superstitions about bad luck caused by bringing living or wild things into the house. A paraphernalia of stands and containers, plus many books of expert advice accompanied this 'naturally' feminine occupation. (374)

According to one amateur poet, "In every woman's soul there dwells pre-eminently a natural fond affinity for flowers" (374). Jane Webb Loudon, a prominent writer on gardening for ladies, could not wholeheartedly advocate female management of vegetable or fruit gardens, but declared that the flower-garden is "pre-eminently a woman's department" (qtd. in Davidoff and Hall 374). Priscilla Wakefield, endeavouring to suggest suitable occupations whereby the female sex might improve their lot, is more ambitious: she proposes that "[o]rnamental gardening, and the laying out of pleasure-grounds, with the improvement of natural landscape, one of the refinements of modern times, may likewise afford an eligible maintenance to some of those females, who, in the days of their prosperity, displayed their taste in the embellishment of their own domains" (Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex, 1798; Jones 126-27).

Flowers are potentially hybrid figures in various ways, connoting both life, beauty, and innocence, but also death, as in De Quincey's recollection "of having connected a profound sense of pathos with the re-appearance, very early in spring, of

some crocuses" (Suspiria 96-97). The flowers function as semes of death and rebirth ("annual resurrections"), as "memorials", or written artifacts, they are part of that "chapter" of De Quincey's always textualized life which deals with the death of Kate Wordsworth (Recollections 369). In terms of gender, flowers may signify femininity and/or masculinity.<sup>11</sup> The classificatory systems for plants and flowers current during the Romantic period emphasized the gender of plants. Erasmus Darwin prefaces The Loves of the Plants (1789), the second part of his poem The Botanic Garden, with an outline of Linneus's system. Darwin gives details of categories of plants denominated "Feminine Males" and "Polygamy"; this latter class he explains as "[m]ale and female flowers on one or more plants, which have at the same time flowers of both sexes" (3). The final class recorded by Darwin is termed "Clandestine Marriage, *Cryptogamia*", which "contains the plants whose flowers are not discernible"; in the poem itself, he tells us, "the word '*secret*' expresses the Class of Clandestine Marriage" (5). "Not discernible": these are flowers which frustrate the putative phallogocentric desire for visible guarantees of gender, making it impossible to tell the difference between male and female.

Curiosity about the sexuality of plants was reasonably widely disseminated: The Loves of the Plants was a bestseller for its author, whose publisher paid him an advance of 1000 guineas on The Economy of Vegetation, which, with looking-glass logic, came out after the second part, in 1791.<sup>12</sup> Richard Polwhele, in his poem The Unsex'd Females, castigates the female study of botany, and indirectly attacks Darwin's The Loves of the Plants, which describes sexual reproduction in plants in anthropomorphic terms.<sup>13</sup> Polwhele's unsexed females demonstrate their defiance of "NATURE'S law", for they,



With bliss botanic (b) as their bosoms heave,  
 Still pluck forbidden fruit, with mother Eve,  
 For puberty in sighing florets pant;  
 Or point the prostitution of a plant; (ll.29-32; Jones 187)

The footnote (b) explains: "Botany has lately become a fashionable amusement with the ladies. But how the study of the sexual system of plants can accord with female modesty, I am not able to comprehend. ...I have, several times, seen boys and girls botanizing together" (Jones 189).<sup>14</sup>

Recently, Claudette Sartillot has argued that the "actual morphology" of flowers "seems to invite [the] symbolic crossing of the genders: the receptacle-shaped corolla readily becomes a symbol of the womb, whereas the pistil with its erect stylus points to phallic symbolism" (72). But even this erotic crossing narrows the field of signification, effacing the contingent differences *between* flowers, and setting up a binary paradigm, womb/phallus, an unexpected configuration which elides any reference to the female genitalia (I discuss the dissemination of this occluded detail during my reading of the 'Kate Wordsworth' and 'Fanny of the Bath Road' episodes below).

For the male Romantic poets, flowers provided a figure for signifying their own gender mobility. Keats seems to recognise something of the transvestite allure of flowers; as I noted in the previous chapter, here is a male poet who says, "let us not therefore go hurrying about and collecting honey-bee like, buzzing here and there impatiently from a knowledge of what is to be arrived at: but let us open our leaves like a flower and be passive and receptive ...taking hints from every noble insect that favors us with a visit" (Letters I: 232). Keats proposes a withdrawal from the

teleological trajectory of traditional male writing in favour of a more diffuse feminine jouissance.<sup>15</sup> Byron's Sardanapulus thinks of himself as "softer clay, impregnated with flowers" (2.1.522), the metaphor, as Susan Wolfson points out, "revealing a feminine reconception of self" ("Problem" 880).

It's worth summarizing at this point, I think, the contradictory discourses which are generated in this context by woman's perceived secondariness to man. R. Howard Bloch observes that the creation of woman from, and for, man as it is recounted in Genesis coincides with the creation of language as supplement to things (Wollstonecraft's desire for the literal can thus be explained as the desire for the lost plenitude of the unfallen world, a gesture towards a space which is precisely ungendered, before the imposition of gender difference). Eve, as a "part" to Adam's "whole" (to use Hannah More's words) connotes difference, matter, the body, the temporal, facticity; but the engenderment of the female simultaneously involves the loss of the literal, the creation of language as mediation and metaphoricity, so that the feminine is also associated with the figural as perversity, deviation and derivation.<sup>16</sup>

'Woman' may be either/and matter or decoration, either Hegel's "plant-like" figures, or "cow-like", as Toril Moi puts it ("Patriarchal Thought" 195), or Hazlitt's harlots. This bifurcated view of woman also informs the cultural history of woman's association with nature. As I suggested in the previous chapter, woman's place is at the negative pole of a series of binary oppositions. The feminine form - so fluid that it can fill any desired shape - is traditionally used as a metaphor for nature, which acts as a surrogate mother for the male subject/creator; female nature is nurturing and life-giving, certainly in much of the poetry of the male Romantics (see Chapter One). Yet the unruly female body is also mirrored in perceptions of nature as excess, as

wild, destructive and uncivilized; in her association with artifice, woman denaturalizes nature. Constructed as the 'Other' to culture - as nature/body - woman in the history of Western thought is 'object' for the male subject, an entity to be colonized, fetishized, disempowered, domesticated.<sup>17</sup>

It is precisely because of this bifurcation, this fissure within a figure, that women and flowers perform as a 'supplement'. As a third or plural term (though clearly not a third term in a traditional system of dialectics), they destabilize the binary systems which operate through such oppositions as the central and the peripheral, the pure and the contaminated, the natural and the unnatural. As I will demonstrate, in De Quincey's texts women and flowers frustrate the ideal unity of the male subject.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Those parasitical thoughts, feelings, digressions, which climb  
up with bells and blossoms round about the arid stock.*

Thomas De Quincey

In a well-known passage in the "Introductory Notice" to the Suspiria de Profundis De Quincey uses the metaphor of flowers to describe the subject and style of his own narrative:

The whole course of this narrative resembles, and was meant to resemble, a caduceus wreathed about with meandering ornaments, or the shaft of a tree's stem hung round and surmounted with some vagrant parasitical plant. The mere medical subject of the opium answers to the dry withered pole, which shoots all the rings of the flowering plants, and seems to do so by some dexterity of its own; whereas, in fact, the plant and its tendrils have curled round the sullen

cylinder by mere luxuriance of *theirs* ...The ugly pole ...is there only for support. Not the flowers are for the pole, but the pole is for the flowers. Upon the same analogy view me, as one ...making verdant and gay with the life of flowers, murderous spears and halberts - things that express death in their origin ...things that express ruin in their use. The true object in my 'Opium Confessions' is not the naked physiological theme - on the contrary, *that* is the ugly pole, the murderous spear, the halbert - but those musical variations upon the theme - those parasitical thoughts, feelings, digressions, which climb up with bells and blossoms round about the arid stock; ramble away from it at times with perhaps too rank a luxuriance. (93-94)

These meandering ornaments are like Dorothy Wordsworth's sensitive grafts, but the implied significance of forest and foliage has been mixed up ("Not the flowers are for the pole, but the pole is for the flowers"). The aporetic horror is engendered not merely by the inversion whereby the essential is seen as accessory, a transference of significance that would enable difference to be re-stabilized as opposition, but in the slipperiness of the deconstruction of difference, that is, what remains perceived as the accessory (the floral) is also perceived as the essential. De Quincey describes the impotent centre as "the shaft of a tree's stem", "the dry withered pole", "the sullen cylinder", "the ugly pole"; evidence of the availability of the phallic symbolism of these terms may be confirmed by reference to John Cleland's Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure (1748-9), in which these nouns are (among the many) euphemisms for the penis (though, in contrast to De Quincey, the adjectival appendages in the novel are characterized by a quality of glorious inflation). The supremacy of the centre (and

all the prestigious terms of binary oppositions which this term comprehends) cannot hold - it is exposed as a cultural phallacy, mere "arid stock" (this phrase echoing the description of Wordsworth as "arid rock"; the second passage accentuates my earlier doubts about male potency). Instead, we have a profusion of "meandering ornaments", "parasitical plant[s]", "tendrils [which] have curled round the sullen cylinder", "bells and blossoms". Flowers here are (self-)contradictory, perverse signs, figures of a mutability which might be represented by the unstable opposition "verdant"/"rank", which inscribes flowers as both fresh and foul (obviously, the primary contextual meaning of "rank" is 'overgrown', but other connotations persist, though under erasure); flowers are life-giving, yet the pole around which they are entwined is "dry [and] withered". The feminine plant generates an excess of signifiers, the entangling of near-synonymous terms: "meandering", "vagrant" and "ramble" all point to an erratic or irregular wandering. Tautology overruns any sense of teleology. Where Hannah More, with her desire for an "undeviating course", voices the ideology of masculinity, De Quincey produces what Baudelaire considered a "*feminine style*" (qtd. in McFarland 97).<sup>18</sup>

Throughout the passage the reader finds inscriptions of the ornamental, the sinuous and the serpent-like (as well as the obvious reference to the caduceus, "wreathed", for example, derives from the Old English "to writhe"). The OED cites a Miltonic usage of the verb "to curl" which prefigures De Quincey's: "So varied hee [the serpent], and of his tortuous Train Curld many a wanton wreath". As well as serpents, De Quincey's words evoke an image of curled or ringleted hair, hinting at a combination of Eve and the serpent (think of the Renaissance paintings in which the serpent has Eve's face). Perhaps these "tendrils" also trace the serpentine ringlets of

the Medusa. I will come back to the significance of the Medusa, especially in her Freudian incarnation; here I want to cite two intertexts that will buttress my arguments about the threat to masculine subjectivity encoded in the wayward rambling of flowers.

Dorothy Wordsworth notes in her Alfoxden Journal (1798):

*January 22nd.* Walked through the wood to Holford. The ivy twisting round the oaks like bristled serpents. The day cold - a warm shelter in the hollies, capriciously bearing berries. Query: Are the male and female flowers on separate trees? (Journals 1)

Wordsworth's speculations on gender and flowers resonate with the De Quincey passage under analysis, in the analogy between the ivy and serpents, in the capriciousness of the holly which carries connotations of femininity, arbitrariness, and irrationality (De Quincey elsewhere links the "capricious" with feminine "coy[ness]" [Confessions 154]), and most significantly, in the query about the difference between male and female flowers which, as in Linneus and Darwin, suggests the recognition that there are no visible marks to ground this demarcation. Dorothy Wordsworth views the serpentine ivy with a naturalist's detachment; Rebecca Hey in The Moral of Flowers (1833) spins a narrative out of a natural detail. "We are indebted", she writes, "to the ivy for the picturesque beauty it throws around every object to which it attaches itself"; "it decks indiscriminately 'the loftiest height' and 'the humblest grave'" (45-46). Hey, it seems, is praising the egalitarian sensibilities of the ivy, but her reference to the indiscriminate pre-echoes the promiscuous entangling of differences effected by De Quincey's parasitical plant. Interestingly, the poem which Hey appends to her short essay on the ivy is a romance story which casts the ivy as

a female lover entwined around a masculine arch or column. This is a story of unmanning: the woman's love, like the ivy, remains "unshaken", "Around its earliest prop still cling[ing]", while the decay of the prop itself is analogous to what Hey calls the "waning splendour" of "manhood", the loss of "proud manhood's strength" (47).<sup>19</sup> I would argue that De Quincey's 'maleness' is textually (and existentially) unstable, and that this facilitates his playing out of a similarly emasculating drama.

At times, De Quincey's voice rings with the tones of nineteenth century masculinity (or, at the least, strives to compete on this terrain), as in the 'clubmanese' of "The Palimpsest" section of the Suspiria, wherein he patronizes female educational aspirations, or the glow of superiority that emanates from his recollections of going down from Oxford recorded in The English Mail-Coach (though it's important to note that the implicit sexual politics here are inflected by the explicit discourse of class). In his essay, "Style", De Quincey asks his male reader, "Would you desire at this day to read our noble language in its native beauty, picturesque from idiomatic propriety, racy in its phraseology, delicate yet sinewy in its composition?" (Jordan 66-67). To satisfy this desire, he advocates the violation of female letters, advising his reader to "steal the mail-bags, and break open all the letters in female handwriting" (Jordan 64). De Quincey can only appropriate or "borrow" the 'natural' "mother tongue": "I often borrow their seals from young ladies - when closing my letters" (Suspiria 147). De Quincey's Lovelacean gesture of opening the letters of the 'other' scripts a sexual, as well as a textual, penetration (enforcing the link between corporeal and corpus). Most disturbingly, De Quincey's narratives are strewn with the bodies of dead women, replicating the pattern that Elaine Showalter has annotated in nineteenth century novels (in A Literature of Their Own). As Mary Jacobus observes, "women in his

writing are especially accident prone" (Romanticism 133). On the other hand, as Eve Sedgwick observes, De Quincey "seems normally to have taken the women around him with a good deal of seriousness, to have been unusually open to their intellectual and emotional influence" (Coherence 74). He takes Dorothy Wordsworth's writing seriously, and indeed, writing himself in the 'minor' art of prose in an age of luminary poets, may have felt himself outside the mainstream/malestream genre.<sup>20</sup> De Quincey distinguishes himself from Wordsworth's "masculine and Roman harshness"; his "self-bafflement" makes him a textual double of Dorothy Wordsworth, of whom De Quincey writes that "[a]t times, the self-counteraction and self-baffling of her feelings, caused her ...to stammer", which suggests that he identified both with her repressed energy and with her secondary role vis-a-vis William (Recollections 319,207,131-32). He is content that his "infant feelings were moulded by the gentlest of sisters, not by horrid pugilistic brothers" (Suspiria 96). Like Keats, his stature is diminutive, failing to conform to ideals of masculinity. De Quincey's is a fragile masculinity.<sup>21</sup> He is susceptible to the feminine. The dark side of this receptivity is the possibility of parasitical infestation by a feminine foliage/figure, which erodes the grounds and bounds of masculinity.<sup>22</sup>

There are provocative parallels between De Quincey's 'parasitical' figure and the rhetoric of certain contemporary literary theorists, and a short digression into recent inscriptions of this trope may help to illuminate the sexual politics that are involved in its usage. In his essay, "The Critic as Host", Hillis Miller discusses the image of deconstructive criticism (as portrayed by Wayne Booth and M.H. Abrams) as "'parasitical'" on the "'obvious or univocal reading'" of a text (217).<sup>23</sup> In this view, deconstruction threatens to contaminate "pure" (sic) literary criticism. Miller's



aim is to deconstruct the binary oppositions purveyed by these other critics, but, interestingly, there are unassimilated traces of masculine paranoia in his De Quinceyan obsession with invasive, feminine foliage:

"Parasitical" - the word suggests the image of "the obvious or univocal reading" as the mighty oak, rooted in the solid ground, endangered by the insidious twining around it of deconstructive ivy. That ivy is somehow feminine, secondary, defective, or dependent. It is a clinging vine, able to live no other way but by drawing the lifesap of its host, cutting off its light and air. I think of Hardy's The Ivy-Wife ...

(Miller 218)

Though I am indebted to Miller's subsequent argument, in which he deconstructs the difference between host and parasite, Barbara Johnson nevertheless rightly observes of Miller's essay "how effortlessly the vegetal metaphor is sexualised" (World 35). In other words, in articulating his parodic vision of literary studies in terms of gender difference, Miller both intensifies the anxiety evident in the primary metaphor of host and parasite, and reproduces classic phallogentric discourse: the description of the feminine as "defective" and "dependent" is reminiscent of Hegel and Burke, and locates Miller in a line of masculine thought extending back to Aristotle and to early Christian writers. The intrication of the feminine and the parasitical is a subset of this discourse, appearing in texts as disparate as Wollstonecraft's Rights of Woman, in which she criticizes those fragile females who "cling" with "parasitical tenacity" to male support (153), to Jonathan Culler's On Deconstruction: "in Freud's writings the feminine is treated as supplementary, parasitic" (167).<sup>24</sup> In the passage cited above, Hillis Miller produces a nightmarish version of De Quincey's vision, or, rather, he

makes explicit the danger enfolded in the "too rank a luxuriance" of De Quincey's parasitical plant which draws the lifesap from the host, reducing it to a "dry withered pole". Miller describes the parasite as an invading "alien" but then proposes that the "obvious or univocal reading" (the host) may "itself be the uncanny alien which is so close it cannot be seen as strange" (218). What is uncanny, finally, about the relationship between host and parasite, and, implicitly between male and female, is that "each is already inhabited by the other as difference from itself" (Johnson, World 35). Miller's metaphors take a turn which helps to map out my reading of De Quincey: the twining of the deconstructive ivy around the oak - or the parasitical plant around the pole - engenders, I will argue, a paradigm of self-difference, a destabilization of the univocality of gender.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Witchcraft has seized upon you, nympholepsy has struck you.*  
Thomas De Quincey

In Recollections, De Quincey recounts the moving story of his attachment to Kate Wordsworth. He is "fascinated" by her flower-like innocence and independence, citing Wordsworth's lines (from "Characteristics of a Child Three Years Old") on "'this happy creature [who] of herself / Was all sufficient: solitude to her / Was blithe society'" (371). De Quincey ascribes "some witchery to the nature and manners of this innocent child". What is the attraction of such self-possession? Freud theorizes about the appeal of the narcissistic woman who attains the "self-sufficiency" of loving only herself; such women - along with children, cats, large beasts of prey, criminals, and "humorists" - represent a tantalising vision of paradisaical completeness from which the lover is excluded, the satisfaction of his desire eternally deferred ("On Narcissism" 14:69). The self-sufficient, self-satisfying woman eludes the grasp of the

phallogocentric system that would put her in her proper place, for she is impenetrable, indifferent to male desire. I recall that De Quincey has to "entice" Kate to share his walks and his bed.<sup>25</sup>

Stephen Spector, in his brilliant reading of this episode, also turns to Freud's essay, but he chooses to quote a line which focusses on "'the charm of the child'", on "'*his* narcissism, *his* self-contentment'" (Spector 504; my italics).<sup>26</sup> The fact that it is a female child in De Quincey (a nymph, no less) is a matter of indifference. Spector argues that Kate's self-sufficiency makes her "almost a double of her father ... She serves as a substitute, a replacement for Wordsworth, both of whom attract De Quincey because they seem to possess what he cannot have". He elaborates the ties between De Quincey's textualization of Kate Wordsworth and Wordsworth's "Lucy" poems, positing that "the entire story ... solicits an interpretation as a reading of Wordsworth", for example, as "a deconstructive reading of the Lucy poems" (503,506). Spector's substitution argument is, at least initially, seductive: we know that De Quincey was infatuated with Wordsworth - he idolized the latter's work, often quoting or alluding to Wordsworth's poems in his own texts; he "trembled", lover-like, in "intense expectation" of their first meeting, and he went to live in Dove Cottage (Recollections 128). Spector's subtle deconstructive reading is, on one level, a sensitive response to De Quincey's own obsession with the textualization of experience, but on another it accedes to what Barbara Johnson has called the "patriarchal filiation" of the male (Yale) deconstructionists (World 36). For example, while De Quincey views Kate as an "impersonation of the dawn", an Auroran acolyte, Spector argues that De Quincey "had linked Catherine to the *masterlink*, the *master trope*, the sun" , thus connecting her explicitly with a male luminary (505, my italics).

Though it is true that De Quincey supplements his vision of Kate as the dawn, observing "the visionary sort of connection which ... she assumed with the summer sun" (Recollections 372), and that elsewhere in his essay Spector acknowledges the Kate/dawn link, his rhetoric here may be read symptomatically. It is surely not insignificant that Spector's theorizing eliminates the (narcissistic) woman, leaving only what Eve Sedgwick has called male "homosocial desire", the bonding between De Quincey, Wordsworth and Spector.<sup>27</sup> Though I go on to trace the 'feminization' of De Quincey, this is not to negate a reading of De Quincey as a homoaesthete with eyes only for Wordsworth, but it is to question that effacement of woman - the way in which woman's 'difference' is made unnoticeable - by which the homosocial / homoaesthetic bond is naturalized. In other words, I want to question the patriarchal fabrication of an 'in-difference' to the feminine difference on which it is grounded. I will shift the focus of the critical gaze, privileging those marginal details which may be connoted as 'feminine'.

It is worth noting that the 'blind spot' of Spector's critique is replicated in other criticism of De Quincey. John Beer's commentary, too, is marked by the desire to elide female sexuality (sometimes, sexuality, per se) from De Quincey's texts. The repression of female sexuality often entails "making a nun out of a nymph" (Johnson, World 34). Beer analyses De Quincey's description of his feelings after the disappearance of Ann of Oxford Street: De Quincey wishes that "the benediction of a heart oppressed with gratitude ... might have power given it from above to chase - to haunt - to way-lay - to overtake - to pursue thee into the central darkness of a London brothel or (if it were possible) into the darkness of the grave" (Confessions 22). Beer observes that these words (chase, haunt, waylay) "look strangely at odds

with the rest of the passage, suggesting as they do a language of sexual pursuit", but in mitigation he proposes that "De Quincey is in fact haunted by the opening stanza of Wordsworth's 'She Was a Phantom of Delight'" (175-176).<sup>28</sup> For Spector, Kate is a substitute for Wordsworth; in Beer's reading, though there is no disputing the verbal echo, a Wordsworth poem usurps the place of the prostitute ("De Quincey is *in fact* haunted"). Beer argues that De Quincey "sees the imagery as transcending female beauty"; the gender politics are despecified in order to celebrate "a love of the heart between *human beings*" (176,168; my italics - the heart displaces other organs of feeling). Earlier in his essay, Beer proposes that, "Like others in that age he [De Quincey] found in such a relationship of the heart [the reference here is to De Quincey's sister, Elizabeth] qualities which *seemed* to him to transcend those of sexual attraction" (169, my italics); "De Quincey could hardly have lived in close association with these men [Wordsworth and Coleridge] ... without picking up some of the implications of a love of the heart which *seemed* to transcend sexual desire" (171, my italics). The subjunctives inscribe the possibility of non-transcendence, but this is an (unconscious?) insight which Beer sublimates in favour of the certainty that "it was fully in consonance" with the "Wordsworthian programme" of "cultivating intense personal relationships", that De Quincey "should have fallen in love, *sexlessly*, with Catherine, the Wordsworth's three-year old daughter" (170, my italics). However, to *this* reader, De Quincey's relation with Catherine, as it is textually mediated, is laced with the language of desire: "ties of passion", "excess of love", "entice", "sick, frantic yearning", "frenzy of grief". Beer has to ignore the erotic connotations of De Quincey's words in order to validate a transcendental trajectory.

The texture of De Quincey's erotic obsession should become clearer (if more

complex) if we return to the episode dealing with Kate's death. Her death does not sever the "ties of passion", for the ghosts of self-sufficient tropes continue to haunt De Quincey:

my eye was haunted ... with a facility, but at times also with a necessity, for weaving, out of a few simple elements, a perfect picture of little Kate in the attitude and onward motion of walking ... usually the first hint upon which the figure arose commenced in wild plants, such as tall ferns, or the purple flowers of the foxglove; but, whatever might be the colours or the forms, uniformly the same little full-formed figure arose, uniformly dressed in the little blue-gown and black skirt of Westmoreland, and uniformly with an air of advancing motion.

(Recollections 373)

In the involuted folds of this passage, Kate Wordsworth is female form, (rhetorical) figure, and flower, the enwreathing of these elements enacted by alliteration and repetition.<sup>29</sup> She is always observed in proximity with the wild plants, and De Quincey's homonymic play generates a picture of Kate as a/rose. De Quincey is conscious of her female fashioning, her child-woman body (a "full-formed figure", the conjunction of adjective and noun semantically overdetermining her shape; the figure is also a playful Platonism); he is attentive to the details of dress (falling for a girl in uniform?). The figure is always advancing, provoking desire but deferring satisfaction.<sup>30</sup> De Quincey is fixated, a condition emblemized by his adherence to the consonant /f/ which takes on a talismanic force in this passage. The flowers of rhetoric are involved in a process outwith De Quincey's control (he is "haunted ... with a necessity"). This trope flaunts its forms, it turns and turns again, feeding De

Quincey's "frenzy of grief". By night, De Quincey embraces Kate's grave - "I ... stretched myself every night, for more than two months running, upon her grave; in fact, often passed the night upon her grave" - as though his body can stretch across the abyss of death and prevent mortification or stasis; by day, he is haunted by her figure. De Quincey analyzes his "self-surrender to passion", a "self-surrender" which inversely (or perversely) mimics the self-sufficiency of the female figure, calling it a "luxury" ("I cling to it as a luxury"), with all the connotations of excess, sensuality, even femininity that that word brings.<sup>31</sup> Is femininity contagious?

De Quincey writes of being "under the possession of some internal nervous malady, that made each respiration which I drew an act of separate anguish" (Recollections 373). It is as though he is being asphyxiated by a parasitical plant. I would speculate that these respiratory problems affect De Quincey's eloquence, constraining his wit, and producing a kind of stuttering (making him more like Dorothy Wordsworth, who, as De Quincey tells us, is afflicted with a nervous stammer [Recollections 131-32]). The initial onset of the ailment involves "a sting as it were, of some stationary torment left behind", its departure leaves De Quincey partially immobilised "with difficulty to stand or walk" (373-74). In a type of mirror narcissism, the death of the other is experienced as a death of the self. De Quincey's malady is a mimicry of Kate's illness, for she was "not what could be called paralysed, but suffering a sort of atony or imperfect distribution of vital power" (371). De Quincey's loss of physical and linguistic mobility may be attributed to what might be called the 'Medusa-effect'. Earlier in this chapter, I postulated traces of the Medusa in the 'parasitical plant' passage; here, De Quincey stiffens like those spectators turned to stone by the Medusa head. Moreover, he informs us that he was

"blindly, doatingly, in a servile degree, devoted to this one affection", a blindness which, is traditionally symbolic of castration (372). Thus, De Quincey's transfixed attention to the feminine threatens to 'unman' him, to reduce him to what he describes as "languishing impotence", a state which names the loss of fixed ego boundaries and of a secure social identity.

There is, however, an ambiguity at the heart of the Freudian text which replicates a double movement in De Quincey. Freud argues that "the terror of Medusa is [thus] a terror of castration that is linked to the sight of something", though this is an absence (of the penis) rather than a presence ("something") ("Medusa's Head" 18:273). The disturbingly split/multiple female genitalia (or "plural" as Irigaray puts it in her revalorisation of this "sight") are metamorphosed into the snakes which are a "multiplication of penis symbols". The sight of the Medusa offers both "horror" and "consolation to the spectator": the snakes offer a replacement of the penis, covering the disturbing 'lack' of femininity, and, most significantly, Freud reads the spectator's horrified "stiffening" as a trope for erection, "he is still in possession of a penis, and the stiffening reassures him of this fact". In other words, and to return to De Quincey, this spectacle threatens to 'unman' him, but it also, paradoxically, promises to 'man' him: De Quincey's obsession with Kate involves the identification of the subject with the object of desire, with a corresponding loss of phallic authority (or castration), but the very fact of obsession *is* the fact of difference, so that the separateness of the self is perpetually reconstituted and a sense of mastery is reinscribed.<sup>32</sup>

The gender destabilization of the 'Medusa-effect' is reinflected in the way in which De Quincey's passion for the dead Kate Wordsworth is inscribed on, or within,



his body: "I felt, to my horror, the sting as it were, of some stationary torment" (Recollections 373). The word "sting" recurs elsewhere in De Quincey: in "The Affliction of Childhood" (a section of the Suspiria de Profundis) De Quincey writes of "the earliest instances in [his] life which left stings in [his] memory"; these instances are associated with the feminine, being "a remarkable dream of terrific grandeur about a favourite nurse" and "the fact of having connected a profound sense of pathos with the reappearance, very early in the spring, of some crocuses" (Masson I:32-33).<sup>33</sup> In the same text, De Quincey mourns deeply for his sister: "when I was told insultingly to cease 'my girlish tears', that word 'girlish' had no sting for me, except as a verbal echo to the one eternal thought of my heart - " (Suspiria 111). There is no "sting" here, no movement from outer to inner, for the word "girlish" echoes a feminine that has already been introjected (but which is under De Quincey's control). But a couple of pages earlier, De Quincey had pondered on "those dreadful words of St. Paul applied to my sister ... For here lay the sting of it, viz. in the fatal words - 'We shall be *changed*.' How was the unity of my interest in her to be preserved, if she were to be altered, and no longer reflect in her sweet countenance the traces that were sculptured on my heart?" (109). De Quincey's investment in the woman is narcissistic ("*my* interest", "*my* heart"), his desire seeks a reflected self. But this mimetic guarantee of his subjectivity is shattered by the possibility of an alien image ("if she were to be altered") - then the internal inscriptions of femininity would have no external image to ground them, and onto which De Quincey can displace his own femininity, that is, another body (differently sexed) which embodies his own 'Otherness'.

In the Recollections De Quincey is horrified by penetration ("I felt, to my

horror, the sting").<sup>34</sup> I noted above that he ascribes some "witchery" to Kate Wordsworth, while in an earlier essay on William Wordsworth, De Quincey writes:

If there be an enchantress's spell yet surviving in this age of ours, it is the haughty grace of maidenly pride - the womanly sense of dignity, even when most in excess, and expressed in the language of scorn - which *tortures* a man and *lacerates* his heart, at the same time that it *pierces* him with admiration. (Recollections 185, my italics)

Significantly, this is the penetration of the male by female power, a sexual reversal to which Wordsworth is apparently immune, but De Quincey is drawn to this "spectacle", overwhelmed by the 'excess' of a feminine which is also phallic and experiencing an erotic wounding from which he has no recourse (Recollections 186). To annotate this laceration is to acknowledge the 'castration' of the Subject, the split within the self.<sup>35</sup>

One way of describing De Quincey's textual sexuality is to invoke paradigms of masochism: "she who spares a man the agitations of this thralldom, robs him no less of its divinest transports" (Recollections 186). Eve Sedgwick, commenting on "the pervasive masochistic component in De Quincey's writing", reminds us that "it is important to realize that passivity and paralysis can be ...unspeakably delicious as well as unspeakably painful" (Coherence 72). Like the "sting" which penetrates the male, masochism poses the masculine subject as feminine: in a theatrical, even melodramatic, identification with female passivity, masculine subjects, according to Adela Pinch, "transfer themselves into the part of a woman" (843).<sup>36</sup>

De Quincey describes his condition as a case of "nympholepsy".<sup>37</sup> In "The Affliction of Childhood", the signs of nympholepsy are "a disease which seems no

disease; ...a languishing which, from its very sweetness, perplexes the mind and is fancied to be very health" (Suspiria 119). In such an instance, "Witchcraft has seized upon you, nympholepsy has struck you ...Sweet becomes the grave." Nympholepsy is an uncanny disease, a languishing that masquerades as health, and which collapses the gap between erotic and death wishes - desire for the "sweet faces" becomes synonymous with desire for the darkness of the grave. It is, in other words, a condition which confounds differences. The perplexity does not stop here, for the signifier "nymph", as the root of "nympholepsy", brings with it a host of unruly cultural associations. The original Greek word means 'bride', but the OED cites an obsolete anatomical usage of the plural "nympha". This angle was picked up by seventeenth century anatomists who used the term "nymph" as a name for the labia minora: "Nymph: little pieces of Flesh in a Woman's Secrets", a secret 'something' that subverts Freud's "nothing to see" (Blancard's Physical Dictionary, 1693; qtd. in Mills, Womanwords 181). *Nymphaea* is the botanical name for a waterlily: in Bataille's "The Language of Flowers", the waterlily signifies indifference (qtd. in Sartiliot 68), while for Mrs. Hey, "if the rose may be the queen of the bower, the water lily may certainly aspire to be queen of the stream" (95). These notions of the regal, and of indifference, recall the self-sufficiency ascribed to Kate Wordsworth (as well as to Freud's narcissistic woman). The invaginated textual folds of the word "nymph" inscribe the traces of female autoeroticism, a resistance to appropriation by the phallogocentric system which would reduce woman to a lesser and 'lacking' man. Kate, as nymph, cannot be securely objectified. Moreover, I would argue that "nympholepsy", which classically names a male, voyeuristic desire for young girls, a frenzy inspired by the unattainable, and "nymphomania", that is, uncontrollable

female desire, may be seen as mirror images of each other.<sup>38</sup> To speculate on this mirroring might lead to the suggestion that the voyeur is implicated in the feminine which he objectifies. Typically, De Quincey confounds any binary opposition of difference, characterising his relation to Wordsworth as one of "nympholepsy" (Recollections 119).

Near the end of the lakeland essay which documents the life and death of Kate Wordsworth, De Quincey inscribes a regaining of fluency. His "awful malady" and his "grief for" and "remembrance of" Kate Wordsworth disappear together: "The traces of her innocent features were utterly washed away from my heart; she might have been dead for a thousand years, so entirely abolished was the last lingering image of her face or figure" (Recollections 374). The memory of Kate is effaced so that De Quincey can be regenerated. But, of course, the "traces" of Kate are (re)inscribed in the very fact of writing: De Quincey uses the past tense while writing from an unspoken present in which Kate's death clearly does make a difference. In the Confessions, De Quincey tells us "that there is no such thing as *forgetting* possible to the mind; a thousand accidents may, and will interpose a veil between our present consciousness and the secret inscriptions on the mind; accidents of the same sort will also rend away this veil; but alike, veiled or unveiled, the inscription remains forever" (69). Deferring commentary on this rhetoric of veiling, I want to observe here that De Quincey's desire to suppress the feminine, to put (female) sexuality under control, is, necessarily, imperfectly fulfilled: at the margins of the text, there remain displaced reminders of femininity. De Quincey writes of his radical amnesia: "The little memorials of which her mother had given me, as, in particular, a pair of her red morocco shoes, won not a sigh from me as I looked at them" (Recollections 374).

This detail, from which De Quincey perversely takes away significance, continues to haunt me. To use De Quincey's word, I might say that it "stings" me, or, in Barthesian terminology, that it is the "punctum" of the text.<sup>39</sup> It's a little detail which is excessive, extraneous to the episode, that type of "disorderly" detail which Jane Gallop would call "truly sexy" (*Thinking* 48).

By way of linguistic coincidence, Freud in his essay on "Fetishism" remarks that "the horror of castration has set up a *memorial* to itself in the creation of this substitute", that is, the fetish substitutes for the maternal phallus/penis which "the little boy once believed in and ... does not want to give up" (21:352-53, my italics). "It remains a token of triumph", Freud theorizes, "over the threat of castration and a protection against it". Shoes are a popular fetish, synecdochically representing the woman's genitals: "the subject's interest comes to halt half-way, as it were; it is as though the last impression before the uncanny and traumatic one is retained as a fetish" (354). In other words, the fetish acts as a screen, or, to pick up De Quincey's rhetoric, an erotic veiling of the real female genitals. Like Freud's patients, De Quincey might well "praise the way in which it [the fetish] eases [his] erotic life" (351).<sup>40</sup> Like the red shoes in De Quincey's text, the fetish is located in the margins: "As a rule ... the fetish made its appearance in analysis as a subsidiary finding".

Before moving on to discuss The English Mail-Coach, I would like to comment on my use of Freudian psychoanalysis (especially since I return to Freud in the next section). I will also offer some self-criticism of the implications of my methodology for feminist reading. Psychoanalysis is not invoked here in the traditional sense of a pure metalanguage offering an insight into the existential 'truth'

of De Quincey's fixation; rather my purpose is to trace the rhetorical parallels, the contiguity, between De Quincey's texts and the scenarios of psychoanalysis, both of which are concerned with the cultural/linguistic construction of gender. The symptoms, repressions and representations of psychoanalysis are themselves textual, 'slips' of an unconscious pen; Freud himself observed that his case histories 'read like short stories'. The main problem with the textualization of fetishism is that it repeats the movement inherent in fetishism itself, that is, it acts as a double displacement, twice distancing us from the 'real' Kate Wordsworth, and, in a sense, consigning her to death again. In this chapter, I am concerned with the appropriation, aestheticisation, and fetishization of the female body by the male subject, and with the ways in which this perversely destabilises male ego boundaries; but, as I suggested in Chapter Two, the risk here is of colluding with the effacement of women in the triumphant production of deconstructive 'Woman' (De Quincey, ultimately, in this instance). How, then, to negotiate between aesthetics and ethics, or between "the formalist and the ideological".<sup>41</sup> One way, perhaps, is to emphasize the body as the site where the figurative becomes literal or material. Though the body is always already culturally coded, though it is not outside of representation, it is possible to interrogate the rhetoric of representation for those instances when the flesh becomes word or the word becomes flesh. In the next section, I turn from the red shoes, those poignant material "memorials" of an absent body, to De Quincey's use of flowers as figures of the symbolization or displaced representation of female sexuality. The instability of this trope, which is (un)grounded, in De Quincey, in the shifting space between the real body and its image, helps me to keep the existential within my field of vision.<sup>42</sup>

*A strange sort of contradictory life.*  
Thomas De Quincey

The full-bloom of De Quinceyan fetishism is exposed in The English-Mail Coach. At the beginning of the "Dream Fugue" section, De Quincey recalls his vision of the woman in a gig, whose fate forms the subject of "The Vision of Sudden Death". He makes reference to "the shadows of ... averted signs" and provides an explanatory footnote: "I read the course and changes of the lady's agony in the succession of her involuntary gestures; but let it be remembered that I read all this from the rear, never once catching the lady's full face, and even her profile imperfectly" (Mail-Coach 225). This is an oblique vision, an imperfect glimpse which is doubly mediated ("shadows", "averted"). The vocabulary of fetishism articulates the inattentive strategy by which the subject distances himself from any of the immediate implications of perception, that is, the perception of female 'lack', the mutilated female body. The distraught figure of this unknown woman is subsumed into De Quincey's dreams, metamorphosing into all the frail female figures of the "Dream Fugue".

However, a more destabilizing glimpse of the feminine in this text is provided by the details of the transformation of Miss Fanny of the Bath Road. The narrative itself structurally mimics the fetishist's glimpse, for we glance at Fanny four paragraphs before the episode proper begins (193-94). The language of flowers characterizes De Quincey's description of Fanny, as it marks his obsession with Kate Wordsworth. Fanny is perennially "blooming", and thus her figure maintains its life in his dreams thirty-five years after his intermittent flirtation with her. The "rosy blossoms" on her face derive from her "youth and innocence, and from the fountains of the dawn" (196); waiting for her grandfather, the mail coachman, she is "a constant

watcher for the dawn, and for the London mail that in summer months entered about dawn into the lawny thickets of Marlborough Forest" (194-95). The topography here invites a symbolic reading (later, De Quincey will describe the thickets as "dewy" [199]). The rose/Fanny dyad transfixes De Quincey, who is mesmerised by the almost "infinite iteration" of luxuriant plants:

Out of the darkness, if I happen to call up the image of Fanny from thirty-five years back, arises suddenly a rose in June; or, if I think for an instant of the rose in June, up rises the heavenly face of Fanny. One after the other, like the antiphonies in a choral service, rises Fanny and the rose in June, then back again the rose in June and Fanny. Then they come both together, as in a chorus; roses and Fannies, Fannies and roses, without end - thick as blossoms in paradise. (198)

Fanny is figured, exorbitantly, as a rose. In Mrs. Hey's rather De Quinceyan rhetoric, "So many are the classical legends and poetical associations connected with the rose, that they crowd almost too thickly on the memory, baffling it by their very profusion" (79). Roses have been associated throughout history with sainthood (from Dante's mystic rose to the wild-rose bush of De Quincey's transatlantic contemporary, Hawthorne), and De Quincey's religious rhetoric draws on this tradition ("heavenly face", "the antiphonies in a choral service", "blossoms in paradise"). It suggests a desire to sanctify the heart's affections, but this language also enacts the dematerialization of the 'other' (the return of the nun). The rose is a slippery signifier, connoting secular as well as divine love, and it recurs as a traditional emblem of romance, and of sexuality (we recall that The English Mail-Coach begins with talk of a marriage). In traditional ballads, such as Waller's "Song. Goe lovely



Rose", the woman and the rose resemble each other in terms of feminine beauty ("sweet and fair"), but this analogy (though ironized in Waller - "How sweet and fair she *seems* to be") is founded on the Christian association of the rose with purity. Roses may be signifiers of the maidenhead: in As You Like It, "He that the sweetest rose will find / Must find love's prick, and Rosalind" (3.2.107-8), while Naomi Schor argues that a "black rose ... is the metaphor for the female sexual organ that [is] disseminated throughout Flaubert's writings" ("Fetishism" 92).<sup>43</sup> Wetenhall Wilkes deploys the trope of the rose in June in his conduct text: the woman who lives up to the rules of chastity "ever flourishes, like a rose in *June*, with all her virgin graces about her - sweet to the sense, and lovely to the eye" (A Letter of Genteel and Moral Advice, 1740; Jones 29). Shelley's poem "The Sensitive Plant" graphically unfolds the sexual symbolism, as well as linking the rose with a nymph:

And the rose like a nymph to the bath addrest,  
Which unveiled the depth of her glowing breast,  
Till, fold after fold, to the fainting air

The soul of her beauty and love lay bare: (11.29-32)

As in De Quincey, the rose provokes the miscegenation of discourses: "the *soul* of her beauty" is exposed.<sup>44</sup>

In the entanglement between the terms of a transcendent and an earthly desire in the De Quincey passage, the sexual resonances predominate, partly because of the happy coincidence of Fanny's name. The OED records that "fanny" is first used as a slang term for the female genitals in 1879, but I suspect that this is a somewhat belated recognition. Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure was published a century before De Quincey's text; Cleland's novel is a cornucopia of euphemisms for the

male and female genitalia, and it seems likely that the more commonly known title, Fanny Hill, had been assimilated into this field of meaning (particularly given the sexual connotations of 'hill' - as well as of 'fans' - in literary history).<sup>45</sup> De Quincey's essay "Introduction to the World of Strife" provides an appropriate metacomment: "I found, in almost everybody's words, an unintentional opening left for double interpretation. Undesigned equivocation prevails everywhere" (Masson I:77-78).<sup>46</sup>

De Quincey's representation of Fanny may be read, then, as a rhetorically overdetermined displacement of the fetishized part, the disembodied genitalia blossoming as the folds of a rose. Indeed, the very word "rose" is fetishized; as Roland Barthes puts it: "Desire is not in the text by the words which 'represent' it, which relate it, but by words sufficiently delineated, sufficiently brilliant, triumphant, to make themselves loved, in the fashion of fetishes" (qtd. in Gregory Ulmer 337). De Quincey's work, like Barthes's, proceeds through a series of such amorous infatuations (in De Quincey's case, infatuation with 'flower' words).

In Mary Ann Doane's words, fetishism involves "the ability to balance knowledge and belief", to simultaneously acknowledge and deny woman's castration, and hence "to maintain a distance from the lure of the image" (Desire to Desire 12). An homologous temporal disjunction matches the spatial distance, for De Quincey writes: "Did I then make love to Fanny? *mais oiu donc*; as much love as one *can* make whilst the mail is changing horses"; out of its abundance, the affair yields the moral that "the man making love ... ought to be made a ward of the General Post-Office, whose severe course of *timing* and periodical interruption might intercept many a foolish declaration" (Mail-Coach 196). The exigencies of the postal service

interrupt between desire and its full satisfaction, constantly renewing the pursuit for a perpetually lost object. There is no seven-year itch for De Quincey, only an endlessly repeatable scene of fetishized eroticism.<sup>47</sup>

De Quincey laments (tongue-in-cheek): "Roses, I fear, are degenerating", literally, departing from kind, "the Fannies of this island ...are not improving" (Mail-Coach 197-98). The fetishist must preserve the security of his distance from the 'real' body, the fetish must stay in its place, but the rose/Fanny fetish gets out of control, frustrating rather than facilitating male mastery of the feminine. De Quincey mixes memory and desire, and a monstrous regiment is engendered, for Fanny brings with her "a chain of signifiers" (Spector 518). "[B]y links of natural association she brings along with her a troop of dreadful creatures", perhaps the "new and monstrous phenomenon" to which De Quincey refers elsewhere (Masson 13:285; Suspiria 89). The randomness of the law of association is emphasized: "*by an accident of fanciful caprice*, she brought along with her into those dreams a troop of dreadful creatures" (Mail-Coach 195, my italics). This account of "the slight case of Miss Fanny on the Bath Road" is propelled by the erratic motor of free association (193). The first link is with Fanny's grandfather who, like Fanny herself, is described as "blooming", though his rosiness is artificially induced by alcohol rather than metonymically linked with the pink flush of dawn (196). His appearance demonstrates the transformations and substitutions associated with flowers, for in his "monstrous inaptitude for turning round", the coachman "too much resembled a crocodile"; when De Quincey "happen[s] to call up the image of Fanny", along with the ubiquitous roses "comes a venerable crocodile, in a royal livery of scarlet and gold ... and the crocodile is driving a four-in-hand from the box of the Bath mail" (198). This visionary mail-

coach arrives in Marlborough forest, where

the thickets are rich with roses; the roses call up (as ever) the sweet countenance of Fanny, who, being the granddaughter of a crocodile, awakens a dreadful host of wild semi-legendary animals - griffins, dragons, basilisks, sphinxes - till at length the whole vision of fighting images crowds into one towering armorial shield, a vast emblazonry of human charities and human loveliness that have perished, but quartered heraldically with unutterable horrors of monstrous and demoniac natures; whilst over all rises, as a surmounting crest, one fair female hand, with the fore-finger pointing, in sweet, sorrowful admonition, upwards to heaven, and having power ...to awaken the pathos that kills in the very bosom of the horrors that madden the grief that gnaws at the heart, together with the monstrous creations of darkness that shock the belief, and make dizzy the reason of man. (199)

In one sense, the overt logic of the text points to the transformation of the coachman as the signal for the generation of monsters, but this metamorphosis is occasioned by, and dependent on, Fanny's shape-shifting, that is, the "floral luxuriations" of the dream-text (200).<sup>48</sup> In the passage there are (again) provocative thickets embedded with roses; the roses disseminate monstrous signifiers which are framed by the image of an heraldic shield. The shield is "*quartered* heraldically" (my italics), demarcating the cross-coupling of "human charities and human loveliness" with "monstrous and demoniac natures". Just as images which are originally gay open into "sudden capacities of horror" during their evolution, so the monsters engendered are curiously self-divided, hybrids marked by "the horrid inoculation upon each other of

incompatible natures" (193,200). Above the armorial shield there is a "surmounting crest": a "fair female hand, with the forefinger pointing, in sweet, sorrowful admonition, upwards to heaven" (199). This hand, another fetishized object, acts as a sort of female signature on the shield - "surmounted" by the female hand, monstrosity comes under the aegis of the feminine.<sup>49</sup> As in the 'parasitical plant' passage, the feminine is marked by (linguistic) excess (here, the insistent layering of poetic devices, such as alliteration, assonance and consonance). Syntax, as well as signifiers, slides beyond De Quincey's control, disorientating and dissolving the implied subject of the discourse (see especially the convoluted syntax of the clause beginning "to awaken the pathos..."). This vision of the feminine, which eludes possession, makes 'male' Reason dizzy.

The horror does not stop here, for in the dizzying involutions of this section of the Mail-Coach the outside invades the inside, external horror devolves into an internal parasite, an alien difference *within* the self: "The dreamer finds housed within himself ... some horrid alien nature", which maintains "a secret and detestable commerce with his own heart" (201).<sup>50</sup> De Quincey often represents himself as a split, or doubled, subject. Fantasising about Wordsworth and the Lake District, he writes: "I viewed myself as a phantom-self - a second identity projected from my own consciousness, and already living amongst them!" (Recollections 120). The figure of the Dark Interpreter in the Suspiria is "originally a mere reflex of [his] inner nature", but, De Quincey tells us, "the Interpreter sometimes swerves out of my orbit, and mixes a little with alien natures. I do not always know him in these cases as my own parhelion" (Suspiria 156). But the passage in question unveils an unkindler graft, generating an interiorized, wayward split, a wound that cannot be sutured: De

Quincey ponders the curse that "the alien nature contradicts his own, fights with it, perplexes, and confounds it", and that, like the monstrous multiplicity of femininity (as it is culturally conceived), "not one alien nature, but two, but three, but four, but five, are introduced within what once he thought the inviolable sanctuary of himself" (Mail-Coach 201). As De Quincey anxiously writes elsewhere, "there might be supplements to supplements" (Suspiria 133). Contagious self-division defines this dangerous supplement within the self. The fetishist's protective distance from the object of desire collapses as the feminine is engrafted upon "inviolable" masculinity. Or, to put this another way, the fetish loses its metonymic efficacy, so that proximity rather than distance characterizes the relation between male and female subjects. Interestingly, this scenario of an alien within the body, an other within the self, is close to recent conceptualizations of maternity, particularly Kristeva's thesis that the maternal space is a place "simultaneously dual and alien"; "Within the body, growing as a graft, indomitable, there is an other" (Desire in Language 237).<sup>51</sup> The boundaries between self and other are destabilized, and the notions of a unitary, inviolable identity and a phallogentric order based on differentiation, are put in jeopardy.

"I was placed in a strange sort of contradictory life; feeling that things were and were not at the same instant; believing and not believing in the same breath" (Recollections 381). De Quincey is referring here to Wordsworth's "ridicule" of many books which he himself admired, and the ensuing "perplexity of mind which possessed [him]" because of the conflict between his powerful recollection of the books and "[his] blind and unquestioning veneration for Wordsworth". De Quincey's comment is striking as an almost textbook definition of fetishism ("He [the boy] has

retained that belief [that women have a penis], but he has also given it up" [Freud, "Fetishism" 21:353]). Note that De Quincey's figurative blindness inscribes the crisis of visibility that so is so central to Freud. In another Freudian text, Studies on Hysteria, Fraulein Elizabeth von R. is also in the "peculiar situation of knowing and at the same time not knowing", or, as Freud puts it in a footnote to the case of Miss Lucy R., that "strange state of mind in which one knows and does not know a thing at the same time" (2:165,117). Moreover, Freud posits that Elizabeth von R.'s "love for her brother-in-law was present in her consciousness like a foreign body", a formulation which is reminiscent of De Quincey's introjection of alien bodies (2:165).<sup>52</sup> There are other parallels: De Quincey and Freud's female hysterics share symptoms such as paralysis, stammering, hallucinations, nightmares, a general somatic excess, while Breuer's famous phrase "*Hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences*" could be De Quincey's epitaph (Freud 2:7). Freud, of course, later universalizes the problem of the impossibility of complete knowledge: the hysterical symptom of female sexuality yields the recognition of a split at the heart of being itself.<sup>53</sup> Freud also recognized that hysteria was not only a female condition, and he described cases of male hysteria. However, the case studies of the famous Studies on Hysteria are all of female patients and, etymologically, hysteria describes a disease of the uterus, and thus the name marks the specificity of the woman's body. Hysterical disturbance remains associated with the feminine.<sup>54</sup> I would argue, therefore, that the entanglement between the discourses of fetishism and hysteria remains provocative for reading De Quincey as - undecidably - male and/or female, fetishist and/or hysteric.

The focus on femininity (whether fetishized or as hysterical symptom) disrupts

stability, but the typical trajectory of a De Quincey text is to recuperate this threat, to regain a type of masculine order. For example, De Quincey "gloomily retires" from the gothic scene that I have analyzed as the deconstruction of gender opposition, opting for exclusion and repression - he shifts register, referring to the "*transfigured* coachman" and rewriting the "horror" as merely "playful" (Mail-Coach 201, my italics). Significantly, in Masson's edition, much of the final paragraph of this episode is relegated to a footnote; according to Masson, "this paragraph is but about one-fifth of the length of the corresponding paragraph as it appeared originally in Blackwood's, De Quincey's taste having led him, on revision in 1854, to cancel the other four-fifths as forced or irrelevant. The condensation was judicious for its particular purpose; but, as the original paragraph is too characteristic to be sacrificed altogether, we reproduce it here in detached form" (13:289-90). Deconstructive and psychoanalytic readings have taught critics to be attentive to the marginal (footnotes and the like). It is ironically appropriate, given the subject of this chapter, that the passage itself is fetishized in Masson, represented in "detached form", a supplement to the main text. Masson's own reading of De Quincey is judicious, for the notion that the latter erased some text because of its "irrelevance" is a gift for psychoanalytic reading. It was the only substantial cut De Quincey made to the essay, and this from a man who, though a congenital reviser of his own work, tended to add rather than to delete. Certainty is always only precariously generated out of the abyss of uncertainty.

\* \* \* \* \*

I want, finally, to comment on the pleasure a feminist reader may take in reading De Quincey; in particular, I want to situate the impropriety of flowers and fetishes within



the context of recent feminist theory. Fetishism has become critically fashionable, but the question remains as to whether the whole concept is inescapably contaminated by phallogentrism.<sup>55</sup> Is fetishism a masculine perversion, a male discourse? Do feminists really want to get involved here? As I suggested in Chapter One, I would argue that ideological 'purity' should not be the privileged aim of feminist reading - indeed, such a stance might well be seen as merely reproducing a masculine fiction. To engage with the discourse of fetishism, to refashion it, is to deconstruct patriarchy from within. Derrida suggests that the sexual subversiveness of floral figures lies in their formal reversibility; like shoes and gloves (two of De Quincey's fetishes), flowers can be turned inside out: "For castration to overlap virginity, for the phallus to be reversed into the vagina, for alleged opposites to be equivalent to each other and reflect each other, the flower has to be turned inside out like a glove and its style like a sheath" (Glas 47b).<sup>56</sup> Flowers and fetishes enable an oscillation between apparent contraries, such as "erection/relapse", "total body proper/fetishised morsel" (126b).<sup>57</sup> Recently, several feminist critics (Schor, Kofman, Berg, Jardine) have celebrated the paradigm of undecidability offered by the theory of fetishism in its Derridean reincarnation. Naomi Schor writes of a certain kind female fetishism, which duplicates, or doubles, the fetishist's double life, his "oscillation between denial and recognition of castration", and by which "women can effectively counter any move to reduce their bisexuality to a single one of its poles" ("Female Fetishism" 368). Schor also calls for a strategic "*refetishizing [of] the fetish*" (Breaking the Chain x). Again, I would gloss this as a *double* process of defetishization (or defamiliarization), that is, understanding the nature of the fetish, and refetishization, or the reinscription - reliteralization - of the sexual and textual particularity of the fetish, a reading of/in

detail. In this chapter, I have refetishized (female) sexuality, making visible the details of those parts of the female body from which male critics have averted their eyes.

Perhaps De Quincey is a model for Nietzsche's "third woman", the "affirmative woman" identified by Derrida in Spurs (77), who is both masculine and feminine, in Elizabeth Berg's words, "the female equivalent of the fetishist, who treats castration as an undecidable question" (13). De Quincey, however, is ultimately horrified by this hybrid position, but his discourse is seductive for the feminist critic precisely *because* his fetishism - paradoxically - feminizes him, *because* of the enticing collapse of the distance between male and female. De Quincey's fascination with the feminine engenders an "hysterical" discourse, wherein the foreign or the exotic turns out to be inside the body of the 'masculine' subject, as close to home as the transsexuality inscribed in two of De Quincey's early letters to his sister, which are signed, "your affectionate sister, Tabitha Quincey" (Lindop 27).

\* \* \* \* \*

I remain uneasy that my critical pleasure is somewhat disembodied, that the women whose bodies provide the material for De Quincey's dreams remain, in my text, secondary to the tropes which displace (and silence) them in De Quincey's texts.

The figure of "a young female dancer" haunts my thoughts. De Quincey writes:

I have witnessed more than once the case, that a young female dancer at a certain turn of a peculiar dance, could not - though she had died for it - sustain a free, fluent motion. Aerial chains fell upon her at one point; some invisible spell (who could say what!) froze her elasticity.

(Masson I:9)

The dancer is spellbound, her body frozen, reified, suspended in a pause in time. She has the arrested quality of a statue or a photo, her gesture captured mid-way ("at a certain turn of a peculiar dance"). Immobility and distance are the prerequisites of the fetish, which is gratifyingly non-invasive; the subject is untouched by the other. The fetishized body of the dancer provides a fixed point to which the male subject returns, a spectacle to be consumed by his gaze.<sup>58</sup> The dancer's discourse is suppressed, her ability to tell her own story frozen along with her body. De Quincey tells us that she "*cannot* be confidential", she does not have it in her "power to lay aside reserve", unlike De Quincey himself whose autobiographical impulse extends through fourteen volumes of the collected writings. And yet, her body does speak to me, both in its anterior uninhibited fluency, and in the enigmatic eroticism of stasis (the sexual resonances of "though she had died for it"). Her image is elusive, slipping between the substantial and the insubstantial ("aerial chains"), the precise and the vague ("a certain turn of a peculiar dance"). Paradoxically, her 'power' resides in *not* putting things into words, for her meaning, therefore, cannot be 'fixed'. She remains unbound, and she continues to move me.

## Notes to Chapter Six

1. The articles collected under the title Recollections of the Lakes and the Lake Poets are a series of pieces published in Tait's Edinburgh Magazine between September 1834 and October 1840. In this chapter I use the most widely available texts, those edited by Lindop and Wright, who follow the first published versions of De Quincey's texts. Wright notes major deletions and additions to the revised text, and, for ease of reading, follows the paragraphing of the revised version. Lindop uses the first version of Confessions of an English Opium-Eater, which first appeared in the London Magazine in September and October 1821. The text of the Suspiria de Profundis is the version which appeared in Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine in March, April, June and July 1845. The English Mail-Coach is reprinted from the two separate papers, subsequently joined when De Quincey revised his works, which appeared in Blackwood's in October and December 1849. The Confessions, the Suspiria and The English Mail-Coach all appear in Confessions of an English Opium-Eater and Other Writings. When discussing essays not included in their editions, and elsewhere when appropriate, I refer to editions by Masson and Japp. These texts will be superseded by The Works of Thomas De Quincey, Gen.Ed. Grevel Lindop, Pickering and Chatto, forthcoming 1996. De Quincey's reference is to Wordsworth, The Prelude XIII, ll.231-34.
2. As I have noted throughout this thesis, the ideology of femininity promotes women as "designed to soften our [men's] hearts and polish our manners" (John Gregory, A Father's Legacy, 6-7). Gregory argues that this function is not debasing: "I have considered your sex ....as our companions and equals" (6).
3. In one sense the notion of complementarity ascribes 'lack' to both women and men: George Savile, Marquis of Halifax (1688), instructs his daughter that "We are made of differing *Tempers*, that our *Defects* may the better be mutually supplied: Your *Sex* wanteth our *Reason* for your *Conduct*, and our *Strength* for your *Protection*: *Ours* wanteth your *Gentleness* to soften, and to entertain us" (Jones 18). For an influential account of how the idea of complementarity was used to subvert women's demands for equality, see Kate Millett, Sexual Politics, esp. 106-11, 179-201. The full Irigarayan phrase is 'The Blind Spot of an Old Dream of Symmetry', which is the title of the long first section of Speculum of the Other Woman.
4. See De Quincey's remark in his 'Notes for the Suspiria' which explicitly links flowers and writing: "the hope is but as a dim augury written on a flower\* ... \*I allude to the signatures of nature" (Japp 1:27). Though my focus is on floral 'graffiti' in De Quincey's writings, in broader terms we might say that his texts are themselves

graffiti; often De Quincey's writing presents itself as writing on the walls of other discourses. For example, in The English Mail-Coach De Quincey inscribes a kind of obscene, personal text *over* the public language of English imperialism. I am indebted to Drummond Bone for this insight.

5. Burke's rhetoric is echoed by later Romantic writers; Hazlitt, for example, writes of the poet Samuel Rogers that "[h]e is an elegant, but feeble writer, and his language is a tortuous, tottering, wriggling, fidgety translation of every thing from the vulgar tongue, into all the tantalizing, teasing, tripping, lispings, *mimminee-pimminee* of the highest brilliancy and fashion of poetical diction" (5:148). Hazlitt's judgement is gendered: Rogers is "a very lady-like poet". Femininity here is the acquisition and production of an artificiality which is perceived as both defective and excessive (all those qualifiers).
6. The gendered boundaries of the Sublime and the Beautiful remain insecure during the Romantic period: the male Sublime in romantic writing is haunted by the feminine, for example, the Witch in Byron's Manfred who is the personification of the Alps. On Mary Shelley's representation of the traditionally masculinized Alps as female, see Fred Randel.
7. De Quincey, of course, was familiar with Kant's paradigms; his translations of Kant include "Kant on National Character in Relation to the Sense of the Sublime and the Beautiful" (Masson XIV:46-60).
8. Kant's desire to keep the definitions of sublime and beautiful, masculinity and femininity under control is similarly marked by his insistence on the "proper" and "propriety" (76-81). See Irigaray on the significance of "proper, proper name, property, appropriate"; she argues that "[T]his word cluster suggests close connections between the related systems of capitalism and patriarchy - more specifically, between their demands for order, neatness, the proper name, and the proper or literal meaning of a word, on the one hand, and the concepts of property ownership and appropriation, on the other" (This Sex 221).
9. I am, of course, aware that Against Nature, the text I have in mind here, postdates De Quincey, being first published in 1884.
10. The full title of Mears's work is The Pupil of Nature; or Candid Advice to the Fair Sex; the section quoted is from "Essay 1". As Elaine Showalter will do almost two centuries later, Mears's use of the trope of fashion suggests her anxiety about disguise: plain words and plain clothes are closer to 'nature'. Mears rejects one available version of femininity, that which associates it with artifice and disguise (the aspects that men find most troubling), in order to reclaim pregnancy as a natural state, as opposed to male physicians who defined it as a disease. Moreover, she is writing at a time when the practice of

midwifery was increasingly being taken over by men, and therefore is trying to defend this sphere against encroachment.

11. In his discussion of plant symbols in Romanticism, Robert M. Maniquis argues that the plant "can bring to mind death or life, chastity or orgasm, memory or oblivion" (130).
12. The information on publishing history is provided by Desmond King-Hele, in the unpaginated 'Note' which prefaces his edition of Darwin.
13. Alan Bewell alludes to a popular form of eighteenth century writing which he calls "botanical pornography", the most notable text being James Perry's Mimosa or the Sensitive Plant" (87).
14. Priscilla Wakefield's An Introduction to Botany (1796) is a series of letters written by Felicia to her absent sister Constance. Felicia takes to botany on the advice of her mother in order to pass the time while her sister is away. She tells us that Linnaeus's "system is now universally adopted" (26). The trend of botanizing women continues healthily into the 1840's; on women's popular science writing, and especially the writer Maria Jacson, see Ann B. Shteir, "Botanical Dialogues".
15. To valorise Keatsian passivity and uncertainty as a feminization of the male writer is to simplify Keats's subject position; I explore this passage, and Margaret Homans's critique of it, in more detail in Chapter Five. If some of the male Romantics wanted to incorporate the femininity of flowers, it remains open to argument whether to read this as subversively proto-deconstructionist or as just another gesture of colonization.
16. I was alerted to the relevance of Bloch through Elisabeth Bronfen's summary of his argument (68-69).
17. This 'double vision' of the female also involves the dualistic system of literary stereotypes, that is, woman as virgin or whore, Madonna or Magdalen, angel in the house or wicked vamp.
18. McFarland quotes Baudelaire's view of De Quincey's "feminine style", and he provides a biographical explanation: "[R]eared by women, bathed in the softness of woman ... [De Quincey] ends by contracting a certain tenderness of skin, a refinement of speech, a sort of androgyny" (97). McFarland's metaphor of disease ("contracting a certain tenderness of skin") is provocative: as I will argue, femininity, in De Quincey's texts, is contagious. I have dealt more fully with the problems of Romantic androgyny in Chapter Five. On the question of digression, it is important to note that this is a strategy used by writers to preserve the life of the text, to defer ending, stasis, death; in Sterne's words (in Tristram Shandy), "digressions are the life of the text".

Virginia Woolf provides another reading of De Quincey's digressive style, seeing it as the mark of his desire for the unattainable: De Quincey "could not tell the simplest story without qualifying and illustrating and introducing additional information until the point that was to be cleared up has long since become extinct in the dim mists of the distance" (Second Common Reader 236-37).

19. The feminine ivy or vine twined around a masculine oak or pine is a commonplace trope. The following anonymous verse is from the commonplace book of Mary Young, Walthamstow, Essex 1828:
 

Man is the rugged lofty pine  
That frowns on many a wavebeat shore;  
Woman the graceful slender vine  
Whose curling tendrils round it twine,  
And deck its rough bark sweetly o'er, ...  
(qtd. in Davidoff and Hall 397).
20. I do not wish to lay too much emphasis on this line of argument, since, as I argue in Chapters One and Two, women were increasingly successful and visible as poets during this era. However, De Quincey perceives himself in relation to Wordsworth, and moreover, he is writing much later in the century than the heyday of Romanticism, at a time when notions of the Victorian "poetess" were being codified.
21. Interestingly, Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall in their sociological study of the period observe that, "Far from carrying the blustering certainty of the late Victorian paterfamilias, early nineteenth century masculine identity was fragile, still in the process of being forged and always measured against the background of condescension from the gentry as well as a long tradition of artisan pride" (229).
22. De Quincey is increasingly attracting feminist readers, such as Josephine McDonagh. For a fine feminist reading which intersects with mine at several points, see Angela Leighton, "De Quincey and Women". We diverge on the angle of our approach: Leighton emphasizes "the guilt of masculinity ... [which] dogs all De Quincey's writing about women", whereas I focus on the seductive threat of the feminine (168). A specific difference is that Leighton argues that "[t]he figure of the woman may provide him, as in 'Suspiria', with a still point for the caducean 'meanderings' of his 'narrative' ... - a point of origin or of imaginative difference, from which the dream can take its bearings", while my thesis is that that difference (within) is destabilizing, indeed, that it engenders the "meanderings" (163). On the question of "guilt", see also Michael Haltresht's psychological reading which emphasizes the "sense of *personal guilt*" and "self-reproach" in De Quincey's writings, "especially in relation to women" (32).

23. Parts of this article are quoted in Barbara Johnson, World 35. De Quincey's own writings, in particular, his textualization of experience, lend themselves to deconstructive criticism (for deconstructive readings see, Mary Jacobus, "The art of managing books" in Romanticism and Sexual Difference and in Reed, ed. 215-46; Arden Reed, "'Booked for Utter Perplexity'", and Stephen Spector).
24. Derrida uses the metaphor of the parasite in defining the law of genre, which is also, he tells us, a law of gender: "It is precisely a principle of contamination, a law of impurity, a parasitical economy" ("The Law of Genre" 59). Derrida's notions of gender, genre and the "law of impurity" have been influential in formulating my thinking about De Quincey.
25. This is not to deny that the existential Kate is not fond of De Quincey, but it is to suggest that the aesthetic figure who inhabits his texts is a type of the narcissistic woman.
26. I am indebted to Spector's provocative analysis of De Quincey's texts; indeed, my choice of passages for analysis has been partly motivated by my desire to reinscribe the traces of gender - of the feminine - in those places where Spector has elided, or failed to see them. In doing this, I participate in that area of feminist criticism which reveals the 'blind spots' of male writing.
27. Sedgwick's theory of homosocial desire is developed in her book Between Men.
28. De Quincey uses a very similar locution in his essay on Coleridge: he tells us that it is among those features of nature such as the "lawny recesses of forests" "that such evanescent hauntings of our past and forgotten selves are most apt to startle and to waylay us" (Recollections 92). A sexually resonant topography engenders a haunted self.
29. By saying that Kate is a rhetorical figure I mean to suggest two things: firstly, she could be read as a figure of metonymy - here, it is the contiguity of feminine figure, flower, and trope that is important; or, she could be seen as a figure of metaphor - metaphor being the trope of movement and *transformation*.
30. On the conjunction of child-women, flowers and desire, see Schlegel's Lucinde: "Since he was the first one who had ever attracted her by his interest in her, the sweet child turned her soul toward him like a flower inclining itself toward the light of the sun. The fact that she was scarcely grown-up, that she was hardly more than a child, only served to incite his desire more irresistibly" (79, see also 80).



31. The passionate excess of De Quincey's response to the life and death of Kate Wordsworth is also inscribed in his letters; see especially a letter written to Dorothy Wordsworth in June 1812 (Jordan 265). For an analysis of the differences between De Quincey's and Wordsworth's responses to Kate's death, see Michael Thron.
32. The Medusa has become a popular figure in recent accounts of Romanticism. Nigel Leask uses the very phrase, the 'Medusa effect', in his essay "Shelley's 'Magnetic Ladies'" (coming across this phrase was an uncanny experience, involving both loss [of originality] and consolation). Leask argues that "Freud's account of the Medusa highlights the *displaced* phallocentrism of Shelley's version [of this trope]; the ambiguity of Freud's 'stiffening' signals a moment of phallic return which - in the case of Shelley - normally marks the collapse of his bid to unbind the Promethean male will" (60). See also Elisabeth Bronfen, who discusses Freud's essay alongside Poe's "Philosophy of Composition" (69-70). Her most pertinent insight, in the present context, is that "[g]iven that for Freud 'to decapitate = to castrate', the threat of castration emerging from Medusa not only threatens to kill the viewer, but conversely the decapitation of Medusa also means a castration of castration. It enacts a killing of the metonymy for Other sexuality, for feminine genitalia, which have been culturally construed as a signifier for castration" (70). Since Bronfen's book deals with the linkage of "Death, femininity and the aesthetic", it makes fascinating reading for anyone excavating the trail of dead female bodies in De Quincey (or, more generally, in Romantic texts). On Medusa, see also Neil Hertz.
33. Lindop's edition differs slightly, notably in the omission of the word "stings". Lindop follows the first published version of De Quincey's text, so that this section of the Suspiria is taken from Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine LVII (March 1845): 275. De Quincey dismembered and revised this text in preparing the first volume of Selections Grave and Gay, published as Autobiographic Sketches in 1853; Masson follows the revised text.
34. The OED provides a range of definitions for the word "sting" which involve penetration and wounding; see, especially, OED 2,4,5a. See also, Dudu's dream in Byron's Don Juan: "A bee flew out and stung her to the heart, / And so she woke with a great scream and start" (VI:st.77), and Uvedale Price: "We talk of the stings of pleasure, of being goaded on by desire. The god of love ... is armed with flames, with envenomed shafts, with every instrument of irritation ..." (An Essay on the Picturesque, qtd. in Paulson, Representations 133).
35. I use the term "castration", both in its Freudian sense, wherein it refers specifically to sexual difference, to genital 'lack' (of a penis), and also in an extended sense - deriving from Lacan - to denote a split within

the self, a severing of unity, a wound that involves the loss of power. This cut is exposed in the encounter with death and with the feminine, two 'lacks' which are frequently conjoined in De Quincey. On this, see Bronfen 74. Note McFarland's suggestive vocabulary when he writes of "the special prose style [exemplified by the 'Caduceus' passage] that he [De Quincey] developed to cauterize and bind up the wound [of the loss of his sister, of the feminine]" (104).

36. Pinch's remark is a quote from Freud's essay "'A Child is Being Beaten': A Contribution to the Study of Sexual Perversions". For discussion of De Quinceyan masochism, see Eve Sedgwick, Coherence 79-90 and Mary Russett 359-60. There are obvious connections at this point between my readings of De Quincey and of Burke.
37. On "nympholepsy" during the Romantic period, see Marilyn Butler, "Nymphs and Nympholepsy"; see also James A. Heffernan's recent essay "Blake's Oothoon: The Dilemma's of Marginality", for a provocative discussion which links flowers, nymphs and language.
38. Historical usage supports this theory: the OED gives references to nympholepsy from 1775-1974, and for nymphomania from 1775-1973. On the medical (and aesthetic) status of "nymphomania" in the eighteenth century, see G.S. Rousseau ("Nymphomania").
39. The "punctum" is a moment or detail of an image which wounds any obvious meaning; because it is indifferent to the narrative, it has "at least a distancing effect with regard to the referent, to 'reality' as nature" (Barthes, Responsibility 55); "it is not I who seek it out ... it is this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me. A Latin word exists to designate this wound, this prick, this mark made by a pointed instrument: ... This second element which will disturb the *studium* I shall therefore call *punctum*; for *punctum* is also: sting, speck, cut, little hole - and also a cast of the dice. A photograph's *punctum* is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)"; "The *punctum*, then, is a kind of subtle *beyond* - as if the image launched desire beyond what it permits us to see" (Camera Lucida 26-27, 59). The "punctum" is described in a hybrid rhetoric that connotes both the male and the female body - it is both "wound"/"little hole" and "prick". In Barthes and De Quincey, there is an eroticization of castration, an experience which is inscribed on the body of the subject, and which is outside the control of "[his] sovereign consciousness" (Camera Lucida 26). Barthes subsequently positions the passive spectator in a more complicitous dialectic: "Last thing about the *punctum*: whether or not it is triggered, it is an addition: it is what I add to the photograph and *what is nonetheless already there*" (55).

40. As Freud points out, "[t]he meaning of the fetish is not known to other people, so the fetish is not withheld from him: it is easily accessible and he can readily obtain the sexual satisfaction attached to it. What other men have to woo and make exertions for can be had by the fetishist with no trouble at all" ("Fetishism" 21:354).
41. I borrow this phrase from Angela Leighton, "De Quincey and Women" 163. Leighton's fine essay explores the "continual conflict in [De Quincey's] work between the sublime ambition of the imagination, on the one hand, and the sympathies of real life, on the other; between an aesthetics of woman as pure and perfect and therefore figuratively dead and a politics of woman as the actual victim of some external destructive force". In other words, she suggests that the clash between the aesthetic and the existential is self-consciously perceived as a problem by De Quincey.
42. See Bronfen esp. Chapter 3 ("Violence of representation - representation of violence") for an extensive and fascinating analysis of Ferdinand Hodler's pictures of his dying mistress Valentine Gode-Darel which attempts to answer - from a feminist perspective - the questions: "Do we see the real, while denying the representation or do we see the representation, thus putting the real under erasure?" (51). Bronfen's work has helped me to articulate some of the problems I struggled with in earlier versions of this chapter.
43. Stephen Heath argues that '[p]lucking the rose is quickly [in terms of literary history] an image for the climax of male sexual desire, as in the Victorian poet Robert Browning:
- I kiss your cheek  
Catch your soul's warmth, - I pluck the rose  
And love it more than tongue can speak  
Then the good minute goes.  
"Two in the Campagna"
- (The Sexual Fix 114-15).
44. I have discussed the implications of the Shelleyan trope of (un)veiling in Chapter Four.
45. See Jane Mills, Womanwords 78 for a short history of the word "fanny". Fans are signifiers of female sexuality in much Restoration drama; for a wonderful example of the erotic connotations of fans, see the anonymous poem "To a Lady, with a Present of a Fan" (1789), in which the fan is a proto-De Quinceyan hybrid, both feminine "rosebud[s]" and masculine "shaft[s]" (Lonsdale, Eighteenth Century Verse 759). I am indebted to Martin Aske for getting me thinking about fans.

46. See Sundelson, who argues that psychoanalysis can help us to "see a coherent pattern of threats and defenses in [De Quincey's] prose" as revealed in "the sexually charged vocabulary" of The English Mail-Coach (16).
47. Timothy Corrigan uses Lacan's theory that "[d]esire is metonymy" in the service of his argument that in De Quincey's writings "the only maneuver available is a metonymic courtship in which his longing to speak his vision is never consummated and in which the linguistic displacement of the romance is necessarily a veering off from any final meaning" (138). In the present context, it is worth recalling that De Quincey compulsively turns his experiences into text, indulging - literally - in the grammar of desire: "whispering into a young woman's ear a great deal of truth; and (by way of parenthesis) some trifle of falsehood" (Mail-Coach 196). The dissemination of De Quincey's desire involves what Shari Benstock, in another context, has described as "a substitutionary and supplementary principle of sexual satisfaction", that is, an obsessional erasure and refilling of this female space ("From Letter to Literature" 280). De Quincey's desire is "metonymic" both in its fetishistic substitutions and also in the rhetorical interchangeability of the women who traverse his texts (Ann, Fanny and Kate are all linked with dawn and roses; Ann and Fanny are both "ingenuous"); De Quincey's irritated comment on "Coleridge's movable verses upon 'Sara', [written] for some forgotten original Sara, and subsequently transferred to every other Sara who came across his path" (Recollections 130), may be read ironically as self-referential. See also Thomas McFarland, who reads the accounts of the deaths of Catherine Wordsworth and Ann of Oxford Street as recapitulations of the death of De Quincey's sister Elizabeth (103).
48. One could give more weight to male sexuality here by arguing that De Quincey recoils in horror from the vision of the crocodile as phallic mirror image, and that this precipitates his plunge into the abyss of femininity.
49. This fetishized signature is reduplicated in the "Dream Fugue", for example, in the images of the revenant in the elfin pinnace "raising at intervals one hand to heaven", and the girl sinking in the treacherous sands whose "marble arm ... rose above her head ... clutching as at some false deceiving hand stretched out from the clouds" (Mail-Coach 226-27).
50. On the deconstructive tendencies of outer/inner structures in De Quincey, see Angela Leighton, "De Quincey and Women" esp. 170, and Sedgwick, Coherence esp. 41-44; Eve Sedgwick is concerned, as am I, with "[h]ow permeable and subtle the circumferences of the self are" (43).

51. See also John Barrell's wonderfully obsessive book, The Infection of Thomas De Quincey, which I came across after I had written the first version of this chapter. From a different direction - though he discusses the feminine "other", his main focus is on the discourses of race and class - Barrell arrives at remarkably similar formulations to those outlined in this chapter. He writes of "De Quincey's horrified discovery that his is (to use Homi Bhabha's term) a hybrid identity [I used this term without having read Bhabha]; that his relation with an imaginary East, like that of an imperial power with its colonial dependencies, is a relation (at best) of symbiotic interdependence, and can no longer be thought of in terms of a safe transaction between a self and an other" (18).
52. Earlier in this case study, though, Freud retreats from the notion of a "foreign body", as well as from the epistemological undecidability of the subject: "From the beginning it seemed to me probable that Fraulein Elisabeth was conscious of the basis of her illness, that what she had in her consciousness was only a secret and not a foreign body" (2:138-39).
53. See Jacqueline Rose on "Freud's move ... from the sexuality of the woman to the necessary failure of a knowledge or consciousness which would control either the woman or itself" (Sexuality 109).
54. Stephen Heath discusses the links between hysteria and women in his essay, "Difference".
55. On fetishism in recent feminist theory, see Alice Jardine and Paul Smith, Men in Feminism, and Marjorie Garber, and Diana Fuss, "Fashion and the Homospectorial Look".
56. Claudette Sartiliot (77) and Alice Jardine, (Gynesis 192, n.60) both cite this passage (Jardine with a slightly different translation). For De Quincey and gloves, see Suspira 163.
57. Gayatri Spivak's article "Displacement" is, among other things, a fascinating critique of what she argues is Derrida's own textual fetishism.
58. John Berger's paradigms of western painting (mentioned at the start of Chapter Three) are pertinent here.

## Afterthoughts

In this study, I have interrogated notions of gendered subjectivity, emphasizing the fabricated nature of the connection between body and text, and I have tried to find a space for the 'feminine' in the textuality of my own text. I have focussed on a limited number of texts produced within an extended Romantic period, and asked, in various ways, what happens when the male authorial voice seems to be cross-dressed. I have tried to contribute to the project of revising, or revisioning (in Adrienne Rich's sense) Romanticism, by revealing that the stability of gender in these texts is what Judith Butler has described as a structure of impersonation: "gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original" (21). The riddle of femininity is that femininity occurs in men as well as in women. The textual transvestism that I locate remains attached to specific analyses, and I do not wish to suggest that this is necessarily a general Romantic trend.

The stories I have recounted, which speak of the slippage between male desire for women (or, more frequently, that idealized construct, Woman) and identification with the feminine, do not follow a teleological plot. The tropes of self-feminization in the work of selected male writers between Burke and De Quincey do not reach some sort of climax in the late Romantic period. Indeed, to construct such a plotline would be to reproduce the sexual/textual rhythms of phallogentric narrative.<sup>1</sup> De Quincey's dancer, who enigmatically figures the feminine as both fixity and performance, and who, in the light of my previous analyses, holds open the possibility of spectatorial identification, is not the 'end'. As I suggested at the beginning of Chapter Four, the order of this thesis is not immutable. Depending on the sequence

in which they are read, these analyses can tell the personal encoded narrative of my own academic career, broadly the shift from a dependence on male theorists to a position in which I consciously try to privilege the writing of female critics and theorists. I no longer have a fancy French guy, a Derrida or a Barthes (Foucault was never for me), but rather a network of women (Irigaray, Spivak, Gallop, Miller, Schor, to name just a few).<sup>2</sup> The Gallic connection remains in that these writers, whatever their nationality, work within (and sometimes against) the context of French poststructuralist thought, and it is within the parameters of such thought that this thesis is clearly situated.

Rather than presenting a formal conclusion in these final pages, I would like to mark my resistance to closure by acknowledging some anxieties about, and omissions from, this project. I will briefly record three roads not taken, which may be summarized under the following headings: the discourses of nationality/race; absent male prose writers; gender and the issue of women's writing.

On the question of national identities, I should say that it strikes me as surprising, in retrospect, that a woman (myself) who is notionally English, who worked for several years in Greece, studied in Scotland and supports Scottish independence within Europe, and who is finishing this thesis between Scotland and The Netherlands, should have paid so little attention to the politics of geography, the discourses of nationality. Perhaps this omission, like the changing allegiance already mentioned, points to the theoretical moment in which this study was conceived, a time around 1989 when I, like many other feminist critics, was between feminism and psychoanalysis.<sup>3</sup> This, of course, is the title of an influential anthology (Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis), edited by Teresa Brennan, and published in 1989.

The big issues debated in its pages are essentialism, language and sexual difference, the meaning of the phallus (for women), the rereading and appropriation of Lacan. Moreover, though critics in the 1980's were debating the significance of the intersections of gender, race and nationality, this was not foregrounded in Romantic Studies until quite recently; Moira Ferguson's brilliant feminist study, Subject to Others: British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery, 1670-1834, for example, was published in 1992. I lament now that though I use the tropes of geography - the contours and terrain of Romanticism, the spatial emphasis of the whole concept of marginality - my writers inhabit an unspecified locale.

There are several male writers of letters, journals and essays during the Romantic era who are not included in this study, and who, if time and the demands of teaching were not against me, would certainly find a place. Byron, Lamb, Hunt and Hazlitt make cameo appearances, but are never centre stage (though Hazlitt's contribution is perhaps more substantial). Of these four, I am insufficiently acquainted with Hunt's oeuvre to judge how he would fit in, but his essays in Men, Women and Books would certainly repay further attention. More analyses of the configurations of gender in the work of Charles Lamb are certainly necessary, but he does have the advantage of a fabulous feminist reader in Jane Aaron, whose book A Double Singleness I have discussed in Chapter One. I regret Byron's absence, for I have read his letters and journals throughout the time I have spent on the present project. Byron's fluid prose, punctuated almost solely by dashes, as well as the self-reflexivity of his writing, has affinities with contemporary theories of feminine writing. Moreover, in the context of the particular concerns of this thesis, both Susan Wolfson and Caroline Franklin have discussed the question of transvestism in Don Juan, but



the possibility of textual cross-dressing in Byron's prose writing has yet, to the best of my knowledge, to be examined (though Sonia Hofkosh does discuss the engenderment of Byron's prose in her article "The Writer's Ravishment").<sup>4</sup>

Most especially, I wish I had written a chapter on Hazlitt: his essay on effeminacy plays a significant role in my reading of Keats, while his observations on Burke's posturings (in particular, his vision of Burke coqueting with the Speaker of the House of Commons) are scene-stealers. I would like to analyse further (in some future project) the fabrication of gender during the Romantic period, and especially the significance of clothes or fashion implied by fabrication (I looked at the trope of fashion in contemporary criticism in Chapter Two, but only marginally at romantic dressing-up). George Gilfillan, in his essay on Keats (1845), suggests that "[n]one save Keats, and Tennyson after him, has adventured on the delicate yet lovely theme, the poetry of dress" (Matthews 305). Hazlitt adventures on this theme in prose: his writing is full of the details of female dress (as well as bodily marks), and raises interesting questions about the imbrication of the languages of gender and class. Consider the following extract from "On Great and Little Things" (in Table-Talk):

Some gallants set their hearts on princesses; others descend in imagination to women of quality; others are mad after opera-singers. For my part, I am shy even of actresses, and should not think of leaving my card with Madame Vestris. I am for none of these *bonnes fortunes*; but for a list of humble beauties, servant-maids and shepherd-girls, with their red elbows, hard hands, black stockings and mob-caps, I could furnish out a gallery equal to Cowley's, and paint them half as well. Oh! might I but attempt a description of some of them in poetic

prose, Don Juan would forget his Julia ...I admire the Clementinas and Clarissas at a distance: the Pamelas and Fannys of Richardson and Fielding make my blood tingle. (8:236)

Hazlitt (like Burke) is seduced by the spectacle of 'Woman'/women; his gaze is drawn to the minutiae (mob-caps) of femininity, though unlike Byron's Don Juan, the objects of his desire are housemaids, rather than ladies of quality. The power dynamic here directs attention, in a particularly acute way, to the necessary factoring-in of class to the analysis of gender.<sup>5</sup>

In my introductory material (Chapters One and Two) I discuss the way in which feminist theory and criticism has facilitated a consideration of masculinities; indeed, as I point out, there is a whole new area of study, represented by anthologies such as Men in Feminism and Engendering Men (ed. Boone and Cadden), which analyses the cultural construction of masculinity. Though my work is clearly a part of this broad project, I remain anxious about what Jane Gallop has called a "shift from women's studies to gender studies" (Around 1981 242). Gallop argues that, "Although it is theoretically invaluable for feminist scholars to intervene in the understanding of men, within literary studies, this tends to mean work on canonical authors. When we study their ambiguous and multiform gender, we often lose sight of their cultural authority, all the while contributing to it". In other words, we can end up again "beyond the cruel binarized oppressions of the [real] world".<sup>6</sup> I still believe that the analysis of gender in male writing can make a (feminist) difference to the world we inhabit (which, after all, does include the academic world), but I would like to reiterate the gist of my earlier comments, that an adherence to the idea of the fabrication of gender and of a subject constructed and deconstructed in

language, does not preclude the necessity of a strategic essentialism, the recognition that male and female voices are politically different. For a man to pose (textually) as a woman, or for him to be constructed as feminine in critical discourse, is not the same thing as becoming a woman. Feminist critics of Romanticism need to be careful that work on gender does not reinscribe the old hierarchies, especially the marginalization of women's writing. This is a problem that has troubled me through the writing of this thesis. At one point (during the writing of Chapter One), I thought I should have worked on the women poets; now I am conscious of the relative neglect of the prose works of writers such as Anna Barbauld, Mary Hays, Hannah More. The map of Romanticism remains painfully incomplete (though from another perspective excitingly open to feminist work in this area). Myra Jehlen's call to examine men's and women's writing in the same historical period in order to expose the particularities and contingencies of the patriarchal set-up, provides one inviting path to take, and though I have focussed on male writing, I have included female voices and thus have tried to move in the direction that Jehlen advocates. For it is only by understanding the construction of gender in relation to both women and men that we can begin to understand its operations.<sup>7</sup>

## Notes to Afterthoughts

1. Luce Irigaray's Speculum spectacularly renounces a teleological format: in her own words, "Strictly speaking, Speculum has no beginning or end. The architectonics of the text, or texts, confounds the linearity of an outline, the teleology of a discourse, within which there is no possible place for the 'feminine', except the traditional place of the repressed, the censured" (This Sex 68). The nondirectiveness of Irigaray's writing makes it impossible to extract an all-encompassing feminist theory, and so it remains non-prescriptive.
2. I owe the wonderful phrase "fancy French guy" to Nancy Armstrong, who used it in a talk given at the University of Groningen, May 1992. In charting what I perceive to be a shift in my critical affiliations, I do not mean to imply that I am no longer interested in these male writers. I find the politics of seduction in the relation between female critics and these male 'masters', so ably and wittily analysed by Jane Gallop, rivetting. Moreover, the women critics to whom I am most indebted have not divorced themselves from male-authored theories, but their attitude towards such theories has become, I think, more irreverent. (The Chapters which form the body of this thesis were written in the following order: Six, Four, Three, Five, which explains the privileging of Derrida at the end of Chapter Six). The notion of 'getting personal' about one's work has a high profile these days (see, Nancy K. Miller, Getting Personal).
3. The phrase "around 1989" is meant to evoke Jane Gallop's fictive moment "Around 1981", which designates a certain moment in academic feminist literary theory (see her collection of essays entitled Around 1981).
4. I have, however, borrowed my title from Byron: "Beyond the fitting medium of desire", Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto III, 1.374. This is perhaps the place to record my dissatisfaction with Chapter Four: of the writers in this study, it is Shelley whom I love, yet it seems to me the most alienated of the chapters, the least able to transgress its theoretical 'frame'. I cannot account for this.
5. Byron himself, of course, was not averse to housemaids. On the representation of working-class women in the nineteenth century, see Cora Kaplan, "'Like a Housemaid's Fancies'" and Allon White and Peter Stallybrass, The Politics and Poetics of Transgression, especially Chapters Three and Four. Both texts deal in some detail with the relationship between Arthur Munby and Hannah Cullwick.
6. See, in this context, Tania Modleski's criticism of Elaine Showalter's introduction to Speaking of Gender, which she argues marginalizes

feminism, making it simply a stage on the way to gender studies (Feminism Without Women 5).

7. This is not to perpetuate the binary opposition of biology: though there are some obvious Romantic pairs who have been analysed in tandem (Charles and Mary Lamb, Dorothy and William Wordsworth, Mary and Percy Shelley), they may be 'odder' pairings (Hazlitt and Hannah More?), as well as the possibility of getting away from the power of two by analysing three or more writers alongside each other.

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