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WOMANIST INTELLECTUALS: DEVELOPING A TRADITION

by

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Approved by

  
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APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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This study traces a womanist intellectual tradition, beginning in early Victorian England and ending in late twentieth-century America.

Prominent studies on the public intellectual have excluded women from their discussions, and in recent years there has been an attempt to co-opt women into the Victorian sage tradition. This study presents an alternative intellectual tradition for women, which I term womanist.

Womanist intellectuals cannot be traced through a mother/daughter line, but through what Virginia Blain describes as the aunt/niece paradigm, a lineage which allows for "gaps, omissions, forgettings, and suppressions," while simultaneously revealing fascinating "intertextual relationships" and patterns between women intellectuals of different centuries and cultures. In general, womanist intellectuals share the following characteristics: 1) a position of marginality; 2) an interest in border-crossing; 3) a non-hierarchical relationship with their audience; 4) a journey toward self-redefinition; 5) a purpose, which is to speak the truth to power.

The first section of this study re-establishes Harriet Martineau as the foremost intellectual in nineteenth-century England and as the Great-Aunt of the womanist intellectual tradition. The second section explores how Virginia Woolf built on the groundwork laid by Martineau. Woolf was able

to elevate the status of women intellectuals by making a woman's marginalized position an asset. The final section of this study focuses on three twentieth-century American intellectuals-- Susan Sontag, bell hooks, and Adrienne Rich--and how they have continued in the womanist intellectual tradition. The aim of this study is to strengthen women's position in the intellectual realm and provide them with an intellectual tradition of their own.



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## INTRODUCTION

### WOMANIST INTELLECTUALS: DEVELOPING A TRADITION

The intellectual has been an integral part of Western society for well over two thousand years. Two hundred years ago, however, the term that originally applied to philosophers such as Aristotle and Plato shifted its etymological direction: it went public. The public intellectual is a philosopher of sorts, but unlike his or her more reclusive predecessor, s/he possesses a more developed sense of audience and social responsibility. Public intellectuals are interested in the meaning of life, but they view life in a broader context--socially, politically, and economically.<sup>1</sup>

Over the past seventy years, numerous works have addressed the topic of the intellectual. Julien Benda's The Treason of the Intellectuals (1928), The Victorian Sage (1962) by John Holloway, George de Huszar's The Intellectuals (1960) which begins in Ancient Greece and ends in twentieth century America, and Russell Jacoby's The Last Intellectuals (1987) are four of the more prominent studies. In these four works, only one woman is discussed in detail George Eliot in The Victorian Sage--an intellectual who assumed a masculine nom de plume and whom critics have lauded for her "manly" style of writing.

That society has failed to recognize women in their roles as public intellectuals was brought home to me early in my research. I had asked a number of colleagues to name those individuals they considered to be the most influential thinkers of our age. Responses varied, but only slightly, and the following usually topped the list: Edward Said, William F. Buckley, Edmund Wilson, Lionel Trilling, Richard Rorty, Hannah Arendt, and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Five white men, one woman and an African-American. So much for progress.

As the millennium approaches, the public intellectual has become a "hot" topic. One need look no further than magazines like the New Yorker and the Atlantic Monthly, and writers from Harold Bloom to Camille Paglia to see the interest that the intellectual has aroused. The appearance of articles with ominous titles like "Agonizing over the Intellectual" and "Intellectuals: the End of a Species?" appear in journals from Australia's 24 hours to New York's Partisan Review, making the topic of the intellectual an intriguing, and at times, disturbing, part of our social discourse. But, why all these concerns about this, heretofore, relatively quiet group of cultural critics? As we spiral (in the most Yeatsian sense) toward the twenty-first century, the need for public intellectuals to steer us through this transitional (and tumultuous) period has become critical to our survival. As artist Guillermo Gomez-Pena has pointed out, "We are living in a state of emergency. . . . Our lives are framed by a sinister kind of Bermuda Triangle, the parameters of

which are AIDS, the recession, and political violence" (Lacy 31). To address the concerns of society in the twenty-first century, however, the public intellectual of the past must be re-visioned.

An article in the New Yorker (1994) suggests that this process is already taking place. In "Public Academy," Michael Berube describes a new generation of black thinkers as the most dynamic voices in American intellectual life today. According to Berube, this group, led by Cornel West, Michael Eric Dyson, and Derrick Bell, is seeking to "redefine what it means to be an intellectual" (73). In yet another recent article, Robert Boynton, too, acknowledges the "moral imagination and critical intelligence" of "an impressive group of African-American writers and thinkers" who are "moving beyond race to voice what he calls 'the commonality of American concern'" (53). Unlike Berube, Boynton includes the names of a number of African-American women (June Jordan, bell hooks, Alice Walker, and Toni Morrison) on his list of African-American intellectuals. Disappointingly, however, he excludes them from his discussion.

Until recently, historian and cultural critics like Edward Shils, George de Huszar, Franklin Baumer, and Raymond Williams have also excluded women (and other minority groups) from their respective studies. Their writings, instead, suggest that the pundits of the past two hundred years have been white and male. Even in recent years, women such as Jordan, hooks, and Walker receive only a passing nod at best, yet they, along with earlier

(Margaret Mead, Simone de Beauvoir, Virginia Woolf, and Mary McCarthy) and contemporary (Susan Sontag, Hannah Arendt, and Adrienne Rich) female intellectuals, have contributed significantly to the development of our world. Why, then, has the intellectual sphere been a predominantly masculine domain? What, historically, has kept women on the periphery of this illustrious group of thinkers? Is it because the stereotype of the traditional intellectual as a rational, analytical, reasoning (read "masculine") being conflicts with women's emotional and intuitive natures, as many nineteenth and early twentieth-century scientists would have us believe? Or is it that in our society "work is valued by the social value of the work" and once a field contains "too many women" it becomes "devalued" (Steinem, Moving Beyond Words 210)?

A brief examination of its history reveals the Western public intellectual tradition to be a gender-specific social construct that has disregarded the contributions of women and other minorities. As the public intellectual developed during the nineteenth century, members of this coterie were given titles such as 'men of letters', 'men of science', and 'sages'-- gender-specific labels which set this elite group apart from the rest of society, elevating them to positions of power. Even today, some men of letters continue to play their part in the creation of this elitist group by postulating political, economical, and literary theories so enigmatic that even the most educated audience would find deciphering their words a Herculean task.

Because of the intellectual gender-constructed image, many women and other minority intellectuals do not fit comfortably within this traditional intellectual paradigm. For the most part, they differ from the 'traditional' public intellectuals (who are often seen as "philosopher kings") in how they define themselves and their relationship to their audiences and in the focus of their work. In an effort to explore the shared traits among these women, I have looked to the works of two seemingly disparate individuals: bell hooks and Edward Said. hooks, an African-American and Distinguished Professor at City College in New York, has published four major works of cultural criticism in the last two years: Outlaw Culture (1994), Teaching to Transgress (1994), Killing Rage: Ending Racism (1995) and Art On My Mind: Visual Politics (1995). In an earlier work, Breaking Bread (1991), hooks examines specific problems addressing the African-American intellectual; in Teaching to Transgress she takes the seeds sown in Breaking Bread and applies them to specific pedagogical practices, thus linking the intellectual with the educator.

Edward Said, an American of Palestinian descent, teaches English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University. He is best known for his seminal work Orientalism (1978) which explores how Western writers have stereotyped Arab cultures in such a way as to condone the exploitation of those cultures. His more recent works include Culture and Imperialism (1993) and Representations of the Intellectual (1994), the latter being a compilation of his 1993 Reith lectures. In these talks, Said attempts to hold

public intellectuals to a "universal and single standard." Urging them to think globally in addition to nationally, he moves intellectuals beyond the boundaries of "easy certainties provided us by background, language, nationality" and sets forth a "single standard for human behavior" (xiii-iv). This single standard--freedom for every member of our global society--compels intellectuals to re-examine their relationships with their audience, as well as with the academic, religious, professional and global institutions of their societies.

Sifting through the writings of bell hooks and Edward Said, in addition to those of Susan Sontag and Adrienne Rich, I have compiled a list of characteristics that I believe that the public intellectual must possess to meet the needs of the twenty-first century. It is also a list of characteristics which I believe many intellectuals (which I will label womanist) already share:

1) a position of marginality (usually due to gender and/or race). This socially imposed marginality significantly shapes one's childhood, educational, and work experiences, and finds its way into the writings of public intellectuals. In Representations of the Intellectual, Edward Said argues that all intellectuals can be divided into two groups: "insiders and outsiders" (52). The insiders, or "yea-sayers," flourish in society "without an overwhelming sense of dissonance or dissent" (52). The "nay-sayers," however, are both "unsettled" and "unsettling" (53) and are often in conflict



with social norms. Society marginalizes nay-sayers, especially where issues of "privilege, power, and honor" are concerned (52-53). Their condition of marginality, however, also produces a clarity of vision which enables the intellectual to "see things that are usually lost on minds that have never traveled beyond the conventional and the comfortable" (63). Thus their peripheral position allows intellectuals a certain independence, giving them the freedom to oppose rather than accommodate those in power.

2) an interest in border-crossing. A womanist intellectual's "expertise"--whether it be in the field of economics, literature, critical theory, or politics--does not necessarily dictate the topics/issues about which she writes. Susan Sontag, for example, has advanced degrees in English and Philosophy but has written extensively on politics, war (Vietnam and Bosnia), and art. These intellectuals defy social codes by refusing to be bound to a particular profession, or in the case of Victorian and early twentieth-century women intellectuals, their 'proper sphere'; a task which has proven quite difficult in a society that extols the virtues of conformity;

3) a non-hierarchical relationship with one's audience. Generally, these intellectuals speak to and with a broader, less exclusive audience than that of the academic intellectual. The concerns of the people with whom they discourse (which includes members of oppressed groups and classes) often direct and fuel the writings and activities of these women.

To more effectively communicate with their audience, womanist intellectuals attempt to create a "common" language rather than employ an enigmatic one. Their voices are "never fixed and absolute" but "always changing, always evolving in dialogue with a world beyond itself" (hooks Teaching to Transgress 11). bell hooks argues that the most effective teachers/intellectuals are those willing to change their "performances" to meet the needs of particular audiences. If necessary, they alter their "sense" of voice in order to speak to their age and employ a more fluid, malleable language to better "speak to specific contexts" (11);

4) a purpose and/or mission. Womanist intellectuals share a talent for writing, living, and delivering a message that speaks "the truth to power" (Said 8) and raises the critical consciousness of a people. They examine cultural products and judge whether these products perpetuate or deconstruct the process of mental colonization, a process that both entraps and oppresses individuals.

5) a journey toward self-redefinition. By self-redefinition, I do not mean self-aggrandizement. Rather, I am thinking of the concept of self-actualization as propounded by psychologist Abraham Maslow. Maslow describes self-definement as a process by which a self-directed individual comes to realize his or her purpose in life. Ideally, redefinement enables an individual to more objectively perceive other people, situations, and events and to loosen his/her ego (Maslow 159). This is necessary since, according to

bell hooks, intellectuals/teachers are "healer[s]," as well as educators. hooks admits, however to the difficulty in seeking wholeness in a culture that holds to "the idea of a mind/body split" or that "promotes and supports compartment-alization" (Teaching to Transgress 15-16). In a fragmented culture such as ours, the healing intellectual finds herself internally and externally conflicted. To "heal" society, women such as Adrienne Rich and bell hooks have, by necessity, committed themselves to a "process of self-actualization that promotes their own well-being" (15). Since society defines the individual and assigns them certain roles, it is only through self-redefinition that womanist intellectuals can lead others to free themselves from social-definition and confinement. The work of these public intellectuals involves more than simply sharing their personal journey; it involves a commitment to the growth of others as well as themselves (13).

It would be unrealistic to suggest that *all* women intellectuals share these traits. It would be just as unrealistic to argue that no male intellectual fits within this paradigm. Case in point: Cornell West, critical theorist, cultural critic, philosopher, and professor of Religion at Princeton University, whose "intellectual project, spiritual commitment, and revolutionary political agenda," has awakened "us," according to bell hooks, "from the slumber of indifference, narcissism, [and] obsession with material success" (hooks and West 26). Overall, however, the fact that women intellectuals of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries examined in this study--Harriet

Martineau, Virginia Woolf, Susan Sontag, Adrienne Rich, and bell hooks--do share most of these characteristics, in varying degrees, suggests that a non-traditional lineage does exist for those who do not fit neatly in the traditionally masculine, Aristotelian-Baconian-Arnoldian mold.

To separate these thinkers and cultural critics from their more traditional counterparts, I have classified them as "womanist" intellectuals. Why womanist rather than feminist? Though all of the women discussed in this study have feminist views, not *all* have openly aligned themselves with the women's liberation movement. Another concern I have is with 'feminist' itself, a term which has become quite problematic in recent years. In a recent interview, Adrienne Rich discussed the negative connotations the term carries which have often led to misreadings of women's works. For this reason Rich has reclaimed for herself the label of 'women's liberator'.

Of course, the term "womanist" comes with its own set of issues. The term was originally coined by Alice Walker in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (1983). Many African-American feminists, who rightly feel that the women's liberation movement has evolved into a struggle for white women's liberation, have replaced 'feminist' with 'womanist' when referring to themselves. According to Walker, a womanist can be a "black feminist or feminist of color"; however, a womanist can also be "a woman [regardless of color] who loves other women . . . and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility," as well as "women's strength" (xi). The term

womanist, according to Walker, also describes an individual "committed to the survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female"; someone who is "not a separatist" but a "traditional universalist" (xi). It is this definition--an individual and universalist committed to the "survival and wholeness" of all peoples--that leads me to select this particular term to describe the women intellectuals of this study.

This study, Womanist Intellectuals: a Developing Tradition, initially examines the lives and works of two women--Harriet Martineau and Virginia Woolf--and notes their contributions to the womanist intellectual tradition. It then traces the lineage to three American womanist intellectuals of the late twentieth century, noting not only their commonalities and differences as intellectuals but the ways in which the womanist intellectual line is developing.

Some critics might argue the implausibility of tracing an intellectual lineage since the generational, racial, and/or class relationships of these women with each other are quite complex. The task would appear doomed to failure if one employed the mother/daughter metaphor to link them together. But there are other ways of tracing one's family tree. In "Thinking Back Through Our Aunts: Harriet Martineau and Tradition in Women's Writing," Virginia Blain asserts that the complexity of relationships between women writers of different generations cannot easily be traced through the mother/daughter line. For sixty years, Blain argues, the mother metaphor has

successfully been used by writers like Virginia Woolf, Elaine Showalter, Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar, and Margaret Homan to connect past and present women writers. Now, however, the problematization of "maternal and sororal metaphors" used in discussing the "nature" of a female literary tradition has necessitated a re-evaluation of the mother/daughter paradigm (224). Feminist scholars, Blain suggests, should consider other possible links between generations of women writers, such as that which exists between the aunt and her niece.

My study examines the connections and disparities between past and present womanist intellectuals from this more appropriate aunt/niece paradigm, a model which allows for the representation of discrepancies as well as commonalities that the mother-daughter/father-son archetypes fail to do. This unique pattern of inheritance introduces a fresh perspective from which to examine women's relationships in literary works by producing a new "genealogy of relations between texts" (Blain 225) that challenges the concept of 'Tradition.'

To think back through our mothers, as Virginia Woolf suggests in A Room of One's Own, presents, according to Blain, a "false parallel" to the traditional father-son inheritance:

Where sons can inherit directly from their fathers. . . , daughters can have no such unmediated link with their mothers under patriarchy. A mother-daughter model of literary inheritance, then, by

definition implies the mediation (and legitimation) by men as fathers linking the generations. It is a concept which, while appearing to subvert, finally only mirrors a patriarchal and patrilineal model. (225)

Since not every woman has an aunt, a literary heritage traced through them can often be discontinuous and fragmented, filled with "gaps, omissions, forgettings and suppressions" (Blain 226). Yet these separate and distinct fragments, joined together, reveal interesting "intertextual relationships" and patterns.

For example, all five of the women in this study have been labeled "unconventional." Harriet Martineau was the first female political economist and sociologist of the nineteenth century. Virginia Woolf was deemed by T. S. Eliot to be the driving force behind the Bloomsbury intellectual coterie; Susan Sontag directs Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo as four thousand shells fall daily on the city; bell hooks, an academic and self-proclaimed intellectual, interviews rap stars like Ice-T; and Adrienne Rich is a lesbian/Jew famous for her politically radical poetry.

These womanist intellectuals are separated from each other by time and/or culture. Harriet Martineau, for example, was quite "Victorian" in her views on "illicit" relationships (such as that of George Eliot and Henry Lewes). Others, like Adrienne Rich and Virginia Woolf, work(ed) within the confines of their society but at the same time attempt(ed) to move beyond its peripheries by creating a new language through which they can/could speak

to their own experiences. Sontag and Woolf have been described as "high-brows," though both women eventually altered their writing styles to accommodate a greater variety of readers. hooks, on the other hand, has been accused of over-simplification, of speaking to too broad (read "low-brow") an audience. Martineau was an essayist, Woolf a novelist; Sontag is a playwright, novelist, and essayist; hooks is a poet and essayist, as is Rich. Yet despite their differences all five women share a common goal as womanist intellectuals: to fight human misery and oppression.

The first section of this study re-establishes Harriet Martineau as the foremost woman intellectual in nineteenth-century England. Virginia Blain argues that Martineau's "work and [her] place on the margins of literary history first suggested to her the possibilities of an 'aunt-centred' approach." Martineau is the ideal starting point from which to begin a discussion on women intellectuals and their "divergent and non-patriarchal pattern of inheritance" (225), both because of her fame and because of her time in history.

Martineau, best known for her Illustrations of Political Economy (1832-34) and her translations of August Comte's Course de Philosophie, made significant contributions in the genre of the political essay, the autobiography, the novel, as well as in the field of sociology. This study on Martineau is prefaced in Chapter One with a sketch of the middle-class experience, one which focuses primarily on the problems facing women in Victorian society,



problems which make the accomplishments of Harriet Martineau even more astounding.

The second section examines Virginia Woolf. As did Martineau, Woolf wrote in areas traditionally closed to women and she, too, encouraged inclusion and border crossing, especially in works like A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas. She also took the first steps in establishing a women's literary tradition by recovering the works of women writers obscured by history. Woolf also elevated the status of women intellectuals by making a woman's marginalized position an asset. In doing so, she made it possible for intellectuals such as Susan Sontag to free themselves from university careers, and for women like bell hooks to become part of the university system while at the same time writing on topics ranging from pop-art to rap.

The final section of this study focuses on three twentieth-century intellectuals: Susan Sontag, bell hooks, and Adrienne Rich. Susan Sontag, America's best-known woman intellectual, is a novelist, screenwriter, director, activist, and polemicist. Her major works include Against Interpretation and other essays (1967) and Volcano Lover (1993). A controversial writer, in "The Third World of Women" (1976), she identifies the "morally defective and historically obsolete conceptions" of women's femininity and men's masculinity (Schor 325). Sontag has also boldly addressed two of the more frightening and controversial issues of our age--cancer and AIDS--in Illness as a Metaphor (1978) and AIDS and Its Metaphors

(1989). In her latest work, a play entitled Alice in Bed she examines the problems intellectual women--Alice James, Margaret Fuller, and Emily Dickinson--faced in the nineteenth century.

bell hooks describes herself as a cultural critic and intellectual whose role is not merely to affirm cultural practices already defined as "radical or transgressive, . . . [but to cross] boundaries, to take another look, to contest, to interrogate, and in some cases recover and redeem" (Outlaw Culture 5). In Talking Back (1989), Breaking Bread (1991) and Outlaw Culture (1994) hooks urges feminists to "move into and beyond feminism." She exhorts women academics to look beyond their self-contained universities and to address political, social, racial, and economic issues outside the university system (Outlaw 207) and in the process, remove themselves from the "sphere of coercive hierarchical domination" (6) which privileges certain groups.

The essays of Adrienne Rich give voice to the concerns of a number of non-privileged and marginal groups, including Jews, feminists, and lesbians. Most of her social and political commentary appear in poetic form. Poetry, she contends, can be "more than self-indulgence in a society so howling with unmet human needs," since it "eludes capitalist marketing, commoditizing, [and] price-fixing" (What is Found There 18). Diving into the Wreck (which won the National Book Award in 1974) is a collection of poems in which Rich attempts to dismantle the patriarchy while continuing to search for greater self-awareness and a sense of community in a fragmented world. With each

new publication, Rich reveals not only a greater depth in her work but a stronger voice with which to indict American culture for "carrying out the genocide of the indigenous people" by destroying their poetry (Rothschild 31). For this reason, she has also undertaken and expanded the task which Woolf began: recovering the history and work of women and other oppressed groups.

I approach the topic of womanist intellectuals by way of two primary paths: biographical--how these five women, especially Martineau and Woolf, came to their position as intellectuals--and historical, that is, how the age affected their entrance into intellectual life. The standpoint from and for which I argue is obviously feminist. Because of my own historical context and personal experiences and interests, I find it impossible to do otherwise.

Excluded from the intellectual realm by reasons of race, class, and/or gender, most women intellectuals find themselves in a double (and triple) bind. Of course, women are not the only intellectuals trapped in this type of situation. Neither are women the only individuals to share the womanist characteristics set forth earlier in this introduction. The term womanist, at least in my use of the term, does not exclude men from its domain. For example, many African-American men have also face a double bind which has traditionally excluded them from the intellectual sphere. But this is another study.

An analysis of the 'lived lives' of these women--Harriet Martineau, Virginia Woolf, Susan Sontag, bell hooks, and Adrienne Rich--reveals not only differences in their socio-political stances and the mediums in which they have written but also similarities in their social commitments. This study also emphasizes the larger issues surrounding the current assessment of women's intellectual contributions. According to Alice Walker, what is needed is a "larger perspective. Connections made, or at least attempted, where none existed before" (In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens 5). America's "narrowed and narrowing" view of life often prevents us from seeing the "common thread, the unifying theme. . . , a fearlessness of growth, of search, of looking, that enlarges the private and the public world" (5). This study suggests that despite socio-political, religious, generational, and class differences, these five women's lives and writings constitute an historical intellectual lineage, albeit a non-traditional one.

A study like this raises numerous questions: What did/does it mean to be a woman intellectual in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? How were/are women able to surmount the restrictive roles dictated by their respective societies? How did Harriet Martineau (lacking the advantage of an education such as that offered to a Matthew Arnold or a John Henry Newman or even her own brothers) and Virginia Woolf (lacking the education of Leonard Woolf and the other Bloomsburians) come to be recognized as intellectuals? And finally, how have time and history silenced

the contributions that Martineau and Woolf made to the development of the womanist intellectual?

One would think that the progress made by women such as Martineau, Barbara Bodichon, and Florence Nightingale during the mid- and late nineteenth-centuries and Virginia Woolf in the early twentieth-century would have opened the way for women in the late twentieth-century. This rarely has been the case. Harriet Martineau enjoyed a tremendous popularity in her lifetime, but her name and contributions were expunged from the history books soon after her death. Germaine Greer describes this not unusual experience as the "phenomenon of the transience of female literary fame" (784).

Gerda Lerner has described the "long and slow advance of women intellectuals toward a group consciousness and toward a liberating analysis of their situation" as "spasmodic, uneven, [and] repetitious" (Lerner 220). This is because each generation of intellectual women have had to "think their way out of patriarchal and gender definitions . . . as though each of them was a lovely Robinson Crusoe on a desert island, reinventing civilization" (221). While male intellectuals "gr[o]w taller by standing 'on the shoulders of giants,' each making his small or large contribution to building a common heritage," women and their "creations s[i]nk soundlessly into the sea, leaving barely a ripple. Succeeding generations of women [are then] left to cover the same ground others had already covered before them" (221).

The final aim of this study, then, is to strengthen woman's position in the intellectual world by providing them not with giants but with aunts, nieces, and cousins. By examining the lives and works of Harriet Martineau, Virginia Woolf, bell hooks, Susan Sontag, and Adrienne Rich, I hope to provide the models that Alice Walker looked for in "Saving the Life That is Your Own," individuals who can "enrich and enlarge one's view of existence" (Our Mothers' Gardens 4). By accepting what Harriet Martineau and Virginia Woolf have to give us, we can leave the isolation of Robinson Crusoe's desert island and begin building on their divergent literary inheritance rather than continuing to cover old ground.

Womanist Intellectuals follows five womanist intellectuals and crosses the Atlantic, from Victorian England to late twentieth century America. I have chosen to cross the Atlantic for two reasons. First, American women have done much to unearth the works and contributions of Harriet Martineau and secondly, Virginia Woolf has received greater recognition in America than in Britain. This is not to say that the womanist intellectual does not exist in Britain. Doris Lessing, Iris Murdoch, and A.S. Byatt are just a few of the growing number of British women intellectuals, but hooks, Rich, and Sontag are taking the womanist intellectual in new directions.

I am often reminded of a passage from Woman and the Demon in which Nina Auerbach speaks of the need "to provide women today with an unexpectedly empowering past" (Auerbach 4). Perhaps by reclassifying

Martineau and Woolf, as well as other women intellectuals of the nineteenth and twentieth century, and tracing their non-traditional lineage, we can continue Auerbach's efforts.

### Notes: Introduction

<sup>1</sup> Of course, in truth, as Edward Said notes in his lectures on Representations of the Intellectual, "there is no such thing as a private intellectual, since the moment you set down words and then publish them you have entered the public world" (12).

<sup>2</sup> By mentioning Cornel West in this study, I am suggesting that womanist intellectuals do not have to be women. Based on my definition of womanist intellectual, West could easily be situated in the womanist tradition.



## CHAPTER I

### COMING TO TERMS: THE PUBLIC INTELLECTUAL

The term "intellectual" is a relatively new addition to the English language. One of its earliest uses occurs in Paradise Lost (1657), as Milton's Belial bemoans his fate and that of his leader: "Who would loose, so full of pain, this intellectual being" (2.147). In this case, "intellectual" simply refers to an individual possessing superior powers of thought. One of the first writers to employ the term as we commonly use it today--that is, to describe a person who possessed not only a high degree of intelligence but who is also given to pursuits which exercise the intellect--was Lord Byron in Don Juan (1819). Byron's narrator in describing Dona Inez sarcastically notes:

Tis pity learned virgins ever wed  
 With persons of no sort of education,  
 For gentlemen, who though well-born and bred,  
 Grow tired of scientific conversation  
 . . . .  
 But--oh! ye lords of ladies intellectual,  
 Inform us truly, have they not hen-peck'd you all?  
 (I.xxii.311)

Surprisingly, this early use of "intellectual" is used to describe women, although Byron uses the term sardonically. I say surprisingly because historical and critical commentaries on the intellectual, both past and present,

rarely make reference to women in the world of the intelligentsia. Why have women been excluded from this group of "knowledge elites?"<sup>1</sup> Obviously the same forces that have heretofore excluded women from the religious and political arenas (and from history) have also erected barricades that prevent women from entering the intellectual realm, as well.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge's The Statesman's Manual and Ralph Waldo Emerson's "American Scholar" both examine the role of the intellectual, but one of the more fascinating early works on the topic of the intellectual is a "how to" book on achieving intellectual status. Philip Gilbert Hamerton's The Intellectual Life, published in 1873, details the step-by-step process one follows to develop "the art or skill of living intellectually" (x). In taking the initial step, would-be intellectuals "compel every circumstance of [their] lives to yield [them] some tribute of intellectual benefit or force" (x-xi). Social barriers, like "the increasing vulgarity" of the age, inhibit man's pursuit of an erudite life, but the major hindrance to man's endeavor is woman, whose inherent lack of "grey matter" impedes his progress. Hamerton argues that women are incapable of becoming man's intellectual companion since they possess a "remarkable incapacity" for "serious mental discipline." Lacking any mental initiative, women avoid "intellectual labour . . . unless they are urged to it, and directed in it, by some powerful masculine influence. . . . They have not in themselves the motive powers" (248).<sup>2</sup>

Considering the general patriarchal mindset of the period, a view fueled by the newest scientific "findings" of women's physical, emotional, and mental instability, it is not unusual to find a late nineteenth century text that summarily dismisses women's intellectual capabilities. However, almost 100 years later, George de Huszar presents the same selective vision in his expansive study which traces the evolution of the modern intellectual over a period of over two thousand years. Contributors to his book discuss over 100 intellectuals from Plato to T.S. Eliot, yet not one woman is discussed at length.

Huszar's The Intellectuals: A Controversial Portrait can hardly be construed as "controversial." This highly traditional and encyclopedic text reveals that the intellectual is not a new phenomenon though the term itself did not come into common use until the mid-nineteenth century. During Queen Victoria's reign, 'knowledge' experts began to play a pivotal role in the development of modern British society. A term, then, was needed to describe this select group of individuals who created and transmitted cultural ideas and moral values to the populace.

## II

### **Devices and Desires: England in the Nineteenth Century**

A number of factors led to the development of the nineteenth century British intellectual. The economic, political, and cultural upheavals at home

and on the Continent had radically altered England's social and demographic landscape. Industrial capitalism generated an increase in the urban population as rural immigrants left the countryside searching for prosperity. Coupled with explosive economic growth, England's transformation from an agrarian to an urban society fueled the expanding middle-classes. As the ancient class structure began steadily to erode and industrial capitalism took root, the rising middle-classes began demanding their social, economic, and political rights.

Class struggles, migration, and both the Industrial and French Revolutions produced a need for specialists. At the same time, the technological advances in the printing industry and the increasing number of journals, magazines, and penny-papers, created a vehicle for marketing the goods of "knowledge" specialists. The burgeoning reading populace of the Victorian age consumed the products of public intellectuals in the same way that we, in the late twentieth century have become consumers (and, at times, prisoners) of computer products.

Eager to move forward in Victorian society and lay claim to privileges unheard of only decades earlier, the rising middle classes sought knowledge and guidance. This was construed by many of the intellectual elite as a class weakness. Nineteenth-century critic Walter Bagehot had observed that "most men in this country like opinions to be brought to them, rather than to be at the pains to go out and seek them." John Henry Newman echoed these

sentiments in his 1850 sermon and was disturbed by "the extreme influence of periodical publications, quarterly, monthly or daily, [which] teach the multitude of men what to think and what to say" (qtd. in Dawson 2).

This tenuous cultural situation, however, also created opportunities for the knowledge elites. Christian socialist Charles Kingsley contended that intellectuals had the opportunity as well as the obligation to guide the masses to a better life, and he expressed impatience with the educated man who failed to "attack the evil and the disgusting the moment he [saw] it" (qtd. in Margaret Thorp 65). The intellectual, as defined by Kingsley, was a public servant who would guide the working classes through this tumultuous period in British history. They were to address the religious, political, and social controversies of the period, analyze thorny and complex issues, and offer viable solutions to England's problems.

The populace was rapidly losing faith in their religion, their government, and their social traditions. This was the price of progress. Indeed, the period's dominant symbol of progress, the steam engine, also depicted a darker side of the Victorian age. For Thomas Carlyle's *Teufelsdröckh*, the universe was "one huge, dead, immeasurable Steam-engine, rolling on, in its dead indifference, to grind [man] limb from limb" (Sartor Resartus 89). Fear, coupled with an eager anticipation of the coming technological age, necessitated the development of leaders who could recover

and restore the public's faith in cultural institutions and traditions or at least replace them with something just as viable.

### III

#### **Two Roads Diverged: The Sage and the Womanist Intellectual**

The western cultural specialists who arose out of the events surrounding the Industrial Revolution marked the beginning of a great intellectual tradition: the Victorian sage. Its illustrious members included John Henry Newman and Matthew Arnold. Its most representative spokesman, Thomas Carlyle, portrayed the intellectual as part of a "perpetual Priesthood, from age to age, teaching all Men that a God is still present in their life; that all 'Appearance,' whatsoever we see in the world, is but as a vesture for the 'Divine Idea of the World'" (Collected Works 5: 157). The "true Literary Man," according to Carlyle, followed in the footsteps of Elijah or Jeremiah; "he is the light of the word; the world's Priest;--guiding it, like a sacred Pillar of Fire, in its dark pilgrimage through the waste of Time" (5: 157). Carlyle's description is quite gender specific. The sage is part of an austere and elite group of men who are "in" the world, but not "of" the world. Of course, some nineteenth century men of letters are not sages of the Carlylian sort. Writers such as Charles Kingsley and John Stuart Mill offer alternative modes of intellectual positions. Still, Kingsley's phallogentric world view and John Stuart Mill's insider status as a member of Parliament and the son

of James Mill, as well as the freedom both possessed as middle-class men in Victorian society, places them somewhere to the right of the womanist intellectual tradition that this text will establish.

George Landow describes sage writing as "postromantic nonfictional prose" which relied heavily on the methods of the Old Testament prophets (Landow, "Cassandra" 33). The sage transcended his audience, a move which gave his message divine authority and revealed him to be one possessing a higher moral vision than other members of society. Unlike his audience, the sage had "continued to follow the laws of God and nature" (32), relying heavily on past tradition to speak on matters of public (and patriarchal) interest.

Some women intellectuals also achieved recognition in the Victorian Age, though one could not say they flourished as did men of letters did. They too focused on contemporary social issues, though they often disagreed with their male counterparts on what constituted a social concern. For all his clothes philosophy, one would not think that Thomas Carlyle considered women's dressing habits either a social issue or a health concern. And it would even be more unlikely that he would write about it as Harriet Martineau did in "Dress and its Victims" (1859). Harriet Martineau did not attempt to set herself apart, nor did she rely as heavily on the phallogentric past as did Carlyle. Hers was a "voice crying in the crowd" and not a "voice crying in the Wilderness: prepare ye the way of the Lord" (Nightingale 25). As

a member of an oppressed group herself, Martineau entered the masculine intellectual domain knowing that, as a woman, she must accept her exilic status in a male-dominated society.

Much can be accomplished from a position of marginality, however. Edward Said argues that the most effective intellectual is one who has been exiled from her society, since "a condition of marginality . . . frees [one] from having always to proceed with caution, afraid to overturn the applecart, anxious about upsetting fellow members of the same corporation" (63). To "move away from the centralizing authorities towards the margins" (63) is more easily accomplished by a woman, who, by nature (read gender) is already an outsider. Many of Victorian England's men of letters were insiders. They came from diverse backgrounds and entered into a variety of professions, but all were respected members of their society. Matthew Arnold was an inspector of schools; John Henry Newman, a member of the Protestant clergy turned Roman Catholic priest; Thomas Carlyle, a writer and translator of German works; John Ruskin, an independently wealthy writer and later professor of art at Oxford; and John Stuart Mill was an officer in the East India Company. History has bestowed on them a variety of titles: literary men, men of letters, cultivators of science. Regardless of the label, these men played vital roles in the formation of the Victorian middle-classes and the perpetuation of a phallogocentric tradition.



## IV

### The Woman Question

Gender, a construct that simultaneously dictates social status , as well as an individual's self-perception, was tightly woven into the social fabric of Victorian England. For a woman to take the role previously designated for men meant defying hersociety on a number of levels. This proved an arduous task. Rising interest in a woman's position in a rapidly changing and progressive society resulted in both negative and positive consequences. The Industrial Revolution had created more employment opportunities, but the few advancements that women made were followed by a backlash that took the form of "The Woman Question," a question which queried woman's appropriate role in society.

Three stereotypes were already firmly entrenched in the social fiber: the sensual woman, the celibate spinster, and the wife/mother, none of whom attain fulfillment.

Three sang of love together: one with lips  
 Crimson, with cheeks and bosom in a glow,  
 Flushed to the yellow hair and finger tips;  
 And one there sang who soft and smooth as snow  
 Bloomed like a tinted hyacinth at a show;  
 And one was blue with famine after love  
 Who like a harpstring snapped rang harsh and low  
 The burden of what those were singing of.  
 One shamed herself in love; one temperately  
 Grew gross in soulless love, a sluggish wife;  
 One famished died for love. Thus two of three

Took death for love and won him after strife;  
 One droned in sweetness like a fattened bee:  
 All on the threshold, yet all short of life.

In "The Triad," Christina Rossetti criticizes the same tradition that many Victorian men, such as Coventry Patmore, wanted to celebrate. The wife/mother had been transformed earlier in the 1800's into the Angel in the House. Coventry Patmore, in 1854, popularized this apotheosis of married love with a poem by the same name. The domestic angel was a wife and mother, self-sacrificing and gentle, domestic and nurturing, adored by a family who sought to protect her from corrupt society and whom she protected from that corruption.

Other stereotypes existed in Victorian society, as well. Elizabeth Helsinger and her co-authors mention three: the woman of equality, the Angel out of the house--who does community service but does not question man's authority--and the female saviour who saves the world from itself (xiv-xv). Still, it was the homebound "angel" that captured the hearts of Victorian England. Middle-class society, as a whole, did not want its married women to work. Keeping them at home insured low wages and limited a woman's political, economic, and intellectual power.

Both men and women participated in constricting woman's sphere of influence. Sarah Stickney Ellis, despite her work *outside* the home as a missionary, social activist, and writer, gave the following advice to brides-to-

be in "The Wives of England" (1850): "One important truth" will make for a happier marriage, and that truth is "the superiority of your husband, simply as a man" (Selected Works 33). Ellis writes that "you may have more talent, with higher attainments, and you may also have been generally more admired; but this has nothing whatever to do with your position as a woman, which is, and must be, inferior to his as a man" (33). It is a woman's privilege, she argued, "to be able to show . . . how much she feels her husband's superiority to herself." This inferiority can most effectively be expressed in two ways: by deferring to his opinion in every situation and by "willingly impos[ing]" upon herself a "silence when he speaks" (33-34).

The angel in the house permeated every facet of Victorian culture.

Man for the field and woman for the hearth:  
 Man for the sword and for the needle she:  
 Man with the head and woman with the heart:  
 Man to Command and woman to obey;  
 All else confusion. ("The Princess" v.101)

Though Tennyson does not always take a completely negative view of women in his poetry, "The Princess" (as well as "Maud" and "The Lady of Shalott") captures the popular Victorian sentiment concerning woman's place in the universe, as well as its general attitude toward ambitious women. In Tennyson's poem, a princess who wishes to open a college for women "learns" that there are more important things than education for young

ladies, like a handsome, wealthy, and indulgent prince, for example. The poetry of Patmore and Tennyson, the essays of John Ruskin and W. R. Gregg, along with the speeches of politicians like Lord Ashley and the sermons of preachers like John William Burgon, contributed to the delimiting of women's power.

Perhaps the legal authority most responsible for restraining women's liberty in England and America during the eighteenth and nineteenth century was Sir William Blackstone, author of Commentaries on the Laws of England (1765). For over one hundred years this text defined British common law, including women's rights and duties (80). Blackstone argued that "the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband" (83). Legally, once married, a woman lost her identity. Marriage made husband and wife one under the law--and that one was the husband. In comparison, Anglo-Saxon women had no rights under public law, but in private law unmarried women of legal age or the widow was "almost the equal of a man," in that she, rather than the eldest son could inherit "the greatest fiefs" (LaBarge 34). Anglo-Saxon law also recognized a single woman's independence. After her marriage, her finances did not automatically fall under masculine control. The morgengifu, or "morning-gift," that a woman's future husband paid was not given over to her father but to the woman herself to do with as she pleased (Fell 56-57). Even the couple's

finances were the property of both the husband and the wife (57). In addition, in her husband's absence, the wife "could legally act for her husband, even to the point of acting as his attorney" (35).

Of course, five hundred years separate medieval law from modern, but compare the situation of the Anglo-Saxon woman to that of the Victorian. In the nineteenth century, any property held prior to marriage automatically came under the ownership of her husband; any of her earnings legally belonged to him, as well. He could dispense her monies, as well as her children, as he wished.

Until now, I have focused primarily on ideological and legal regulations of middle-class women, but the paradigm of man as sole provider and woman as keeper of the hearth is at the core of several major working class issues in the mid-1800's, including the Ten Hours Movement, which limited the number of hours a woman could work; the Chartist Movement, which in its beginnings campaigned to protect the rights of both sexes in the workplace but later dismissed many of the working interests of the very women who had supported the movement from its beginnings; and the Mines Regulation Act of 1842, which barred women from working in the mines.

In a hearing before the passage of the Mines Act, Anthony Ashley Cooper, Lord Shaftesbury, argued that "women working long hours disturbed the order of nature and the rights of laboring men" (1099-1100). Addressing

the House of Commons, Ashley eloquently argues that in allowing women to work, "you are poisoning the very sources of order and happiness and virtue; you are tearing up root and branch, all the relations of families to each other; you are annulling as it were, the institution of domestic life . . . the mainstay of social peace and virtue, and therein of national security" (1100). Though Lord Ashley attempts to co-opt the rhetoric of domesticity for women's advantage, some might argue that his approach could be construed as perpetuating the ideals of middle class domesticity for working women.

Not only did working women threaten national security, they also endangered the labor market; thus, the rhetoric of the Chartist Movement, that originally had advocated humane treatment of workers of both sexes, ultimately silenced its concerns for working women. Intellectuals, like Olive Schreiner, "lamented the parasitism" that entrapped all women. Writing at the end of the century, Schreiner wrote: "Year by year, day by day, there is a silently working but determined tendency for the sphere of woman's domestic labors to contract itself" ("Woman Question" 184-85).

The working woman threatened the nation, its economy, and to the nucleus family. Furthermore, many Victorians believed that she lacked the necessary mental and physical stability to survive outside her sheltered sphere. This argument is still heard today, as Susan Faludi notes in her ground-breaking work, Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women (1991). Newspapers and periodicals, like the New York Times and

Newsweek, have announced that women without children are "depressed and confused" (Dullea C1) and women without husbands are "hysterical," suffering from a "profound crisis of confidence" (Salholz 55). Their distress has led, as one might suppose, to an increasing number of emotional and physical ailments: "stress induced disorders," heart disease, hair loss, nervous breakdowns, and alcoholism (Faludi 19).

Women's emotional and physical frailties had been scientifically "proven" by leading physicians, biologists, anthropologists, and sociologists. These men had ascertained that women were pre-ordained by nature to be the weaker sex. First, women's brains were smaller than (and inferior to) men's. In addition, their menstrual cycles prevented blood from getting to their cerebral system, thereby limiting their learning capabilities. Many doctors believed that "maternal functions" zapped 20 percent of a woman's "potential brain activity" (Haller 65-66). Sir Almoth Wright, a renowned pathologist, insisted that a woman's physiology, her "hyper-sensitivity," her "innate unreasonableness," her periodic "loss of proportion" made her unfit to vote (263).

Because of their supposedly inherently inferior minds and bodies, a traditional education such as that offered young men of the middle-classes would be wasted on an individual who used her brain "but little and in trivial matters" (Bevington 30)? What education girls did receive prepared them for a life of domesticity (Sonya Rose 163).<sup>3</sup>

In her study on the education of middle and upper-class women, suffragist Millicent Fawcett noted that "at about 18, when a boy is just beginning his university career, a girl is supposed to have completed her education." From that moment on she is "practically debarred from further intellectual progress" (Fawcett 512). T.S. Clouston, a well-known Victorian scientist, argued that limiting a young girl's education was done only to protect her. Since young women who studied for long hours developed thin blood and pallid cheeks, Clouston concluded that "the world may be all the better for a generation of healthy, ignorant and happy mothers" (214-28). Other opponents of women's education insisted that schooling could have few positive results. In a paper presented to the Anthropological Society in 1869, James McGregor Allan, contended that if an educated woman and an uneducated man were given "a problem in Euclid, the mechanism of a steam-engine, or any other study requiring reason; the man's views [would] be more profound, broad, and luminous than those of the woman" (Allan cxcvii). For these Victorians, whether psychologically and physiologically, education was detrimental to women and to society.

Society assigned to women their nature (feminine and, therefore, flawed), their position (disembodied angels), and their power (over a domestic domain). If one were to break through these constraints and become a writer/intellectual, she would become the target of "ad feminam criticism" (Showalter, A Literature of Their Own 73). Many critics insisted that women



writers "lacked originality, intellectual training, abstract intelligence, humor, [and] self control" (90). The ideal writer/intellectual, according to these same critics, was one who possessed "power, breadth, distinctness, clarity, learning, abstract intelligence, shrewdness, experience, humor and . . . open mindedness" (90), which according to modern science, women did not and, physiologically, could not claim. Occupational segregation existed on a number of levels, from the hosiery industry to politics. There seemed little question that woman was "inferior to man in natural endowments, legal position, and the power to shape her own destiny" (Bauer 29).

According to Deidre David, intellectual women of the nineteenth century carried a "double burden." They were victims of British law and of their own thinking (6). Internally they struggled between choosing a path of self-development or one of self-sacrifice. Yet despite enormous social and professional constraints, women intellectuals succeeded in becoming a viable social force.

Many in society viewed women as victims plagued by debilitating limitations, but women like Anna Wheeler, Harriet Martineau, Florence Nightingale, Barbara Bodichon, Olive Schreiner, Geraldine Jewsbury, Alice Meynell, Julia Kavanaugh, and Frances Cobbe moved women from positions of oppression to that of power, from victim to agent. Struggling against dehumanizing forces, they recorded their struggles not only in diaries, letters, and autobiographies but in editorials, novels, and social and political tracts.

Victorian women intellectuals openly addressed thorny issues, exerting pressure against the status quo which objectified and departmentalized their sex.

## V

### Reshaping the Public Intellectual

Harriet Martineau was Victorian England's foremost woman intellectual and her life and work laid the foundation for a womanist intellectual tradition. A best-selling writer, she was lionized by the reading public. Her phenomenal success and its longevity can be attributed, in part, to England's matriarchy (Colby 2). With Queen Victoria's coronation came a greater interest in women and their position in the world. The consequence of this rising interest was mixed, however. On the one hand, women writers now had wider audiences, voracious readers looking for light entertainment, social education, spiritual guidance, and moral inspiration. On the other hand, these new opportunities produced a backlash.

Critics, for the most part, denounced the woman intellectual, ridiculing Anna Jameson for her appearance and labeling as "latent homosexuals" women, such as Harriet Martineau, who developed strong female friendships (R.K. Webb 51). In the literature of the period, women who moved outside the home in their philanthropic endeavors were caricatured. Mrs. Jellyby of Bleak House (1853) is a fine example. Charles Dickens portrays her as a

woman whose "tea-drinking, speech-making and letter-writing on the general merits of the cultivation of coffee, conjointly with natives, at the Settlement of Borrioboola-Gha" caused her to neglect her duties as housewife and mother (139).

The woman most maligned by social critics, however, was the public intellectual, who was described as nothing more or less than "a monster more horrible than that created by Frankenstein" (Allan 124). Today we witness similar vitriolic criticism of women intellectuals. Hillary Rodham-Clinton has been repeatedly attacked by one of the last strongholds of male privilege--the media--for going the keeping-my-own-name route and for failing to conform to the traditional campaign rules for aspiring first Ladies. One group labels her a lesbian and strident feminist, while another side attacks her as a false feminist. That Rodham-Clinton is an intellectual, a respected litigant, the chairperson (on-leave) of the Children's Defense Fund, and a member of five corporate boards appears to be of lesser import than her conformity to the role of First Lady.

Despite intense opposition that has continued until the present day, women intellectuals altered the landscape of Victorian England. Yet, one cannot find the names of these women listed in the history books alongside other great thinkers of the age or in contemporary works on the intellectual. As Dale Spender notes, women intellectuals of the nineteenth century found themselves in a catch-22 situation, for "if every obstacle were overcome and a

woman found the courage to write, the confidence to write, the chance of publication, and the conquest of the literary and public world in her own age, her efforts would still be minimized with the passage of time and her writing fade till it disappeared entirely from view" (Spender, Man-Made Language 204).

Even now, womanist intellectuals, despite the progress made by the women's liberation and civil rights movement and the efforts of Marxist, historicist, and feminist literary critics, continue to be dismissed. In 1917, T.S. Eliot wrote that he "struggle[d] to keep the writing as much as possible in Male hands, as I distrust the Feminine in literature" (Letters 204). Sixty years later, Harold Bloom, America's best known (and best published), literary critic continues the 'struggle.' His most recent effort has been the best-seller The Western Canon (1994), in which he dismisses Virginia Woolf as merely a great stylist.

The barriers erected to keep women out of the intellectual arena in the nineteenth century continue as we enter the twenty-first, as overt and covert arguments for excluding women intellectuals from the canon and Western Civilization courses continue. In 1929, Virginia Woolf wrote of how the intellectual contributions of women had been abused and distorted by male critics. The same is true today. The most effective method of dismissing womanist intellectuals of late has been to label them feminists. This labeling can be just as confining as was the Victorian woman's domestic sphere.

A panel discussion entitled "The New Feminist Intellectual," held at Skidmore College on April 10, 1985, clearly reveals this labeling-to-distort-and-dismiss approach. Though the discussion was supposed to be focused on the emergence of a new feminist intellectual, the conversation soon disintegrated into a verbal attack on the women's movement. Renata Adler, in her opening comments, asserts though things have not been "altogether fair with respect to women. . . , [but] being treated unfairly . . . is not the same as being oppressed. And I'm not sure that all the talk of oppression indulged in by people in the women's movement has not done us all a disservice by making it harder than it would have been to distinguish real issues from shallow polemic" (Lasch 33-34).

When Sarah Goodwin, an unknown voice in the audience, responds to the panel's digressions by questioning "why so much time has been devoted to cataloguing the weaknesses of feminist discourse and so little time devoted to the genuine achievements of feminist scholarship," panelist Jeane Bethke Elshtain, responds, a bit defensively, "I must say, Ms. Goodwin, that what often happens when these questions are raised by feminists like yourself. . . ." (38-39).

I need not continue with Elshtain's response since it obviously leads to a mean-spirited attack on feminists in general. The purpose in my quoting these passages is to reveal how easily the term "intellectual" evaporates from

a discussion of women intellectuals and ends up in a heated debate over the femi-nazi invasion.

Critics and historians like Toril Moi and Ellen Moers have succeeded in reviving the works of Victorian and early twentieth century women intellectuals as well as in rejecting the singular labels attached to their person. It is time that we, too, examine Martineau and other women not as victims of a patriarchal society or solely as feminists, but as womanist intellectuals with their own tradition and heritage.

## Notes: Chapter 1

<sup>1</sup> Eva Etzioni-Halevy in The Knowledge Elite and the Failure of Prophecy argues that intellectuals do not constitute a new social class, rather they are an elite which she defines as "minorities of people who are especially influential in shaping society's various institutional structures or spheres of activity. In modern society such structures and spheres include politics, administration, the economy, the military and the sphere of culture" (15).

<sup>2</sup> Hamerton's work makes for entertaining reading. His posturing and self-aggrandizing give the reader insight to some of the mind sets of the pseudo-intellectuals of the period, as well as the general attitude of society toward the role of women during this period.

<sup>3</sup> One victim of this type of reasoning reveals her private thoughts on Victorian England's education system in her diary. She writes that "the implicit lesson learned by all girls was that, fundamentally, whatever else a woman might do in her life, the ultimate responsibility for the daily care of the home and the family lay with her and not men" (qtd. in Rose 63).

## CHAPTER II

### HARRIET MARTINEAU

The publication of Illustrations of Political Economy series beginning in 1832 marked the appearance of Victorian England's first woman public intellectual, Harriet Martineau (1802-1877). Though history has obscured her numerous accomplishments, scholars have recently rediscovered her influential cultural role as educator, sociologist, historian, feminist, journalist, poet, and novelist. As "Victorian England's most famous female intellectual" (Mermin 105), Martineau's fame rivaled that of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Charlotte Bronte, and George Eliot during the nineteenth century.

Dorothy Mermin's latest appraisal of Martineau forces a reassessment of Leslie Stephen's earlier judgment. Although this imminent, late Victorian intellectual acknowledged in The Dictionary of National Biography that "some of her stories perhaps show[ed] an approach to genius, . . . neither her history nor her philosophical writings ha[d] the thoroughness of research or the originality of conception which could entitle them to such a name" (1198). This "damning with faint praise" is not atypical in the criticism of women's works. Harold Bloom writes of being "compelled to read" Alice Walker's Meridian "twice," but discovered on second reading ("one of my most remarkable literary experiences") the work to be a type of social novel which



"offers itself up for rapid ingestion and discarding" (30-31). Bloom's comments give validity to Brenda Silver's observation that "praise can be double-edged, blunting the arguments and defusing the authority of the text" (Silver 349).

During her lifetime, Martineau triumphed over physical infirmities--deafness, heart disease, a uterine tumor, and other health problems--as well as the usual familial and social constraints placed on Victorian women, to opine on a variety of topics ranging from America to Java, Sidney Herbert to Harriet Beecher Stowe, and from taxes to sanitation laws. She brazenly disregarded social codes by writing on topics--foreign and domestic affairs, the Crimean War, prison and health reform, and imperialism in Ireland and India--usually reserved for male scholars, politicians, and cultural critics.<sup>1</sup>

Martineau never lacked an audience whether she was lecturing on cattle raising and irrigation or writing about current fashions because the needs of her audience directed her writing.

As a womanist intellectual, it was necessary that Martineau defy social codes. Convinced that the duty of the intellectual was to educate the general populace in subjects that would help them "get on" in life, Martineau first chose to write on political economy, since it "had been studied less than perhaps any other science whatever, and not at all by those whom it most concerns,--the mass of people" (Illustrations of Political Economy 1: 4): "Can anything more nearly concern all the members of any society than the way in

which the necessaries and comforts of life may be best procured and enjoyed by all? Is there anything in any other study" (1: iv). This first effort as a public intellectual suggests a close connection between Martineau and her audience and their needs. She demystified what Gloria Steinem calls a "mysterious set of forces manipulated from above" (Moving Beyond Words 204) In writing to her readers, she addressed them not just as consumers or laborers but as fellow citizens united in a cause--their own survival. This connection between the intellectual and her audience is also exemplified in other writings such as her open letters she wrote while campaigning to repeal the Contagious Diseases Act: "Are you aware that . . . [the] honour and security of our sex and our homes are at present exposed to urgent danger, and even undergoing violation?" (Autobiography 2: 537).

A highly innovative and sensitive writer and thinker, Martineau has readily been dismissed by critics like Leslie Stephen as simply a popularizer of other people's ideas. To be a popularizer means to speak another's words, an action, which bell hooks would describe as "talk[ing] a talk that was in itself a silence" (Talking Back 7). By putting the economic philosophies of Adam Smith, Thomas Robert Malthus, David Ricardo, and James Mill<sup>2</sup> into a clear narrative form, Martineau did more than just make the basic tenets of political economy accessible to the reading public--specifically the "middling and lower classes"--for the first time. In writing as she did, Martineau reinforced the necessity of the public intellectual to speak in a clear language

that could be understood by a broader audience. Her translation of Auguste Comte's Cours de Philosophie, which she describes as her "greatest literary engagement" (Autobiography 2: 371), is the work of a first-rate political writer. Furthermore, to condense its six volumes to two and receive unequivocal praise from Comte (who requested that Martineau's abridged work be translated into French) in addition to world-wide critical acclaim would be a difficult feat for a mere popularizer.

The insight and creativity Martineau gave to her translations and economic tales appeared in other writings, as well. In the field of autobiography, Martineau revised the genre by transforming the basic conventions of this predominantly masculine tradition with its dramatic conversion structure and introspective perspective from which the autobiographer traditionally wrote (Peterson, Victorian Autobiography 153). Martineau worked within the traditional framework of the spiritual autobiography, like that of John Henry Newman, but replaced much of its theological content with a positivist outlook that was both secular and rational.

Cultural historian Seymour Martin Lipset describes Harriet Martineau as one of the earliest practitioners of the science of sociology, as well as one of the first to note the nexus between a society's changing moral values and social structural changes ("Introduction," Society in America 10). In Society in America, Martineau describes America's moral values as the primary

determining factor of its "institutional structure" (10). In naming moral values as a major causal agent, Martineau ushered in a new approach to examining a society's infrastructure (an approach, incidentally, which put into practice her necessitarian views).

As for the novel, Martineau only wrote three in her lifetime, yet many critics now recognize Deerbrook (1839), published thirty years before George Eliot's Middlemarch (1872), as one of the earliest precursors of the provincial novel. In this novel, Martineau experiments with dialogue, characters, and setting, presenting middle-class characters in rural settings who lived real lives and experienced real crises.

Writing in 1920, Janet Courtney concluded that Martineau's greatest contribution to society was not in sociology or in the development of the novel and autobiography but in "her assertion of a woman's right to think" (198). Early in her career, Martineau had begun to grapple with the Woman Question. It became the focus of much of her writing as she ceaselessly campaigned for equal educational and employment opportunities--the first steps toward women's independence.

Her genius, her dogged determination, as well as her refusal to succumb to the pressures of the age, inspired other women, like Barbara Bodichon, to enter into the public arena as intellectuals. Bodichon, Florence Nightingale, and Margaret Fuller, among others, claimed Martineau as their mentor. Late in the twentieth century, we find more and more women doing

as Martineau did as they cross borders and write on topics deemed, even now, unsuitable for a woman.<sup>3</sup> Few intellectuals, however, have matched Martineau in the volume or breadth of her works and achievements. The most appropriate parallel in modern times might be Susan Sontag--author, journalist, educator, social historian, and commentator--whose writings cover a broad range of topics, including communism, aesthetics, AIDS, photography, pornography, and literary criticism. However, Martineau's achievements, 150 years earlier, are even more astounding when one considers the constraints placed on her by her society, her family, and her own health, barriers which we will now explore in greater detail.

## II

### **"the happiest single woman in England"**

Harriet Martineau was born in 1802 in Norwich, which at the time had become a place of concentrated intellectual activity (Bosanquat 1). But the end of the Napoleonic Wars, which marked the return of 400,000 troops to England, resulted in a loss in government contracts, a decline in exports, and ultimately an economic depression, not only in Norwich but in all of England. Her father, Thomas Martineau, a textile manufacturer, suffered serious financial losses during the crash of 1825 and died the following year. Henry, Harriet's brother, took over his father's business and soon lost the rest of the dwindling family fortune, leaving Harriet with "precisely one shilling

in [her] purse (Autobiography 1: 109). Martineau's double tragedy--the loss of father and fortune--which perhaps did not exile her from proper society as much as it placed her along its periphery, made her career as writer/intellectual a possibility. In her autobiography, she acknowledges that:

but for the loss of money, we [Martineau, her sister, Elizabeth, and their mother] might have lived on in the ordinary provincial method of ladies with small means, sewing, and economizing, and growing narrower every year; whereas, by being thrown . . . on our own resources, we have worked hard and usefully, won friends, reputation and independence, seen the world abundantly, abroad and at home, and, in short, have truly lived instead of vegetated. (1: 108)

Another tragic occurrence that further marginalized Martineau but also moved her along in her journey toward self-actualization and self-sufficiency was the untimely death of her fiancé John Worthington who died of "brain fever" in 1827. Looking back at this earlier time, she writes that

If I had had a husband dependent on me for his happiness, the responsibility would have made me wretched. . . . So also with children. The care would have so overpowered the joy . . . that I rejoice not to have been involved in a relation for which I was, or believed myself, unfit. . . . I long ago came to the conclusion that . . . I am probably the happiest single woman in England. (1: 101-02)

Lacking a husband prevented Martineau from becoming part of that large contingency of middle-class women dependent solely on their spouses for their survival.

These tragic events, as Martineau notes in her autobiography, were, ironically, fortuitous. Just as Jane Eyre's dismissal from the Reed home and her dismal experiences at Lowood School were dual forces--both destructive and generative--moving Jane Eyre to independence, so, too, the death of Martineau's father and fiancé, coupled with the loss of her family's fortune, propelled Martineau, like Jane, out of the genteel world and into a social vocation of her own creation.<sup>4</sup> Unlike the heroine of many domestic novels, Martineau did not chose to enter employment as a governess or seamstress.

She chose instead a career as writer and public intellectual, which forced Martineau (in her own words) "to overcome my obstructions, and force my way to that power of public speech of which I believed myself more or less worthy" (Autobiography 1: 108). Painfully aware of the obstacles confronting independent-thinking women, Martineau knew that to succeed as an intellectual, she had to claim a power that would give her voice authority and authenticity. Accomplishing this feat meant engaging in a transformational process of self-actualization. The nineteenth-century woman intellectual, like her nieces in the twentieth century had to create for herself a self-empowering condition. This would enable her to help others attain this sense of freedom, for as bell hooks points out, the public

intellectual is both an educator and a healer. For Martineau, this meant 1) acquiring a language with which she could confidently speak, 2) understanding the relationship between power and knowledge and identity and employing it to her purposes (hooks, Teaching to Transgress 326), and 3) creating a space for herself within an enclosed intellectual community.

Language and style were acquired from her early schoolmaster who introduced her to classical rhetoric. Her experiences as a young Victorian woman (which included familial neglect, as well as loss of father, fortune, and fiancé) in addition to her early struggles with publishers, taught Martineau the relationship between power, knowledge, and identity. As for creating a space for herself among the intelligentsia, Martineau fixed her reputation and credibility through the application of "good sense, her rationality, and her lucid arguments" (Peterson, "Harriet Martineau" 179).

### III

#### **The Education of the Intellectual Woman**

Much has been written by Martineau and her biographers about her unhappy childhood, but, in truth, it was little different from that of other Victorian, middle-class girls. Martineau's mother, Elizabeth, was indifferent, if not cold and neglectful, toward her daughter. Harriet's feelings of loneliness, depression, and occasional thoughts of suicide (a "vaguely imagined alternative to the pains of life and the ennui of living")



(Miscellanies 59-60) created discord in the Martineau home, and at one point she was sent to stay with her aunt. Yet, despite her family's indifference, Martineau did have one advantage that many young Victorian women did not: Unitarian parents who believed in their daughters as well as their sons.

In general, Unitarians held that the physical and intellectual training of all members of a society was necessary for individual moral development as well as for social progress. Thomas and Elizabeth Martineau educated all eight of their sons and daughters. However, the education allotted the Martineau children could not be considered equal, since both parents deemed it unseemly for a young woman to commit herself wholly to her studies. For this reason, Harriet's household responsibilities--making clothes for her family and embroidery--took precedence over her studies (Autobiography 1: 20). Her mother never reconciled herself to her daughter's chosen profession, and continued to press her daughter "to pursue,--not literature but needlework" (1: 148-49), long after Martineau had become a successful writer.

Martineau received home instruction in Latin, math-matics, and French and taught herself political economy by reading the newspapers, especially The Globe (1: 54-55). In 1813 she enrolled in a day school. During her two years under the tutelage of Isaac Perry, Martineau had first thoughts of herself as an intellectual. In her autobiography, she writes of this time as being "inestimable" in "its importance": it marked the beginning "of [her] . . . intellectual existence" (1: 53). Later, Martineau came under the tutelage of

Lant Carpenter, another Unitarian theologian. While her studies under Perry focused on French, Latin, composition, verse-making and arithmetic,<sup>5</sup> Carpenter placed special emphasis on religion, history, and poetry, as well as logic and rhetoric.<sup>6</sup>

Compared to other middle-class young women, whose training centered on the social graces--dancing, music, drawing, and deportment, Martineau received an exceptional education. In comparison to her brothers', however, Martineau's formal training seems severely limited. What Virginia Woolf would later term "Arthur's education fund,"<sup>7</sup> made it possible for Harriet's brother Thomas to attend medical school and become a practicing physician and for her brother James to attend Manchester New College at York, while Martineau was left to find her own way.

As one might expect, the education of the woman intellectual differed markedly from that of the man of letters. At ten, Thomas Carlyle enrolled in Annan Academy and in 1809 attended the University of Edinburgh. John Stuart Mill's unorthodox education came in the form of the great "Education Experiment" designed by his father James Mill and philosopher Jeremy Bentham. The austere curriculum included the study of Greek at the age of three, and Latin, math, physical science, chemistry, and English Literature at eight. This intense study continued until Mill was fifteen, when after a fourteen month sojourn on the Continent, he returned to England to study law. Matthew Arnold, as a young boy, attended the Rugby School where his

father Thomas served as headmaster. Upon winning the Balliol Scholarship, he went up to Balliol College in 1841, earning a second class degree from Oxford.

Let us now compare these educational experiences and opportunities with those of George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans) (1819-1890), who, at four, was sent to a Dames school, which was little more than a nursery. At nine, she attended a school in which education took second place to social reform. In 1832, Robert Evans decided that his youngest daughter should receive the best affordable education<sup>8</sup> and sent her to Miss Franklin's boarding-school at Coventry. His position on educating his daughter changed when his wife died three years later. At that time, Mary Ann returned home to take over her mother's domestic duties.

Mary Somerville (1780-1872), a celebrated intellectual and mathematician whose work in the interconnection of the sciences foreshadowed that of Auguste Comte, was a brilliant woman, who, driven by her "ardent thirst for knowledge, . . . overcame obstacles apparently insurmountable, at a time when women were well-nigh totally debarred from education" (Somerville 2). At ten, she attended a boarding school where she received instruction in fundamentals of writing and basic French and English grammar but soon found Miss Primrose's teaching methods "extremely tedious and inefficient" (22). A year later, her mother, who "would have been contented if I had only learnt to write well and keep accounts, which was

all that a woman was expected to know" (24-25), decided that twelve months of formal education was enough for any young woman.

These women, Harriet Martineau, George Eliot, and Mary Somerville--not only three of nineteenth-century England's most well-known and gifted thinkers--received, in total, approximately ten years of a patchwork education and one which largely excluded topics within the "provinces of masculine knowledge" (as Eliot describes them in Middlemarch). The marginalization these intellectuals experienced in their education is reflected in their writings. The reader senses Maggie Tulliver's frustration (Mill on the Floss) with the educational opportunities afforded her brother, who was her intellectual inferior, the suppressed anger of Mary Ann Evans. In Household Education, too, Harriet Martineau's frustration is revealed in the urgency with which she argues for the education of boys *and* girls. The purpose of education, she asserts, should be "to bring out and strengthen and exercise all the powers given to *every human thing*" [my emphasis] (13). Education is a key issue addressed by many womanist intellectuals. In one of her earliest published pieces, "On Female Education" (1822) Martineau argues that women are intellectually inferior to men only because they receive little if any education. Later, in A Room of One's Own, Virginia Woolf explores how the lack of an education affects women's writing, and both Adrienne Rich and Woolf argue for a "Woman-Centered University." bell hooks, like her aunts and cousins,

believes that education should be a practice in freedom. Each of these women describes education as the first step to freedom from oppression.

#### IV

##### **"because I could not help it" Harriet Martineau and the Womanist Intellectual Tradition**

Despite her marginalized social position, limited education, and few employment opportunities, Martineau succeeded in becoming one of the foremost intellectuals of her age. Her interest in the intellectual life began in early childhood. In her autobiography, Martineau asserts that her "business in life has been [and will be] to think and learn" (1: 101-02), and later, in Illustrations of Political Economy, she announces her mission as a public intellectual, which is to "write on subjects of universal concern [so] as to inform some minds and stir up others" (1: ix).

Edward Said, a hundred and fifty years later, centers his lecture series on the public intellectual around a similar idea. The public intellectual's primary responsibility, according to Said, is "to hold to a universal and single standard," which he defines as simply freedom from oppression (xiii). This obligation impels the intellectual to "go beyond the easy certainties" of his or her own language and/or nationality which often blinds individuals to "the reality of others" (xiv). It entails questioning "patriotic nationalism, corporate thinking, and a sense of class, racial or gender privilege" (xii). Thus, the intellectual's mission possesses sharp edges but they are unavoidable for the

individual who publicly "raise[s] embarrassing questions [that] confront orthodoxy and dogma" (11). Like Martineau, Edward Said argues that the intellectual must both inform and incite to action.

Looking back over her "remarkable life" (Autobiography 1: 1), Martineau asserts, as do many of the public intellectuals past and present, that her intellectual life, or specifically, her "authorship [had] never been . . . a matter of choice: I have not done it for amusement, or for money, or for fame, or for any reason but because I could not help it" (1: 143); she had seen a need. Martineau recognized that the lower middle and working classes faced enormous hardships yet were ignorant of the industrial/capitalistic conditions that created many of their difficulties, and from the beginnings of her career felt compelled to enlighten, educate, and emancipate them.

A woman public intellectual in the nineteenth century, not surprisingly, was an oddity, since to be an intellectual meant entering public life, and Victorian women, with the rare exception of someone like the queen, had no 'public' life. Legally, economically, and institutionally, men controlled their wives/sisters/daughters. Few women, Geraldine Jewsbury noticed, led "normal" lives, since the masculine was the norm and feminine was not. For this reason, woman, as "other," looked to man not only for economic and social support, but also for self-definition. Men were "the channel through which women were required to find themselves" (Jewsbury 347-49). Possessing no vote, few rights, and little self-identity, the female

intellectual defied her culture on every level--domestically, legally, educationally, economically, and politically--to pursue her career.

This oppressive situation is not unique to world history. Conquering powers have always found ways to annihilate or absorb the languages and voices of the conquered, as we can see in reading of American slave narratives. Fast-forwarding 150 years, we find Martineau's situation not unlike that of African-American intellectuals in twentieth century America. Cornel West and bell hooks depict the black intellectual as "caught between an insolent American society and insouciant Black community" and living in a world both "isolated and insulated" (Breaking Bread 131).

In addition to addressing the problems facing black intellectuals, Cornel West also attempts to discover what, despite numerous obstacles, drives African-Americans to enter the intellectual arena. In his studies, he has discovered that it is usually "a conversion-like experience with a highly influential teacher or peer that convinced one to dedicate one's life to the activities of writing, and conversing for the purposes of individual pleasure, personal work, and political enhancement of Black (and often other oppressed) people" (hooks and West 148).

Harriet Martineau's earliest mentors were her male teachers--the Reverends Perry and Carpenter. Becoming a public intellectual, a decision which she made at an early age, was made doubly difficult for her since she had few women mentors or role models to emulate. Carol Heilbrun in

Writing a Woman's Life asserts that it is not "lives . . . [that] serve as models" for many women writers. Instead, women must "live [their] lives through texts" (37). But, Martineau was in the unenviable position of having few women intellectual ancestors to inspire and guide her.

As a young woman, Martineau had read Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication on the Rights of Women, and she acknowledged Wollstonecraft as the first English public advocate of women's rights. She honored her work and sympathized with the woman, believing that "every allowance [should] be made for Mary Wollstonecraft herself, from the constitution and singular environment which determined her course." She did not, however, regard her as "a safe example, nor as a successful champion of Woman and her Rights" (Autobiography 1: 403). As a rational moralist, Martineau deemed Wollstonecraft a "detriment" to the cause of women's rights, since she, a "poor woman of passion," lacked "control over her own peace, and no calmness or contentment except when the needs of her individual nature were satisfied" (1: 399-403). In examining Caroline Norton's campaign to change British divorce laws, Brenda Silver echoes Martineau's sentiments, noting that "as long as a [woman] occupied the place of female victim, she could ask only for protection, not rights" ("Authority of Anger" 360). Wollstonecraft, according to Martineau, lacked self-control and self-confidence, two qualities necessary for the womanist intellectual. But more



importantly, Martineau understood that to argue from the position of victim could have no long-lasting positive effect for women.

In demanding that society make right its transgressions against women, Mary Wollstonecraft, despite her failings (most of which came out posthumously when her husband William Godwin published his memoirs), prepared the way for the women's movement. Susan Gubar argues (as did Martineau) that she unknowingly established a tradition of "feminist misogyny" (454). In her analysis of the feminine in A Vindication of the Rights of Women, Wollstonecraft, according to Gubar, "associates the feminine with weakness, childishness, deceitfulness, cunning, superficiality. . . , irrationality, flattery, servility, prostitution, coquetry, sentimentality, ignorance, indolence, intolerance, slavish conformity, fickle passion, despotism, bigotry, and a 'spaniel-like' affection" (Gubar 456). In Wollstonecraft's hands, according to Martineau, femininity becomes an illness which transforms women, according to Wollstonecraft, into weak, whimpering, helpless invalids. If their judgment is left undeveloped and their emotions "pampered," women become "restless and anxious, their over exercised sensibility . . . renders them . . . troublesome . . . to others. . . . [T]heir conduct is unstable, and their opinions are wavering. . . . Miserable, indeed, must be that being whose cultivation of mind has only tended to inflame its passions!" (Wollstonecraft 60-61).

Though her "derogation of the feminine" is couched in "terms of her breakthrough analysis of the social construction of gender," Wollstonecraft is, albeit unwittingly, denigrating womanhood in general (Gubar 457). This observation is supported by Wollstonecraft's choice of audience, not women but "men of understanding." In A Vindication of the Rights of Women, she, albeit indirectly, practices a form of "victim feminism," which Naomi Woolf describes as "seek[ing] power through an identity of powerlessness" (Fire With Fire 135). Though women should acknowledge the ways in which they have been victimized, to argue from that perspective is detrimental to women's progress since to speak as other is to subordinate one's self.

Emma Rauschenbusch-Clough in 1898 criticized Wollstonecraft's "moderate . . . demands for the higher education of women" (282). But Rauschenbusch-Clough reminds her readers that that the author of Vindication of the Rights of Woman was, in 1792, treading on unknown territory. At that time, there were some women of "brilliant achievement," although they were "exceptional cases." In her treatise, Wollstonecraft limits herself to "the plain, dull average; and there she had nothing to inspire hope beyond the fact, that woman is in possession of reason, and that reason in its nature must be the same in all" (Rauschenbusch-Clough 283-84).

Unable to find intellectual inspiration in the writings of earlier women thinkers such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Martineau created her own "ideal," taking what she needed from the masculine tradition and then decentering

masculine authority. One way Martineau accomplished this was by using "gender-free patterns of human development" (Peterson, "Harriet Martineau" 150), in such works as Household Education in which she argues that equal attention should be given to the education of boys and girls. In fighting to repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts, Martineau attempted to right the wrongs of women, as Wollstonecraft had, not by asking permission for social equality but by laying claim to her inalienable rights as a human being.

Having come to terms with her social, political, and historical position, Martineau was able to develop an authentic and authoritative voice, as well as the ability to present herself as subject rather than object. American essayist and poet Nancy Mairs announces in Voice Lessons: "I am a writer. Without modification" (4). So, too, Martineau in her Autobiography claims for herself the title of intellectual and, at the age of twenty-seven, vows that "my chief . . . object in life shall . . . be the cultivation of my intellectual powers, with a view to the instruction of others by my writings" (Autobiography 2: 166).

Martineau, like Wollstonecraft, had her weaknesses. Like other women writers, she desired legitimization so she could claim the right to speak openly on political economy or necessitarianism or any political, social, religious issues. For Victorian men of letters, this was not difficult since most attended prestigious universities and/or received extensive tutoring which enabled them to discourse with some of the great minds of the day and thus gain legitimacy as writers/intellectuals. Self-authority or even the authority

of experience was not enough for Martineau. As a woman in Victorian England who possessed little power of her own, Martineau needed a socially-recognized authority figure to legitimize her right to speak publicly.

In 1820, Martineau anonymously submitted an essay entitled "Female Writers of Practical Divinity" for publication in the Monthly Repository. Her older brother, James, read the article, and according to Martineau, upon discovering his sister to be the author, "laid his hand on my shoulder, and said gravely (calling me 'dear' for the first time) 'Now, dear, leave it to other women to make shirts and darn stockings; and . . . you devote yourself to this.' I went home in sort of dream. . . . That evening made me an authoress" (Autobiography 1: 120). His command that she "devote herself" to her writing was necessary in that it symbolized for Martineau a commissioning by a member of the patriarchy to embark on her intellectual mission. Linda Peterson speaks of Martineau's need for justification and observes how she wove a "magical story" for readers of her autobiography in which her career was "sanctioned" by her elder brother. It is as though this normally self-possessed and self-assured woman could not choose her life; it had to choose her. Martineau writes that she became a public intellectual because "I could not help it" (1: 188).

Most intellectuals, however, both male and female, desire validation of some form. bell hooks speaks of this need, but rather than looking to a "white supremacist capitalist system" (Teaching to Transgress 324), she uses

her personal childhood experiences to legitimize her work. She recalls turning to intellectual work as a young child "in a desperate search for an oppositional standpoint that would help [her] survive a painful childhood" (hooks and West 148). One might suppose that Martineau's early tragedies, as well as her strained relationship with her mother and siblings, led her, too, to seek refuge in an intellectual life where she found an "unexhausted spring of moral relief" (Autobiography 1: 50). Whether her intellectual pursuits were legitimized by the patriarchy, as represented by her brother James, or whether she was forced into this vocation as a way of surviving, Martineau devoted her long life to the process of self-actualization and to the struggle for human liberation.

## V

### **"to inform some minds and stir up others"**

Most nineteenth century intellectuals, including Harriet Martineau, perceived themselves as world-builders and most chose to address the rapid changes in their society in one of roughly two ways: 1) either by transforming traditional creeds and re-envisioning England's social, political, economic, and aesthetic structures or 2) by re-establishing traditional credos in an effort to maintain England's social, political, economic, and aesthetic structures. Martineau chose the path of transformation and re-envisionment while working within a patriarchal system. Employing classic rhetoric and the

language of the oppressor, Martineau developed an authoritative voice but one which she used in creating, according to Linda Peterson, a "genderless model for interpreting human experience" (Victorian Autobiography 180). Peterson also notes Martineau's use of a "sexless model of the human mind" in Household Education to prove that for Martineau no difference exists between the two sexes in their development of "the powers (will, hope, fear, patience, love, veneration, truthfulness, conscientiousness)" (176). In other works, like her Autobiography, Martineau uses the language of the patriarchy, if not to dismantle it, then to re-structure it.

One example of Martineau's use of language to reshape social views on women's bodies and to redefine social roles is found in Life in the Sickroom, which she wrote in 1844 while still convalescing from a uterine complaint diagnosed four years earlier. In this treatise, Martineau responds to recent scientific findings on woman's frailty and its effect on her mental processes. She argues, based on her own success in treating her illness through mesmerism, that the invalid should have a greater role in her medical treatment. Being removed from the "affairs of men," makes one more perceptive and more knowledgeable. It is true that one might be

excluded from much observation of the outer life of men; but of the inner life, which originates and interprets the outer, it is scarcely possible that in any other circumstances we could have known so

much. . . . What is there of joy or sorrow, mystery and marvel, in human experience that is not communicated to us! (Life in the Sickroom 211).

For this reason Martineau places the infirm in a privileged position--in control not only of the sickroom but of her medical care. The invalid's marginalized position has its own power, part of which includes control over the sickroom environment (number of visitors, location of the bed, view from the window, furnishings). Thus, in Martineau's treatise we find a foreshadowing of Virginia Woolf's concept of "a room of one's own" as a source of power and independence.

In addition to campaigning for medical and educational reforms, Martineau actively involved herself in a number of movements, including the campaign to repeal the Poor Laws and the Corn Laws and to pass the Reform Bill and the Divorce Act.<sup>9</sup> She was not alone in her concern for the mistreatment of farmers, housewives, children, prostitutes, and slaves.

The situation of oppressed groups also troubled many of the more traditional intellectuals as well. Matthew Arnold the duty of the intellectual was "to open [the populace's] mind and to strengthen them by a better culture" (Culture and Anarchy 163). An admirable goal, and one still espoused by cultural critics like Harold Bloom and Edward Hirsch. But, the suggestion needs clarification. Who is to open the mind of the populace? Who will best be served by this better culture? And, for that matter, who will

decide on what constitutes a "better culture"? From Arnold's perspective, certainly not the majority of the middle class, whose world view he deemed "narrow, harsh, unintelligent, and unattractive" (Democracy 10). To achieve a great and ennobled spirit, one needed an education which presents the best that has been said or known in the world, but as to who would select which works would appear on the "best" list is not mentioned.

Martineau, too, recognized the need for educating the rising middle classes, but her approach was more pragmatic and less elitist than Arnold's. Rather than ennobling the general populace, she believed that the "greatest service" she could render to society was "to familiarise them [the general population] with the principles which regulate their own interests."<sup>10</sup> She was driven to engage in a discourse that would inform minds (Martineau, Illustrations of Political Economy 1: ix). As Virginia Woolf did in "How One Should Read a Book?" Martineau desired that individuals be allowed to think for themselves and create their own independent lives. Her mission was to arm them with the skills needed to survive.

Matthew Arnold sincerely believed his class could improve society, and that it was his responsibility as a member of the intelligentsia and a school inspector to take a leading role in formulating a modern system of education. Yet, however admirable his motives, Arnold's purpose appears to be directed not toward the development of independent minds but toward the colonization of the public consciousness, a pedagogical approach still



practiced today in most educational systems. Who ultimately is being served by this type of education--the oppressed or the oppressors? It appears that the cultural commentary of many traditional intellectuals re-inforced the status quo and/or called the populace back to an ancient tradition, as when Arnold argues that men should look to the classics, which he refers to as "touchstones," for guidance and inspiration. The classics do offer great insight and speak to universal concerns, but the canon perpetuates a narrow world view.

Arnold may have foreseen the ultimate demise of aristocracy's control, but still he hoped to mold the middle-classes in its (or his?) image by teaching them the best that had been said or thought--and all of that "best" had been written or thought by the great philosophers and thinkers of the ages who had little to do with the mundane, day-to-day concerns facing the working and middle classes. For Arnold, "men like Comte and Mr. [John Stuart] Mill" were "enemies of culture" in that they denigrated classical culture which sought to raise individuals above the mundane, shaping them into what was beautiful and perfect (based on classical standards). These culturist foes, such as Auguste Comte lowered themselves to the level of the masses in order to "indoctrinate [them] with the set of ideas and judgments constituting the creed of their own profession or party" (Culture and Anarchy 361-62). Others, such as Mill, sought, in Arnold's view, unrestrained freedom for the individual, an effort which, Arnold believed would ultimately lead to anarchy. Neither Martineau nor Mill, however, worked for unlimited

freedom for members of their society nor were they "system makers" (360) as Comte was (though, of course, in translating Comte's Philosophy, Martineau was, albeit indirectly, advocating a system which she was later to denounce in part for its sexual and racial biases).

Stooping down to one's audience for Martineau simply meant speaking to her audience on day-to-day issues, as well as those of universal concern, in a language her audience could understand. Having already defied her culture by entering a masculine profession, she now transgresses other social codes to write on topics considered either improper for the intellectual to address or inappropriate for women to discuss. She expanded her focus and enlarged her sphere to analyze economic, political, social issues, such as slavery, colonization, government laws, and social welfare and domestic issues. She also broke with the elitist intellectual tradition by instructing middle class and working men and women on the basic concepts of political economy, child-rearing, and dairy farming. In works such as Deerbrook and "Dress and Its Victims," Martineau portrays the realities of her readers' lives, making the "every day" an integral part of the intellectual's focus.

But her realistic picture of the world, such as that portrayed in Deerbrook (1838), was not what most publishers were looking for, at least not in the novel. In the thirties, publishers believed that the genteel reader cared little for novels about provincial life. Describing the reception of her work, Martineau writes that the first publisher rejected her novel because "people

liked high life in novels, and low life, and ancient life; and life of any rank presented by Dickens" but not "the familiar life of every day" (Autobiography 1: 4). Martineau, however, suggests that Deerbrook would "have been useful in overcoming a prejudice against the use of middle-class life in fiction" (1: 4).<sup>11</sup>

In the preface to Illustrations of Political Economy, Martineau stresses the connection between knowledge and successful living: "Can anything more nearly concern all the members of any society than the way in which the necessaries and comforts of life may best be procured and enjoyed by all? . . . And yet Political Economy has been . . . studied not all by those whom it most concerns--the mass of the people" (1: iv).

She concludes this observation with a series of reader-directed questions which reveal the enormous influence economics had on the reader's daily life:

Is there anyone breathing to whom it is of no whether the production of food and clothing . . . goes on or ceases? . . . whether the crimes of oppression and excess . . . and violence and theft . . . are encouraged or checked by the mode of distribution? Is there anyone living to whom it . . . matters not whether the supports of life, the comforts of home, and the pleasures of society, shall become more scanty or more abundant? Whether there shall be facilities for the attainment of intellectual good, or whether the old times of slavery and hardship shall return? (Illustrations of Political Economy xv-xvi)

In her preface, Martineau concludes that "if it concerns the wealthy that their property should be secure" and the middle classes "that their industry should be rewarded, [and] the poor that their hardships should be redressed, it concerns all that Political Economy should be understood" (Illustrations of Political Economy 1.xvi). For the working classes to improve their lot, they must grasp the basic principles of economics. There was no more effective way to "petition intelligently or effectually" ( I.ix) to the government.

What makes Martineau's work on political economics differ markedly from other numerous studies on the topic during this period is that these other guides, which "profess[ed] to teach" economic principles, were written, according to Martineau, solely "for the learned" (1: ix). Illustrations of Political Economy, however, translates and transforms difficult concepts into stories easily understood by the adult population. This is another aspect of the womanist intellectual that bears repeating. For Martineau to speak to and with the working classes meant altering her "performance" and speaking directly to them in a common language. hooks writes that the intellectuals must use "language in ways that speak to specific contexts" and diverse audiences (Teaching to Transgress 11).

Edward Said's lecture series on Representations of the Intellectual and Michael Berube's recent article suggest that in the late twentieth century, the idea of making complex economic, political, and social issues available to a wide audience has become part of the public intellectual's responsibility.

Today, womanist intellectuals such as bell hooks are "enabl[ing] . . . women and men to live more fully in the world" by employing an "accessible language that is informed by the best of recent theory and is inspired by the struggles" of the oppressed (hooks and West 71, 59). Susan Sontag does much the same thing in using day-to-day experiences to describe the Serbian-Bosnian conflict, often portraying the war in terms of a piece of bread and a pear stolen at play rehearsal.

In "Dress and Its Victims," Martineau criticizes a number of female garments as having "injurious and sometimes murderous" effects on women (231). The popular dress of the day did not fit woman's natural form; it did "not protect them from cold, heat, damp, or glare" (232). With the invention of hoop skirts, boas, imported French bonnets, and petticoats, women became more susceptible to "rheumatism," "throat and chest diseases," and "neuralgic pains in the face and head." British women, Martineau fears, were becoming slaves to fashion.

Though her article seems humorous reading for the late twentieth century reader, the ideas she presents here have been argued in The Beauty Myth (1991) by American feminist and intellectual Naomi Wolf, who describes modern women as "slaves" to fashion, in addition to cosmetic surgery and the "ideology of self improvement" (55). One can little imagine the great Sage of Chelsea, Thomas Carlyle, writing about corsets and gutta-percha shoes as forms of oppression.<sup>12</sup> Martineau, however, found nothing

demeaning in publishing pamphlets on domestic affairs, lecturing day laborers in her living room at Ambleside, or writing leaders for a daily paper. For her, this was all part of the work of the public intellectual whose goal was to reveal the relationship between power, knowledge, and identity.

Martineau was an intellectual who "trade[d] in ideas by transgressing discursive frontiers" and who recognized the connection between these ideas and a 'wider political culture" (hooks and West 152). Because she was an educator, not just to the elite, but to the "middling" classes and the poor, Martineau produced two editions of Illustrations, one expensive and the other quite affordable. Unlike Matthew Arnold,<sup>13</sup> Thomas Carlyle, and William Edmonston Aytoune, whose works, as often than not, were directed to other critics, much of Martineau's writings and lectures spoke to the populace as a whole, as well as to politicians.

## VI

### **Martineau and the Traditional Intellectual**

Harriet Martineau claimed acquaintance with several of the more famous members of the intelligentsia, such as Thomas Carlyle, John Stuart Mill, and Matthew Arnold. Jane and Thomas Carlyle were considered friends, Mill an acquaintance, and Arnold a friend and neighbor. But Martineau's relationships with the intellectual elite were problematic, revealing not only differences in political and social views and in approaches

to their roles as intellectuals, but also the general tension between men and women intellectuals. This tension manifested itself in a backlash of criticism that further marginalized and isolated women thinkers, driving them to take the public intellectual into new directions.

Martineau met Thomas and Jane Carlyle in 1836 when she returned from a two year trip to America. Early in their relationship, Carlyle had commented on Martineau's intelligence and liveliness (Kaplan 229). Her "sharp eye" and "imperturbable self-possession," that fitted well with her "loyalty of intention and her frank guilelessness and easy ways," compensated for the fact that she was a bit "strange" (Reminiscences 176-77). However, later, when Martineau became seriously ill (1839-45), Carlyle expressed relief that "her meagre didacticalities [would] afflict me no more" (Reid 1: 435).<sup>14</sup>

In his review of Martineau's Life in the Sickroom, a work which placed the invalid in the "seat of authority" over her illness and its treatment (Winter 608), Carlyle accused Martineau of portraying herself as "a female Christ, saying, 'Look at me; see how I am suffering!'" He deemed Deerbrook "very ligneous, very trivial-didactic, in fact very absurd for the most part" (Webb 185) and argued that Martineau's "talent," though "considerable," was "totally inadequate to grapple with deep spiritual and social questions." Instead, he found her genius better suited to a "quite shining Matron of some big Female Establishment, mistress of some immense Dress-Shop" (Reminiscences 177). Obviously Carlyle believed that Martineau was only

capable of making clothes and not espousing a "clothes" philosophy, as he had done.

Martineau, on her part, readily acknowledged Carlyle's genius, insisting that Sartor Resartus "best conveyed [of any other writing of the period] an outpouring" of the major concerns of the day (Autobiography 1: 291). She was also instrumental in the organization of Carlyle's lecture series, On Heroes and Hero Worship, which helped Carlyle financially at a critical time in his career. Martineau found Carlyle to be a brilliant but complex man existing "in opposition to himself": ". . . he may be the greatest mannerist of his age while denouncing conventionalism,--the greatest talker while eulogising silence,--the most woeful complainer while glorifying fortitude,--the most uncertain and stormy in mood, while holding forth serenity as the greatest good within the reach of Man" (Autobiography 1: 292).

The Sage of Chelsea, according to Martineau, had "awakened [in social consciences] a sense of our sins" by "infus[ing] into the mind of the English nation a sincerity, earnestness, healthfulness and courage" (1: 292).

Martineau's life attests to Carlyle's influence; it is a manifestation of his 1829 dictate that the "grand business" of the individual "is not to see what lies dimly at a distance, but to do what lies clearly at hand" (Carlyle, "Signs of the Times" 15: 462-87).

These two intellectuals, both lionized by Victorian society, held opposing political and economic views. Though Martineau's life and



writings put Carlyle's "Gospel of Work"--to do the duty that lies nearest--into practice, both were strongly divided on a number of socio-political issues, especially slavery.

In December 1849, Carlyle's "Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question" appeared in Fraser's Magazine. Later republished as The Nigger Question, this fictional discourse stereotypes blacks as lazy do-nothings, whose recalcitrance deserved the "beneficent whip." But does the speaker [Carlyle]

hate the Negro? No; except when the soul is killed out of him, I decidedly like poor Quashee [the slave]; and find him a pretty kind of man. With a pennyworth of oil, you can make a handsome glossy thing of Quashee, when the soul is not killed in him. A swift, supple fellow; a merry-hearted, grinning, dancing, singing, affectionate kind of creature, with a great deal of melody and amenability in his composition. (Works 18: 302)

Carlyle's view on the slave issue reveals a lack of concern for or a failure to recognize the plight of the oppressed.

Martineau deplored slavery and openly spoke out on the issue in works such as Illustrations of Political Economy, Society in America, and A History of the Thirty Years' Peace. In "West India Slavery," an article which appeared in the Monthly Repository, Martineau writes of the "pain" she felt when thinking "on the condition of our Negro brethren; of their tortured bodies, their stunted intellects, their perverted affections, their extorted

labour, their violated homes" (Miscellanies 2: 378). Considering their differing views, it would be natural, then, that Martineau and Carlyle would find each other in opposition during the John Eyre controversy.

In October, 1865, Jamaican Negroes rioted in Morant Bay, killing twenty-one volunteer guards, most of whom were black. Jamaican Governor Edward John Eyre (1815-1901) swiftly retaliated, permitting his men to hang, shoot, and flog suspected revolutionaries, and burn their homes. Ultimately, four hundred men lost their lives in the month following the uprising, and England was sharply divided as to how the issue should be resolved. Thomas Carlyle and John Ruskin co-chaired the Eyre Defense Committee which defended the governor's actions as necessary for maintaining law and order. Martineau and John Stuart Mill (who headed the opposition) found Eyre's actions to be racially motivated and morally indefensible and openly raised objections to the violations of due process guaranteed in British law and fought to bring Eyre to trial. Though Eyre was ultimately removed as governor, he received his pension and all criminal charges were dropped (August 192-93).

Speculating as to the reason for Carlyle's ultimate dismissal of Martineau--both her genius and her work--is not too difficult a task. Martineau's abolitionist views alone would have been sufficient grounds. Carlyle's negative response to Martineau can also be traced to his disdain of the Unitarian doctrine and Martineau's promotion of Utilitarian teachings of

Adam Smith and Jeremy Bentham. In 1829, Carlyle prefigured John Stuart Mill's later complaint that Martineau was "a sign of the times," that is, a political economist who had "grown mechanical in head and in heart, as well as in hand" (Carlyle, Works 15: 63). Carlyle attacked modern philosophers like Smith and Bentham, accusing them of transforming the government into a machine guided solely by their own "appetite for self interest" (15: 67). Though laissez-faire capitalism, in theory, was quite appealing, in that it appeared to work to the good of everyone, it did not solve the problems of poverty and unrest among the workers; in fact, according to Carlyle, it created problems, like pollution and disease.

Carlyle, Mill, and Matthew Arnold argued that laissez-faire economists, such as David Ricardo and Thomas Malthus, were interested less in progress than in promoting radical individualism, which would lead to unbridled greed. Certainly the ruling classes did use the laissez-faire system to their advantage, promoting those aspects of Adam Smith's The Wealth of a Nation that suited their purposes, such as the non-regulation of wages, and opposing those that did not, like the corn laws.

Why, then, did Harriet Martineau, obviously a woman devoted to social reform and concerned with the needs of the working classes, so adamantly defend the laissez faire system? One could argue that Martineau, a self-educated woman, allowed herself to be unduly influenced by the greatest economists of her day--Smith and Malthus--as well as by the economic

concepts put forth by the Globe. Or perhaps Martineau was an idealistic rationalist who believed that problems could be solved simply by rational thought.

Her belief in the laissez-faire system led her to campaign for reform of the old Poor Laws, an unpopular opinion for which she was criticized by most men of letters. She wrote four tales (based on her readings of the reports given her by the Poor Law Commission) on the subject which supported a new poor law that would better serve the poor and destitute. In A History of the Thirty Years' Peace, Martineau describes the old law as "antiquated and corrupt" (2: 487). And she was correct. The old laws had relieved little of the suffering, and the "increase of pauperism and poor rates" supports her position. Martineau rightly argued that many of those responsible for dispersing monies were "misusing funds allocated for the poor" (Thirty Years' Peace 2: 488). Martineau asserted that the new Poor law would check this misuse of funds and, in giving work to able-bodied men, would give the working poor a sense of purpose and self-worth, thus increasing their productivity. However, in truth, the new law created work-houses and provided that unclaimed paupers' bodies could be dissected for scientific research.

A History of the Thirty Years' Peace also placed Martineau in opposition to Carlyle. Seeing the ultimate powerlessness of man and religion, Martineau placed her faith in principles, "the great natural laws of

society" and viewed "men as the functionaries of irresistible natural laws" (1: 318). Carlyle, on the other hand, put "his faith [according to Martineau] in men rather than principles" (Martineau, Autobiography 1: 147 ). Those individuals in whom he places his faith, however, are neither poor nor black nor female. They include the prophets, the heroes of Heroes and Hero Worship, Arnold's Captains of Industry, men of letters, and religious and military leaders. There is little question that Carlyle understood the "Spirit of the Age," the articulated values and ideas of the period, but it appears that he chose to ignore the underside of these concepts, that is the values of the oppressed.

Carlyle was the type of philosopher-king praised by Julien Benda, one who, like Socrates and Jesus, represented the collective conscience. According to Benda, real intellectuals are "those whose activity is essentially not the pursuit of practical aims" but rather "seek their joy in the practice of an art or a science or metaphysical speculation, in short in the possession of non-material advantages, and hence in a certain manner say: 'My kingdom is not of this world'" (Benda, The Treason of the Intellectuals 43).

This lengthy discussion of Martineau's and Carlyle's relationship reveals a source of tension that we find later in Virginia Woolf's relationship with T.S. Eliot and between late twentieth century womanist intellectuals and their male counterparts. Early women intellectuals worked without a net, so to speak. They lacked a tradition of their own and were self-educated for the

most part, thus each generation of women intellectuals had to re-educate and re-create themselves. Maleness has always been a mark of privilege, and women writers have resented the power men possess. In A Room of One's Own, Virginia Woolf notes the anger of educated women against men who "with the exception of the fog . . . seemed to control everything" (50-52). But the anger of men against intelligent women surprised her. Woolf found it "absurd that a man with all this power should be angry" (50-52).

John Stuart Mill's anger with Harriet Martineau is also surprising considering their similar stance on a number of issues. Early in their relationship, Mill proclaimed her to be "narrow and matter-of-fact . . . in the bad sense" (Collected Works 12: 140). Writing to Carlyle in 1833, he describes her as an ominous "sign of this country and Time," a self-educated woman who positions herself with the likes of Adam Smith and James Mill. In reviewing Illustrations of Political Economy, Mill labels Martineau a typical economist, one who sees the status quo as a scientific fact, who "revolves in [her] eternal circle of landlords, capitalists, and labourers" until she sees "society [as solely being divided] into those three classes, as if it were one of God's ordinances, not man's, and as little under human control as the division of day and night" (Collected Works 4: 225-28). As Valerie Pichanick suggests, Martineau's understanding of economics at this time was largely "academic" (49), based wholly on her readings of such works as Adam Smith's The Wealth of Nations and David Ricardo's Principles of Political

Economy, as well as Mill's father's Elements of Political Economy. According to Mark Blaug, however, her treatment of "the proper scope of government" was a "perfectly standard" one of the period (138-39). Her views, it should be noted, underwent some modification, perhaps because of her close relationship with those individuals most affected by the laws--members of the working classes. Mill's views on Martineau, however, underwent no change over the years. In January 1854, Mill writes to his wife, Harriet Taylor, that she need not worry about his public reviewing of the translation of Comte's work for one primary reason: "I don't like to have anything to do with the name or with any publication of Harriet Martineau."

Yet despite Mill's intense disapproval of Martineau's economic views, London and Westminster (a journal which he edited from 1836 to 1840) describes Society in America as the "ablest and most instructive" book on America, a work which deserves the highest encomiums for the boldness and freedom of thought which it displays, and the many important truths which it inculcates and helps to diffuse.

Despite a mutual dislike, Martineau and Mill shared common views on critical issues and were able to work together on a number of campaigns. In addition to seeing their age (as did Carlyle and Arnold) as both politically and philosophically transitional, they also shared a sense of responsibility in publishing their personal and intellectual journeys, which they did in their autobiographies. In fact, in many ways John Stuart Of all the sages, only Mill

might be considered a type of womanist intellectual. He opposed despotism in its many forms (including the power wielded by husbands over their wives) and argued for intellectual and spiritual equality of all oppressed peoples. In addition Mill stood against popular opinion and conventions, such in when he went to jail for disbursing birth-control literature in 1823 (Carlisle 154). Martineau, too, almost destroyed her career by publishing her tale on birth control in Illustrations on Political Economy.

Martineau and Mill noted the importance of familial relationships in the development of the individual and the need for a democratic family unit. In Household Education, Martineau blueprints the restructuring of the Victorian household into a democratic school designed to educate and elevate the minds of *all* its members. Let no individuals, she writes, be "shut out" because of either class or gender (244-45). In The Subjection of Women (1869), John Stuart Mill also asserts that the family is the place where the virtues of freedom are learned.

John Stuart Mill and Harriet Martineau found greatest agreement on issues concerning women's rights. For Mill, freedom meant equality: "The desire of power over others can only cease to be a depraving agency among mankind, when each of them individually is able to do without it: which can only be where respect for liberty in the personal concerns of each is an established principle" (On the Subjection of Women 167). Mill also campaigned against the current marriage laws which denied the intellectual



and spiritual equality of husband and wife and gave husbands complete control over their wives.

Martineau and Mill opposed Thomas Carlyle and John Ruskin on the Eyre controversy. They viewed this explosive issue, as did many cultural critics, to be central to Victorian thought: "the best test of what we are worth, as English citizens, that has been offered in my time. It is a wonderful way of separating the sheep from the goats" (Martineau, Letters to Fanny Wedgwood 273).

"On the whole," Martineau approved of Mill's On Liberty (1859) (Selected Letters 179). Mill's most famous work, specifically chapters two and three, celebrates the independence of the individual, an idea which Martineau embraces. However, she qualifies her praise of Mill's opening and closing chapters which, she believes, focuses on the limitations of that independence: "The opening sentence to On Liberty states that the subject of this Essay is not the so-called Liberty of the Will, . . . but Civil, or Social Liberty: the nature and limits of the power which can be legitimately exercised by society over the individual" (Selected Letters 59). Mill argues that the individual has freedom "over himself, over his own body and mind," but the community can "rightfully exercise" its "power . . . over any member of a civilized community, against his will, . . . to prevent harm to others" (On Liberty 68). Mill advocated freedom but gave society ultimate control over the individual.

In one section, Mill argues the "absolute right" of man's "independence. Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign" (On Liberty 69). A list of reasonable exceptions follow this pronouncement, such as "we are not speaking of children or of young persons below the age which the law may fix as that of manhood or womanhood" (69). But these exceptions are followed by another in which despotism is described as a "legitimate mode of government in dealing with barbarians, provided the end be their improvement and the means justified by actually effecting that end" (69). Once man has been civilized, that is

as soon as mankind has attained the capacity of being guided to their own improvement by conviction or persuasion (a period long since reached in all nations with whom we need here concern ourselves, compulsion, either in the direct form or in that of pains and penalties for noncompliance, is no longer admissible as a means to their own good, and justifiable only for the security of others. (69)

But, who is to judge whether a group had "attained the capacity of being guided to their own improvement by conviction"? Who will take the responsibility for inculcating the proper convictions to mankind? Who will decide what "improvement" barbarians needed? Furthermore, who will represent the will of the community? These questions are similar to the one's we asked concerning Arnold's promotion of a better culture. Obviously it would be a sub-class of the majority, perhaps the intelligentsia, of which

Mill was a member, since "the majority [of the population] have not yet learned to feel the power of the government their power, or its opinions their opinions" (67). But are those in power always in the right?

In 1868, John Stuart Mill took part in the Parliamentary debate over the Irish question. Riots, skirmishes, and revolts in Ireland, led by groups like the Fenian Brotherhood (a group of Irish-Americans), forced Parliament to take action. Blaming England for the strife in Ireland, Mill published England and Ireland, a volatile pamphlet which called for government intervention to protect tenant farmers against rapidly increasing rents and to grant them some invested interest in the land (August 196). He proposed that the British government appoint a committee "to examine every farm which is let to a tenant, and commute the present variable for a fixed rent" (quoted in August 197). Needless to say, his position, first seen in his earlier essay on Coleridge, was unpopular with purists of the laissez-faire system, even though he is siding with the oppressed. Even at the end of her long career, Martineau continued to oppose government interference in the workings of a capitalistic society.

In a letter to Henry Reeve, Martineau suggests that the pamphlet "ought to ruin him": "I said before he had sat [in Parliament] five years he would have cut his throat (politically,)--by his mingled impressionability and temperament, his professorial pedantry, his open vanity and latent self distrust" (Selected Letters 179). John Stuart Mill, from Martineau's

marginalized status, had become an egotist and an elitist and in the process had lost his independence. He had lost the double-perspective so necessary to the public intellectual. Martineau's comments are later echoed by Virginia Woolf as she expresses her impatience with the self-centeredness of writers such as W. H. Auden. Though some critics might argue that Martineau's comments reflect a personal bitterness directed toward Mill, I am not so sure. Martineau *did* disapprove of the match between John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor, which might have been a source of contention between both parties, but Martineau had worked with Mill on a number of committees. They were aligned with each other on numerous issues, such as the Eyre controversy. Mill carried the petition for woman's suffrage, which Martineau had signed and campaigned for, to Parliament. Yet Mill's election to Parliament in 1865 seemed, according to Martineau, to bring out those traits abhorrent to an intellectual of the womanist tradition, including an "assumption of a philosophical bearing," an air of "professional pedantry," as well as "open vanity" (Selected Letters 219). It is Mill's loss of vision and desire for fame (from Martineau's perspective) which Martineau disparages.

Martineau's relationship with Matthew Arnold was less problematic than her association with either Carlyle or Mill. Martineau and Arnold were neighbors in the Lake Country, her Ambleside home, The Knoll, located only a short distance from Arnold's Fox How. Both worked for educational reforms (Arnold was a school inspector for 30 years), though they were

divided on the type of reform, as well as on who should profit from the changes. Responding to a letter from Martineau concerning the education of women, Arnold dismisses the issue as entirely "too obscure to me, for me to try and grapple with it (Arnold, Selected Letters 142).

Arnold, not surprisingly considering his family background, was a cultural elitist whose attitude toward the rising middle classes reflected his own upbringing. He accepted the fact that the aristocracy could no longer maintain control of an industrialized world moving rapidly toward democracy, but he also recognized that the rising middle classes that would soon replace the aristocracy as the rulers of England were ill-equipped to handle the task: "One must look [he writes], as Burke says, for a power or purchase to help one in dealing with such great matters, and I find it nowhere but in an improved middle class" (Couling 163).

In Popular Education of France, Arnold describes the rising British middle class as "nearly the worst educated in the world" (75). Not only are its members poorly educated, they also suffer from what Arnold describes as social diseases: narrow-mindedness and intellectual impoverishment. How was one to find a cure for "the bad civilisation of the middle classes? (qtd. in McCarthy 117). Arnold believed that he and his fellow men of letters could solve the problem by simply "open[ing] their [middle classes'] minds and strengthen[ing] them by a better culture. . . ; we shall then have a real force to employ against the aristocratic force and a moving force against an inert and

unprogressive force, a force of ideas against the less spiritual force of established power, antiquity, prestige, and social refinement" (qtd. In Armytage 252).

Only "real thought and real beauty; real sweetness and real light" ("Sweetness and Light" 475) can cure the middle-classes. Arnold warns that

plenty of people will try to give the masses, as they call them, an intellectual food prepared and adapted in the way they think proper for the actual condition of the masses. The ordinary popular literature is an example of this way. . . . Plenty of people will try to indoctrinate the masses with the set of ideas and judgments constituting the creed of their own profession or party. Our Religious and political organizations give an example of this way of working with the masses. (475)

"Culture" does not try to teach down to the level of inferior classes"; instead it "seeks to do away with classes; to make the best that has been thought and known in the world current everywhere; to make all men live in the atmosphere of sweetness and light" (475). As inspiring as phrases such as "the best that has been thought" and "sweetness and light" are, they reflect Arnold's interest in transferring, as opposed to transforming, the philosophical, educational, and social ideals of the upper to lower middle-classes. These same interests can be found in late twentieth century intellectuals like Harold Bloom and E.D. Hirsch. In the mid-eighties, Hirsch created his own list of what a "truly literate American" should know.

This, then, is the primary difference between Arnold as a man of letters and Martineau as womanist intellectual. Arnold often seemed less concerned with educating the populace than with promoting the highest ideals of civilization, though he hoped these two ideas were the same. (Conveniently they coincided with his own.) In "Sweetness and Light" (1869), Arnold campaigns for a national culture which has "its origin in the love of perfection" (459), one which would absorb the "knowledge of the universal order" and "learn, in short, the will of God" (460). After visiting schools in France in 1861, he concludes that the greatest "difficulty for democracy is how to find and keep high ideals" ("Democracy" 17) and suggests that the British government take the responsibility of promoting these ideals in the school system, just as the French government had done.

Edward Said suggests that beneath Arnold's argument is "a fear that in becoming more democratic, with more people demanding the right to vote and the right to do what they pleased, society was becoming fractious and more difficult to govern. Hence the implied need for intellectuals to calm people down" (30). Martineau, too, questioned whether the state should possess the power to dictate a national agenda, which encouraged uniformity and conformity and ultimately re-created citizens in its own image. For this reason, she criticizes Arnold and others, accusing them of implanting in students attending public schools a "snobbish spirit which is too often the vice and disgrace of English society in our time"

(Coulling 163). Teaching unity and conformity, she contended, is just another tool of the oppressor.

Despite disagreements on the part of both parties concerning women's education and the laissez-faire system, Martineau and Arnold each acknowledged the other's talents. Though rejecting Martineau's creed in principle, Arnold could not "but praise a person whose one effort seemed to have been to deal perfectly honestly and sincerely with herself" (Selected Letters 96). In a letter to his mother in 1848, he writes that "no man of a certain delicacy of intellectual organization can fail to have a just appreciation of Miss Harriet Martineau" ( 41). What Arnold greatly admired in Martineau was her independence and her strong sense of self, which he reveals in a poem written in her honor.

Shortly after Charlotte Bronte's death (March 31, 1855), Arnold wrote "Haworth Churchyard." In this poem he praises Harriet Martineau who had been seriously ill at the time. The opening lines describe his meeting

two

Gifted women. The one,  
 Brilliant with recent renown,  
 Young, unpractised, had told  
 With a master's accent her feigned  
 Story of passionate life;  
 The other, maturer in fame,  
 Earning, she too, her praise  
 First in fiction, had since  
 Widened her sweep, and surveyed  
 History, politics, mind.



...

Hail to the steadfast soul,  
 Which, unflinching and keen,  
 Wrought to erase from its depth  
 Mist and illusion and fear!  
 Hail to the spirit which dared  
*Trust its own thoughts*, before yet  
 Echoed her back by the crowd!  
 Hail to the courage which gave  
 Voice to its creed, ere the creed  
 Won consecration from time. [my emphasis] (7-46)

In a letter to his sister dated May 7, 1855, Arnold writes that he found Martineau's "character to be a fine one, and her independence and efforts to be sincere with herself worthy of admiration. I am glad of an opportunity of expressing my admiration [in this poem]" (Arnold, Selected Letters 392).

When his family expressed concern that Arnold, in "Haworth Churchyard," was giving the appearance of accepting some of her unorthodox ideas, such as those on mesmerism and laissez-faire, he replied, characteristically, that he never gave "the slightest applause" to her creed, but that he admired her "boldness in avowing it" (Selected Letters 96). More than any other prominent man of letters, Arnold was able to view Martineau with a certain amount of "disinterestedness" and to recognize and acknowledge her achievements and her daring while opposing her views on particular issues.

Arnold may have consistently admired Martineau's tenacity, but his personal opinion of his neighbor fluctuated. In 1869, he confides that "Miss

Martineau has always been a good friend to me" (Letters 2: 6), but eight years later he tells a friend, "I had forgotten the poem about Charlotte Bronte and Harriet Martineau. . . . I do not want to overpraise a personage so antipathetic to me as Harriet Martineau. My first impression of her is, in spite of her undeniable talent, energy, and merit-- what an unpleasant life and unpleasant nature!" (Letters 2: 158). Arnold's response to Martineau's work and person, in the end, reflects in a lesser degree those of Thomas Carlyle and John Stuart Mill.

Considering that the woman question was one of the most volatile issues of the day, the mixed feelings, and the contradictory commentaries are easier to understand. However much as the men of letters disagreed with her religious views, her fascination with mesmerism, her infatuation with the teachings of Comte and Malthus, they were forced to acknowledge her genius, and if not her genius, her talent and influence with the general populace.

## VI

### Victorian Womanist Intellectuals

The responses of England's most well-known women intellectuals toward Martineau and her work were, as might be expected, more positive on the whole. In return, Martineau's influence on many of these women was substantial. Margaret Fuller had met Martineau in England at a low point in Fuller's intellectual life and, as Donna Dickenson notes, had "pinned high

hopes on the older woman as her liberator" (49). In a journal entry dated 1835, Fuller "sigh[s] for a spiritual guide." Some friend who would "comprehend me wholly, mentally, and morally and enable me to comprehend myself. I have had some hope that Miss Martineau might be this friend. . . . She has what I want,--vigorous reasoning powers, invention, clear views of her objects,--and she has been trained to the best means of execution" (Memoirs 1: 109).

Florence Nightingale proclaimed Martineau to be one of England's greatest spokespersons for human rights.

She was born to be a destroyer of slavery, in whatever form, in whatever place, all over the world, wherever she saw or thought she saw it. The thought actually inspired her: whether in the degraded offspring of former English poor-law, of English serfdom forty years ago, - in any shape; whether in the fruits of any abuse, - social, legislative, or administrative, - or in actual slavery; or be it in Contagious Diseases Acts, . . she rose to the occasion. (Autobiography 3: 479-80)

Martineau's mission was simple--to destroy oppression--and at times simplistic, such as in the case of the Ireland issue. When she launched her campaign, however, she worked globally as well as locally and nationally, addressing slavery in the United States, the oppression of women in Ireland and the Far East and the mistreatment of Native American women, to name a few.

Florence Nightingale was one of Martineau's strongest advocates. The two women joined forces on a number of projects, including repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts. In addition, at Nightingale's behest, Martineau wrote letters and leaders on issues of interest to both women, such as job discrimination against women, War Office reform, and nursing education. Nightingale often took advantage of Martineau's influence and journalistic talents to obtain cabinet appointments for those men who would fight for her health reforms.

Though agreeing with Martineau (and Comte) "that human behavior [was] subject to universal laws, Nightingale disagreed [with them on] the origin of these laws" (Calabria 37). She argued instead that since scientific laws emanated from God, one could replace "the word 'law'" with "a thought of God" thus reconciling, in part, science and religion (Suggestions of Thought n.p.). Comte's positivist philosophy (which she first embraced but in later years modified) rejects the concept of God, something Nightingale was unable to do. Yet despite differing religious and philosophical views, Martineau and Nightingale mirrored the other's talent, public service, and anger.

Anger and frustration over the treatment of women led Martineau to write in Society in America that American women had become indolent and idle as a result of being "caged" by men who "dread their escape from their cage, while man does that which he would not have woman hear of" (2: 340).

From personal experience, Martineau knew that only through disaster (loss of father, fortune, and fiancé) that were women likely to be moved to action. Florence Nightingale publicly voices similar feelings in Cassandra (1859), when she pleads, "Give us back our suffering . . . --suffering rather than indifferentism." Like Martineau, Nightingale knew that "out of suffering may come the cure" (Sanders, Reason 176-77).

In Nightingale, Martineau found a kindred spirit, as well as an ideal role model for women achievers: "Florence Nightingale encountered opposition--from her own sex as much as the other; and she achieved . . . what would beforehand have been declared a deed for a future age. . . . She talked little, and did great things . . . and her success has opened a way to all others easier than anyone had prepared for her" ("Earl Spencer and Florence Nightingale" 2). For her part, Martineau viewed Nightingale as a ground breaker, a woman who lived her beliefs and made tremendous personal sacrifices in order to put them into action.

Another Victorian woman intellectual with strong links to Martineau was George Eliot, the only woman given the title of "Victorian Sage" by John Holloway, was caught, as Arnold was, between admiration and disdain for Martineau. George Eliot responded negatively to Martineau and Henry George Atkinson's collaborative publication of the Letters on the Laws and Nature of Man's Development (1851), describing its near atheistic doctrine as "studiously offensive" (Eliot, Letters 1: 364). Yet, she coupled her criticism

with admiration: "Whatever else one may think of the book it is certainly the boldest I have seen in the English language" (1: 364). It is interesting to note that Eliot's religious views eventually took the form of agnostic humanism. Martineau, on the other hand, found her agnosticism through mesmerism. Through they began from different starting points, both came to be positivists (Sanders, Reason 161, 16).

Eliot and Martineau were united in their efforts to change the marriage laws and both put their signatures to Barbara Bodichon's 1856 petition to parliament, the purpose of which was to establish a divorce court which would allow women a legal separation from abusive husbands. Though neither aligned themselves with the feminist movement, they viewed women's struggle as a collective effort.

As a young woman, Mary Ann Evans had read Deerbrook and was "surprised by the depths of feeling it reveals" (Letters 8: 51). It would be interesting to speculate how much influence this precursor of the provincial novel had on Eliot, considered by many to be the greatest writer of this sub-genre of the novel. Both Martineau and Eliot perceived their writing as vehicles for social change. As meliorists, they were no doomsayers looking, as Carlyle often did, too longingly at the past and too negatively at the present and future. The title Carlyle chose for his essay "Sign of the Times" suggests his ominous outlook: "O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times? A wicked and adulterous

generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it" (Matthew 16:3). Martineau selected a different approach in addressing her audience during these times of enormous change by challenging her audience and mobilizing them into greater democratic participation in society. Martineau, more strongly and persistently than George Eliot, challenged all classes to question and reject hierarchical institutions and begin to see how ineffectual sacred traditions and values had become.

George Eliot responded positively to much of Martineau's ideas, work ethic, and writing style and duly "honour[ed]" her "powers and industry" (Letters 2: 4-5), proclaiming her to be "the only English woman that possesses thoroughly the art of writing" (1: 32). One aspect of Martineau's writing which Eliot found so enticing was her "mannish way of talking" which forced her readers to take her seriously (3: 258). Though Eliot found Martineau's style "admirably adapted for the people, clear, spirited, idiomatic," she questioned whether Martineau possessed the "calibre of mind" for translating Comte's Cours de Philosophie as she had proposed to do. Eliot preferred that Rev. Nathan Mark Wilks Call be given the commission: "Miss Martineau . . . thinks no one can be so fit for the work as herself. . . . Find out the quality of Call's translation . . . and if it be satisfactory use your influence on his side--of course with all possible delicacy towards Harriet Martineau, who after all is an admirable woman worth twenty of the people who are sniffing at her" (Letters 1: 360-61).

Eliot, of course, damns Martineau with faint praise. This letter reveals a rationalization similar to that used by cultural critics to dismiss bell hooks as an academic and intellectual. A supposed intellectual who writes clear and accessible texts must not really be a scholar. They must, therefore, be low-brow and, therefore, unable to take on intellectually challenging tasks.

On June 1, 1852, it was Martineau, not Call, who began work translating and abridging Auguste Comte's Philosophie Positive, a project which was to have enormous influence on her philosophy and writing. The work, completed in 1853, was judged by critic George Grote to be "not only . . . extremely well done, but it could not be better done" (Letters 1: 145). George Henry Lewes, whose book on Comte appeared the same year as Martineau's, and Thomas Huxley, a well-known Victorian biologist, also applauded Martineau's efforts, and her translation quickly became the standard in England.

Martineau praised Eliot's talents and acknowledged the younger woman's genius, but she "did not much respect, or at all like her" after Eliot became romantically involved with Lewes, a married man.<sup>15</sup> She "admired her abilities, beyond expression" (Letters 1: 181), but found them ill-employed. The "Clerical Scenes" were "odious," Silas Marner was "a specimen" and the Mill on the Floss was filled with "querulous women" characters (189). Martineau was adamant about how women should be portrayed in fiction and non-fiction alike. Eliot's whining women in Mill on the Floss had the



same effect as did Charlotte Bronte's emotional female characters and Mary Wollstonecraft's portrayal of women as victims. They were detrimental to women's fight for equality.

Though Martineau and she were never "friends," Eliot wrote, at the time of Martineau's death, that she felt "deep respect and admiration. Whatever may have been her mistakes and weaknesses, the great and good things she had done far outweigh them" (1: 258). Following Martineau's death, Eliot, concerned with the possible negative reception of Martineau's memoirs, wrote to her publisher and friend, J. Chapman, requesting permission to review Martineau's memoirs, promising that the article "would be an admiring appreciation of [the author]" (1: 258).

Eliot never wrote the obituary, but she was right to be concerned about the world's remembrance of Martineau's "great and good things." Some did remember the "great and good," like George Jacob Holyoake who eloquently eulogized Martineau in the National Reformer: "No woman more brave, or wise, or untiring in the public service has lived this century. . . . Her glory was that she not only sympathised with progress, she took trouble to advance it, she worked for it by the labour of her genius" (619). The Times obituary that appeared two days after her death had few words of praise, describing her as one who adopted "extreme opinions upon most subjects without much examination" (qtd. in Pichanick). John Morley agreed that Martineau's work

had "little . . . permanent value," though the woman "behind the books and opinions was a remarkable personality" (Morley 3: 176-77).

Soon following the publication of her Autobiography (the year following her death), Margaret Oliphant attacked not the work but Martineau's physical unattractiveness, which she believed negatively affected "both her character and habits of thought . . . . She was a very sensible woman, yet not very much of a woman at all" (379, 496). Martineau's reputation reached its nadir in the 1890's. Most critics now viewed her as a woman who had outlived her purpose. She was no longer a sign of her times, but a sign of the past. At her death she was merely a phenomenon, a Victorian rarity: a woman intellectual.

Harriet Martineau's reception by the Victorian men of letters ranged from open hostility to ridicule and sarcasm to grudging admiration. Though forced to admit that she possessed more than a modicum of talent, Martineau's popularity and strong self-presence threatened their power. Even more infuriating, in all probability, was her lack of concern for public recognition and fame. At three different times in her life she was offered government pensions but rejected each offer in order to maintain her independence and reputation with the populace for fairness (Weiner, "Harriet" 73). Matthew Arnold, too, found Martineau's honesty and openness to be her strongest qualities.

Edward Said points to the intellectual's relationship with those in power as one of the greatest pressures challenging "the intellectual's ingenuity and will." Being "co-opted by [a] government or corporation" makes it difficult for intellectuals to publicly "raise embarrassing questions, . . . confront[ing] orthodoxy and dogma (rather than . . . produc[ing] them)" (76, 11). Jean Paul Sartre also wrote that the intellectual is at his or her best when in conflict with his society. Harriet Martineau in refusing government pensions was acting according to the same basic principles that Sartre espoused when he refused the Nobel Prize in 1964.

Obviously this highly negative and partisan response by intellectuals to Martineau and her work should not surprise us today. This womanist intellectual had broken into a closed circle of masculine power, which heretofore had successfully excluded women from its membership. Not only had Harriet Martineau infiltrated their ranks, she had begun to rewrite the intellectual's creed, advocating a more pragmatic approach to her task and a more personal relationship with her reader. The task of confining women to their domestic sphere of influence became more difficult as women made minor gains in rights and employment opportunities.

Martineau, then, was a true anomaly: a rational, intelligent woman who defied social norms and boundaries. She was a self-actualized and independent woman, whose works on history and political economy made her the most prominent woman intellectual of her age. It is disappointing to

read critics who view her not as a self-actualized intellectual but a "marginal man" or a "Dark Lady" who associated with none but the "purest of female messiahs" (like Nightingale--the lady with the lamp) and condemn[ed] less successful male impersonators more loudly than any member of the first sex" (Dickenson 50). Dierdre David, too, argues, albeit sympathetically, that Martineau colluded with the patriarchy to gain acceptance as an intellectual by denouncing women (David 27). This latter argument overlooks Martineau's supportive relationship with Barbara Bodichon, Florence Nightingale, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

## VII

### **Making Connections: Martineau and Her Audience**

"I would rather encounter a nest of wasps than a clever woman" (Ferrier 439). These lines, spoken by Mr. Headly in Susan Ferrier's Marriage, a Novel (1818), reflect the feelings of a number of male nineteenth-century intellectuals, as well as writers such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, toward those "damned lot of scribbling women." Though some men of letters, like John Stuart Mill and Thomas Carlyle, attempted to dismiss Martineau as narrow-minded and foolish, they were unable to do so for one simple reason: her popularity with the masses. The working and middle classes accepted Martineau almost from the beginning as an authority on political economy, travel, agriculture, childrearing, and education, purchasing by 1834 10,000

copies each month of Illustrations of Political Economy, a work which simplified in story form the ideas of Adam Smith and Thomas Malthus (Pichanick 50). Consider, in contrast, the public's reception of Illustrations to that of John Stuart Mill's Principles of Political Economy (1848) which sold 3,000 copies over a four year period (50).

But it was not only the working and mobile middle classes that acknowledged Martineau's intelligence and power of influence. Lord Chancellor Brougham (whose economic principles, admittedly coincided with those of Martineau's) proclaimed Illustrations to be "of the highest merit, and indeed are of very great importance. It is difficult to estimate the good they are likely to do . . . . [S]he has the best feelings and, generally the most current principles of any of our own political economists" (qtd. in Pichanick 68-9). (Of course, it helped that Martineau's views on this issue coincided with those of the Lord Chancellor). Lord Althorp, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, was another admirer of Martineau's work who requested her advice on socio-economic issues, specifically her views on direct taxation.

While liberal Whig journalists were generally more positive in their reviews of Illustrations, the Tories, not surprisingly, railed against Martineau's Malthusian principles and venomously attacked her ideas as "absurd trash" and her doctrines as "unfeminine and mischievous." They ridiculed Martineau's person, depicting her as "an unmarried woman" who "thinks child-bearing a crime against society! . . . who declaims against

marriage!! . . . who deprecates charity and provision for the poor!!!" (Croker 139,141). Obviously they had not yet begun putting into practice the attitude of Matthew Arnold's disinterested critic.

Harriet Martineau overcame these vitriolic attacks, however, to become the first woman intellectual to gain wide public acceptance in Victorian society (and in America). This is because she, as a womanist, offered something to the rising middle and working classes that the sage had not offered so freely and fully--practical knowledge. While Matthew Arnold and Thomas Carlyle were centering their discourse on the "best that is known and thought in the world" (Arnold, "Function of Criticism" 429) or preaching against "Mammonism" (Carlyle, "Gospel of Mammonism" 135), Martineau was putting theory into practice by lecturing at Ambleside on economy, home building, child-care, hygiene, politics, history, and temperance.

Martineau's political tales, like her educational pamphlets and travelogues, were enormously popular. Government committees, as well as feminist, abolitionist, and other special interest groups, approached her to spread their own messages. Unlike some politicians today, however, Martineau could not be bought, though what we would describe as nineteenth century "lobbyists" attempted to do so.

Her reception among the intelligentsia might have been mixed, but the public lionized her. In "The Hero as Poet" (1840), Thomas Carlyle argued that every age, if chaos is not to overtake and destroy it, must look for a hero to

guide it. Martineau met the criteria of Carlyle's hero in that she shaped her work to accommodate the needs of her audience. The hero [according to Carlyle] "can be Poet, Prophet, King, Priest or what you will, according to the kind of world that he finds himself born into" ("The Hero as Poet"113).

## VII Moving the Womanist Intellectual Forward

Martineau was more than a novelist, more than a spokesperson for her time, and more than a "world builder." Early in her life she had read the words of her teacher Reverend Lant Carpenter in Principles of Education and accepted his challenge:

If any female writer should come forward to the public, possessing the clearness, simplicity, correctness, and well-stored understanding of an Edgeworth, the brilliant yet chaste imagination and "devotional taste" of a Barbauld, and the energy and high-toned principle of a More, divested of bigotry, . . . she will probably stand unrivaled among her contemporaries. (41-42)

Martineau did "stand unrivaled among her contemporaries." Even now the power of her work and her life is felt, though only one of her works, Deerbrook, is still in print. F. S. Marvin in the Hibbert Journal wrote in 1927 that "the Truth is greater than any man and will grow after us and one day combine the contradictions of the past. To this eternal human edifice Harriet Martineau contributed more than one steel-clad corner" (qtd. in Rivlin 5).

Her unwavering effort to speak the truth to power makes Martineau the "true progenitor of the intellectual mode that reigns in Anglo-American liberalism today" (Yates 5). Her radicalism which, according to Gayle Yates, included "rationalism, progressivism, organizational order, voice for the inarticulate, respect for the individual, and faith in science" (5-6), became the liberalism of the twentieth century. In addition to being a forebear of twentieth century intellectual thought, Martineau also gave to the twentieth century "a dominant informing paradigm of mainstream western feminism" (5). Acknowledging areas of disagreement between Martineau and herself, Yates, a self-described "English-language feminist intellectual" (6), recognizes Martineau as one of her aunts. Over a century earlier, Martineau had postulated the ideas and thoughts of feminist and womanist intellectuals of the late twentieth century, ideas which included: "the belief in order, . . . that change will bring about betterment, . . . that knowledge is power, . . . that the individual will do good if . . . taught the good, and above all, [that] the substitution of a science of society for a theological or speculative base, [is] the first premise for other individual and collective ideas" (Yates 6). These concerns for education and for developing a sense of community, as well as the willingness to play the skeptic and challenge science and religion and tradition, are the hallmarks of the late twentieth century womanist intellectual.



Calvinist Church fathers told Anne Hutchinson, a preacher in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, "You have stepped out of your place" (qtd. in Rowbotham, Women in Movement 20). This could be said of Martineau as well. Harriet Martineau knew that in order for the world to change, individuals must first, as Ghandi reminds us, "be the change we wish to see in the world." As a world-builder, Martineau gave the middle and working class men and women opportunities for advancement; she also gave us one of the earliest "aunts" of the womanist intellectual tradition by 1) claiming her right to speak as an authority on numerous topics; 2) speaking from a marginal position yet refusing to speak as victim; 3) by chipping away at the stereotype of the Angel in the House; 4) by taking the first steps in manipulating and transforming the language of the patriarchy for women's use. Considering Martineau's enormous contributions as womanist intellectual to the social, political, and economic climate of the nineteenth and twentieth century, we must agree with Martineau that she did indeed live a "somewhat remarkable" life (Autobiography 1: 1).

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Her volume of work is just as remarkable its breadth. In addition to 1,642 leaders for the Daily News, Martineau wrote over fifty books and pamphlets and numerous articles for such respected journals as the Edinburgh Review, Cornhill Magazine, and Charles Dickens' Household Words.

<sup>2</sup> Adam Smith (1723-90), Scottish economist and philosophy, wrote Wealth of Nations, the first masterpiece on political economy. Thomas Robert Malthus (1766-1834), English economist and clergyman, published Essay on the Principle of Population in 1798. His work anticipated that of David Ricardo (1772-1823), an English political economist, who authored Principles of Political Economy and Taxation (1819). James Mill (1773-1836), Scottish philosopher, historian, and economist, was father of John Stuart Mill and disciple of Jeremy Bentham. His Elements of Political Economy (1821) influenced Karl Marx.

<sup>3</sup> The first that comes to mind is the field of sports writing. Mary Carillo, for over ten years one of tennis' most insightful and intelligent commentators, has rarely been allowed to do live television commentary during the *men's* Grand Slam matches.

<sup>4</sup> Jane Eyre reflected Martineau's own unhappy early years. Lifelong friends of Martineau thought she had written the work, so well did it describe

her childhood experience. In her autobiography, she writes that she was convinced that "it was portions of my childish experience in his or her mind" (2.21-22).

<sup>5</sup> This educational experience marked her "entrance upon an intellectual life" in which, she writes, "I found then, as I have found since, refuge from moral suffering and an always unexhausted spring of moral strength and enjoyment" (Autobiography 1: 50).

<sup>6</sup> Between the move from Perry's to Carpenter's tutelage, Martineau received instruction at home in French, Latin, and the piano. Family readings, involving "history, biography, and critical literature" (including Shakespeare and Milton) were also added to her self-directed studies (Autobiography 1: 53).

<sup>7</sup> "Arthur's education fund" is discussed by Virginia Woolf in Three Guineas, which she takes from William Makepeace Thackeray's novel Pendennis (1848-1850). Arthur's Education Fund is the monies set aside for educating young men and to which the sisters of these young men had to sacrifice their own education.

<sup>8</sup> Some critics suggest that he was motivated by "prestige and convenience" rather than out of concern for his daughter (Dodd 70).

<sup>9</sup> a) The Poor Law was passed in the sixteenth century as a way to provide relief for the infant poor, aged, and sick. But, later with the

introduction of the Spienhamland System, wages of workers were subsidized.  
 b) The Corn Laws allowed the government to regulate the import and export of grain. It was repealed in 1946. c) The Reform Bill of 1832 expanded the electorate for the House of commons and transferred voting privileges from small boroughs to heavily populated areas.

<sup>10</sup> Harriet Martineau, letter to Lant Carpenter, n.d. [1820's]. Cited in Alison Winter, "Harriet Martineau and the Reform of the Invalid in Victorian England," The Historical Journal 38.3 (1995): 600.

<sup>11</sup> Charlotte Bronte met with the same rejection by six publishers in 1846 with The Professor in which she rejects the romantic ideal in everyday life (Tillotson 84).

<sup>12</sup> I might be too hard on Carlyle here. I have not forgotten his clothes philosophy. He applies this metaphor to all social and personal customs, which are seen as an outward expression of underlying spiritual attitudes and conviction. Sartor Resartus ("The Tailor Re-Tailored") is an attack on materialism of its day, which is analogous to clothing valued not for its function but for itself.

<sup>13</sup> The focus of my master's thesis describes Matthew Arnold's 1853 preface to Poems as part of a public dialogue between Charles Kingsley, William Edmounstone Aytoune, Arthur Hugh Clough, and other critics.

The fact that it was published for public consumption was of secondary importance.

<sup>14</sup> Weynyss Reid, The Life, Letters, and Friendship of Richard Monckton Milnes, 2 vols. (New York: Cassell, 1891).

<sup>15</sup> One of Eliot's first tasks after being named sub-editor of John Chapman's Westminster Review in 1851 was to find contributors who would be interested in connecting "intellectual controversy and human issues" (Dodd 197). In addition to John Stuart Mill, Thomas Carlyle, Leigh Hunt, J. A. Froude, and George Henry Lewes, Harriet Martineau became a regular contributor. The journal's purpose, as stated in its Prospectus, was to "institute such a radical and comprehensive treatment of those controverted questions which are practically momentous, as an aid in the conciliation of divergent views" (Westminster Review 1: 1).

### CHAPTER 3

#### "TIME PASSES"<sup>1</sup>

Harriet Martineau died in 1878, four years before the birth of Virginia Woolf. The fame of this eminent Victorian, which rivaled that of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, George Eliot, and Charlotte Bronte, had begun to decline at the time of her death. The energizing spirit of the Victorian period which had driven Martineau's career was winding down. The British empire of the early twentieth-century lacked the muscle, the momentum, or the optimism of the earlier period. Queen Victoria's death in 1901, after a reign of sixty-four years, severed twentieth-century England from its earlier golden age. At her death, H.G. Wells compared the Queen to a "great paper-weight," which when removed caused "things" to be "blown about all over the place" (qtd. in Harold Perkin 247).

In January 1909, The London Times, painted a bleak picture of this new period in England's history. The empire now faced evils greater than any in past history . It was a transitional age characterized by "a real loss of nerve . . . [and] a feeling of crisis" (Kermode, Essays 34). Major changes in the British psyche, which began in the previous century, had led to feelings of anxiety, discord, and irresolution as the nineteenth century came to a close. Scientific discoveries continued to influence how individuals viewed

themselves and their place in the universe. With the publication of Charles Darwin's Origin of the Species (1859) and The Descent of Man (1871), Britons discovered they descended from "barbarians," much like the Fuegians Darwin had observed in 1832: men "absolutely naked, . . . their mouths frothed with excitement," living "like wild animals" (274).

Another cause for what in the 1960's would be termed "future shock" involved England's rapidly shifting economic base coupled with the equally rapid rise of capitalism, as well as the demographic shift from rural to urban life. These trends created job opportunities and freedom for women as well as men, but disease, squalor, and crime in overcrowded towns often outweighed the advantages.

J.W. MacKail, a social critic and disciple of William Morris, wrote in 1900 that these were "strange and evil" times (MacKail 18-19). The nineteenth century which had accomplished

such wonderful things, and from which things so much more wonderful were hoped, has been on the whole a failure. Fifty years ago men's minds were full of ideals. Some of them have come to nothing. Others have received a strangely disenchanting fulfillment. Cinder heaps smolder where there once were beacon fires. (18-19)

In these lines one senses apprehension of the future mingled with nostalgia for the past.

Feelings of disillusionment, apprehension, and skepticism can be traced to sources other than scientific discoveries and the fluctuating economy, though all are woven in the same cloth. The Boer War had proved the English army ineffectual: 450,000 British troops were required to quell 50,000 Boers in South Africa. This lack of military acumen coupled with incompetent leadership led British citizens to question England's future and whether she would be able to hold on to her empire, much less expand it.<sup>2</sup>

Like the Queen's troops, Britain's economy was also in a state of decline. Though industry expanded as coal production and exports rose and though investments in steel, as well as England's foreign holdings, continued to increase, the country's situation seen in a global context was bleak. New industrial powers, such as the United States and Germany challenged British markets.<sup>3</sup> With the reduction of exports, overseas investments were all that "maintained" the balance of trade (A.J.P. Taylor 1). These economic and industrial global issues explain in part Britain's "dual reality" (Kranidis 3): one being focused on the actual "material conditions" and the other, on England's "projected self-image or on the fantasies it promoted of itself" (3). While presenting its citizens with a picture of affluence and omnipotence, England's position as a world power was rapidly diminishing, as the novels of E.M. Forster revealed.

As world exports decreased, so did food prices--a boon for city and town dwellers but a disaster for landowners and farmers in England and Ireland.



Rural areas suffered a depression as burgeoning cities became sights of industrial unrest. Union conflicts, strikes, and work stoppages reflected an even greater animosity than that portrayed between the captains of industry and the workers in Elizabeth Gaskell's North and South (Read "Introduction" 16). Wages continued their steady decline (13 percent in seven years) (16-17), resulting in eight out of ten Britons in the early twentieth century living "below the 'poverty line'" (31).

Poverty, depressions, and strikes brought a change in power in 1880 and with it the passage of a number of educational, economic, and social reforms (Kranidis 4).<sup>4</sup> Women over the age of thirty received the vote in 1918. The Sex Disqualification Act of 1919 made it unlawful for women to be denied public office, but civil service jobs continued to remain solely in the hands of men. As late as 1944, employers could enforce a "marriage bar," forcing single women to quit work after marriage (Joan Perkin 243). Laws continued to deny women property rights. Until the passage of the Inheritance Act in 1938, a widow could not contest her husband's will even if it failed to provide for her and her children (246).

The Victorian angelic and domestic ideal reached its apex in England between 1837 and 1873. At the end of the century, however, the British novel was introducing "new ideas on women's property rights, the need for better education and jobs for women, and changed marital relations" (Perkin 241). In the early twentieth century, the Woman Question continued to preoccupy

British society. As the suffrage movement grew, women began looking expectantly to a new millennium, one that would offer them greater opportunities. Writers such as George Egerton and Mona Caird developed a bold and liberated female character--the New Woman--who was both independent and career minded and who questioned the very concept of marriage.

The New Woman, the symbol of women's liberation, threatened the late Victorian patriarchy. The resulting backlash focused less on the new woman's socio-political role than on her sexuality. Just as nineteenth-century scientists and physicians had argued against the education of young women on physiological grounds, in the early twentieth century medical professionals were describing the emancipated woman as a "uterine deviant," a "virile lesbian," and a "dangerous shameless 'wo-man.'" (qtd. Thebaud 34). England's declining birth rate frightened British doctors who saw it as a trend moving toward race and class suicide since middle and upper-class white women were giving birth at a lower rate than women of lower classes and different ethnic origins (Walkowitz 387).

The onset of World War I moved women out of their domestic spheres and into the work force. Though making gains toward equality, a woman's position was still tentative. According to Joan Perkin, the feminist movement in 1920 was active but becoming fragmented as it shifted its focus from women's careers and education to "women's needs as wives and

mothers" (244).<sup>5</sup> It seemed that the depression, the threat of war, and increasing poverty overshadowed other women's issues. Life as the Victorians (both women and men) knew it was rapidly coming to an end, but there were still strong links connecting the two ages as Yeats, the last Victorian and the first Modernist poet, revealed in his life and poetry.

Virginia Stephen Woolf also stood on the cusp of a new and an old age. She was raised in an emphatically Victorian household, but feelings of modernism permeated every facet of British society. The dual reality of Woolf's life might explain, at least in part, the complexity and depth of her writing, as well as the varied responses by Woolf's contemporaries to her work. Perhaps Jane Marcus's description of Woolf as "a guerrilla fighter in a Victorian skirt" best depicts the struggles Woolf and other women writers faced in this transitional period ("Thinking Back Through Our Mothers" 1).

## II A Breaker of Rocks; A Builder of Bridges

In 1976, Mark Goldman wrote that any study of Virginia Woolf's criticism "must begin by [contrasting] her stature as a novelist and her reputation as a literary critic" (1). During this period "one finds only scattered comments . . . on her essays; there is still no published, book-length study of Mrs. Woolf as a literary critic" (Goldman 1). Happily, his concern, voiced less than twenty years ago, has been addressed by critics such as Toril Moi and

Carolyn Heilbrun. I am one of a number of writers who now sees Woolf's politics as important to an understanding of her works and the times in which she lived. Most critics, however, have traditionally limited their discussion of Woolf's essays to two primary areas. Jane Marcus, Heilbrun, and Elaine Showalter focus on Woolf as feminist, while another faction of critics, including Mark Goldman, have centered their studies on Woolf as literary critic. Experimental novelist, feminist, and literary critic--these are the labels most often attached to Virginia Woolf.

But, as Toril Moi notes, "a life" is composed of a variety of texts; "conversations, philosophical treatises, gossip, novels, [and] educational institutions" all take part in the "same discursive network" (Simone de Beauvoir 5): "The point," Moi argues, "is not to treat one text [or one label] as the implicit meaning of another, but rather to read them all with and against each other in order to bring out their points of tension, contradictions and similarities" (5). One way of expanding Woolf's "texts," then, is to examine Woolf's role as social critic and womanist intellectual in British society.

There are myths surrounding Woolf which have hindered the reading of her other "texts." After her death, family and friends portrayed Woolf as indifferent to socio-political issues and dismissed her political writings altogether. In his biography of Woolf, Quentin Bell writes that his aunt, at the age of fifty-two, showed little interest in politics, in fact its "machinery . . . exasperated and bewildered her" (2: 179,188). Leonard Woolf continued the

myth-making by describing his wife as "the least political animal that has lived since Aristotle invented the definition" (Downhill 27). Perhaps it is for this reason that Berenice Carroll, in the 1970's, was able to assert that Virginia Woolf had rarely been viewed as a political writer, "least of all as a successful political writer, and almost never as a theorist with a comprehensive and penetrating grasp of the social and political fabric of [her] society" (99). To view Woolf as a social and political commentator meant removing her from her domestic sphere.

Other myths, like Woolf's self-imposed exile, relegate Woolf to the periphery of society. According to Quentin Bell, his aunt was a transcendent artist, far removed from the sordidness of everyday life: She pursued "shadows," looking "for the ghostly whispers of the mind and for Pythian incomprehensibility" (2: 186). Some critics, however, have disclosed Woolf to be neither the Lady of Shalott's tower nor the artist of Tennyson's Palace of Art. Woolf lived in the real world, observed it, and made a career of exploring how a society "shaped (or deformed)" the individual (Zwerdling, Real World 13-14), as well as how history altered the direction of individual lives.

As for the popular myth that depicts Woolf as an intellectual snob, one need look no further than Q. R. Leavis' review of Three Guineas which describes Woolf as "quite insulated by class" (203). Virginia Stephen Woolf, an educated man's daughter, accepted her leisure-class status primarily

because she could not escape it. In "Am I a Snob?" (an essay presented at the Memoir Club in 1936) she acknowledges (albeit satirically) the influences of class and money had in shaping her psyche.

Though differing in many ways from women of the working class, Woolf and the female worker were both victimized by their society. Woolf readily admitted to often being left "untouched" by some of the speeches presented at the Working Women's Guild, speeches which demanded "an extra shilling," "another year at school," "eight hours instead of nine behind a counter or in a mill" ("Introduction," Life as We Have Known It xviii-xix). But her life and writings reveal another side to Virginia Woolf. In her personal and public writings, Woolf addresses issues that confronted all facets of British society--war, poverty, oppression. Within her texts, the reader discovers a complex web of social, political, and environmental threads from which her ideas on literature and society developed.<sup>6</sup>

As a stylist and modern experimentalist in the genre of the novel, Woolf has received high praise. Critics have lauded the "aesthetic qualities" of her novels, the "lyric mode" of her works, her experimentation with "interior monologue," as well as her use of symbol and metaphor (Spender, Ideas 674). However, in the intellectual realm, critics find Woolf unfit for the task. In 1944, three years after her death, Horace Gregory praised Woolf (albeit grudgingly) as "mistress of what often has been called an 'outmoded' form," that is, the informal essay, but he summarily dismissed her as a literary critic,

for when her criticism took "the form of argument" he could "hear only the ringing of small bells" (192). Those ringing bells excluded her from consideration as a cultural critic or public intellectual.

In his best-seller, Western Canon, Harold Bloom echoes Horace Gregory's damning-with-faint-praise approach to Virginia Woolf. Initially, Bloom lauds Woolf as "the most complete person-of-letters in England in our century," having "no rivals among *women* novelists or critics" (434,436). "Overwhelmed by her eloquence and her mastery of metaphor," he cannot, however, bestow upon her the title of political theorist, academic, or intellectual (437). Certain passages in Three Guineas make him "wince," and "irreconcilable habits of thought" fill the pages of A Room of One's Own (437). From a traditional and canonical perspective, Woolf is neither a public intellectual nor a cultural critic but an aesthete.<sup>7</sup>

Harold Bloom fails to recognize Virginia Woolf's contributions in the fields of literature and criticism. She was one of the earliest women critics to recognize the importance of unearthing past women writers (she described her discovery of eighteenth-century women novelists as more historically significant than the Crusades). Lacking an explicit system to study these women's works Woolf began to expand and redefine the concept of literature and criticism: "I feel . . . that I can devise a new critical method; something far less still and formal than [what other critics have done]" (Writer's Diary 172).

Woolf experimented with a variety of forms in her novels and essays and perfected the interior monologue (Marder 1). As "one of the great explorers of the psyche" (Zwerdling, Real World 4), she examined the "psycho-physical totality of the self (Richter vi). Along with James Joyce, Virginia Woolf attempted to portray a "lived reality" (as Martineau had attempted to do in Deerbrook), and explore how individuals experience it (vii). Before The Voyage Out no novelist had ever attempted to "describe exactly how the eye-mind experiences the object or how the body participates in this experience. Indeed, no one had ever really considered perception and the mental and physical influences which act upon it" (Richter viii). Woolf's experiments with form and psyche influenced the work of womanist intellectuals such as Susan Sontag. Sontag's The Way We Live Now, a story of one PWA (person with AIDS), centers not on the patient but on the flow of thoughts of his friends and acquaintances as they move in and out of his life.

Barbara Bell and Carol Ohmann describe Woolf's solution to the problem of addressing one's readers both "amiably and unpretentiously" as "revolutionary" (364). By rethinking, redefining, and re-sculpting a common reader out of the clay found in Dr. Samuel Johnson's Life of Gray, Woolf created a new audience for the essayist and intellectual. To speak to this common reader, Woolf began transmogrifying phallogocentric words to create "quotations, [which] like Shakespeare's, have passed into the realm of idiom, familiar and resonant in any number of contexts and uses" (11).<sup>8</sup>



What Woolf said of Bloomsburian philosopher George Moore could be said of Virginia herself: "[s]he has brought a new mind into the world; [s]he has given us a new way of . . . seeing" (qtd. in Schore 15). The failure of critics to recognize Woolf as an intellectual can not be due to a lack of talent or insight on Woolf's part. And yet, for more than fifty years after her death, "intellectual" is one label that has eluded her.

In "Anger and Art," Jane Marcus recalls omitted passages from "Professions of Women." In this speech, Woolf describes Ethel Smith<sup>9</sup> as a member of a "race of pioneers, of path makers," one who "has gone before and felled trees and blasted rocks and built bridges and thus made a way for those who come after her" (Pargiters xxvii). To discern fully Woolf's contribution not only to the world of letters but the world itself, we must read her not only as a literary and cultural critic, novelist, etc. but as "a blaster of rocks and the maker of bridges" in her role as public intellectual. This vision of Woolf directly the portrait of Woolf as an isolated artist who spent half her life suffering from bouts of madness and the other half as transcendent artist.

### III The Daughter of an Educated Man

Remarkable portraits of Virginia Woolf's father and mother appear in To The Lighthouse as the characters Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay. The author herself admits to some distortion in the fictional parentage, acknowledging that Mrs.

Ramsay was a "child's view" of her mother since Julia Stephen died when Woolf was thirteen and that her portrait of "that old wretch my father" was "more critical" because "I was more like him than her" (Letters 3: 374). Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, then, present a picture of Julia and Leslie Stephen that has been "transmuted through time, distance, and fiction" (Gorsky 89).

Leslie Stephen, Virginia's father, was a well-known Victorian man of letters. Socially situated at the lower end of the upper-middle class and with strong ties to the literati (Stephen's first wife was Minny Thackeray, William Makepeace's daughter), the Stephens entertained some of the greatest literary minds in England: George Meredith, Thomas Hardy, Henry James, James Russell Lowell, and Anne Thackeray, as well as Americans Oliver Wendell Holmes and James Russell Lowell, the latter being Virginia's godfather.

As a child Virginia had been "obsessed" with her mother, Julia. Her mother, however, as did Harriet Martineau, "disliked affection," having neither the "time, nor strength, to concentrate" on her children (Moments of Being 92-93). Virginia's relationship with her father was more complex. She writes that she "never knew" him (115).<sup>10</sup>

Though he expressed an interest in his daughter's intellectual development, Leslie Stephen's tyrannical behavior and "violent temper" drove a wedge between himself and his daughters and, according to Woolf, "queered the angle of that immensely important relationship" (109, 108). The outbursts often began "with groans and sighs" and developed into "really

terrible outbursts of bellowing fury" (Bell 1: 63). Following these "scenes," Woolf writes, her father would excuse his behavior, reminding his family that tirades were a "sign of genius" (Moments of Being 110). Following Victorian convention, the family was expected to accept his apology.

In numerous letters, Woolf expresses her bitter resentment at patriarchal conventions that condoned her father's outbursts and stifled her own creative genius, while at the same time denying her an education.<sup>11</sup> On what would have been his ninety-sixth birthday, Virginia wondered what her life would have been like if her father had lived: "His life would have entirely ended mine. What would have happened? No writing, no books;-- inconceivable" (Diary 3: 208). Leslie Stephen never considered a systematic educational program for his daughter. Instead, Julia Stephen, a "fount of misinformation," taught Virginia and her sister Vanessa Latin, French and history (King 41). Their father's teaching of mathematics was so ineffectual that "Virginia continued throughout her life to count on her fingers" (Bell 1: 26). Virginia did have the luxury, when she turned fifteen, of having free reign of her father's extensive collection of books.

Following the death of her mother in 1895, Virginia began attending classes at King's College, taking classes in history and Greek, and receiving instruction in Latin from Clara Pater (sister of Walter). Five years later, in 1902, Janet Case became her Greek tutor. I mention Case specifically because 1) under her tutelage Virginia came to understand how mediocre the education

was that she had received thus far, and 2) Case stressed upon her student the importance of developing original critical thought.<sup>12</sup> The practice of critical reading with Janet Case as guide, led Woolf to develop her own theory of critical reading which she discusses in "How One Should Read a Book?"

While Virginia and her older sister, Vanessa, received a third-rate education, brothers Thoby and Adrian, financed by Arthur's Education Fund, attended the finest preparatory schools, finishing up their education at Cambridge. Virginia's lack of formal schooling was a source of bitterness throughout her life. Shortly before her suicide in 1941, she wrote a letter to Desmond McCarthy,<sup>13</sup> responding to his review of "The Leaning Tower" in which he criticized Woolf's ivory-tower mentality:

I never sat on top of a tower! Compare my little 150 pounds education with yours, with Lytton's, with Leonard's. Did Eton and Cambridge make no difference to you? . . . Would Lytton have written just as well if he'd spent his youth, as I did mine, mooning among books in a library? I assure you, my tower was a mere toadstool, about six inches high. (Letters 6: 467)<sup>13</sup>

Her frustrations parallel those of the narrator of who says: "You can never imagine what it is to have a man's force of genius in you, and yet to suffer the slavery of being a girl."

Julia Stephen died when Virginia was thirteen years of age, and Leslie followed eight years later. Upon his step-father's death George Duckworth

took control of the family and the tyranny of the Victorian patriarchy continued.<sup>14</sup> Though "the game of Victorian society" had its charm, being founded in "restraint, sympathy, and unselfishness--all civilized qualities," it was detrimental to the aspiring intellectual and artist, who found herself imprisoned within a Victorian framework which "bit into [her] with innumerable sharp teeth" (Moments of Being 150, 152).

Both Gerald and George Duckworth sexually abused Virginia from the time she was six years old.<sup>15</sup> Adrienne Rich writes of the Duckworths' abuse of their younger sister in her poem "Virginia 1906": "What if at five years old/ she was old to his fingers splaying her vulva open/ what if forever after, in every record/ she wants her name inscribed as innocent" (Your Native Land Your Life 42). It is interesting to note that Rich laces her sympathy with criticism: she "will not speak, refuses to know, can say/ I have been numb for years/ . . . as if the victim can be innocent only in isolation." What disturbs Richs is that Woolf waited so long to tell her story of victimization and abuse. The "Sketch," in which Woolf writes openly of being sexually abused, was written the year before her death.

To outsiders, Woolf's life might have appeared ideal--she was the daughter of an educated man--yet in reality hers was a life marred by sexual and emotional abuse, debilitating depression and anxiety, mental breakdowns and emotional traumas, as well as several suicide attempts, the last of which succeeded. Despite her privileged status, Woolf's relationship with her

family reflects that of many women in her society and brings to mind Berenice Carroll's observation that "personal relations are the mirror of the social system and its crucible" (117-18).

#### IV Early Influences

As a young child Woolf looked to independent women--Clara Pater and Janet Case--as intellectual guides. Pater, her Latin tutor, became the Vice-President of Somerville College, Oxford. Janet Case was a classical scholar of "ardent theories" and "clear strong views & more than this . . . a fine human sympathy" (Passionate 182,184). These women possessed characteristics that Woolf would develop as an intellectual. But a stronger influence in her growth as an intellectual and an artist was what was later to be called the Bloomsbury group.

The Bloomsbury group was a coterie of post-Victorians that included among its membership a mix of artists, writers, political theorists, literary critics, economists, and philosophers. In addition to the "regulars"--Thoby, Adrian, Virginia and Vanessa Stephen, Lytton Strachey, Clive Bell, Duncan Grant, Desmond MacCarthy, Saxon Sydney-Turner, E.M. Forster and Leonard Woolf--others who wandered in and out of the group included Roger Fry, Maynard Keynes, and Rupert Brooke (Woolf, Moments of Being 186-201). The Bloomsburians constituted neither an organized club nor a school of

thought, but a "fluid collection" of individuals united in their commitment to "art and friendship" (Rosenthal 31). This social network promoted the value of "a passionate skepticism,"<sup>16</sup> and "the claims of the individual above all others" (22,29,31). If one could say that Bloomsbury had an "agenda," it would have been to tear down the "impenetrable wall of Victorian tradition" (Levenback 171). Intellectuals though they were, each rejected "the prophet's mantle" of the Victorian sage, for to accept it meant turning their literary and artistic endeavors into dogma. The Bloomsbury group helped Virginia break free from Victorian conventions, since they "seemed to have no meaning in the [Bloomsbury] world" (191). Rather than being told "You did look plain" or "You were a failure," Woolf heard, "I must say you made your point rather well" (191). This, then, was their contribution to Virginia's development as a writer and intellectual: freedom to express, freedom to experiment, and freedom to give voice to one's thoughts and ideas.

It was during these Bloomsbury gatherings that Virginia Stephens met Leonard Woolf. She married him in 1912. A literary and political critic, Leonard Woolf, as did Harriet Martineau, believed that the task of the intellectual was to "lead people to a rational understanding of history, politics, and economics" (Meyerowitz 1).<sup>17</sup> In his early days as a member of the Bloomsbury group, Leonard had encouraged Virginia in her writing; as her husband, he continued to do so. He praised her work, calling Jacob's Room a "work of genius" and To The Lighthouse "a masterpiece," but he

also served as critic, describing characters in Jacob's Room as "puppets" and the first 100 pages of The Waves as "extremely difficult" for the common reader (Writer's Diary 45,102,45,169).<sup>18</sup> Just as they did Harriet Martineau and George Eliot, it seems that male intellectuals and writers served as Virginia Woolf's primary mentors in her early development as an intellectual.

Unlike Harriet Martineau and Florence Nightingale before her, Woolf elected to marry, despite her awareness of the problems the married intellectual/artist faced. In a 1924 essay, she suggests that it is better that the artist not to marry: Wordsworth "should have had no wife, as Tennyson should have had none, nor Charlotte Bronte her Mr. Nicholls" ("Indiscretions"). But her marriage to Leonard Woolf differed strikingly from that of Wordsworth's, Tennyson's, and Bronte's; the Woolf's marriage was a literary partnership. Fascinated with the political machine, both intellectuals explored the complex connections between social experience (class) and the individual consciousness and between the "structure and ideology of the class system and fascism and war" (Meyeroitz 18). At times their work complemented each other. Selma Meyerowitz describes Three Guineas as a "companion piece" to Leonard's Quack, Quack! because "both analyze the communal psychology of barbarism and liken it to fascism and war" (18-19). Perhaps just as important to their reliance on each other was their shared position as outsiders--he as a Jew, she as a woman.<sup>19</sup>



The progeny of their marriage was the Hogarth Press (Diary 3: 43). The purchase of this publishing company is, perhaps, the single most important decision they made, for it allowed them to express their ideas uncensored by publishers (Letters 4: 348). Virginia Woolf could now pen in her diary: "I'm the only woman in England free to write what I like" (Diary 3: 43). The freedom to publish also gave Virginia Woolf the freedom to experiment with form and language.

## V

### "Making the Path Smooth"

In a speech delivered before the Women's Service League, Virginia Woolf acknowledged that "many famous women, and many more unknown and forgotten," had gone before her, making "the path smooth, and regulating my steps" (Essays 4: 235). She mentions Harriet Martineau, Jane Austen, George Eliot, Fanny Burney, and Aphra Behn by name. A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas adds other women, past and present, to her list of influential women-- Charlotte Bronte, Mary Wollstonecraft, Dorothy Wordsworth, Geraldine Jewsbury and Jane Carlyle, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Christina Rossetti, Emily Davies, Anna Jemima Clough, Josephine Butler, and Octavia Hill.<sup>20</sup>

Intrigued by the artist's relationship with her reader, Woolf noted the "deep emotion" lay beneath the surface of Austen's novels that "stimulat[ed]"

the reader to "supply what is not there" (Common Reader 142).<sup>21</sup> Charlotte Bronte was another novelist who possessed tremendous power over the reader. Taking her readers "by the hand," Woolf writes, "Bronte forces [them] along her road, seeing the things she sees and as she sees them. She is never absent for a moment, nor does she attempt to conceal herself . . . , for she is herself the heroine of her own novels . . . [and] the recorder of feelings and not of thoughts" (Common Reader 160).

Woolf admired Bronte's relationship with her readers, but she too reiterates Harriet Martineau's criticism of Charlotte Bronte, that Bronte lacked control of her emotions. Woolf finds that Bronte instead, wrote "in a rage when she should [have written] calmly" (A Room of One's Own 104). Woolf also found fault with Bronte's most famous heroine, Jane Eyre, depicting her as a single faceted character: she is "always to be a governess and always to be in love" which is a "serious limitation in a world which is full, after all, of people who are neither one nor the other" (Common Reader 161). As a public intellectual, it troubled Woolf (as it did Martineau) that Bronte not only did "not attempt to solve the problems of human life; she [was] even unaware that such problems exist" (161). Bronte's failings went to the very core of Woolf's world view. In a world threatened by war, the purpose of the intellectual was to advance human freedom and knowledge by addressing pressing social concerns. Whether reading To the Lighthouse, Three

Guineas, or "I am Christina Rossetti," one finds political/gender/cultural issues being addressed in most of Woolf's works.

Other women of the past guided Woolf's process toward self-redefinition. Mary Wollstonecraft, whom Woolf discusses in "Four Figures," was a "highly intelligent" woman obsessed with the idea of independence (Second Common Reader 141), viewing it as "the first necessity for a woman" (142). Woolf was magnetically drawn to Wollstonecraft, whose entire life "had been an experiment from the start" (148).

One cannot read Woolf's essays on Jane Carlyle without a sense of loss, of an intellectual life unfulfilled. Carlyle was a "genius" who possessed "brilliant gifts," but they bore little fruit. Part of the blame Woolf placed at the feet of Thomas Carlyle, noting that "if there was one creature that [he] hated, it was a strong-minded woman of the George Sand species" (179). Though Jane Carlyle held a "higher ambition," she settled on the "study of human nature," pursued "over her teacups" (Woolf, Essays 3: 55). In Jane Carlyle, Woolf could see a Judith Shakespeare, the fictionalized brilliant sister of William in A Room of One's Own. Judith and Jane were two "wonderfully gifted" women, denied educations and an opportunity to express their genius. Tillie Olsen writes the concept of the woman writer, impaired by exclusion and "the denial of full circumference" (244) to be a common theme found in all Woolf's writings.

George Eliot, "a sage who served the advancement of the common life," preached the "sin of egotism and the virtue of self-denying fellow-feeling" (Booth 5). Woolf communicated a similar "doctrine" but made more explicit "the gender dynamics of egotism. . . , repeatedly mocking the phallic 'I, I, I'" (5). George Eliot, as did Martineau, served as a testimony to tenacity and perseverance. Eliot's development as an intellectual and novelist had been "very slow and very awkward, but it had the irresistible impetus behind it of a deep-seated and noble ambition" (Common Reader 169). What Woolf said of George Eliot could be applied to herself: "Every obstacle at length was thrust from her path. She knew every one. She read everything. Her astonishing intellectual vitality had triumphed" (169).<sup>22</sup>

Though seeking the help of "aunts," such as Martineau, Eliot, Wollstonecraft, and Austen, Woolf ultimately paved her own way along a path made more difficult by the fact that she had to re-envision the womanist intellectual for the twentieth century. This is not to suggest, however, that Woolf "outstripped" either Martineau or Eliot as "the enabling foremother" (or for our purposes, "aunt" of the womanist intellectual tradition, which is what Booth asserts Woolf did to Eliot in tracing female literary history (Booth 19). The lineage of the womanist intellectual is more complicated in that it is difficult to draw a straight line from Martineau to Woolf and from Woolf to hooks. The influences of the nineteenth-century womanist intellectuals are indirect, though one can easily argue Harriet Martineau, Florence

Nightingale, and George Eliot in their roles as aunts, not only for Virginia Woolf but for later public intellectuals such as Adrienne Rich and bell hooks. Woolf's new vision, which have continued to be perpetuated by Rich and hooks, included, among other things, the advancement of a more effective way to communicate to a wider audience, as well as the development of a relationship with one's audience that was even less hierarchic than that of their predecessors.

Adrienne Rich writes that "danger lies in forgetting what we had" (What is Found There 78). Danger also lies, however, in forgetting what women have not had. Woolf understood, as did Rich, that the "passing on of living history" is essential for individual self-actualization and "communal self knowledge" (79). Examining the lives of Mary Wollstonecraft and Jane Carlyle made Woolf aware of some of the pitfalls awaiting the intellectual woman and of what Susan Sontag would describe as "the all too common reality of a woman who does not know what to do with her genius, her originality, her aggressiveness" (Alice in Bed 115). On a more positive note, however, reading women's collective past validates one's existence, enabling women to see the contributions and crucial roles their aunts played in history.

## VI Choosing the life

It is difficult to compare the intellectual developments of Martineau and Woolf. Martineau embarked on her life's mission early, plunging straightway into campaigning for social change. Writing, for her, was a means to an end, not an end in itself. Woolf, on the other hand, wrote "for the sake of writing" and for the love of literature (Passionate 139). She describes her obsession with words and pen as an "eternal instinct in the human beast, to try & reproduce something of . . . majesty in paint marble or ink" (Passionate 143). Her development as a cultural critic was more circuitous than that of Martineau's, and perhaps for this reason we can more easily see the development of the budding young intellectual as she moved from diarist to experimental artist to public intellectual in the womanist tradition.

One of the more interesting aspects of Woolf's development as an intellectual and writer is her creation of 'Miss Jan'. Living in an oppressive Victorian household, Virginia Stephen faced the dilemma of choosing to either express her thoughts or to silence them; instead Woolf split herself in half and created an alter-ego: 'Miss Jan.' Miss Jan, according to Louise DeSalvo, gave Virginia a vent for her emotions and the freedom to "carve out an identity separate from the rest of [her] family" (113). Jan was the "other" who, unlike Woolf, refused to be silenced. This fictional persona

enabled her to create a strong authoritative voice, as well as a fluid and malleable one that spoke to a variety of audiences.

The early journals of Virginia Stephen trace the intellectual through its embryonic stage. Her entries and 'Miss Jan's' gave voice to the silent--a young girl in a Victorian household--and depicts the artist as a young woman, taking her first steps toward a creation of self. At the end of her first journal year, Virginia writes that it had been "the first really lived year of my life" (1 January 1898). A number of entries express Virginia's pride in her developing intellectual self--a feeling that as a child was lost in a household of Georges and Gerald and Thobys and Adrians--and she acknowledges in these private thoughts that it was the "activity of the mind . . . [that kept] one's life going" (*Passionate* 138). Perhaps Woolf like Martineau and hooks, entered the intellectual realm as a way of surviving a childhood of maternal neglect and/or sexual abuse.

The diaries, of course, also express Virginia's frustration as an intellectually gifted young woman growing up in the confines of a Victorian household. At seventeen, she describes herself at first like a "restless steamer paddle urging the ship along" then later, as "Norseman" on a long sea voyage: "What a force a human being is. There are worse solitudes than drift ice, & yet this eternal throbbing . . . energy of one's mind thaws a pathway thro'; & open sea & land shall come in time" (138). This restlessness reflects

the helplessness she felt in being denied an education and the fears she felt in perhaps never finding a harbor in which to dock her ship.

The year 1905 was a monumental one in Virginia's development as a writer and intellectual. First, she accepted a teaching post at Morley College. In a letter to Violet Dickinson, she describes herself as "a professional Lady" who makes "a living . . . by the pen" (Letters 1: 189-90). Secondly, she began interacting with a different social class than her own: "nice enthusiastic working women who say they love books" (Passionate 218). At Morley, she organized a "girls club" for these women, giving them the opportunity to express their ideas and "talk about books &c!" (217). It was also at Morley that she taught history and literature and worked as a librarian.<sup>23</sup> These teaching experiences gave Woolf the opportunity to dialogue with men and women of the working classes and hear, first hand, of their oppressive situations. Cognizant that even in the novel "the historical record was the product of the victors rather than the vanquished," she gave voice in her writings to their situation, though uneasy about her lack of knowledge concerning their powerless lives. From this point, the plight of the powerless becomes a major theme in her works.

It was also in 1905 that Woolf came to realize the "ambition of [her] youth, and actually [began] making money" by writing reviews for The Times Literary Supplement, the Academy, the National Review, and the Guardian (Letters 1: 180). The power editors held over her work frustrated Woolf, who



was an independent intellectual who did not want to put her message in the hands of social authorities. Commenting on Margaret Lyttleton, editor of the Guardian's Woman Supplement, Woolf complains to her friend Violet Dickinson (3 Dec. 1905) that the editor often "sticks her broad thumb into the middle of my delicate sentences and improves the moral tone" (Letters 1: 214). She expressed similar displeasure with the "wretched Academy": "It sent me a proof, word for word as I had written my article, and now I buy a copy and find they have changed the title . . . ; cut out a good half--altered words on their own account without giving me a chance to protest. I shouldn't so much mind if they hadn't clapped on my name in full at the end" (Letters 1: 181-182). Of course, the purchase of the Hogarth Press relieved Woolf from censoring editors and publishers; she could now "write what I like . . . in my own voice . . . without [concern for] praise" (Writer's Diary 43, 46). The only question now would be the shape her voice would take.

## VII Coming to terms with the Past

To develop as a writer and intellectual in the twentieth century, Woolf had to first come to terms with her Victorian past. Even in early twentieth century, British society was still divided (ideologically) into two realms: 1) capitalism, ruled by "competition, selfishness, and materialistic values" and 2) domesticity which offered "comfort, companionship, and spiritual

renewal" (Rosenman 4). Her break with this past was made easier by the times in which she lived. In "How it Strikes a Contemporary," Woolf reveals how war and the threat of war "sharply cut us off from our predecessors. A shift in the scale. . . has shaken the fabric from top to bottom, alienated us from the past and made us perhaps too vividly conscious of the present" (241-42). Woolf confronted the modernist dilemma: individuals adrift in a world attempting to create order out of chaos.

As a woman, artist, and intellectual, Woolf was conscious of her time and place in history. This consciousness, according to T.S. Eliot in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," was made possible by the writers "perception not only of the past, but of its presence" (Selected Essays 4). Woolf handles the tension between past and present in a way that exposes her literary and cultural "approach to the modern consciousness" (Goldman 27). Walking a narrow path between tradition and rebellion, she attempted to meld past and present, as in Between the Acts when she combines them in the village pageant.

Virginia Woolf pays homage to the great Victorian tradition, while simultaneously dismantling it (Booth 10). In Mrs. Dalloway, for example, the two central figures, Septimus Warren Smith and Clarissa represent two faces in this period of transition. At the end of the novel, Septimus, unable to return to a Victorian way of life, leaps to his death from a third story window as Mrs. Dalloway converses with her dinner party guests. The Victorian

facade, the stability of Clarissa's life, lies decaying around her. Clarissa's final thoughts in the novel are about this young dead soldier she had never met. Surprisingly, she "does not pity him," rather she is "glad that he had done it; thrown it away" (283). In committing suicide, Septimus regains control of the life he had lost in the war; Clarissa, however, "[loses] herself in the process of living" by holding to the Angel in the House ideal (282).

Virginia Woolf developed a modernist style of writing, but she held on to the Victorian novelist's "strong sense of place," as did Thomas Hardy, whose genius moved "out on to the darkness of the heath and upon the trees swaying in the storm" (Second Common Reader 224,229). She also retained the Victorian's "social imperative" and need for community (Paul 5)--which drove works like A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas. But the Victorian's phallogocentric world view denied her complete independence, so Woolf began attacking the "imperialist, Victorian structure of perception and evaluation" and developed a "system of multiple focus" (Ouditt 170). To understand a character, a scene, a "moment of vision," Woolf's reader "wanted fifty pairs of eyes to see with" (To The Lighthouse 294).

Though maintaining this link with her Victorian past, Woolf did not betray her sex. It was as if, in recognizing that she could not escape her time or social position, that she could not erase 2000 years of patriarchal rule, Woolf decided instead to re-envision it, introducing an intellectual approach that

involved the creation of a common language and making the woman intellectual's marginal social position an asset.

## VIII Double Binds and Dual Realities

To be a woman intellectual in an age of fascism, world wars, and phalloethnocentric world views proved an arduous venture, even for the daughter of an educated man. Woolf's relationship with her society would have been problematic whether she had been writing in the nineteenth or twentieth century since critics of both ages found women intellectuals an enticing target. In her study on George Eliot and Virginia Woolf, Allison Booth writes that critics have portrayed both women as either "aloft in the impersonal, apolitical ether of art" or "muscling it out in the trenches of a Cause" (18).

Just as Thomas Carlyle wrote that Harriet Martineau was better suited to be a "mistress of some immense Dress-Shop," so too did twentieth-century critics attack Woolf's femininity, as well as her privileged social standing. Q. D. Leavis, in a now famous and particularly scathing review of Three Guineas, quotes a passage from the work in which Woolf argues that the "daughters of educated men have always done their thinking from hand to mouth . . . . They have thought while they stirred the pot, while they rocked the cradle." Leavis contends that since Woolf was childless, that "there is no

reason to suppose Mrs. Woolf would know which end of the cradle to stir" (210). Today we continue to hear echoes of Queenie Leavis' remarks in the pens of feminist critics, such as Elaine Showalter who honors Woolf's contribution to women's literary history but at the same time criticizes her for being "out of touch with ordinary women" (Literature 294-97).

Early twentieth-century England's phallogentric society also made it difficult for a woman to speak. In 1935, Woolf had hoped to be asked to join the London Library Board where her father had served as President but was told by E. M. Forster that the committee found women to be "impossible" (Diary 4: 297-98). Five years later, the Board changed its mind and Forster offered Woolf the position. Woolf writes that she wanted "to tell them what [she] thought of them for daring to suggest that [she] should rub her nose in that pail of offal" (Diary 4: 298). What she chose to do instead was to "tell lies," to apply a soothing ointment, just as the Angel of the House would have done, to the "swollen (& inflamed) skin of our brothers' so terribly inflamed vanity." Woolf regretted her action (or inaction), but she had discerned that in early twentieth-century British society "truth is only to be spoken by those women whose fathers were pork butchers & left them a share in the pig factory" (298). Only ownership in a pig factory or five hundred pounds and a room of one's own could free a woman to speak her mind.

In addition to critical attacks and struggles to gain financial independence and social status, women in the early twentieth-century also

confronted, as did their aunts, a medical profession which continued to dismiss women as physically and mentally inferior to men. Sir George Henry Savage (on whom the fictional Sir William Bradshaw in Mrs. Dalloway was based) was a prominent physician and the Stephens family's doctor and later served the Woolf family. Like Dr. Weir Mitchell, Charlotte Perkins's physician portrayed in "The Yellow Wallpaper," Dr. Savage judged his patient's progress in terms of their submission to his judgment and narrow view of reality.

Woolf employed Savage's fictional counterpart, Sir William Bradshaw, to attack the medical profession and the way the profession victimized its patients. Sir Bradshaw based his medical philosophy on a "goddess": "Proportion, divine proportion" (Mrs. Dalloway 150). With its sister "Conversion," "which feasts on the wills of the weakly, living to impress, to impose" (151), the duo "made England prosper, secluded her lunatics, forbade childbirth, penalized despair, made it impossible for the unfit to propagate their views until they, too, shared his sense of proportion" (150). Noel Annan notes in his biography of Leslie Stephen that Dr. Savage's diagnosis of Woolf's illness reflected Stephen's own view of women, "namely that women have weaker minds as well as weaker bodies" (117). The tyranny of medical practitioners was the force Harriet Martineau confronted in Life in the Sickroom. As did Harriet Martineau, Woolf wanted to give the patient greater control over her treatment.

These powerful instruments of authority--traditional institutions and science--had to struggle with women's increasing independence and created a dual reality. As a public intellectual, essayist, and novelist, Woolf found herself writing both within the periphery of society (as the daughter of an educated man) and outside its circumference (as a woman intellectual). This might explain Ralph Freedman's assessment of Woolf as "both elitist and non elitist, playful and earthbound, self-conscious about her art and socially conscious as well"(qtd. in Booth 88). This internal/external struggle<sup>24</sup> of the daughters of educated men is addressed by Woolf in her speech presented to the London National Society of Women's Service in January, 1931. Here, Woolf describes the difficulty a woman faces in getting a publisher to accept her work, since most were men and/or of a patriarchal mindset. In essence, "a woman . . . is not a man. Her experience is not the same. Her traditions are different. Her values, both in art and in life are different" (Pargiters xxxiii). This led to Woolf's pronouncement that she considered herself the citizen of no country. But she ultimately failed, for everyone is "born into a language" community which they cannot escape, except by "impress[ing]" one's unique perspective, sound and accent on it (Said 27). Though Woolf began developing a language that would have a "special accent," she found that she also had to repress her anger and self-censor her own writing in order to be heard (qtd. Marcus "Anger" 81-82). Just beneath the "polished surface" of Woolf's writing, however, seethed "great violence" (81). Fearing

that her anger could "clot up" or "clog" her works (81), Woolf kept it under control through the use of satire, the epistolary form, and footnotes.

The duality of her existence, the repression and the revelation, as well as the myth and the reality--expressed itself in all facets of her life. Though repeatedly portrayed as apolitical by her family, Woolf held membership in a number of social and political organizations, such as the People's Suffrage Federation led by Margaret Lewellyn Davies (Black 184), the Women's Co-operative Guild, and National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies. Her introductory letter, entitled "Memories of a Working Women's Guild," prefaces Life as We Have Known It--a compilation of writings by working female members of the Women's Co-operative Guild (Meyerowitz 18). Class did separate Woolf from some working members of these groups. Adrienne Rich writes that "women both have and have not had a common world" since "the mere sharing of oppression does not constitute a common world" (On Lies 203), but Woolf and these working women could unite as outsiders and work together to achieve enfranchisement, to improve men's and women's working conditions, and to prevent the threat of war from becoming a reality. Woolf's membership in these organizations positioned her at the center of a "network of social feminism in Britain" (Black 184), but even more importantly, it connected her "private beliefs to the public world" (Rosenman 8). Rosenman writes that the "violent treatment of the suffragettes spoke to [Woolf] in direct and personal ways" (8). As a young



woman, she had been sexually abused by her stepbrothers, and as an adult she had been confined and force-fed during her illnesses.

Woolf's double bind began to loosen as she developed a stronger sense of identity. Woolf, especially in her final years, was overcoming what Adrienne Rich describes as the "fear that if we do not enter the common world of men . . . on its terms and obey its rules, we will be sucked back in the realm of servitude, whatever our temporary class status or privileges" (207). As did Rich, Woolf had discovered that this fear could limit her powers as an intellectual and writer.

## IX Breaking New Ground

The purchase of Hogarth Press enabled Woolf to break new ground--in the essay, in literature, in language, and in women's literary history. She also used this freedom to unearth the past, digging up the bones of those ancestral intellectuals whose voices history had silenced. In "Sara Coleridge," Woolf finds a woman whose life "remains unfinished" (Common Reader 111) and an "aunt" who, like herself, had been placed in a double bind. Scrutinizing the "fragmentary remains" of Coleridge, Woolf discovered a critic, philosopher, and theologian who, like herself, had been shackled by the Victorian conventions which imprisoned women.<sup>25</sup>

It should be noted, however, that Woolf's "aesthetic standards," which she used to judge Coleridge's work, were "canonical even when revisionist" (Mudge 204). She admired the woman but thought less of her literary work. According to Bradford Mudge, Woolf's "canonical" (read masculine) standards led her to err in her assessment of Coleridge, since she "condemned" Sara by judging her according to "hierarchical [read patriarchal] standards of 'taste.'" Though "How Should One Read A Book," suggests otherwise, Woolf was guided, as was her contemporary T.S. Eliot, by Matthew Arnold's touchstones: the best that had been said or written.

Woolf's seemingly harsh judgment gives us pause. How can the womanist intellectual escape the "double-bind"? The truth is, she often can't. The fear of disobeying the "rules" creates for women, as it had for Martineau in the early nineteenth century, an "anxiety about work" and erects fear that she will lose what little power she now possesses (Rich, On Lies 207). Instead the womanist intellectual must work her way out of the hierarchy through the process of self-actualization. In this process, the womanist intellectual can heal the split that has cut her off from the real world and denied her womanist heritage and self-identity and that has made her "lose touch with [her] real powers and with the essential condition for all fully realized work: community" (207). Woolf healed her split psyche in part by gathering female guides and mentors<sup>26</sup> from past and present around her and also by gaining

her financial independence, But even with this, one could never completely free one's self from the hierarchical and patriarchal world.

History had revealed to Woolf the "logocentricity of language" which reduced "women's dissenting opinions . . . to irritation and subjective 'tangles.'" (Middleton 406). A scene in Mrs. Dalloway explores how this reduction occurs. Lady Bruton dictates her thoughts favoring the emigration of young men and women to Canada to Hugh Whitbread who then translates them for public consumption (publication in The London Times) (Mrs. Dalloway 165-167). One way to get out of this position was to take an exilic and oppositional stance. As an outsider, Woolf could better avoid the patriarchal manipulation and reduction of her own thoughts and words and attack "patriarchal ideology and its rhetoric" (Middleton 406), in order to deconstruct the phallogocentric language and rebuild it.<sup>27</sup>

Woolf pushed at the periphery of language and its rhetorical possibilities. Krista Ratcliffe describes Woolf as a writer who "brilliantly synthesized feminist thought and rhetorical principles" in her essays (84). She asserts that Woolf's "rhetorical masterpiece," A Room of One's Own, speaks to the need of a feminist essay tradition which would "strengthen subsequent generations of women writers, giving them a sense of pride as well as roots from which to grow" (Ratcliffe 85, 15). Woolf's groundbreaking work in the informal feminist essay, compels Ratcliffe to conclude that "[w]ithout a Virginia Woolf stretching the limits of language and society to empower

women, an Adrienne Rich" (238) or an Alice Walker, bell hooks, June Jordan, Susan Sontag, or a Gloria Steinem would not be able to express herself (themselves) so openly.

## X

### **"What a relief to have a vision!"<sup>28</sup>**

Woolf built her literary career around the exploration and destruction of oppression, whatever form it took; she unearthed works by women writers that history had attempted to erase, and examined the relationship between the writer and her reader. But Woolf's overall plan was to change civilization from a competitive, violent, hierarchical one--all elements of a fascist regime--to one of acceptance and equality. Nancy Hartsock describes this concept as a feminist theory of power. In "Peace Research: the Cult of Power," Berenice Carroll describes the "powers of the allegedly powerless," which include "disintegrative power," "inertial power," "innovative power," "legitimizing, integrative power, or socializing power," "expressive power," "explosive power," "power of resistance," "collective" and "cooperative power," and "migratory" and "population power" (614). Exploring the forms in which power appears, Hartsock concludes that the aforementioned powers can help to successfully move society away from the concept of power as domination and submission. This was the vision shared by womanist

intellectuals Harriet Martineau, Virginia Woolf, Adrienne Rich, bell hooks, and Susan Sontag.

Woolf's approach to the development of this power was less radical than that of bell hooks. Though she would have liked to "take one leap to the desirable lands," Leonard Woolf's voice reminded her that "one has got to plod along the road, indeed to make it" (Letters 6: 478). Betwixt "plods" and "leaps," while crossing the boundaries in selecting topics appropriate for women, Woolf exposes 'spots' of power in a number of works.

Attacking capitalism, fascism, war, oppression, and education necessitated crossing borders and on topics that would seem out of the realm of the transcendental female artist that Leonard Woolf and Quentin Bell have portrayed her to be. War took center stage after 1910. In works such as "The Leaning Tower," "Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid," Mrs. Dalloway, and The Years (1937), Woolf expresses the fear other Brits experienced over impending war and its disruptive nature in their day-to-day existence.

The message of this womanist intellectual was pacifism; only then could this "preposterous masculine fiction" be halted (Diary 1: 59).<sup>29</sup> The preposterous fiction Woolf refers to is a New York Times letter entitled "A Righteous War" which was signed by George Wells, Arnold Bennett, John Galsworthy, Thomas Hardy, Rudyard Kipling, A.C. Bradley, Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch and May Sinclair. Wells, Bennett and Galsworthy argue the righteousness of war in their novels. How could Woolf speak to the horrors

of war if the papers "insist[ed] upon [its] indispensability"? How could her words turn the populace away from their "unreal loyalties," when renowned male intellectuals, like H.G. Wells and Thomas Hardy, wrote in support of the war? (Ouditt 174) Woolf denounced their propagandizing efforts in a diary entry dated October 12, 1918, writing that "the Northcliffe papers do all they can to insist upon the indispensability & delight of war. They magnify our victories to make our mouths water for more" (Diary 1: 200).

A short but powerful essay, "Heard on the Downs," reveals Woolf's response to these masculine propagandizing efforts. In this essay, she speaks to her audience of the realities of War by presenting two metaphorical views of war. The first employs the language of the oppressor to sound the death knell for civilization: "the hammer stroke of Fate" and "the pulse of Destiny." In the second view, Woolf, the artist, paints a domestic landscape, describing the guns of war as "the beating of gigantic carpets by gigantic women, at a distance" (Essays 2: 40). In "Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid," which appeared in the New Republic in October 1940, she relates her personal fears as she attempts to convey the queer experience of lying in bed and listening to the Germans "zoom[ing]" over her house, knowing they may at "any moment sting you to death" (2: 243). The message here is one reiterated in all her war writings: "Unless we can think peace into existence we--not this body in this one bed but millions of bodies yet to be born--will lie in the same darkness and hear the same death rattle overhead"

(2: 243). Woolf works on a number of different levels to express her anger with a senseless world seemingly driven to destroy itself. Her message is also one that flies in the face of authority as she contests the patriotic consensus, taking the side of the intellectual 'nay-sayer' who both unsettles and is unsettled.

In his study on Woolf as literary (and social) critic, Mark Goldman considers what "voice" a woman should use to "write about the war" (8). The one Woolf most frequently chose was that of detached observer, a relatively easy task for the socially-marginalized womanist intellectual. At times, she paints pictures of war on a domestic landscape. At other times it is "a chasm in a smooth road," as in "Leaning Tower," when war also becomes for Woolf "a little blur had come round the edges of things." Woolf confronts her readers not with the bloody horrors of war, that is, in "terms of mud or barbed wire" but in terms of the "'ordinary' life left behind" and the "destruction of a secure past" (Hattaway 14).

Critics like Sharon Ouditt argue that Woolf might have philosophically rejected the war as an effective method of "conflict resolution," but she refused to actively and openly campaign against the war (5). These critics seem to ignore Woolf's "war" essays and novels which were her tools for change. Ouditt also mistakenly assumes that Woolf "mourned no good soldier." Vanessa Bell's son, Julian, was killed in the Spanish War and Woolf felt her own sorrow and that of her sister deeply.

Ouditt's criticism of Woolf echoes those of a number of feminist and Gay Rights activists who have taken Adrienne Rich to task for failing to take a more active political role. hooks, too, has received similar criticism. In defending her intellectual work and theoretical writings, hooks asserts that "the work we [intellectuals] do has meaningful impact" (Breaking Bread 148). Writing and lecturing are forms of activism, though hooks acknowledges that this type of intellectual activity is less noticeable than concrete activism, such as picketing in the streets (148). hooks' writings, like Woolf's Three Guineas, may begin in theory but they do not dwell in it; they inspire her wide-ranging audience to become radical activists.

In novels, as well as essays, Woolf pursued a variety of venues in campaigning against the war. The issue of "shell shock," for example, is examined in detail in Mrs. Dalloway (1925), her fourth novel. Early in 1922, Woolf had access to the Report of the War Office Committee of Esquire on 'Shell-Shock' which came before Parliament in August of that same year (Sue Thomas 49). Sir Bradshaw and Richard Dalloway in Mrs. Dalloway make reference to the bill at Clarissa Dalloway's dinner party. The Report defines shell-shock as "the sapping of morals by sudden or prolonged fear . . . which reduces [a man] to a state wherein he cannot control his emotions" (RWOC)<sup>29</sup>, quoted in Thomas 52). Septimus Warren Smith, Sir Bradshaw's patient, having recently returned from the war lacks this control, a situation



which causes embarrassment for the "public spirited British Empire, tariff-reform, governing-class spirit" (86).

The war report and the fictional physicians draw a parallel between shell shock and "the usual feminine outbursts of hysteria" (Thomas 50). The treatment for the disorder as prescribed by Sir Bradshaw and Dr. Holmes coincides with those in the report. Its success depends on the doctor's having complete authority and control of the situation and the patient. If, however, the patient's (in this case, Septimus') "selfish and social tendencies" interrupt his treatment, the doctor must "be able to throw his weight into the scale on behalf of the latter, [since] there must be *no barriers of escape* between the patient and himself" [my emphasis] (Thomas 53). Obviously, Septimus Smith did find one means of escape--leaping to his death from a third story window. One could well argue, as Woolf did, that the physician's cure was what killed him.

Woolf's strongest and most open attacks against war and fascism are found in her essays prior to World War II. In Three Guineas Woolf melds fascism and sexism so tightly as to make them inseparable. Tracing the source of fascism to the patriarchy and its subjugation of women, Woolf describes the uneven division of power between men and women as the "first cause" (Marcus "No More Horses," 278).

Marie-Luise Gattens finds it interesting that Woolf did not choose to focus her "analyses of fascism" on either Spain or Germany, countries that

suffered under a fascist regime (Gattens 33). For Woolf, it was of greater importance that England recognize that its own "vaunted moral superiority" over the Germans veiled a form of fascism flourishing in its traditional institutions--church, state, and industry. Tunneling deep within the social structure, Woolf discovers a microcosm of fascism in the nuclear family, the place where women first experience the "cruelty," "hypocrisy," "immorality," and "inanity" of their domestic sphere (39).

Obviously, to destroy fascism one must attack its first cause--patriarchal structures--and "burn them to the ground" (36). Woolf can "dream her dreams" and "fire off her rhetoric" if she wishes, but ultimately, she, too, has "to face realities" (35). Just as Woolf cannot reveal her anger and frustrations to the editors of the Guardian and still expect to be read, neither can she openly call for the overthrow of Family, Church, and State (though her writings at the time suggest this idea). What Woolf can do, however, is urge women to examine the history of their sex and critically determine for themselves their social situation, as she did in examining the lives of Dorothy Wordsworth, Sara Coleridge, George Eliot, and Jane Carlyle. Only then can history be re-written and a woman's position redefined.

Woolf's vision for women, which she unveils in A Room of One's Own. (1929) includes educational opportunities, economic independence, and control over their own bodies. She foresees a society in which women are no longer the "protected sex," one in which gender difference has been laid aside

and in which women's history stands equal to that of men's. Woolf's society has "no gate, no lock no bolt" to imprison a woman's mind (39-45, 76).

Long before the publication of A Room of One's Own, Woolf campaigned, in her own way, for women's rights. Like Harriet Martineau and George Eliot before her she did not openly align herself with any one movement. In fact, a few of her works portray suffragists in a negative light, as for example Lucy Craddock in The Years.<sup>31</sup> Mary Childers suggests that Woolf's negative portrayal of these women reflects her "impatience with feminism," that Woolf had "tired of [the] repetition of feminist points and the predictability of the opposition" (64). Two other possible explanations for Woolf's attitude suggest themselves, however. First, the feminist movement during the early 1900's had splintered and become fragmented. Militant feminists, like Emmeline and Sylvia Pankhurst, were breaking windows and setting fires. As a pacifist, Woolf deplored violent acts of any kind. Secondly, Woolf's "Professions of Women" speaks to the compromises women intellectuals made in order to be accepted by the general populace. If Woolf aligned herself with a particular movement, she might lose some of her authority as a public intellectual.

Despite this compromise, Woolf maintained her exilic status, as her refusal to accept the Cambridge lecture series discloses. At first glance, it seems paradoxical that a public intellectual would deliberately position herself outside the margins of society, since Woolf by her social and economic

position was an insider, though situated on its periphery. bell hooks argues, however, that marginality is a "space of radical possibility and hence the center for the production of a counterhegemonic discourse" (Yearning 150) In "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness," hooks asserts that "understanding marginality as a position and place of resistance is crucial for oppressed, exploited, colonized people. If we only view the margin as a sign marking the despair, a deep nihilism penetrates in a destructive way the very ground of our being" (150-51).

Cultural critics, like bell hooks and Nancy Hartsock, have "reconceptualized" the concept of power, the latter arguing that instead of "getting rid of subjectivity," women (and members of other oppressed groups) should engage in "the historical, political, and theoretical process of constituting ourselves as subjects as well as objects of history. [They can become] the makers of history as well as the object of those who have made history" (Hartsock 170-71).

The education of socially marginalized subjects is the key to the independence Wollstonecraft demanded in Vindication of the Rights of Women. Education, Woolf repeatedly argues, "makes a difference" in women's lives (Three Guineas 6), especially one that "broadens one's outlook [and] enriches one's mind" (4-5). Let a woman be educated as men are, Woolf argues. Let Arthur's Education Fund provide her with an education and "those luxuries and trimmings which are . . . an essential part of education--

travel, society, solitude" (5). This is not to suggest that Woolf wants women to receive a man's education. In A Room of One's Own, she argues that if a woman's college is going to instill the same values as those inculcated by its patriarchal counterpart, it would be better that it burn to the ground. What Woolf is advocating, however, are equal opportunities and resources. True freedom lies in the "right to earn one's living," which means the right to live independently (15). This "new weapon"--a profession of one's own--empowers any woman to "express her own opinions" against war rather than concede to a man's pro-war rationale (17).

For civilization to survive and progress, men, too, must share with women a commitment to preserve the human race and to grant equality to all citizens. Woolf asks men and professional women financially to support "colleges for the daughters of educated men." For

if those daughters are not going to be educated they are not going to earn their livings; if they are not going to earn their livings, they are going once more to be restricted to the education of the private house; and if they are going to be more restricted to the education of the private house they are going, once more, to exert all their influence . . . in favor of war. (A Room of One's Own 37)

Throughout her career, Woolf worked to dismantle the senseless conventions of a class-bound society. In Mrs. Dalloway, she satirizes the British ruling class by revealing the absurdity of its conventions as well as

how these absurd world views are passed on from one member to the next. Peter Walsh observes “[b]oys in uniform, carrying guns, [who] marched with their eyes ahead of them, marched, their arms stiff, and on their faces an expression like the letters of a legend written round the base of a statue praising duty, gratitude, fidelity, love of England” (Mrs. Dalloway 76).<sup>32</sup> Woolf’s position on class and tradition was discomfoting to many members of the middle-class. She was questioning the very foundations on which the middle-class had been erected.

E.M. Forster and Queenie Leavis, along with Elaine Showalter criticized Woolf’s seeming indifference to the working class woman. Criticism also arose from Woolf’s penning the introduction to Life as We Have Known It (1931). This selection of autobiographical letters, written by members of the Women’s Co-operative Guild and compiled by Margaret Llewelyn Davies, was published by the Hogarth Press. For the first time, common readers heard the voices of hard-worked and poverty-stricken women telling of their difficult lives. In her introduction to the work, Woolf explores the troublesome relationship between herself--a member of a privileged class--and the working-class members of the Guild.

It was a difficult piece for Woolf to write and only through “great plodding” (Diary 3: 305) did she succeed in finishing it. As an honest and sincere individual and a member of the upper-middle class, how could she speak for these working class women when she had not lived their lives?

She feared misrepresenting them since she had only observed and not experienced their hardships: "One could not be Mrs. Giles of Durham because one's body had never stood at the wash-tub; one's hands had never wrung and scrubbed and chopped up whatever the meat may be that makes a miner's supper" ("Introduction" xxi). Adrienne Rich too explores the problematic relationship between her privileged position and women in Third World countries. Though she cannot understand their oppression, she can bring their voices to life, as she does, by publishing their works in What Is Found There.<sup>33</sup>

## XI "My Point of View"

Three Guineas links many of the themes found in Woolf's earlier essays and novels--fascism, war, peace, and gender and class conflicts. Is Three Guineas an anti-fascist tract (Marcus 277), a feminist polemic (277), an expose on class struggle (277), a guidebook for the womanist intellectual, a "glorious release of her anger" (Heilbrun 241), the "product of a very odd state of mind" (Bell 2: 204), a "good gallop," as Woolf describes in her diary (Writer's Diary 267)? A "war book" (253)? Or is it . . . (298)? The answer is yes. What Woolf attempts to do in Three Guineas is undercut the "rules of political discourse" by deconstructing "the conventional oppositions private/public, English

liberalism/ German and Italian fascism" (Minow-Pinckney 188), which constructed early twentieth century society.

By the 1930's, England was again headed for war. Woolf was now in her fifties, had achieved financial independence, validation, and fame: she no longer felt the need to carefully measure her words. Though she disdained the propagandizing and preaching she found exemplified in the works D.H. Lawrence, Woolf wanted to "strike very sharp and clear on a hot iron" (Writer's Diary 268). In reading Three Guineas one sees Woolf taking the central ideas from works spanning a period of three decades, coupled with her anger and frustration that society had failed to act on these issues. She molds them into three gold coins and bets them on a final throw (Three Guineas was Woolf's last great work). In a way, she won her bet. As an public intellectual, Woolf "wanted to communicate" rather than "create a poem" (Writer's Diary 284). To enlighten and emancipate rather than entertain. Upon completion of what she described as her crowning achievement, Woolf "reached [her] point of view, as a writer, as being" (267).

Despite the predominately negative reviews of Three Guineas, Woolf felt she had "already gained [her] point": "I'm taken seriously, not dismissed as a charming prattler as I feared" (285). This diary entry discloses Woolf's desire to be taken seriously as a public intellectual. She wished her message to be received as a "serious challenge that must be answered" (285). Though her position as a woman intellectual was a precarious one, she, for once



dismissed the scathing reviews that would surely follow. Neither "praise or wiggling" had the effect that it once had (290). At this time in her life, Woolf is able to acknowledge that "I'm fundamentally, I think, an outsider" (297).

Her acceptance of this marginalized position, which she ultimately chose for herself, freed her from social constraints. With a spirit of opposition rather than accommodation, Woolf could write of Three Guineas: "I had said my say: take it or leave it" (278). Though "uneasy at taking this role in the public eye," her fears are "out balanced (this is honest) by the immense relief and peace I have gained": "my mind is made up. I need never recur or repeat. I am an outsider. I can take my way: experiment with my own imagination in my own way. The pack may howl, but it shall never catch me. . . . Still I am free" (282). One can see in these lines that Woolf's perception of herself as outsider had a more powerful effect on the shape of her writing and thought than the ways in which she was undeniably an insider.

## XII

### "That My Message Be Understood"

In examining the works of Harriet Martineau and Virginia Woolf, we can trace the general progression of the developing womanist intellectual from the early nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries. Since the traditional intellectual's consecrated ground forbade Harriet Martineau entry, she created her own position as a public intellectual, speaking to the working

and middle-classes. To speak to her readers, Martineau developed a writing style that was clear, rational and concise; she engaged her readers, primarily by addressing their personal issues and concerns; she made theories into a reality by taking concepts of political economy and applying them to her reader's every day life. Virginia Woolf took these basic elements and expanded upon and re-envisioned them for the twentieth- century.

Harriet Martineau and Florence Nightingale wrote from the position of outsiders, often working behind the scenes as political movers and shakers. It was not a position they wished for and one often reads in their diaries and letters their frustration with their exilic position. Virginia Woolf, however, was one of the first womanist intellectuals to view woman's marginal position as a positive challenge. She believed that she did her "best work and [felt] most braced with [her] back against the wall. It's an odd feeling though, writing against the current. Difficult to disregard the current" (Writer's Diary 297). From the outside, Woolf could more freely unsettle tradition and confront patriarchal institutions and beliefs.

Possessing a publishing press, a room of her own, and five hundred pounds a year, Woolf escaped the vise-like grip of editors and publishers. She was now free to write what *she* wanted to write. But as Martineau, Nightingale and Eliot had proven, being an outsider could limit one's effectiveness. To refuse to belong to "authorities" (media, government, and corporations, etc.) could limit one's ability to "effect direct change" (Said xvii).

It often relegates the intellectual "to the role of witness who testifies to a horror otherwise unrecorded" (xvii). Nightingale did this by reporting the atrocities of the Crimean War. Woolf, too, gave witness to the horror of World Wars, of fascism, of oppression.

But, from a more positive perspective, Woolf, as an outsider, didn't have to defend a singular position. Moving around in the margins of society, Woolf could view the world through "fifty pairs of eyes." Yet, even with fifty pairs of eyes, Woolf found it necessary to present her message at a indirectly, at a "slant," a position which Emily Dickinson defends:

Tell all the Truth but tell it slant--  
 Success in Circuit lies  
 To bright for our infirm Delight  
 The Truth's superb surprise  
 As Lightning to the Children eased  
 With explanation kind  
 The Truth must dazzle gradually  
 Or every man be blind--

Woolf's "Truth" might be slanted but it contains one of the unifying universal principles of the womanist intellectual: everyone is entitled to freedom from oppression. Her "mission" as a public intellectual was to demonstrate how citizens, male and female, could unencumber themselves from the traditional and patriarchal social conventions, how they could humanize their lives and move toward independence.

Dogma and egotism in the intellectual or artist frustrated Woolf (Writer's Diary 182). Though she acknowledged the talents of poets like Stephen Spender and W.H. Auden, she found their works marred by "anger; pity; scapegoat beating; excuse finding" (Death of a Moth 171). D.H. Lawrence's failing was that he preached: "But it's the preaching that rasps me. Like a person delivering judgment when only half the facts are there: and clinging to the rails and beating the cushion. Come out and see what's up here--I want to say. I meant it's . . . so easy: giving advice on a system" (182-83).

One could argue that Martineau, in the first half of her career, was apt to give advice on a system without fully understanding the system itself, as she did in writing her Illustrations of Political Economy. If the writer or intellectual really wants "to help," Woolf asserts, s/he should "never systemitise" (183). The womanist intellectual should avoid "preach[ing]," telling the readers "what a thing means," for then the message "becomes hateful" to them (Bell 2: 129).

Like many women, Woolf was angry--angry with her father, with her step-brothers, with male colleges, with war, with the capitalist patriarchal system in general and what it represented. But uncontrolled anger makes voices "shrill." Woolf wanted to avoid the emotional outburst of a W.H. Auden or a D.H. Lawrence because it often turned in upon itself, erupting as egotistical rantings, reminiscent of her father's tirades. Woolf held her anger--

"a great violence underneath the polished surface" of her writing--in check through the use of the epistolary form and footnotes (Marcus, "Anger" 80). Rich keeps her own anger controlled by compressing it into poetic form. Satire and humor also serve as "safety-valves" as Woolf writes her socio-political vision without having to sacrifice her experimental style, just as Susan Sontag does in works such as Alice in Bed.

Woolf not only re-visions the womanist intellectual for the twentieth century, she expands her audience to include the "common reader" and then elevates him or her. In Life of Gray, Johnson writes that the common reader possesses "common sense" and is "uncorrupted by literary prejudices, after all the refinements of subtlety and the dogmatism of learning" (quoted in Common Reader 1). To this Woolf adds that although he or she might lack a formal education or the talents of a writer and intellectual, the common reader is a lover of books who reads "for his [or her] own pleasure rather than to impart knowledge or correct the opinions of others" (1). The common reader, as fashioned by Woolf is a critical thinker, possessing "an instinct to create for himself." This instinct guides her to fashion "some kind of whole" whether it be a "man . . . a sketch . . . [or a] theory" (1).

In speaking to her audience, Woolf refuses to accept the prophet's mantle or portray herself as a divine messenger of an unalterable Truth; rather she employs a common language with which to encourage her readers to question texts and writers who at times pretend knowledge they don't

possess or often veer too far away (and above) the realities of life. Expressing a tolerance and acceptance of her audience's "own vision of the world, she notes that "we have made it [our vision] from our own experience and prejudices" ("Robinson Crusoe" 44). The 'we' Woolf employs establishes a sense of community between her and her reader, which constitutes, according to Woolf, "fabric only made once in the world; these contacts we have are unique" (Diary 3: 188).

Virginia Woolf writes in a style and language that is both expressive and clear. Beneath the surface, however, are layers of meaning that the critical reader must tease out. Harriet Martineau, and Florence Nightingale lacked Woolf's artistry but employed a similar style in conveying their collective messages.

In addition to connecting with her audience by identifying with them and responding to their needs, Woolf also takes a lesson from Thomas Hardy. In his works, Hardy often engaged his audience by forcing them to become involved with the story, as Robert Browning had done in his dramatic monologues. Woolf writes that Hardy's "consciousness held more than he could produce, and he left it for his readers to make out his full meaning and to supplement it from their own experience" (Second Common Reader 225). She follows his example in essays like "American Fiction," in which she describes how American writers have created a new tradition by forming their own words and their own art. Though earlier in the text she briefly

compared British women writers to the Americans, Woolf leaves it to her reader to uncover this layer of the text which asserts that women writers, too, can start a new tradition.

Virginia Woolf does not merely offer theoretical polemics; she concretizes them. In "A Society," Woolf refutes Desmond MacCarthy's and Arnold Bennett's contention that women are intellectually inferior to men, by attacking England's socio-political and economic structures. She does not, however, seek to destroy these institutions without offering something in its place: "There's only one thing [for a woman] . . . to believe in--and that is herself" (Monday or Tuesday 40). To believe in one's self means promoting one's own well being, a difficult task in a society which assigns individuals their roles. But with an education, financial independence, and an understanding of one's collective and individual histories, one can confront patriarchal institutions and rebuild society. Woolf's message is not singularly directed to women, however. Her essay reveals the struggle of women *and* men as they move toward self-awareness, "either through or despite social conventions and institutions that construct class and gender lines" (Meyerowitz 241). Woolf in speaking on self-realization and fulfillment puts her theoretical views in a context working men and women can understand.

### XIII Woolf's Place in the Womanist Intellectual Tradition

Reflecting on her early articles for the Times Literary Supplement, Woolf blames "their suavity, their politeness, their sidelong approach, to my tea table training. I see myself, not reviewing a book but handing plates of buns to shy young men and asking them: do they take cream and sugar?" (Letters 4: 150). Yet having mastered this "surface manner" of writing, she discovered it was possible "to slip in things that would be inaudible if one marched straight up and spoke out loud" (4: 150). Woolf had learned to tell the Truth but tell it slant.

Looking back at the volume of Woolf's work and her social commitment for change, I find it remarkable that E. M. Forster could call Woolf the "invalid Lady of Bloomsbury" who had "no great cause at heart" (Noble 187). As an intellectual Woolf symbolized, embodied, and vocalized a message of pacifism and equality. Woolf might have preferred the role of artist and private intellectual, but the private intellectual can't exist since "the moment you set down words and then publish them you have entered into the public world" (Said 12). Woolf was committed to her life's work. She believed "that by writing I am doing what is far more necessary than anything else" (Moments of Being 73).



If Woolf had been born in 1902 rather than 1882, her life might have been quite different. In all probability she would have received the same type of education as Simone de Beauvoir and Margaret Mead had received. In her biography of Beauvoir, Toril Moi writes that whatever their differences, the great intellectual women of previous generations--Madame de Stael, George Sand, George Eliot, Virginia Woolf--had one thing in common: "all were excluded from the major educational institutions of their day" (1). Both Mead and Beauvoir were given the chance to develop as intellectuals, but life was different for Virginia Woolf. Brought up in a Victorian home, sexually abused by her step-brothers, and for the most part, self-educated, she carved for herself a career that barely existed, that of the womanist intellectual.

Jean-Francois Lyotard tells a story of how intelligence came to women: The King of Ou commands his general Sun-Tse (a great military strategist) to make soldiers of 180 of the king's women. The general lines them up into two groups with the King's two favorites leading each group. The groups are to follow the drum beats. At two beats, they are to face right, at three, face left, and at four beats the groups are to turn about face. Instead of obeying the commands, the women laugh and talk among themselves. Again, Sun-Tse repeats the commands; again disorder results. The general accuses the group of mutiny, a crime punishable by death. The sentencing is relayed to the King, who forbids Sun-Tse to kill his two favorites. Sun-Tse replies, "You have charged me with their training, all the rest is my business." He then

cuts of the heads of the favored women and replaces them. The exercise begins again and then, "as though these women had always been soldiers, they become silent and orderly" (9-10).

"Thus," Lyotard adds, "masculine imperialism either relegates women to its orders or makes them homologues of men if it educates them" (11).

The world of ancient China, the world of the early twentieth century, and our world today, according to Lyotard, share a common tradition: "Everything is in place for the imperialism of men: an empty center where the Voice is heard (God's, the People's--the difference is not important, just the Capital letters), the circle of homosexual warriors in dialogue around the center, the feminine (women, children, foreigners, slaves) banished outside the confines of the corpus socians" (11-12). In Three Guineas, Woolf tells a variation of this ancient tale describing fascist and patriarchal regimes at home and abroad. Again, members of the oppressed receive their intelligence (their language and behavior) from their oppressors.

In A Room of One's Own: Women Writers and the Politics of Creativity, Ellen Roseman examines the importance of Woolf's "'book which isn't a book'" to women writers/intellectuals in the twentieth century (Woolf, Letters 4: 102). Margaret Drabble describes her first reading of this essay as one of "mounting excitement and enthusiasm" and was amazed that this "militant, firm, concerted attack on women's subjection," whose message spoke "so relevantly to my own condition," could have been written by a

"woman from [Woolf's] background" ("Virginia Woolf" 211). For writers and intellectuals, like Margaret Drabble, Woolf offered not "dogma but a state of mind" (Middleton 406), one which questioned assumptions about culture and power. One might argue that Woolf, in addition to killing the Angel in the House, also took the first steps in overturning the power of Sun-Tse.

Like Harriet Martineau, Woolf was an amateur who wrote from a position of conscious marginality on topics traditionally closed to women. In works, such as A Room of One's Own, Three Guineas, and "Professions for Women," she radically asserts that the message of any intellectual is perhaps best delivered from a marginalized position. Woolf also expanded the audience of the public intellectual. Paul Lauter suggests that Woolf "posed an ideal [audience] toward which . . . intellectuals must aspire: the common reader" (150). Her efforts influenced Susan Sontag, Adrienne Rich, and Alice Walker to present their social, cultural, and political commentaries to a less exclusive audience; by elevating woman's status, Woolf opened the door for women intellectuals to speak openly on social and political issues.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> "Time Passes" the title of the second chapter in Virginia Woolf's To the Lighthouse.

<sup>2</sup> According to Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain in 1902, "the weary Titan staggers under the too vast orb of its faith" (quoted in Read, Documents from Edwardian England 179-81).

<sup>3</sup> Between 1880 and 1914, England's share in world exports fell along with industrial production. England's share in world exports fell from 19.6 to 14.1 percent. The rate of exports dropped from 5 percent a year between 1840 and 1870 to only 1 percent in the 1890's and industrial production dropped from 3 to 1.5 percent per annum by the end of the century.

<sup>4</sup> These reforms included school meals (1906), medical inspections of children in schools (1907), establishment of old-age pensions (1908), unemployment and sickness insurance (1911), and the Trade Boards Act (1909) which marked the first step in wage regulation.

<sup>5</sup> At the turn of the century, there appeared to be three major factions of feminists. There was the group who worked behind the scenes, approaching sympathetic members of parliament to introduce their bills. Another group was more direct in their attack of the government; they organized parades, rallies, and meetings. The third group, led by Christabel Pankhurst, could be described as militant. They smashed windows, set fires,

and once imprisoned, went on hunger strikes. Many women fighting for suffrage believed that this pattern of "arson, arrest, hunger strikes, release, and rearrest" hurt the cause more than it helped it (Vicinus, "Male Spaces" 209-211).

<sup>6</sup> According to Leonard Woolf, his wife was interested in a variety of "things, people, and events" and was "highly sensitive to the atmosphere which surrounded her whether it was personal, social, or historical" (Downhill 27).

<sup>7</sup> Dale Spender in Women of Ideas points out the way in which Woolf "has been portrayed, and by whom" (672). Though Woolf's works and life have not been "erased" as of yet, she, nevertheless, "has been given the 'treatment' of a patriarchal culture" (672).

<sup>8</sup> Even the title of Woolf's A Room of One's Own has "spawned a cottage industry of self-conscious inheritance" in works like A Literature of Their Own and numerous others (Rosenman 11). Ellen Rosenman, noting that "imitation is the sincerest form of flattery," cites numerous adaptations of the title of Woolf's essay: A Room of One's Own (modern journal of criticism), "A Life of One's Own" (on George Sands), "A Quest of One's Own" (on Doris Lessing), "Words of One's Own" (on Woolf and Adrienne Rich), A Voice of One's Own (anthology of women's fiction), "An Income of One's Own" (on money and Moll Flanders), "A Criticism of His Own" (on male feminist critics), "A Life of One's Own" (on Finnish woman author, Onerva),

"A Language of One's Own" (on Mrs. Dalloway), "An Asteroid of One's Own" (women science fiction writers of the Soviet Union), and "A Womb of One's Own" (11). To this list I would add A Journey of One's Own, a guide for women travelers.

<sup>9</sup> Ethel Smyth (1885-1944) was a composer (The Wreckers, 1909), writer (Impressions that Remained, 1919), and feminist. Smyth met Virginia Woolf in 1930 after she had written Woolf a letter in praise of A Room of One's Own. Jane Marcus suggests that Smyth was the model for Rose Pargiter in The Years.

<sup>10</sup> Virginia reveals in a late sketch of her life that she wrote to receive approbation from her mother, but that she read to make her father "think me a clever brat" (Moments of Being 112).

<sup>11</sup> It angered Virginia Stephen that none of "Arthur's education fund" was spent on her education, that she was never given the "chance to pick up all that goes on in schools--throwing ball; ragging; slang; vulgarity; scenes; jealousies."

In "A Sketch of the Past," Woolf writes that she had no idea whether she was "clever, stupid, good looking, ugly, passionate, cold," because she "was never at school, never competed in any way with children of my own age, . . . never been able to compare my gifts and defects with other people's" (109).

12 Virginia writes in a diary essay that "Miss Case . . . forced [her] to think more than [she] had done hitherto" by having her not only read but interpret literary texts ("Miss Case," Passionate 183).

13 Charles Otto Desmond MacCarthy (1877-1952) was literary editor of the New Statesman, literary and drama critic for the Sunday Times, and literary journalist and member of the Bloomsbury group.

14 Her stepbrother, Woolf writes, took "the larger lines of the [Victorian] age stamped" on her father and "filled them in with a . . . crowquill etching of the most minute details" (Moments of Being 151).

15 She retells of their abuse in "The Sketch." "Since when I was very small Gerald Duckworth . . . began to explore my body . . . . I stiffened and wriggled as his hand approached my private parts. But it did not stop" (Moments of Being 69). Later, George Duckworth, too, would "fling himself on [her] bed, cuddling and kissing. . . , as he told Dr. Savage [her family doctor] later, to comfort [her] for the fatal illness of [her] father--who was dying three or four storeys lower down of cancer" (182). Following Stephen's death, George continued his molestations, causing Virginia to write: "Yes, the old ladies of Kensington and Belgravia never knew that George Duckworth was not only father and mother, brother and sister to those poor Stephen girls; he was their lover also" (177).

16 The Bloomsburians adopted the philosophy of George Edward Moore (1873-1958), then a professor of philosophy at Cambridge. In Principia Ethica he writes: "By far the most valuable things . . . are . . . the pleasures of human intercourse and the enjoyment of beautiful objects; . . . it is they . . . that form the rational and ultimate end of social progress."

17 In addition to co-founding two literary journals: the International Review and the Political Quarterly, Leonard Woolf, with his wife, established the Hogarth Press.

18 Diary entries dated 6 July 1922, 23 January 1927, 19 July 1931. In other areas of their marriage, however, Leonard played the role of attentive husband too well. Quentin Bell writes that Leonard had been "cast in the ungrateful role of family dragon" (2: 34). He "protected" Virginia from unwanted visitors, he kept her from "exhausting excursions," he took "no chances and neglect[ed] no precautions" concerning her health (2. 34). It has been popular for feminist critics to bash Leonard's attempts to control his wife, but despite his human faults, in caring for his sick wife he was simply following the prescribed medical procedures of his day.

19 In evaluating their years together, Virginia Woolf writes that their marriage was "a completing of the instrument," and when he is not there with her, she becomes a "violin robbed of its orchestra." In her final letter to



him, she writes: "What I want to say is that I owe all the happiness of my life to you" (Letters 6: 481).

20 It should be noted that all of these women have acknowledged in some way, Harriet Martineau's influence on their own work.

21 Woolf described Jane Austen as "the most perfect artist among women" and "one of the most consistent satirists in the whole of literature" (Common Reader 149, 143).

22 In her essays on Eliot, Woolf presents her Victorian intellectual aunt, according to Booth, "as the incomplete version of the story of Virginia Woolf herself" (57). There is a certain truth to this statement. Alice Walker and Adrienne Rich often appear to portray Virginia Woolf as an incomplete version of themselves.

23 Her explanation for her stint as librarian appears in a letter to Violet Dickenson dated 16 December 1906. She writes that Mary Sheephanks, the principal of Morely, thought Virginia's gifts better suited to "influence than direct intellectual teaching" (Letters 1: 264).

24 In a speech to the Women's Service group, Woolf calls attention to a recent article in the Nation which reported that "the members of Clare College have spent six thousand pounds upon a history of their college" (xxxiii). Angered, Woolf responds:

had the Editor of the Nation sent it to me, I should have been compelled . . . to write in a very different strain. Oh you old humbugs, I should have begun . . . would it not be better to spend your six thousand pounds not upon a book, clothed in the finest dress of paper and buckram, but upon a girl, whose dress allowance is very meagre and who tried to do her work . . . in one cold gloomy ground floor bedroom . . . overrun with mice. (xxxiii-iv)

But of course, "that review would not [have been] printed" since Woolf's "sense of values differs too much" from theirs (xxxvi).

In the published version of this speech, entitled "Professions of Women," however, Woolf adds that the review would not be printed because "I am a woman" (xxxvi). A woman must struggle with publishers for publication and to do so they must struggle with their own anger and sense of self.

25 In much of her writing, Woolf describes how women's and men's so-called "natural" social roles are culturally defined. By exposing the unnaturalness of their differences, the oppressive power of one gender over the other could begin to dissipate (Middleton 406). Gender roles, however, are not the only social barriers that confine men and women in their socially constructed roles.

26 One of her mentors was Eleanor Ormerod, whose study of insects and contributions to agriculture caused her cousin to suggest that "the farmers of England" make her their "Goddess" (The Common Reader 110, 135). Ormerod held membership in the Royal Agricultural Society and advised

the respected male scientists of her day, but at the end of her life, she refused the offer of a pension in recognition of her contribution to the scientific community for it would make her "feel inexpressibly lowered" (133-135). Perhaps the forgotten Ormerod inspired Woolf to turn down the prize of lecture series, which she called "bribes."

<sup>27</sup> It should be emphasized here that Woolf is not trying to create a new "female" language, as late twentieth-century French feminists have attempted to do. Instead, she employs the tools at hand. She stresses the reader's need to question the meaning of words and, if necessary, reinterpret that meaning rather than accepting the "lure of old myths, symbols and slogan," to "rewrite old scripts of power" (409).

<sup>28</sup> In a letter to Ethel Smyth from Woolf dated March 1941: "But Lord! what a relief to have a vision!" (Letters 6: 478)

<sup>29</sup> Woolf's diary of 1915-1919 reveals moments of war disrupting Woolf's daily life, such as when she visits Sussex in April of 1918 and notices the daffodils: "the daffodils were out and the guns I suppose could be heard from the downs" (Diary 1: 131).

<sup>30</sup> RWOC will be used to signify Report of the War Office Committee of Enquiry

<sup>31</sup> Miss Kilman, too, is a feminist of sorts negatively portrayed in Mrs. Dalloway. As a child she longed to study "law, medicine, politics," but when

the war came, she took a job tutoring Elizabeth Dalloway, "Clumsy and so poor," filled with pride and consumed by "hatred for Mrs. Dalloway," she acted as though she had a "grudge against the world. The last the reader sees of Miss Kilman, she has lost her petticoat (and "her way") and is blundering out the door of a department store (187-202).

<sup>32</sup> These ideals are passed down to these young men from the "exalted statues" that surround them: "Nelson, Gordon, Havelock, the black, the spectacular images of great soldiers" who were, like these young men, "trampled under the same temptations, and achieved at length a marble stare" (77).

<sup>33</sup> Despite class differences, a "curious sense of community" existed between these women and Woolf. Woolf compares the community she felt with her students united in their love of reading and with working-class women to the collective efforts of a members of a village preparing for an approaching storm (Diary 3: 279). Woolf never experienced the life of a charwoman, but she had felt the "storms" of oppression and abuse, and the threat of impending war in England dissolved class boundaries.

## CHAPTER IV

### "A THINKING WOMAN SLEEPS WITH MONSTERS"<sup>1</sup>

Thus far, this study has examined the various texts in Harriet Martineau's and Virginia Woolf's lives which both sustained and conflicted them in their careers. A homely, deaf Victorian spinster with a single farthing in her pocket became Victorian England's greatest woman intellectual. The sexually-abused and emotionally neglected daughter of an educated man struggled with loneliness and debilitating depression to become the symbol of the feminist movement in the last half of the twentieth-century: two women of varying temperaments and from different eras but both aunts to late twentieth century womanist intellectuals.

What then is the connection between these women and Susan Sontag, bell hooks, and Adrienne Rich? How could these five disparate women be part of the same 'non-traditional' tradition? Early in the nineteenth century, Harriet Martineau had laid the foundation for the womanist tradition. Marginalized by her sex, her financial situation, and her single status, she entered a masculine domain with an assurance and zeal rarely seen. Her relationship with her audience was less hierarchical than that of Matthew Arnold or Thomas Carlyle with their readers. Even though her work is often heavily didactic, there is a sense of shared moments in her works. Employing

the language of the patriarchy for her own purposes, Martineau broke through the glass ceiling, so to speak, paving the way for George Eliot, Barbara Bodichon, and Florence Nightingale to step through the broken shards and follow.

Virginia Woolf proved that the woman artist could also function as a public intellectual. Like Martineau, Woolf was limited, not by a uterine tumor or deafness, but by a depression that ultimately took her life. As the daughter of an educated man she was less marginalized than Martineau, and she used her insider/outsider status to see the world through "fifty pairs of eyes." Examining valued traditions and unreal national loyalties, Woolf stripped off their masks to reveal fascism and other forms of oppression existing in traditional British institutions, including the family.

Today, women intellectuals have educational and employment opportunities of which Martineau and Woolf could only have dreamed, but these opportunities also hold potential dangers for women. Though universities have admitted them "into the mainstream of higher education" (Rich, "Woman-Centered" 58), many women, in attending these patriarchal institutions of learning, have become unwitting

participants in a system that prepares men to take up roles of power in a man-centered society, that asks questions and teaches 'facts' generated by a male intellectual tradition, and that both subtly and openly confirms men as the leaders and shapers of human destiny both within and outside academia (58).<sup>2</sup>

Women graduates of this system are no longer considered outsiders in the way Harriet Martineau, Florence Nightingale, Olive Schreiner, and Virginia Woolf had been. Some are full professors, others are editors for publishing firms, and still others are independent poets and writers, but all, like their predecessors, are forced to work within the confines of male-dominated institutions and societies. One wonders with all these 'opportunities' whether future womanist intellectuals will continue survive or will they soon be added to the endangered species list.

Thais Morgan (Victorian Sages and Cultural Discourses) and Dorothy Mermin (Godiva's Ride), among others<sup>3</sup> have attempted to mainstream women intellectuals of past and present by placing them within the sage paradigm. Morgan states in her preface that the goal of Victorian Sages is to expand the concept of sage writing by making it more intertextual and heterogeneous, and yet at the same time she undercuts her argument in suggesting that women, to enter sage discourse, must "adopt a 'masculine' tone of authority" (6). This argument might be made of Harriet Martineau but what of later women intellectuals? It is true that being placed within the sage tradition does increase the status of women intellectuals since sage writing held a "commanding position . . . within the Victorian hierarchy of genres" (Morgan 2). But the co-optation of Victorian women intellectuals into the sage tradition quickly becomes problematic. What then are we to do with Adrienne Rich and June Jordan? Certainly it would be difficult for them

to wear the sage's mantle since they refuse to adopt a 'masculine' tone of authority. Thus, many late twentieth-century women intellectuals are left with no history, no tradition. I suggest that greater effort be put into giving womanist intellectuals a "room of their own" rather than forcing them into a tradition which for many women (past and present) is an uncomfortable fit.

Womanist intellectuals face more than simply a loss of tradition or history. Even today, "women who set out to become intellectuals have to face personal, social and ideological obstacles not generally placed in the way of aspiring male intellectuals" (Moi 3). Toril Moi in her study on Simone de Beauvoir points to an editorial in the National Review (8 April 1969) which described Sontag as the "Dark Lady of the New Left" (271). In the same journal, twenty-five years later, Florence King accuses Adrienne Rich, an activist who has strenuously campaigned for women's and gay rights, of "tearing them [women] apart by simultaneously promoting masculine work and condemning masculine work habits" (72). In responding to Rich's assertion that the concept of the "masculine" is a myth, King replies that "the 'myth' of the masculine . . . thinker--or any worker--is fact" and is "achieved by making oneself unavailable to others" King's commentary supports the idea that the myth of the masculine intellectual tradition is alive and flourishing in America, but *he* is a *he*, and *he* is aloof, erudite, and unapproachable.



How then is one to receive a womanist intellectual such as bell hooks? *She* is a *she*, and *she* is involved, intelligent, and approachable. In Talking Back, bell hooks speaks of the negative reception of her first work, Ain't I A Woman: "While I had expected a climate of critical dialogue, I was not expecting a critical avalanche that had the power in its intensity to crush the spirit, to push one into silence. . . . [I learned that] to those who wield oppressive power, that which is threatening must necessarily be wiped out, annihilated, silenced" (8).

The avalanche of negative responses to the works of womanist intellectuals by critics today, in addition to other obstacles, makes imperative the restoration of their aunts from the past. Tracing the womanist intellectual's genealogy enables late twentieth-century women intellectuals to see how Harriet Martineau, Florence Nightingale, George Eliot, Virginia Woolf, and others addressed similar conflicts to create their own unique place in their societies.

An abbreviated list of today's American womanist intellectuals includes such women as Susan Sontag, bell hooks, Adrienne Rich, Alice Walker, June Jordan, Joan Didion, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Paula Giddings, and Kate Millet. Rather than discuss each one of these intellectuals in detail, I have selected three representative American women: Susan Sontag, bell hooks, and Adrienne Rich and, in these last pages, will explore how these women have continued the womanist intellectual line. The

reason I have chosen these three particular women is two fold. First, they each represent different economic and ethnic groups. Secondly, they are better known to the general reading populace than, say, cultural critic Paula Giddings.

## II The Free-Floating Intellectual

Susan Sontag is perhaps the most prominent American woman intellectual of the twentieth century. An intellectual tour de force for almost four decades, she has crossed borders to write on a wide range of topics, from pornography to photography, cancer to AIDS, Vietnam to Havana, and fascism to democracy. In addition to her career as essayist and cultural critic, Sontag works as a screenwriter, activist, and film and theater director. Edward Said would describe this type of intellectual as an amateur, that is one who is "moved not by profit or reward but by love for and unquenchable interest in the larger picture, in making connections across lines and barriers, in refusing to be tied down to a specialty, in caring for ideas and values despite the restrictions of a profession" (76). Though lacking degrees in either political science or sociology, Sontag has written voluminously on government policy and the U.S.'s position as a global power. Claiming the same authority that Noam Chomsky claimed in speaking out against the Vietnam war--that of an interested and informed spectator confronting and

challenging the current wisdom--Sontag has addressed volatile issues, dug for the truth, and then shared it with the public.

Sontag's childhood is reminiscent of Woolf's in that she too has described herself as "a psychologically abandoned child" (Lacayo 88). Her "militarily perky" father and withdrawn mother played their parts in what she describes as an "unconvincing childhood" ("Pilgrimage" 38). What Sontag desired as a young girl, she writes, was her own room and "a door of my own" (38). Often she would retreat from family life into her books. For her, "characters were ideas and ideas were passions" (38).

Both Susan Sontag's and Virginia Woolf's early years shaped their critical visions as did the times in which they lived. Woolf walked a fine line between modernism and the Victorian age; Susan Sontag has ridden the cusp between modernism and postmodernism and has been described by critics as an "ardent modernist," who possesses the "earnestness--and superabundant energy--of a Victorian moralist" (Lacayo 88). This layering of victorianist, modernist, post-modernist characteristics suggest that Sontag might be described as a hybrid of the Woolf/Martineau variety with her own post-modernist sensibilities.

Much of Sontag's critical work has focused on war and political conflicts, specifically the Vietnam War in the sixties and seventies and the Serbia-Bosnian conflict in recent years. Her stance concerning these issues has been controversial and often unpopular. Along side Woolf's Three Guineas

which directly linked the fascism of the World Wars to the British patriarchy and was negatively received by most critics, we can position Sontag's "Town Hall Address" (6 February 1982). Sontag presented this speech at a gathering of well-known writers, actors, and musicians who met to protest Jaruzelski's Soviet-backed invasion of Poland. It was to be an evening in which Americans were to announce their "solidarity with Solidarity" (Branham 26). Sontag's talk, however, differed dramatically from others given that evening, those being somewhat self-congratulatory. Like all womanist intellectuals, Sontag had to choose between antagonizing or praising her audience, between giving them what her audience wanted to hear or what they needed to hear. In the end, Sontag elected criticism over solidarity.<sup>4</sup>

She began by acknowledging the purpose of the evening's gatherings--to support Solidarity and to "stake out a different kind of support for Poland than tendered by, say, Reagan and Haig and Thatcher" (qtd. in Branham 264).<sup>5</sup> Conservatives, Sontag argued, had stolen rhetoric away from the left by making anti-communism the focus of each of their political campaigns.<sup>6</sup> Campaigning for "rhetorical liberation," Sontag challenged her audience to openly confront the rhetorical constraints constricting their language. Then, and only then, could individuals speak out freely against communism without having to align themselves with the right.

Admonishing her constituents for having failed to actively campaign against communism (and including herself in her admonishment), Sontag

argued that they had been silent too long in "utter[ing] villainy of the communist system" (267). Her audience jeered her, and the reviews of her speech were "violent, sneering and vituperative."<sup>7</sup> The fact that Sontag blamed herself as well as her audience, that she argued for rhetorical freedom, that she tried to give the left a voice that had been usurped, was never reported in the news.<sup>8</sup> In a later interview, Sontag admitted to having said "something I wasn't supposed to say, and I knew what I was doing. I knew I would be booed and I would make some enemies there" (qtd. in Branham 260). Then, as now, Sontag's independent analysis and critical judgment has often rubbed against the grain of both sides of the political spectrum.

Susan Sontag has also revealed her critical vision and intellectual mission in such works as in The Way We Live Now and Against Interpretation (1966). In the latter work, she attacks the status quo, championing the oppressed or misunderstood (260), as she has done in her recent articles on the Serbia-Bosnian conflict. Sontag is a relentless erudite individual who perceives her intellectual role as that of a skeptic, questioning the underpinnings of society, and inciting individuals to action. She is not the type of intellectual who calms and controls the masses as Matthew Arnold, in part, had viewed his role.

Though Sontag's critical vision involves speaking in behalf of oppressed groups by questioning phallogentric political institutions and policies, she, as did Martineau, Florence Nightingale, and George Eliot, has

not openly aligned herself with the feminist movement. Her lack of connection, however, has not prevented critics from employing weapons of gender and class in their criticisms of her work. Some have taken unusual approaches, such as when Kevin Costner in Bull Durham announces that "the novels of Susan Sontag are self-indulgent, overrated crap" or when a would-be Casanova reveals that "the woman he most wants to sleep with is . . . Susan Sontag" (Lacayo 86). Critics, too, have forgotten the Arnoldian creed of disinterestedness and often made personal attacks when critiquing her work. R.Z. Sheppard's review of The Volcano Lover (1988) describes Sontag as a "gravely seductive celebrity" and her "middlebrow" novel a "mild cerebral aphrodisiac" (66). Its message is unexceptional but jarring. Perhaps, Sontag, like [Mt.] Vesuvius simply blew her top" (67).

Those critics who still perceive Sontag as unsympathetic to the feminist movement must have failed to read her more recent works, such as her latest play, Alice in Bed (1993). This fictionalized version of Alice James's life depicts, in Sontag's own words, the "grief and anger of women" and the power of their imagination. However, "the victories of the imagination are not enough" (Alice in Bed 117). In her notes at the end of the play, Sontag writes that Alice James, sister of William and Henry, was Virginia Woolf's Judith Shakespeare brought to life, a woman of genius who became "a career invalid" because no other opportunities were offered her (115). James was

silenced "not merely for want of encouragement" but "because of the way that women are defined and therefore, commonly, define themselves" (113).

As Sontag's works begin to shift toward women's issues, critics have broadened their criticism of her and her work. Now some critics are attacking her for being a feminist, others for not being a feminist, and some, reminiscent of Q.D. Leavis's assessment of Virginia Woolf, have labeled Sontag (a former graduate student at Harvard and Oxford) an elitist who "combines a metropolitan taste, omnivorous and hard to satisfy, with a transatlantic mind, drawn to European writers and film makers" (Lacayo 86). In Backlash, Susan Faludi asserts that the patriarchy, in an effort to stop women intellectuals, often dismiss them as either as hysterical females or as strident feminists or both. The reason behind the media's seeming dismissal of Sontag might be related to her refusal to appear on television or her disinterest in pleasing the interviewers. Or perhaps, it is Sontag who has dismissed the media circus, as did Woolf after the publication of Three Guineas.<sup>9</sup>

Further comparisons can be made between Sontag and her great-aunt Virginia. Though their writings carry strong political messages, these women are artists who have experimented with form and language both in the essay and the novel. In "Notes on Camp," which praises camp's freedom and spontaneity, the author employs "jottings, rather than an essay (with its claim to linear, consecutive argument)," since the former "seemed more

appropriate for getting down something of this particular fugitive sensibility. It's embarrassing to be solemn and treatise-like about Camp" (Sontag Reader 106).

Sontag also makes use of this fragmentational structuring in "Project for a Trip to China." In this essay, Sontag speaks with anticipation about her upcoming visit to Asia, but fears that her preconceptions of China (based on readings and talking with friends who traveled there) will alter her experience. Will her visit be destroyed by "a conflict with literature?" she asks (284). Will her previous readings taint the reality of the experience? Sontag's anti-travelogue is composed primarily of one or two sentence paragraphs, which enable the reader more readily to follow her train of thought as she arrives at some understanding of her situation: "Literature, then. Literature before and after, if need be" (286). Though she had planned to write a story about her trip, in the final line she concludes, "Perhaps I will write the book about my trip to China before I go" (286). This final statement, however, ironically reveals how biases and preconceived ideas inform our experiences. In this essay, as in Virginia Woolf's A Room of One's Own, Sontag lets her line down in a stream of consciousness and allows the reader to follow her train of thought.

In addition to their experimentation with structure, Sontag, like Woolf, has attempted to re-envision language. Her revisioning of language and metaphor has allowed her to be her own witness to the atrocities of war.



In a trip to Sarajevo, Sontag focuses on scenes in daily life rather than the senseless killings in a way which brings the reality of war home to America. She describes how the actors performing in her production of Waiting for Godot rehearsed in the dark, suffering from fatigue ("Whenever I halted the run-through for a few minutes to change a movement or a line reading, all the actors would instantly lie down on the stage"); how the actors felt little relief in hearing (rather than feeling) the shells exploding since they had "left wives and husbands, parents and children at home"; how the crew had been unable to find props (a suitcase, a piece of rope, a picnic basket, a carrot); how Sontag scavenged dry rolls from the Holiday Inn dining room to feed the actors and her assistants; how the audience sat in an auditorium without access to water or bathrooms; how three of the nine candles given to her by an English photojournalist were stolen, as was a lunch consisting of "a chunk of home-baked bread and a pear" ("Sarajevo" 87-104).

In her writings, Virginia Woolf described the war as giant women beating giant rugs. Susan Sontag explains the Serbia-Bosnian conflict in terms of a stolen lunch, though more than the 4,000 shells that fell on Sarajevo in one day during her stay. The war was about more than the annihilation of a race; it was about families being separated, of being unable to find a candle, a piece of rope, a suitcase. Sontag knew how to reach the common reader, as did Woolf and Martineau before her; she directs her

argument in such a way that her readers can see the tragedy in the everyday and, perhaps, feel compelled to respond.

Virginia Woolf walked the tightrope between the past and the present. In "How One Should Read a Book?" Woolf suggests one read the classics, Arnold's touchstones to develop one's literary tastes. Yet in the same article, she advises reading lesser works as well. In "Pilgrimage" (1987), Susan Sontag's autobiographical portrait of the intellectual as a young woman, Sontag scorns "anti-intellectual" writers and views the great writers of the past as deities, yet in "Notes on 'Camp,'" she defends "the avant-garde, the abstruse, and the obscure" (323). Sontag, too, walks the tightrope between past and present, between tradition and modernism (and post-modernism).

## II

### **bell hooks: accepting the cultural challenge**

To be effective, the womanist intellectual must observe the age in which she lives with "fifty pairs of eyes," for only then can she discover the "locked chambers of possibility," as well as what June Jordan describes as the "intimate face of universal struggle" (qtd. in Rich, What is Found There xiv, 216). The multiplication of sites of struggle, if not the universality of a single struggle, has forced late twentieth-century womanist intellectuals to widen their audience to include members of all races, nationalities, classes, and genders. Some intellectuals of the masculine tradition, such as George Will,

Harold Bloom, and William Buckley, continue to speak to small and narrowly defined groups, and often from an elitist position of power and authority. Adrienne Rich, however, contends that the voices of the intellectual and her audience should interact and become "a pulsing, racing convergence of tributaries--regional, ethnic, racial, social, sexual--that, rising from lost or long-blocked springs, intersect and infuse each other while reaching back to the strengths of other origins" (What is Found There 130).

Interaction between writer and audience is a key component of bell hooks' writings. Even more important to the womanist intellectual's mission, according to hooks, is teaching one's audience the necessity of accepting the concept of "other." The intellectual's "true spiritual quest and the archetypic quest" should be to "embrace difference and sameness at the same time without feeling the need to negate one or the other. This is the tremendous cultural challenge" ("How Souls Unfold" 143). The broadening of the intellectual's audience and scope necessitates this attitude as the womanist intellectual attempts to "decolonize and liberate" the minds "of all oppressed and/or exploited people" (Breaking Bread 150) and to shift the center of discourse away from the privileged and toward the oppressed. One way of shifting discourse, hooks argues, is to apply political, economic, social, and intellectual thought and theory to the everyday. In this way the public intellectual acts as "catalyst for personal and communal transformation," so that "women and men [can] live more fully in the world" (71). Fulfilling

hooks's mission involves addressing issues confronting individuals day-to-day in a modernist society whether the issue be a Spike Lee movie or Madonna's best-seller, Sex.

bell hooks perceives herself as someone "who trades in ideas by transgressing discursive frontiers" from rap to racism to economic policies (Breaking Bread 152). Like Terry Eagleton in The Significance of Theory and Edward Said in Representations of the Intellectual, hooks, too, envisions intellectuals as "creative thinkers, explorers in the realm of ideas who are able to push to the limits and beyond" (152) to a place where they can ask challenging questions that confront tradition and dogma. As a member of academe, her situation is made more problematic by the fact that as a womanist intellectual one must be outspoken, controversial, political, and independent, which is difficult in an institution which preaches conformity.

Because of her double marginal position--a black woman intellectual--hooks faces the Herculean task of transforming the attitudes of white men.. Cornel West describes her as a "bonafide member of the academy--with a Stanford education, a Ph.D. and appointments to Yale and Oberlin" (Breaking Bread 60). Yet despite her academic credentials, hooks has faced numerous obstacles in her development as a black academic and womanist intellectual. One of these barriers involves the stereotyping of African-Americans: "Black people are usually viewed as guilty (i.e. unable to meet standards of excellence) until proven innocent (i.e. taken seriously by the academy)" (60).

Other obstacles are gender directed: "Black women are perceived as congenitally guilty" and therefore have difficulty in finding "mentors who believe in their intellectual capacity and potential" (60). Cornel West contends that these ideas are not solely the result of the "chronic racist and patriarchal sensibilities" in America but are part of a defense mechanism employed by a "threatened" academic culture, which is a close-knit community of intellectuals (60). Yet despite these social fears and academic barriers, hooks has preserved her intellectual integrity in a way that allows her to give voice to her rage at society's mistreatment of women and Blacks while presenting herself to white males as a catalyst for their own transformation.

Both in her writings and lectures, hooks speaks to other dangers, in addition to that of a phallogentric educational system and world view, which threaten both men and women public intellectuals. One threat she discusses in a number of works is the pseudo-pop intellectuals, such as Camille Paglia, who are threatening to take over the lecture circuit. Accusing Camille Paglia and Madonna of promoting a "New feminism," hooks describes these women as "agent[s] of antifeminist backlash," whose "works effectively . . . set women against one another, . . . [and] engage us in competition wars over which brand of feminism is more effective" (74). hooks rejects their egotistic poses, just as Woolf ultimately rejected James Joyce's posturing. Of course, 'Miss Camille,' as hooks refers to her, is no James Joyce. She is a lecturer and

writer who, under the protection and sponsorship of Harold Bloom, pretends to speak from the margins and has attempted (dishonestly by hooks's standards) to co-opt herself into black and gay cultures. Individuals like Madonna, Camille Paglia, and Rush Limbaugh, driven by a desire for power, threaten the public intellectual's authority. It is imperative that the reader be able to distinguish the concept of "authority from power because authority does not necessarily imply a positionality that can lead to dominance, whereas when we're dealing with questions of power we are talking about how we occupy the space of authority in a way that can reinforce and perpetuate domination" (Olson and Hirsch 117). hooks's mission as an intellectual is to engage her audience in analyzing the nature of postmodern society and the agenda of desperate individuals who inhabit it.

Ideally, to actively engage a general audience, the womanist intellectual must create a separate. One aspect of being a professional includes speaking to one's audience in a language they can understand: "To know our audience, to know who listens, we must be in dialogue. We must be speaking with and not just speaking to" (Talking Back 16). One approach to revisioning the language of oppression involves the "teaching of new worlds/new words" (Teaching to Transgress 167) in order to give voice to an individual's experience whether it be that of the intellectual's or her audience's. In Outlaw Culture, hooks explains that she accomplishes this in the classroom by encouraging a type of "polyphonic" language, one which includes

"academic talk, standard English, vernacular patois, the language of the street" (Outlaw 7). This vernacular is both a celebration and affirmation of "insurgent intellectual cultural practice" and serves as an "invitation to enter a space of changing thought, the open mind that is the heartbeat of cultural revolution" (7). By encouraging polyvocal dialogue in and outside the classroom, the intellectual/teacher takes the first step not only in allowing students to be their own witnesses but also in teaching students the importance of tolerating difference.

#### IV

#### **Adrienne Rich: Back to the Future**

To keep history from repeating itself in its currently successful efforts to silence women, womanist intellectuals. must look to their individual and collective pasts to alter the future. Adrienne Rich sees herself as having once been part of that patriarchal system and holds herself accountable for her participation, as well as her position, in history: "I need to understand [the] place in history within which as a woman, a Jew, a lesbian, a feminist I am created and trying to create." To know the individual truth about one's self, women's collective past must be explored as well. Both Rich and Virginia Woolf struggle[d] to "discover our [insert women's or African-Americans' or Chicanos' or the oppressed's] buried or misread history (On Lies, Secrets, and Silence 57). Though the truth might be difficult to bear, Adrienne Rich

asserts that "it is "[b]etter to know the ways you are accursed,/and stand up fierce and glad to hear the worst" (Rich, "The Perennial Answer" 22). The discomfiture of the truth, for Rich, is better than believing the lies perpetuated by history up until now.

In her career as intellectual and poet, Adrienne Rich has made it her mission to unearth lost women writers. As Woolf revived names from the past: Mary Wollstonecraft, Sara Coleridge, and Dorothy Wordsworth (all white, middle-class women), so too has Rich taken a "backhoe" to "a crumbling flank of earth" and has placed the voices of nineteenth century women in her own poems (A Wild Patience 3). But Rich takes Woolf's recovery process one step further. In "Culture and Anarchy" (the title, she writes, was "stolen from Matthew Arnold"), Rich blends with the voices of Susan B. Anthony, Jane Addams, Elizabeth Barrett-Browning, Ida Husted Harper, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton (10-15). In recent years, Rich has also used her influence to give lesser-known, contemporary writers an opportunity to speak. These voices include: women prisoners (Jacqueline Dixon-Bey and Mary Glover), Chicanos (Jimmy Santiago Baca), African-Americans (Cheryl Clarke), lesbians (Minnie Bruce Pratt), Native Americans (Joy Harjo), and Jews (Irena Klepfisz). In What is Found There, Rich gives space to these little-known poets, juxtaposing their works with those of canonical poets, such as Wallace Stevens and Elizabeth Bishop, and exploring the connections between the two.



Adrienne Rich's position as a womanist intellectual differs from both Susan Sontag's (a WASP educated at prestigious Columbia University) and bell hooks's (an African-American academic). Her situation is also tenuous because of her triple marginality (as a Jew, a lesbian, and a woman). Her position is not unlike Woolf's in that Woolf was a lesbian who married a Jew. Both Rich and Woolf also shared a similar love/hate relationship with their fathers. Woolf was the daughter of a Victorian man of letters, Rich, the daughter of a charismatic father who made her feel the power of language. Both women found their fathers' "investment" in their intellectual development oppressive, "egotistical, tyrannical, opinionated and terribly wearing" (On Lies). It wasn't until after Leslie Stephen's death that Woolf wrote for publication in earnest, but Rich broke from her father before his death.<sup>10</sup>

When Adrienne Rich looks back at the poems written before the age of 21 while under her father's influence, she is "startled" to see "beneath the conscious craft" a young woman who has been "split" between her traditionally defined and self-actualized identity" (Adrienne Rich's Poetry and Prose 93). It is this split that leads Rich on a life-long journey of redefinition, beginning perhaps in her thirties, when she began to write "directly about experiencing [her]self as a woman" (97). Rich's father had taught her "that poetry should be 'universal,' which meant, of course, non-female" (97). The universal principles to which Rich refers speak to and for individuals of all

racism, nationalities, and gender. As a Jewish/lesbian/ womanist intellectual, Rich campaigns for freedom from oppression and for the acceptance of individual differences, as all womanist intellectuals in this chapter appear to do.

In "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law," Rich vividly captures the oppression of women in the character of a daughter-in-law (the poet's mirrored self), whose "mind" since her marriage has become "heavy with useless experience. . . , crumbling to pieces under the knife-edge/of mere fact. In the prime of her life" (35). The speaker denounces the literature, politics, and history that have labeled the thinking woman (Mary Wollstonecraft, specifically) as a "harpy, shrew and whore" (37). Her criticism, however, directs itself to socio-political and literary forces and to women themselves, who, as did Sarah Stickney Ellis, perpetuate their history of oppression by accepting it. Quoting Woolf who quotes eighteenth-century critic Samuel Johnson, Rich writes:

*Not that it is done well, but  
that it is done at all? Yes, think  
of the odds! or shrug them off forever.  
This luxury of the precocious child,  
Time's precious chronic invalid,--  
would we, darlings, resign it if we could?  
Our blight has been our sinecure:  
mere talent was enough for us--  
glitter in fragments and rough drafts.*

Rather than opening the "unlocked door" of their cages, some misguided women have accepted men's "gallantry" and listened to them "over-praise" women's "mediocrities" (38). The solution of this problem, according to Rich, is not to employ masculine language for one's own purposes, as Harriet Martineau had done, but to "smash the mold straight," (38) unmasking the stereotypes and creating a language from which to speak.

Adrienne Rich, as do many late twentieth-century womanist intellectuals, experiments with language, form, and thought in her search for a way to speak the truth to power. In Twenty-One Love Poems (1976) Rich quotes Sontag's statement that "there are ways of thinking that we don't know about yet." This experimentation with language, which "the thread [our] lives /were strung on" (56), is part of the womanist intellectual's effort to find words to express a woman's (or any oppressed individual's) thoughts and experiences. Readers can only connect if they feel that the essay, the story, or the poem connects with their own life. They have the right to ask, "*But what has this to do with me? Do I exist in this poem?*" (qtd. in Montefiore 169).

In response to her own question, Rich pictures a scene in which a woman is listening to Wallace Stevens reading "The house was quiet and the world was calm" on the radio. This hypothetical listener, having just returned from her night shift at a nursing home, is packing her children's lunches in the early hours of the morning while listening to Stevens read

over the air waves. Her sister has been stabbed by a boyfriend and calls her, asking if she will drive her to the hospital since her boyfriend has taken the car. The speaker of the poem wonders whether "these words of Wallace Stevens coming over the radio--"house . . . quiet . . . calm . . . summer night . . . book . . . quiet . . . truth"--would these words, she wonders, make "your hand pause on the dial[;] why would these words hold you?" (12) They might hold her, Rich suggests, because a poem not only describes one's world but also one's desires and need for something else (12). Wallace Stevens speaks to Adrienne Rich who believes the poet can speak to anyone who will listen, but she also agrees with Woolf's assertion in "How One Should Read a Book?" that only the reader can know what will "re-awaken" her.

The key to the awakening lies in education and in laying claim to a language that gives voice to who and where one is. In "Claiming an Education," Adrienne Rich speaks to a group of women students at Douglass College forty-nine years after Woolf delivered her lecture to another group of women attending Newnham and Girton Colleges. In their presentations, both women allow their audience to follow their thoughts as they challenge their audience of young women:

But, you may say, we asked you to speak about women and fiction--what has that got to do with a room of one's own. I will try to explain. . . [A] woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction. (A Room of One's Own 4).

But my talk is not really about women's studies. . . . [T]here is a more essential experience that you owe yourselves. . . . This is the experience of taking responsibility toward yourselves. (Rich, On Lies 67)

Rich's explanation of what it means to take responsibility for one's self echoes the advice Virginia Woolf gave to her common readers:

Responsibility to yourself means refusing to let others do your thinking, talking, and naming for you; it means learning to respect and use your own brains and instincts; hence grappling with hard work. . . . Responsibility to yourself means that you don't fall for shallow and easy solutions--predigested books and ideas. (Rich, On Lies 67).

The only advice . . . about reading is to . . . follow your own instincts, to use your own reason, to come to your own conclusions. . . . To read a novel is a difficult and complex art. . . . [It ] is difficult to press further [and judge a work for one's self]. (Woolf, A Room of One's Own 234, 236, 243)

As a woman and intellectual who shares her own experiences with oppression, Adrienne Rich attempts to heal her students by urging them to take control of their own education/destiny, to re-define themselves, and see the university as it truly is--a "hierarchy built on exploitation" (On Lies 64). In the academic world, educated white males function as deans and full professors, while "ill-paid" women work as teaching and research assistants,

secretaries, cleaning persons, or waitresses in the cafeterias and faculty clubs (59).

Rich encourages women in the university to address their energies "to changing the center of gravity of the institution" and "work toward a woman-centered university" ("Woman-Centered" 58). Only then can the "center of gravity . . . be shifted" in a way that will free women "to learn, to teach, to share strength, to explore, to criticize, and to convert knowledge to power" (58). The university system holds man's work as "a sacred value in whose name emotional and economic exploitation of women [assistants, workers, and students] is taken for granted" (58). Just as Leslie Stephen justified his tirades by claiming his right as a "genius" to do so, the ego of the "distinguished professor" requires, in addition to a wife and secretary, an "au pair girl, teaching assistant, programmer, and student mistress. The justification for all this service is the divine concept of 'his work'" (58).<sup>11</sup>

The "ego-bound achievement of individual success" (56) which defines the traditional university mindset breaks the sense of community, according to Rich, and perpetuates a hierarchical society. Traditionally, womanist intellectuals have been wary of patriarchal institutions and awards which work on the principle of competition and hierarchy. Harriet Martineau repeatedly refused the government pensions offered her. Virginia Woolf refused the Clark Lectureship as well as any accolades awarded by the patriarchy. Susan Sontag chose not to teach at the university. bell hooks

writes of her fears when up for tenure at Oberlin College. Her nightmares were not a "response to the reality that I would be granted tenure. It was afraid that I would be trapped in the academy forever" (Teaching to Transgress 1).

Over fifty years later, Adrienne Rich also refused an award for her writing. Upon winning the National Book Award in 1974, she refused to accept the honor unless the two other feminist nominees--Audre Lorde and Alice Walker--were also awarded. In her acceptance speech, Rich said, "We symbolically join here in refusing the terms of patriarchal competition and in declaring that we share this prize among us, to be used as best we can for women." For Harriet Martineau, Virginia Woolf, Susan Sontag and Adrienne Rich, refusing the prizes, pensions, and awards, was an act of resisting institutions that have traditionally controlled and confined women.

## V Nieces and Aunts

In this final chapter I have focused primarily on how womanist intellectuals have emulated the teachings of Virginia Woolf and Harriet Martineau in their works and on how both Woolf and Martineau serve as aunts to the late twentieth-century womanist intellectual. But in order to adapt the ideas of this Victorian and early twentieth-century writer to the twenty-first, women such as Adrienne Rich and Alice Walker have been

compelled to re-envision some of their aunt's teaching and reject others. In "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens," Alice Walker quotes from A Room of One's Own, but in the process of writing down Virginia Woolf's words, she simultaneously rewrites them to make them applicable to her audience.

In A Room of One's Own, Woolf asserts that a woman needs 500 pounds a year and a room of one's own, but, Walker rightly asks, "What then are we to make of Phyllis Wheatley, a slave, who owned not even herself" but "who would have been easily considered the intellectual superior of all the women and most of the men in the society of her day?" (235): "Virginia Woolf wrote further, speaking of course not of our Phyllis, that 'any woman born with a great gift in the sixteenth century [insert 'eighteenth century,' insert 'black woman,' insert 'born or made a slave'] would have certainly gone crazed. . . (In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens 235). Virginia Woolf spoke to daughters of educated men, to middle class women, and/or to working women. To make Woolf's message still viable in late twentieth-century America, slaves, black women, root workers, Phyllis Wheatley, Zora Neal Hurston, and Richard Wright should be added to the list, since

genius of a sort must have existed among women as it must have existed among the working class [Change this to 'slaves' and 'the wives and daughters of sharecroppers']. Now and again an Emily Bronte or Robert Burns [change this to 'a Zora Hurston or Richard Wright'] blazes out and proves its presence. But certainly it never got itself on to paper. When, however, one reads of a witch being dunked, of a woman possessed by devils [or 'Sainthood'], of a wise woman selling



herbs [our root workers], or even a very remarkable man who had a mother, then I think we are on the track of a lost novelist, a suppressed poet, of some mute and inglorious Jane Austen. . . . Indeed I would venture to guess that Anon, who wrote so many poems without signing them, was often a woman. [bracketed comments are Walker's] (In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens 239-40)

The lives and works of earlier womanist intellectuals are sources of guidance and encouragement, but one must remember that their messages addressed different cultures and different times. It is the task of womanist intellectuals in the late twentieth-century to question and contest the methods and messages of their predecessors just as they question and contest the contemporary phallogocentric world and its view of history. As Virginia Blain points out, the legacy of aunts is "simultaneously gratuitous and enabling" (237). The niece does not "engage directly with her predecessor; she neither rejects nor reproduces, but instead obliquely appropriates and rebuilds into her own construction" (237). The fact that the female literary heritage, Blain argues, is more supportive and dictatorial frees womanist intellectuals to "debate with their predecessors" (237).

Now, more than ever, America needs intellectuals of the womanist tradition. The United States is in a depressed state and faces an "emotional crisis. . . . [P]eople [are] battered by a more-than-ever indifferent and arrogant distribution of resources" and often blame themselves "for the fact that they couldn't manage, that they couldn't survive, that they couldn't support their

families, that they couldn't keep a job" (Rosenthal 33). To whom will these individuals turn for help? Television evangelists? Pseudo-intellectuals such as Newt Gingrich and Camille Paglia? Or perhaps television's John Sununu and Rush Limbaugh.

Our global society, devastated by random acts of violence and well-planned acts of genocide, yearns for public intellectuals who will speak to universal struggles for peace. Martineau spoke to these exigencies at a time when the very concepts of God, Man, and Society were being called into question. Virginia Woolf did the same, writing during World War I and at the onset of World War II. Recently, bell hooks revealed that speaking to what Virginia Woolf called the "every day" has become a "big issue" for her. Recognizing that feminist and intellectual theories rarely "provide actual strategies for altering every day lives" (*Let's Get Real* 40), hooks asserts that what is needed is a "public framework" (41), one that encourages practical applications of theoretical thought to everyday life. Relying on personal experiences, Susan Sontag, Adrienne Rich, and Alice Walker, like their Great-Aunts Harriet and Virginia, speak "to" and "for" not only women and African-Americans but other members of oppressed groups, in part by applying their political/educational theories to everyday experience.

But to do this, the womanist intellectual must position herself in a non-hierarchical, even marginalized, position. In 1944, C. Wright Mills wrote that public intellectuals would have to choose between positioning

themselves in the margins and on the side of the oppressed or staying in the mainstream, aligning themselves with the interests of large companies, institutions, and the government. Only the independent intellectual, however, is "equipped to resist and to fight the stereotyping and consequent death of genuinely living things" (Mills 299).

Though not their literary daughters, late twentieth-century intellectuals Susan Sontag, bell hooks, June Jordan, and Adrienne Rich bear striking similarities to earlier womanist intellectuals. hooks was drawn, as was Martineau, a life of knowledge by "a passion for ideas, for thinking critically" (hooks and West 65). Viewing her intellectual work as a form of activism, hooks is frustrated that her endeavors are devalued as "more visible expressions of concrete activism, like picketing in the streets," are rendered "more important to revolutionary struggle than the work of the mind" (Breaking Bread 148). Susan Sontag also perceives her writing as a form of activism. In Trip to Hanoi, she passionately opposes the Vietnam War at a time when it was unpopular to do so. Martineau proved, as has bell hooks and Susan Sontag, that to be an intellectual doesn't mean removing oneself from life. It means actively involving oneself with the everyday while producing the work of the mind.

These women's perceptions of the intellectual's work deviates, at times, from that of the nineteenth century Jeremiah who often set himself above his audience and his society. This view also is a departure from the

New York Intellectuals in the early part of the twentieth century, who, like their predecessors addressed a limited and well-educated audience (Boynton 56). These gifted "philosopher kings," past and present, created for themselves a seat of power within their culture.

## VI The Art of Survival

Let me close as I began, with a discussion of that troublesome term--womanist--a word which has caused me so much uneasiness. Some womanist intellectuals that I have mentioned are black feminists (bell hooks and Alice Walker), white feminists (Gloria Steinem and Naomi Woolf), or Jewish/lesbian feminists (Adrienne Rich). Yet, I find that on completion of this study that I am more comfortable with the term womanist than feminist. One reason for this is that I often feel as Adrienne Rich does, that words such as feminism and feminist, get "lodged in a certain point of time" and become narrowly defined (Rosenthal 33). Rich contends that feminism, like many of our words, has lost its "fluidity" and its "openness" (33).

Another reason for my use of the term womanist returns me to Walker's gardens. In the preface to her work by that title, Alice Walker defines womanist as "[a] woman who loves other women. . . , [who] sometimes loves other men . . . . [and who is] committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female ("In Search" xi). To work for the

survival of an entire people is a monumental task, filled with open confrontations and hidden dangers. Audre Lorde speaks to these difficulties in "Litany for Survival":

and when we speak we are afraid  
 our words will not be heard  
 nor welcomed  
 but when we are silent  
 we are still afraid  
 So it is better to speak  
 remembering  
 we were never meant to survive. (Black Unicorn 35)

In Revolution From Within, Gloria Steinem, another niece of Martineau's and Woolf's, recalls the old feminist adage: the personal is political. Many of the public intellectuals in this study, especially Adrienne Rich and bell hooks, have incorporated their personal experiences in their writing in order to guide individuals toward self-realization and self-definition. Steinem states that she too "create[s] much of the outer world, [as well as her] political essays, from within" herself (Revolution 8).

Women intellectuals, past and present, who speak as their own witness and refuse to adopt a "masculine persona," pay a heavy price. James Allan, a nineteenth century critic, described women intellectuals as "monster[s] more horrible than that created by Frankenstein" (124). When Martineau wrote on politics and economics, critics accused her of being "trivial-didactic" and

"absurd" (Stephen 1198) and "not much of a woman at all." Critics throughout the twentieth century have dismissed Woolf's A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas as simply displacements of her depression. When Woolf found the words with which to express her emotions and experiences, critics accused her of being inartistic. Yet to speak of Woolf's work without taking A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas seriously is to refuse to take Woolf seriously as a public intellectual.

In this study I have discussed numerous obstacles confronting women intellectuals. One of those barriers which I have not yet alluded to but which is becoming increasingly popular is the use of the "label." Today, Virginia Woolf is in danger of being reduced to a "great stylist." Martineau is a "popularizer" of the ideas of great men, Nightingale is "the lady with the Lamp," Susan Sontag is the "dark lady," and Gloria Steinem is a strident "feminist." This limiting-by-labeling approach is one of the more effective strategies used to deny the existence of the womanist intellectual; but she does exist, and for very good reasons.

VII  
**A Story of the Womanist Intellectual  
 &**

### the Middle-Aged Co-ed

Nine years ago, I applied to graduate school at the age of thirty-five. I didn't understand the application process at the time and so included such pertinent information as serving as room mother for fourteen years, coaching a junior high tennis team, working with PWA's (Persons with AIDS) ad infinitum. One prestigious university sent the usual form letter: "Our school only takes 5% from out of state. We are sorry that we must reject your application." Thinking there must have been some misunderstanding, I quickly wrote a reply. "Yes," I noted, "My education has been spotty, and I understand that I am an atypical student; however, if you will accept my application, even on a contingency basis, I will do the work and I will do it well." Weeks later, I received a letter from Professor E\_\_\_. In her letter, Dr. E\_\_ wrote that many women, like myself, find as their children grow older that they have more leisure time on their hands and some even consider returning to school. "The problem," E\_\_ queried, "Is how can one make up for the 'lost years'?"

Standing by the mailbox, letter in hand, I felt as Virginia Woolf did, standing in front of her step-brother in a green dress, and being shamed and humiliated for not fitting into the Victorian mold. For some strange reason, I did not fall apart; I became furious. The letter, framed, hangs in my office. It has kept me moving forward through difficult times, as I attended university

classes full time, worked as a teaching assistant, moonlighted as a tutor, and, oh yes, I was still burdened by those children--products of my "lost years."

Every time I look at the letter, even now, I think of other women, such as myself, to whom this female professor and academic intellectual had written. Some recipients of her letter didn't get angry. They decided, "Professor E\_\_\_\_ is right. Isn't she on the faculty of one of the most prestigious schools in the country? No," they agreed, "I'm not smart enough, capable enough, or strong enough to follow my vision."

A few years after receiving the letter, quite by accident, I discovered bell hooks. Here was an African-American woman who really believed in herself and had the audacity to call herself an intellectual. And in print! If she was an intellectual, she certainly didn't sound like the ones I read as an undergraduate: Matthew Arnold, Thomas Carlyle, John Stuart Mill, Michel Foucault. Unlike Richard Rorty's treatises, I could actually understand what she was trying to communicate. bell hooks sent me on a journey that has lasted more years than I want to remember. It has been a fascinating journey and I am pleased with the discoveries I have made, especially that of the womanist intellectual tradition.

I have traced this tradition back to Harriet Martineau (and perhaps even further, for who knows what other womanist intellectuals obscured by history and brought it forward into the twenty-first century. These women--Virginia Woolf, Susan Sontag, Adrienne Rich, and bell hooks--reveal to me,



that Antonio Gramsci was right when he said that "all individuals are intellectuals," that there is room for the woman who will speak the truth to power with her own voice, in her own language, with a message that can be understood, whether she is a poor black child growing up in the south, or a well-heeled Californian attending the University of Chicago, or a middle-aged white woman still trying to make up for lost years.

In this study, I have attempted to state this message as clearly as possible. I wanted to reveal how these women, fighting greater obstacles than I shall ever face (certainly more than one rejection letter), moved forward "transcending," as Nancy Mairs notes, "a destructive past which binds and suffocates the present, foreseeing a future that is uncertain and potentially dangerous, but necessary for survival" (63). There exists for women intellectuals a fascinating lineage of aunts and nieces which, linked together, form a non-traditional tradition differing from that of the sage's. The connection is indirect, almost tangential, but is less "constraining an influence" than that of the mother's or father's. I developed this study both because I felt that the need to establish a women's intellectual tradition and because women such as myself long for "possibilities." It is my hope that I have achieved both ends.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Adrienne Rich, "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law," Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law (New York: Harper, 1963)

36.

<sup>2</sup> Rich makes an interesting observation about those women educated in a patriarchal academic system who are deemed successful:

The exceptional women who have emerged from this system and who hold distinguished positions in it are just that: the required exceptions used by every system to justify and maintain itself. That all this is somehow 'natural' and reasonable is still an unconscious assumption even of many who grant that women's role in society is changing. (Adrienne Rich Prose and Poetry 58)

<sup>3</sup> Mention has already been made of Thais Morgan's Victorian Sages and Cultural Discourse. Dorothy Mermin's chapter on "Women Sages" in Godiva's Ride suggests a similar approach to incorporating the womanist intellectual into the sage tradition.

<sup>4</sup> Said's quote reads: "Never solidarity before criticism" (32).

<sup>5</sup> I will have to quote extensively from Bantham's work since I do not have access to the speech itself. The only known "copy" (and I believe only sections of the original speech were ever published) appeared in the Soho News. Sontag sued the paper and received harsh criticism.

In her original speech Sontag had slurred The Nation, stating that the individual who read the Reader's Digest would know more of the truth about communism than one who read the Nation. The Nation expressed interest in publishing the speech. Sontag agreed to send it to them after revisions. However, in the revisions she deleted the Reader's Digest vs. The Nation commentary. Displeased with the situation, The Nation agreed to publish Sontag's three-page, revised speech, but followed it with a three page editorial.

<sup>6</sup> "The anti-communist position seems already taken care of by those we oppose at home," but she adds, "I want to challenge this view" (264).

<sup>7</sup> See comments by Charles Ruas's "Susan Sontag: Past, Present and Future," The New York Times Book Review (October 24, 1982). Also, Richard Grenier's "The Conversion of Susan Sontag," The New Republic (14 April 1982): 15-19.

<sup>8</sup> In "Trip to Hoi," Sontag writes that "ever since World War II, the rhetoric of patriotism in the United States has been in the hands of reactionaries and yahoos; by monopolizing it, they have succeeded in rendering the idea of loving America synonymous with bigotry, provincialism, and selfishness" (Styles of Radical Will 266).

<sup>9</sup> In addition to attacking Clinton, the UN, and the U.S. government, during her Sarajevo visit, Sontag also assails the news reporters. The "inane

and simple-minded questions" she received revealed that "the questioner has bought into the propaganda of the aggressors: that this war is caused by age-old hatreds; that it is a civil war or a war of secession, with Milosvic trying to save the union: that in crushing the Bosnians, whom Serb propaganda often refers to as Turks, the Serbs are saving Europe from Muslim fundamentalism" (9).

Her interviews with the press did not go well, in part because Sontag was reticent, since "to speak at all of what one is doing seems . . . a form of self-promotion. But this is just what the contemporary media culture expects. My political opinions--I invariably went on about what I regard as the infamous role now being played by UNPROFOR, railing against 'the Serb-UN siege of Sarajevo"--were invariably cut out" (104).

<sup>10</sup> But even after leaving home and attending college at Radcliffe, Rich continued to write the "perfect" poems her father had praised and was selected for the Yale Younger Poets Award by W.H. Auden who described her poems as "neatly and modestly dressed." (A Change of World, preface).

<sup>11</sup> Woolf, too, had reservations concerning the college curriculum. If a college, Woolf says, must be built according to the "old Plan," she would rather earmark her guinea for "'Rags, Petrol. Matches'" and attach to the guinea the following note: "Take this guinea and with it burn the college to the ground. Set fire to the old hypocisies. . . . [L]et the Daughters of educated men . . . and their mothers . . . cry, "'Let it blaze! Let it blaze! For we have

done with this 'education. (A Room of One's Own 36) Over fifty years later, Rich takes these ashes and scatters them throughout the society, creating a women's university-without-walls.

Rich argues that the "without-walls" university already exists in the "shape of women reading and writing with a new purposefulness, and the growth of feminist bookstores, presses, bibliographic services, women's centers, medical clinics, libraries, art galleries, and workshops, all with a truly educational mission" (Adrienne Rich Prose and Poetry 56).

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