

READING WRITING
CONTRIVING TO SEE FEMINIST VOICES

ELIZABETH KNOWLES

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THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

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I hereby declare that the following is my own unaided work

ELIZABETH KNOWLES

ABSTRACT

This thesis sets out to engage its readers in an exploration into the possibilities of encapsulating feminist perspective in the grammatical resources of English. It takes a problematizing course. Along the way it shows how patriarchal discourse works to sustain its illusions. To put the primary focus simply: what does it mean to feminists to say *something happened* rather than *I did something*? This question then leads me to wonder about other aspects of speaking and writing feminisms.

I approach these matters by reading feminist discourses through literary texts by women. I take literature as a way of enabling me to imagine what the consequences of writing in a particular way might be. In Frankenstein's (grammatical) ways of eluding responsibility for his actions I find a prophetic warning to feminists looking for ways to erase their selves from text. In response, I look for ways of representing a double self, a self who acts with intention even as s/he cannot know all of what s/he does, and find something of this in the grammar of Angela Carter's 'The Bloody Chamber', whilst Zora Neale Hurston's writing sounds a multiple and contradictory self. I begin to suggest that the double status of innocence and guilt has parallels in reading practice: that patriarchal discourse only succeeds where we read success into it. This is one of the stories of 'A Country House' by Dorothy Edwards. Reading becomes as significant as writing. In the light of all that I have garnered, I then put feminist discourses under detailed scrutiny: in particular, I read Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, and Maggie Humm. I conclude by showing how other feminist concepts, such as women's time and border crossings, might be embodied in grammar, turning again to the imaginative work of Angela Carter for illumination. Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage* echoes through my text.

The strategy of the thesis is to produce close readings of texts of all kinds, readings which turn on grammatical analysis but which emphasize the multiplicity of meanings to be found. It aims to advance the project of feminist stylistics. At different moments it calls on Michael Halliday, Randolph Quirk *et al*, Raymond Williams, Stanley Fish, Deirdre Burton, bell hooks, Drucilla Cornell, Elizabeth Ermarth and Diane Elam, amongst others. There is no adherence to any one version of feminism but rather an attempt to show how all feminists might engage further with the issues of how they read and write. The conversational style of the thesis is intended to evoke such engagement.

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Chapter One: Way In Through Conversation and Stories

*All that has been said and known in the world is in language, in words;*¹

This thesis aims to consider the future of this world in language from feminist perspective. It will approach this world through close readings and analyses of a range of texts, with particular emphasis on grammatical representation. At this stage, the core issue can be formulated through the following question: to what extent can literary texts show how feminist theoretical ideas might be explored and enacted through strategic use of grammar? This is not an entirely new direction: for instance, Lillian S. Robinson, writing in 1978, suggests that 'a radical kind of textual criticism [...] could usefully study the way the texture of sentences, choice of metaphors, patterns of exposition and narrative relate to ideology'.² Meagan Morris talks of the need for feminist formalist analysis that concerns itself with discourses rather than individual signs.³ But I have yet to encounter a sustained application of these precepts. Nor is it a path that all feminists endorse. Imelda Whelehan, for instance, finds that 'it is likely that a tendency to favour close study of individual texts does not serve the political interests of feminism very well'.⁴ Whelehan is concerned with 'viewing [texts] in various relations to each other' (p. 229) and with the inclusion of popular genre fiction -

¹Dorothy Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 4 vols (London: Virago, 1979; repr. 1992) II, p. 99, her emphases. Further references to these editions are given where appropriate after quotations in the text. The episodes which constitute *Pilgrimage* first appeared separately. For full publishing history see Bibliography.

²'Dwelling in Decencies: Radical Criticism and the Feminist Perspectives', in *Feminist Criticism: Essays on Theory, Poetry and Prose*, ed. by Cheryl L. Brown and Karen Olsen (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1978), pp. 21-36 (p. 34). Robinson continues: 'I call such an approach radical and insist that feminism is part of it because up to now we have been very narrow in defining what we mean by the "content" that "form" is supposed to convey' (p. 34). I think I go some way towards a response.

³*The Pirate's Fiancée: Feminism, Reading, Postmodernism* (London: Verso, 1988), pp 1-5. Morris does go on to discuss Mary Daly's writing in the terms that she has laid down but it never quite develops in the ways that I would hope.

⁴'Feminism and Trash: Destabilising "the Reader"', in *Gendering the Reader*, ed. by Sara Mills (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), pp. 217-35 (p. 229). Further reference is given to this article after quotations in the text.

'trash' (p. 217). She refers to 'that element of prudishness which implies that there are proper books to read, as well as proper reading practices' (p. 233). I intend to show why I find this seemingly expansive vision blinkered.

In my exploration, attentive readings (across genres) are posited as source material for the search for and understanding of alternative modes of embodying feminism in language; alternative both to the complex feminine sentencing that Virginia Woolf attributes to Dorothy Richardson in *Pilgrimage* and to the complex structure of meaning in much recent feminist writing.⁵ Although I shall not leave *Pilgrimage* behind, I intend to look for resources within grammar which, as yet unseen and unfulfilled, are accessible to all speakers and writers. I do not intend to present a 'prescriptive attitude towards change rooted in feminism [which] has as little change (sic) of succeeding as the attempts of the eighteenth-century grammarians'.⁶ Even as I try to open out my question I must also close it down. I write only of English although I do not doubt the resources of other languages and would hope that my methodology signals ways of looking for and at such resources. And I write from feminist perspective, although in resistance to all forms of oppression: perhaps the following feminist conversation seems to extend beyond itself into other visions. Already there are terms in use where further explanation as to the intentions embodied in them advances my agenda. These are: the use of *I* in academic context; the formulation of *feminist perspective*; and the mode of *conversation*.

⁵I am thinking here of the wide range of writers previously restricted under the term 'French Feminists', and others, like Drucilla Cornell (see below), who have shown that there should be no assumption of such simplistic geographical divide nor of theoretical cohesion. Rachel Bowlby makes a similar point in *Still Crazy After All These Years: Women, Writing and Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1992).
⁶Urszula Clark, *An Introduction to Stylistics: Investigating English Language* (Cheltenham: Stanley Thornes, 1996), p. 116. This belief leads her to have very little to say on feminism at all although she does briefly discuss gender related terms.

Why Am I Here?

Notions and representations of subjectivity come to infuse this text which seeks at moments to enact its own contentions. It looks again and again at the grammatical possibilities for representing different theoretical perspectives of agency (who acts?) within a wider conversation on the implications of such options. Thus it seems appropriate for me to act out different notions of what *I* might or might not do. The grammatical version of this story can be briefly told: *I* intend to say that *x*; *I* say that *x*; it is said that *x*; *x* says. This story will however return to haunt this text in many different guises, including that of authorial intent and that of form and meaning.

What Feminist Perspective?

The significance of the formulation *feminist perspective* is that it attempts at a simple level to enact its theoretical content. It is not my own: I adopted the idea from bell hooks who fills her *Yearning* with ‘feminist movement’.⁷ Although she does not elucidate this choice, it strikes me as a most effective way of encapsulating both the variety and the singularity that feminists may need to express. ‘Feminist movement’ goes beyond both the indefinite (*a feminist movement*) and the definite (*the feminist movement*), each singular and limiting in some way, to express through a combination of semantic and grammatical content something of an unlimited singularity (which *feminist movements* would undermine), one moreover that is always in process. *Feminist perspective* is intended to evoke the potent combination of one-in-many, or, in reverse, unlimited limit. This stylistic choice is maintained throughout the thesis, marking both my recognition of and engagement with different feminist

⁷*Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Boston: South End Press, 1990), p. 21, passim. Referred to as *Yearning*. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

perspectives and the political need to imagine common ground.⁸ Somewhat ironically then, I do also talk about feminisms rather than feminism, since I wish to reserve the latter for specific reference and since I also do not want to try to reduce so many things to just one. This double move of *feminist perspective* and *feminisms* seeks to encapsulate something of the openness, multiplicity, and common ground that characterizes what I want to find in contemporary feminist thought.

If I have encapsulated these triple wants in grammar and semantics, I can also show them at a theoretical level through a further move which will come to permeate my text. I adopt and adapt Raymond Williams' concept of residual, dominant and emergent ideas over and over again.⁹ Crucial to this process is the recognition that different ways of thinking can coexist and that the relationship amongst them is a dynamic one. Both residual and emergent ideas have in some way 'an alternative or even oppositional relation to the dominant culture' (p. 122) and it is important to recognize that 'residual' does not stand in for *archaic*: on the contrary, it represents that which 'has been effectively formed in the past, but is still active in the cultural process [...] as an effective element of the present' (p. 122). What is crucial and difficult about 'emergent' is 'to distinguish between those [relationships] which are really elements of some new phase of the dominant culture [...] and those which are substantially alternative or oppositional to it' (p. 123). It is the latter which are emergent. In that the emergent is 'not yet fully articulated' it 'depends crucially on finding new forms or

⁸Patrocínio P. Schweickart has a different resolution to the need to produce this sense of both one and many. The title of her article, 'What Are We Doing? What Do We Want? Who Are We?: Comprehending the Subject of Feminism', in *Provoking Agents: Gender and Agency in Theory and Practice*, ed. by Judith Kegan Gardiner (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), pp. 229-48, 'is meant to invoke the problematic ambiguity of collective nouns with regard to the grammatical category of number, and to redress the current one-sided emphasis on plurality ... in my view the "subject of feminism" is a *collective* noun, and as such, is *both* singular and plural' (p. 229, her emphasis). In her play on the double sense of '*comprehension*' (p. 234, her emphasis), she shows a similar concern with the detail of feminist expression. Schweickart also talks about 'the appeal of the trope of conversation' (p. 243) to feminism. My reservations about 'the trope' aspect can be understood in terms of my discussion of what counts as metaphor (below). Gardiner's anthology will henceforth be referred to as *Provoking Agents*.

⁹'Dominant, Residual, and Emergent', in *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 121-27. Further references to this chapter are given after quotations in the text.

adaptations of forms' (p. 126). There is in this analysis no simplistic hierarchy: the dominant is under pressure from the past and the future. Williams' emphasis may have been on societal conditions but I want to extend his concepts into other areas. In this way I can now express feminist perspective which informs this thesis as being more than one thing, or of one time: I am liberal, materialist and postmodernist in my approach and analysis at different moments.¹⁰ Moreover, this move gives me space to articulate the ways in which I am part of dominant structures from which I cannot wholly extricate myself and indeed may not always wish to. I will want to emphasize the shifting in and out of different modes, and at no time will I insist that emergent ideas are of necessity superior. This adaptation of Williams is itself a means of actively bringing something of a Marxist analysis into other ways of thinking.¹¹ The ways in which I adopt and adapt it will emerge over time. There is more than one way to tell a story. To some extent I will co-opt Diane Elam's feminization of one of Derrida's central metaphors, the *ms. en abyme*, alongside Williams' paradigm.¹² This *ms. en abyme* conjures, most effectively in my view, an image of endless visionings (originally a heraldic term, it refers to an image like the photograph in which the photograph itself appears in a never ending regression), infinite deferral. I will also have cause to return to Elam's wider project, as illustration of emergent aspects of feminist perspective.

¹⁰Although I will qualify my use of the term postmodernist, here a convenient shorthand, towards the end of this chapter.

¹¹My approach has something in common with Rosi Braidotti's 'nomadic subject' position elucidated in 'Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory', in *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader*, 2nd edn, ed. by Mary Eagleton (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 411-20. Eagleton ('Locating the Subject', pp. 348-49) comments on Braidotti's use of problematic terms like 'phases' and 'levels' though notes that she resists a hierarchical reading of them. Braidotti has a central stress on 'sexual difference' that does not concern me, and, where she insists that 'these layers [of nomadism] occur simultaneously ... and cannot be easily distinguished' (p. 411), my interest lies in conveying a sense of clear differences in ways of thinking that can coexist. Braidotti draws attention to 'the importance of finding adequate forms of representation for these new figurations of the female subject' (p. 417) but does not take this task on board herself.

¹²*Feminism and Deconstruction: Ms. en Abyme* (London: Routledge, 1994). Henceforth referred to as *Feminism and Deconstruction*. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text. I am surprised to have encountered so little feminist engagement with Elam's work.

What Kind of Conversation?

Conversation as a mode now has a history all of its own in academic discourse. It is claimed as a strategy by Richard Rorty in 'continuing [...] conversation rather than [...] discovering truth',¹³ wherein it can be viewed as having postmodern impulse to produce neither endings nor certainties. It is employed by Charles Bazerman in the different sense that the emphasis is on getting away from traditional modes of academic discourse towards something more informal, interactive, and responsive to students' needs to which end he puts forward a 'model of written conversation'.¹⁴ It is called up by Bill Clinton in his introduction to *Between Hope and History*.¹⁵ Conversation is not then the property of feminisms. But it has been adopted as feminist mode by, amongst many, Drucilla Cornell and Catherine A. MacKinnon,¹⁶ where the former might draw on Rorty's implications and the latter on Bazerman's. It figures most interestingly in *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange*, where it may be explained as a startling con/disjunction of these two aspects and this is a story that I shall return to.¹⁷ For now, I want to establish my own practice by bringing, as I see it, the properties of feminisms into this conversation. My conversation both enacts resistance to endings and certainties and also to formal academic discourse. I want to produce moments of speaking to myself and attempt to engage with the other, to hear what s/he might have to say as well as to induce responses from the reader however different from

¹³*Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 373.

¹⁴*Constructing Experience* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1994), especially 'A Relationship Between Reading and Writing: The Conversational Model', pp. 47-53 (p. 53). Further reference is given to this edition after quotation in the text.

¹⁵*Between Hope and History: Meeting America's Challenges for the 21st Century* (New York: Random House, 1996).

¹⁶Cornell in *Beyond Accommodation: Ethical Feminism, Deconstruction, and the Law* (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 107. Henceforth referred to as *Beyond Accommodation*. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text. MacKinnon talks of 'an opening to a new conversation' in *Only Words* (first published Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993; this edn London: HarperCollins, 1994), pp. 77-78.

¹⁷Seyla Benhabib and others, intro. by Linda Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1995). Henceforth referred to as *Feminist Contentions*. Further reference is given to this edition where appropriate after quotations in the text. This conversation is picked up in chapter four.

my own.¹⁸ I find myself turning to and from Derrida at this point in both his claim that, historically, speaking is privileged over writing and also his style of leaving but a trace - he might talk of ~~conversation~~. I want to bring speaking with all its traces, which mode I believe to be held inferior to carefully crafted end results that constitute writing, into my writing. This aim will permeate the ensuing text both at the levels of theory and of practice at different moments. This approach engages with the whole notion of binary systems of thought and indeed these will come to haunt my conversations. For I need to invoke the very kind of oppositions that I then begin to break down: I want to make certain statements about the perceived differences between speech and writing in order to show that they do not have to pertain. This paradoxical element might be reformulated as dominant self meets emergent self, or as talking to myself across time. I do not deny that I have a long history of thinking in terms of oppositions and connections: I want my efforts to get beyond this history to be on show. I find neither Annette Kolodny's speculation that 'patterns of opposition and connection [are] probably the basis of thinking itself'¹⁹ nor the deconstruction of dualisms sufficient to my needs. I live with both at different moments. I might indeed characterize my shifting position on these terrains as one that is 'securely adrift'.²⁰ For paradox itself is one version of double talk/take to be relished as conducive to feminist perspective. It calls to be reread. This talk of conversation has engendered further need for clarification of terms and intentions. These can begin to be drawn from the question: what might a story be? I propose to answer this in three ways.

¹⁸In 'A Conversation', in *Men in Feminism*, ed. by Alice Jardine and Paul Smith (New York: Routledge, 1987), the editors 'have tried to reproduce as closely as possible the actual tone and content, as well as the conversational texture' (p. 242) of their discussion. However this relates to a recorded conversation (1986) between these two whereas my aim is to stimulate responses from readers as well as to reflect my own multiple and contradictory engagements.

¹⁹'Dancing Through the Minefield: Some Observations on the Theory, Practice and Politics of a Feminist Literary Criticism', in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory*, ed. by Elaine Showalter (London: Virago Press, 1986), pp. 144-67 (p. 161).

²⁰*Pilgrimage I*, p. 88.

What Kind of Story?

The first reply is to engage deconstructive overtones: if there is no grand narrative to explain the world and no metaphysical point from which to view it, then perhaps all explanations are stories in the sense that they imagine reasons and connections although they are often presented as fact. This attitude extends from Hayden White's interpretations of history as the particular stories which get to be told, as well as from Jean-Francois Lyotard's deconstruction of metanarrative.²¹ But there is a cautionary tale too. It is never my intention to approach the world as story in a way that would allow for slavery or the holocaust to be written out as imaginary events: rather I might say with others that the explanations as to why such horrors occur are stories, stories that are constantly being rewritten. There is a prevailing need to know even as the (whole) truth can never be known. The danger, and limitation, can lie in the proclamation that we do know. I can illustrate this through the story of child sexual abuse.

Even leaving aside Freud's ambivalent relationship to this phenomenon - real or imaginary? - the last twenty years or so in the western world have a sorry tale to tell. The need to understand and take control of the event has led to pronouncements of truth that may turn out to have caused great damage. I think, for instance, of declarations that the child never lies and must always be believed, which seemed a great advancement from the position where the child was never listened to. But such an absolute statement could never cover all possibilities and the story had to be constantly rewritten in the light of new experience. Each time it was presented by the experts as revealed truth. We are now in the position where there are no certainties, as battles over false memory syndrome and ritual abuse rage, and, as I might

²¹See White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978), esp. 'The Historical Text as Literary Artifact', pp. 81-100; and Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi ([1979] Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984): 'The grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation' (p. 37).

cynically suggest, lawyers have found a new field of litigation to replace old ones. One story overlaps with and changes another. The particular problem that I identify here and will carry into my conversation is that at each stage that the truth of the matter was presented to those working in the field, untold damage may have been done that can only come to light later. To put this another way, I suggest that there are ethical grounds for resisting such truths which tell how to act rather than engage in continuing conversation about multiple possibilities, imaginative acts of interpretation. To put it again, the dominant way of viewing the world is to see it as something that makes sense and is to be made sense of, but this is not the only way of looking and the deconstructive move to release us from this constant need to make sense can make space for other kinds of responses, unsettled and unsettling. In my own thinking I am still marked by the need to make sense but have emergent moments of seeing things differently - epiphanic deconstruction. I shall return to truth-telling discourse in different ways but in particular in chapter four when I am troubled by feminist discourse which seeks to tell the truth. More generally, I call many different things stories in order to convey this perception that thinking that we know limits our horizons, even as I recognize that I have to seem to know some things in order to be able to talk at all.

The second reply comes to me through the writing of Zora Neale Hurston. I shall return to talking about her writing practice in greater detail but here I want to introduce the idea of complex relationships that Hurston sets up amongst truth, stories and 'lying'. This complexity comes to the surface at times in *Mules and Men*:²²

“Now, you gointer hear lies above suspicion,” Gene added. (p. 21)

And after a preposterous story about a gun, Larkins declares “dat ain’t no lie. Dat’s a fack.” (p. 122, see also Pitts earlier). It is in the light of this instability and inseparability of story, lie and fact, that I approach claims and counterclaims about the relation to truth that Hurston

²²Preface by Franz Boas, intro. by Robert E. Hemenway, 1978 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1935, repr. 1978). Further references to 1978 edition are given after quotations in the text.

exercises in *Dust Tracks on a Road: An Autobiography* in the matter of age, marriages, missing years.²³ In part, this is because I want to suggest, in feminist act of recuperation (a liberal trace moment perhaps), that she has always presented truth as multiple and imaginary, but it is also because I want to foster her ways of speaking. Hurston is accused of inconsistency in *Dust Tracks*.²⁴ I will tell the story of one such moment of inconsistency as I hear it. Hurston spends three pages (101-103) luxuriating in the detail of her (one-sided) fight with her step-mother. As she puts it: 'The primeval in me leaped to life' (p. 101): 'I wanted her blood, and plenty of it' (p. 102). She throws a hatchet at an interfering neighbour. This extended fight scene ends when 'I made up my mind to stomp her, but at last Papa came to, and pulled me away' (p. 103). In an uncharacteristically unchronological act she continues: 'Years later, after I had graduated from Barnard and I was doing research, I found out where she was. I drove twenty miles to finish the job' (p. 103).²⁵ Education has not killed 'the primeval' in her. Yet, in this same time of 'doing research', now chronologically restored in the journey of the text, and therefore, significantly in my reading, separated from the telling of the fight with her stepmother, Hurston declares herself not up to fighting Lucy: 'I was easy. I had no gun, knife or any sort of weapon. I did not even know how to do that kind of fighting' (p. 186). It seems to me that Hurston is playing with notions of truth and representations of the self and that her texts require the reader to engage with them in a questioning, alert and memorable manner.

The criticism that she does not invariably construct black woman (herself and other) as good, as a role model, raises all kinds of questions about what texts are for. In my book, they are to engage me in (re)thinking, not in telling me what to think. Thus it is no accident that Hurston

²³Intro. by Dellita L. Martin, 1986 (dated 1985 in Martin's text), (first published Lippincott, 1942; this edn London: Virago, 1986.). Henceforth referred to as *Dust Tracks*. Further references to 1986 edition are given after quotations in the text.

²⁴By Martin above, and by Alice Walker in *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose* (first published New York: Harcourt Brace, 1983; this edn London: Women's Press, 1984), amongst others. Walker celebrates Hurston's earlier work, but says 'for me, the most unfortunate thing Zora ever wrote is her autobiography. After the first several chapters, it rings false' (p. 91).

²⁵But finds 'a chronic invalid' (p. 103) on whom she can only wish extended suffering.

tells us of her lack of fighting spirit in the first instance (though chronology of events and text are reversed here: time is being played around with too) through the eyes and words of Big Sweet (‘ “You don’t know how to handle no knife. You ain’t got dat kind of sense.” ’ (p. 189)) and that she then takes on this pathetic persona that Big Sweet, the fighter, attributes to her. I want to claim that inconsistency is a deliberate strategy in Hurston born out of an awareness that there are no simple lines to be drawn between truth and not-truth or indeed between one’s own sense of self and another’s reading of it. Hurston may be the author of this self that she presents in text, but she leaves in the traces of how this self is produced by the other’s vision of it. She is simultaneously constructor and constructed.²⁶ In *Dust Tracks*, Hurston’s home is both ‘the beginning’ (‘most likely in Mama’s room’ (p. 37)), and ‘the centre of the world’ (p. 36), for from the top of her chinaberry tree the horizon stretches out the same distance in every direction. She plans to get to ‘the end of the world’ one day to see if it is ‘tucked under like the hem of a dress’ (p. 36). She never quite makes it and no more can the reader get to the end of Hurston. And that beginning ‘is all hear-say’ (p. 27) anyway. This story and her story are not yet over, rather held in suspension. My third reply (for there are always many) to the question (what kind of story?) comes to me from Angela Carter’s *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*.²⁷ I call it the story of ‘warm’:

So he taught her the word for “warm”, which she needed to know, see, because she’d never felt like that before. (p. 89)

I will be telling this story again too but I want here to invoke the notion behind it that there may be experiences that have yet to come and therefore as yet have no word to describe them.

²⁶Peter Barry writes: ‘In critical and creative work alike, both controlling the writing and being controlled by it are fundamental requirements’, in ‘Criticism as Writing’, in *Cambridge Quarterly*, vol xxii, no 3 (1993), pp. 249-62 (p. 261-2). What I am suggesting above however is that this sense of ‘being controlled’ can be intentionally built in, which is not to say that it ends there.

²⁷(First published Hart-Davies, 1972; this edn Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982). This text will be under more detailed discussion in my final chapter. Henceforth referred to as *Dr. Hoffman*. Further references are given where appropriate after quotations in the text.

Naming brings something into being that was not known before. Speaking from feminist perspective there are several commentaries on this 'warm' story. We might decide to create words/syntax which begin to tell the yet-to-be heard: this is part of the strategy of such varied protagonists as Hélène Cixous and Dorothy Richardson.²⁸ We might also call repeatedly to the imaginary in the sense of what is beyond our current experience but might then come to be so: this is the call that Drucilla Cornell makes throughout *Beyond Accommodation*, whose sense of there always being something more outside of any framework of vision I shall consistently invoke by the mark **beyond**. The aspects of this story that will come to resonate are: reflection on the perennial questions as to whether language constructs us, we construct language, or there is some interactive process; and related to that, whether language reflects or shapes the world that we see.

What I intend to draw out by telling these three stories is a perspective for myself which knows no limits, is not founded in immovable facts (whether past, present or future), but is, rather, multiple and exploratory, not prescriptive but rather imaginative. Where I seem to base my stories in grammatical facts, I do so in order to multiply and extend those facts. I have to imagine a place to speak from and that place is grammar.²⁹ There are always stories within stories for I now have some more to tell arising from the above.

Where Am I Heading?

My own approach to reading stories of all kinds will be to problematize them through multiple readings rather than to present resolutions, somewhat in the manner of Michel

²⁸See Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', trans. by Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, ed. by Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1981), pp. 245-64. I refer to Richardson's *Pilgrimage*.

²⁹Terry Threadgold addresses this issue of metalanguage, of how writing about anything involves some version of it, a knowing place, in her recent *Feminist Poetics: Poiesis, Performance, Histories* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 12-15. She too takes grammar as this knowing place but follows a different path from mine.

Foucault:

What I want to do is not the history of solutions [...] I would like to do the genealogy of problems, of *problematiques*. My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous.³⁰

However, I will occasionally offer a preference and then justify this move, for after all it is never my intention to speak solely in one way. Through this process I will begin to call on writing/speaking as ethical as well as political acts. I will increasingly also call on reading as equally a matter of ethics and politics. I will imagine other readings (and I shall later produce other readers) just as I will converse imaginatively with theorists and writers of all kinds.

Here I pick up on Lorraine Code's insistence on this imagining the place of the other **beyond** oneself as the core ethical act:

it will be one of my central claims that, for all the difficulties inherent in such a task, it is important to attempt to *know* other people responsibly and well if one is to act justly towards them.³¹

Just for a moment there is the claim to know the truth in 'the core ethical act'. I shall not, however, allow the ethical impulse to rest, particularly when it comes to talking about the different ways in which feminists might and have enact/ed this 'attempt to *know*' the other, and, in my own constant attempt to hear other voices through rereadings, which attempt embodies the notion that there is no one coherent authorial or readerly voice which always thinks and knows in the same way. I will also respond to the contrary ethical impulse of feminism as expressed by Elam. Where Code calls to what it is that we can '*know* [...] well' in the other, Elam calls to the impossibility of knowing the other, the recognition of difference rather than similarity as what is ethical. This ethical vision cannot rest but is

³⁰'On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress', in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. by Paul Rabinow (first published New York: Pantheon Books, 1984; this edn London: Penguin, 1991), pp. 340-72 (p. 343). Originally published in Foucault's *Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*.

³¹*Rhetorical Spaces: Essays on Gendered Locations* (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 83-84, her emphasis. Henceforth referred to as *Rhetorical Spaces*. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

always on the move: hence her invocation of 'ethical activism' (pp. 105-6). Both notions of ethical engagement will be recalled throughout this thesis.

I want to offer ways of reading and writing texts dangerously and differently. I have come across much feminist theoretical discourse that seems to promise that it will concentrate on the writing processes involved but never does so in the ways that I intend to.³² I am going to enter into this conversation by showing how I read, what I see.

What Kind of Readings: What Kind of Readers?

I practise close readings: rereadings: multiple readings: justified readings: misreadings. I anticipate and seek out active readers: rereaders: real readers.³³

Close Readings

This thesis circulates around detailed analysis of writing by women. I might call it feminist stylistics. This term has been invoked specifically by Sara Mills,³⁴ and earlier practised by

³²There are books and sections and articles with titles like "Writing, Reading and Difference". Mary Eagleton's *Feminist Literary Theory* has a whole section with this appellation, pp. 284-338. See also Part IV of *Women and Language in Literature and Society*, ed. by Sally McConnell-Ginet and others (New York: Praeger, 1980), which is called 'Reading Women Writing'. However, where these texts deal with the difficult territory of what constitutes a feminist text and how one should read it as a feminist, they do not discuss how feminist principles can be embodied in linguistic form. This is not to deny that writers such as Irigaray and Cixous do try to embody their philosophy in their style, on the contrary, but it is to suggest that there may be more accessible ways of doing so.

³³Feminisms have produced many different kinds of readers. Kay Boardman, ' "The Glass of Gin": Renegade Reading Possibilities in the Classic Realist Text', *Gendering the Reader*, pp. 199- 216, extends the discussion on how to refuse to collude with a text and make 'active use of the gaps and inconsistencies' (p. 208) it contains: 'displacement occurs between the way an ideal reader is meant to respond and the way the real or material reader may respond' (p. 208). Boardman's is a materialist 'renegade' reading. In that I do not claim to know how 'an ideal reader is meant to respond' and I do not want to take up one particular feminist perspective nor expect to have only one reading of a text, I prefer to concentrate on the more open move of active and attentive rereaders. It is important in my approach that I respond always to what is there in the text in the spirit of exploration: what does this text show me? This approach will come into particular focus in chapter three.

³⁴*Feminist Stylistics* (London: Routledge, 1995).

Deirdre Burton and Katie Wales amongst others. It is my claim however that, whereas this practice has primarily been employed to show up male bias and female passivity, often being analysis of men's writing practice,³⁵ I move **beyond** this to look problematically at feminist discourse options. By adopting some of Jean Jacques Weber's descriptions of what stylistics can be, I might say that I practise a feminist, contextualized, critical version: I am taking a particular angle drawn from and drawing in cultural and sociohistorical factors; I both look at language as a resource for enacting and producing feminist meanings and also seek to demystify patriarchal ones.³⁶ Critical stylistic activity may be, as Weber suggests, an 'interpretative and interested enterprise' (p. 5) which does not aim to close down meaning but rather to engage with potential meanings. I approach it through an amalgam of theory and practice. Here again, the ways in which I retain such oppositional terms (theory and practice) even as I try to change the relationship between them reflects how I slip from one way of thinking into another. Literature, with its 'sense of an ending',³⁷ by women becomes a way in to imagining what it might mean to feminists to write in particular ways. I claim that the practices, always interactive, that I invoke from within writing and reading can have larger application than I am able to cover here. They will extend to any feminist engagement with text. Issues of choice and intent will necessarily arise in this movement towards reading and writing from feminist perspective. It still matters to me who writes. I have not yet emerged into a world where Foucault's indifferent questioning suffices.³⁸ What am I trying to tell you about my intentions? If I were to say now *I tell you Foucault is wrong: he does not make sense* I would be speaking in ways which contradict these intentions: I do not want to *tell* you

³⁵And this is true of Terry Threadgold's recent approach although there is much of interest in her text.

³⁶A selective adaptation of editor Jean Jacques Weber's introductory 'Towards Contextualized Stylistics: An Overview', in *The Stylistics Reader: From Roman Jakobson To the Present* (New York: Arnold, 1996), pp. 1-7. Further reference is given to this edition after quotation in the text.

³⁷From Frank Kermode's famously descriptive *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967).

³⁸'What is an Author?', in *The Foucault Reader*, pp. 101-20: 'And behind all these questions, we would hear hardly anything but the stirring of an indifference: What difference does it make who is speaking?' (p. 120).

anything but stories that I hope will engage you in thinking; I do not want to sound with only one voice; I do not want to make claims that leave no space for your own thoughts; I do not think that making sense is simply the right thing to do; and since Foucault's writing practice resists such authorial certainty and necessity I have not done justice to his writing by returning this authority to him so crudely in my grammatical formulation of Foucault as hero of his own text. Perhaps I meant to say *sometimes I catch a glimpse of what these words show and sometimes it eludes me: sometimes they show something else: but I will try to speak about these things.*

In suggesting that I practise feminist, contextualized, critical stylistics it is my intention to fashion a space for myself in which I can debate on the dynamic relationship between reader and text. This posits me on the borders of a number of disciplines: pragmatics, 'the science of literature seen in relation to its users';³⁹ the burgeoning field of reader-response theory,⁴⁰ which is exemplified in the feminist field by *Gendering The Reader*;⁴¹ and functional grammar that 'is designed to account for how the language is used'.⁴² This space that I create both insists on identifiable aspects of text that encourage particular readings and on the existence of readers who may or may not confirm such claims. It allows me to imagine other

³⁹Jacob L. Mey, *Pragmatics: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), p. 5.

⁴⁰I am undoubtedly influenced by Wolfgang Iser's analysis of the reading process. However, in *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), Iser's move, however dynamic, is always towards 'what makes it possible for the unfamiliar to be understood' (p. 294). My own interest lies not in coming to such understanding through reading, but rather in two other directions: what can reading/writing show feminists about their own writing/speaking practice (chapters two, four and five relate to this question); and that reading might reveal that the unfamiliar cannot and need not be understood (chapter three addresses this issue). For a critique of Iser's reading practice as ideologically informed (by liberal humanism), see Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), pp. 74-82. I might suggest that Eagleton's response is also ideologically informed (by Marxism), and acknowledge that my own practice is ideologically informed (by feminisms).

⁴¹The first essay in this text is Sara Mills, 'Reading As/Like a Feminist', (pp. 25-46). I share her recognition that 'language serves as both a cue for possible readings and a site from which to resist those readings' (p. 25). Her concern is with how readers map out a 'subject position' (p. 41) for themselves in relation to the text: in my next chapter I begin to look at the grammatical resources and their implications for writers and readers looking to formulate different subject positions.

⁴²M. A. K. Halliday, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* (London: Arnold, 1985; second edition 1994), p. xiii, his emphasis. Unless otherwise stated and for specific purpose, further references are to the first edition and given in brackets after quotation.

responses but also to check these out on occasion. It is an eclectic space filled with different kinds of readings and readers which I will now go on to outline.

Rereadings

It is a strange experience to find myself agreeing with Harold Bloom but it is only for a moment. He insists that

One ancient test for the canonical remains fiercely valid: unless it demands rereading, the work does not qualify.⁴³

I am drawn to texts which demand to be read again for some reason: this is not, however, because I wish to establish any kind of canon but because they make me think again, and, as I shall go on to show, provide a means of illustrating significant issues for feminisms. I have already left Bloom behind since he also insists that

The study of literature, however it is conducted, will not save any individual any more than it will improve any society.⁴⁴

I also leave behind John Bayley who, working from a Bloomian perspective as regards the canonical I suspect, dismisses Angela Carter's oeuvre as not worthy of repeated readings.⁴⁵

As I shall demonstrate most particularly in my last chapter, he only succeeds in revealing his limitations as a reader.

⁴³*The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages* (first published New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994; this edn London: Macmillan Papermac, 1995), p. 30. For most of the time I am happy to belong to his 'School of Resentment' (p. 25).

⁴⁴Ibid p. 31. Ultimately, Bloom wants literature to be about facing up to death: 'the final form of change' (p. 31). I am also in disagreement here with some feminist theorists who feel that literature has no role or force for change in the political arena. See, for instance, Rosemary Hennessy for whom this is a persistent theme throughout *Material Feminism and the Politics of Discourse* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

⁴⁵'Fighting For the Crown', in *The New York Review of Books*, 23 April 1992, pp. 9-11. Quoted and discussed by Hermione Lee in "'A Room of One's Own, or a Bloody Chamber?': Angela Carter and Political Correctness", in *Flesh and the Mirror: Essays on the Art of Angela Carter*, ed. by Lorna Sage (London: Virago, 1994), pp. 308-20 (pp. 309-11).

Each act of rereading produces something different. Rereading has become something of a habit for me. Different aspects, moments and stylistic features move in and out of focus. A word at the end can change the way all the other words are read. This process (always in movement) of reading will come itself into focus in my third chapter. I can illustrate it briefly here again with reference to my experience of reading *Dust Tracks*. This text has the capacity to induce multiple responses from delight to rage, from complicit understanding to conscious disengagement. It depends who I am reading as. In part I try to read it as its critics do: distressed by the bitter alienation from 'my people'. But I also read it as a text which refuses to produce a coherent voice, a party line. I read it in that sense as a predecessor, a source of empowerment, as I seek no single coherent voice, no party line on feminism, but rather a way of speaking that moves **beyond** such limitations.

Multiple readings

I think it will already be apparent that I propose that different readings can coexist, although one of these is likely to be foregrounded at any one time for any one reader. This notion of foregrounded and backgrounded readings, perhaps less dialectically expressed as ever-shifting focus, will itself be subject to shifting emphasis as one way into seeing things differently.

Justified Readings

In what may be perceived as a return to reading in the dominant mode, I shall justify the claims for each reading that I make, and do this in the stylistic voice which shows patterns and their exceptions within the text, but which draws on wider grammatical explanations as the grounding for these analyses. This is to move out of the perspective which refuses to risk such meaningful interpretations and to resist Stanley Fish's suggestion that such patterning,

rather than the source of exploration of meaning, is rather only something imposed on the text by the perpetrator of meaning. It is not however to return to New Criticism's claim that there is one correct reading to be recovered, since it is increasingly accompanied by the call to the reader to engage in these processes and to respond with her/his own justified readings. In some sense, it is the provocation of this active engagement which comes to encapsulate the political and ethical intent of this thesis.

Misreadings

This may be an even more contentious notion than that of justified readings with which it is closely associated. For a while it seemed as though the reader would become the sole source of meaning, so that no reading could be designated as a misreading.⁴⁶ I shall propose, however, that the dominant perception of the relationship between text and reader is that it is an interactive one. I shall adopt this perception. But I shall claim at moments (justified) that the reader may simply produce the same old stories through the shorthand of habit and expectation and not see what is actually there. We need other ways of looking.

Active Rereaders (Even Real Ones)

Someone once said to me: "You're trying to make us read things twice". This was not so. I did not wish to limit them in that way. But I wanted each reading to converse with some aspect of the text. It is this approach which leads to that sense of shifting focus: if you read

⁴⁶Stanley Fish is very entertaining on the practice of his own misreadings in 'Interpreting the *Variorum*', in *Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), pp. 147-73, repeatedly removing his own feet from under him in a series of self-de(con)structive moments, but of course he is also destabilizing readers of his readings. Henceforth referred to as *Is There a Text in This Class?*, further reference is given to this edition after quotations in the text.

to see how a text employs time adverbials for instance you will produce a particular emphasis and start to observe other linguistic themes which call for you to read all over again. Perhaps this time you will have commas on your mind which in turn will lead you to see something else begin to resonate. Read again. In my own experience, these rereadings are always preceded by one which, in the old way, seeks to get to the end, to find out what happened. Once there, I am released into contemplation; 'slow, attentive readings'. This term is Dorothy Richardson's (and I shall locate it in my final chapter) but is not unconnected to Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth's later evocation of 'new acts of attention' which she finds induced by reading postmodernist texts.⁴⁷ I want to suggest both that it is alright to read in different ways and also that attentive readings can be induced by all kinds of texts. In order to know something of others' reading practices, I engage family, friends and fellow students as readers: they will surface in my third chapter which rests on such processes.

What Kind of Texts?

Against this background, it is time to turn to the particular stories, the texts, that I want to talk about and to elucidate further the means by which I shall engage with them. It is worth recapitulating that my overall narrative is a quest for grammatical enactment of feminist perspective, a quest that encounters problems and pitfalls along the way. Although I touch on other aspects, the core of this turns out to be an exploration of representations of subjectivity in all its guises, and reflection on their potential for feminist expression.

I use literary texts to begin with since they provide that 'sense of an ending', that is to say an imaginative exploration of what the consequences of a particular mode of discourse might be. But I use all kinds of other texts such as theoretical ones and Introductions to texts too,

⁴⁷*Sequel to History: Postmodernism and the Crisis of Representational Time* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 58. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

refusing to value one mode of representation above another, in just one version of the story of feminist border crossings. However, although I may produce more than one reading of the same text, I do not claim, any more than Derrida does, that any reading has the same value as any other. I place my justification for my readings firmly within grammatical possibilities, a mode that will become clearer as it is practised. This does not rule out an application of the story of 'warm' to grammar itself. How might new rules emerge to convey new experiences? I base my grammatical analysis in the work of M. A. K. Halliday and Randolph Quirk *et al.* It might be worth pointing out already that I find the latter full of spaces for feminist perspective, whereas I find that I have to create these in the former. I read these grammars as texts too. I cannot refer to a feminist grammar text: that is still to be written. The relevant points of grammar will be explored as and when required. All of the literary texts that I dwell on are written by women. My concern is not whether they can be identified as feminist but what feminists can learn from them as imaginative exercises in ways of speaking and writing. I then apply what I have learned to feminist theoretical texts.

In the next chapter I recount one story of subjectivity through Mary Shelley's evocation of Frankenstein in *Frankenstein* and propose as feminist countervision to this monstrous male signifier Angela Carter's ambivalent nameless protagonist in her short story 'The Bloody Chamber'. I do not let boundaries of chronological time or of genre limit my exploration. This story of mine adapts some of Halliday's grammar of agency (who acts?), providing an overview of the ideology of *I* statements which analysis is absent from his own presentation, and applies this in a concentrated way to moments in the texts. This approach is then widened out to look at cause and effect relations in 'The Bloody Chamber' through the grammar of coordinators, now adopting Quirk *et al* as a place from which to speak. I also draw on *Pilgrimage* in various ways, primarily as a source of speaking new ways of seeing. This speech will then reverberate throughout my conversation.

In the third chapter, I revel in a short story by Dorothy Edwards, 'A Country House'. This, like *Frankenstein*, features a woman's sounding of a male voice, in itself a timely corrective

to all those Shakespearian inventions of women who are taken for real and whose theatrical badmouthing of other women (I think of *As You Like It*'s Rosalind in particular)⁴⁸ is taken as evidence both of women's badness and of their lack of loyalty to each other. Edwards' text, I will argue, begs to be read again and again and illustrates the ethical necessity that we read with care whether we are reading a storybook or a world. Reading practice comes to the fore. This text is one that seems to me to bring out all the activities of reading that Ermarth discovers in postmodernist texts. Not only do I present the stages and processes of my own readings of 'A Country House', but I also bring in those other readers who agreed to participate by relating to me their experiences of reading the story. This practical exercise has helped me to hear other voices as I read. It has led to many wonderful conversations about how one does read. I continue to insist that, whilst there is no correct reading, all readings must be justified from the material of the text.

The fourth chapter marks another shift in focus. Whereas I have been concentrating on literary texts as a mode of illuminating feminist perspective, I now turn to feminist theoretical texts and their modes of speaking, picking up on previous elements in the conversation. The issue of representations (or not) of subjectivity come again to figure. The question that hovers throughout is: what options of representation are there and what might they mean? Reading is by now as significant as writing. The two processes are intertwined in ways that adopt and adapt reception theories. It is in this chapter that I am most aware of my own writing practice and ways in which this might convey the spirit as well as the sound of conversation. There is an underlying search for a discourse that enables me to critique as well as empathize with the other woman who reads or writes. I reread *Dust Tracks* as a

⁴⁸Threadgold writes very interestingly on the experience for women of acting Shakespearian roles, pp. 126-32. It is a major part of her project to bring the corporeal body in performance into her analysis. It strikes me as very strange however when a feminist chooses to analyse the speech of Rosalind and Celia as informative to feminist cause when this speech has been created by a man: for such a discussion see Clara Calvo, 'In Defence of Celia: Discourse Analysis and Women's Discourse in *As You Like It*', in *Feminist Linguistics in Literary Criticism*, ed. by Katie Wales (Cambridge: Brewer, 1994), pp. 91-115. This text is henceforth referred to as *Feminist Linguistics*.

genre-crossing text, this time in response to Dellita L. Martin's hostile Introduction, before going on to look at the discourses of Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose in their joint Introduction to *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the école freudienne*,⁴⁹ and Maggie Humm's Introduction to her own *Border Traffic: Strategies of Contemporary Women Writers*.⁵⁰ I focus on their respective linguistic representations of theoretical perspective from a problematizing rather than a diagnostic perspective. At times I will indicate where I find positive grammatical space for feminism: Angela Carter's work provides much of this. In the context of my agenda, it is not my intention to draw the conversation to a close. Instead, in my final chapter, I reiterate some moments even as I look forward to other ways of encapsulating feminist perspective in grammatical mode. I turn again to the texts of Angela Carter, who, in my readings, is consciously playing with such possibilities. I read *Dr Hoffman* as a grammatical exploration of 'border traffic' and *Heroes and Villains* as an adventure into the grammar of 'women's time'. I do not finish these stories. There is always another reading, another writing.

Intentions

Where preferences do surface, these arise out of my political intent. I write for a reason. This still seems to me a crucial notion for feminisms but one which needs further explication these days. I shall illuminate shifting and multiple perspectives through adoption of Williams' paradigm both to current thinking and to my own position on the thorny areas of *authorial intent* and *form and meaning*. This move also represents an attempt to show how I go about writing and reading.

⁴⁹Ed. by Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, trans. by Jacqueline Rose (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1982). Henceforth referred to as *Feminine Sexuality*. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

⁵⁰(Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991). Henceforth referred to as *Border Traffic*. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

Authorial Intent

It does not fit my political agenda any more than it fits my perception to say that authorial intent can be simply dismissed. For it matters to me how and why feminists (and indeed anti-feminists, but that's another story) write. There may be a world **beyond** where sex, gender, difference of any kind, have lost the need to have meanings but I can only imagine it; I do not see it around me yet. In this sense, I see it as too soon for feminisms to relinquish altogether not just the notion of writing with intent but even more so the notion that this intent can be read from within the text. This is not to embrace unquestioningly the New Critics' claim that there is one correct recovery of the author's meaning accessible through relentless analysis of the text; but it is to acknowledge that there are still active traces of this kind of experience, those moments of epiphany: *I know what she means!* It is also to acknowledge that there are times when I want to know and say just what she means: this desire will not simply disappear.

I wonder if I am right to suggest that the dominant view of authorial intent is that it is irrecoverable and irrelevant. I suppose it depends on which 'interpretive community' is reading.⁵¹ I want to lay claim to the following two-part proposal, both as the dominant method of my analysis,⁵² and as an approach with wider application for feminisms. The first part of the proposal arises out of the positive acknowledgement that different (residual, dominant, emergent) claims about critical issues will be active in varying strengths across the members of a group, an academic community for example. This creates space for flexible and interactive discussion. I want to propose that different claims, ways of seeing, can, like feminist perspectives, coexist in varying strengths within one individual. The resultant atmosphere of coexistence rather than competition seems to me a productive one.

⁵¹To adopt Stanley Fish's phrase (title and p. 171). I think it a helpful way of acknowledging that different stories have different status in different places.

⁵²And I mean *dominant* to assume ironic overtones since in Williams' depiction it is always deficient.

Furthermore, this move not only encapsulates the notion that there is no single authorial voice but also gives some space to the claim that I mean what I say. That will not be all that I say: there will be readings that I did not foresee arising both out of the language that I use and the context in which the reading takes place. But it will still be one of the things that I say. This matters both to how and why I write and read. I do not ever propose that there is an ending, a conclusive reading, whether it be of a text or a world. That is one of the reasons I adopt conversational mode. I do enter this conversation with commitment, always ready to read again. And I do claim at moments that the patterning of a text discloses something of this authorial intent. I will now reconceptualize this flexible approach, in the second part of my proposal, as the vision of the author (of a text or an action) who is both responsible for some and not responsible for all the consequences of her/his act: who is like Zora Neale Hurston both constructor and constructed. This doubled formulation will permeate my acts of reading and writing. I have seen a word for it. Angela Carter shows it to me in ‘The Bloody Chamber’. I shall **contrive** to write my intent.⁵³

In hesitating over what the dominant view of authorial intent actually is, I see that it is not easy to attribute a singular status to any idea. Within the rarified world of academia an idea may hold sway when the wider world has yet, if ever, to consider it. If I were to consider the status of these worlds themselves, I might wonder what that of the university is. Then I realize that within that world, as any other, feminism is accorded differential status. For instance, whilst I picture feminisms as still emergent and oppositional with much to be thought and done, others perceive it as already dominant and to be opposed.⁵⁴ Then again, underneath the umbrella term, feminism, different versions carry different status. Williams’ paradigm itself becomes a site of infinite deferral; Marxism in deconstruction. However, even as this is so, its value lies in its multiple ways of seeing, of shifting in and out of modes

⁵³This ‘contrived’ story will unfold in the next chapter. As **contrive** begins to take on significance within this thesis, marker for a particular feminist perspective, it is like **beyond** emboldened.

⁵⁴One such is Melanie Phillips who has a regular column in the *Observer* and who uses it to propound right wing views on the sacrosanct nature of the family as wage-earning father and nurturing mother.

of thought. I adopt it in preference to the Hegelian dialectic since, although this mode of thought is also always on the move the pressure is towards one of continuous synthesization rather than the perpetuation of the coexistence of different and contradictory ideas. With all this in mind I turn to the issue of form and meaning and begin to offer my version of that story.

Form and Meaning

Literary criticism, and indeed writing practice, used to have as a central focus discussion on the relationship between what is said (meaning) and how it is said (form). Theoretical resistance to oppositional modes of thought (loosely called postmodernism) has led to a powerful movement within recent criticism which says that no such distinction can be made: either since form and meaning are indivisible, or since they are one and the same thing. Form is meaning. I might characterize this singular view for a moment as postmodernist even as I note that it is held by such various proponents as Stanley Fish and Elizabeth Ermarth.⁵⁵ Only for a moment though, since I also note that for a much earlier exponent of this claim that form and meaning cannot be differentiated, Benedetto Croce, it proves an essential part of his larger claim to the unity of a work of art, which is itself part of a larger claim about the unity of the world.⁵⁶ Residual meets emergent and for this moment they are as one. As with the death of the recovery of authorial intent, this absolute claim that form and meaning cannot be differentiated meets neither my political nor my perceptive needs. It seems to leave me silenced and I want to be able to say all kinds of things about form, asking whether some grammatical constructions produce feminist meanings more than others. These sayings will

⁵⁵Ermarth, p. 167. See subsequent discussion on Fish.

⁵⁶*The Aesthetic as the Science of Expression and of the Linguistic in General*, trans. by Colin Lyas (first published 1902; this edn Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.). This is a fascinating text which seems to me to introduce several ideas later associated with postmodernist thought, but for quite other purposes.

become clearer as my thesis proceeds. However, what I can say now is that I engage in a challenging and continuous way with ideas about the relationship between form and meaning. I shall start with Stanley Fish.

Talking Back to Stanley Fish

It is not easy to resist and challenge Fish since he, himself, undertakes this role in a disarming manner. I am talking about the opening essay of *Is There a Text in This Class?*, 'Literature in The Reader', which particularly intrigues me. But the Introduction to the text already acknowledges that he could not write these essays today 'because both the form of their arguments and the form of the problems those arguments address are a function of assumptions I no longer hold' (p. 1). Any essay on my part that insists that the form of the text remains and that it allows me to talk about Fish on form is likely to be swept away through the response that this attributes a stability to the text that Fish no longer allows (p. 12). In that I try to respect the view of the other, I should then be silent but I have something that I need to say. Fish tells a story that I find very interesting. It is the story of how two writers make a general claim that, as Fish is tempted into saying, 'language which pretends to precision operates to obscure the flux and disorder of actual experience' (p. 33). However, where Walter Pater's unstable sentence 'gives you the experience of having [the exact world] melt under your feet' (p. 34), A. N. Whitehead's 'simply does not mean what it says' (p. 33) because 'in its action upon us, [it] declares the tidy well-ordered character of actual experience' and, Fish goes on to say, 'that is its meaning' (p. 33). In other words, the end of Fish's story is that form is the whole of meaning and semantics are excluded from the performance of reading. It would seem that any 'well-ordered' sentence expresses a 'well-ordered' world whatever the words put into that order are. However, I hear a different ending and one that will emerge as crucial to my understanding of what feminist discourse might want to be. The form that I choose to speak in may or may not embody the semantic import.

My own contradictory version is *I use long words all the time*, where *I* patently do not do what *I* say *I* do.⁵⁷ Nor I cannot forget Paul Grice's wonderful maxim: 'be brief (avoid prolixity)'.⁵⁸ This is a tale that goes further back in time to Wordsworth's distinction between words that are an 'incarnation of the thought' as opposed to those that are 'only a clothing for it'.⁵⁹ I want to restore this distinction between form that embodies its meaning and that which does not and indeed stress it as an issue for feminist discourse. This enables me as a reader to ask *does she mean what she says* and as a writer to ask *do I say what I mean*.⁶⁰ It further enables me to ask whether feminists need to mean what they say and what value the paradoxical approach might hold. Where Fish's 'reader performs the characteristic action required of him by [Whitehead's] sentence, [that is] the fixing of things in their place' (p. 33), I anticipate a more attentive reader and she will wonder about what this disjunctive mode does and can do for her.

I can also say that I want to introduce a grain of sand into the notion of the singularity of the proposal that form is meaning. It sometimes seems to me that proponents of this claim, such as Fish and Ermarth, ought to propose one word (the same thing) to embody it, otherwise they are in danger of not meaning what they say. I however shall often say, when I am not insisting on a clash between the two, that form is meanings and that this plurality also enables me to keep talking about what form does. This move is consistent with the multiple readings that Ermarth gives of postmodernist texts.

Thus, the Minotaur's tale, 'I am lying', revived by Lacan and taken as evidence by Jacqueline Rose that there are always two speakers in the single form *I* (*Feminine Sexuality*, footnote, p. 47), might be rewritten as *I cannot say what I mean* for *I* is too singular to embody *myself*

⁵⁷This phrase, *I use long words all the time*, will be recalled on occasion and is intended to evoke that sense of a clash between form and meaning.

⁵⁸*Studies in the Way of Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 27.

⁵⁹'Essays Upon Epitaphs, III' (1810?), in *Wordsworth's Literary Criticism*, ed. by W.J.B. Owen (London: Routledge, 1974), pp. 150-65 (p. 154).

⁶⁰I wish to emphasize that at no point would such a distinction have anything to say about a women's 'no' being taken to mean 'yes'. The distinction that I create always refers to the words that are actually spoken.

across different times just as the claim that form is meaning is too much (in lexical items) if it is to be only one thing. In other words, the problem can be recast as a grammatical one (lack or excess) rather than an existential one. I shall often speak about the story of form as meanings. It has no ending.

What Can Language Do?

The question of what language can do will not go away. In a way, this thesis is a meditation thereon, one which acknowledges that I do not know the answer but that a state of wonderment allows for optimum possibilities. There are those who say that they do know the answer. For each such answer there are differing feminist responses and some of these will emerge in the course of the thesis. In the light of such complexity I will begin to tell these stories in my own way.

One answer is that language does everything. Language determines what you are and how you conceptualize the world. Another answer is that language gets things done. Some would say that you can use language to get the things that you want done. I can draw out these issues further by entering into an intriguing debate that the linguist, Deborah Cameron, sets up with herself over time through *Feminism and Linguistic Theory*.⁶¹ In her preface to the second edition she alerts the reader to the fact that there are changes and to how she manages them:

If I disagree with the earlier Deborah Cameron, should I preserve coherence by pretending I don't, disown her views completely or argue with her in the text? I have chosen after considerable thought to make occasional use of the last strategy, (p. ix)

⁶¹First edition London: Macmillan Press, 1985. Second edition Macmillan Press, 1992. Further reference is given to each edition after quotations in the text.

This statement might encapsulate my own position just as it reflects a more imaginative engagement with the matter in hand. I had already formed my disagreements with the earlier Deborah Cameron before encountering the second edition and finding that she had already passed me by. I can show what I mean through letting Cameron talk back to herself.

The first edition is marked by certain aims in every sense of the words. Cameron sets out to refute in its entirety the notion of linguistic determinism and it follows that she must then also refute the notion that different ways of speaking/writing might induce different conceptions of the world. She will not allow any connection. Cameron also resists the idea that words rather than actions get things done: language is being attributed too much power. Yet, at the end, she allows that change can occur in one's thinking through linguistic choices that one makes. And she allows (after Trevor Pateman) that 'the unthinking acceptance of other people's definitions will go hand-in-hand with a general reluctance to question the way the world operates' (p. 172). She proposes the importance of 'radical discourse' (p. 173) which is 'the very opposite of idle discourse' since

It constantly questions the metalinguistic practices by which idle discourse is created and encouraged and thus by which power relationships are reproduced. It questions, also, the stability of meaning, and asserts very forcefully that we can change our usage by a conscious act of will. (p. 173)

I could not reconcile these different moments in Cameron's text although I think that I was meant to. I tended to hear her saying that change would occur through thoughtful use of particular lexical items not large-scale structural modifications. And I tended to hear this as a concern with meaning that is separate from form. This was not to dismiss her programme. I no longer can hear *he* in any generic sense. I think that the linguistic choice that I made - not to use *he* as a generic representation - followed a change in my thinking, and consistent refusal of *he* has established a different process of reception. *He* statements no longer ever refer to me. I experience this as an interactive process between thought and representation that always allows for *what if*. There was no *what if* in Cameron's text. She knew all of how

language works and what feminists could and could not do. In search of a coherent theoretical position, she was able to state: 'Fortunately for human communication, this model of meaning is false' (p. 139). By the second edition of 1992 these words have disappeared and she acknowledges much less certainty and a corresponding increase in openness to different positions. 'We don't all need to "come to terms" ' (p. 15, second edition) with what language can do. The dogmatic note has gone. There is space now for pluralities, for a modified determinism and for a richer sense of 'the power to shape new meanings for a different and better world' (final words, second edition). I can live in this space, staying open to Drucilla Cornell's admonition, that we do not sufficiently see 'the performative power of language' (p. 18), wanting to imagine, to be open to the latter's claim that 'the rewriting of the feminine can [...] be transformative, not merely disruptive' (p. 2). To speak a different way is to bring that way into existence. This would be one way of characterizing the projects of Hélène Cixous or Luce Irigaray. This notion is itself a transformation of J. L. Austin's work on performatives, which he identifies as a select group where the words, in being spoken in particular circumstances, bring about what they say, bring a changed reality into being.⁶² One classic example, *I now pronounce you man and wife*, is surely enough to make any feminist think of transformation of some kind. If I do not feel able to say with certainty that to speak/ write another way is to make that way happen, I do still feel able to say *what if*. This questioning and tentative approach is informed by an awareness of the dangerous game of thinking that *I know*. There are always unforeseen consequences and I do not know what they will be. I want to trade in imaginative possibilities rather than imaginary certainties. I wonder what language can do for me. One of the ways in which I wonder is how feminisms might talk about subjectivity and responsibility.

⁶²*How to Do Things With Words*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962).

What Can I Do?

My concern here is not with old (male) stories about rational autonomous agents but about different feminist takes on the dissolution of such coherent fantasies and about how these differences are spoken. This theme will haunt this thesis so for now I will simply tell another tale. It is an ethical one. In her search for rhetorical spaces, Lorraine Code aims to show the inadequacy of the dominant concept of objective knowledge/objective knowers. In an intriguing move, she does not deny objectivity but rather insists that 'objectivity *requires* taking subjectivity into account' (p. 44, her emphasis). There are no 'purely neutral observers' (p. 44). You must bring yourself into the equation. She enacts this principle in her own text both by acknowledging how events in her own life shape her concerns (p. xv) and by bringing her *I* into the text. It is these personal gestures which enact her feminism as one that shows how observation of data is always affected, I might add infected, by the self, thereby opening up new ways of seeing things. She is concerned that 'responsibility and accountability' should be on the surface.

Diane Elam has a very different take on the same matters. Her ethical commitment is to 'turning away from subjective agency' (p. 106) for it only repeats the illusion of that rational autonomous agent. There is a significant slippage in her text between 'the absence of the subject' or politics/ethics 'without a subject', and 'a politics that is not centred on as subject' or 'an ethics in which the subject is at stake' (pp. 106-7). In my reading and for my purposes there is a great deal of difference between the absence of a subject and the presence of a decentred or uncertain subject. This theoretical slippage in Elam's text is also visible in the interjections of an *I* expressed in similar terms to those of Code: even as Elam discusses this 'absent subject', such formulations as 'my concern', 'I want to explore', 'I do not mean to suggest', 'I think' (pp. 106-7) abound. These are not incompatible with an uncertain subject but do not voice the absence of a subject. There are moments in the text which do encompass that absence, which attribute activity to abstract concepts: 'it is in this way that

deconstruction and feminism reveal that ethical judgments are actually groundless' (p. 108). Elam will make a different move in her next (editorial) text. I shall return to this as I shall to *Feminism and Deconstruction*. This eventful text needs to be read. I shall also be returning to ways of (not) speaking the self and their relationship to responsibility in subsequent chapters. For now it suffices to begin to show how feminists seek to perform their notion of subjectivity in their text, and to suggest that there are other attitudes and ways. I will mention one such briefly. Women who are black and feminist are not ready to talk of the absent subject when they are only coming into voice. They may however produce multiple and shifting subjectivities by strategies which do not write *I* out but rather tell contradictory and complex stories in the name of this *I*. I am thinking back to Zora Neale Hurston and forward to bell hooks.

For the purposes of my analysis I will generally group what I shall call subjectivity feminists together, now as the dominant story of feminism, and in distinction to what I shall call event feminism, the emergent story which 'turn[s] away from subjective agency' as nothing more than the keystone to the patriarchal castle. I shall be imagining *what if* the consequences of different ways of speaking selves could be envisaged, through fictional texts: and I shall be imagining how feminists might view their speech in the light of these stories. At different moments I will sound like a subjectivity feminist or an event feminist. Susan J. Hekman, who identifies herself as a postmodernist, produces as an insistent echo throughout her thesis the claim that no variegated positions are possible:⁶³ that would be to say in this instance that one cannot hold onto aspects of the old dominant story of subjective agency even as one might want to explore the emergent story of event. I find myself, however, in this in-between world and will indeed continue to explore its constitution in the chapters ahead. The

⁶³*Gender and Knowledge: Elements of a Postmodern Feminism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), p. 7, passim. Hekman talks more recently about 'the discursive subject [which approach] allows [feminists] to posit an "I" with agency without reference to a presocial identity divorced from discursive forces', in 'Subjects and Agents: The Question for Feminism', in *Provoking Agents*, pp. 194-207 (pp. 202-3). As Hekman does not give examples of how this 'discursive subject' would speak (in her own writing she uses *I* sparingly), I cannot come to see what she means.

framework of coexistent and contradictory narratives will prove more conducive to my ways of reading than the notion of paradigmatic leaps in thought espoused by Thomas Kuhn.⁶⁴ bell hooks is one of those who seeks to read both these stories with respect in *Yearning*. hooks eloquently enunciates the need for women whose voices have been suppressed - black women being doubly silenced - to come to a voice of their own and invokes black cultural practice of giving testimony as one means to this end. However, she goes further. At the level of theory she embraces the idea that feminisms could produce very different notions of subjectivity from patriarchal ones: that is to say that one can intervene with intention, construct oneself as well as be constructed. She also endorses the notion of subject-in-progress, never finished, and accepts that this self will have different aspects. But what I find really interesting is how she incorporates these views into her writing practice, not so much in the turn of a phrase but in the way that she produces what I hear as the inner conversation of hooks' selves. In this way of reading her I hear the echo of Zora Neale Hurston, about whom hooks also writes positively. hooks, I suggest, induces this multiple status in her reader. I shall talk about her ways of doing this in chapter four.

Some Words About Words

Definitions are restrictive: I take an eclectic approach towards them. On occasion I turn to the *OED* because the contents allow me to show something of significance. This move is analogous to my dependence on grammatical texts and paradigms as springboards from which to get somewhere else. On other occasions I try to respect the practices of the speaker to/of whom I am talking. This is not to be read as an unquestioning endorsement of any discourse, but rather an ethical commitment to other voices. It is not a rule. Already I have

⁶⁴In *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd edn (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1970).

refused to meet Fish entirely on his terms. However it is a strategy, with some tactical diversions. This leads to the following practices.

I use the word *postmodernism* with care. In my reading, it is often a label used by theorists who are unsympathetic to different ways of seeing and who try to establish multiple aspects as one construct which can be understood and then rejected. This position can be found for instance in the recent overviews of second wave feminism by Imelda Whelehan and Judith Evans.⁶⁵ Whilst they embrace feminisms (liberal, Marxist, lesbian, black) rather than feminism and try to get beyond essentialist notions of what woman is, they are both highly critical of what they designate postmodernist feminism which they characterize as politically disabling to women. (Neither enters into the realm of psychoanalytic feminism at all.) I do say *postmodernism* when it reflects the choice of the speaker. Cornell uses it with reluctance (*Beyond Accommodation*, note 1, p. 207). Ermarth embraces it throughout *Sequel to History*, at no point raising its (de)merits. In *Feminist Contentions*, where Judith Butler rejects it (p. 35), Seyla Benhabib uses it to critique the positions she assumes for it (p. 17).

I shall want to talk of *deconstruction* but I shall always try to remember that it is not a theory or a method, something that *I* do. Elam quotes Derrida:

Deconstruction takes place, it is an *event* that does not await the deliberation, consciousness, or organization of a subject, or even of modernity. *It deconstructs itself. It can be deconstructed* [Ça se déconstruit].⁶⁶

This notion of event, which I might characterize as *something happened*, is an attempt to write over the dominant idea of human agency, which I might characterize as *I did something*.

⁶⁵Whelehan, *Modern Feminist Thought: from the Second Wave to 'Post-Feminism'* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), pp. 194-215. Evans, *Feminist Theory Today: An Introduction to Second-Wave Feminism* (London: Sage, 1995), pp. 125-42.

⁶⁶Derrida, 'Letter to a Japanese Friend', trans. by Andrew Benjamin, in *Derrida and Difference*, ed. by David Wood and Robert Bernasconi (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988), p. 4. Quoted in *Feminism and Deconstruction*, p. 12, emphasis on 'event' Elam's. The double sense of 'ça se déconstruit', given by Elam in her translation, shows that languages other than English have resources for (con)fusing agency.

I cannot pretend to see the world in this way for more than fleeting glimpses but I can recognize it as an ethical act. It would contradict what deconstruction is to talk of it as something that people do, make it manageable. And Elam is very careful about her words. Therefore it seems that I must resist *deconstructors* and *deconstructionists*. Although Elam uses both these terms (with, I presume, ironic overtones) more frequent are *deconstruction is/does* and *deconstructive move* formulations.⁶⁷ None of this is disconnected to Elam's wavering between the absent subject and the decentred subject that I raise above. Even as I try to hear this deconstructive voice, I shall wonder whether there are not other ways of speaking the 'politics of the undecidable' (p. 81) with which my rendition of the story of child abuse should show that I wish to engage.

Elam resists definitions not because they are restrictive but because they are impossible: 'We do not yet know what women *are*' (p. 27, her emphasis). Cornell evokes the notion of 'the specificity of the feminine imaginary and the feminine' (p. 22, *passim*) without ever trying to define what it is. Neither sex nor gender provides a secure foundation. Yet I want to talk about women. So I invoke a multiple and uncertain narrative. I know that woman has been defined as lack against the imaginary norm of man. I know something of what women look and sound like but I know too that none of this has a secure foundation. Stories of sex designation at birth (*we'll call this a girl and try to make it so*) and technological births of various kinds, but also the multiplicity of gender positions that now proliferate disrupt simplistic claims of what woman or man might be. And I do not want to limit what women can become. I do not want to draw up false or immovable boundaries that limit us by sex or gender. I am not drawn by Cameron's declaration, in the first edition of *Feminism and Linguistic Theory*, that 'the dogma that men too can be feminine subjects and feminists [...] has to be discarded at once, for power in society is as a matter of established fact assigned not on the basis of identification choices, but simply on the basis of biological sex. And

⁶⁷*Feminism and Deconstruction*, p. 7 and p. 124 (note 23). See also p. 122 (note 10) for a reference to Derrida's dismissal of such terminology.

there is thus no choice about whether you are an oppressor or one of the oppressed' (p. 132).⁶⁸ This sounds like the story has always already ended. I might turn that 'dogma' back on her. But neither I am drawn to Kristeva's infamous celebration of Joyce and Mallarmé as the producers of *écriture féminine* that is worth writing about.⁶⁹ I might want to imagine a world where there are no distinctions made on gender grounds but I do not yet see it. So I allow myself a flexible notion of women: there is a trace of sex and gender just as there is a faint outline of their extinction. My agenda is not a separatist one but rather one that recognizes that there are many things to be done before the sign and signifiers that are woman and man cease to have the significance of a difference which is marked by man as the norm from which woman deviates. This is a distinction which need not pertain but still has the status of dominant perspective. This must be borne in mind even as feminists look to move **beyond** it according to their dreams.

This flexible approach to meaning extends towards the term and concept *patriarchy*. It is not my intention to erect a monolithic version which can be directly attacked. Rather, I have a sense of a set of structures whereby men wield power and influence over women, and a sense of a set of attitudes which support and maintain these structures. I do not have a sense of which comes first or of how either originated. The dominant story that is patriarchy must be unwritten in any way that feminisms can imagine. In what follows, I shall where appropriate identify the specific notion of patriarchy that I have in mind at that moment.

I shall have recourse to words like *ideology* and *metaphor*. I suggest that we can only tell stories about how we understand the world we inhabit. As the cognitive linguists, Lakoff and Johnson put it: 'Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is

⁶⁸Ermarth makes a similar point in her essay, 'On Having a Personal Voice', in *Changing Subjects: The Making of Feminist Literary Criticism*, ed. by Gayle Greene and Coppélia Kahn (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 226-39 (p. 234).

⁶⁹'Among the capitalist mode of production's numerous signifying practices, only certain literary texts of the avant-garde (Mallarmé, Joyce) manage to cover the infinity of the process, that is, reach the semiotic *chora*, which modifies linguistic structures': 'Revolution in Poetic Language' (1974), trans. by Margaret Waller, in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. by Toril Moi (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), pp. 90-136 (p. 122).

fundamentally metaphorical in nature'.⁷⁰ It is then a question of which metaphorical vision offers most. But it is also the necessity of recognizing that claims to know the world are simply the imposition of one such metaphorical vision. This is how I understand ideology. This enables me to say that all ways of speaking are attempts to enact one's vision, without insisting that any way is necessarily more truthful than another. However, I also want to say that different ways may be more or less truthful to a particular vision: *do you say what you mean?* I do not think that the claim that all ways of seeing the world are metaphorical is taken sufficiently into account either by a grammarian such as Halliday or by critics of *écriture féminine*. The dominant view remains that *I did something* constitutes the real way of seeing the world: texts on style may continue to insist that this mode equals the 'clear and direct' way of communicating.⁷¹ I often think this myself, but I do not want to think only this. Alternative ways of thinking and modes of expression must emerge. George Lakoff writes of 'the divided-person metaphor', 'the loss-of-self metaphor', and 'the true-self metaphor'.⁷² He gives them all the status of metaphoric visions. From this kind of perspective, not-*I* discourses produce other metaphorical visions and *écriture féminine* is another metaphorical way of seeing the world rather than an entirely different way. I might explain my contradictory allegiance to the vision of *I* as something real and clearly identifiable, and to *I* as a series of metaphorical representations by saying that I reside within the dominant perspective even as I try to reach out to emergent ones. Which ways of speaking shape feminist vision of the world?

Feminists enter into these stories in different ways. There are those who believe that *I did*

⁷⁰George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1980), p. 3. Lakoff and Johnson do not wonder whether *I act* is a metaphorical concept although they do look at *things* as metaphorical actors. (Though see Lakoff below.) The possibility that both are metaphorical ways of seeing becomes crucial to my discussion.

⁷¹Joseph M. Williams, *Style: Towards Clarity and Grace* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1990), p. 21.

⁷²'Sorry, I'm Not Myself Today: The Metaphor System for Conceptualizing the Self', in *Spaces, Worlds, and Grammar*, ed. by Giles Fauconnier and Eve Sweetser (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1996), pp. 91-123 (p. 102, 104, and 106 respectively).

something is the viable way to see the world: this visionary capacity must however be extended to the previously invisible woman. This grouping includes liberal feminism which wants all that is understood of and available to man to be applied to woman; in political terms, equal rights for all. It also includes their political opponents, Marxist feminists, who want our false (patriarchal as well as class) consciousness to be swept aside so that our true selves can come to fruition. A further differentiation between these two alliances might be that liberal feminism espouses the strong version of the self, believing that the attainment of full rational and autonomous agency equals fulfilment, whereas Marxist feminism is the weak version, committed to a sense of community above individuality.⁷³ And there are much more subtle analyses that combine Marxist and psychoanalytic perspectives to produce notions of multiple subjects, and subjects-in-process.⁷⁴ Event feminism - which speaks the discourse of *something happened* - is evoked to considerable effect by Elam. This mode of speaking is also used for different effect by the psychoanalytic feminism of Mitchell and Rose which endorses the notion of the decentred subject. In this story, the truth that there are only ever fragmented selves has been covered up by the illusion of a coherent self which is expressed as *I*. That *I* must be erased.

Ways of speaking the self are taking on renewed ideological force, and it is at this moment that I want to join in, have my say and try to push the boundaries of what I can imagine all this might mean to feminisms. I will tell this story another way. One of the crucial moments in second wave feminism was the declaration that 'the personal is political'. This was formulated as a response both to the exclusion of woman from the public world (of politics

⁷³In producing these general formulations, I am reading events for a moment from liberal and Marxist perspective. *Feminisms: A Reader*, ed. by Maggie Humm (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), provides an overview of different feminist perspectives. In *Feminisms*, liberal feminism is represented by an extract from Betty Friedan's *The Feminist Mystique* (1963), p. 183, and socialist/Marxist feminism by, amongst others, an extract from Michèle Barrett's *Women's Oppression Today: Problems in Marxist-Feminist Analysis* (1980), pp. 112-115.

⁷⁴When Julia Kristeva talks of '*le sujet en procès*' this reflects her recognition of the paradox that the speaker both subverts and depends on the system. She practises her politics in and through language: 'The System and the Speaking Subject', in *The Kristeva Reader*, pp. 25-33.

and power) and also to the exclusion of the private world designated as womanly from the definition of what 'political' is. It has proved a potent attitude for many women who find solidarity and confidence in the consciousness-raising groups which grew out of this movement, and are making their way into the political arena, trying to change the scope of the agenda. Many feminists immersed in this approach are concerned that it has taken so long for women to find their voices and therefore strongly resist any move to replace them with the discourse of events. It is a major theme of Diane Elam's text to respond to this fear and to show how political action must still arise out of event discourse.

Reverting to Metaphor

the only difference is that she's taken as real what the rest of us pretend is only metaphorical⁷⁵

I have already talked about metaphor in different ways. I have endorsed Elam's *ms. en abyme* as a metaphor that creates a feminist picture. And I have allowed that all discourse may be metaphor even as I have insisted on the possibilities of saying what you mean. It is something of a relief to remember that *metaphor* is a long and contradictory story within philosophy. I will tell this briefly as far as it concerns me. Metaphor veils the truth: metaphor tells the truth: metaphor shows the impossibility of access to that single meaning that could be truth. Whilst I believe all of these claims from time to time, they are scary rather than fairy tales. Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson produce a convincing story that metaphor 'requires no special interpretative abilities or procedures'.⁷⁶ And, since no speech is 'an identical

⁷⁵Margaret Atwood, 'Polarities' (1971), in *Dancing Girls and Other Stories* (London: Virago, 1984), pp. 51-75 (p. 69). Further reference is given to this edition after quotations in the text.

⁷⁶*Relevance: Communication and Cognition* (Oxford: Blackwell, repr. 1994), p. 237. Further reference to this edition is given after quotation in the text.

reproduction [...] of a thought of the speaker's [this being] postulated on purely theoretical grounds' (p. 230), then it follows that all linguistic acts are metaphorical. I find these claims believable and enticing, but then again, Gerard Steen, in reply to Lakoff and Johnson, has produced an empirical study which insists on metaphor in literature as special, with functions of enhancement, clarity, and beauty, amongst others.⁷⁷ I have not entirely shaken Steen's special category off. Whilst I can hold these very different propositions (metaphor as the (unacknowledged) norm, and metaphor as a special category) together as dominant and emergent features of the way I look at things, there remains something to haunt me. Within this thesis lies the trace of the possibility of a distinction between metaphoric and not-metaphoric representation, always an exploration in progress. For my fear is that, if I accept only that all discourse is metaphorical, this seems to reduce rather than multiply ways of writing, speaking, meaning. Yet how is it other? Diane Elam talks about 'the landscape of metaphors help[ing] to explain groundless ethical judgments' (pp. 108-9), without wondering out loud whether this concept is problematic in terms of her larger claim that subjective experience is an illusion (p. 66). She might not accept my translation of this claim into *I do something* is a metaphor (and she most definitely resists any notion that deconstruction is a tool, the purpose of which is to dismantle an endless series of oppositions (p. 20-21)), but from my troubled perspective, for all her careful attention to language, she does not address how it is possible for her to continue to call some things metaphor (though I can see that she may be trying to unsettle, displace, the picture by not talking of *the metaphors of landscape*). *Pilgrimage* refuses any such distinction and indeed can be read as a sustained disruption of notions of real/imaginary, metaphoric/literal.⁷⁸ This refusal is at its most visible when Miriam thinks of Hypo's reaction to reading about her experience of having 'been up

⁷⁷*Understanding Metaphor in Literature: An Empirical Approach* (London: Longman, 1994).

⁷⁸This creeping recognition is confirmed by the insights of Alison Rawlinson (work-in-progress at the University of Edinburgh). I had always been puzzled about what Miriam actually saw and what she imagined (see IV, p. 595 and p. 608 for visionary moments) but, as Alison pointed out, this was because I was holding onto distinctions that are not to be found in the world of *Pilgrimage*.

amongst the rejoicing cloud-tops' (IV, p. 280): 'What she had just set down, he would take for metaphor. Up in the clouds. Seventh heaven. Any attempt to prove that it was not, would bring forth his utmost dreariness' (IV, pp. 281-82). I cannot yet extricate myself from my reluctant alignment with Hypo. Diana Fuss is similarly (and thus reassuringly) concerned about what counts as metaphor. In her discussion of Luce Irigaray's work she says 'one wonders to what extent it is truly possible to think of the "two lips" as something other than a metaphor. I would argue that, despite Irigaray's protestations to the contrary, the figure of the "two lips" never stops functioning metaphorically'.⁷⁹ And Miriam, I note, must retain a sense of what 'metaphor' is even as it does not encompass her experience. I might say something like this of Elam and of those others who bring feminism and deconstruction into relation.⁸⁰ Genevieve Lloyd expresses the complexity that I experience.⁸¹ Talking of Descartes, she points out that 'the metaphor of the mind in motion is so familiar to us [...] that it can be difficult to see that [it] is metaphorical at all' (p. 78). She talks of 'complex interaction between different constructions of metaphor' (p. 78) and of 'the tensions between different layers of metaphor' (p. 82). I will have cause to draw on her remarks. Where Lloyd provides a useful theoretical perception of metaphor, an article about Margaret Atwood's short story, 'Polarities', seems to promise to throw further light on metaphoric readings of the self by discussing 'the only difference is that she's taken as real what the rest of us pretend is only metaphorical'. But it does not comment on the effect of that 'pretend' inserted between any 'difference' in 'real' and 'metaphorical'.⁸² In my reading this 'pretend', bolstered by 'only', spirals the 'difference' out of control: seeing the world in

⁷⁹*Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference* (New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 66.

⁸⁰See also Cornell's extensive discussions on metaphor and of Derrida's 'suspicion' (p. 31) of it.

⁸¹'Maleness, Metaphor, and the "Crisis" of Reason', in *A Mind of One's Own: Feminist Essays on Reason and Objectivity*, ed. by Louise M. Antony and Charlotte Witt (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993), pp. 69-83. Further reference is given to this article after quotations in the text. Lloyd talks of metaphor from feminist and philosophical perspective through reading Margaret Whitford reading Luce Irigaray (as well as discussing Descartes and Derrida).

⁸²Isabel Carrera Suarez, ' "Yet I Speak, Yet I Exist": Affirmation of the Subject in Atwood's Short Stories', in *Margaret Atwood: Writing and Subjectivity, New Critical Essays*, ed. by Colin Nicholson (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1994), pp. 230-47 (pp. 244-46).

terms of polarities, as Louise is shown trying to do, leads to incarceration in 'the mental clinic' (p. 67). The story is a not unfamiliar one of destabilizing polarities of sanity and madness. But this 'pretend' statement is not made by some invisible omniscient narrator: it is what 'Morrison reflected' (p. 69), and Morrison, who elects to stand in for 'the rest of us', turns out to be no more stable in body or vision than Louise: 'His body was numb: he swayed. In the corner of his eye the old woman swelled, wavered, then seemed to disappear, and the land opened before him' (p. 75). Suarez (who virtually writes Morrison out) can read 'Polarities' as one more 'affirmation of the subject'. I read it as a continuous, expanding slippage away from what can be understood as real and as pretend. The reader loses his/her grip. The concepts of real and pretend are not only dismantled but also are transformed into a *mise en abyme*, a site of infinite deferral. And this is one way that I come to look at *metaphor* even as the (safe) traces of metaphor as special and identifiable category remain visible in my text.

An Afterthought: What Kind of Relationships With Men Who Write?

It will already be apparent that I am not beyond poaching the ideas of men. I have at the same time a lingering empathy with Elaine Showalter's aim of putting men's ideas behind us and concentrating on developing a 'feminist poetics' and the trace of this emerges in my fourth chapter, but I am also aware of Angela Carter's fictional theme of the inerasibility of 'that red mark' of patriarchal history on woman as one of the stories of 'The Bloody Chamber'. I am not entirely happy with the reaction that feminists should pick and mix what we want/need from men and justify it as a revenge act of appropriation and exploitation. So, whilst I have no difficulty in embracing the notion, as embodied by Kristeva amongst others, that feminism and maleness are not exclusive categories, that is to say that gender is

not the determining factor, rather it might be attitude or style,⁸³ I also have no difficulty in stating that I want now above all else to hear and proclaim women's voices as an act of installation, a necessary corrective to the largely silent past. I shall acknowledge the words of men but dwell on the words of women.

Marking Out Some Style Notes

For most of the time I resist putting words into quotation marks unless they are quotations. This is because I might want to argue that all words carry a certain instability of meaning and I do not want to presume where the reader will locate her/his sense of it; nor presume that the reader should hear the same things each time.⁸⁴ For this reason too, I have avoided placing emphasis on particular words except where these reflect another writer's strategy. I do mark **beyond** and **contrive**. I put my examples (alternative writings) into italics. This has the fortunate - for my purposes - side effect of producing *I do* forms which *I* makes no attempt to be identified with an individual coherent thinker, nor is objectified (compared to 'the "I"'), and holds a lively look. I also separate out short quotes and examples where I want them to catch the eye, to be thought about and easy to find if the reader wants to turn back on them. I have on the whole avoided summarizing the plots of texts as this would only reproduce the claim to know the story that they tell. At the same time I try to take account of Morwenna Griffiths' reminder that I must determine how much of a story needs to be told in order for the reader to be able to participate fully.⁸⁵

⁸³Kristeva desires that women move into the third phase where female/male is no longer construed as difference: 'Women's Time', in *The Kristeva Reader*, pp. 188-213.

⁸⁴In his recent publication, *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), Terry Eagleton calls these 'scare-quotes' (p. 126). The whole force of his argument is to restore political credibility to such terms as: essential, universal, history and subject.

⁸⁵*Feminisms and the Self: The Web of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 15-16.

'Getting Started'

I am inspired by women's words. They give me the faith to begin:

Mary sat at the table in the kitchen, with a notebook in front of her and a ballpoint pen in her hand. Not writing. Looking at the river. Getting started each morning was monstrous, an almost impossible exercise of will, in which finally the will was never enough, and it had to be begun on faith.⁸⁶

I become one more link in the chain of women who write, since Mary comes from the act of faith of Morag Gunn who comes from the act of faith of Margaret Laurence. Mary's 'not writing' can only be conveyed through writing. I see paradox and abyssal image. Laurence depicts the effort of bridging the gulf between having the tools of writing and using them for that purpose. And 'getting started' will prove 'monstrous' in deed as I turn to look at *Frankenstein* and 'The Bloody Chamber'.

⁸⁶Margaret Laurence, *The Diviners* (Ontario: McClelland and Stewart, 1974, repr. 1989), p. 185.

Chapter Two: Did I Do That, On Purpose? Reading *Frankenstein* and 'The Bloody Chamber'

She held the baby to the fire [...]. She held the fire to the baby. Bertrande dropped the baby in the fire. She said it was not an accident. Later, the priest tried to sort out the right words. Bertrande. The baby fell in the fire by accident.¹

In this chapter, I begin to read texts through the multiple lenses of feminist perspective addressed in the introduction. The persistent questions that I ask of these texts are: who acts? does s/he do so intentionally? and what can I do? To rephrase this in terms of feminist theory: how does the text present agency and how does this relate through the larger narrative of that text to the different stories of feminism? The grammatical formulation of this question is: what are the modes of construction available for representation of agency, and what if any is the significance of the mode employed? What I am doing then is taking the paradigms of grammar as a story which can be read as both parallel to and in conjunction with other stories, both fictional and theoretical.

I have separated out these strands only to draw them back in together. The questions and my responses are always interrelated: I look at grammatical options in the light of feminist theory as I look at the operations of agency in the text through that perspective. My intention is always to problematize: one feminist solution is another's dilemma. Readings will become just as significant as writings. My own concern in the midst of this can be situated at the point where the acceptance and expression of the loss of the notion of the integrated autonomous self, the one who knows what s/he does, also implies the loss of the notion of responsibility for one's actions and their consequences for others. My semantics are not accidental here. I am aware that I might also talk about the gain that accrues from fragmentative and deconstructive readings of the notion of the self. I might too have talked

¹Michèle Roberts, 'Anger', in *During Mother's Absence* (London: Virago, 1993), pp. 1-29 (p. 9).

of fact or idea rather than notion, but I find that I prefer the more nebulous conviction of the latter. It matters how I write. It is an ethical engagement. What is said and done in the name of academic feminism, what might be said and done, matters.

This mattering, which is another way of recognizing that actions have consequences, is one of the stories, at a narrative level, of the texts that I will come to concentrate on in this chapter.

In both Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Angela Carter's 'The Bloody Chamber',² these consequences go all the way: they are fatal - to others. I will show that each of these texts can be read as a story about who acted and whether they did so knowingly. I shall trace this through the grammar of agency that each text contains. Both share the condition of presenting the protagonists through first person narrative but each encapsulates a very different sense of self. I shall begin to introduce this grammar of agency, drawing in feminist engagement with the possibilities and implications of the options available, before reading *Frankenstein* and 'The Bloody Chamber' in that light.³

Introducing The Grammar Of Agency

I will effect this meeting through telling some stories as I gradually invoke Halliday's *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*, in an adoptive and adaptive reading drawn for feminist cause. I want to show not only the ways in which Halliday helps me understand and

²*Frankenstein* (1818 edn), ed. and intro. by Paddy Lyons (London: Dent Everyman, 1992). 'The Bloody Chamber', in *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (London: Penguin, 1981), pp. 7-41. Further references to these editions are given where appropriate after quotations in the text.

³Dennis Cooley, in 'Nearer by Far: The Upset "I" in Margaret Atwood's Poetry', in *Margaret Atwood: Writing and Subjectivity: New Critical Essays*, ed. by Colin Nicholson (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1994), pp. 68-93, sets out to 'show [...] how in style and grammar ... the speakers situate themselves by virtue of supervising their own narratives' (p. 67). However this never seems to me to go beyond a series of annotations of what "I" said, combined with a succession of rather dubious assertions. Cooley is very confident that he can hear the tone of the speaker. At one point 'the protagonist', 'cool, distant, deprecatory, opinionated', 'anchors herself with wit and certitude' (p. 84). My reservations are increased when he refers to an Atwood poem which talks of 'a frozen scowl/... my stunted child .../ my tiny nightmare' as 'affirming, accepting, celebratory' (pp. 88-89). My project does not impinge on his.

elucidate this grammar of agency, but I also want to go **beyond** his analysis by showing how grammatical choices can or cannot embody differing feminist worldviews, and by beginning to voice ethical engagement with these possibilities.⁴ I shall start to introduce the relevant grammatical concepts and my agenda by applying them in a questioning mode to moments in Halliday's own introductory text. Again, I should emphasize that grammar is my conversational opener, and as such always open to another reading: that is, text talks back to grammar. In a parallel move, certain aspects of grammar are taken as a starting point from which an interactive process (between text and grammar) can emerge. This strategy seems to defy Halliday's warning, after Whorf, that

it is naive and dangerous to take isolated phenomena and try to relate them to features of a culture [...]. Only the grammatical system as a whole represents the semantic code of a language. (p. xxxi)⁵

and is undoubtedly adopted because it is a way in to enabling me to have my say. I shall not lose sight altogether of Halliday's injunction. However, I have a different agenda which means that, as I read Halliday through feminist perspective, I will see things from points of view that he might not recognize. What I mean to say is that for my purposes Halliday's analysis does not take sufficiently on board the fact that grammatical formulations can both disguise and represent ideological ones. The insertion of this dimension is one of the ways in which I could be said to have adapted his work.⁶ It is with feminist ideologies and worldviews that I engage and I want to tell these stories in 'straight lines' of my own making

⁴In her introduction to *Provoking Agents*, Judith Kegan Gardiner invokes feminist perspectives through the series, 'I do', 'we shall overcome', 'shit happens', and 'act up' (pp. 2-10). However, the idea is not followed through in any detail.

⁵Though his own reading of Golding's *The Inheritors*, subjected to severe critique by Stanley Fish, seems to read world views through a particular emphasis on transitivity patterns.

⁶This is not to say that Halliday's formulation of functional grammar has not been used to highlight ideological factors at work in texts: see Gunther Kress, *Linguistic Processes in Sociocultural Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985). Deirdre Burton, who I will be referring to later in this chapter, is one of the first to bring a feminist perspective to such an analysis of texts. I however am taking a step further back in suggesting that there are ideological implications in Halliday's formulation.

and then in 'intricate interlocking circles'.⁷ In a sense it is one story: about an opening door and my move from one side to the other.⁸ But it can be told in more than one way:

I decided to open the door I opened the door I wanted to walk to the other side So I did

This is an extreme version of the story of a world within which *I* choose and control my thoughts and deeds, whereas

The door opened I found myself on the other side

unsettles this notion. *I*, although retaining in the grammar a sense of self as subject, do not act on the narrative. *I* only see the end result. In

The door opened Some event placed me on the other side

this sense of self recedes still further into the distance. Feminist discourses like Elam's have no sense of self. The question in my mind is whether this eliminating move is in the interests of feminism. I will read *Frankenstein* as a story (though it tells many others too) of such elimination at crucial moments, a story of a self who avoids responsibility to others for his actions by this very process of removing himself as agent from the scene.

I shall pause here to show how I am using the term *agent* as distinct from *actor*, for it will be crucial to my claims that some feminist writers do not give sufficient recognition to the difference and that this leads to an unnecessary drive to eliminate *I* from their texts. This distinction builds on the analysis of D. A. Holisky,⁹ and the work of Robert D. Van Valin, Jr, and David P. Wilkins,¹⁰ for Halliday never explicitly discusses whether or not an action can

⁷In *Dr Hoffman*, Desiderio says of Nao-Kurai, one of the river people, that 'he did not think in straight lines; he thought in subtle and intricate interlocking circles', (p. 79). Desiderio makes this comment in relation to Nao-Kurai's slow progress in learning to read. I want to think, speak, write, and read in both ways.

⁸This story of the opening door will reappear from time to time. I chose it initially because it served my purposes (and is a familiar one in grammatical analysis) and because I did not see both its literal and metaphorical significance for feminists. I then decided to retain it because of these reverberations.

⁹'The Case of the Intransitive Subject in Tsova-Tush (Batsbi)', in *Lingua* 71(1987), 103-32 (pp. 118-19).

¹⁰'The Case for "Effector": Case Roles, Agents, and Agency Revisited', in *Grammatical Constructions: Their Form and Meaning*, ed. by Masayoshi Shibatani and Sandra A. Thompson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 289-322 (p. 289).

be said to be done with intent.¹¹ *Agent* incorporates the notion of human and intentional force behind the act. *Actor* refers to the human participant who does something, but not necessarily with intention. Unless the context makes it clear that intentionality is a factor, it is habit or pragmatic inference which makes the reader ascribe agency to the action. Such expectations are higher in the environment of *I*. Indeed I draw on this expectation. However, if, in my first example above, I had only said *I opened the door* there would not be sufficient grounds for reading this as an intentional act: I may have done so inadvertently. In ‘turning away from subjective agency’ by removing *I* altogether from their discourse, feminists also lose the capacity to represent versions of a non-agentive *I*.¹² I wonder if feminists ought to find ways of writing which encapsulate an uncertain multiple *I* (subject and subjected) rather than writing it altogether out.

Alternatives which write out the human and/or any sense of intentional element carry their own dangers. I will read Frankenstein, the imaginative presentation of a self who writes himself out, with fatal consequences to others, as an apocalyptic warning across time and place to feminists who write themselves out. To tell that tale briefly, he writes out his agentive role after the birth scene by literally running away or fainting at crucial junctures, but he also does it at another level, that is through grammatical enactment, in the events leading to that birth. The distinction that I make here between ‘literal’ and ‘another level’ rests on the sense that the former is more visible, more evident in the manner of Genevieve Lloyd’s analysis that I outline in my introduction. Form is meaning. Do feminists who write their selves out mean what they say? In the protagonist of ‘The Bloody Chamber’ I find the embodiment of the kind of self I tell myself I have; knowing and not knowing, innocent and

¹¹In a survey of Halliday’s work (amongst others) on grammar, Margaret Berry introduces the concept of supervention as the pair to intention in material (doing) clauses with animate actors: *Introduction to Systemic Linguistics: 1 Structures and Systems* (London: Batsford, 1975). She gives as an example of supervention (unintentional action) ‘Aunt Jemima dropped the teapot’ (pp. 151-52). However she does not contextualize her examples at all, and I would want to suggest, citing the quote from Michèle Roberts that opens this chapter in support, that ‘dropped’ may occur with intention as well as supervention.

¹²I am taking Elam’s words now as representative of event (or not-*I*) feminism.

complicit in one and the same moment that is produced in 'I contrived'.¹³ Form is meaning and this means what I want to say.

Who Acts? Some Grammatical Stories

My engagement is with grammatical representation of feminist perspective and that this commitment shapes my readings and adaptations of Halliday. I draw on those aspects of his work which help to illustrate the ways in which the grammatical subject, *I/she*, is not necessarily agentive (p. 33) and the ways in which the human actor (agentive or not) can be written out. In a simplification of Halliday's analysis, the capacity for representing something other than *I* as the active element lies in the following: the attribution of consciousness to inanimate objects (p. 108); the form which elides internal/ external agency (p. 145); and the use of grammatical metaphor, by which something 'has been dressed up to look as if it were a participant' (p. 322).

Halliday, from his different perspective, separates material (doing) processes from mental (thinking, feeling) processes in a way that I resist. He says

In a material process no participant is required to be human, and the distinction between conscious and non-conscious beings simply plays no part. (p. 108)

It is a consistent part of my claim that we can be active in the processes and interpretations of grammar, and in this spirit I ask of Halliday: 'required' by whom? for I might well think that the distinction between 'I created a rational creature' and 'an incident [...] created a rational creature' (and these are (distorted) moments from *Frankenstein*) is a significant one. From my perspective, the distinction that Halliday eliminates must be reinstated. This 'incident'

¹³This might be seen as a grammatical enactment of the sense that Donna J. Haraway seeks to evoke in her 'cyborg', 'creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction': 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology and Socialist Feminism in the 1980's', *Feminism/Postmodernism*, ed. and intro. by Linda J. Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 190-238 (p. 191).



may have 'been dressed up to look as if it was a participant'. Whereas Halliday does not claim that any of these modes is better than any other, to the feminist seeking a way of embodying her world view her choice does matter. If she believes in the 'death of the subject', by which I understand that the self has no independence from language and is solely created by it, then it may be *I* formulations which are viewed as metaphorical and *incident* ones which more closely reflect actual processes. It all depends on one's perception of a congruent world. In this spirit of inserting feminist perspective into Halliday's analysis, I shall now look more closely at the various grammatical means by which agency can be erased before going on to read these processes in(to) texts. The implications of such styles for feminisms will continue to reverberate.

The Separation of Subject From Agent

It is a crucial feature of English, clearly demonstrated by Halliday, that the subject and the actor of a clause need not, though can, be the same thing. In the example

I opened the door

subject and actor are that same thing, which is *I*. However, as I have pointed out, it does not follow that intentionality - agency - can be attributed to such a statement, although there is a high expectation that it will be:

'Your Uncle Craig died last night.' [...] The active verb confused me. He *died*. It sounded like something he willed to do, chose to do.¹⁴

Expectations can change. There is no simple correspondence between either the grammatical category of subject and agency, or the psychological category of subject and agency.

¹⁴Alice Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women* (first published McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1971; this edn Harmondsworth: Penguin, repr. 1985), p. 45, her emphasis.

Grammatical subject and actor need not be the same thing:

The door was opened by me

Now *the door* is the subject, but it is not the actor: that is still *me*. This grammatical move should not be underestimated. If feminist acts of ‘turning away from subjective agency’ (which seem to assume intentionality for all *I* statements) have anything to do with grammatical categories - and there does seem to be a slippage between this and the psychological notion through the constant emphasis on *I* - then, in the story of grammar, their two aspects (subject and agency) can be separated by the simple expedient of speaking in the passive voice. At the same time this effects a switch emphasis from what *I did* to what *happened to the door*. In this formulation, the sense of self is fading.

As I signalled in one of my earlier stories, it is equally the case that *I* may hold onto subject position but not be the actor let alone the agent. The self as ‘doer of the deed’, to borrow Judith Butler’s ironic term,¹⁵ can disappear in stages. Where

I found myself on the other side

still holds a faint echo of self activity

I was found on the other side

has none. There is no inevitable grammatical correspondence between *I* and actor, and even less so between *I* and agent.

Finding Other Doers of the Deed

In the world view of Halliday’s text, human consciousness is presented as an unproblematic source of action and his point is to show how simply, in grammatical terms, this notion of consciousness, of mental processes, can be extended to inanimate things. He gives as his example ‘*the empty house was longing for the children to return*’ (p. 108) and comments:

¹⁵*Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 142.

Simply by putting *the empty house* in this grammatical environment, as something that felt a longing, we cause it to be understood as endowed with consciousness.

I want to make a few moves here which take me **beyond** Halliday's analysis and interest.

By incorporating Halliday's concept of 'dressing up' in grammatical metaphor at this stage ('*the fifth day saw them at the summit*' (p. 322)), I intend to show that it is not grammatically difficult to attribute those activities which have been thought of as human to things that are not human. I do not want to insist however that those who take on this style necessarily attribute consciousness to the inanimate thing. Rather I want to suggest that this constitutes a means of writing consciousness out, of placing things rather than people in the position of the doer (or *effector*), in order to establish a grammar of event. But such style will never only mean that. Form is meanings. There is difficulty as well as diversity for those who speak this feminism.

Within Or Without: How Did It Happen?

The door opened

Halliday asks of this *something happened* formulation a question which will prove crucial to my readings of text: 'is the process brought about from within or from outside?' (p. 145). His focus has shifted from conventional transitive/intransitive analysis, which he characterizes as one of extension, to an interpretation that is concerned with causation: 'Some participant is engaged in a process; is the process brought about by that participant, or by some other entity?' (p. 145). In Halliday's analysis (pp. 144-157), in the pair *the door opened* and *I opened the door* the door is the 'one participant that is the key figure in the process [...] without which there would be no process at all' (p. 146). He calls this 'obligatory' participant the Medium. For my purposes this Medium/Process analysis is interesting for the way in which it shows how external agency can be written out and appear to present the act

as 'self-caused'. Halliday makes this point (p. 145), and distinguishes further between *the door opened* and *the door was opened* where only the latter allows for the question by whom? (p. 151). It may appeal to the event feminist that the latter will always leave this question unanswered and the former leave it unasked, but perhaps not to the feminist who feels that she has just found space to act on/in the world. I ask instead: does Halliday's question as to whether the process is 'brought about by that participant, or by some other entity?' matter - to feminist speakers? And, through *Frankenstein* and 'The Bloody Chamber', I will suggest that it does. What kind of world do feminists wish to evoke? one which writes out all notion of the self as actor or agent and therefore any sense of responsibility for the consequences of that action? In telling my stories of *Frankenstein* and 'The Bloody Chamber', I will build on the ways in which *I* can write *myself* out of the picture and wonder what they mean to feminism.

Recapitulations

I want to restate at this juncture that it is not simply my intention to show that one way of speaking/writing is more feminist than another - after all I move in and out of different modes myself- but to show how each way means more or other than the producer might intend.

However, I do tell the 'contrived' story of 'The Bloody Chamber' as one to relish.

I will continue to reflect on matters of style and representations of the self that is *I*.

It might, and will, be said that academic and colloquial discourse have different requirements.

But I will go on to show that there are different readings, not always anticipated by the writer, of what role *I* have to play in these discourses. It might also be said that the writer's use of the range of grammatical options outlined above simply reflects the need for variation in style so that the text negotiates a path between an *I* so egotistical that the reader is alienated from

him/her,¹⁶ and an arid absence of personality. I do not forget these claims but I also remember that no style is neutral, form is meanings and we need to think about their implications in any way that we can imagine. At times, I take up an extreme position: *I do/think/feel* as a concept, a way of making sense, is put under question by any grammatical construction which avoids this formulation. This does not reflect a wish on my part to hang onto the notion of an integrated fully autonomous self. On the contrary, chapter three will reveal how this particular patriarchal illusion seeks to maintain itself, though that story can be told here, briefly and mockingly, through Carter's story of the clerk:

Metal bracelets hoisted up his shirt-sleeves to bare his wrists for work; he had been left in charge. (*Dr. Hoffman*, p. 50)

Nor is it to deny that texts which 'specify' in the manner of personal testimony (*I say*) can overcome this illusion by producing multiple, complex voices as indeed Hurston and hooks do.

What Does Language Do?

It is from within the context of wondering about how much control and responsibility feminisms might attribute (grammatically as well as philosophically) to the human self that I call the following introductory statement from Halliday into question:

Language has evolved to satisfy human needs; and the way it is organized is functional with respect to these needs - it is not arbitrary. (p. xiii)

Later, within the body of his text, Halliday points out that there are structures in English in which 'it would be difficult [...] to identify an Actor'. He gives as an example: 'Psychology

¹⁶Bruce Morrisette writes about 'The Alienated "I"', in *Novel and Film: Essays in Two Genres* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1985), pp. 95-107, and Desiderio recognizes it in the 'utterly self-centred nature of [the Count's] discourse' (*Dr Hoffman*, p. 124).

[...] has had mixed origins in every country where it has developed' (p. 105). I read this as a way of writing out the human factor, the psychologists, and this is also how I read his language statement above. Someone like Lacan or Derrida might not dispute this *language does* formulation as an accurate representation of how things are, albeit for different reasons, but it would be less acceptable to those, amongst whom I find myself (most of the time), who believe that there is an interactive process, that even as *I* am created and shaped by language, once *I* recognize this *I* can enter into these creative and shaping processes. I might reformulate this claim into one of imagining rather than recognizing that it is so: this act of imagination may be crucial to the notion that change is possible. This move brings me into alignment once more with Drucilla Cornell's 'transformative' rewritings.

For, one of the themes of my text is precisely to wonder whether language does 'satisfy' feminist needs. Halliday's statement is impregnated with stasis and with certainty rather than with movement and doubt. It just 'is'. His 'has evolved' construction is a particularly intriguing one in the light of my interests about how meaning is produced. It conveys a completed process. Something of the forward movement that I am looking for would have been retained by the selection of the present tense, *evolves/is evolving*. And this verb has intriguing semantic and grammatical properties which can be illustrated through Halliday's own comments. The *OED* gives as its meaning, when used intransitively as here, 'developed gradually by a natural process'. This meaning does not meet my needs, but perhaps it is not quite so straightforward in any case.

This last claim rests on Halliday's recognition that 'with more abstract processes, we often find active and passive forms side by side with very little difference between them' (pp. 104-5). He gives as one of his examples: '*a new approach is evolving/ is being evolved*' (p. 105). But he acknowledges that 'there still is some difference' and in my search for meanings this difference is crucial: 'if the passive form is used, we can probe for an explicit Actor - we can ask *who by?*, whereas with the active form we cannot'. Halliday, in his language statement, has used the active form, so this question that I want to ask, *who by?*, cannot be posed. The

difference from my perspective may become clearer with my own example: *a plan is evolving/being evolved to cope with unforeseen consequences*. Some feminists still want to be able to ask *by whom?* If Halliday had used the passive, giving space to that question, the reply might be along the lines of a Marxist or Foucauldian analysis which would work to reveal that powerful institutions, carriers of ideology, constituted of people who sustain such power, patriarchs, are prime candidates for the answer.¹⁷

Such a reading would double the meanings that *evolve*, used intransitively, can carry in that there would now be a developmental element that is not natural, that is man-made but that could become feminist. This is the reading of language that I want to imagine. Halliday is fully aware of the weight of meaning that *evolve* can come to carry for, beyond his use and discussion of it in this text, he analyses it himself in some detail in an essay on Charles Darwin's discourse. Here, he dwells on both the laden meanings that Darwin makes this word carry and also how this works through the grammar and tense that Darwin selects.¹⁸

Evolve is a word to watch. Darwin aims to convince us that he knows and proves the origin of the species. However, as *Pilgrimage's* Miriam points out, his theory may well be disproved one day.¹⁹ The discourse of education still prefers certainty, but, as Alexander Gode shows, it has been recognized, pre-Derrida, that the origins of language cannot be traced in spite of multiple attempts to do so.²⁰ This means, in my reading, that any

¹⁷I am not claiming that Halliday is himself a prime candidate as I understand he is not politically conservative although this makes his approach to language even more surprising in my view.

¹⁸See 'Discourse, with Reference to Charles Darwin's *The Origin of the Species*', in *Advances in Written Text Analysis*, ed. by Malcolm Coulthard (London: Routledge, 1994), esp. pp. 153-55. Although this paper postdates the first edition of *Functional Grammar* it predates the second edition which still carries this language statement.

¹⁹*Pilgrimage* III, p. 111. It is fascinating in this context to read Paul Davies' article, 'Doubts over Darwin', in *Guardian*, 30 December, 1993, p. 17.

²⁰In his introduction to *On The Origin of Language; Essay on the Origin of Language/ Jean-Jacques Rousseau/ Johann Gottfried Herder*, trans. by J.H. Moran and Alexander Gode (first published New York: Ungar, 1966; this edn Chicago, IL: Univ. Of Chicago Press, 1986), p. vi, Gode says:

The Linguistic Society of Paris, which was founded in 1866, had in its bylaws the provision that it would not, under any circumstances, accept any kind of communication on the subject of the origin of language.

explanation of the development of language can only be an imaginative exercise, and in this lack of certainty lies the recognition that its future too is untold, but may also be imagined. Some further questions extend the ways in which Halliday's language statement does not satisfy my needs: what might the meaning of 'to' in 'to satisfy' be? Does he intend it to signal consequence or intent, where in the latter it stands in for *in order to*? I cannot know. It will always carry both possibilities. Who determines 'human needs'? Is it possible that language is quite so separate from 'human needs'? I can show my divergence from Halliday's statement through a series of rewritings which enact in deliberately and increasingly dramatic stages the ways in which I want to go beyond its limitations as I read them:

Language evolves to satisfy human needs

Language evolves to satisfy some human needs

Language is being evolved to satisfy some human needs

Some humans (and I might risk saying that historically these have been men) develop language in order to satisfy their particular needs (though this as I tell later can never be the full story)

Feminists (amongst others) have an interest in engaging imaginatively with processes and possibilities of change in language

It may be evident from earlier comments that I am aware that this last revisioning does not embody all feminist perspectives. In *Feminism and Linguistic Theory*, Deborah Cameron produces an excellent rehearsal and critique of the various claims as to how language works (for instance, the innate or learned debate; the determined/determining debate) from feminist perspective, showing in particular the traps into which feminists can fall. However, she does so in order to establish her context for looking to the institutions which control the dissemination of language systems to change. She rejects the notion that political change can be brought about through linguistic change because of her view that language is structurally irretrievably interconnected with values and judgments. My thought is rather that as such interconnections are opened out to discussion, the perception of how different values and

judgments may be conveyed can change. Indeed, as I outline in my introduction, Cameron's stance becomes more flexible and open to such possibilities.

Barbara Christian is one writer who makes a conscious attempt to use grammar to bring value systems to the surface. In her perception, this is something that is always going on in different ways for different groups:

I have used the passive voice in my last sentence construction, contrary to the rules of Black English, which like all languages has a particular value system, since I have not placed responsibility on any particular person or group.²¹

I read the following in Christian's statement (not always in this order). She is able to negotiate her way in and out of different discourses and value systems. Normally she writes Black English but because she knows its rules she knows how to break them too. Black English does not use the passive voice because Black English reflects its value system by placing responsibility on person(s). All languages have a value system. What I am left wondering is how this is so. There is a movement from her agentive 'I' which determines language into statements in which language seems to determine her, and back out again. Whilst this may reflect my own double take (controller and controlled), I think that we need to engage with the difficulty that we cannot pin down one factor and say that from this comes everything else. Where Christian speaks with assurance I want to ask questions. How do languages come to have value systems?²² Do all speakers of that language use and understand them in the same way? Do readers notice the value systems of different languages? To reformulate in terms of my own project: how can *I* affect the rules and value systems of feminist discourse in ways that readers will know what *I* mean to say? Whilst never losing sight of the worth of such an aim, I will talk about the difficulties that must

²¹'The Race for Theory', in *Gender and Theory: Dialogues on Feminist Criticism*, ed. by Linda Kauffman (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), pp. 225-37 (p. 227).

²²I might want to substitute *discourse* for *language*, but I note Christian's objection to this term (p. 278).

accompany it.

Where I have used Halliday's language statement as a way in to showing how meanings work, I turn now to wondering how feminists might show their meanings. For it matters how we mean. I will be looking at current options to see what comes of them even as I wonder from time to time what might be **beyond** them. In a gesture of restoration, for I know that I have 'mutilated' Halliday's texts to make my point,²³ I acknowledge that he too towards the end of his Introduction calls to the possibility of imaginative acts of creation:

Beyond the realm of existing human languages lies that of possible languages, those that do not exist but could do. There would be many other ways of devising a symbolic system for encoding our observations and actions. What kinds of grammar can we imagine, that would be different from those we have? (p. xxxv).

For Halliday, though, the imagining is for totally other languages rather than for the ones that we already have: more akin to Irigaray's or Cixous' utopian project, rather than to a project of 'transformative' rewritings, or to one informed by Carter's fantastic story of 'warm'. I think there is some space within the language we already have to insert the sense of other value systems even as there is a need to look to extend the frontiers. I do not take up the extreme position which claims that patriarchy controls/has controlled all production of language. A Bakhtinian analysis of competing and divergent discourses soon puts this claim to rest, and indeed Halliday himself has written about what he calls anti-languages, though significantly, in terms of my interests, these retain the grammatical structures of the dominant discourse.²⁴ Nor do I exclude the fact that there are always also uncontrollable consequences to any action, however planned. This realization is after all one of the stories that is *Frankenstein*. Rather I want to suggest that feminists can and must enter into the linguistic web. This is a moment where I specifically endorse Drucilla Cornell's call to feminists to

²³Frankenstein 'would not that a mutilated [narration of his history] should go down to posterity' (p. 180).

²⁴'Anti-Languages', in *Language as Social Semiotic: The Social Interpretation of Language and Meaning* (London: Arnold, 1978), pp. 164-82.

imagine and to create ways of speaking that are not outside of our language, but that are **beyond** that which we currently perceive as being possible. And I take up Diane Elam's call to 'the politics of the undecidable' as a positive move alongside her ethical admonition that, even if that future

cannot be known, there is an obligation to engage with the possibilities (p. 88). It is surely ironic that I want to say that I endorse Elam's vision but have questions about her way of putting it. I have a sense of meaning that goes beyond form.

These points will have continuing significance for my argument and so I will summarize them briefly here in a way that looks forwards as well as backwards. Whilst it may not be his intention, one way of reading Halliday's language statement is, I claim,

- that he writes out the human involvement in language development and that
- this leads him to underplay the ideological elements in language²⁵
- thus presenting development as entirely a natural process.

In countering this position, I align myself with those who contend that there is an interactive process: we are constructed and constructors, always both. It is from this position that I read and write. And talk back to Halliday:

He: 'there are rarely any sharp lines in language, since it is an evolved system and not a designed one.' (p. xix)

Me: the first part of this statement is an interesting one from my perspective. However, I have designs upon it.²⁶

Just as I want feminists to engage with ways of meaning now, so I want them to engage with 'transformative' potential, imagining their own designs so that they can begin to see and show that which was previously unknown since there was no way to express it. This is to continue the story of Carter's 'warm'. This imaginative space comes from within our current

²⁵Buried in amongst his list of 'some of the purposes for which linguistics is likely to be useful' is: 'to understand many aspects of the role of language in the community and the individual: multilingualism, socialization, ideology, propaganda, etc.' (pp. xxix-xxx.).

²⁶These will emerge in my final chapter when I look at grammatical ways of (con)fusing borders.

language to go **beyond** it; it is a space which feminists can begin to fill with ways of meaning beyond established practice. As Lorraine Code says, imagination is a crucial ingredient of an ethical feminist stance to knowledge:

The role of the imagination in cognitive and moral lives is often underestimated [...]. It is the activity of imaginations trained to go beyond the purely empirically given that provides the impetus for growth and change in scientific, and other, knowledge. (pp. 92-93)

This thesis will only begin to touch on this creative aspect, whilst always insisting on the necessity of it. The question I return to now is: how might feminists do things?

What Can I Do?

Halliday gives as the 'typical, UNMARKED form in an English declarative' (p. 36, his use of capitals indicating that this is a grammatical term) the form which conflates subject, agent and theme 'into a single element' (p. 36). That is to say

I opened the door

where 'I' functions as the 'single element' is, in Halliday's analysis, 'the form we tend to use if there is no context leading up to it, and no positive reason for choosing anything else' (p. 36, and see also p. 45 and p. 74).²⁷ In this analysis, there is an element of differentiation between written and spoken language. In Halliday's characterization, the former is lexically dense (nominalization) but syntactically relatively simple, and the latter is lexically light but syntactically much more complex (extension, parataxis, hypotaxis) (pp. 329-31). Thus I might write

The opening of the door preceded egress (nominalization)

²⁷Halliday is not the only one to make this distinction. It is perpetuated by Katie Wales in *A Dictionary of Stylistics* (London: Longman, 1989), where she claims, 'since agentive and affected roles are most characteristic of subjects and objects, it is natural for the active to be regarded as the unMARKED or neutral voice, as opposed to the PASSIVE' (p. 8).

but say

I opened the door and then I went out (parataxis)

(I have deliberately inflated the example in order to emphasize the difference.) The point that I want to make about Halliday's analysis is that, although he uses UNMARKED as a grammatical notation, the implication is that this use of 'I' can be equated with a neutral way of communicating, outside of 'context' and 'reason'.

Through the specific perspective of event feminism, this way of thinking reflects a marked ideology, one particular vision of the way things work, and a way that inhibits feminist thought. To put this another way, it is a patriarchal illusion that *I* act in/on the world, one that is sustained through its grammar. This is the grammatical aspect of the argument which says that patriarchy has an interest in presenting certain things as natural and universal for all time rather than serving some particular purpose, an argument with which I concur.²⁸

However, I propose an alternative path for feminists set on undermining this natural status: show repeatedly that to say *I* did something means neither that *I* necessarily intended to do it or even that *I* did do it. It is not my intention to show this on philosophical grounds but through an interactive exploration of grammar and narrative. Take this story:

I killed him

It is highly conceivable that this is the story of an accident, something that happened rather than something that I meant to do. The distinction between accidental and intentional is rarely a straightforward one to draw:

I murdered her. I, the true murderer.

Semantically, *murder* conveys a level of intentionality (reflected in the law) that *killed* need not entail.²⁹ However, this second story is not one that I have made up: the words are

²⁸In the same way that (some) feminists question the validity and the naturalness of entrenched claims such as *women are nurturers: men are hunters*, event feminism posits that *I do things* may be equally open to questions of validity and naturalness.

²⁹Van Valin and Wilkins discuss this distinction in their paper (pp. 309-11). I had already brought it into my discussion by the time I read this, but was encouraged that they saw it in the same way.

Frankenstein's (p. 159 and p. 68). The question of responsibility arises here. That of Frankenstein might have been more accurately invoked by something like *I am responsible for the creature who murdered her*. Though really I mean to say *unambiguously invoked*, since the sameness of Frankenstein and his creation is one of the central motifs of this text, carried through semantics and grammar.³⁰ However, these murderous moments in Frankenstein's speech - and there are many - have led to readings which take his claim literally (because, I would suggest, of an overly simplistic correspondence between grammatical form and meaning) and set out to show that this is a forerunner of a Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde text rather than one imbued with the subtlety of James Hogg's 'justified sinner'.³¹ These critics point to Frankenstein's fainting fits and demonstrate that only he or his creation is ever active at any one point in time. To stop here would be to acknowledge Mary Shelley's subtle management of the interchangeability factor. But some go on to prove that Frankenstein would have had time to travel back home to murder his brother and get back to Ingolstadt without anyone noticing his absence.³²

³⁰And it is time to comment on Richard Lansdown's reading of *Frankenstein* which insists on the poverty of the language, ultimately designating it as 'stillborn': 'Beginning Life: Mary Shelley's Introduction to *Frankenstein*', in *Critical Review*, 35 (1995), 81-94 (p. 83). He wonders how *Frankenstein* has achieved 'its extraordinary degree of penetration' when it is not well-written. It is the wrong question for the wrong text. It is the form in which it is written which generates its greatness and productivity. Form is meanings.

³¹James Hogg, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* ([1824] Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).

³²One critic who suggests that no 'objective monster' exists in the text is Mary K. Patterson Thornburg in *The Monster in the Mirror: Gender and the Sentimental/ Gothic Myth in Frankenstein* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Research Press, 1987). *Frankenstein* generates endless readings (is itself a site of infinite deferral): I have given some information on some of these in the Bibliography. One fairly recent reading evidences some of the failings that I try to avoid: in 'Sibling Rivalry in *Frankenstein*', in *Studies in Romanticism*, 36:1, 1997 (pp. 27-41), William Crisman, who considers that it can now be taken for granted that Victor and the creature are the same thing, sets out to correct readings of *Frankenstein* as oedipal drama. In their place, he posits that it is a story about sibling rivalry. He establishes this by showing that Frankenstein initially uses 'tender' to describe the love that his parents had for him before his siblings arrived on the scene. Subsequent uses, he claims, of 'tender' when associated with, for instance, parental love of William indicate jealousy on the part of Frankenstein. This claim seems to me to fail the test of sufficient conditions: I do not think that one can establish a pattern from one example. Crisman also fails to take the triple framework adequately into account, since although he wants to claim that this 'sibling rivalry' is common to all three male speakers, he never acknowledges that Walton speaks of his 'tender' love for his sister before the word is ever heard from *Frankenstein*. Furthermore, Crisman cannot account for the fact that Edward is neither injured nor at risk, so he just does not mention him. I think that my own approach to reading

This roundabout story is a way of emphasizing that grammar does not offer a straightforward correspondence between subject and agent (*I killed him* inadvertently), subject and actor (*the man was killed by me*) and even that the subject who claims agency may not possess it. This point is made with poignant force by Carla Kaplan in her discussion of Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*.³³ As she says, the enslaved girl's claim that 'I knew what I did, and I did it with deliberate calculation' (*Incidents*, p. 83) has to be put in its very particular context. All of this problematizes the notion that feminist perspective which resists the patriarchal (coherent and autonomous) *I* need and can only be represented by writing *I* out.³⁴ This is not to say that there is no work for feminists to do, but rather that this work is to look at ways of speaking/writing differently with the aim of becoming conversant in speaking/writing in all the ways that they mean.

Can I Be Feminist?

Let me draw together the beginnings of an ideology of the use of *I* statements, in the full recognition that feminisms take up ideological positions. What the writer must keep in mind is that she may intend one position but her reader might assume another.

1) *I* statements specifically enact the patriarchal voice of control, of mastery over self, other and environment. Feminists and other oppressed speakers may feel then that they should avoid this construction in favour of others.

2) *I* statements more generally reflect the dominant western world view which has at its

Frankenstein is much more flexible, although I am motivated towards providing imaginative illustration and not by a need to present a new or controversial reading.

³³ 'Recuperating Agents: Narrative Contracts, Emancipatory Readers, and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*', in *Provoking Agents*, pp. 280-301 (p. 288). *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Schomburg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers ([1861] Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988). Kaplan makes her point with some clarity so I do not attempt to add to it.

³⁴ In their introduction to *Feminism Beside Itself* (New York: Routledge, 1994), the editors, Diane Elam and Robyn Wiegman, refuse the term *I*. This practice does not work for me. I shall return to it in chapter four.

centre the notion of a unified autonomous rational agent: *I act with intent*. A focus on such a self can be seen as both desirable and undesirable, depending on one's position in that society and one's ideological perspective. If it is desirable to you it follows that you will embrace a style characterized by *I do something*. Some feminists will want this power to speak. If it is undesirable, for instance to deconstruction or to a Lacanian psychoanalyst, such constructions may be avoided in favour of the *something happened* type. This is to some extent the position adopted by Mitchell and Rose in their introductions to *Feminine Sexuality*. I shall return to their voices in chapter four.

3) *I* statements can be claimed for feminisms, not only as a coming-to-voice for oneself as evidenced in the history of giving testimony, or the 'personal is political' rallying call, but also with the declared aim of producing other kinds of subjectivities than the patriarchal one conveyed above. This is the position which bell hooks brings vividly to life. Hers is the attempt to create a feminist *I*, that is opposed to the patriarchal *I* that dominates - and that will be read as such. My own attempts to find other (grammatical and lexical) ways of speaking this self remain too embarrassingly traditional to mention, but the imaginative space is there. Until it is filled, I rest on the grounds that *I* statements are neither neutral nor fixed. There is flexibility. One's perception of the status of *I* statements, whether writer or reader, will depend on one's 'presuppositions and knowledge of the world'.³⁵ These are not immutable. Halliday's claim that *I* statements are 'the form we tend to use if there is no context leading up to it, and no positive reason for choosing anything else' (p. 36) will be heard as a loaded statement by many feminists, one that carries the implication that such 'form' is just one of those timeless truths masquerading as neutral rather than as the representation of a particular worldview (who are Halliday's 'we'? what constitutes a 'context'? what about negative reasons?). In this reading of Halliday, I do not intend to take up a stable feminist position

³⁵Randolph Quirk and others, *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (London: Longman, 1985), p. 930. These 'presuppositions' will recur. Further reference is given to this edition where appropriate after quotations in the text.

(nor claim to have recovered his intentions). The feminist who would resist *I* statements as ideologically informed metaphors would also follow this through to the recognition that the act of 'choosing anything' is also an ideological and imaginary construct. I still hold onto this notion of making (informed) choices as an important one for feminisms. In this moment I invoke shifting and coexistent feminist perspectives.

I have continued to 'mutilate' Halliday's text for my purposes. For all ways of speaking about who acts/what happened can be problematic to feminist perspective. I hope to justify these mutilations by showing how women writers have responded to the possibilities and limitations and by producing provoking readings of their practice. Towards this end, I want to reflect on the meanings of *not-I* statements. They also have a weight of ideological content. This recognition constitutes a continuous theme in my conversations as I talk about how this is so, and how some feminist speakers/writers do not take it sufficiently into account.

Can Not-/ Be Feminist?

The feminist who sees the way forward in the recognition that the coherent autonomous self is nothing but a patriarchal imposition and limitation, a fantasy at its peak in the signifier *I*, is likely to endorse those grammatical options which enable her to speak other ways: *the door (has) opened*. Simply an event: no agent, no actor. I have at the back of my mind the work of Judith Butler and still very much at the front of my mind the explicitly ethical project of Elam's 'turning away from subjective agency'. To rewrite this event feminism through Halliday, it is effected within the 'context' of the alliance of feminism and deconstruction, and for 'positive reason[s]' it produces discourse which does not mimic 'subjective agency', since 'deconstruction is [...] an event without subjective agency'.

However, as with *I* statements, Elam's positive reading is not the only way that events can be read. Form is meanings. I will show in my reading of *Frankenstein* that such structures also

function within patriarchal discourse to conceal and avoid responsibility for one's actions and that the larger narrative of Shelley's text shows this practice to hold no positive value for women. In support of this contention that there might be a negative reason from feminist perspective for speaking in modes which circumvent agency, I call on another (male) grammarian, Dwight Bolinger:

Bias enters [language] when the passive is used to conceal the agent.³⁶

It can be seen (a way of writing that assumes that you, the reader, can see just what I see, and carrying the further implication that it is your shortcoming if you do not) that Bolinger enacts his claim grammatically as well as semantically. He uses 'the passive [...] to conceal the agent'. Form is meaning: and I read Bolinger as knowingly playing with it here. The point is more visible in the following pair

The door was opened by me

The door was opened

Both are constructed in the passive, which form always allows for the agent to be concealed through omission as in the second version. This mode of writing that I attribute to Bolinger, mirror enactment of meaning in form, is one that haunts this thesis. It reverts to Fish's question that I address in my introduction: *do you say what you mean?* Feminisms have to think about this. No writing is a destination: it is one strategic possibility. But this kind of doublespeak can produce deep complexities and multiplicities of meaning and has the advantage of being accessible to all readers and writers who engage with the rules of the game. Of course, one of those rules is that paradoxical modes of speech (*I use long words all the time*) have their own feminist import. I will continue to play with the possibilities in and limitations of ways of speaking/writing feminisms.

³⁶*Language, The Loaded Weapon: The Use and Abuse of Language Today* (New York: Longman, 1980), p. 86.

In the continuous spirit of looking from all directions, I shall identify a range of evasive and oppressive modes of discourse in *Frankenstein* which take the form of *not-I* statements. In chapter four I will show how the psychoanalytic feminists, Mitchell and Rose, embrace the same modes in an attempt to express something quite different - their theoretical move beyond oppression. Much as I recognize and relish paradox as a feminist tool, I find it troubling that *not-I* statements have the potential to be intended/experienced as both oppressive and liberating. This practice of looking forward occasionally to Mitchell and Rose as well as back at my own text is a version of women's time, another way of allowing different things to coexist in the same moment, producing conversation between chapters.³⁷ From this moment, for instance, my discussion of the production of agency (who acts with intention?) in 'The Bloody Chamber' is not only posited as a counter to that produced by *Frankenstein* (the character), but also to that of Mitchell and Rose. I see no problem in paralleling literary and theoretical discourse, and, in crossing this boundary with such abandon, I diverge from Cornell's insistence on the 'specificity of literary language' (p. 186, *passim*). In keeping with her overall project Cornell does not ever define this term but rather seeks to evoke what it might mean throughout her text. Cornell claims that 'such a language [literary] has the power to formulate itself as act. The performative aspect of this language creates its own reality' (p.188). I would extend this claim to all kinds of language. Literature plays a very different role in my project. It is a source of enlightenment, an idea in practice followed through imaginatively to an ending. Literary language can tell the stories of who

³⁷The expression 'women's time' has gained particular resonance from Julia Kristeva's work. When I use it, I intend to evoke something of her claim that 'there is no time without speech. Therefore, there is no time without the father', from 'About Chinese Women' (1974), trans. by Seán Hand, in *The Kristeva Reader*, pp. 139-59 (p. 153). Whilst I endorse her subsequent notion that we must get beyond difference to the point where all times, both those traditionally associated with woman ('cyclical' and 'monumental' time) and the linear time of history and politics, must merge into a new space 'to make [the implacable difference in personal and sexual identity] disintegrate in its very nucleus': 'Women's Time' (1974), trans. by Alice Jardine and Harry Blake, in *The Kristeva Reader*, pp. 188-213 (p. 209). I wish, in other words, to convey that sense of time which is not included in linear time, rather than Kristeva's later incorporating move which embodies her desire for the disintegration of difference between women and men: as I say on more than one occasion, that remains a dream for the future whilst there is still work to be done in the present.

acts in ways that imagine the implications and consequences, a move that I suggest feminists must transpose into their own communicative practice.

A Proposal on the Scope and Limits of Grammatical Adventures

I talk of expanding our present grammar to create options which are associated with an ideology of non-oppression, rather than the creation of other grammar(s). I take this modifying position because I want to concern myself with what I believe to be attainable and accessible. I can express my view on the limits of what is attainable and accessible in three ways.

The first is to relate Williams' paradigm to language itself. The dominant mode, I suggest, is found in Halliday's 'UNMARKED' form. That is, to say *I open the door* is to reflect the primary means by which westerners construct and make sense of their world. It incorporates the notion of self as agent (the assumption being that *I meant to open the door*). There is a persistent notion that this style can be designated neutral. Some feminists wish to replace this with *the door opened* as the dominant form, expressing a newly emergent way of seeing and thinking. As Williams stresses however, emergent concepts require 'new forms or adaptations of forms' (p. 126). It is into this challenging arena that I claim feminists should enter with designs. And as emergent forms become dominant, new oppositions will arise. Language, like anything, is open to constant processes of change, which state of affairs is caught in Shelley's borrowing of her poet husband's prophetically deconstructive words:

Man's yesterday may ne'er be like his morrow;
Nought may endure but mutability!³⁸

We cannot hope to produce desirable forms and then call a halt. This is to accept the

³⁸From Percy Bysshe Shelley's 'Mutability', quoted in *Frankenstein*, p. 79.

deconstructive claim voiced for feminism by Elam that there can be no resting place, only infinite deferral and ethical engagement. Translated into language, this tells of endless attempts to express things better, knowing that such attempts must be constantly on the move. There is no limit.

Yet, my second move is an expression of limit arising out of and in opposition to the writings of Irigaray, Cixous, Kristeva. It remains my contention that their attempts to formulate new modes of expression in order to (re)create different ways of seeing the world are too different to be embraced: that is, these writings are not accessible to most readers. They verge, quite deliberately, on other ways of 'devising a symbolic system'. Where I do not necessarily reject the philosophical views which I hear behind these writing processes I look to embody them in more accessible ways.

This brings me to my third move and second limit: take things in stages. This necessity is encapsulated in the story of *Frankenstein*. I read the reception of linguistic terms as parallel to the reception of Frankenstein's creature. (I might sometimes read the latter as a metaphor for the former. It would give life to an idea. Reverting to Lloyd's notion of 'different layers of metaphor', I wonder if such a visible metaphor would increase the visibility of my meaning.) It does not do to create something that is altogether different for it will be rejected on sight. This creature cannot integrate himself into the existent community with its concomitant set of perceptions. No one waits to see if any of his constituent parts might be beneficial, for the new whole that they give birth to is too hideous to contemplate. It seems that if the structural change is too great in one move then it cannot hold: it is perceived as monstrous and rejected outright.

I am aware that this recognition of limits reeks of reform rather than revolution. And the dominant group has the ability to absorb limited challenges, to make just enough concession to maintain control. Williams speaks of 'incorporation' (p. 123). For now, I can only keep this dilemma in mind and confront it in part in my next chapter by showing how discourse that seems to control and limit is itself infused with alternative meanings. But there is

another sense in which all language is limiting. This too I can show through literature and theory. As Miriam, the protagonist of *Pilgrimage*, succinctly (on this occasion) puts it:

Whether you agree or not, language is the only way of expressing anything and it dims everything. (II, p. 99)

This is the Lacanian sense of language (as entry into the symbolic order) as simultaneously addition and loss. Whilst language can produce a multiplicity of meanings, there is always also an empty space - the gap that nothing can fill. It is the recognition too of the major conceptual difficulty that language can only be discussed within itself: there is no outside to it.

Putting Feminism Into Halliday

Against this background, I want to return Halliday's analysis to the fore, but this time through the voice of a feminist who explicitly identifies the political role in her application of his theory to text. The stylistician, Deirdre Burton, emphasizes the need for personal statement. In hers, she identifies sexism as both the problem and the source of the solution, and as the paradigm for all oppressive practices:

I believe that, of these three major and massive injustices [classism, racism and sexism], sexism is the most deep-rooted (psychologically), the most pervasive, the most difficult to perceive, the most resistant to change - yet available as a locus for important and essential radical impetus to the reorganisation of all the unequal and oppressive power-structures in our society.³⁹

To some extent, I build on Burton's paradigmatic approach, although I try to be aware of the specificity of, for instance, bell hooks' position which takes account of both race and gender.

³⁹'Through Glass Darkly: Through Dark Glasses', in *Language and Literature: An Introductory Reader in Stylistics*, ed. by Ronald Carter (London: Allen & Unwin, 1982), pp. 195-214 (p. 187). Further references to this article are given after quotations in the text.

Language, for Burton, as for Janet Wolff,⁴⁰ is the primary conductor of ideology. In her own *I*-statement above, her choice of the verb 'believe' signals an attempt to get **beyond** control: ethical commitment is the crucial factor here. Burton does not seek a neutral position but rather testifies to her faith. In her close analysis of Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* - who does what to whom? - she proclaims that 'stylistic analysis is *not* just a question of discussing "effects" in language and text, but a powerful method for understanding the ways in which all sorts of "realities" are constructed through language' (p. 202, her emphasis).⁴¹ I would add into this a need to imagine 'the ways in which all sorts of [other] 'realities' [might be] constructed through language.

It may be apparent that my intention is to write openly, agentively: *I do/think this and then/so I do/think that* even as I build into this a recognition that other things are happening that I do not intend. However, this revealing format can also be the mark of patriarchal style, style which seeks to express direct control over environment and events, and which Miriam mockingly describes in another moment of simultaneous stylistic enactment, this time parodic:

he made little short statements, each improving on the one before it and coming out of it. (II, p. 113)

⁴⁰*Feminine Sentences: Essays on Women and Culture* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), p. 82.

⁴¹Burton is one of the first feminists to take Halliday's functional grammar as the way in to a discussion on how women can identify features in language which may not operate in their interests, and many have followed her. In 'And Then He Kissed Her: The Reclamation of Female Characters to Submissive Roles in Contemporary Fiction', in *Feminist Linguistics*, pp. 117-136, Shan Wareing sets out, through examining who gets to act, to demonstrate that 'assertive and independent' female characters 'are reclaimed in romantic encounters to the roles of passive victims' (p. 117). My problem with this is that I cannot agree with her notion of who gets to act. For instance, in her collating of 'processes which have the male in the role of actor', she includes '(he) felt her draw him near' (p. 126). It seems to me that he experiences the woman's action that is done to him and that, if the pronouns were reversed, this would be produced as evidence of the passive female. Wareing strikes me as having made up her mind what she is looking for and thus not open to factors which undermine this. At this point, I accept Halliday's warning not to take isolated features as the whole story. My own dependence on Halliday is different in that I am looking for the problems and the resources within the language from (more than one) feminist perspective rather than repeating what have become for me slightly tired grammatical stories of active male/passive female.

This typifies the construction of speech which Quirk *et al* characterize as the 'step by step' mode (p. 1435), which is generally perceived as informative, appropriate for instance to the process of constructing an argument. It might also be labelled from an ideological perspective as controlling, linear - patriarchal. In the surrounding context of Hypo 'making' 'little sounds', 'cordial sounds', 'social sounds' (p. 113), both the conscious nature of the activity, the 'making', and the relative meaninglessness of the outcome, the 'sounds', demonstrate the inadequacy of such language, its mere scratching on the surface in contrast to Miriam's own extended, elaborated processes of internal speech. This superficiality of the patriarchal style as a reflection of inner limitation is later spelt out:

But it was true for men. Skimmed off the surface, which was all they could see, and set up neatly in forcible quotable words. The rest could not be shown in these clever, neat phrases. (III, p. 62)

The simple declarative style in its most minimal sense, Halliday's 'UNMARKED' form, has been employed to highly stylized effect by Ernest Hemingway:

I rang the bell. The door opened and I went upstairs and went to bed.⁴²

This style (imagining an extended version of it) might be read as conveying mastery over environment. Perhaps, in stark contrast, it is the depiction of someone suppressing emotion. It may be experienced as either at different moments in both the text and in one's reading of it. It is never only one thing. For it is at the same time a way of eliminating all obvious means by which a reader comprehends the relationship between events. It is hard to gain a perspective on them. This can be seen as either an oppressive or a liberating structure. It is the former in so far as the speaker controls both his environment and the release of information, but the latter in that it does not conceal the actor (with the familiar exception of 'the door') nor does it impose a judgmental, deterministic view. There are no contextual

⁴²*Fiesta: The Sun Also Rises* (first published London: Cape, 1927; this edn London: Grafton, repr. 1988), p. 57.

features which impose an agency (intentional) as opposed to an actor (may or may not be intentional) reading. It leaves space for the reader to make her/his own connections. (This is not to deny that there are other linguistic clues in Hemingway's texts which produce further levels of meaning,⁴³ but rather to 'mutilate' his text in order to make a general point.) Any grammatical structure has the potential to be used in an oppressive manner, particularly when given as the invariant or near invariant form. There is no easy voice for feminism to find. With Burton's feminist commitment extended into imaginative realms, built into a questioning acceptance of Halliday's grammatical analysis, and positioned within shifting feminist perspective, I turn to exploration and illustration of the ideological issues for feminist discourse through close readings of literary text. I have not limited myself by period or genre. I claim that the grammatical features under discussion have not changed in form over the period I cover and that this allows for an ahistorical conversation between the texts at one level, that of representation. I do not claim that the meanings attached to or extracted from these representations by readers remain the same. Theory converses with text and both continue to change in the light of the other. I shall justify my readings through close attention to the text.

How Did Things Happen?

I anticipate that many readers of *Frankenstein* would expect, in the episode leading to the creature's animation,⁴⁴ a predominance of the simple declarative style marked by Frankenstein as unproblematically the grammatical subject and agent (*I did something on purpose*), in short a grammatical embodiment of the intentional creator. In ideological terms,

⁴³For further comment on Hemingway's style see Paul Goodman, *Speaking and Languages: Defence of Poetry* (first published New York: Vintage, 1971; this edn London: Wildwood House, 1973).

⁴⁴The subsequent argument centres on the third chapter of *Frankenstein*.

I would read this contextually as the visible patriarchal *I*. This form does occur, with normal patterns of ellipsis:

I collected bones from charnel houses; and disturbed, with profane fingers, the tremendous secrets of the human frame. (p. 38)

In Halliday's analysis this reads as

I	collected	bones
subject + actor	material process	goal

and is the straightforward representation where there is no 'context or positive reason' (p. 36) for using anything else. My counterclaim is that, in the context of *Frankenstein*, I read the 'positive' or negative reason for speaking this way as producing the sound of the visible patriarchal *I* who controls events and objects around him. And it is because I see Frankenstein as the embodiment of the desire to exert control that I anticipate that the agentive *I* will dominate his discourse. However, there is far less of this way of speaking in this episode than I anticipate. My expectations are not fulfilled once I read with attention. Most of the *I* plus active verb constructions are mental rather than material processes. They tell of Frankenstein's 'state of mind' (p. 34): 'I thought', 'I hoped', 'I asked', 'I considered', 'I knew', (pp. 34-39). Or they occur with much more abstract activities often without a designated goal:

As I applied so closely, it may be easily conceived that I improved rapidly.
(p. 34)

This pattern is fully in keeping with Frankenstein's repeated reference to his own immense mental capacities: 'My imagination was vivid, yet my powers of analysis and application were intense' (p. 181), and his self-absorption. It conveys the sense of the self that knows its own mind, and it is this knowing purposeful aspect of the self, I think, that Elam wishes to dismantle, grammatically as well as theoretically, rather than all and any of the sense that *I act*.

But why does this controlling knowing *I* not extend to his construction of the creature? It is my contention that the author has created an idiolect for Frankenstein, his own way of speaking, which reveals his disposition from the outset to try to play it both ways: that is to retain credit for an immense achievement, but simultaneously to shift any blame that is due elsewhere. It encapsulates the movement from his initial concessionary

I am now convinced that he [my father] was justified in conceiving that I should not be altogether free from blame (p. 39)

to the conclusive

During these last days I have been occupied in examining my past conduct; nor do I find it blameable. (p. 186)

The only other thing Frankenstein has been doing 'during these last days' is telling his story. His problem is who or what to blame if his tremendous achievement, 'I created a rational creature' (p. 186), is to be recognized as such. This double vision produces a more complex and less visible version of the patriarchal story: *I control the way that I tell the story of my control*. This compares with my earlier readings of Hurston and Bolinger as *I control the way that I concede/disguise control*. This story of control can have multiple frameworks. *Frankenstein*, itself, is full of them and then there are the outer layers: Shelley, her prologues and her husband; publishers' demands and expectations. I will interrogate Frankenstein's discourse through applying his own scientific method of gathering, dismantling, examining 'the minuteness of the parts' (p. 37). This practice, in a double sense in opposition to Frankenstein, who hangs onto his 'secret' (p. 36), will reveal the manipulative processes at work and show alternative available versions. Frankenstein is in this moment taken to be the embodiment and realization of the nightmarish consequences of patriarchal ideology in a character who speaks that world.

His suppression of blame contrasts with the approach of the protagonist of 'The Bloody Chamber' and it is this contrast which supplies the focus for the next stage of my discussion.

Carter's protagonist has all too visible an external presence, the monstrous Marquis, on which to place the blame, but also always implicates her self in her own downfall:

I knew I had behaved exactly according to his desires (p. 34)

'I only did what he knew I would.' (p. 37)

She is the speaker and grammatical subject of this discourse, but within it she is no more than the ostensible actor for it is 'the puppet-master' (p. 39) who pulls the strings. Earlier in this chapter I read Elam's project as writing out the knowing and intentional self. I put these two aspects together. Carter rips them apart and presents a truly terrifying articulation of the woman who knows that she has no agency. However, this woman survives to tell her tale of how the feminist force from another world, her mother, breaks this old power dyad and allows both for the emergence of a new concept, the co-operative triad, and also of herself as a newly empowered speaker who controls how she tells us of her earlier hideous manifestation as conscious puppet. I read this horror story that has a happy ending as an exploration of the very issue that intrigues me: how might (feminist) notions of subjectivity be embodied at the level of grammar as well as narrative? I will read Carter's fiction in this kind of way again in chapter five.

The Grammar of Responsibility

I have begun to talk of how levels of actor/agency are conveyed in grammar and context. I will look at the range of grammatical structures in action in *Frankenstein* and 'The Bloody Chamber'. Always 'the question at issue is: is the process brought about from within, or from outside?'. I might rewrite this in the light of my particular concerns as: to what extent is process represented as engendered by an autonomous agent and what ideology might lie

behind such representations? And repeat an earlier assertion about the grammar of agency.

There is no simple correspondence between *I* statements and the representation of an autonomous agent either in the active or the passive voice: *I* killed him; *I* found myself on the other side; *I* was found on the other side. No more is there a simple correspondence between not-*I* statements and the absence of any notion of human agency. This is the story I shall tell even as I show how the beauty of the ‘contrived’ episode in ‘The Bloody Chamber’ lies in the way it always oscillates between the two extreme perspectives which might be characterized as *I act knowingly* and *something just happened*. I offer here a reminder and a forecast of how one might (not) speak of the self as acting knowingly:

I myself opened the door on purpose
I myself opened the door
I opened the door
The door was opened by me
My hand opened the door
A sudden urge led me to open the door
A sudden gust of wind opened the door
The door was opened
The door opened

Did *I* do it? on purpose? Or did it happen without *me*? These will be the questions that I address through the discourse and narrative of *Frankenstein* and ‘The Bloody Chamber’.

Both texts, in my view, produce ambiguous answers but through different grammatical choices and to different ends: I will argue that, where *Frankenstein* seeks to diminish his and the reader/hearer’s sense of his responsibility, the (nameless) protagonist of ‘The Bloody Chamber’ seeks to augment hers.

If, for the moment, I accept the simple declarative (*I opened the door*) as the version which is clear and unambiguous in its claim to responsibility as agent, and shall show how *Frankenstein* never uses this mode when he is relating the struggle to continue his assemblage of the creature, I first want to show how the declarative structure can produce highly ambiguous readings in ‘The Bloody Chamber’. This is the story of **contrive**. It works through semantics. The particular instance that I want to expound occurs at the crux of the story; the moment which will lead the protagonist to discover the bloody chamber. It is

presented against a background which establishes that the narrator co-operates with her oppressor:

Then he sharply ordered: "Kneel!"
I knelt before him. (p. 36)

Already, the notion of the agentive *I* is under threat since 'I knelt' is a response to a command rather than an action initiated by her self. This might be depicted in ideological terms as the contrast in the text between the classic image of the patriarchal self who calls and the female other who can only make automatic responses. In the crucially ambiguous moment to come however, 'I' appears to be the agent of the action:

Fell, indeed; and with the clatter of a dropped canteen of cutlery, for, as I turned the slick Yale lock, I contrived, somehow, to open up the key ring itself, so that all the keys tumbled loose on the floor. (p. 26)

Contrive contains two oppositional meanings. There are not many such paradoxical processes (*cleave* is another, and *manage* has some of the qualities of **contrive**),⁴⁵ but feminist speakers might like to think about designing some more if their intent is to speak both ways. One meaning of **contrive** is positive in both sense and outcome: it carries intentionality and achievement:

I contrived to make the party a success

This is 'to plan with skill' (*OED*). The other meaning is negative (though of course my portrayals of positive and negative depend on my suppositions about the world) in both sense and outcome: it is involuntary. The *OED* gives as its example:

I contrived to make matters worse

I have determined my readings as positive or negative within the context of 'success' and 'worse'. It is in fact equally possible that one might with intentionality contrive to achieve a

⁴⁵As has *drop* in 'she dropped the baby'. *Compromise*, and *assumption of guilt/innocence* are other lexical items containing very different meanings.

negative result. The point, however, in 'The Bloody Chamber' is that all such meanings and combinations are both always possible and present. In the intentional reading, the 'somehow' would mean *against the odds* whereas in the involuntary one it would mean *I don't know how*. Did she mean to do it or not, and, did it have a beneficial outcome or not?

Doublespeak

This doubleness, 'luck or ill fortune' (p. 26), carried within the language forms, is integral to 'The Bloody Chamber' at both narrative and structural levels. It is the doubleness of internal and external compulsion and it is the doubleness of language itself; friend or enemy, addition or loss, or always both? It could thus be seen as a response to the view put forward by Miriam that language is never enough by also showing the overflow: it can also be too much. This is in no way to suggest that Carter produces an easy solution to the inadequacy of language to convey experience. The pervasiveness of this sense of the never enough of language is reflected through its representation in each of my chosen texts, (although I do sometimes hear a mocking gothic laugh in Carter's voice):

with an almost unimaginable horror, a horror the intensity of which I cannot transmit to you ('The Bloody Chamber', p. 33)

What can I say, that will enable you to understand the depth of my sorrow? All that I should express would be inadequate and feeble (*Frankenstein*, p. 187)

Miriam sat silent, busily searching for something to express the effect she felt. But she could not tell him what she felt. (*Pilgrimage II*, p. 107)

This last sentence carries its own double meaning. On one occasion I might read Miriam's lack as being that she could not find 'something to express the effect she felt', but, on

another, experience the lack in the larger sense that even if she (had) found 'something' she would not be able to tell it to him. Similarly in the *Frankenstein* quote 'should' carries the double possibilities of *am able to* and *ought to*. Once I notice that this kind of effect is being produced in a text, I begin to look for, be open to, other readings, and also to develop an awareness that the one that I hear will depend on my own uppermost 'presuppositions' at that time.

The 'contrived' episode in 'The Bloody Chamber' is in itself a rewriting (another kind of doublespeak) of what has gone before:

But I wanted to know still more; and, as I closed the office door and locked it, the means to discover more fell in my way. (p. 26)

At first glance, this initial rendition seems to present internal and external agency clearly and separately. 'I wanted', 'I closed', 'and locked' are all declarative structure, subject and agent (and mind and body) unproblematically combined. By 'the means to discover more' clause however the question opens up: is it self-engendered action or occurrence (*c/f the keys fell*) or has the human agent been suppressed? Reading backwards only compounds the double option. For, how do you read 'as I closed the office door and locked it'? One possibility is that it simply conveys a time-scale, two simultaneous events, but it could also be read with 'as' having the meaning of *because*. In the first reading, the narrator is not directly implicated in the fall; in the second, she is.

And is this fall 'luck or ill fortune'? For a moment I am reading 'The Bloody Chamber', like *Frankenstein*, as yet another version of *Paradise Lost*. Within the narrative structure of Carter's tale it proves to be both, as the event leads both to her downfall and her resurrection. Now it is *Paradise Regained*. In Carter's two writings of this crux, the constant feature is the parenthetical 'as I' clause. Each allows for both a complicit and an innocent reading. The generality of the first description ('as I closed the office door and locked it'), redolent of Hemingway's stripped down style, becomes much more specific in its rewriting ('as I turned

the slick Yale lock'). In cinematic terms (and Carter is a very visual writer, both of radio play and film scripts) the camera is honing in and the reader is entitled to anticipate clarification, this time round to be shown what really happened and how. On yet another level, the movement does seem to be towards explanation for, whereas the first version is held together by the coordinators 'but' and 'and', giving events equal status and omitting explicit causal links, in the second,⁴⁶ the use of the linking 'for' and 'so that' produce not only a sense of consequence but of planned consequence: *For I opened the door so that I could bang it shut*. If Carter had written *and all the keys tumbled loose on the floor* this would have represented something closer to a naturally occurring sequence of events. The movement from *but I opened the door and banged it shut* to the *so that* version is a movement towards an increase in the status of intentionality. But, if the reader thinks that a process of clarification is taking place here, it is only then to find it trapped forever within the doubleness of 'contrived'. The clarification is an illusion.

This irrevocably 'contrived' doubleness of responsibility in 'The Bloody Chamber' can be read as a linguistic representation of the internal and external pressures that a woman faces in her confrontation with patriarchal power. It encompasses aspects of both agent and not-agent feminist perspectives. This woman is always both victim and survivor:

No paint nor powder, no matter how thick or white, can mask that red mark on my forehead. (p. 41)

The past cannot be written out. It is forever an integral part of her, signified in 'that red mark'. But even as this is stated, there is a grammatical drive to externalize the fact. This process of externalization is possible primarily because of the feature, mentioned earlier, that Halliday identifies as grammatical metaphor. The following expanded discussion of

⁴⁶For convenience, here is the text again:

Fell, indeed; and with the clatter of a dropped canteen of cutlery, for, as I turned the slick Yale lock, I contrived, somehow, to open up the key ring itself, so that all the keys tumbled loose on the floor. (p. 26)

grammatical metaphor is shaped by my particular concerns. The related questions that I have in mind are: what counts as metaphorical and what might this mean for feminisms? I mediate between the first (1985) and second (1994) editions of *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*, enabling Halliday to talk back to himself, as I do not think that he is unaware that his analysis is problematic.

In the preface to the second edition Halliday responds to a question asked of the first: 'What do you mean by "natural"?' (p. xii). However I do not think that he resolves this, as this 'natural' is not unconnected in my reading to his statements about 'unmarked' formulations. I will show what this means in relation to his discussion on grammatical metaphor, at the same time showing my own problematic relationship to this notion, which is informed by my questioning of what counts as metaphor, from feminist perspective. In the second edition,⁴⁷ Halliday says the following:

If something is said to be metaphorical, it must be metaphorical by reference to something else [...]. We shall refer to the less metaphorical variant as 'congruent' [...]. This is not to say that the congruent realization is better, or that it is more frequent, or even that it functions like a norm; there are many instances where a metaphorical representation has become the norm, and this is in fact a natural process of linguistic change [...]. We make the assumption that there are typical ways of saying things [...]. There is an important sense in which this assumption is true. We do not know whether language evolved initially along these lines, beginning with congruent modes of representation and gradually elaborating them - we only start thinking of these as 'congruent', of course, when metaphorical ones develop alongside them. It is possible that metaphoric variation has been inherent in the nature of language from the very beginning. But either way, we are able to recognize the congruent forms for what they are, as the typical way in which experience is construed. (pp. 342-343)

Whilst there is 'an important sense' in which I (want to) agree with Halliday, he also makes too many assumptions on my behalf, which, I believe, he later undercuts in his own analysis.

⁴⁷ Since this is one of the sections that Halliday has substantially rewritten, it seems fair to refer to his most recent claims which, in my opinion bear the trace of his own struggle to formulate his position in a coherent way. For instance, whilst most of the quotation I have made from Halliday remains the same, the first edition has: 'If something is said to be metaphorical, there must also be something that is not' (p. 321). The second edition takes a less direct path.

In the above Halliday establishes a binary pair: congruent and metaphorical. 'Congruent' is attached to 'typical', where 'metaphorical' is attached to 'elaborating'. Subsequently, Halliday erodes both this binary distinction - 'There is no very clear line to be drawn between what is congruent and what is incongruent' (p. 348) - and the link between 'congruent' and 'typical' since 'these "metaphors" have become part of the system of English; they are now the unmarked form of encoding for these particular types of processes'. Halliday is referring here to his analysis of 'she has brown eyes' as the metaphorical realization of the congruent version, 'her eyes are brown' (p. 348). Whilst I think that Halliday's analysis begins to unwind in terms of sequential logic, I recall the important sense in which I want to retain the notion that *I do something* is the 'typical' way of things even as event feminism suggests that it is not. What Halliday does not allow for is the possibility of non-natural change.⁴⁸ Of his formulation, event feminism might argue that *something happens*, if used enough, could turn into 'the unmarked form of encoding for these particular types of processes'. It might also insist that all linguistic realizations are metaphorical in the sense that they are already a translation of one's thoughts. If, for Halliday, *I select interpretations* would be congruent where 'interpretations select themselves' would be grammatical metaphor, how does the latter come into being? Deconstructive writing would be marked by a refusal (I wanted at first to say *reversal* but that would be most undeconstructive) of these terms on the grounds that they impute an origin and a deviation from it just as they set up a binary structure. For Derrida, 'interpretations select themselves'.⁴⁹ This formulation embodies how things

⁴⁸Deborah Cameron, in *Verbal Hygiene* (London: Routledge, 1995), repeatedly states that change does not only occur naturally but also with intent, and she wants that to be informed intent: 'the meaning and use of words is a matter of contestation, and I am proposing we engage in the contest openly and with a more explicit notion of what is at stake' (p. 164). I aim to follow this exhortation, but in relation to the use of grammar rather than words.

⁴⁹In *Discerning the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), Paul Smith discusses this 'Derridaist' (p. 45) move (p. 50). Smith is concerned to show how 'the subject' still permeates Derrida's work in spite of his best efforts to efface it. Smith is aware of the grammatical formulations open to a speaker/writer, but is primarily concerned to make his point through the play on meanings of 'cern(e)': 'to accept an inheritance'/'to enclose' (p. xxx). 'My project in this book is, then, to be described as an attempt to *dis-cern* the "subject," and to argue that the human agent *exceeds* the "subject" as it is constructed in and by much poststructuralist theory as well as by those discourses against which poststructuralist theory claims to pose itself' (p. xxx, his emphases). However, although

happen, in its erasure of *I*. It resists origins. I cannot settle in either Halliday's or Derrida's world: I find my place on the borders.

With these thoughts in mind, I return to Halliday's analysis, aware that it enables me to talk from more than one feminist perspective. Halliday proposes that grammatical metaphor is the process by which a substitutive form takes the place of a congruent form, resulting in grammatical changes. These may involve a redistribution of subject/object: *They reached the summit on the fifth day* becomes *the fifth day saw them at the summit* (p. 346). One of the effects in this example is to produce as both the grammatical subject and actor something other than a human element. Though this, I should emphasize, is not always the case. In his account of interpersonal grammatical metaphors, *all authorities on the subject are agreed* (metaphorical) is just one way in many of meaning *I believe* (congruent). Although Halliday acknowledges here that this may be 'dissimulating' (p. 355) and that 'nominalizing is the single most powerful resource for creating grammatical metaphor' (p. 352) and one which 'tends to mark off the expert from the uninitiated' (p. 353) he does not choose to revise his earlier statement that neither version is necessarily better nor more accurate than the other.⁵⁰

it interested me, I diverge from it in several ways: in particular, I hope to speak through ideas and grammar that are already accessible to the reader, and I do not take up such an antagonistic relationship to 'poststructuralism' or to Derrida. In the light of my discussion of the hostile introduction to *Dust Tracks* (chapter four), it is intriguing to note John Mowitt's foreword, 'The Resistance in Theory' (pp. ix-xxiii), to Smith's text since it is concerned to fill in the details that Mowitt thinks Smith has left out. Further reference is given to this edition in the text.

⁵⁰I do not intend to suggest here that I am the first to be aware that nominalization, or indeed other grammatical modes, might be used for ideological purpose. Nor do I ever intend to suggest that Halliday's work has not been used to expose the ideological significance of such modes. In *Language and Power* (London: Longman, 1989), Norman Fairclough discusses how the use of nominalization and passive verb structures may be 'ideologically motivated obfuscation of agency, causality, and responsibility' (p. 124). Roger Fowler and Gunther Kress, in work based on Halliday's functional grammar, also discuss the implications of 'nominalizations and passivizations' in their essay, 'Critical Linguistics', in *Language and Control*, Roger Fowler and others (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), pp. 185-213 (pp. 207-210). In the same text, Tony Trew's essay, 'Theory and Ideology at Work', pp. 94-116, in analysing contrasting newspaper reports of a fatal incident, concludes that if 'passivization [...] stands as the first in a sequence of changes that include deletion of agents, selective rewording, nominalization, and embedding [...], then that single linguistic change belongs to a structured sequence of changes, which as a whole has determinate theoretical or ideological significance' (pp. 111-112). Perhaps these claims are too simplistic for my purposes as I want to wonder about the different ways in which these constructions (nominalizations, passives) mean, rather than present them as simply a product of (right wing) ideology.

I want to put this view into question, from feminist perspective. My questioning of it will reverberate throughout this thesis.

Returning to 'The Bloody Chamber', and borrowing, in a problematic mode, Halliday's account of grammatical metaphor, the congruent version of the stain that marks 'The Bloody Chamber' might be construed as *I cannot mask that red mark on my forehead with any powder or paint*. I hope the point will be emerging that the Carterian version externalizes the action from *I* out to 'no paint nor powder'. It becomes their failure rather than the protagonist's. This outward movement is intensified by the choice of the deictic expressing distance, 'that', rather than the one which conveys nearness, *this*. Carter's mode of expression helps me to return to my border territory. In that I hold it to be true that inanimate objects such as 'paint' or 'powder' cannot act independently or intentionally in the world I hear grammatical metaphor.⁵¹ In that I do not hold it to be true that the protagonist is entirely responsible for what happens to her I hear congruence. The part of me which attributes responsibility and choice to speakers also insists that what Halliday calls grammatical metaphor can serve to disguise responsibility. I can illustrate this through an example of political discourse:

Events have forced us to raise taxes.⁵²

What would a deconstructive reading of this be? I think that both the externalizing and ideological intention is very clear. I propose as one congruent form: *We (the members of the Conservative government) have raised taxes because of our poor management of the economy*. Another might be: *we do not have control over the very things (such as the economy) that we claim to control*. The Conservative government *se déconstruit*.

⁵¹There is the further complication that something like the wind could open the door independently of human involvement, but I would not see intentionality behind it - unless I was reading a horror story. Halliday would not see this as a complication since he does not share my focus on human or indeed intentional action.

⁵²John Major in the House of Commons, 25th Jan 1994.

Ironically, it is the increasing recognition of the debasement of language by politicians that might lead to greater awareness of the current need to think about how language can be worked to specific ends. Such awareness denudes the practice of much of its power. And this is my point. As we learn to read and write such strategies then language no longer has the same totalizing power whatever one's position. This need for fluency in all discourses is another of the stories of 'The Bloody Chamber'. The protagonist speaks all ways: she talks the language of fairy-tale, science, schoolgirl, sensuality, and pornography. She is afraid of none of them. She speaks in 'straight lines' and 'intricate interlocking circles'. Ultimately, she and her companions move beyond reach. Modes of discourse, particularly those historically and negatively assigned to women, cease to have power:

We know we are the source of many whisperings and much gossip but the three of us know the truth of it and mere chatter can never harm us.
(p. 40)

However, this success coexists always with 'that red mark'. Here at the metalevel of both structure and narrative is success and failure: 'luck' and 'ill fortune': she both controls and does not control. The opposites are always present and part of the same thing. I take 'I contrived' to encapsulate the double vision of proponents and opponents of agency. Read both ways.

Seeing Frankenstein In More Ways Than One

Frankenstein also controls and does not control his own discourse. He controls both through his evasive tactics which I shall go on to expose, and through his practice of changing the words of others. Though Walton tells the story, Frankenstein 'himself corrected and augmented [Walton's notes] in many places' (p. 180):

'Since you have preserved my narration,' said he, 'I would not that a mutilated one should go down to posterity.' (p. 180)

But, at a higher level, the author controls. Shelley does this in the first instance by developing an idiolect for Frankenstein which both seeks to serve his purposes but also can be shown to reveal his failures. She also, in creating a triple narrative framework, reveals patterns of unsuccessful male creativity and shows destructive links among her narrators that they never see for themselves. At a higher level still, the author both controls and does not control her own text. Quite apart from publishing, financial and possibly husbandly impositions, the text (and I now mean any text) continues to generate new meanings within new historical contexts. This is, of course, part of Shelley's theme - the uncontrollable production of unforeseeable consequences, reborn as Chaos Theory. This dual spiral of control and loss of control can be read as an pre-enactment of Derrida's recognition of a process of constant deferral, the *mise en abyme*. There is no point at which one can stop and say that this text is under control, its meaning is defined for all time. Nor is there a sense in which one can assume that change necessarily constitutes progress, a change for the better.⁵³ In this context, my readings, like others, are an act of deferral in that they seek to converse rather than dictate, and in that *I* do not have control over how these readings will in turn be read. I do however take responsibility for my readings and show how they come into being: I attempt ethical engagement. This process must continue into infinity.

The justification for my readings of *Frankenstein* depends both on revealing patterns of discourse and in showing at times the crucial exception. I claim that Frankenstein's discourse is characterized by the creation of ambiguity as to the responsible agent. This pattern would not have such impact if there were not another style within the same text standing in contrast. Ultimately, this belongs to the nameless creature who, although, as Paddy Lyons points out, he has a shifting attitude to responsibility,⁵⁴ finally accepts it for himself. He, like the protagonist of 'The Bloody Chamber', has all too evident sources of grievance, but, having

⁵³This is to veer away from Williams' analysis, for I think it would be fair to say that he endorses the notion of history as progress.

⁵⁴Introduction to *Frankenstein*, p. xi.

detailed to Walton the ways in which he was ‘spurned’ and ‘sinned against’ concludes:

‘But it is true that I am a wretch. I have murdered the lovely and the helpless; I have strangled the innocent as they slept, and grasped to death his throat who never injured me or any other living thing.’ (p. 190)

This is to return to the simple declarative structure. Grammatical subject and agent are one, acting, I risk saying here, with intention towards specific goals. The verbs and nominalized adjectives are value-laden, contrasting his vile acts with the purity of the victims. The absence of specifying nouns, of naming the other, contributes to intensifying the contrast of evil and good: it is the specific ‘I’ against the general other. Furthermore, it is judgment against himself. Within all the transpositions of Frankenstein and the creature (which I shall later argue are strongly prefigured in the creation scene) there finally stands this central contrast. The creature, both structurally and narratively, ultimately takes unequivocal responsibility for his actions: Frankenstein evades them till the end. In this context, it is logical that their endings should also be in stark contrast. (I tend to see the symbiotic relationship as one of a series of crossovers, producing moments of intersection and contrast rather than one proceeding along parallel lines.) Frankenstein hangs onto life even as it is gradually removed from him:

About half an hour afterwards he attempted again to speak, but was unable; he pressed my hand feebly, and his eyes closed forever, while the irradiation of a gentle smile passed away from his lips. (p. 187)

Control fades out both semantically, through ‘attempted’ and ‘feebly’, and structurally, as the coherent self, ‘he’, is reduced to parts of himself, and further diminished to a mere echo of an action from one such part. In the ultimate crossover, it is Frankenstein who, at the moment of his ‘untimely extinction’ (p. 187), disintegrates back into his component parts and beyond, and the creature who takes control of his ending, who times his extinction and remains whole and active in his vision of it. (It is part of the crossover that we experience the creature’s

coming-to-being but only hear of his death, and that the reverse holds true for Frankenstein.)

For he tells Walton that

I shall ascend my funeral pile triumphantly, and exult in the agony of the torturing flames. (p. 191)

This moment of death will at all levels be the pinnacle of his life. Against this contrasting background, I shall interrogate the ways in which Frankenstein creates ambiguity even as he creates life.

‘An Almost Impossible Exercise of Will’?

In this discussion, I am claiming that it is valid to talk of Frankenstein’s discourse as something peculiar to him as well as something given to him by the author. This kind of differentiation is currently a problematic area. Critics no longer want to talk about characters as meaningful entities, just as some writers no longer want to produce characters at all.⁵⁵ In view of this I must make my own position clear. Of course I am aware that Shelley has evoked the character that is Frankenstein, but I also claim that she does so in such a way as to produce a discourse that is idiomatic to him. Frankenstein speaks. The harder part of my claim is that this is to be understood as Frankenstein speaking to a particular end, knowing what he does. My evidence is that he ‘corrected and augmented’ Walton’s record of his speech, and the patterns that this evinces. A Freudian reading might claim that this is an unconscious, defensive/self-protecting mechanism. Others might find me guilty of the ‘intentional fallacy’. Every way, the notion of patriarchal control as a meaningful concept is disturbed. I will however continue to claim for clarity’s sake that Frankenstein speaks with intent since this is how I hear it. In this light, I look at his use of the whole range of

⁵⁵Christine Brooke-Rose summarizes this discussion in *Stories, Theories and Things* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 168-80.

grammatical strategies for declaring and concealing his active role. My point is that in using the concealing modes, Frankenstein's intentions are very different from those of feminists who want to write *I* out, but that these different intentions are produced in the same way and may be read in the same way. Writers cannot control readers. They are in dangerous territory.

It is not that Frankenstein never speaks of himself in the creation scene:

I often asked myself (p. 35)

[I] determined thenceforth to apply myself (p. 35)

I prepared myself (p. 37)

I had dedicated myself (p. 38)

I promised myself. (p. 39)

He speaks to and of himself in moments of great intensity. In only one of these, 'I had dedicated myself', is 'myself' an essential complement. Elsewhere it could be omitted, as it is in 'as I applied so closely' (p. 34). It occurs with verbs of mental rather than material processes. On that occasion when 'myself' is obligatory, this statement could be reformulated to leave it out: *I was dedicated*. I read this practice as indicative of Frankenstein's overarching self-absorption: it is literally self-reflexive. He knows the other way of speaking too:

I was engaged (p. 34, twice)

I [...] was solely wrapt up in (p. 35)

I was encouraged (p. 37)

My attention was fixed. (p. 35)

This construction begins to have creeping overtones of an ambiguous internal/external compulsion. It begins to allow for the question: by whom or what? It is functioning at one level as a pseudo-passive. This effect occurs when the verb *to be*, which does not have a

separate passive form, is used in conjunction with a past participle. The ambiguity arises out of whether the latter is acting as an adjective which would equate with an internal state, as in *I was busy* where *busy* simply says something about *me*, or as the predicator completing the verb group, which then equates to process, with the possibility of outside interference. Thus there are always two readings available: 'I was encouraged' as an internal state of mind, and as a process produced by some suppressed external agency. There are instances where this question of by whom or what can seem to be carried through and resolved:

but my imagination was too much exalted by my first success. (p. 37)

However, on reflection this turns out to be a cyclical process, moving around Frankenstein's own perceptions. There is no identifiable external perspective available. These instances are in themselves of limited ambiguity, but they set the scene whereby similar but much more doubled structures can slip in as part of Frankenstein's idiolect:

Now I was led to examine the cause and progress of this decay, and forced to spend days and nights in vaults and charnel houses. (p. 35)

There is now a much more crucial sense in which the question of internal or external compulsion arises. Was it a free choice? The verbal constructions here allow for follow through of both kinds of compulsion:

I was led by the man's demand to open the door (external)

I was led by my desire to open the door (internal)

and ambiguity

I was led by necessity to open the door (whose necessity?)

The absence of specified agency in Frankenstein's speech coupled with the range of potential agencies leaves the reader with multiple perceptions of what he might be meaning to say.

The movement from 'led' to 'forced' is a semantic intensification of this pressure whatever is understood to be its source. The unambiguous forms of *I led/forced myself* are rejected in

favour of a mode which always contains irresolvable tension much as that 'contrived' in 'The Bloody Chamber', the effect though here being to blur Frankenstein's level of responsibility rather than to acknowledge that there has been some. In this issue of claiming and accepting responsibility, and exploring the grammatical strategies available, feminists need to take great care. Frankenstein, in my view, is being shown to enact the patriarchal voice of control which seeks to choose at which points he will claim responsibility, but not blame.

Carter's protagonist knows this 'forced' construction too:

But that perfume of spiced leather always betrayed him; after my first shock, I was forced always to mimic surprise, so that he would not be disappointed. (p. 8)

I forced myself to be seductive. (p. 35)

In the first of these uses, the context makes it clear that this is the external pressure of social expectation, of giving the right response. Its narrative value lies in the way that it semantically pre-enacts subsequent events. 'Betrayed', 'shock' and 'forced' are the discourse of brutal encounter rather than seduction, in which this event recurs. But in this story the two are irrevocably intertwined. It is worth recollecting at this point, bearing in mind my story of who controls the text, that both *Frankenstein* and 'The Bloody Chamber' are always retellings of their story the end of which is already known to the narrator, and that, whereas the narrator of 'The Bloody Chamber' uses this knowledge to reassure the reader, Frankenstein uses it to intensify the fear of the reader ('Great God! if for one instant I had thought what might be the hellish intention of my fiendish adversary' (p. 164)). These are texts which consciously look back from the now of the telling (as does 'A Country House' to which I turn in the next chapter), in contrast to *Pilgrimage*, for instance, which although also a retelling of a kind, chooses not to bring this to the surface as the aim is to present a developmental rather than a recollective image.

At the second 'forced' occasion in 'The Bloody Chamber', 'I forced myself', the move is, both structurally and contextually, explicitly into internal compulsion. This is a retelling of the earlier scene of enforced seductive behaviour on the part of the protagonist, but at stake now is personal survival rather than social etiquette. This 'forced' thus carries the full strength of its meaning that there is no other option. The context of 'forced' in *Frankenstein*, however, never allows for this level of understanding to be reached. The source of pressure, internal or external, can never be determined there. This is not to say that such ambiguity is not also present in the discourse of 'The Bloody Chamber's' protagonist for she tells of

that illimitable darkness whose source I had been compelled to seek in his absence. (p. 34)

Inviting the unanswered question, 'compelled' by whom or what?, this formulation occurs in a concentration of forms which blur the initiating factor. Are the actions self-engendered, or brought about by the Marquis, or indeed by 'luck or ill fortune'? In this tale, these aspects are forever inextricably linked.

There is similar ambiguous potential in modal constructions of the *I must* variety. This mode can convey personal conviction or external insistence: *I must pay my taxes*. Too often, I read analyses which insist on one meaning or the other where it seems to me that the context leaves both always as possible interpretations. I can see that one's singular reading may arise out of one's 'presuppositions' and habits of making determinate epistemological claims. I however relish double readings. My approach allows for this entangled simultaneous vision of self and not-self, rather than a commitment to either side. How do you read:

I must also observe the natural decay and corruption of the human body
(*Frankenstein*, p. 35)

The telephone rang a shrill imperative [...] I knew I must answer it.
(*'The Bloody Chamber'*, p. 38)

Internal or external compulsion? or always something of both? In 'The Bloody Chamber', 'I knew' often precedes this ambiguous structure, and it is this which, in my reading, again points to the protagonist's desire to implicate herself in the unfolding drama in contrast to Frankenstein's desire to extricate himself from blame. However, *I knew* can also carry a double status of internal (intuition) and external (research) knowledge, particularly when it is, as here, not followed through by *because*. I know this double status to be true because each time I read this I wonder why she has to answer the phone. Just as the protagonist may have been 'compelled to seek' the source in the Marquis' absence, the reader may be compelled to seek the source of her actions, but I suggest that any conviction that such source is determinable is brought about by the reader's 'presuppositions' imposed on the text. Returning to the story of Frankenstein's duplicitous discourse, the next means by which the waters of responsibility are muddied is the explicit passive form. Something is done to him:

I had been animated by an almost supernatural enthusiasm. (p. 35)

I wonder by whom or by what. The process (of animation) is followed through: there is an answer to the question. However, it is more apparent than real. It seems that source is revealed to be 'an almost supernatural enthusiasm', but this noun phrase pushes in opposite directions. 'An' is the impersonal choice which avoids the clarification that 'my' would have brought. 'Enthusiasm' on the other hand, points to his own internal resources. Between this opposition, 'supernatural', had it stood alone, would have pointed unambiguously outwards. However, it does not stand alone. Its modification by 'almost' redoubles the inherent inner/outer structure of agency. Semantically, if only 'almost' then it is not 'supernatural', but the very presence of this 'supernatural' word introduces that idea into the reader's mind. S/he cannot determine whether or not this 'enthusiasm' emanates from within Frankenstein. This is another of those structures, now gaining the status of strategy, of dominant mode of speech, which turns in on itself. Subject and predicate are separated out only to collapse into the same thing:

a convulsive motion agitated its limbs. (p. 40)

This process refers to the creature coming to life. This double writing does not produce two angles of perception as in 'The Bloody Chamber' but rather creates the illusion of two separate participants which are in fact the same. I would suggest as the congruent version

Its limbs moved convulsively

or

Its limbs convulsed

In this reformulation, *limbs* would be the essential participant, Halliday's Medium, and *moved convulsively* or *convulsed* would be the process. There would be no other agent. Was there one? I might propose as another congruent version

I caused its limbs to move convulsively

Frankenstein's tactic of nominalizing the verbal process into 'a convulsive motion', another grammatical metaphor, appears to create an agent-process-goal distribution. The effect is to make the creature seem to be the source of its own animation. Frankenstein's preceding desire 'that I might infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing' (p. 40), with its air of potentiality rather than certainty, takes on a new resonance that may already be there in a rereading.

Animation is a crucial aspect of this episode. The way that it is employed here draws out a moment of intersection between creator and creation. I would suggest that this is where Shelley controls the text to produce this effect. Frankenstein tells us that he could not have proceeded 'unless I had been animated by an almost supernatural enthusiasm' (p. 35). Then

I became myself capable of bestowing animation upon lifeless matter.
(p. 36)

With minor variation, these words are repeated three times (pp. 36-37) at this crucial juncture. The semantics show that Frankenstein must first be animated before he in his turn can bestow animation (and then try to represent it as self-engendered). It is the same process of coming-to-life, but who or what is the source? Who 'reserved' Frankenstein 'alone [...] to

discover so astonishing a secret' (p. 36)? There is perhaps at this point a chain effect rather than a moment of intersection, one created through semantic cohesion. It is 'the birth of that passion' (p. 23), and note that externalizing and distancing deictic 'that', in Frankenstein which leads to the birth in turn of the creature. It is at times as if he is the chosen agent of a higher power as in a way I am suggesting that he is the chosen agent of Shelley to reveal the perfidy of patriarchal discourse. If so, then

When I found so astonishing a power placed within my hands (p. 37)

he is merely carrying out, as Carter's protagonist may have been, his predestined role. There are echoes of God as well as woman behind Frankenstein's usurpation of the creative role. It is essential that this is never more than an echo since Frankenstein wants the glory for himself even as he seeks to displace blame somewhere else.

Prior to the birth scene, 'an incident happened that protracted my stay' (p. 35). Grammatical metaphor creates a new inanimate subject, 'an incident', which seems to be the cause which affects Frankenstein, (the possessor of) the goal. The congruent version, and I hope the significance of Halliday's portrayal of congruence as a recognition of human involvement is becoming increasingly clear, might read *I decided to stay because*, placing responsibility unambiguously with Frankenstein, himself. *I had to stay because* would reproduce the ambiguity. Human involvement is not equivalent to human agency: *I do not necessarily choose to do something*. There would also always be the semantic option of clarifying exactly what 'happened', whereas 'an incident' is highly unspecific. This translates into *a happening happened*. However as the reader progresses, it turns out to be anything but unspecific. It is, rather, nothing less than when 'I succeeded in discovering the cause and generation of life' (p. 36). 'An incident' is of Frankenstein's own making (seeking glory) though he has tried to present it first of all as coming from somewhere else (dispensing blame). Compare this with his presentation of the creature's own making that I discuss above. Creative acts have no secure foundation inside this text any more than they do outside

of it. For 'an incident' is also not of Frankenstein's own making. At the actual moment of its occurrence, it is presented as revelation:

until from the midst of this darkness a sudden light broke in upon me
(p. 36).

This is the discourse of the bible. Again there is a sense of God behind this god of creation. Frankenstein is both linked back to another power, which might be his creator, as well as forward to his creation. The chain extends, but the source/cause is never determinable. Here is *différance* out of its time.⁵⁶ In further instances of making something other than himself appear to be the source of action, forms that would be the linguistic embodiment of event feminisms, Frankenstein unwittingly continues to establish this chain. I say unwittingly since I now claim that there are two levels to Frankenstein's discourse: the knowing level is his drive to conceal culpability for subsequent awful events; but there is another outcome to this process which is to establish, primarily through semantic links ('animation', 'impulse', 'supernatural') the elision between creator and creation, which then extends at the metalevel across the discourse of all three narrators to reveal connections between and amongst them that none of them ever acknowledge.⁵⁷ This is the unwitting aspect of his speech. Frankenstein both knows and does not know. Frankenstein almost stops 'his secret toil' (p. 38)

but then a resistless, and almost frantic impulse, urged me forward. (p. 38)

⁵⁶I am referring to Derrida's related concepts of infinite deferral and absence of origin though of course they can be, as deconstructive events, neither concepts nor Derrida's. Infinite deferral and absence of origin are raised throughout *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976), originally published as *De la grammatologie* (Éditions de Minuit, 1967).

⁵⁷There is semantic crossover between *Frankenstein* and *The Vampyre* [1816], written by Dr. John Polidori, another of the group of friends (also including Percy Bysshe Shelley and Lord Byron) who decided that each should write a horror story. In *The Vampyre*, Aubrey is absorbed in 'that mystery which to his exalted imagination began to assume the appearance of something supernatural', *The Vampyre and Other Works: Selected Writings of Dr. John Polidori* (Chislehurst: Gargoyle's Head Press, 1991), pp. 5-20 (p. 8). This commonality of lexical items - gothic discourse - might suggest that Mary Shelley was unaware of (the significance of) the fact that her narrators share words.

He cannot openly declare responsibility for continuing. Again, through grammatical metaphor, Frankenstein creates a spurious agent. The congruent version might read *I urged myself forward* or *I went forward*. As it stands, does the 'impulse' come from within or without? Is Frankenstein 'resistless' to a higher power or his own desires? The reader is denied certain knowledge. Earlier, speaking in relation to himself, Frankenstein tells us about 'the unnatural stimulus ceasing to operate' (p. 36). The language of 'frantic impulse' and 'unnatural stimulus', as with 'animation' earlier, relates forward to what Frankenstein is doing to the creature as well as backwards to what is being done to him. Frankenstein may not be the director but just playing his part in a potentially endless chain of patriarchal fantasy. It is not hard to read this text as a prophetic and troubling enactment of Derridean philosophy.

I have suggested that it is Frankenstein who invokes the possibility of a pre-existent external power through his grammatical choices, but Shelley who invokes the chain reaction through semantic links, which, I will later show, transcend any one narrator. This authorial process of prefiguration of the shared aspects of creator and creation takes another, powerful, form at the point at which the parts of the latter are being assembled into a whole. Frankenstein's own body, as it does at the moment of death, breaks down into parts so that for a moment the two symbolically intersect as components (fragmented selves) rather than a totality. It is an intersection, as one is in the process of coming together precisely as the other is coming apart in the moment of (dis)assemblage. There is no coherent self that is Frankenstein, but, instead, in rapid and concentrated succession, in both that time and this time of recollection, the metonymic

my cheek had grown pale (p. 37)

my person had become emaciated (p. 38)

my limbs now tremble, and my eyes swim with the remembrance (p. 38)

and, in the culmination of the moment of ‘dissecting’:

my eyeballs were starting from their sockets in attending to the details of my employment. (p. 38)

This, too, might be a kind of double writing: the same action in both directions at the same time. That is to say that one of ‘the details of my employment’ would be the insertion of the creature’s eyeballs into their sockets even as ‘my eyeballs were starting from their sockets’.

In that moment Frankenstein and his creation are visually indistinguishable.

I have proposed earlier in this chapter that I can distinguish between aims that can be attributed to the character, Frankenstein, and to the author, Shelley, and justify this through the varying levels of patterning in the text. I shall expand this somewhat controversial claim now. In his introduction to *Frankenstein*, Paddy Lyons discusses the absence of a controlling narrative voice that can be identified as authorial,⁵⁸ which absence has been perceived by feminist critics in both a positive and negative light. It can be conceived that a feminist who favours personal testimony would find this less acceptable than a not-*I* feminist, if it were true. Hearing an authorial voice is problematic in the light of the ‘intentional fallacy’ and the ‘death of the author’, and I would always resist simplistic identification between author and narrative and certainly resist readings of *Pilgrimage* which claim either that Miriam is Dorothy Richardson, or that the narrative is unproblematically always and only Miriam’s perception.⁵⁹ I have already noted that I read Angela Carter as using her stories to try out theoretical ideas in practice, explorative, mocking, not necessarily endorsing, all at the same time. It is not possible then to make a simple equation between textual idea and authorial

⁵⁸Introduction pp. xii-xiii.

⁵⁹In this context it is worth noting that where Gillian E. Hanscombe finds that ‘no ironic distance, therefore, between Richardson’s voice and Miriam’s is admitted’ (‘Richardson versus the Novvle’, in *Breaking the Sequence: Women’s Experimental Fiction*, ed. by Ellen G. Friedman and Miriam Fuchs (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 85-98 (p. 86)), Gloria G. Fromm thinks that ‘an attentive reader should not be taken in for one moment: Miriam is not being presented without irony’ (*Dorothy Richardson: A Biography* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1977), p. 103). I might interpret Hanscombe as saying *is admitted by me*, drawing attention to her possible use of the passive to ‘disguise the agent’ and the semantic doubleness of *admit*.

belief, but it is possible, in my view, to draw out authorial intrigue in a text, and I do this through looking at patterns of linguistic construction which transcend any one perspective, although they do not transcend the text to represent the author. It concerns me when readers resist aspects of a text, for instance the multiple framework strategy of *Frankenstein*, because they do not fit in with the text that the reader wants to find there. I am always insisting on the ethical responsibilities of reading and this is not one of them. The attentive reader will listen to all that is said.⁶⁰ It is my view in any case that the layered narrative structure (the form) of *Frankenstein* is crucial in the production of its meanings. Rather than a concern with how it stifles an authoritative voice, through producing a distancing effect between author and narrative, I see how this structure reveals the overarching sense of the chain reaction from one male voice seeking power to another and of their own blindness to this process: how it shows up repeatedly the silent women whose stories can only be told by men. And I hear this as the real anxiety that *Frankenstein* tells. It is the recurrent patterning which creates this theme. It transcends any one of the narrators. The features of idiolect of each speaker coexist with repetitive semantic features, and repetitive sequences within and across speakers reveal that it is this pattern of male behaviour which is ultimately more destructive than one awful isolated act. I spoke earlier in this chapter of the blindness of the perpetrators. Walton, who provides the outer framework, reveals through semantic representation both the powerful identification between himself and Frankenstein in their shared 'ardour' for scientific 'pursuit',⁶¹ and between Frankenstein and his creation:

then, like a volcano bursting forth, his face would suddenly change to an expression of the wildest rage, as he shrieked out imprecations on his persecutor (p. 180)

⁶⁰This exhortation does not rule out Judith Fetterley's call for 'the resisting reader' in *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978). No reader has to go along with the text and any reader may see ways in which it contradicts itself as Fetterley suggests, but such readings lose their effectiveness if they leave out what is there in the text.

⁶¹Walton's (pp. 8-9) and Frankenstein's (pp. 34-35) discourse are suffused with such terminology. Other words of passion and childbirth such as 'desire' and 'conceive' permeate both their justifications.

and every feature and gesture seemed instigated by the wildest rage of some uncontrollable passion. (p. 188)

Walton describes Frankenstein in the first instance, and then the creature, but never acknowledges what the semantics insist upon - the sameness. Indeed, he constantly avers the difference between 'this admirable being' (p. 181) and the 'monster' (p. 180). There is no overt didacticism on the part of the author. The multiple links are there to be found but the reader must make his/her own connections, reading against the narrator as well as with him. I want to divert here to suggest that the same slippage of identification occurs in *Pilgrimage* although through different means. This is one way in which something beyond Miriam's perception exists in the text. These processes whereby one identity is in some way fused with another should be of interest to feminists who wish to dismantle the binary opposition of self and other.

Miriam and Julia

At the explicit level of narrative, Miriam is often at pains to disassociate herself from other women in a way which is troublesome to the reader who wants to find a positive vision of female solidarity within the text. This isolationist position cannot be read out of *Pilgrimage*. However, at another level, that of grammar, there is identification and fusion between Miriam and other women. This, too, is a patterned occurrence running through the text and, since I can demonstrate from within the text that Richardson knows the grammatical rule at stake, I can fairly claim that this is an intended effect. Here, first of all, is the rule, arising out of Amabel's letter to Miriam:

Behind the counter, a woman watching a kitten, *on* the counter, lapping up milk as if she, I mean the woman, who had her elbows amongst the buns and rather gorgeous red hair, never did and never would have anything much else to do. (IV, p. 425, her emphasis)

This is a wonderful example of an extended grammatical joke (what exactly were those elbows amongst?), but my particular interest here lies in the grammatical rule for pronominal referents. This says that *she/hel/it* may be substituted for a previously mentioned noun where the reference is clear.⁶² Amabel, recognizing that ‘she’ might grammatically be taken to represent the kitten, introduces the clarifying parenthesis, ‘I mean the woman’, to put Miriam back on the right track. Within this crazy writing lies a clue to a game that works because *Pilgrimage* is written primarily in the third person, that is, Miriam is *she* rather more than *I*. Ironically, if indeed ‘the whole world of *Pilgrimage* is filtered through Miriam’s mind alone; the reader sees what she sees and is never told what any of the other characters see’,⁶³ yet this pervasive ‘she’ produces another effect which rises **beyond** Miriam’s perception:

She [Julia] ate scarcely anything herself, keeping her attention free and always seeming to be waiting for someone to say something that was never said. Her broad-shouldered, curiously buoyant, heavy, lounging, ill-clad form, her thick white skin, her eyes like a grey-blue sea, her dark masses of fine hair had long been for Miriam the deepest nook in the meal-time gatherings - she rested there unafraid of anything the boarders might say or do. She would never be implicated. Julia would take care of that, heading everything off and melting up the difficulties into some absurdity that would set all the Pernes talking. (I, p. 340)

In my first time readings (for it happens each time I return) I think that it is Julia who ‘rested there unafraid’ and who ‘would never be implicated’.⁶⁴ The extended description of her has enticed me into thinking that she is the focus of this moment rather than the trigger to some other recognition of Miriam(’s). I have not heard enough to induce me to make the switch. I have on the contrary heard a textual link between ‘lounging’ and ‘rested there’, and in the larger context I already know that it is Julia who is ‘unafraid of anything the boarders might say or do’ whereas Miriam approaches ‘the little girls [who] always seemed large and

⁶²The grounds for determining whether such substitution is appropriate are that ‘the substitute pro-form can be replaced by the antecedent without unacceptability on structural grounds and without change of meaning’ (Quirk *et al*, p. 864). This rule, like any other, can be subverted.

⁶³Gillian E. Hanscombe, 1979 Introduction *Pilgrimage*, p. 1.

⁶⁴I have given this extract to several readers. Four read ‘she rested’ as Julia, three as Miriam. One kept changing her mind. Two said it was not possible to know.

formidable' (I, p. 333) 'with beating heart' (I, p. 288). When I look again, confounded by the realization that it is Julia who 'would take care of that' (for Miriam? for herself?), I see how the punctuation abets a (con)fused reading. There is a surfeit of commas followed by a drought.⁶⁵ Commas around 'for Miriam' might have supported a reading that it is Julia who 'rested there'. To tell the truth, I am not sure what the effect of the dash before 'she rested' finally is because, by the time I come to wonder about it, I am already 'implicated' in a (con)fused reading. For now I see a textual link between 'the deepest nook' and 'rested there'. In this reading, it is Miriam who 'rested there'; 'there' has a specific anaphoric referent ('the deepest nook') rather than an existential status; is a mental rather than a physical place; and the story is about a visionary moment of peace for Miriam rather than a reflection on Julia's general state of mind. The sound of my reading changes depending on whether I hear 'she' as Miriam or Julia. It may be Julia's body and it may be Miriam's mind. The naming of Julia seems to reassert the reader's clarity of vision, but that too can work both ways - a reassertion or a switch. It depends whether the reader thinks that Miriam goes on looking outwards at Julia, or turns her glance inwards. I do not think that one can ever know. The reader cannot distinguish with certainty between Miriam and Julia just as s/he cannot know for sure if 'there' is a place of mind or body. They will always be 'implicated', 'melting up' into each other in an endless series of forward and backward readings. This (con)fusion could have been easily averted by a simple insertion, 'she, *that is Miriam/Julia*, rested there'. The same kind of interrelated selves are produced in relation to Miriam and her sister, Eve, (I, p. 205), Miriam and her mother (I, p. 317), and Miriam and Frau Knigge (IV, p. 32) amongst others. It is a recurring feature of the text, which can never be contained within 'Miriam's mind alone'. And it is there whether or not it was intended.

⁶⁵I will be returning to Dorothy Richardson and commas in my last chapter.

Deconstructing 'The Monster'

Reverting to the question of Frankenstein's discourse, I continue in the belief that he is to be read as controlling it. Though if my reader cannot share this perspective I simply need to effect a reformulation: instead of saying that the discourse reveals that the patriarchal figure knowingly avoids responsibility and that this is part of his power, I say that the discourse reveals that the patriarchal figure who thinks he is in control actually is not. The costs to women and society are the same either way. (I will be reading this illusionary aspect of patriarchal control in chapter two through 'A Country House'.) I have proposed that, during the creative episode, Frankenstein creates sources of agency as well as the creature, but that ambiguity infuses both of these processes. I turn now to the opposite point in the text, the point at which Frankenstein determines to deconstruct his monster.

After Frankenstein has finally taken his tale to a Genevan magistrate, having justified his course of action at each stage, and not achieved the desired outcome, he tells of how he 'retired to meditate on some other mode of action' (p. 172). Frankenstein is in control of this meditation. The immediate consequence of it (after a chapter boundary) is a statement which is both an explicit rendition which seems to resolve the ambiguity of agency, but yet also another embodiment of that ambiguity:

My present situation was one in which all voluntary thought was swallowed up and lost. (p. 173)

Within my perception of Frankenstein, there is a calculated intensification of grammatical and semantic metaphor here. It is a presentation by him, controlling and telling his story, of, paradoxically, a Frankenstein who has lost his coherent self in both grammatical and narrative terms. Once more, grammatical subjects and spurious agents ('my present situation', 'all voluntary thought') have been created through a process of nominalization. As I pointed out earlier this is a feature of written rather than spoken discourse and, although Frankenstein originally renders speech to Walton, it is Walton's written record of this that he

amends. If I propose as a congruent version *I could no longer think for myself* then the externalizing and depersonalizing character of Frankenstein's mode begins to emerge. Even the crucial 'voluntary thought' is cast into the passive, affected rather than affector, enacting a further step away from Frankenstein as controlling agent, one further intensified by the lack of follow-through: there is no answer to the question, 'swallowed up and lost' by what or whom? Agency itself is 'swallowed up and lost' in yet another construction which returns unto itself, creating an inviolate grammatical circle.

I am presenting Frankenstein's strategic discourse, of avoiding constructions which show his agency, in a negative light: I am reading it as a means by which patriarchal power disguises its power operations. At the same time, I am aware that these kinds of structures will be favoured by not-*I* feminists, who might read Frankenstein in a different light; perhaps as showing that even the discourse of the most creative of beings reveals his lack of control over events. In continuing to suggest that Frankenstein designs his evasive mode of speech, I am also aware that I consistently make the claim that feminists do and should design their speech. I want to highlight both the necessity of ethical and ideological involvement with the issues and also the need to extend one's vision **beyond** one's own writing/reading practice to imagine how it might be heard in order to break out of the uroboric trap. I am not saying that I can propose a foolproof way out, on the contrary, but rather showing why we must look for it, whilst contriving to point to ways of expressing the double sense of simultaneously intentional and involuntary action. I can reformulate this predicament of agency from my perspective, again illustrating it through my reception of Frankenstein, here presented as a series of stages.

I claim that Frankenstein designs his discourse. He has 'reason' and 'context'.

Frankenstein represents agency at crucial moments as being ambiguously internal/external.

If my initial claim is held to be true, Frankenstein controls this dissembling discourse.

Then there is an *I* behind the representation of not-*I*.

Translated into feminist writing, the argument reads something like this. Feminists who endorse not-*I* events design a form of writing which embodies this vision. This design has features identical to Frankenstein's speech; passive verbs not followed through, abstractions and aspects of things accorded the role of effector. It is a conscious process. There is an *I* at work behind this representation of not-*I*. It is an attempt to produce an emergent concept (not-*I*) from within the dominant idea (*I*). It is not unproblematic. I shall explore the difficulties in depth when I come to discuss the discourse of some feminist theorists, having shown first of all that they know what they do. I want here to emphasize that Frankenstein's use of this style can be seen as a prophetic warning - and Shelley produces prophetic texts.⁶⁶ There is more than one ethics to come out of these ways of speaking. And to add, by way of a silver lining, that, if I have just claimed that Frankenstein controls the dissemination of a potentially uncontrolling self, I now reinsert the next link: that Shelley controls Frankenstein's control of the uncontrolling; and that this is an unstoppable interactive chain of responsibility that the reader enters into. There is always both control and not-control. It is this ethical position which 'The Bloody Chamber' **contrives** to tell.

This double status in the forefront of my mind, I return to Frankenstein's loss of 'voluntary thought'. This abdication is followed, in a concentrated outpouring of his discourse strategies, by the personification of emotional states and intentions, which appear to be independent, taking over, acting upon him:

I was hurried away by fury; revenge alone endowed me with strength and composure; it modelled my feelings, and allowed me to be calculating and calm, at periods when otherwise delirium or death would have been my portion. (p. 173)

Frankenstein, the speaker and essential participant, has reduced himself to the object of forces which are presented as external to his being. Forces is the right word. They have a

⁶⁶*The Last Man*, ed. and intro. by Anne McWhir (first published London: Colburn, 1826; this edn Ontario: Broadview, 1996).

power over him brought out in the series of verbal processes: they 'endowed', 'modelled' and 'allowed'. In the ensuing period, Frankenstein's declarative physical actions - 'I darted', 'I pursued' and 'I followed' (pp. 174-75) - appear to be directed by his now identified and seemingly concretized puppet masters, the 'spirits of the dead' and the 'wandering ministers of vengeance' (p. 174). But Frankenstein is explicitly the author of their existence. They are 'the spirits that I had invoked to aid me' (p. 175). From another world or from his own imagination? The ambiguity of internal/external compulsion persists, if raised to a new level. Here too is a concentration of episodes of transposition, between dream time and waking time (p. 175), and of the chain reactions, that I hear as one of the loud messages of this text. Now, food is left by the spirits (p. 175) and by the creature (p. 176) for Frankenstein, as Frankenstein leaves food for others (p. 175). His 'path towards the destruction of the dæmon' is

more as a task enjoined by heaven, as the mechanical impulse of some power of which I was unconscious, than as the ardent desire of my soul (p. 176).

There is a powerful grammatical parallel here between 'as a task enjoined by heaven' and the parenthetical 'as the mechanical impulse of some power of which I was unconscious'. They seem to be two versions of the same thing, the second being more specific through the progression from the indefinite 'a' to the defining 'the'. It is like the movement from *a game played on a pitch* to *the football game*. This is a connection which Frankenstein has hinted at before, 'the mechanical impulse' explicitly (lexically) linking it back to that other 'frantic impulse' which gave birth to his 'ardent desire' which in turn gives birth to his monster. It is both a chain effect and another moment of intersection, now between the coming-to-life and its reversal. Ironically, it is 'when I am dead' (p. 179) that Frankenstein envisages reclaiming the independent and controlling course of action which he has increasingly come to absent

from his own life. In that imaginary moment beyond life, as Walton, at his bidding, finishes Frankenstein's task of destruction, he declares 'I will hover near, and direct the steel aright' (p. 179). But there is to my mind no hope here that this belated reintegration represents an act of recuperation that can be read positively from any feminist perspective. I see in death no solution to the patriarchal trap.⁶⁷

What Am I Saying?

Frankenstein and 'The Bloody Chamber' show the complexity of the grammar of agency in action. It cannot be simply said that *I* statements constitute a clear vision of agency (*I did it on purpose*) anymore than not-*I* statements constitute its absence. Both kinds of statements can produce ambiguity. My story, always told from feminist perspective, is that where *Frankenstein* shows the negative aspect of the ambiguity of not-*I* statements, 'The Bloody Chamber' shows the positive aspect of the ambiguity of *I* statements. I shall pick up this thread again when I turn to reading feminist texts. I want now, however, to begin to show how other grammatical features can be part of feminist agenda.

Feminism and Grammar: Extending Vision

It is worth restating my project here. I am claiming that texts (of all kinds) can raise and meditate on significant theoretical issues through the grammar that they employ; and that feminists can engage in this process as both readers and writers. This engagement should

⁶⁷I distance myself here and at all times from readings which propose that madness and suicide are positive responses to a patriarchal world: Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar seem to have this view in *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979). I do not distance myself from readings which propose that they are understandable responses: Elaine Showalter presents this view in *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture* (first published New York: Pantheon, 1985; this edn London: Virago, 1987).

seek not only to reveal what is already there but also to wonder what ways of speaking/writing that go **beyond** might be possible - to extend and multiply our visions. In my analysis of agency, I have 'mutilated' the various texts under discussion in the manner of Frankenstein, reducing them to parts which I then reassemble to make different kinds of connections which I hope are not too monstrous for the reader to face. To make different kinds of connections is, in an extension of Deirdre Burton's term, to begin to see other 'ways of constructing reality'. I want to suggest that both the notions of seeing and of connecting in new ways can be produced through simple, accessible means.

Seeing Anew

This transformative act can happen at the level of the word. In the large-scale act of revisioning that is *Pilgrimage*, this desire to produce a new way of looking at familiar scenes and objects is echoed in the unexpected ways in which verbs expressing the seeing process are used. It is possible to trace the history of 'glance' and 'scan' across the text. This is an incidence of a text sweeping aside the dominant meaning in favour of producing an emergent one, which, within the world that is *Pilgrimage*, through repetition, begins to take on the status of accepted meaning. People in *Pilgrimage* frequently 'glance'. But not in the conventional sense : to cast a momentary look (*OED*). Glances in *Pilgrimage* are 'investigating' (IV, p. 300), 'sweeping' and 'searching' (IV, p. 350). The crux of this extension of vision lies in the moment when Miriam's 'glance [grows] elastic in the warmth coming from the room' (II, p. 328). 'Scan' similarly takes on a new look.⁶⁸ It usually refers to inanimate objects (to scan the horizon (*OED*)) but in *Pilgrimage* is regularly used in relation to people as well:

⁶⁸Thanks to Norman MacLeod for first drawing this to my attention

There was a man leaning against the lamp-post. She scanned him unwillingly, lest he should turn into Mr. Shatov. (III, p. 54)

This really is a new way of looking at the familiar, for, 'it *was* Mr. Shatov' (III, p. 54 her emphasis). This new way does not move so far from cultural expectation that the reader cannot see it (in that case she would be able to stop him from 'turn[ing] into Mr. Shatov'), but it does signal an extended visionary process. I venture to say that it shows the humour that often hovers in *Pilgrimage*. From now on, I shall bring 'glance' and 'scan' into my text as markers of new ways of seeing.

Making Different Connections

I have started to look at causation from the perspective of agency (how we read our own world) and now want to look at it from the perspective of some understanding of how the wider world works and how its parts fit together. Again I approach this issue through grammatical representation rather than philosophical inquiry. Indeed I might term this activity as philosophical inquiry expressed in a few little words. A text can set up its own world which portrays its own logic. Where Carter does this explicitly in *Dr Hoffman*, I want to suggest that she also opens up the world of connections in an implicit but recoverable mode in 'The Bloody Chamber'.

The primary grammatical means of producing connections is through the use of conjunctions. I am particularly interested here in the coordinators *and, but, so*. I draw on Quirk *et al* (pp. 918-35) throughout this discussion of what coordinators are and do. Coordinators have an unexpected (since they are so much absorbed into dominant modes of speech) power to transcend and transform reader expectation, that is, to produce emergent connections rather than established ones. They can reconceptualize the relationship between one process and another. Minor alteration can result in substantially different meaning and perception. In the tradition of Russian Formalism, they can make the familiar unfamiliar: in the Brechtian

imperative they can constantly make the old new. The reader sees from another angle: scans the text another way. Coordinators are paratactic. That is to say that they link two processes of equal status. One may initiate and the other provide a continuation. Hemingway's strategy of combining a series of processes with *and* as the invariant link word might evidence either the suppression of a causative relationship amongst them, or indeed a postmodernist perception that such relationships cannot be ascertained with certainty. Here as elsewhere, less (words) can lead to more (meanings). There is another option, and that is to present unexpected connections, a strategy I want to suggest may be a valuable one for feminist writing. In my readings of Angela Carter's stories, I repeatedly see at work a mind intrigued by this issue of how feminist perspectives might be represented through grammar. I hear no endorsement of any particular form, but I hear the question again and again. What connects in 'The Bloody Chamber'?

In this text Carter opens up possibilities for different ways of seeing through her tactic of making unexpected connections. I will show that there are two instances sufficiently startling that the attentive reader will be drawn to look for the story of cause and effect throughout the text. Roland Barthes' concept of 'retrospective readings' which 'multiply the signifiers' is, like Dorothy Richardson's 'slow, attentive reading', no longer an emergent idea but central to my understanding.⁶⁹ The protagonist is telling of the death of the Marquis' last wife:

They never found her body but I rummaged through the back copies of the society magazines my old nanny kept in a trunk under the bed and tracked down her photograph. (p. 10)

'But'? This choice plays on the fact that 'but' carries more than one possible relationship to its initiating clause. In addition to its most straightforward adversative use as in *I can play football but I can't play rugby*, it can introduce a contrast which may be unexpected in view

⁶⁹*S/Z*, trans. by Richard Millar (first published Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1973; this edn Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), p. 165.

of the nature of the initiating clause:

Unemployment is going up but no one is complaining

or

Unemployment is going down but no one is complaining

Whichever of these *but* clauses one reads as surprising will depend on one's 'presuppositions and knowledge of the world'. It depends on one's attitude to unemployment. And, I might add, one's attitude to reading, because some readers, taking in the *but*, predict what will follow and read what they expect to read. (I know because I read this way myself..) The seeming contrast introduced by *but* can also be a restatement in affirmative terms of what has been said in the initiating clause:

*Tony Blair is not going to rest on his laurels on the unemployment figures
but will try to improve them further*

In Carter's text, *but* is masquerading somewhere between the surprising and the reaffirmative statement. The photograph that the narrator finds stands in as the source of her image of the Romanian Countess 'dead, just three short months before I met him' (p. 10), but what it replaces is 'her body', the surprising implication being that if her body had been found the protagonist would have looked on it for the image. This, however, is to be proved true when she does find the body 'pierced, not by one but by a hundred spikes' (p. 29, contrastive use of *but*). The image of the 'sharp muzzle of a pretty, witty, naughty monkey' (p. 10) caught forever in the photograph must replace and coexist with that of the body, 'its sculpted face caught in a rictus of pain' (p. 29). There is both continuation and disjunction between events, 'caught' forever in the unexpected use of the coordinator *but*, but in a use which turns out to be fully justified by the events of this world. For this is Carter's world of 'curious reversal', 'a place of privilege where all the laws of the world [s]he knew need not necessarily apply'.⁷⁰

In this world

⁷⁰From 'The Courtship of Mr. Lyon', in *The Bloody Chamber*, pp. 41-50 (p. 46 and p. 42 respectively).

All was in order, so I found nothing. (p. 25)

I would expect to read *all was in order, so I found what I was looking for*; or, *all was in order, but I found nothing*. Read again. A different sense of 'order' has been achieved by the simplest of means. Might this emergent practice, consolidated to truth within its own world of the short story, achieve the status of the dominant mode if feminists repeatedly wrote different orders? Then again, is this Carterian 'order' simply a recognition that the powerful male figure arranges things so that the woman can find nothing out: in this reading it is the removal of the clues which establishes this particular notion of order, a familiar world after all? There is no settled, or settling, meaning.

Now the text of 'The Bloody Chamber' begins to resonate with different notions of order. It is full of sentences beginning with *and* and *but*, a move which is often attributed to bad writing practice rather than to the creation of a particular effect. Of the coordinator *and*, Quirk *et al* have this to say:

The only restriction on the use of *and* as coordinator is the pragmatic one that the clauses should have sufficient in common to justify their combination. [...] But the pragmatic implications vary, according to our presuppositions and knowledge of the world. (p. 930)

As they go on to point out, 'the relation connoted by the link between the two or more conjoins can generally be made explicit by the addition of an adverbial' (p. 930): again less is more when it comes to possible meanings. They then outline the potential uses and meanings of *and*, and here I detail the ones of significance to my argument, giving my own examples of practice which are intended to exemplify rather than to confound. I have already mentioned that it can present two clauses of equal status:

I opened the door and I shut the window

And can introduce a clause which may be consequent to the first:

I opened the door and the cat ran out

And can convey the chronology of events:

The cat ran out and I shut the door

I have said 'can' in all cases since the formulations would require that 'addition of an adverbial' to make such implications explicit, for instance to convey chronology:

The cat ran out and subsequently I shut the door

(Note that the more common adverbial *then* might imply chronology or consequence.)

I will pause here to wonder in the light of this how you read the protagonist's thoughts of her father, of

how he would hug me [...] when I was a little girl, before he kissed me and left me and died. (p. 12)

I hear a strange story. I take 'would hug' to convey habitual hugging,⁷¹ which habitual mode I then bring to 'kissed' because of the strong pull of textual cohesion: that is to say, 'hug' and 'kissed' go together. This pull to hear habitual activity could continue into 'left me', producing a repeated pattern of behaviour on her father's part which might be logically completed by *and came back again*. It is my knowledge (or 'presupposition') of the singularity of the next action, 'died' which prevents me from carrying this habitual reading right through. It is the presence of *and* intensified by the ellipsis of the referent 'he' in 'before he kissed me and left me and died' which now, in the retrospective reading which knows he 'died', sets up a strong reading not of habit but of the singularity of each of these events. Somewhere in between, the habitual and the singular interpretations intersect, but that moment can never be tied down as there are grammatical/semantic pulls in opposite direction at either end. Now I read 'before he kissed me' doubly: in my forward reading it is habit and in my backward reading it is a single act. Knowledge remains suspended. It can always be read both ways.

⁷¹I will return to a more detailed analysis of habitual activity in my discussion on time in *Heroes and Villains* in my last chapter.

Then again, are these connected events, 'kissed', 'left', 'died', as chronological or consequential? It will depend on one's 'presuppositions'. They could speak an elegiac chronological recollection, but could also sound a child's point of view, familiar to the suppositions of psychology, that each act depends on the one previous to it, that the child is somehow responsible for her father's death. In this perception of events, the narrator has reverted to the time 'when [she] was a little girl'. Her speech form enacts the dominant logic of the child just as the growing development of Stephen Dedalus is embodied in his linguistic style.⁷² Carter effects this in a moment. In this reading of the moment, death has already arisen from a kiss, and this too will become a pattern in 'The Bloody Chamber'. It is the male who dies: she survives, in another 'curious reversal'.

In addition to chronology and consequence, *and* can also express contrast:

I love the cat and the cat hates me

This contrastive meaning can be tested by seeing if the replacement of *and* with *but* retains congruence of meaning between the initiating and subsequent clauses, as it would do in the above instance (in the prevailing knowledge system) but would not seem to do so in:

I love the cat and the cat loves me

The choice of *and* over *but* suggests a parallel structure which is then confounded by the contrastive element, love/hate. What then of this moment in 'The Bloody Chamber'?

I lay in bed alone. And I longed for him. And he disgusted me. (p. 22)

I read incongruence here. In keeping with the pattern of double readings which I track at several levels in this text, the protagonist here expresses her contradictory feelings for the Marquis. I presuppose that all readers would hear the contrast between 'longed for' and 'disgusted'. But, I would argue further that the grammatical formulation of these oppositional experiences pushes against the meaning in two stages: that is to say, it goes

⁷²James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (first published New York: Huebsch, 1916), in *The Essential James Joyce* (London: Grafton, repr. 1989), pp. 175-365.

beyond mere contrast towards an enactment of containment of the contrast. The first way that this works is through 'and' in the 'disgusted' clause where *but* would expose the contrast unambiguously. This 'and' is directly parallel to the previous 'and', which parallelism provides an impulse for the reader to anticipate two clauses of parallel form (declarative, subject-verb-object) and content. 'And' is already distinctive in both cases in that it introduces a sentence. There is a sense in which the end induced by the full stop is immediately overruled by the link word. There is a break and not-break. Readers who have been trained never to begin a sentence with *and* or *but* can be disconcerted by this tactic. Over that hurdle, the reader might still expect the congruence of reciprocal semantic and grammatical parallels to be found in

And I longed for him And he longed for me.

Alternatively, the reader might anticipate the contrast thus:

And I longed for him And he despised me

But this is where the second stage effect of the grammatical representation comes into play. I quote again:

And I longed for him. And he disgusted me. (p. 22)

There appears to be a parallel construction along Halliday's lines of ACTOR-PROCESS-GOAL distribution. But what exactly is the status of these processes? Halliday only applies these terms to verbs of doing, physical action: *I* (actor) *opened* (process) *the door* (goal). He sets up a different analysis for verbs of mental process (those of sensing: that is thinking, feeling, seeing): SENSER-PROCESS-PHENOMENON (pp. 106-12). This produces *I* (senser) *like* (process) *it* (phenomenon). I have already proposed that, in the representation of human agency from feminist perspective, such distinctions between physical and mental processes do not hold, since the question - whether *I* know what *I* do - pervades all processes. I want to suggest further that 'longed for' and 'disgusted' break out of the category of mental process into that of the physical. I might say that they, like Miriam and Julia, break down the

classic Cartesian mind/body dualism. In this reading, I attribute the qualities of AGENT and of SENSER to the 'I' and 'he' who long for and disgust. This borderline prowling extends to the question: who is the essential participant in these processes? At first, what I noticed and found significant was that, in spite of the seeming parallel constructions, the protagonist was the one affected person in both cases. But then I realized I was still imposing my 'presuppositions' onto the text and that it was not beyond the bounds of possibility that, given the Marquis' other interests, he would actively desire to disgust her in a direct parallel to her longing. This led me to an intriguing observation: the Marquis might or might not be aware of this disgusting activity/response. It is the turn of the Marquis, surely the ultimate representation of patriarchal power, to be in the position of being aware and unaware of what he does. Loss of grammatical autonomy prefigures loss of life.

This particular doubling effect can only occur with a closed set of verbs similar to *disgust*, with, I would argue, the same potential to be deliberate action as well as affective: these would include *disquiet*, *amaze*, *intrigue*. I do not want to overrepresent the case but there does seem the potential here to add to the set of grammatical representations of agency that I have been building up another mode which both knows and does not know. It works primarily in third person contexts and particularly, from feminist perspective, to show that the dominant male can be easily put into a state of ambiguous control. The closest that I can find that Halliday comes to this analysis (who is affected?) is in his discussion of *It pleases me* (pp. 108-10). However, his point here, which I take up elsewhere, is that agency and consciousness can be attributed to non-human aspects, the human actor then having to be recovered in the congruent version *I like it*. The former effect arises since 'either the senser, or the phenomenon that is being sensed, can be the Subject, still keeping the clause in active voice' (p. 110). In the Carterian instance, the 'phenomenon(/goal)' is also human. The significance is that this closed set of verbs allows the writer to keep that 'phenomenon [as] Subject, still keeping the clause in active voice', thus creating someone who may not know what he does. The oppressed turns the tables on the oppressor in that imaginary moment,

using his devices. It is a moment of embodying the illusionary nature of patriarchal control. And it is knowledge of speaking, writing, and reading which makes this moment possible. Even moments of disruption are to be cherished.

I have shown that the conventional ways of perceiving the world will not suffice in 'The Bloody Chamber' any more than they do in *Pilgrimage*: that it is not difficult to produce unexpected connections through grammatical means; and that this might be a useful strategy for feminist revisionings. I want now to turn to the absence of connections in 'The Bloody Chamber', which might express a move into a postmodern world. The moment is when the protagonist 'advanced [...] along the corridor' (p. 27) that will take her to the bloody chamber. She is in transition, between two worlds. There:

For some reason, it grew very warm; the sweat sprang out in beads on my brow. (p. 27)

This way of saying enacts the loss of specificity of reason that it presumes in the indeterminable 'some reason'. It enacts this through denying an explicit connection between 'warm' and 'sweat', a connection that could very easily be established: *it grew very warm so that the sweat sprang out*. Note that the simple insertion of *and* as a link (replacing the semi-colon) would not (necessarily) convey the same clear line of cause and effect, but might rather represent two separate events of equal status. Of course, in my reading and analysis I am clinging to the idea of established (dominant) connections (*warm* is to *sweat*) in order then to show the breakdown of this process. I am, in a sense, infected, but the dominant mode can itself be infected by the emergent. I am suggesting that if the protagonist's discourse were itself to be established through expansion and repetition, in the way that Richardson establishes 'glance', it begins to take on the status of the dominant mode itself. A feminist writer whose agenda is to break down dominant systems of understanding (that is making sense of two or more events by proposing a relationship between them) might choose to elide grammatical connectors from her discourse in the same way that the feminist who

wishes to establish different kinds of connections might employ the unexpected *but* or *so*. There would be a whole range of possibilities of using both styles in varying combinations. What kind of world might be projected?

I hope the reader will begin to see that 'the sweat sprang out', visibly metaphoric in grammatical and semantic terms, has the effect of seeming to remove control from the protagonist in this border territory. Is metaphor a way of showing the truth? Something happens to her now whereas, as I have argued earlier, her general mode is to seek complicity. Am I justified in proposing two congruent versions?

As I had gone so deep into the castle, it grew very warm so that I began to sweat

As I was becoming very frightened, it grew very warm and I began to sweat

Language systems can be a means of imposing order and I have just imposed such an order. Each of us enters this already congruent world. But we can then learn the systems and begin to design other worlds. This has always happened at the level of narrative (in utopias, science fiction) but my aim is to show that it is also happening at the accessible and productive level of grammar, both as a revealing and as a creative process. All feminisms can recognize and reassert their power to disrupt, multiply and engender linguistic forms to produce other kinds of visions.

In claiming that Carter plays with the grammatical possibilities of making or refusing connections in order to create other versions of congruity, I have shown that this is not founded on one isolated instance of an unusual link, but rather a case of continuous play. One reading of 'The Bloody Chamber' that I can justify is that it is a story about alternate versions of the relationship between parts (as is *Frankenstein* in a different way), and that this story is embodied in its grammar. This is a world in which there are unexpected, and sometimes no, connections between events, though paradoxically, I accept that I have to acknowledge dominant patterns in order that I can talk about revisions in a meaningful way. I want to restate that I do not claim that it is possible to control the meanings that accrue from

any discourse. There is always a process of deferral and of increment. My readings flow from this historical moment rather than the author's time of writing. I do suggest that feminists who wish their discourse to enact their philosophy need to engage with the kind of readings that I propose.

Looking Backwards And Forwards

This chapter has focused initially and primarily on the range of grammatical possibilities for representing or not representing agency through close readings of theoretical and literary text, engaging with the theoretical implications for feminisms of each process. My interrelated claims for feminisms arising out of this analysis are that: we need to know all about the possibilities and how they work: this relates not only to our role as writers but as readers: feminists of different persuasions will find value (and loss) in different realizations: none of these realizations is unproblematic or without ideological tone, each having been used in the service of patriarchy and feminists need to consider the full implications of their own usage: we need to imagine always how we might extend the range to encapsulate and create other visions of the world, other versions of feminism.

I will end this chapter by returning briefly to Halliday's conception of language and how it works:

each part is interpreted as functional with respect to the whole (p. xiv).

This statement (which both 'The Bloody Chamber' and *Frankenstein* resist in some way) epitomizes the Durkheimian view of society as being an organic whole in which each aspect makes sense and relates to all other aspects.⁷³ This is portrayed as a natural process rather

⁷³The concept of 'organic solidarity' is at the centre of Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labour in Society*, trans. by George Simpson ([1893] New York: Free Press, 1964).

than one that could ever be subject to design. The issue of agency is a central one to Halliday's text (which is why I have found it a useful starting point) with the claim that the congruent form acknowledges the human element, yet here again he has written such agency out of his own text. There is no answer to the question: who interprets? I might propose Halliday, himself, or grammarians in general to fill this gap; or I might more radically propose that feminists reinterpret 'each part' to expose the ideology behind such an interpretation, and, further, design new parts.

If I might imagine for a moment that I hear other feminist speakers' responses to Halliday, I hear bell hooks say that such an organic approach enabled the powerful not so long ago to claim slavery as a part, indeed functional to the whole, and as a natural rather than an unnatural practice. Her role, and need, in coming to voice is to disclaim, disrupt, destroy such self-justifying notions. And I hear Diane Elam saying that such a belief system lies parallel to the patriarchal notion of the integrated autonomous self, 'each part [...] functional with respect to the whole'. Where the psychoanalytic feminist would want to break this up, to stop believing in such imaginary and limiting wholes, the feminist aligned with deconstruction would call to move **beyond** this position, for it is such closed-off structures of belief which prevent us from seeing differently. To evoke Elam's concept of 'groundless solidarity', let us 'scan' and 'glance' at the world and not fear to see those parts which do not function with respect to any whole; embrace Frankenstein's creature and **contrive** to 'advance [...] along the corridor' in a spirit of adventure towards a wide open space rather than a bloody chamber:

It's the uncertainty that makes me try.⁷⁴

⁷⁴Willa Cather, *The Song of the Lark* (first published Houghton Mifflin, 1915; this edn London: Virago, 1982), p. 464.

Chapter Three: Seeing Through Patriarchal Illusions, Reading 'A Country House'

People's lives, in Jubilee as elsewhere, were dull, simple, amazing, and unfathomable - deep caves paved with kitchen linoleum.¹

It is my aim in this chapter to advance the thesis that feminist writing can find spaces for itself within the expansive limits of grammatical possibilities through showing that words and texts, can like lives, be 'dull, simple, amazing, and unfathomable'. At the same time I will show that patriarchal discourse, if by that I mean language which controls and is under control, is no more than a powerful illusion. This double move is possible because I work through a text written by a woman and spoken by a man. Thus, in alignment with Cameron's position throughout *Feminism and Linguistic Theory* but not Dale Spender's in *Man Made Language*,² I intend to side-step the notion that language is only a patriarchal entity, shaped by and for men for their own use, for that would only leave feminism the search 'beyond the realm of existing human languages' for an 'other way of devising a symbolic system'. My argument against this project has been told.

I have already begun to bring into play grammatical as well as narrative means of embodying concepts of significance to feminisms such as subjectivity, and cause and effect relationships. I have begun to show that it is the flexibility which is already present within English grammar that makes space for feminist representations but that these representations must be held in constant question because they are available to all speakers and because they do not ever mean only one thing. Feminists need to be able to read and write this variant potential in order both to speak their own ideas and expose the illusion of patriarchal ones.

¹Alice Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p. 249.

²(London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980).

My discussion here is based on the notion (hinted at in the chapter on *Frankenstein*) that language that appears to be patriarchal in form can actually be feminist in effect. Form is meanings: *do you say what you mean?* For my purposes here I define patriarchy as that which seeks to control and limit others, and take all that is not patriarchal into feminisms. This has the positive effect of not confining all men or indeed all women to either the category of patriarchy or of its antidote,³ feminism/not-patriarchy: but simultaneously the (for my purposes) negative effect of establishing a binary opposition, which system of thought I (in)consistently seek to override. Again such distinctions are set up to show that they do not hold in linguistic terms. They are but a stage in the conversation prior to the elision of simplistic oppositional analyses. However, these I do believe are still required as political terms: they provide grounds for action. This is one of those moments where I invoke the dominant feminist perspective even as I am also aware of an emergent view expressed in Elam's notion of 'groundless solidarity'. For it takes time for new ways of seeing to gain acceptance. I reinvoke both the resistance to the new appearance of *Frankenstein's* creation and Raymond Williams' analysis of emergent ideas in the midst of dominant ones.⁴ In the process, I reassert that there is no necessary boundary between fiction and theory as sources of understanding.⁵

³I choose this expression in order to invoke something of Derrida's deconstructive reading of Plato ('Plato's Pharmacy', in *Dissemination*, trans. by Barbara Johnson (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1981)) through the doubleness of the Greek word *pharmakon* (poison and remedy) as a way of beginning to undermine the binary opposition in the moment of temporarily establishing it. Diane Elam invokes this text (pp. 98-100) in Derrida's sense that philosophy always contains both cure and poison.

⁴There are arguments that deconstruction and postmodernism are not emergent, that is oppositional to the dominant mode (and Williams points out how difficult it is to identify something as emergent), but rather are consistent with the interests of that dominant mode which is (late)capitalism. Both Frederic Jameson and Terry Eagleton sustain this view.

⁵I find it intriguing that Sue Roe and others, in *The Semi-Transparent Envelope: Women Writing - Feminism and Fiction* (London: Boyars, 1994) make such a very clear distinction in their own practice. To talk about writing is in their view to talk about their forays into fictional writing. Their critical practice (for which they are all better known) is seen as another kind of activity altogether:

We have each negotiated a route through the proliferation of theories, models and positions available to the reader which we apply, here, to our own writing process. Yet writing entails a different starting point and mode of procedure to the task of literary criticism. As we write we undergo a process of struggle and change. (Introduction, p. 12).

I turn to a short story: Dorothy Edwards' 'A Country House', first published in 1926.⁶ It has a male first person narrator - an autodiegetic one it might be said.⁷ I want to argue that it exhibits overwhelmingly the forms that are associated with patriarchal discourse, but that it shows the characteristics associated with not-patriarchal discourse (and here I might want to make a further, temporary distinction between feminine discourse, as that held to represent all the negativity of the not-patriarchal form, and feminist discourse of the kind that seeks to validate and indeed idealize this not-patriarchal form - without endorsing either). I might describe this move as an extended and meditative version of that earlier paradoxical story *I use long words all the time*. I also want to tell, albeit in a minor key, a related tale of how 'A Country House' produces the kind of effects that Elizabeth Ermarth identifies as peculiar to postmodern literature, but through different means.⁸ I specifically want however to differentiate Edwards' text from the connotations of surface rather than depth which seem to go with postmodernist texts. In other words, where the postmodernist text is heralded as all surface, I find 'A Country House', so simple on the surface, increasingly complex in its depths. It requires to be reread. For it presents its readers with the same kind of opportunity to see things in an altogether other way. My readings will show that one form has many meanings and this creates space for possibilities, both troubling and exciting, of conflict and divergence. This story of form and meanings will recur. I will at the same time be showing that 'A Country House' is a text which breaks down many averred distinctions, including the

'Writing' is here synonymous with *fictional writing*. I cannot identify with this idea that the same 'process of struggle and change' does not go into the production of literary criticism.

⁶See later footnotes for full publishing history. The complete story forms an appendix to this thesis as I wish to give all readers the experience of reading it, without which the following would not have the same import.

⁷Joyce Tolliver, 'Script Theory, Perspective, and Message in Narrative: The Case of "Mi suicidio"', in *The Text and Beyond: Essays in Literary Linguistics*, ed. by Cynthia Goldin Bernstein (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994), pp. 97-119, uses this expression (p. 97) and then provides an endnote to explain what it means. My use is ironic. Bernstein's anthology henceforth referred to as *The Text and Beyond*.

⁸It was a strange experience for me to read Ermarth's *Sequel to History* as I had already established most of my stories about 'A Country House' and I could not keep the latter out of my mind. I am thinking particularly of the specific notions of: "the Narrator as Nobody", absence of time and space frameworks, and 'enabling new acts of attention for readers' as well as the more general attribute of the loss of meaning in any traditional sense.

one between speech and writing. This particular postmodernist vision will, however, be reached by attentive readings grounded in grammatical categories, anathema to the postmodernism that Ermarth espouses.

Laying the Foundations

I want to unwrite a story, but first I need to tell it. There are still widely held prescriptions as to what is and is not patriarchal discourse both within and without feminism. I shall show that these deeply laid norms and expectations come from all kinds of political direction. I shall begin to problematize them from feminist perspective and then write them out through readings of 'A Country House'. This story that I want to erase has been in circulation a very long time. I cite as my first defendant, the Pythagorean table of opposites:⁹

limit	unlimited
odd	even
one	many
right	left
male	female
rest	motion
straight	curved
light	dark
good	bad
square	oblong

It does not take too much imagination to see that the 'male' side embodies the 'good' concepts of order and control in opposition to the 'bad' chaotic 'female' side (though I must admit I am always puzzled by the odd/even alignment - logically required to fit in with the one/many distinction - which even here seems to give space to my argument that patriarchal discourse contains its own antidote¹⁰). Here lies the foundation of the long entrenched binary

⁹This table dates from circa 530 b.c. and shapes much of Aristotle's philosophy. Those who wish to unwrite binary systems of thought have to challenge and disrupt a long and entrenched history.

¹⁰And I am even more intrigued by the defence that a male philosopher put up to the claim that Aristotle, in his development of dualistic thinking, was sexist. He pointed out that limit if applied to the concept, obedience, for instance, produces less control than would unlimit. What was particularly interesting was that he did not see that this is an argument which serves to undermine simplistic oppositional terms by showing that indeed they do not hold up in practice once another element is

system of thought. The story of its deconstruction is recent and in restricted circulation.

Feminists such as Kolodny, and, much more recently, Sabina Lovibond,¹¹ still hear the old familiar tale. I hear it too, but I can also hear other stories.

These ideas are held to have a correlative linguistic form (order or chaos) which form is held to carry certain characteristics born out of the ideas. Order produces ordered discourse which embodies order. There is no way in if you believe that. The snake-swallowing-tail imagery which reverberates through Carter's stories may seem to embody a feminism imbued with the vision of circularity in opposition to patriarchal linear progression but in *Heroes and Villains* the charming snake of chaos turns out to be a stuffed dummy: the closed circle may simply repeat the old stories rather than create feminist space. There are those from all points of the political compass who support the view that there is an intrinsic difference between men and women which is reflected in their writing which reveals the differences between them. Mary Gomez Parham adopts this position wholeheartedly.¹² I borrow some of the evidence that she has gathered in support of it, but, where this proves to be her prelude to valorizing the female sentence, I read things differently. For the model of the patriarchal (here considered synonymous with male) sentence she quotes Gustav Flaubert:

I love above all else nervous, substantial, clear sentences with flexed muscle and a rugged complexion. I like male, not female, sentences.¹³

This is a clear example of the strategy of assimilating the structure of writing with physical characteristics attributed to the male, thus trying to complete the hermeneutic circle and erect the keep-out sign. I might say that it is women's collusion with this move which leads to the

introduced, for he went on to deride those who challenge dualistic thinking. These comments occurred at a talk given by Sabina Lovibond at the University of Edinburgh in April, 1997.

¹¹At this talk, Lovibond invoked this same Pythagorean table of opposites but then went on to show how feminists required these distinctions and could benefit from them.

¹²'Rosario Castellanos and the New Essay: Writing It Like a Woman', in *The Text and Beyond*, pp. 179-205.

¹³Quoted by Parham, p. 182. Parham in turn borrowed the quote from Naomi Schor, 'For a Restricted Thematics: Writing, Speech, and Difference in *Madame Bovary*', in *The Future of Difference*, ed. by Hester Eisenstein and Alice Jardine (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1980), pp. 167-92 (p. 185).

belief either that the chaotic remainder must be revalued or that a new way of speaking must be invented. As representative of contemporary feminist endorsement of Flaubert's claim, Parham evokes Robin Lakoff, who states that male sentences exhibit:

declarative rather than interrogative sentence structure, no hedging or imprecision, and lexical items chosen for their pure cognitive content, not their emotional coloration.¹⁴

What can I say when I cannot imagine what she thinks? Even Flaubert throws in that intriguing 'nervous' which surely threatens the stability of all that follows.

For a celebratory evocation of the feminine/feminist sentence I turn to Virginia Woolf's famous description of Dorothy Richardson's style:

She has invented, or, if she has not invented, developed and applied to her own uses, a sentence which we might call the psychological sentence of the feminine gender. It is of a more elastic fibre than the old, capable of stretching to the extreme, of suspending the frailest of particles, of enveloping the vaguest shapes [...]. It is a women's sentence, but only in the sense that it is used to describe a woman's mind by a writer who is neither proud nor afraid of anything that she may discover in the psychology of her sex.¹⁵

In her choice of words, 'developed and applied to her own uses', Woolf encompasses the notion that this is a strategic rather than a natural activity, yet she also specifies that this 'elastic' sentence mirrors/enacts a woman's mind, rather than a previously devalued aspect of anyone's mind.

In compiling this series of definitions, I have made no distinction between writers of fiction and writers of theory. They come to the same point: there is a male sentence and there is a

¹⁴Quoted by Parham, p. 187. From Robin Lakoff, 'Stylistic Strategies Within a Grammar of Style', in *Language, Sex and Gender: Does "La Différence" make a Difference?*, ed. by Judith Orsanu and others, pp. 53-78 (p. 66).

¹⁵Virginia Woolf, from extract of 'Romance of the Heart', *Times Literary Supplement*, 19 May 1923, repr. in *Virginia Woolf: Women and Writing*, select. and intro. by Michèle Barrett (London: Women's Press, 1979), p. 191. There may be more recent formulations but I think it still essential to recognize the influence that Woolf's analysis still carries.

female sentence.¹⁶ The difference lies in the value attributed to either. All who believe in the distinction however also hold some version of the following to be true: men are ordered, controlled, precise, not governed by the emotions, and this is visible and reflected unproblematically in their writing; ordered writing, not governed by the emotions, reflects a mind endowed with these same characteristics, in a word, patriarchy. 'A Country House', however, as I shall show, seems to fit into this category of ordered unemotional writing, yet it is of a most 'elastic fibre'. The notion of the conjunction of patriarchal word and mind is shown to be an illusion. Both lose their power.

I want to advocate the following reformulation. There is the illusion of an ordered, rational, objective discourse which has supported the illusion of an ordered, rational, objective mind: there is in the other direction the illusion that it takes a chaotic mind to produce chaotic text. There is the related dependent illusion that the former is masculine and the latter, feminine. There is the further related dependent illusion that one must necessarily be better than the other. There is the Kristevan complication, raised in previous chapters, that masculine and feminine can no longer be equated with gender categories, which move enables her to claim Joyce and Mallarmé as the epitome of feminine writing. Through my reformulation, I can suggest that they and Wordsworth, in his wonderfully wandering sentences, play on the side of the chaotic, feminine illusion even as Edwards mocks the ordered, masculine one. It is the latter game that concerns me here.

There are two angles from which I will continue to question feminist engagement with form: the assumption that the male sentence differs from the female one;¹⁷ and the assumption that the (dis)order of the text mirrors the (dis)order of the mind. I now read Woolf's evocation of

¹⁶It is not my intention to claim that all writers and theorists take up this distinctive position. See for instance Sara Mills' consistent presentation of the view that no such distinction can be made in 'The Gendered Sentence', in *Feminist Stylistics* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 44-65: 'It is clear that female and male sentences do not exist except in stereotypical forms or as ideal representations of gender difference;' (p. 65). Similarly Terry Threadgold has no time for such distinct claims. My point is rather that the view that men and women do necessarily write differently still has a great deal of currency and still has to be talked out.

¹⁷I return to the categories 'male' and 'female' here since I wish to include the notion that there is a biological basis to this distinction.

'a women's sentence' as trying to have it both ways in claiming that Richardson's style is both strategic and specific to her gender. Furthermore, I read feminist refusal of structures associated with patriarchy as restricted vision. They do not simply contain the power that is too easily attributed to them. I shall expand my earlier insistence that *I do not necessarily know what I do* to show how other grammatical modes also go beyond those patriarchal categories which they are held to enact. I shall still talk about agency, but also linearity, objectivity, logic. I shall read with 'new acts of attention'. The illusions, however powerful and sustained, can be revealed through feminist analysis of how they work. 'Articulating what we do changes what we do'.¹⁸ I cannot finish this story but I can start it. Paradoxically, it is through a short text that I expand my theme.

Moving Into 'A Country House'

I do not intend to dwell on the specific qualities of the short story as a genre except where they seem of particular relevance to my story.¹⁹ I will however tell why I chose this short story. It fascinates me endlessly: it insists on multiple rereadings: it is the story that I would have loved to have written. Its length allows for a 'slow, attentive reading' of the whole text,

¹⁸Bazerman, *Constructing Experience*, p. 72.

¹⁹Particularly as these seem notoriously hard to define. See for instance H.E. Bates, *The Modern Short Story: A Critical Survey* (London: Nelson & Sons, 1941): 'Many definitions have been, and always are being attempted.' (p. 16). Amongst many examples of writers' definitions of what constitutes a short story, he tells that Chekhov 'held that a story should have neither beginning nor end, but reminded authors that if they described a gun hanging on the wall on page one, sooner or later that gun must go off' (p. 16). It seems to me that this is precisely what the telling of 'A Country House' sets out not to do. See also Valerie Shaw, *The Short Story: A Critical Introduction* (London: Longman, 1983) in which she emphasizes the flexibility of the short story as a 'strength' (p. vi.). Of particular interest to my discussion are the following comments on the short story: L. A. G. Strong talks of 'a gesture which enables the reader's imagination to fill in all that is left unsaid ... if sufficiently perceptive, we can see in shadowy outline the completed pattern'. Somerset Maugham talks of the 'object' of the use of 'the first person singular' being 'to achieve credibility' (both p. 114). In my readings, Edwards' tale, which predates both of these comments, shows how they can be undermined.

where elsewhere I refer to one part/aspect in depth to try to draw out wider significance.²⁰ Its selection supports my project of not being confined by genre or period so that I may claim that the points that I am making have the widest application. And I have encountered a reading of this story which in no way enacts or covers my responses to it, and to which I wish to respond.²¹

Before I return to this last point, some publishing history is required. Dorothy Edwards' oeuvre consists of *Rhapsody* (1927), a collection of short stories of which 'A Country House' (1926) is one, and one novel, *Winter Sonata* (1928).²² Both were republished by Virago in 1986 (though not widely available or currently in print) with new introductions by Elaine Morgan. 'A Country House', having been anthologized twice,²³ is probably her best known story. I had already read it without editorial guidance before I came to Virago's *Rhapsody* to be amazed by, and therefore caught up in, Morgan's introductory comments:

Some of the best portraits are of outsiders - predictably, for Dorothy was an outsider all her life. Sometimes they are lonely men who hover for a while on the periphery of an unhappy marriage until the husband grows uneasy and finds some wordless way of pulling up the drawbridge; in one case he even underlines his territorial claims by hoisting a flag.²⁴

²⁰I am aware that I have already discussed Carter's 'The Bloody Chamber' but again that was in a representative way.

²¹It is interesting to read W. J. Keith's 'Interpreting and Misinterpreting "Bluebeard's Egg": A Cautionary Tale', in *Margaret Atwood: Writing and Subjectivity*, pp. 248-57. He (?) is inspired to write in response to an unpublished 'strictly feminist' essay which 'could not be reconciled with a careful response to the subtleties of the narrative' (p. 248). He writes, he says, 'not just to cast doubt on one extreme application of feminist theory but to register a warning against excessive reliance on *any* theory' (p. 256, his emphasis). Perhaps this chapter hints at a response to Keith (whose reading of both texts was interesting and possibly justified, and I might wish it had been read by the other contributors to this collection whom I refer to earlier), as well as to Elaine Morgan, whom I am about to discuss above.

²²She killed herself in 1934 at the age of 31. See authorial notes in *That Kind of Woman* (p. 272) details below.

²³1) In *The Best Short Stories*, 1926, that is to say prior to the 1927 publication of *Rhapsody*.

2) In *That Kind of Woman: Stories from the Left Bank and Beyond*, ed. by Brontë Adams and Trudi Tate (London: Virago, 1991), pp. 60-73.

²⁴Elaine Morgan's Introduction to *Rhapsody*, (first published UK: Wishart, 1927; this edn London: Virago, 1986), pp. xxi-xxii. Further references to the Virago edition of 'A Country House' are given after quotations in the text. In her introduction to *Winter Sonata* (first published UK: Wishart, 1928; this edn London: Virago, 1986) Morgan states that 'Dorothy never completely internalised the "feminine" role. Whenever she writes a story in the first person it is a man who is the narrator' (p. x). I cannot relate to this perception.

I was taken aback not only at Morgan's reading of the story but also that she sought at all to sum up its meaning when, in my view, 'A Country House' constantly calls meaning into question. (I will be going on to show that I have many readings of 'A Country House' and that I have heard many others.) The construction of Morgan's presentation here is accumulative: each comment builds on the one previous to it much in the style of Quirk *et al*'s steps (p. 1435) and Hypo's 'little statements'. It also enacts a movement from the general towards the specific, from 'some of', 'they' to 'the husband [...] in one case'. So, in a backward reading of Morgan, the protagonist of 'A Country House' is being presented as one of the 'lonely men [...] who grow uneasy' back further to being 'an outsider'. I will argue that none of this is explicit to the text: that Morgan has been drawn into filling in the gaps that this story is built around - and filling them in in entirely traditional (synonym for patriarchal?) ways. I cite as further evidence that this issue of determining meaning, or of readerly construction of the text, is one of the stories in 'A Country House', the range of responses that my readers gave to the question: what is this story about?

The manner and method of my engagement with real readers was developed and extended over time. It arose out of my recognition that it was not enough to only ever imagine the response of another when I could also do this directly. Since I intended to make some strong claims about how readers would experience 'A Country House', it was appropriate to put these claims to the test. I gave the story to twenty people, relatives, friends and fellow students to read and asked them to respond in any way they wished.²⁵ I did not impose any criteria. I then worked with them on their responses, and at this stage raised points of particular interest to me if they had not already come up. Later, borrowing from Martin S. Lindauer's 'interruption technique',²⁶ I gave the story piece by piece to three other readers

²⁵This included form as well as content. Some wanted me to take notes of their responses: others wrote them for me. Some read the story in my presence: others took it away.

²⁶'The Psychology of Literature and the Short Story: A Methodological Perspective', in *Literary Discourse: Aspects of Cognitive and Social Psychological Approaches*, ed. by László Halász (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1987), pp. 125-39 (p. 136). I made it clear to the readers that I had not (whereas Lindauer had) doctored the content/order of the story, though of course I did have an effect on the process since I had decided how to cut the story up. The first piece was just the title: one of my readers immediately

and asked them to comment at any stage that they wished. Selected comments and responses will appear (primarily in footnotes) during my readings of 'A Country House'. This group were unrepresentative in that most of its members shared the one factor of being an avid reader: this selective move seemed likely to produce the most challenging range of responses to the text. One of the ways in which these readers fulfilled my expectations (and there were ways in which they did not, leading to further readings on my part) was the number of times that they read beyond the text.²⁷ They did not see it this way: they believed that the justification for their perception was there until I asked them to show it to me. This is the classic 'How many children had Lady Macbeth?' syndrome.²⁸ It could also be perceived as a not-patriarchal way of reading : to go **beyond**. So it may seem paradoxical that I am resisting this process and claiming rather that this is a story which ultimately (and I say this because multiple readings and analyses are required) alerts the reader to the dangers of this process: that is of filling in the gaps in entirely traditional ways. 'A Country House', I claim, shows how patriarchal language creates the illusion of control and logical progression and in doing so alerts the reader to the ways in which such language draws her/him into what I might call the patriarchal trap - make everything make sense.²⁹ This reading of 'A Country House' is then consistent with that part of my practice which still insists that *I* takes and is given responsibility for its actions whether it is the fictional *I* of the text or the reader of that text who is being measured against this standard. This reading also reflects the crucial dilemma for me from feminist perspective: the difficulty in shaping forms of representation that take responsibility without assuming control. I suggest that I can approach the theoretical aspect

said, 'Ah, it's a murder story': another, who writes short stories herself, refused to commit herself until late into the story; 'I'm not sure what this story is about at all' eventually gave way to 'I think something awful is going to happen'. I was not surprised at her sustained wariness but I was surprised at her capitulation, which occurred around the point that I had decided that nothing was going to happen after all.

²⁷I was told for instance that the narrator kept his wife a virtual prisoner and that it was clear that the couple would now divorce.

²⁸L.C. Knights, 'How Many Children had Lady Macbeth?', in *Explorations: Essays in Criticism Mainly on the Literature of the Seventeenth Century* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1958), pp. 1-39.

²⁹My readers included several men as it is no part of my claim that all men read in the same (or patriarchal) way.

of this dilemma once more through the notion of the simultaneous existence of residual, dominant, and emergent ideas of agency in my mind: I am reaching out for new or adapted grammatical modes which can speak this multiplicity of ideas in a moment rather than a story: they will be strategic choices. I seem to be making large claims about what one short story can do, and producing a very different reading from that experienced by Elaine Morgan. I shall now begin to show how, through a multiplicity of small readings of the text, I reach and justify this large conclusion. But this is in no way to say that I have exhausted the meanings of this text nor reached the right reading: rather it is to continue the particular conversation that reading this story triggers.³⁰

Filling in the Gaps

One of the pervasive features - I might go so far as to say strategies - of this text is the amount that is not said. It is imbued with silence. At one level I read 'A Country House' as strangely prescient of both Pierre Macherey's theory of the need to recover the not-said,³¹ and also of feminist adoption of this theory as a positive means of going beyond patriarchal texts to fill the silences: it acts as a warning of the potential downside of this mode of reading.³² I can represent this imaginative formulation of Edwards' perspective in the words of a very aware woman writer:

There was a silence but Nel felt no obligation to fill it.³³

³⁰I am aware that I come very close at times to saying I have reached the right reading. However, in my ideal world, my suggestions would trigger further readings from others which would set me off again in conversational mode. I am trying to start this conversation.

³¹'The Text Says What it Does Not Say', in *Literature in the Modern World: Critical Essays and Documents*, ed. by Dennis Walder (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 215-22.

³²I might call this prescience women's time in operation, since it cedes nothing to the linear notions of time associated with patriarchy.

³³Toni Morrison, *Sula* ([1973]; this edn London: Chatto & Windus, 1980), p. 144. Both Alice Munro and Toni Morrison are very aware of grammatical and theoretical possibilities in their writing. As this awareness is often on the surface, I find them particularly useful for clarifying examples rather than for detailed analysis.

Feminists might want to remember that they too need on occasion feel no such obligation. I want to emphasize that I am making a distinction between the textually justifiable recovery of gaps and those imaginative leaps for which there are no textual grounds. This is a difficult move because my distinction appears prescriptive, controlling. Ironically, my further claim is that readers who go beyond the text fall into the trap of seeing things in the same old ways, and that it is the former activity, reading what is there, which unexpectedly produces more dynamic and challenging readings. I shall illustrate what I mean briefly here before subsequently showing how I mean it. Elaine Morgan is not the only one to read this story as a man successfully (re)establishing his territory. Most of my readers saw it in this light. They fill in the silences/gaps to concur with this perception. I want to go so far as to suggest that this is a misreading and that I can produce the evidence for this claim from within the text. In this approach, it is the text that can teach us something about how we read the world. It can produce a different way of seeing. Whereas if we bring the world into the text, it just produces the same old story.

In raising issues of interpretation, I borrow from the body of work on pragmatics and discourse analysis. I shall draw on *Discourse Analysis* in order to illustrate what I mean since it in turn draws from many different sources.³⁴ Brown and Yule recognize that readers make assumptions about the coherence of a text to which end 'we readily fill in any connections which are required' (p. 224). They identify three aspects to this interpretative process: 'These involve computing the communicative function (how to *take* the message), using general socio-cultural knowledge (facts about the world), and determining the inferences to be made' (p. 225). In their wide-ranging analysis, Brown and Yule make no simplistic assumptions themselves about the efficacy of the interpretative process, including their own attempts to delineate it. They are aware of the necessity of contextualization; of the range of inferences that both speakers and hearers can produce; of the advisability of

³⁴Gillian Brown and George Yule (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). Further reference is given to this edition after quotations in the text.

listening to real readers; and they are aware, as I shall later show, that inferential mistakes can be (predictably) made (pp. 223-271). In all these respects their analysis of discourse informs my own thinking. Perhaps the sense in which I go **beyond** their analysis in my readings of 'A Country House' is in my insistence that a text itself can show an attentive reader how this assumption of coherence on her/his part may produce unwarranted inferences and that paradoxically the reader must shift towards not expecting everything to make sense in order to get beyond his/her assumptions to see what is actually there in the text.

A Contrary Reading

'A Country House' is written by a woman, and is spoken by a man. It is a first person narrative. In a sense my grammatical paradox of the responsible but not controlling *I* is addressed in literature, since this voice of *I* is always mediated through another, here Edwards herself, earlier Shelley and Carter. Where Lacan and Derrida produce complex narratives that reveal this mediated status, literature has long enacted this process. This form of narrative immediately opens up the argument that the discourse thus invoked is only an imaginative approximation and appropriation of the speech of the other (gender), but I think it is fair to say that most of this practice has been in the opposite direction. I turn to Shakespeare's construction of female characters. This would correspond to the Pythagorean table of opposites since it is patriarchal in that it controls the representation of women and since it represents them ideationally and linguistically as belonging to the left (disordered) side. It is simultaneously problematic to a simple patriarchal model, as Shakespeare's production also shows that he can produce those very forms of speech/behaviour which are claimed as the special province of women and conversely that a woman, such as Rosalind, can put on the patriarchal mode as s/he puts on its clothes.³⁵ My point is that there are no

³⁵I am not claiming any originality for these points - merely that they need to be restated here.

immovable barriers that determine or limit/unlimit speech modes. I am not with Flaubert, nor am I entirely with Woolf. Like the protagonist of 'The Bloody Chamber', I will learn to speak al(l)ways, so that the power of any one form loses its hold.

So, I hear double tongues (at the very least) in both the speech of Shakespeare/Rosalind and Edwards//. The latter, I would argue, is a necessary riposte to the former as a stage/means to getting **beyond**, to making spaces for the emergence of new forms and understandings. I claim that anyone can reproduce so-called patriarchal discourse if s/he wishes since it has such identifiable features, and here I will take particular issue with Parham's own writing practice, taken here as representative of the feminist perspective that women think and speak differently as a matter of gender and that this mode is to be valued. For Parham reveals in her own writing, even more clearly than Woolf, that this is not at all the natural process that she claims it to be but a strategy (and, as such, one that I have no problem with as one aspect of the possibilities of writing). She is talking about the 'feminine style' that she finds in another woman's writing and that she wants to recommend to feminists:

We will also find that Castellanos often uses this feminine style and tone in the traditional essayistic endeavour of engaging and convincing the reader. (p. 188)

This is one more demonstration of the use of a typically feminine stylistic trait skillfully manipulated to assist in the task of winning the reader over to the writer's point of view. (p. 192)

Whilst I might not have a problem with Castellanos' style, I do have one with Parham's. The (unacknowledged) implication of her writing here is that 'feminine style', claimed elsewhere in her text as a natural product of gender, is yet something that can be 'used' which word indicates a very deliberate process, and furthermore 'used' towards the same ends as patriarchal discourse (rhetoric/debate) 'to convince' and even 'manipulate' - again deliberate activities - with a clear sense of the end goal: that the writer is bringing the reader's mind into line with her own; rather than the open sense that the writer would want to trigger off a

debate in the reader's own mind. In terms of my own project, in addition to her non-recognition of the strategic use that she attributes to 'feminine style', Parham's approach fails either to establish a counterpart to patriarchal representations of women (as she glorifies the left side as natural) or to find a not-patriarchal agenda for such writing. I can reformulate this as a very strange paradox: 'feminine style' embodies patriarchal endeavours. (I shall be returning to Parham's essay and its demarcation of this 'feminine style', as another route into determining patriarchal style as what is not-feminine, prior once more to destabilizing these categories.) I suggest that Dorothy Edwards provides me with a counterpoint to Parham's story.

To recapitulate, my claim is that Edwards reproduces the classic notion of patriarchal discourse through the medium of her all-controlling narrator and shows in that very same format that such style has no clear or single meaning, but rather is full of deceptive potential, and skewed logic. In other words the form that is associated with the Pythagorean right (male) side can produce all the characteristics associated with the left (female) side.

Patriarchal style reflects a disordered mind. 'A Country House' brings these sides into glorious collision: simple, direct forms can produce not simple, direct meanings, but multiple, complex indefinable ones; and simple, direct forms can produce not honesty and openness, but secrecy and disguise. Much of this relationship is mirrored in that of author to reader. Surface simplicity creates layers of complexity. This takes place through the grammatical games that this text plays. It enables me to bring together various linguistic puzzles that I have already raised, now gathered in concentrated form. I do not claim to recover Edwards' specific intentions, but rather to show that she has created a discourse which has all the appearance of patriarchy - and within this context the 'territorial claims' which Morgan finds are entirely to be expected - but which contains so much more than patriarchy and which leads the reader **beyond** containment within the story to think of the wider significance of modes of writing/speaking. If I can show this, then any simplistic notion of the relationship between form and content breaks down: meaning is not so easily achieved.

A Hesitant Reading

As I have suggested, one way in which I experience 'A Country House' is that it is a story about the very process of reading, itself; of reading as an act of observation, attention, of knowing what is there in the objective sense, that is, beyond one's individual response to the text. As the narrator puts it:

This is not simply my experience. It was so with my wife and Richardson too. I know by my own observation of them. (p. 44)

But it is also about reading as an act of deduction which follows on from such observation:

I knew there was something wrong with him by his voice. I detected that at once. (p. 47)

This is a text imbued with such acts of knowing and detecting, but, crucially, it is also a text which reveals the failure/inadequacy of such processes; which constantly disrupts such simple analysis and explication. In other words, here is a narrator who seems to be omniscient, all-controlling, who declares that 'I can find my way about in the dark' (p. 32), but one who, I will argue, reveals that he is always struggling with meanings, connections, with retaining control over everything around him for, in a counter image, 'night is a distorter' (p. 38). As in Parham's text, such contrariness is not acknowledged but is there to be found in the process that is reading. Before going on to show some of the other ways in which this text can be read, I will pause to identify some linguistic features which mark this as written in the style predominantly associated with the patriarchal mode.³⁶

The syntactic structure is overwhelmingly of the simple declarative that is associated with giving information, with clarity of meaning. This stands as the model against which the 'elastic' sentence had to be invented by Dorothy Richardson:

³⁶One of my readers could not bear this story as she found it evoked such a powerful sense of the controlling male. Her note, flung in my direction, simply said 'I HATE THIS'. She began to like it once I persuaded her to read it again.

I went up to town and called at the electricians. They would send someone down to look at it. But they could not send anyone until September.
(p. 33)

Built into this and closely associated with it is the progressive linear development of events. Sentence one leads into sentence two and so on. It is the mode that Morgan used to establish her argument, Quirk *et al*'s step discourse strategy, the 'simplest type of exposition, and one 'normal [...] in description, narrative, or argument' (p. 1435). The particular significance in this story is that it conveys a sense of progression, that one thing leads naturally into the next, that there is meaning and connection.

Emotion is largely absent from the text. Events are related in the main without the reaction being given. What direct speech there is is rendered overwhelmingly in *she said* mode without associated adverbial comment, the style that might be said to have been perfected by Hemingway:³⁷

When I turned back she said, 'Why did you send him away? It looked so nice.'
'He can go somewhere else to swim,' I said.
Richardson said nothing.
'He does no harm here, surely?' she said. (p. 46)

(I will return later to exceptions to this pattern.) It is recorded that 'Richardson said nothing'. This is a text which can be read (as I shall later show) as one long speech by the narrator, but also one which not only avoids the presentation of the direct speech of others through quiet (covert?) means via the presentation of indirect speech forms (in the visit to the electrician's for example (p. 33)) but which also shouts out its recurring silences, its not-saids. They progress from:

He climbed into the car, and sat in silence during the whole long drive. (p. 34)

³⁷See Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast* (London: Cape, 1964): 'If I started to write elaborately, or like someone introducing or presenting something, I found that I could cut that scroll-work or ornament out and throw it away and start with the first true simple declarative sentence I had written' (p. 15).

via

'That is very kind of you,' and he leaned back in his chair and cut off all communication with us. (p. 39)

and on through many other instances to my particular favourite:

We spent dinner very pleasantly. Nobody spoke a word. (p. 49)

Silence is a positive virtue in the narrator's world. I would not have liked to be at that dinner. Perhaps I am more constrained by the social 'obligation to fill' the silence than either Nel or these participants. This, I claim, is one of the stories of 'A Country House': one must watch how one fills the silences.

Yet this is a text which also directs attention to the voice, both its sound:

His voice was at least an octave deeper than is natural in a speaking voice. (p. 33)

(The apparent tautology of 'speaking voice' is later explained when it is contrasted to the singing voice.) And its meaning:

I knew there was something wrong with him by his voice. (p. 47)

I will be going on to show that these patterns begin to interact with each other to create the complexity that this text does not seem to have on the surface. For instance, I believe those patterns built around speech/not-speech acts begin to draw attention to another reading of this text which is that it is about speech and writing,³⁸ which is another way of saying that the author can produce readings that go beyond the narrator's apparent story, as is the case in *Frankenstein*. I shall develop these points later. I am intent for now on establishing some general points before honing in on the detailed workings.

³⁸One reader, once I raised this speech/writing issue, suggested to me that in fact, in an intriguing reversal, what dialogue there is sounds written (because stilted and unnatural sounding) whereas the rest sounds spoken.

There is as I have said little adverbial comment in this text. It is through adverbial clues that its writer (or should I say speaker) can choose to convey further information about his perception of how something is to be seen or heard, as becomes apparent in the few adverbs that do occur, which occurrences draw attention to the general lack, or, to adopt a poetic analogy:

it was clear why Baby Suggs was so starved for colour. There wasn't any except for two orange squares in a quilt that made the absence shout.³⁹

Here are two of those adverbial 'orange squares':

She turned to him petulantly (p. 41)

he said seriously. (p. 36, p. 37)

Ironically, and significantly in terms of my argument that such discourse may be deceptive, the (psychological) occasions on which one as a writer/speaker might choose to avoid such descriptive (and judgmental?) comment are almost diametrically opposed. One either seeks or claims to present an objective recording of the facts unencumbered by subjective judgment, or the emotional engagement is so strong that to try to represent it would be always inadequate to the experience and/or inappropriate to the enormity of the event. So which of these suppressive acts is in operation at the moment of the climactic conversation (and here *conversation* can only be ironic from feminist perspective since the narrator speaks in the mode that conveys essential information in one direction only, the mode encapsulated in *I will tell you*) of this story? I reproduce this conversation here, with my responses in square brackets.

Half-way to the gate he turned and thanked her. [There is no direct speech, no adverbial comment. It relates the observable facts.] He had never experienced such pleasure in a holiday before. [Speech is rendered indirectly, reported. No tone is given.] Then he shook hands with me and

³⁹Toni Morrison, *Beloved: A Novel* (first published New York: Penguin, 1987; this edn London: Picador, 1988), p. 38.

said nothing. [The narrator 'speaks' the silence. The form delays the negative, seeming to present it as a positive. Compare the given mode with either leaving the silence unspoken - *then he shook hands with me* - or bringing the negative to the foreground - *but did not speak*. The narrator's choice of linking with 'and' rather than opposing with *but* suggests that this silence is the norm. But what is the reader's expectation here? Might s/he be prepared to hear *and said good-bye*? I shall come back to this.]

'Come down to see us often,' I said. 'Come whenever you like, for week-ends.' [There is no tone, though the reader 'knows' he does not mean it?⁴⁰]

'Oh yes,' said my wife, 'please come, and bring your music.' [There is no tone, though this time the reader 'knows' she really means it? There is the same kind of intensification of language in both the narrator's and wife's speech but the reader attributes oppositional meanings to them.⁴¹ This is to say that the reader is led by what has gone before to take up/assume the judgmental role that the narrator seems to suppress in himself.] (p. 51)

In the absence of adverbial clues, the reader has to decide how to hear each of the speakers and what, if any, emotional register to attribute to them.⁴² The reader has to supply the sound. My parenthetical comments have already gone some way to suggesting how to fill in the gaps. It is a complex activity since, through the narrator, we are already one step removed from the other participants. If the narrator has removed the tone (either in order to sound objective or because his emotions are too great, and both of these are always possible) how can we know what to put back in? I want to suggest that the reader has a responsibility here to justify from within the text whatever sound s/he produces. In other words, I am now putting my own assessment of that conversation back into further question.

To sum up my reading so far, I am arguing that the general and surface framework of this text implies that it is knowledgeable, informative and tends towards objective, that is non-

⁴⁰Here, of course, I defy my own earlier injunction to refrain from 'scare-quotes'. I do so in the recognition that this text makes the reader think about what s/he knows.

⁴¹This is the experience of my own 'naive' reading and of my readers. After I had asked them for their immediate unprompted responses I then tested out the key areas where I feel the reader is simultaneously being led into mistaken readings and being shown that this is happening.

⁴²I am taking a different stance from that given by Elmore Leonard in an interview with Jim Shelley ('The Detroit Spinner', *Guardian*, 9 March 1989). Shelley refers to the fact that 'adverbs are almost non-existent' in Leonard's writing. He responds "That [using adverbs] is a moral sin. If you've developed your character adequately, the way the character speaks should be apparent" (p. 34). Leonard presumes both too much and too little of his readers.

judgmental, forms. However, I then begin to show how such simplistic analysis does not withstand close reading. I might then rephrase this to conclude that 'A Country House' is written in the style and tradition of that Pythagorean right hand side, with all the attendant patriarchal implications of order and control, before going on to show that it is infused with the characteristics of the left hand side: it does not mean what it says.

Multiple Readings

I have already begun to suggest different ways in which this story might be read, for instance as a meditation on the speech/writing distinction, and I want now to elaborate on some of my other readings of this short and simple tale, though with no claim that I have exhausted the possibilities. I shall try to present these readings as I experienced them.

I read it first of all as an example of the classic usurper's tale. The danger of the stranger, unwittingly invited in:

And then at the first sight of a stranger (p. 32)

At this point I ought to describe his appearance (p. 33)

and I think that something terrible is going to happen:

If things had not happened as they did (p. 43)

even although (perhaps because) this is counteracted:

Do not think for a moment that I regard this as a melodrama.
(p. 34, see also p. 40)

When nothing does happen (which is a hazardous claim that I am prepared to risk), I reread in order to see how I was led down this particular path. And I find myself reading it now as a

detective story, complete with clues, trails and red herrings. The narrator's discourse of observation and detection comes into the foreground. Yet no awful event is revealed. So I read again. And I continue to find other discourses which direct me to significant and terrible events, even though I am repeatedly advised that this is not a 'melodrama'. I read it now with the narrator as witness, relating a series of events as they occur in the simple, repetitive step-by-step form that might be required of a witness. The seeming banality of much of the writing (one of my readers likened it to a conversation he might overhear at a bus stop) then becomes readable as appropriate to its function, and the addressee moves into the foreground. In this version, the narrator is explaining, making clear to someone else how it came to be so and, through recognition and repetition, these processes rise to the surface:

I must tell you we live in the country (p. 32)

Now I will tell you where the stepping-stones are (p. 36)

And I will tell you why (p. 41)

and I will tell you what it is like. (p. 42)

This stylistic device of invoking a 'you' who has in my previous reading been, and who will always potentially be, the reader being told the story now also carries the possibility that it refers to an undisclosed outsider, a listener, some version of the court/judge/jury scenario which raises the whole potential that this text is one long speech represented in writing. This would then explain and carry the many examples that I can point to of discourse that is acceptable in the immediacy of speech but still frowned upon in the context of what constitutes good writing:⁴³

⁴³I can still hear my English teacher at school on the subject of 'nice'.

and all that sort of thing (p. 32)

he was a nice fellow (p. 34)

a nice enough fellow (p. 40)

He was not a bad sort of fellow (p. 43)

He sang some Brahms. It was quite nice. (p. 43)

The repetition which appears in these examples of 'bad' writing is characteristic of unprepared speech, but also draws to the surface the thought: what is going to happen to this 'nice fellow' or what is he going to do? I would argue that these questions occur to the reader because the dominant mode of reading is still to find out what happens,⁴⁴ and that Edwards, through her narrator's speech, is playing with the ways that such expectations are raised. This is one of the ways in which I read 'A Country House' as producing in a very different style the kind of experience that is attributed to postmodernist texts: meaning and its construction is thrown into question. This ploy of leading up to not-events is also present in Edwards' novel, *Winter Sonata*, though I for one find it much more effective in the short story form precisely because I can keep going back over the whole text to learn how it is that I read. Simple words and structures can deceive. It might be worthwhile here indicating some of the points at which this garden-path process occurs on a small, intimate scale before I go on later to show how it pervades the whole text:

After the music we sat round the empty grate and said nothing, and we went very late to bed. (p. 49)

⁴⁴A number of my readers referred to this process - reading to see what happens, and then feeling that 'A Country House' failed as a story since nothing did seem to happen. The alternative was that my readers made things happen and actually thought these happenings were in the text, that they had seen them, until asked to point them out. As David Guterson puts it, 'like most people, Horace felt the need not merely to know but to envision clearly whatever had happened' (*Snow Falling on Cedars* (London: Bloomsbury, 1995), p. 47). My point is that there are happenings, but not of the kind that one might expect.

Might not this 'late' be read in anticipation, within a standard set of social expectations, as its opposite *early*? The other pressure is to read something into it which is not actually there: that the narrator was not going to give the other two the chance of talking without him there, a game of lasting out.⁴⁵ This is one of those moments where I claim that the slow, attentive reader must resist this pressure to fill in the gap in an entirely predictable, but unjustifiable, way which will produce nothing more than the same old story. What about

I saw at once that he was a nice fellow, something out of the ordinary, not a villain at all. (p. 34)

Is not 'nice fellow' the most ordinary language? I suggest that there is a pressure to read *something ordinary*, again the opposite of what is actually there, for otherwise we go along with the (extraordinary) notion that 'a villain', here set up in contrast through the use of the negative 'not', is ordinary.⁴⁶ I want to suggest that such intimate examples are there to alert the reader to the larger ways in which language can play on norms and expectations, and that such writing demands the attentive reader who goes beyond such conventions to see, paradoxically, what is actually there. This can be compared with Angela Carter's garden path structures (see discussion on *Dr Hoffman* in my concluding chapter) but, where Carter's operate through complex syntax, Edwards produces the same kind of effect within the simplest forms. It is the patterning at various levels which creates the complexity. My crucial claim is that Edwards is showing that patriarchal discourse works on the illusion of control and order and that it only succeeds if the other conforms to that illusion. The act of reading for what is really there - I might want to risk saying reading for the truth - can become a paradigm for a political position which refuses to ascribe to patriarchy the illusions

⁴⁵This is how a number of my readers reconstructed it.

⁴⁶I found it interesting that one of my recent readers, the one who writes short stories and was reluctant to commit herself, stopped at this point and drew attention to this construction in exactly this way.

that it claims. This is one of those occasions where I insist that the combination of patterning and exceptional examples in Edwards' writing justifies the claim that particular effects were intended. There will always be other effects and other intentions but I say that for a moment I know what she means.

I want to return to the strategy of explicitly invoking an addressee, 'you', as this is one powerful means by which the unsuspecting reader is led to speculate beyond the presented text.⁴⁷ 'You' are invited to do so: the outside has been brought in as it were, whether the reader experiences this as being her/himself, or a silent listener. I cannot emphasize enough how reading strategies are an integral part of the agenda of this text. My reading of the narrator as witness is one which suggests that somebody else has done something, that Richardson or the narrator's wife is the perpetrator, I might say the agent, of an act. This reading can in a sense be reversed, for 'A Country House' also reads as a confession(al) which form would also require the silent listener and the repetitive detail, only now the focus shifts to how 'I' came to act as 'I' did, and the narrator is now the agent rather than the victim. What I am suggesting, at its simplest, is that all kinds of expectations are set up and then left unfulfilled. The reader must constantly displace/downgrade these fearful predictions and read this once more as the story of the usurper, in this case an unsuccessful one, for the knowing narrator triumphs over him. Whereas all that is actually here - as objective event - is that an electrician comes, does his job (and has his holiday), then leaves. This may seem to be an underreading but I shall go on to show how it is so. I am of course claiming that around and beyond these bare bones is an unexpectedly complex text which raises many other issues but one which does not follow the path of Richardson or Woolf in constructing linguistic and ideational modes of parallel complexity. This is language we can all speak, but we need to be aware of how it works.

In turning now to look in more specific detail at the ways in which surface control and

⁴⁷See Bruce Morrissette, 'Narrative "You" in Contemporary Literature', in *Novel and Film*, pp. 108-40, for further discussion on how *you* works in text.

meaning (the patriarchal version of life as a clear and simple story) is disrupted (by the not-patriarchal or the non/sense view) I shall read attentively through a number of grammatical features which occur in this text. They are not complex in themselves: it is the games that are played with them which produce the complexity. You need to know the rules. I shall look at the following: pronominal referents, verb tense, temporal referents, repetition, and the use of the negative form. I shall then go on in a wider sense to show how, through such grammatical games, the text/narrator sets up its/his own internal logic and that this can be characterized in the narratorial refrain 'that is nonsense'.⁴⁸

Who is He?

The manipulation of the use of referents is one means by which this story is expanded and deepened. I have already discussed how Dorothy Richardson's use of 'she' produces implicit connections between women that are otherwise denied on the surface. This particular effect may be a by-product of the predominantly third person narrative, one of those moments of not knowing, rather than an intention. Grammatical fusion between self and other will return as an insistent feature of Maggie Humm's style as philosophical enactment in *Border Traffic*. I suggest that it is a powerful strategic device if one's (feminist) intention is to enact the disruption of the boundary of discrete being. But it is also a (re)source of obsfucation. Form is meanings: read al(l)ways. It is in this problematizing mode that I approach the story of referents in Edwards' text. In 'glancing' at her pronominal tactics, it is essential that I show that the speaker is knowing about the referent rule: that is, the issue of clarity on which the rule is determined. The narrator has just been speaking of Chopin and of darkness 'bringing many things with it' (p. 38):

But he liked it. That is, Richardson liked the nocturne. (p. 38)

⁴⁸ This statement occurs on p. 32, p. 38, p. 41, and p. 46.

The qualification is technically required since otherwise the expectation would be that 'he' refers grammatically back to the last logical referent, Chopin, and similarly 'it' would be taken as a continuation of the last 'it': darkness. But I want to suggest that the style is overcorrective here since the larger context - his wife playing the piano for Richardson - gives accessibility to the meaning that is 'Richardson liked the nocturne'.

Part of the narrator's overstatement can be understood as one of the aspects which supports a witness reading - scrupulous attention to detail to prevent misunderstanding, or clarification of a point just made. It also indicates speech rather than writing since something else is added on to promote clarity rather than the original statement being reconstructed, which reconstruction would produce *but Richardson liked the nocturne*. It is the way in which this text's construction can refer to different levels and aspects of meaning which both make it something more complex than it appears on the surface and which contribute to the reader's experience of putting meanings into being. I want to propose, in a revival of my detective story reading as one also applicable to the grammatical content, that this signalling of the referent rule, as well as being a narratorial red herring in that it implies clarity of meaning as the house style of 'A Country House', is also an authorial clue, one that can be followed up with regard to the wider use of referents in the text, and which reveals some of the tricks in this tale. Already it will be apparent that reading backwards and forwards is essential. (And I shall later show, in relation to verb tense, how such readings are integral to the text.) Armed with this referential clue, I shall now return to the beginning of 'A Country House' to trace the story of the referents.

What Do *You* Mean?

I have already referred to the stylistic device of invoking a very definite and explicitly external if undefinable 'you' and given examples. But what of this earliest use?

It takes many years to close up all the doors to your soul. And then a woman comes along, and at the first sight of her you push them all open, and you become a child again. (p. 32)

English grammar has *one* as the formal generic term, particularly common in academic discourse (and the source of much duplicity), but also accepts *you* as the informal generic equivalent of *one*. But, as Quirk *et al* go on to elucidate, this generic *you* still ‘retains something of its second person meaning: it can suggest that the speaker is appealing to the ‘hearer’s experience of life in general, or else of some specific situation’ and that ‘sometimes, the reference is to the speaker’s rather than the hearer’s life or experiences’ (p. 354). In other words *you* can carry the meaning of the general anyone, of a specific hearer, or of the speaker her/himself, that is to say *I* by another name. This latter perception is one that might prove useful to feminists looking for ways of representing the ethical perspective that marks the common ground between self and other, a (con)fusion of the boundary between the two. Somewhat ironically, I would suggest that the same is true of *one* to a greater extent than is acknowledged by Quirk *et al*.⁴⁹ This flexibility of pronominal reference is gleefully presented at the outset of Edward’s tale. Her use can be compared with Dorothy Richardson’s subtle shifts in *Pilgrimage* from third to second to first person, which have been associated with movement into moments of great emotional intensity.⁵⁰ Both come to represent versions of the story of multiple perspective/selves even if they are by products of some other authorial intent. This first paragraph of ‘A Country House’ does have a different tone to that which dominates the text (though there are other occasional slippages to which I shall return, visible signs that the patriarch cannot wholly maintain control of his discourse). I shall now place *you* in a larger context, this time with the significant referents underlined:

⁴⁹The irony arises since it is not likely that many feminist speakers have thought that *one* with its overtones of class and snobbery in dominant usage might prove a useful grammatical option. However, Monique Wittig makes a similar point about *one* as the ungendered ‘munificent’ pronoun in ‘The Mark of Gender’, in *The Straight Mind and Other Essays* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), pp. 76-89 (p. 83).

⁵⁰See Jean Radford, *Dorothy Richardson* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991). Radford suggests the conveyance of emotional intensity as one effect of the shifting through pronominal referents, with particular reference to Miriam’s reaction to her mother’s suicide in *Pilgrimage I*, (pp. 489-90).

But from the very first moment I saw her I allowed all those barriers and screens that one puts up against people's curiosity to melt away. Nobody can do more than that. It takes many years to close up all the doors to your soul. And then a woman comes along, and at the first sight of her you push them all open, and you become a child again. Nobody can do more than that. (p. 32)

What might be going on here? I offer three of my readings. In the first of these, the speaker, in a moment of emotional intensity, moves in the opposite direction from that attributed to Richardson's presentation of Miriam: that is from the personal towards the less personal, from 'I' to 'one' to 'you', but is still primarily talking about himself. In this reading 'you' stands in for *I*. Or perhaps the speaker, from the outset, seeks to draw in the listener/reader, the external other, to share his experience. In which case 'you' equals *you*. Then again, the speaker may be externalizing his own experience out to the general condition. 'You' means *one*. All of these readings are always present. There will be others. It will be the reader's experience/involvement which determines a preference for any one reading at any one time and it may well be that the reader is able to hold more than one at a time. I would suggest that, in different and sustained contexts, there is scope here for something like a pronominal version of the story of **contrive**, where the notion of self and not-self coexist.

However, there is another game being played here which depends on the additional feature of repetition. Who is the 'nobody' who encircles the 'you'? In the first occurrence, 'nobody' can share a sense of identity with the earlier 'I' or 'one', depending again on the relation that the reader perceives, so that it may be the narrator himself, 'I', or the more generic form which includes the narrator, 'one', who cannot 'do more than that'. This then indicates that the anaphoric referent 'that' relates to this process of melting away the barriers. In the second occurrence, however, this 'nobody' can refer to 'you', which already involves the reader's particular perception of 'you' and therefore holds multiple possibilities, or conceivably, refers back to 'a woman'. 'Nobody can do more than that' begins to take on an additional meaning second time around. In the first meaning of this second use, the narrator

is the actor, the one who effects something. In the second, the narrator is acted upon, responding to 'the woman [who] comes along'. The narrator is the one who is affected. It is my general contention that there is considerable pressure (in terms of conventions) to read the same statement, when it recurs within such a short space, in the same way. So, a rereading of the whole passage now opens up the possibility that it is his wife who is the agent on the first occasion too, who is 'nobody'.⁵¹ The significance of this is, I hope, apparent: the ambivalence in the narrator's discourse as to who is the agent, the controller, and who is the acted-upon, the controlled, is there from the outset, as is the intriguing discourse of negative agency forerunner of Ermarth's postmodern 'Narrator as Nobody' (p. 27). As in *Frankenstein*, the author has found ways of presenting a male narrator who speaks the language of patriarchy, of control, but who reveals within this very process that all is not as it might appear to be on the surface. The secret as a reader lies in not giving in to the pressure to read the surface. The negative generic form 'nobody' is yet another means by which a speaker can avoid specifying the perpetrator where *she/I can do no more than that* makes it clear. However, this negation is buried under the multiple negations in this text, rather like the tactic in detective stories of hiding the clues in amongst other closely related items. I shall return to the role of negation.

Who is *One of Us*?

My interest here does not lie in generic uses of *we* though I might have some interest in tracing it in academic discourse as a powerful means of assuming that the reader is already and always in agreement, that is a form which induces a passive reader, and I would argue that this is often the effect when it is used in feminist discourse, even if the intention may be

⁵¹There is an added level of irony in that speaking this text (reading it out loud) would mean decisions being taken about tone and emphasis. Such a reading would have to favour one meaning over many. How you say each 'nobody' would convey something of your understanding. Of course, this is true of all speech, but has particular resonance in a text which plays with notions of speaking and writing.

to create an atmosphere of shared conditions. This, however, is not how Edwards plays the game. I suggest that, in a story about a stranger/usurper coming into and between the relationship of a couple, one, as the writer, might decide to portray the shifts in allegiance through the use of the first person plural pronouns: that is, the story might begin with *he*, the outsider, and *we*, the couple, and gravitate towards *I*, the outsider, and *they*, the couple, either resting here or returning to a *we/he* distinction depending on whether or not the usurper succeeds.⁵² The dance of the story is expressed through the pronominal referents. Here, as you might now already be expecting, I intend to show that, whilst there is an element of this predictable form, there are also more complex shifts occurring beneath the apparent surface. Rather than trace each example through the text (which the reader might choose to do for her/himself) I shall establish the predictable pattern and then show the significant variations. I want, where appropriate, to add a further element into the status of the first person plural referent. That is, whether both parties which constitute *we/our* share this knowledge or whether it is an imposition by one on the other, what I would call the patriarchal *we/our*. I note too that, in a first person narrative, this imposing role is likely to belong to the narrator. So to the predictable pattern:

we live in the country [...], so we have no electric light. (p. 32)

This 'we' refers to narrator and wife. And to something that they both know.

Now why not use the water for a little power station of our own and make our own electricity? (p. 33)

⁵²Toni Morrison understands the rules of this particular game:

and she [Nel] could get into bed and maybe she could do it then. Think. But who could think in that bed where *they* had been and where they had *also* been and where only she was now? (*Sula*, p. 106, her emphases).

One of these *theys* is Nel and Jude, the other is Sula and Jude, but the reader will already have drawn a meaning from the first (understood at this point in reading as the only) instance which depends on the evaluation *s/he* attributes to the intonation that the italics convey. Note also how 'it' works here.

Here 'our' refers to narrator and wife but this idea is known only to him (see p. 35 for confirmation of this supposition).⁵³ These events precede chronologically the meeting with the stranger (although he has been referred to obliquely by this point in the tale). They establish the bond between husband and wife and begin to convey that she is bound to him by his power over her. So far, so traditional:

I invited him to stay the night with us. (p. 34)

This 'us' refers to narrator and wife. She has no knowledge of or say in the act. This structure complies with the classic tale of the husband unwittingly inviting the usurper in, but also continues the tale of the controlling patriarch. But then comes:

When we reached the avenue of trees just before we turn in at my gate.
(p. 34)

The first 'we' refers to the narrator and Richardson. The second would seem to follow this pattern as would be expected, but the switch in verb tense to the habitual present of 'turn' then indicates a different interpretation. It could now constitute once more the narrator and his wife, or be some more generic reference of the *you/one* kind. Then the sudden switch to the possessive singularity of 'my gate' seems to contradict this reading of 'we' as narrator and wife, or at least to signal that whilst she might 'turn in at' she does not share ownership of the gate (signifying property). The patriarchal force of this 'my' would not have been so great had it been set up in contrast to a series of *we* which referred unambiguously to the narrator and Richardson. The mode used increases the narrator's sense of the patriarchal relationship that exists between his wife and him, although, as I have said, this same has already been undermined in the ambiguous agency of the opening. It is this surface power relationship and the ways in which it is undermined within its own terms which provide

⁵³Several of my readers read this as a text of the man exerting control over the unknowing wife and pointed to this use of 'we' as evidence of this.

another reading of this story: it becomes the story of the illusion of control, of how this is maintained and represented. To continue:

We turned in at the gate. (p. 35)

'We' refers unproblematically to the narrator and Richardson.

My wife came across the lawn to meet us. (p. 35)

This 'us' also refers to the narrator and Richardson. The narrator's wife is the outsider. The pattern of referents still lies within the conventions of the usurper's tale. But then something more interesting occurs. Richardson and the narrator's wife have just met in the presence of the narrator, (though there is only oblique reference to this: that is to say there is no representation of it in direct speech). Richardson has just responded to a question posed by the narrator's wife. Then the narrator also responds:

'We don't know yet,' I said; 'we must take him to see the stream.'
She came with us. (p. 35)

Who is being set up as the outsider? I will argue that there is a strange and complex transference introduced from this first moment that all three meet. The first 'we' could logically refer either to the narrator and Richardson or to the narrator and his wife with a different context being assumed by the reader depending on the choice made. The context of 'we' as narrator and Richardson, which seems to be stronger initially, is that they already have shared information about the insertion of electricity, they are there to effect a change, and that they are the couple who have just arrived to meet the third person.⁵⁴ The context of 'we' as the narrator and his wife is that they are the two who are to be affected by the change, the couple who live together in the house. This reading is initially less convincing since the narrator has not shared his plan with his wife before this point and thus has not brought her

⁵⁴I am not claiming a homoerotic reading but one reader did wonder if the narrator wanted Richardson to himself. See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick for a homoerotic reading of *Frankenstein*.

into the knowing equation. However this reading gains credence after the second 'we' which is presented as a direct grammatical continuation of the first (same sentence) where referent rules would indicate that 'we' represents the same combination in both cases in the absence of clear evidence that it is otherwise. Here, on the second occasion, it is clear that 'we' refers to the narrator and his wife since 'we must take him to the stream', and 'him' can only refer to Richardson. In an act of reading backwards the reader might then readjust her/his understanding of the first 'we'. This doubleness would not hold such significance if it were not for the next move: 'She came with us'. If 'we' has been established as the narrator and his wife, as a couple, then the grammatical logic (of the patriarchal form) would have been to continue this practice. This would have produced *We took him* or *He came with us*. Instead, his wife is unexpectedly transformed through the grammar of the referents into the outsider, and the narrator and Richardson re-established as the couple, the incomers. Another way of putting this is to say that the couple/outsider boundary is an unstable, shifting one:

and **he** leaned back in his chair and cut off all communication with **us**.
We sat in silence until **my wife** left **us**. Then **we** talked. (p. 39, my emphases).

What is also significant in my reading through referents is that the one person here who is not ever the outsider,⁵⁵ in direct contrast to Morgan's reading, is the narrator, who, partly through the consequences of the controlling first person narrative, must always be a part of *we* in his own speech. Quite a different pattern could have emerged had this been a third person narrative where *he* would then always have two possible referents and *they* multiple combinations.⁵⁶ It could also be argued that 'she came with us' is fairly redundant as it has already in a sense been said in 'we must'. Its presence not only has the effect of allowing this

⁵⁵And 'we' can of course also refer to all three as it seems to at '[w]e followed it [the stream] down' (p. 35).

⁵⁶This is not to claim that there are not other ways - nominal - of constructing Richardson and the narrator's wife as a couple: see 'my two friends who admire Chopin so much' (p. 42). This is a construction of the narrator's in the double sense of the word and lies on the surface. Pronominal referents carry much more subtle properties and potential. These have to be read for: they are not always evident.

subtle game of changing partners but also of producing the sense that his wife makes her own choices/actions and that the narrator is aware of this. In other words it cannot simply be taken for granted that his wife would respond to 'we must'. It must be stated. This links in to the reading of the opening which questions agency - the affect/effect distinction - in that the narrator's wife may not be the passive recipient that is implied on the surface. In the most simple and seemingly direct of styles, Edwards has endowed her narrator with a complex discourse, patriarchal on the surface/in its forms, not-patriarchal underneath/in its effects.

It is my consistent claim that it is the reading which accepts the surface of patriarchal control in this story, that is the reading which takes the narrator at face value, and does not read to challenge, that leads to Morgan's introductory comment which attributes weighty significance to the flag raising. This is a reading which sees only what a narrator in control would say. After all, the last and, in my reading, crucial sentence is:

Up above the flag waved senselessly in the wind. (p. 52)

Here, at the last, I claim that the narrator's failure rises literally above the surface but that Morgan has already made up her mind what this story is about so fails herself to see what is actually there rather than what might be expected to be there - within patriarchal boundaries. Although there are many readings, there are also misreadings.

How Straight is The Line?

I want now to switch to another aspect of the text which also seems to be upheld in patriarchal terms but is actually subverted. This is the way in which this story appears to adopt a linear sequential approach to events, each step relating back/forward to those on either side of it. Within this mode, consistent with the discourse of detective/evidential

forms, is the attention to detail, the sense of obligation on the part of the narrator to his unseen/unheard audience to provide all the relevant information at the right time:

At this point I ought to describe his appearance. (p. 33)

My argument will be, however, that it is all ‘appearance’: that none of these patriarchal modes are sustained; and yet that this deception occurs in the classic patriarchal style.

A linear sequence would require first things first:

From the day when I first met my wife she has been my first consideration always. (opening sentence)

I have mentioned that repetition is a significant feature of this text. The word ‘first’ occurs four times in the opening paragraph and again near the beginning of the next. What possible readings might this ploy produce? I will propose several. It heralds an emphasis on the beginning of things. This might be contrasted with short stories which plunge straight ‘in medias res’, and compared with Humm’s attempt in *Border Traffic* to establish Bakhtin as the origin, which I return to in my next chapter. In this reading, the listener/reader seems to be privy to events from the ‘first moment’ of significance. Then again, it conveys clarity. It produces poetic form. It constitutes bad writing, in that it usurps the convention that words are not to be repeated in close proximity.⁵⁷ It sounds the representation of speech in all its

⁵⁷I am not claiming that all feminist writers are beyond this good/bad writing distinction. On the contrary, I find in Susan Sellers’ discussion with regard to her own fictional writing strangely conventional in terms of both writing practice and reading response. She is reflecting on the process of rewriting her novel:

The sentence began with a more prosaic account of what Melanie saw.

As she stood on the cliff and looked out to sea, she could see a dotted group of small islands, a group of fishing trawlers throwing their nets behind them into the sea, a group of seagulls bobbing on the water like corks as they swam behind the trawlers.

The problems are immediately apparent. Not only is there an awkward repetition of group [...], but the reiteration of ‘trawlers’ in such a short sentence is unnecessary. These difficulties, however, are minor when compared to the disastrous (sic) conjunction between ‘sea’ and ‘see’ [...]. Clearly this had to go. (‘Writing New Fictions’, in *The Semi-Transparent Envelope*, p. 124)

immediacy. It is one feature which binds this opening into one of Gertrude Stein's 'emotional paragraphs'.⁵⁸

There will be other ways of reading this. I certainly read it as one means by which the impression is created that significant events will unfold. Here is my version of 'A Country House' in its bare linear terms:

I met my wife. I took her to my house in the country. I decided to have electricity put in. I arranged for an electrician to come down. He did. He stayed with us. He spent some time with my wife. I overheard them talking together once. He finished his job on schedule. (I raised my flag.) He left.

What disrupts this surface order? I propose that it is another grammatical device, verb tense.

When Did 'Things' Happen?

I am not claiming here that the tactic of disrupting time through strategic use of verb tense is innovative.⁵⁹ Other writers who would not resist being labelled patriarchal employ this device. This is in part what is being exposed here. What I am claiming is that the verb tenses are used to particular effect here, especially when seen in combination with the reworking of other familiar strategies. They show the power of such a readily available device to be, like night, 'a distorter' (p. 38). The primary device common to first person narrative is a move between past and present tense, where past records the narrator as protagonist of her/his own story (autodiegetic), and present allows for her/his current reflections on these past events: 'I wonder if' (p. 62). This is not the only move in 'A Country House' (once more I will speak back to the text in square brackets). There is the distinction between single events that are

On this kind of traditional analysis (I hear my old English teacher again), 'A Country House' would be considered very bad writing indeed, whereas I am suggesting that instead it shows how effective such a discourse can be.

⁵⁸'Poetry and Grammar', in *Writing and Lectures 1911-1945*, ed. by Patricia Meyerowitz (London: Owen, 1967), p. 131. Further reference to this edition is given after quotation in the text.

In the Steinian sense the word would never mean quite the same thing twice.

⁵⁹This discussion on verb tense and time will re-emerge in my final chapter in relation to *Heroes and Villains*.

over, and continuous truths:

From the day when I first met my wife

[active simple past verb group, single event]

she has been my first consideration always.

[passive, present perfective verb group, the effect of which is to convey the continuous and current relevance of the past: this claim still holds true for the speaker. Other options such as *she was my first consideration* or *she had been my first consideration* would indicate that this is no longer held to be true by the speaker even if the apparently inexhaustive temporal indicator 'always' was retained.]

It is only fair that I should treat her so, because she is young.

[Stative present tense. This formulation supports the previous reading that this 'first consideration' constitutes continuous truth still holding in the present. Yet note that the reasoning process ('because') also rendered in the present tense ('she is young') is an intrinsically illogical one since no-one can stay young for ever. She cannot continue to be as young now in the present as she was when he 'first met her.' Yet there is no compromise: 'she is young'.⁶⁰ Though note the continuation of this particular story, 'and she still looks very young' (p. 35) where the switch to 'looks' conveys that this may only be appearance and no longer truth. (I shall be returning to issues of the internal logic of the text.)]

There is the classic patriarchal trick of using the present tense to imply timeless truths or rather to present opinion as undisputed fact:

But it is natural that a woman would not like it (p. 32)

where the semantics of 'natural' and the generality of 'a woman' add to this sense of presenting a simple reality.⁶¹ There is movement from a specific event to a general truth:

But from the very first moment I **saw** her I **allowed** all those barriers and screens that one **puts** up against people's curiosity to melt away. (p. 32, my emphases to highlight verb tense shift)

⁶⁰And this "refusal" to let her grow up is cited on a number of occasions by my readers as an indicator of the patriarchal control exerted in the text.

⁶¹And this generality of 'a woman' also occurring in the first paragraph in more direct reference to his wife along with 'a child' was another feature identified by my readers as patriarchal in its objectification of his wife. The absence of a name for her is seen by some to come into the same category. I was less aware of this level of patriarchal discourse as I was looking above all for readings against the patriarchal content.

This, crucially, and from the outset, begins to set up as typical a style within which the narrative can slip without jarring from past into present tense. In so doing, it can confuse the reader. I wonder what time is being represented. The text gives other temporal indications (to which I shall return) that the narrator speaking from now, like Frankenstein and the protagonist of 'The Bloody Chamber', knows what has happened and is choosing how to reveal this, how to tell that story. This looking back to the past from the present is a classic means of indicating authorial control, but where the 'knowing' *I* of 'The Bloody Chamber' uses her knowledge to provide the reader with a safety valve (she has survived whatever is to be revealed as having happened) and conforms to the implication that the reader may justifiably have confidence in the narrator's control of the material, somewhat akin to the traditional omniscient narrator, this is again only the surface experience of 'A Country House'. This appearance of control is accentuated by the series of clues as to how to read the text:

Do not think for a moment that I regard this as a melodrama. I do not.
(p. 34)

The present tense indicates that this is the view now held, from the vantage point of knowing, of telling what is to come (as opposed to a story told throughout in either the past or present tense):

If things had not happened as they did he might have come down often.
(p. 43)

The habitual discourse of informal speech patterns already established in this text allows for these 'things', which only seem to tell the reader something. It is because 'things' is a semantically empty word that it is not revered in so-called good writing, but just as 'things' has only the appearance of informing here, so will the not-melodramatic nature of the text be played upon.

A Melodramatic Interlude

When we got to the bottom of the garden [...] she gave a cry of horror.
(p. 41)

This sounds like melodrama. In performance, melodrama's over-the-top action is heralded by dramatic musical accompaniment, there to indicate the appropriate emotional tone to the audience. At this level, 'A Country House' can be read as parody of the genre of melodrama: Chopin's music which pervades the text speaks the unspeakable.⁶² What is the reason for that 'cry of horror'? First of all there is a delaying tactic, to build up the suspense, but ironically one about explanation:

And I will tell you why. (p. 41)

then follows revelation:

It was because I had had the grass and weeds on the bank cut. (p. 41)

The build up of suspense is undercut. I read it as mock melodrama. But the further irony is that the 'white flowers' that his wife saw in his 'grass and weeds' were

'Hemlock,' I said. 'It had to be cut.' (p. 41)

I hope it is becoming apparent how each of the apparently simple grammatical (and semantic) choices feeds in to the others: each seems to contribute to the other making sense, thus creating a complex layered effect out of the simplest and available of materials. Here I move towards endorsing Halliday's claim that 'it is the grammatical system as a whole [which] represents the semantic code' (p. xxxi). For, it is the already established habit of predominantly reporting direct speech as 'I/s/he said' that now allows for this bare response

⁶²Edwards' stories tend to have musical thematics: *Winter Sonata* for example.

as typical of the narrator's style. The reader has to deduce for him/herself that there might indeed be a justification for cutting down hemlock (that it is poisonous) which is on a different level of validity than the reason that seems to adhere within the text, that it is all to do with the narrator's and his wife's differing attitudes to 'tidiness' (p. 41). Where he desires order she wants chaos.⁶³

Did 'Things' Happen?

Returning to verb tense, I want only to establish a point and tell another story before moving on. The point is that the controlling present tense is one powerful means by which the reader is tricked into thinking that something is going to happen and that the narrator both knows and controls the relation of events from the position of now, looking back. The story is the one about whether the electricity was ever switched on: in other words, perhaps at even the most banal and literal level, the tale of providing electric light, this is a story of not-happening. I tell this particular story through the slippage of past/present tense, the variations on present tense, the buried clue, that lie in the second paragraph:

I must tell you we live in the country, a long way from a town, so we have no electric light. (p. 32)

In terms of my discussion above on what tense can do, I read this series of present tense verbs as follows: 'I must tell you' represents the controlling narrator of now; 'we live in the country' is continuous truth with the implication that *we still do*; and crucially, 'so we have no electric light' is also continuous truth, a reading the syndetic co-ordinator 'so' would seem to support. The two events are contingent on each other so that there is the implication that *we still have no electric light*. Yet this is a story which is set up on the prosaic level as being

⁶³This is another of the ways in which this story responds to what I will call a traditional reading. They take up traditional positions on the Pythagorean right and left sides.

about this very process, having electric light. My suggestion is that possibly even this intention was never fulfilled, and that lack of fulfilment, on many different levels and subtle scales is what 'A Country House' is about. Intention, meaning and outcome are inferred but there is never adequate ground to justify the inference, whether it is the action of the narrator or of the reader of the text. The reader must watch how s/he fills in the gaps, makes sense, because s/he may simply be falling into the patriarchal trap which seeks to create the illusion of knowing, of making sense, and needs the collusive passive victim to sustain that illusion.⁶⁴ My claim that 'A Country House' portrays Ermarth's vision of the postmodernist text (things do not make sense so why tell stories in which they do) ahead of time and in ways accessible to all readers rises to the surface in this moment. And once I posit the possibility that this basic intention - to put in electric light - is not achieved I can show both how this is true within the text and also how it is part of a deeper pattern of failure.

Now I begin to read with a different agenda. Now I am reading for the story of the electricity. Different things come into focus. I am looking for a different set of clues. I find

It was curious how much interest we all took in the little building and the pipes and the water, and yet when we thought of the electric light in the house, which was to be the result, all the romance was gone out of it.
(p. 44)

'We' consistently refers to the narrator, his wife and Richardson; 'This is not simply my experience. It was so with my wife and Richardson too' (p. 44). But look now at the ambiguity, created out of verb formation, of 'which was to be the result'. It could mean

⁶⁴On this theme see Alice Munro's short story, 'Fits', in *The Progress of Love* (first published McClelland and Stewart, 1986; this edn Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), pp. 143-78. It is about the need to know and, in the absence of knowledge, the creation of information to fill in the gap. No one can cope with Peg's lack of the need to tell and make known after she finds the Weeples shot dead in a suicide pact:

(This, in fact, was Robert's explanation to himself. She didn't say all that, but he forgot she didn't. She just said, 'I thought I might as well take them up to the kitchen.')

Nobody would want not to know. (p. 160)

simply that this was the objective or it could mean that this was the intended but unfulfilled objective. Intonation, that is to say how you read, plays a part here.⁶⁵ The first proposed reading would have no stress on 'was' whereas the second would.⁶⁶ The first reading could have been more clearly expressed by an omniscient narrator as *which was/had been the result* and the second by *which was to have been the result*. As it is, both possibilities continuously coexist. And then again, whose 'romance'? If this were a reference to his wife and Richardson then the narrator might himself desire the electric light. If it were however a reference to the narrator and his wife, he might not want it. And perhaps it continues, like the 'we' here, to refer to all three: the narrator is the sole creator and controller of this game of romance.⁶⁷ I might present as evidence for this view the way that he controls the time that the other two have alone together by leaving or not leaving the room ('every night he sang and my wife played, but I did not always stay in the drawing-room' (p. 45)). And 'all the romance was gone out of it'. To what, in a revival of pronominal referent play, does that 'it' refer? To 'the house', or, in the manner of 'things', to some less definable condition that the narrator is bringing into existence amongst the three of them? Again, it is the semantic

⁶⁵For Bakhtin's discussion on intonation, see 'Discourse in the Novel', in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (first published c1967; this edn Texas: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 259-422. Bakhtin proposes that the reader, in creating intonation, is an active participant in the text rather than a passive recipient.

I have had some very strange experiences in rereadings where, in producing a different intonation, I find myself wondering why the writer has changed his/her mind. In this process is evidence that I experience texts as living things but that my first impulse is still to hold the author responsible for the intonation that I choose at any particular moment. My second impulse is to look at how the author may be producing such multiple possibilities of intonation. So, whilst I agree with Bakhtin that the reader produces intonation, I also hold onto the notion that the author can play with this expectation.

⁶⁶I am interested in the role of intonation in my (incidental) reading of Cormac McCarthy's *All The Pretty Horses* (London: Picador, 1993), which I argue is set up in its opening pages to be read as cliché or as an attempt to get at some deeper experience. The choice is yours. The setting is the protagonist looking at the body of someone close to him (it turns out to be his father laid out for burial:

Lastly he looked at the face [...] the eyelids paper thin. That was not sleeping. That was not sleeping. [...] He stood with his hat in his hand. You never combed you hair that way in your life, he said. (both p. 3, first page of text).

My argument is that it depends on the intonation that the reader places on 'that' in 'that was not sleeping' and on 'in your life' as to whether these expressions are given the weight of old clichés or a personal engagement with the reality of death. We tend not to associate intonation with the process of reading as it seems to be a silent activity, but the sounds are there in our head.

⁶⁷One recent reader's first comment to me was: 'I think the others are an illusion. They're not really there.'

emptiness of 'it', like 'things', which paradoxically may lead the reader to overfill it with meaning. And how does the story of the electric light develop?

The day before everything was finished and he [Richardson] was to go - he was not waiting to see the light actually put in the rooms. (p. 47)

This story ends just around this moment of Richardson's departure. No-one sees 'the light actually put in the rooms'. Indeed, this story ends:

The engine was working, and it throbbed noisily, while there was hardly any water in the curve of the stream. It has made a great difference to the garden. Up above the flag waved senselessly in the wind. (p. 52)

The key structure here is the verb 'has made' which differs from the simple past tense of 'throbbed' and 'waved'. It is again the present perfective tense. Even in its sounds it rings of the present tense. I return to Quirk *et al* for further elucidation:

Both [the simple past and the present perfective] indicate a state of affairs before the present moment, but the simple past indicates that [the action] has come to a close, whereas the present perfective indicates that the action has continued up to the present time (and may even continue into the future). This kind of difference, although by no means invariable, is often summarized in the statement that the present perfective signifies past time 'with current relevance'. (p. 190)

This is to say that the 'difference' still pertains: this is the narrator speaking from now within the simple past tenses which represent the protagonist's *then*. As Quirk *et al* go on to say:

The connotation [...] that the result of the action still obtains, applies to dynamic conclusive verbs i.e. verbs whose meaning implies the accomplishment of a change of state. (p. 192)

This is exactly the case here. 'It has made a great difference to the garden [*and this is still so*]'. But what of the house? Here I do draw in the not-said, that is, the not-said which can be implicated directly from what is said, rather than filled in from the text's silence and the reader's imagination. Perhaps it has made no difference to the house. It was the intention to make a difference to the house. In other words, the light never is 'actually put in the rooms'

in which case the romance has not 'gone out of it' and 'we have no electric light' is indeed a continuous truth. In this reading the absence of light can then continue to be the 'something' that 'you must pay [...] for living in the country'. This 'you' may be general observation with speakerly intention combined with present tense continuous truth. It does not then have to be replaced by anything else, by his wife's desire for someone (else) since 'there is no one here at all' (p. 48). Edwards creates her 'emotional' paragraphs by enclosing in them many of the secrets that the eruption of the present into the past can bring. These secrets will not come to light without close, active rereadings, and a refusal on the part of the reader to be constrained by the narrator's repeatedly expressed desire for order and control:

A place must be tidy. (p. 41)

The corn was cut and stood up in sheaves. That is what I like. (p. 42)

I will go so far as to suggest that the 'new acts of attention' required to read a 'A Country House' have greater significance for feminisms than do those required by texts which flaunt their postmodern status. For what these 'acts' show here is how the dominant mode of patriarchy tries to sustain its illusions. Such rereadings do not leave the reader unchanged.⁶⁸ I am talking not only of the linguistic games that feminists might choose to play in all seriousness in order to represent their own ideas, but also of the revelation of the games that have been played against them. It is part of the struggle to know al(l)ways. So what other secrets might come to light in this story which is after all about bringing light where there is darkness? I want to turn to the issue of the internal logic of this text.

⁶⁸One of my readers, my elder sister, exclaimed, after our conversation, that she would never read the same way again. Others bring stories to show me, have joined reading groups. One specifically related the processes of misreading to her own life.

How are 'Things'?

Some strands of feminism hold that men and women write differently and that the reason they do so is that they think differently. In this scenario, the role of feminism is to elucidate this difference and then to demonstrate the superiority of the female form - the reversal process. This is the position taken by Parham in her essay on Castellanos, and established by her with reference to the analyses of other feminist theorists of similar persuasion in order to create a valid female line. Thus she, and I continue to use Parham as the [imaginary] starting point because she both expresses this position most emphatically and puts it into her practice, quotes, in support of her argument, the feminist view that men's writing:

reflect[s] an epistemology that perceives the world in terms of categories, dichotomies, roles, stasis and causation, while female expressive modes reflect an epistemology that perceives the world in terms of ambiguities, pluralities, processes, continuities, and complex relationships.⁶⁹

This sounds like that Pythagorean table of opposites, or the narrator and wife's contrasting visions of the garden. My first problem here is that this articulation by women of the natural difference between men and women paradoxically contains the very features attributed to writing by men.⁷⁰ For Parham's is a highly dichotomous position rather than a pluralistic one. It relies on simplistic 'categories' not to mention 'roles, stasis and causation'. This is why I try to write in different ways, so as not to be subject to such limits. My second problem, arising out of the first, is that I do not find this a constructive way to look at the issue of patriarchal power.

My position is rather that patriarchal (in a return to a distinction that I still hold to be necessary on occasion but which is not set up on simple gender oppositions) modes have

⁶⁹These words are quoted by Parham, pp. 187-88. They come from Julia Penelope (Stanley) and Susan J. Wolfe, 'Consciousness as Style: Style as Aesthetic', in *Language, Gender, and Society*, ed. by Barrie Thorne and others (Rowley, MA; London: Newbury House, 1983), pp. 125-39 (p. 137).

⁷⁰I know that I relish paradox elsewhere as a feminist strategy so it seems entirely consistent that paradoxically I do not relish it here.

tried to figure the world in this way in order to appear to be in control and to justify controlling, and that it is precisely this appearance which Edwards' story holds out for investigation. Her 'light' tale gains more weight by the moment. It is as though she is responding to the readerly impulse - which is itself the miniature of all experience - to construct a whole world out of even such a short text as this. (And I can hear the counter-response that I have simply created a far greater world out of it in that my stories about it exceed it, but my argument rather is that I have created a series of possible overlapping worlds.) I want to look at how this is so in two further ways. I shall go on to show how the narrator presents himself on the surface as a rational thinker, and then how his own speech subverts this position. Before doing this, I shall show how this narrator appears to give the reader sufficient information in order that s/he too can operate within this world of rational thought, but that this, like so much else in 'A Country House' is no more than appearance. Quirk *et al* (who, in producing the defining grammar, give (not-patriarchal) space to many possible definitions) have some guidance on 'textual orientation':

we spoke of the need for every text to have a context. In particular we need an orientation in respect of *place, time, factuality, and participant relations*. (p. 1432, their italics)

I have already touched on 'participant relations' in 'A Country House' with regard to the subtly shifting *we* (and there is another whole story to be told about the naming/not-naming game),⁷¹ and I shall be talking about 'factuality'. I want now to turn to place and time as means by which the seemingly clear and informative logic of the narrator can be called into question.

⁷¹And I could of course play this game with Quirk *et al* whose own 'we' (as they say themselves) can simply refer to the fact that there is more than one speaker/writer as well as carry the more traditional academic overtones of authority.

Where and When Did These 'Things' Happen?

Perhaps it seems strange and disorientating if I ask where and when this story takes place, for it tells you overtly about place:

I must tell you we live in the country, a long way from a town (p. 32)

Now I will tell you where the stepping stones are (p. 36)

and time:

From the day when I first met my wife (p. 32)

I had thought about it for a long time (p. 33)

But they could not send anyone until September (p. 33)

At five o'clock, he was standing on the office steps. (p. 34)

I want to propose that the narrator keeps seeming to give the information required for the reader to form an accurate place and time framework from which to create the world-view of the story: that is to say that, from what information is given, the rest can be constructed, by deductive logic. To say another way, the reader as detective fills in the gaps. My suspicion is that the reader tends to do this in predictable ways,⁷² but that the text does not justify these ways. That is to say, on these occasions the not-said is imagined out of the silence rather than from what is actually said. And this is to fall into the patriarchal trap. It could be said

⁷²Born out by my readers telling me things about place and time that they then cannot find in the text.

that I am returning here for a moment to the era of New Criticism: do not go outside of the text: do not ask how many children had Lady Macbeth. And, I do intend to justify each and every reading from within the text. For that is one crucial way in which I read 'A Country House'. It asks you to listen how you read and reach understanding; to think about how you work with material which tells you things. This reading for what is there, as opposed to speculative reading, may seem to be an anti-feminist strategy in that it seems to ask you to curb your imagination, stick to the facts. My answer to this is that it warns against patriarchal control and limitation of that imagination. This way, far from imposing limitations, can open up multiple reading possibilities because, paradoxically, the text does not tell you enough.

Where does 'A Country House' take place? Again, the practice of using words which are practically empty of meaning - speech fillers - contributes to this effect of seeming to convey such information:

I must tell you we live in the country, a long way from a town. (p. 32)

What does this actually tell you? That it is rural not urban. But how far are they 'from a town'? Phrases like 'a long way' mean anything the reader perceives them to mean. One of my readers thought this story took place in the wide open spaces of turn-of-the-century South Africa until she noticed the references to Yorkshire: she continues to feel it ought to have been in South Africa. Similarly 'a town' remains generalized, never specified, the indefinite 'a' here functioning, paradoxically, in terms of meaning, like the seemingly definite 'the' of 'the country'. But there is no one defining point from which all others can be deduced.

This is even more the case with time. Time indicators can of course be a factor in establishing place: the answer to *how long* might contribute to *how far*. The two often appear together:

At five o'clock [...] He climbed into the car, and sat in silence during the whole long drive. When we reached the avenue of trees just before we turn in at my gate (although it was still twilight [...]). (p. 34)

This seems to be highly informative. But when is twilight? The reader might think that s/he knows, because s/he has been told, what time of year 'A Country House' takes place, but all that s/he has been told - repeatedly - is that September is a crucial time in the electrician's, and subsequently, the narrator's calendar.⁷³ But when does this story begin? We know that Richardson comes to 'the country' for the period of his holidays:

He would not put it off, but he would make this his holiday. (p. 37)

But we are also told that:

it would take some time if I decided to have it done. (p. 33)

'Some time', 'a long way': these are as long as you choose to make them. There are multiple opportunities within the text for specificity, but they slip away. There are clues on the surface; but nothing underneath. But the reader is being drawn into the practice, which can then become a habit, of filling in the gaps - of making it all make sense in the old patriarchal way. In my way of reading, however, one minute of time in 'A Country House' tells me several possible things:

The minute the building was finished we went down to see it. (p. 44)

I might take this as supporting evidence that the narrator is scrupulous in the extreme in giving his listener time-scales. Perhaps I would claim that it works to sustain that illusion. Maybe, I think, this is the glaring episode which asks the reader to think about time within this text; an authorial moment. Then again I might produce this as proof that this tale is overwritten or badly written. Alternatively, I might see it as hyperbole, the kind that is held to be characteristic of speech. This in turn might support my reading that the narrator is to be

⁷³August is mentioned too (p. 47), negatively, but it is never spelt out what period has been covered by Richardson's visit. There is a reference to 'days and weeks' (p. 46), but notably this occurs in the context of a generalization (present tense, indefinite articles) rather than specific connection.

heard as speaking rather than writing this text.⁷⁴ Stanley Fish suggests that in reading we find only what we are looking for. However, if I hold onto all of these possibilities, since I cannot discount any of them, then I have found more than I am looking for. Form is meanings.

What then of the wider framework of time-scales in this story? My point is best illustrated by asking some questions. How long is it between the narrator's *now* and the protagonist's *then*? How long is it between 'the day when I first met my wife' and these events? Again, the narrator's 'she still looks very young' (p. 35) contributes to the sense that time has passed, through the temporal adverbial 'still', but, on further reflection gives no depth to this sense as we do not know how much time, and nothing seems to have changed. Verb tense again contributes to the deceptive effect of seeming to give information. The actuality is that the reader has no secure means of establishing a time framework. The gradual ageing of his wife could have been precisely the means of conveying in an unobtrusive way how time is passing. And just what is the time-scale between the narrator and this eternally 'young' wife?

It is only fair that I should treat her so because she is young (p. 32)

begins to take on the mantle of a present tense that represents a continuous truth. And the logical impossibility of this being so might extend out to all the other continuous (or timeless) truths perpetuated by patriarchal discourse. I hazarded a guess, confirmed by most of my readers, that 'A Country House' is read not only as a usurper's tale but as a May/December scenario. And yet there is not one explicit reference to the narrator's age at all. Readers directed me to 'I have lived here since I was born' as somehow conveying old age but this is just another illusion: it could represent any length of time. I would suggest that it is the constant references to his ('still') 'young' wife which feed the expectation that we know what length of time. We fill in the gap which is born out of the silence: and our

⁷⁴For a 'curious reversal' of this process see Jewel's discourse in *Heroes and Villains*. He has not been taught to read (p. 27) but speaks in writing: 'but you forebore' (p. 23); 'owing to my father's wives having this facility for dying in childbirth' (p. 26); 'grant me some competence' (p. 105).

reading is in danger of conforming to the story of patriarchy. It is not that the narrator is not aware of the relevance of such information. He tells us all the things about Richardson that he never reveals about himself, including the assessment that he was 'about forty years old' (p. 33). Here too he could have taken the opportunity to compare this to his own or his wife's age but does not. The other indicator that my readers pointed to to support their view that the narrator is old has more weight on the surface:

It takes many years to close up all the doors to your soul. (p. 32)

'Many years' is another 'long time'. And now the use of 'your', with all the attendant hues of generic/hearer/speaker-directed intent that I discussed earlier, begins to reverberate within this reductive effect that again only seems to give meaning, for the reader cannot pin this remark down to being a specific reference to the narrator as opposed to a generalization. These 'many years' need not have passed for the narrator. More than one reading is always there. There are many time phrases in this text but they are semantically empty, waiting to be filled. In themselves they determine nothing. This is a narrator who will not be confined to time, who can remark of Richardson:

He had to keep himself to a time, that is what it was. (p. 51)

The feminist narrator who chooses to live outside of time will have to watch that she does not sound just like that same old timeless narrator, man as god. There is one last time-scale integral (though by no means exclusive) to the reading of 'A Country House' that I want to mention. Each reader in her/his own time can operate as both the naive reader recollecting the *then* of their first innocent reading, and as the sophisticated reader of *now*, who is knowing/guilty of the text, having read it many times. I am one such. There is this double time in my own narration which recapitulates that of the text - except that I try to show it happening.

What Are the Facts of This Matter?

One of the characteristics of a short story is that it may have no definable beginning or ending, but rather be a drop into 'the minute'.⁷⁵ 'A Country House', however, is constructed so as to lead the naive reader into thinking that it does have a beginning and an ending, into thinking that, like the narrator, s/he 'can find my way about in the dark' (p. 32). But then again, 'night is a distorter' (p. 38). (The thought of it is enough to 'distort' his speech.) There is never both a beginning and an ending in 'A Country House'. I offer this further piece of evidence from the text that this narrator knows and shows not only the pitfalls of filling in the gaps from silence, the not-ever said, but also the drive to do so, to make sense:

These nocturnes come of never having spent his nights alone, of spending them either in an inn or in someone else's bedroom. No! How do I know what Chopin did? But I tell you they are the result of thinking of darkness as the absence of the sun's light. (p. 38)

The narrator reads Chopin through filling in the gaps, recognizes this and refutes it, but then simply replaces that reading with another, through one of those imaginary endings that constitute 'the result'.

If 'A Country House' gives no definable place and time framework to the reader, perhaps this is compensated for by a consistently presented factuality? 'That is nonsense'. This narratorial refrain - that he can distinguish between sense and nonsense - begins to take on a different resonance if the text is read once more, this time as the story of the logic of the narrator who tells 'A Country House'. I want to show how tracing this particular story reveals that the narrator does not conform to his own system of logic. There are recurring disruptions. I am suggesting that these are a less visible eruption (compared to the distortion of the Chopin episode) of the not-patriarchal into his seemingly controlled discourse. In other words, once again the form associated with patriarchy produces the characteristics

associated with not-patriarchy. I shall endeavour to work my way up from small self-contained episodes:

At five o'clock he was standing on the office steps with a very small bag, which he carried as if it were too light for him. (p. 34)

Did you perhaps for a moment read this as *too heavy*? Brown and Yule quote an interesting example of this kind of misreading:

This book fills a much needed gap.

Johnson-Laird, whose example it is, suggests that this is typically interpreted initially as praise for the book but on that further consideration the reader will see that the opposite is the case.⁷⁶ I certainly fell into the praiseworthy trap and I think that Dorothy Edwards is setting up one of her own. Although 'too light' is semantically compatible and logically consistent with 'very small', I would suggest that this creates an aura of tautology (of saying 'the same things over twice' (p. 41)). Might not the subjunctive form, 'as if it were', be expected to predicate something that is less likely to be so? In other words, the logical conclusion would go without saying and it is the unknowable that must be told, that is to say that although the bag was small it was heavy. In a text which resonates with long 'silences' and 'must tell you' this particular telling cannot be insignificant. This small bag that may be 'too light' is in my experience a very hard image to picture.⁷⁷ It takes me back to that 'very late to bed' (p. 49). I must read again. Yet the story of the bag could not be expressed more simply or directly. I will move up a notch now, for stranger logic begins to rise above the surface:

⁷⁵Perhaps this aspect, ideally suited to the postmodernist and to the not-patriarchal condition, as it relates to this story, begins to explain why I find so many of Ermarth's postmodernist conditions here. I find myself thinking that the short story may be a strategic feminist genre.

⁷⁶Quoted and discussed by Brown and Yule (p. 252). P. N. Johnson-Laird's article from which the example and discussion come, 'Mental Modes of Meaning', can be found in *Elements of Discourse Understanding*, ed. by A. K. Joshi and others (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

⁷⁷My readers certainly found it so when I drew it to their attention and asked them what the picture then was in their mind. See my earlier footnote on *Snow Falling on Cedars* about the need 'not merely to know but to envision clearly'. I think it is fair to say that most of us can picture *the small bag that is too heavy*.

At this point I ought to describe his appearance. (p. 33)

A classic identification description follows - height, age, eyes, hair, demeanour. But what then of this a few paragraphs (that is to say temporally close in the reading experience) later:

My wife came across the lawn to meet us. I do not know how to describe her. That day she had a large white panama hat and a dress with flowers on it. I said before that she had black hair and blue eyes. She is tall, too, and still looks very young. (p. 35)

His 'I do not know how to describe her' (present tense, the problem is in the time of narration) is immediately confounded by his recollection that she was wearing a 'hat', and that it was a 'panama hat'. Indeed it was a 'white panama hat'. In fact it was a 'large white panama hat'. This hardly constitutes a failure to describe. But his statement is also confounded within the larger framework of descriptive acts since the ensuing description of his wife's eyes, hair, height and youthfulness matches the pattern which he found perfectly adequate when he chose to 'describe the appearance' of Richardson. The two together do not make sense. And, in that 'she is tall, too,' does that 'too' indicate that she is tall in addition to all her other qualities, or, in a different temporal framework, that she is tall as Richardson 'was tall' (p. 33) thus possibly enacting the usurping discourse, the shifting partners, and further uniting these two 'descriptions' only one of which he acknowledges as such. And yet the statement that he 'cannot remember that now' (p. 33) (and I shall be returning to his memory processes) occurs not in relation to any uncertainty about his wife's appearance but paradoxically in his successful description of Richardson and relates to uncertainty about the colour of his hair (not insignificantly that it 'might have been simply fair, not grey' where we might read into the gap, from what is said, that Richardson may be rather less than 'about forty'). So, there is a double slip in the narrator's logic: in the first place, he describes his wife, having just said that he could not; and in the second, this description is actually presented with more certainty than that of Richardson though it is the latter which is preceded, not by doubt, but rather by narratorial control. I should add that several of my

readers responded to this descriptive double act by saying that the narrator's inability to know how to describe his wife refers not to her physical attributes but to her self and indeed that we are never told about her as a person. Whilst this latter point is undoubtedly true and noteworthy, I think this reading fails to take account of the earlier descriptive process: that is, it is precisely a way of reading that is driven to make sense of this story at each moment rather than dealing with it as a complete entity, however imaginary. I am hinting here at the notion that it may be only in fictional stories that we can experience such completion and that this is part of their value. However, I might in a reformulation say that the reader is propelled by 'A Country House' into a postmodernist experience, for it is only by reading for the moment rather than the whole that s/he can gloss such double speak. In this reformulation, I am the one who is confined to reading in the old way, looking at the whole thing rather than living the lack of coherence: reading text as history (looking back on earlier events as a source of understanding the present) rather than a series of abyssal moments. I shall continue in my old ways for a while yet even as I think again. So here is an even denser episode of contradictory logic, denser in the sense that the norm and its disruption are now part of the same thing:

The second day he was here, after tea I suggested taking him for a walk.
 He bowed with one hand behind his back, and he kept it there afterwards.
 I noticed it particularly. My wife came too. We walked down the garden.
 Richardson, still with his hand behind his back, walking just behind her,
 talked to her about the work, and he said the same things over twice.
 (pp. 40-41)

Pausing only to note the discourse of the detective/witness ('I noticed it particularly') and the discourse of couple/outsider/usurper ('my wife came too'), I want to concentrate on the irony that lies in the fact that the narrator, himself, has just done the very thing that he attributes to Richardson: that is, he has 'said the same things over twice'. Only, I might say, he has done it in silence, unacknowledged. This is so because the narrator states that Richardson 'bowed with one hand behind his back, and he **kept** it there **afterwards**' (my emphasis). Indeed the

narrator 'noticed it particularly'. It is then a tautology, or saying the same thing twice, to follow this up with 'Richardson, still with his hand behind his back'. The reader must engage with what is actually there, and not succumb to the narrator's own agenda.

Otherwise, his systems hold sway. A reading of this text which upholds the notion of the patriarch in control has given in to the very systems which allow patriarchy to sustain that illusion, systems that have very real consequences. Feminists must read all ways.

What can be said of the system of memory contained within this story, that act of looking back from the knowing now, already reduced by 'I cannot remember that now' (p. 33)? I shall tell a story-within-a-story. It is the story of the song in 'A Country House'. Again, once read without prejudice, it is not quite the story we might expect.⁷⁸ Although the rereader will no longer expect the expected. This story involves the memory of the reader as well as that of the narrator, for the links are less textually dense. In other words, the reader has to employ her/his memory processes apart from, if not actually in opposition to, the narrator's if s/he is to make connections that go beyond those that the narrator sets up on the surface. It is a parable about reading within a story which is also about reading. For this is the story of the song as the narrator tells it:

One night, though, I remember particularly, he sang a song by Hugo Wolf about a girl whose lover had gone, and while the men and women were binding the corn she went to the top of a hill, and the wind played with the ribbon that he had put in her hat. It was something like that; I have forgotten it. (p. 45)

'I have forgotten it.' This 'it' seems to refer anaphorically to 'a song'. Again, the narrator has given a great deal of narrative detail about this song that he claims to 'have forgotten'. This verb tense (present perfective) is significant since, like 'has made a great difference' (p. 52), it refers to present time, where *I had forgotten* would refer to past time, in which case the subsequent 'sing it again' (p. 45) would then explain the remembrance of 'forgotten'

⁷⁸It is perhaps worth commenting here, somewhat ironically, that this particular use of 'we' is intended to align myself with the naive reader in my own casting of double time.

knowledge. And what at the outset did he ‘remember particularly’ (and this is a very ‘particular’ narrator) if this is not a cataphoric reference to ‘a song’? ‘One night’? but even so the song is what makes this night memorable. These seemingly contradictory statements of memory and forgetfulness encircle this story. However, it is not over. The narrator remembers the words of the song and quotes them (p. 45), and he shows that he knows all about connections and parables:

Now I should think that the hill that she climbed in that song was like the hill in our cornfield, and the girl sat there for hours ‘like one lost in a dream.’ (p. 45)

The narrator makes the first link, ‘the hill’, explicit, but leaves the other, ‘the girl’, unspoken, silent. In another hazardous move, I suggest that the reader fills in the gap out of the silence that has been set up, and reads this song as a parable/parallel to the story of Richardson and the narrator’s wife. Are those ‘dream’ words a further quote from the ‘forgotten’ song? This story of the song, a story of remembering and forgetting, of (dis)connections, is put aside for a while. The reader must remember or forget it. Then towards the end of the larger story that is ‘A Country House’ we find, within a conversation (which is remarkable for having none of the attributes that I find appealing) between the narrator and the about-to-depart Richardson:

‘In the village down there,’ I said, ‘there is a very nice girl called Agnes. She isn’t pretty, but she is very nice.’
Now Agnes was the name of the girl in the song by Hugo Wolf, but I knew he would not see that. (pp. 50-51)

Noting briefly that he ‘said the same things over twice’ (‘very nice’) again and that there is another discourse underway about seeing and supposing, I wonder has the reader remembered that this is the song of which the narrator claims that it ‘was something like that; I have forgotten it’. Yet now he knows the name of ‘the girl in the song by Hugo Wolf’, though he never ‘knows’ the name of his wife (or himself) well enough to tell it to us. He produces from this a reverse parable for Richardson: ‘but I knew he would not see that’. The

narrator, as well as the author, is playing with the notion of making connections, of filling in gaps. This process, present throughout 'A Country House', rises to the surface here. What does the narrator expect 'you' to see?⁷⁹ The opening refrain to which I return now takes on a new weight of metaphor for this process of reading.

First Sight

From the day when I first met my wife she has been my first consideration
always

from the very first moment I saw her

at the very first sight of her. (all p. 32, first paragraph)

As well as contributing to the notion that this story begins at the beginning, the (poetic?) repetition of 'first' here might be said to mark the (un-said) emotional intensity of the narrator at this 'moment' and to emphasize that everything changed then. But, in spite of the generic flavour introduced through the referents one/nobody/you (for this tactic works both ways), he is unable to relate this transforming experience as potentially belonging to someone else as well: he cannot empathize, know the other. It is my contention that the reader will not see this 'at the very first sight' of it that is the narrator's controlling vision, but will have to do his/her own detecting, to notice it 'particularly':

And then at the first sight of a stranger she begins talking about
"community of interests" and all that sort of thing. (p. 32, opening of
second paragraph)

⁷⁹Readers may care to look at the story of the bay/lake/sea (p. 42) to reflect further on what it is that they (are expected to) see in 'A Country House'.

This 'first sight' of his wife's, whilst semantically and textually fused to his 'first sight', is presented as something altogether different, as something mundane rather than as a mirror to or repetition of his flighty experience. This effect is achieved in (at least) two ways. First of all, in relating his own experience, he already names and presumes the relationship that will come about as a result of the event: 'When I first met my wife'. This is not an uncommon format in storytelling but it is one that could have been averted should he have given her name.⁸⁰ On further consideration, it has a certain illogical quality: she was already 'my wife' when he first met her.⁸¹ What this move allows the narrator to not-say of himself is *when I first met a stranger who was to become my wife* which formulation would point up the parallels between the two 'first sights'. Any first meeting is with a stranger, but by reserving this term until he talks of his wife and her meeting with some other stranger the narrator differentiates and belittles her experience. I see that this narrator might be said to enact Elam's ethical impulse to see the difference in the other, rather than Lorraine Code's call to imagine the place of the other;⁸² and I see that the act of naming, which is called the patriarchal act of possession and limitation by some feminisms, here through its very absence reduces what his 'wife' can be (which is not to deny that naming her as his 'wife' is the classic patriarchal act). In other words, I see that, in Parham's theorization, there is no simple opposition between feminist principles and patriarchal attitudes. That might just have been one dualism I wanted to go on believing in.

That differentiating and belittling effect is achieved through specific semantic shifts. It is compounded by the fact that the narrator presents his own experience in extended and, in relation to the banality that becomes the dominant style, poetic form. This tone persists until the moment when he introduces her 'first sight of a stranger'. Then he deflates that moment by deflating the language, draining the meaning out of it, reducing it to 'all that sort of thing'.

⁸⁰And is another of those features that my readers picked out as evidence of the narrator as patriarch. This woman is allowed no existence prior to or other than 'my wife', although note that we are later allowed to overhear her telling Richardson about an earlier and 'happiest time' (p. 47).

⁸¹I have not forgotten about arranged/proxy marriages.

⁸²These different ethical impulses were raised and discussed in my opening chapter.

The words already in quotes (“community of interests”), as though actually spoken, never come to be in the telling of the story. The narrator paints the backdrop that is his experience (as continuous timeless truth) and then brings into the foreground the specific incident that is his wife’s experience - the trigger to the telling of the story. The absence of a clear time context means that by the time the reader has recovered the fact that his wife’s meeting with ‘a stranger’ is the future that is the story about to be told, s/he has read the story, which is now the past, and will have forgotten that this “community of interests” never comes into that future.⁸³

The reader simply cannot say that the narrator either knows or does not know what he is doing. S/he might say rather that he **contrives** to convey certain effects: some intentional, some not and we can only wonder which. S/he can say further that the narrator’s own discourse reveals the complexities of and lack of congruence in communicative activity and that this revelation is a constant feature of ‘A Country House’. I have at times gone some old-fashioned way towards saying that the patterning, the density and interweaving of examples is evidence that Dorothy Edwards is fully aware of and intends such effect. I might reformulate this to say that she too **contrives** to convey certain effects. As indeed do I. There may not be sufficient proof of intent for the judge to whom this story may be addressed, but I will insist that the evidence of effect stands on its own throughout ‘A Country House’. It shows that patriarchal speech represents the illusion of control, no more than that.

⁸³I can hear another doubled story here: the wife might have talked thus to the narrator (as stranger) about “community of interests” on their first meeting, though he gives her no voice at the outset, and throughout the story it is noticeable that her conversations are with Richardson, although she does on two occasions question her husband’s actions (p. 41 and p. 46). Yes, there is an element of silence that he imposes on her but there is also the silence that emanates from her since she is no longer aware of his existence: she tells Richardson “There is no one here at all” (p. 48). As feminists from Tillie Olsen onwards have noted, silence can be part of a strategy of resistance. Several of my readers of the narrator-as-patriarch themselves produced too monolithic a form in commenting that he denied her speech as well as her name.

Listen to the Story

The sense of the power of the narrator's 'first sight' over sound (silence being a positive in the narrator's world) is reversed later in the story when the narrator is deprived of sight and himself begins to speculate with only sound now to draw upon.⁸⁴ This mirrors the position of the reader listening to the speech that is 'A Country House'. The narrator, preparing the ground to plant violets later (the August example of seeming to provide a time context) 'heard them coming along on the other side of the wall' (p. 47). Hearing is everything now and must serve the same function of leading to knowing that sight has done before. This is the movement from

I could see that she was surprised at it (p. 35)

to

I knew there was something wrong with him by his voice. I detected that at once. (p. 47)

In the absence of sight, the narrator begins to suppose:

I suppose they sat down (p. 47)

I suppose she was looking. (p. 47)

This activity compares with Richardson who has always been presented as having the quality of uncertainty in his speech: 'I hope so,' (p. 35); 'I am not sure,' (p. 37); 'I suppose it is fuller than this sometimes?' (p. 35); and 'I suppose from the beginning I knew I could not come here again' (p. 48). Richardson's suppositions have a different quality in them from those of the narrator. Where the former express hesitancy, the latter ring of logical processes of deduction. I know this because I draw on the features accorded to each man, and I hear

⁸⁴This has something in it of an ironic version of Shakespeare's blinded figures, Gloucester in *King Lear* for one, who then see events more clearly.

this in my reading by according a different intonation and tone to each. To paraphrase, contra this Richardson: I look at the text and listen to what is said.⁸⁵ That is to say in these moments, like the narrator, I choose sound as the determining feature rather than sight (which latter only gives me the same for both speakers: the visual marker 'suppose'). Where in Richardson's speech I hear 'suppose' with a long drawn out second syllable, in the narrator's I hear a brief emphatic one:⁸⁶

I suppose nobody could expect me to hide behind a tree (p. 49)

I suppose no one could expect me to do that. (p. 49)

The reader/listener is drawn directly into this process of supposition:

And do you suppose she wanted to know what he was talking about?
(p. 49)

I am one such reader. This process of supposition on my part has been an act of logical deduction. Is it simply a reproduction of the patriarchal act of the narrator's? This question comes into focus when the (as I hear them) contrasting sounds of 'suppose' collide. The narrator speaks first:

'I suppose you think it funny that I should be putting the flag up on the day that you go?'
'I did not know that you had a flagstaff,' he said. 'I suppose it can be seen even from the sea?'
'Yes.' (p. 50)

Both 'suppose's are now framed as questions (in another not-conversation). They follow the same syntactical pattern. This now leads me to think that I have no justification in reading them differently. But I may have already done so. I have deduced that the narrator sounds

⁸⁵'He looked at me without listening to what I said' (p. 51). My reformulation would not be contra Dorothy Richardson: on the contrary it enacts her requirement that I listen to the text.

⁸⁶I am trying to reproduce the sounds I hear rather than produce technical stress markings.

emphatic and I then apply that as a rule. This as Jean Aitchison points out is how rules (and she is talking of grammar) come into being.⁸⁷ However, it becomes a negative act and one of which I am guilty if I read only and always the same way. I must not suppose that I know that I have heard correctly. I must read again, this time hearing an uncertain, hesitant narrator.⁸⁸ For, in this story about supposition, the deductive kind, the narrator's suppositions bear no fruit:

They stood up, and I waited for them to come through the door. I suppose nobody could expect me to hide behind a tree so as to cause them no embarrassment. 'Excuse me, I was just passing at this moment. Please go on with your pleasant conversation.' However, they chose to go back by the other way along the bank of the stream. (p. 49)

No conversation ever takes place. Only the reader gives sound and meaning to the narrator's suppositions. This speechless not-event is mirrored in that wonderfully silent dinner that follows it. Only the reader gives sound and meaning to the narrator's story.

Nothing Happened After All

This brings me back to the not-event of the flag. It has not after all 'made a great difference to' anything:

Up above the flag waved senselessly in the wind. (p. 52)

Morgan has filled it with symbolic meaning. She has not listened hard enough. This particular story about potent(ial) symbols can then be recovered from yet another reading of 'A Country House'. Readers who adopt a position as accessory to the facts will fill these signs with sound and meaning. I claim that the active reader engaged in 'new acts of

⁸⁷'The Language Web', Reith Lecture, Radio 4, February 1996. The movement is from 'preference to tendency to habit to rule'.

⁸⁸I do not follow this particular reading through here since it is not one that I believe could be sustained with reference to the rest of the text. I would be intrigued to encounter a hesitant reading.

attention' will see that they are empty. One has only to look into Richardson's 'small black notebook'.

The Diary of a Nobody

Almost the first thing that I noticed about 'A Country House' was that it is a story with a powerfully negative refrain and now I find that this negation is the last thing I come to write about. What does it signify? I acknowledge that I have found it the hardest aspect to analyse and yet that I experience it as one of the primary organizing principles of the story: a case then of first things last.

It might be predicted that a story heavily weighted towards negation is a story that has, to borrow Quirk *et al*'s term, 'negative orientation' (p. 808). I can see readings which align light/positive against dark/negative to which several of my readers directed me.⁸⁹ But remember, 'night is a distorter' and it is through these distorting spectacles that I shall look at how negation works in this text. That is to say I am already starting with the view that negation holds no more of a simple correspondence to meaning than any other aspect of this story that I have held out for discussion. I want to suggest that negation here is often used to present a not-negative perspective and that this in turn feeds into the sense that positives and negatives are often reversed from normative expectations. The old ways of seeing do not pertain. This seems an appropriate moment to invoke, as illustration, Carter's splendidly reversible image in *Dr Hoffman*:

Inside looked like the negative of a photograph of outside and the moon had already taken a black and white picture of the garden. (p. 55)

⁸⁹This led into mythic and Freudian readings to which I confess my lack of interest. It seems to me that such readings distort the text in order to make it fit a theoretical position, and reduce many different texts into meaning the same thing.

With regard to unexpected positive images, I am haunted by the narrator's evocation of that 'pleasantly' silent dinner, and claim it as a reversal of one conventional social practice that I admit to adhering to. With that in mind, I turn to these negative constructions:

Nobody can do more than that (p. 32)

Not that it worries me (p. 32)

simply fair, not grey (p. 33)

only this was not contemptuous (p. 33)

Do not think for a moment that I regard this as a melodrama (p. 34)

not a villain at all (p. 34)

She isn't pretty. (p. 51)

All of these are negative in formulation. Only the last, however, can be said, again assuming for a moment a normative framework, to be negative in meaning. This negative meaning could be equally expressed in an apparent positive formulation: *she is ugly*.⁹⁰ The reason for this doubleness is that negation can be expressed through other means than simply negation of the verbal construction.⁹¹ It can also occur at the level of the word. This means that local negation contained in the semantics of a word such as *ugly* can itself be negated through the verbal construction to produce *she is not ugly*. As in maths, two negatives constitute a positive. At the level of the sentence, the meaning, though suffused in negation, is positive. And this is what occurs particularly at the beginning of 'A Country House', when the stage is

⁹⁰As Alison Rawlinson pointed out to me *she is plain* is equally if not more so an appropriate reformulation. I accept that I have been selective for the purpose of making a point.

⁹¹See Quirk *et al* on negation, pp. 787-94. They discuss scope and focus of negation, and the local negation that I refer to above.

being set, the gun put up to hang on the wall as it were.⁹² In this way, the semantic negative orientation of 'worries', in 'not that it worries me', is cancelled out by the sentential negation of 'not': the same thing is happening with 'grey', 'contemptuous', 'melodrama' and 'villain'. There are three points that I want to draw out from this process of double negation. The first is that this gives a strategic device by which one can produce a text which sounds negative: listen to all those not/no/nobody/never noises. Secondly, this is a means of mystifying any simple correspondence between positive and negative, so that the reading process - how am I supposed to experience this? - becomes more and more complex. As I suggested earlier, the narrator's farewell to Richardson, positively framed as 'come down to see us often,' (p. 51) is understood by the reader within the narrator's context to mean the exact opposite, that is to say, the negative *don't come here again*. Can the reader ever be sure of the narrator's point of view? Which is preferable to him - light or dark? If silence turns out to be a virtue, what about romance? The reader's perceptions are defamiliarized. S/he does not know what value things have in this world. The third point that I wish to make stems from this experience of reading for the opposite meaning, as several of my readers have pointed out to me that they read 'not that it worries me' or 'do not think that I regard this as a melodrama' as already meaning the opposite of what is there. They hear a narrator trying to reassure himself (or fool the reader). This produces a complicated formula whereby sentential negation cancels out local negation to produce a positive formula, but then this may be interpreted by the reader as its opposite, as negative after all. This pervasive sense of something meaning the opposite of what appears is enlarged when the narrator, in another kind of negation, shifts to telling what he did not do, rather than what he did do. The earlier positive formulation of

I went to write some letters, and afterwards I walked about in the garden
(p. 43)

⁹²I am referring back (see footnote 19) to Chekhov's remark to authors 'that if they described a gun hanging on the wall on page one, sooner or later that gun must go off'.

is later negated into

I did not go away to write letters after dinner. I never left the drawing-room. I suppose no one could expect me to do that. (p. 49)

This latter statement could quite easily and more briefly have been presented in a not-negative way: *After dinner I stayed in the drawing-room.* I think my reformulation points up the rhythm of the original. There is something of the incantation in the repetitive syntax, the simple diction, and the phonetic knell of not/never/no one.

I want now to introduce another perspective on how negation works:

All this indicates that for people to deny something, they assume that they and their interlocutors share a common world in which certain beliefs and expectations are usual. Taking up the concept of the ideal reader, all this implies that the writer attributes to his/her ideal reader certain knowledge (schemas) and beliefs or ideas specific to the topic being dealt with.⁹³

Taking up Pagano's reference to the ideal reader, I wish to propose that the narrator's ideal reader is very different from that of the author and that this is the gap that the story tells. The narrator desires a compliant reader to whom 'certain knowledge [...] and beliefs or ideas specific to the topic' can be attributed. The author (and I am here insisting on claiming that the evidence is strong enough in its patterning style and effect to justify this knowledge) desires an active reader who resists the world view presented by the narrator, who sees how this reveals its and his own failures. So, within the narrator's world of shared expectations, it is consistent with Pagano's analysis of how negation works that the narrator can consistently deny that something is so. It is a way of acknowledging the shared system of beliefs. But **beyond** this patriarchal narrator, negation also serves the purposes of the author, revealing the illusionary nature of this shared world.

⁹³Adriana Pagano, 'Negatives in Written Text', in *Advances in Written Text Analysis*, pp. 250-65 (p. 258).

The Value of Nothing

'A Country House', with its layers of interwoven contradictions, is a story which throws meanings into question. Does the narrator mean what he says, say what he means? The text does not allow the reader to make those (comforting) binary distinctions that are still an integral part of the conventional framework, the dominant mode of organization. Opposites such as light and dark, silence and sound, positive and negative, speech and writing, and, ultimately, success and failure are inextricably entwined to the point of dissolution. By conventional 'beliefs or ideas specific to the topic' of speaking and writing, its conversations do not sound like someone speaking whilst the text which surrounds them does. In this confounding of simplistic binary thinking, 'A Country House' meets Ermarth's criteria for the postmodernist text: but again, I would argue, the complexity is achieved by showing how much more the ways of speaking and writing that are at most people's disposal can do than we think. Perhaps 'A Country House' is a successful story about failure: a story in which positives and negatives of form and meanings operate in a complex system of reversals. The part of me which still reads in the old way - to make sense of the world - is left wondering not about the narrator's status as an outsider or the symbolic function of the flag but about whether the light was ever switched on or not and which of these states would constitute success. The part of me that has learned to read in other ways from this text sees that such questions may only ever, like the flag, wave 'senselessly in the wind'. But I shall continue to read, glancing anew. In reading all ways and always, I can enact the impulse to know things without being constrained by the belief that I do know them. It is not paralysis that ensues, but a continuous process of engagement - 'ethical activism':

Why didn't they ask me what I meant? I could have proved it to them. In any case it was an interesting point. (pp. 38-39)

What has the narrator 'proved' to the reader? You might like to ponder on the referents here. What exactly is that 'interesting point'? Does it refer to what he 'could have proved'? If so,

it seems immediately to throw that proof into question through the (oppositional) 'in any case'. Or does it refer to his question, that is 'it was an interesting point' as to why they didn't ask him? It is my contention that 'A Country House' is full of such 'interesting point[s]' that the active reader will keep asking her/himself. Through this experience of 'new acts of attention' the reader is held in constant suspension - out there above the abyss.

Next to Nothing

The impulse of this chapter has been to suggest that, rather than identify, justify, or glorify the feminine/ist sentence, what we need to do is look and listen for ways of writing and reading that begin to enable us both to speak and hear in terms of our feminist perspective.⁹⁴ There are no easy ways, no simplistic correspondences, no final solutions, and so we must keep on talking. In the next chapter I will be scanning some feminist writers' attempts to say what they mean.

⁹⁴I hope that by now this 'we' has flexible and multiple overtones. There are many ways **beyond**.

Chapter Four: Listening for Feminist Voices, Reading Feminist Theory

The previous chapters have centred on illuminating issues of significance to feminist writing practice through close readings of literary texts, showing how these can operate as imaginative representations of endings, of how theory might work in practice, with the meanings thus evoked envisaged in problematic rather than determinate, multiple rather than singular, ways. These exercises have increasingly incorporated notions of reception (by the hearer) as well as notions of intention (by the speaker), and the concept of an ethical approach to reading has come to have as much significance as the concept of an ethical approach to writing. This chapter sustains and develops these themes but with a reversal of focus: background gradually becomes foreground. That is to say: where it has been a recurrent practice in this thesis to hold the discourse of theorists under discussion through the close readings of literary texts, feminist theoretical discourses now come to be read with attention. Two interwoven questions focus and permeate this particular conversation: how might feminists (want to) write, and, as one aspect of these stylistic choices, how might they (choose to) converse with each other? I offer an approach, a framework for the discussion, and show this in practice without resolution, opening up spaces for others to speak in reply even as I continue to converse with myself in one enactment of the issues raised - practice in theory.

I want to step back to reflect further on the processes of enactment: of meaning what *I* say; of form and meaning which continuously represent and reinforce each other (*I use short words all the time*). I have at times implied that it may be an ethical and desirable act for feminisms to mean what *I* say and say what *I* mean, but this practice might be read as just one more version of a seamless Durkheimian whole which admits of no space for revisioning, for glancing and scanning differently. To put it another way, if feminisms were instead to

valorize paradoxical mode (*I use long words all the time*), where *I* do not mean what *I* say, or seek to formulate feminist versions of Lacan's borrowed 'I am lying', where *I* both mean and do not mean what *I* say, would such moves simply perpetuate the old stories, write them anew, close them off, or get **beyond** previous limitations? I will for now resolve this into a further series of questions that I continue to ask, thereby colouring the ensuing discussion. I take a provocative stance in order to illuminate my thoughts and concerns.

How might the disjunction between form and meaning operate in feminist writing? This notion of disjunction between form and meaning is one that I specifically reclaim here as significant to feminist perspective. Might contrary methods induce an active reader who realizes that s/he must read and counterread? Or might they produce a reader who can no longer hear the speaker because she does not identify an ethical voice? This is another way of wondering whether an argument is more convincing, more directly experienced by the reader if it embodies its own agenda. It is to reengage with the matter of the performative role of language: does language construct its speakers or can they intervene into the process to produce, in time, different kinds of speakers. If the latter, what are the ethics which would govern such intent?

In one sense, my answer to these questions is that we must keep asking and trying to answer them. At the same time, it will be evident that, in returning to issues addressed in earlier chapters, I am not about to provide conclusions. Rather I want to recirculate issues of feminist grammatical representations of self and not-self, but now from the specific viewpoint of theoretical feminist discourses: I look at other feminist practice even as I try to develop my own. But primarily, I glance at the detail of linguistic construction of theoretical claims through the lens of form as/as not meaning. In directing the spotlight onto feminist theoretical discourse, I turn to writers who in some way point to their own style as an integral aspect of their agenda, an embodiment of their theoretical stance: they bring this issue of form as/as not meaning to the surface. I continue to highlight certain theoretical distinctions even as I try to show in writing practice how these might not be sustained: choices and limits;

writing and reading; writing and speaking; certainty and doubt; ethics of intention and of reception; agency and event. I try to tell a different story.

Whose Stories?

Introductions of various kinds figure strongly in the ensuing conversation. I anticipate that these will be sites of explanation, justification and adjudication. This choice re-enacts my refusal to privilege one kind/part of text over another as worthy of analysis. Of course, the first of these will prove not to be an Introduction after all. Rather it is my reintroduction to *Dust Tracks*, to the style of Zora Neale Hurston, her writing and her mode of research. And this in turn acts as my introduction to Dellita L Martin's 1985 Introduction to the Virago reprint of Hurston's 1942 text. The conversational move thus produced enables me at a structural level to traverse boundaries of time and genre, boundaries of theory and practice. It enables me to talk about how feminists might talk about other women's writing. And it enables me to keep on talking about versions and productions of agency. These topics weave their way through what follows.

The sustained discussion of this chapter lies between two other kinds of Introductions which seek in different ways to overcome the notion of an autonomous transcendental self. These are, Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose's 1982 Introductions to *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the école freudienne*,¹ and Maggie Humm's 1991 Introduction to her own *Border Traffic: Strategies of Contemporary Women Writers*.² I choose these introductions because I anticipate finding some kind of personal statement of intent/philosophy in each, and some kind of condensed version of the theoretical issues in question which can be read with

¹Ed. by Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, trans. by Jacqueline Rose (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1982). Henceforth referred to as *Feminine Sexuality*. Further reference is given to this edition where appropriate after quotations in the text.

²(Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991). Henceforth referred to as *Border Traffic*. Further reference is given to this edition where appropriate after quotations in the text.

attention. I choose them too because, in their different ways, they fascinate me, constantly calling me back for another glance. I choose them because they engage overtly with the process of writing as strategy. I choose them because of their differences from each other. Mitchell and Rose produce an interactive text, with a relationship between the two speakers as well as towards Lacan. Perhaps I should say already that I find this to be a traditional linear developmental relationship rather than an imaginative feminist engagement. Humm introduces voices other to her own by various means. I want to plant a further clue as to what will come: I read and reread Mitchell and Rose, but the closer I get the further I move away in resistance to what and how they say; I read and reread Humm and find that my initial empathy is increasingly modified. This is to say that my attempt to read the other ethically as exhorted to do by Lorraine Code and Drucilla Cornell amongst others does not always produce empathetic recognition. Just as I claim that any reading must be justified to be ethical practice, so must writing. And I will justify my resistant readings of these writings.

Talking to One Another

This leads me to meditate on the means by which feminists might talk to each other: it is an issue for many feminists. bell hooks, in engaging with it, is caught up in the very speaking practice that she wants to resist because it is the only way that she can show what that practice is. In *Yearning*, she dwells at some length on the need for “women of color” (a term that hooks uses with reluctance) to ‘act [...] out an ethical commitment to feminist solidarity that begins first with our regarding one another with respect’ (p. 92). This includes space for ‘dialogue [that is] rigorously critical [...] but not in ways that were trashing of one another, silencing, or disabling’ (p. 92). When hooks goes on to show how this approach broke down at a conference through the speech acts of a Third World woman, she can only do so by ‘trashing’ her at this time of writing even as she shows respect at the time of the conference (see p. 93).

hooks is most aware of the 'dehumanized spectacle' that such confrontations can provide 'to entertain white folks' (p. 92) but she needs to be able to talk about them if she can hope to show how they might be avoided. She runs the risk then that her presentation of the issue might seem like one more such entertainment for those 'white folks'. I would suggest from my reading experience that hooks gets round this hurdle by producing the salutary experience for 'white folks', specifically women, of finding it hard to situate themselves within her text although she is explicit that she does not wish to exclude them any more than she does men even as she acknowledges the difficulties inherent to this aim (p. 66). I shall show what I mean briefly, as I think it serves to show at the same time how hooks chooses to create contradictory (and not always complimentary) voices as a way of enacting postmodern (she does not resist this term) multiple subjectivities (she never wants to give that hard won concept up for black women) and as a way of remembering Hurston whose contradictory (and not always complementary) voices I am coming back to.

hooks tells her readers:

Among white feminist theoretical elites in the United States, the work of women of colour is usually cited solely in relation to discussions of race. Our work is subordinated and used to reinforce their assertions about race and Otherness. (p. 21)

Later she points out that

A white woman professor teaching a novel by a black woman writer [...] who never acknowledges the "race" of the characters is not including works by "different" writers in a manner that challenges ways we have been traditionally taught. (p. 131)

Perhaps to say that hooks produces contradictory voices is to look for a safe place for 'white folks', for what I think she is actually doing, when I read these two statements again now side-by-side, is creating a difficult space for white feminist readers and writers.³ The latter,

³Lynne Pearce recognizes the process whereby readers do not always, and are not meant to, find the place they hope to within texts, which can become 'the site of struggle for reader privilege': 'Finding a Place From Which to Write: The Methodology of Feminist Textual Practice', in *Feminist Cultural*

as outsiders to 'our work', must find new stories to tell about "different" writers if they want to be heard. hooks' strategic quotation marks indicate the need to find new ways of telling too.⁴ She draws me into her text so that I may listen with care. She begins that task of creating new sounds. She is a reader in her own text.

I have already suggested that Mitchell and Rose miss/resist/refuse (I do not know their intent) the opportunity to show feminist version of interactive conversational practice. What happens when this is attempted? *Feminist Contentions* is one such attempt. At a structural level I find it highly effective as another way of glancing at how a text composed of multiple speakers might be produced. This structure is complex. *Feminist Contentions* consists of an Introduction by one writer to 'a conversation among four women' (p. 1). This conversation merges into my text since it turns out to be about subjectivities and agency. Each of these four writers speaks twice. The first time round, the first three re-present interactive conference papers. Seyla Benhabib and Judith Butler, asked to speak on the relationship between feminism and postmodernism, interpret this as a space to talk about subjectivity. Benhabib, in a position which I hear as similar to that of Maggie Humm and bell hooks, wants to retain the notion of a self, however fragmented and changing, which has some control over itself. Butler, closer to Diane Elam, presents the view that this notion is a patriarchal drag, a story which hides totally other ways of seeing/being. The third conference paper, presented by Nancy Fraser who has previously coproduced texts with Linda J. Nicholson who provides the introduction to this text, responds to both the previous papers. Drucilla Cornell is subsequently invited to address the same issue in writing. All four then produce responses to each others' texts. I find this practice feminist in its structure since the conversation never ends nor does it conform to notions of linear development. Benhabib's second intervention deals not only with what has come before but also with what

Theory: Process and Production, ed. by Beverley Skeggs (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), pp. 81-96 (p. 92).

⁴I hear a distinction between her markings and Terry Eagleton's 'scare-quotes'. hooks is surely drawing attention to the way in which these words are used without really being thought out.

is to come: that is to say she responds to Butler's forthcoming response to her response. And Butler responds to the Introduction. It is a wonderful enactment of endless deferral. When does reading begin and end? and writing? It must have entailed complex sharings of proposed texts. In the context of her philosophy it is perhaps not surprising that it is Benhabib who, in her Notes, tries to effect some closure to this endless aspect of their conversation 'to avoid an infinite regress' (p. 119). I see no need for such avoidance. Unfortunately, at the more prosaic levels of conversational tactics, *Feminist Contentions* depresses rather than enlightens (and Butler 'in the end, find[s] the work of this volume to be saddening' (p. 127)). I shall identify my reaction through two aspects of the text. Fraser's tactic, in reply to the others, is to attempt an act of synthesis, very Hegelian.⁵ She claims that neither the theoretical position of Benhabib nor that of Butler is sufficiently rich and that she can produce something better by taking from each and joining these choice pieces together. Now I see a hideous creature before me, assembled from the dismantled parts of others. I find this act of reading and rewriting on Fraser's part deeply unethical, disrespectful to the other(s). Is this to 'trash' her? In terms of *Feminist Contentions*, I might wonder if it is to 'misconstrue' her, for, and this is my second objection, this is the word used by both Benhabib and Butler in their respective refutations of the other's reading of their text. It is this continuous act of refutation of other readings, by all of the speakers of each other, that I resist. It is ironic that authorial intent seeks to hold such sway in these texts. I envisage, not for the first time, that feminist conversational practice would embody listening, amending, hesitating, wondering, sharing. The boundaries which *Feminist Contentions* so gloriously traverses in its macrostructure are reinstated in the detail of its talk. If this claim seems inconsistent with what I say elsewhere - Fraser might reply for instance that she has refused

⁵Her position here is typical of the work that she and Nicholson have produced elsewhere together. See their 'Social Criticism without Philosophy: An Encounter between Feminism and Postmodernism', in *Feminism/Postmodernism*, ed. and intro. by Linda J. Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 19-38.

the boundaries of Benhabib's and Butler's text - inconsistency is a feature of conversation. Imaginative acts are born out of inconsistency.

I am troubled too by aspects of the style of the editors in 'Contingencies', which introduces *Feminism Beside Itself* (1995).⁶ Diane Elam and Robyn Wiegman (the order never changes unlike Elam's earlier transpositions of feminism and deconstruction) try to enact their deconstructive philosophy in their practice. 'Contingencies' begins with shared speech which shifts into the third person - 'the editors, we must warn you, are divided against themselves' (p. 1) - before they literally divide on the page into two separate columns in different font marked by the undistinguished singular third person. 'She/the editor' is intended to disallow the reader knowledge of selves:

in resisting the shelter of "we" as the vehicle for a collective merger, the editors are not heralding a turn to "I". To speak for one's self, at least one of them has been known to say, is no less risky a political enterprise. It is similarly impossible to escape the representational and epistemological complexities of an individual claim to know. (p. 1)

Elam has taken another turn away. How does this move work? As with 'she' in *Pilgrimage*, a fusion between the two writers occurs. However, I do not align the move from *I* to *she* with a 'turning away from subjective agency'. I hear it as a distancing ploy.⁷ What do the editors wish to enact - 'the absent subject'? 'She/they/the editors' are still there in their text as subjects doing things: I just can't tell the difference between them. Furthermore, I remember that Elam called to the recognition of difference as the ethical mode. As Paul Smith points out, there have always been those who avoid the first person. David Hume wrote his "autobiography" as *he*. Smith hears this as Hume wishing to project an objective and rational

⁶(New York: Routledge, 1995).

⁷ However, Jane Tompkins suggests that "I" in texts does not necessarily personalize, just as its absence does not depersonalize'. Although she gives examples of each as she experiences them (male//depersonalized; female/not-// personal), she does not go on to show why this is so. Her experience does show that there is no one-to-one correspondence between form and meaning: 'Me and My Shadow', in *Gender and Theory: Dialogues on Feminist Criticism*, ed. by Linda Kauffman (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), pp. 121-39 (pp. 130-34).

voice (p. 105). The shift into third person has recently been called the ‘the braggart’s disguise’.⁸ On the other hand, Bruce Morrissette suggests that ‘just as first-person discourse cannot guarantee identification [between writer and reader], so third-person style cannot prevent it or maintain psychic distance’.⁹ Whatever Wiegman and Elam’s intents, their discourse may be read in these different ways - unless the accompanying aspects of form (columns and writers beside themselves, different but indistinguishable) determine that the reader will know what they mean to say. I do not want to ‘trash’ them with the by now classic challenge (who makes such distinctive writing choices (has intent) if not a knowing self) because I recognize that they are trying to bring about a different way of looking in which that challenge would have no validity. Neither do I want to endorse claims that language does not work to bring about different kinds of perceptions. I am still on the side of those who want to imagine other ways of speaking. But I do not hear these, embodied or disembodied, in ‘Contingencies’.

Rereading Hurston: Resisting Martin

It is now my intention to begin another conversation - imaginary, inventive and always justified. The starting point is an interpolation into Dellita L. Martin’s commentary on Zora Neale Hurston through my own reading of the latter. There is already more than a hint of circularity to this move. For, in effecting this reading, I trust that Maggie Humm will not mind if I saunter over the border to borrow from her perceptive approach to Hurston in *Border Traffic*, and I hope to show how bell hooks’ voice must be heard again both directly on Hurston and in relation to her own writing practice as a reflection of some of the problems that she identifies for Hurston. I might call this writing to and for each other.

⁸Andrew Anthony, ‘The Unusual Suspects’, *Observer Review*, 10 August 1997, p. 3.

⁹‘The Alienated “I”’, in *Novel and Film*, p. 98.

My reading of Hurston does not create new insights but rather seeks to build on the reading produced by Humm, as a response to readings like Martin's. That might be to say that it aims to promote Humm-like readings from emergent to dominant status, even as Martin's claims retain residual (oppositional and still active) status. I hear, in Hurston, as I hear in bell hooks, multiple and problematizing voices which enact resistance to attempts to categorize or manage them. I read Martin as, many years later, reducing these interactive voices in *Dust Tracks* to simplistic binary oppositions. I will give Martin's voice, the response, first and then Hurston's, for she can still reply in her own voice. Martin reads Hurston's writing as evidence of:

the joker, the public face of a very agitated private self, the outer manifestation of a spirit in flux. (Introduction to *Dust Tracks*, p. xvii)

It is far from my intention to claim that I know, or need to know, Hurston better, but rather to demonstrate how the discourse that she produces speaks for itself through its interactive voices if we will only listen again and again. Although I concentrate on one episode here, I agree with Humm and hooks that there is evidence of this multivocality throughout Hurston's writing, just as in Martin's critique there is a pattern of dualistic oppositions.

Dust Tracks is called 'An Autobiography'. But no text of Hurston's can be enclosed within a single genre any more than her voices can be reduced to something manageable, orthodox: there is always something **beyond** if you look and listen. Here she is telling the story of research:

Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose. It is a seeking that he who wishes may know the cosmic secrets of the world and they that dwell therein.

I was extremely proud that Papa Franz felt like sending me on that folklore search. As is well known, Dr. Franz Boas of the Department of Anthropology of Columbia University, is the greatest anthropologist alive, for two reasons. The first is his insatiable hunger for knowledge and then more knowledge; and the second is his genius for pure objectivity. He has no pet wishes to prove. His instructions are to go out and find what is there. He outlines his theory but if the facts do not agree with it, he would not warp a jot or dot of the findings to save his theory. So knowing all

this, I was proud that he trusted me. I went off in a vehicle made out of corona stuff. (p. 174)

A feminist and academic who read an earlier version of this chapter commented that this passage ‘sounds pretty supine’, and I think that Martin might agree. Yet I read it as full of activities, never settling down. I am aware that it can be perceived as the story of black woman in thrall to white man, or student in thrall to professor, but I want to suggest, very loudly, that this is to read only the surface and not to scan deeper to see that ‘the joker’ laughs at such schematic perceptions. What voices do I hear? I hear academic, poetic, biblical, filial, mocking, contradictory, colloquial, subjective, objective, complex, simplistic, and oxymoronic ones. The closer I get, the louder I laugh, too. I pass over the generic ‘he’. It was not yet time to ‘acknowledge’ such ‘an affectation [...] with fish-mouths of contempt’.¹⁰ The overall style of this passage seems once more to be that associated in Quirk *et al* with informative mode (and in *Pilgrimage*’s Miriam, with contempt): short, clear sentences which build on from each other in a progressive way. It starts with a definition and concludes by signalling a move onto the next stage, new territory. It plays the academic game with a flourish. Producing definitions and then putting them into practice is a feature of the academic game; but Hurston’s definition reeks of oxymoron and oxymoron is one way of spilling over the logical cup. ‘Curiosity’ denotes the (Pythagorean) negative, the feminine, the nosy side of the positive masculine purposeful ‘research’. It may seem to be reined in by the defining ‘formalized’, but this ‘curiosity’ stays to mock notions that ‘research’ is a separate activity which belongs to special people. I hear this tone of infecting the special world with the ordinary one persistently throughout this passage. The series of ‘is’ verbs

¹⁰This is to adopt and adapt Alice Munro’s wonderful evocation of two young girls’ response to Frank in ‘The Found Boat’, in *Something I’ve Been Meaning to Tell You: Thirteen Stories* (first published McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1974; this edn Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), pp. 125-37. There is a salutary reminder that ineptitude can coexist with articulateness. To restore the original:

Frank, who was the most literate, talkative and inept of the three, began referring to the boat as *she*, an affectation which Eva and Carol acknowledged with fish-mouths of contempt. (p. 128, her emphasis)

here set up a series of equivalences. Thus, the oxymoronic and playful tone is compounded when 'research' is re-presented/translated into colloquial and mock poetic (since alliterative and rhythmic) form: 'it is poking and prying with a purpose'. I suggest that the masculine 'purpose' is infected with the (so-called) feminine, verbal activities of 'poking and prying': 'purpose' cannot function alone. I begin to hear a translation from writing to speech, speech that enacts the vernacular of Eatonville perhaps. This 'research' is translated one more time. Having been deflated into the common actions of 'poking and prying', it is now blown up into the transcendent 'seeking' after 'the cosmic secrets of the world'. This is not only the discourse of the bible taken to mock extremes, but also one in which it is easy to hear *Frankenstein*. I could easily borrow Hurston's 'cosmic secrets' to decorate Shelley's text, just as surely as Hurston has borrowed them from biblical/mystical texts. Hurston, I claim, makes the correct academic moves, creating and refining her definition of the crucial term 'research', but enacted in a mode which simultaneously mocks this formal process. In the academic world, the next thing to do, having established one's terms/agenda, is to establish one's credentials in the chosen field. I think of the potted biographies that writers supply for anthologies: looking to be objective, distant, functional, based on asserting academic connections and one's right to speak, and then I hear:

I was extremely proud that Papa Franz felt like sending me on that folklore search.

Hurston, as hooks for one points out (p. 138), is both perfectly capable of producing formal discourse and of going wherever she pleases. What she is doing here is enacting that 'poking and prying' as an integral aspect of the academic world. This statement is personal: it is about feelings. But it is not just about Hurston's pride, filial devotion and acceptance of the master's word. The term 'Papa' cannot be contained by the description of it as a capitulation to the older, whiter, more knowledgeable man, nor by any part of this. For it also calls into question the 'pure objectivity' (before we have even heard of it) of Boas himself in colluding

in such a familiar relationship, and by giving priority to this description over the technical translation that follows. Furthermore, Boas is presented at the outset as one who is subject to whims above and before 'pure objectivity' in that he 'felt like' doing something. Again, there is the trace of speech in this presentation of a world of feelings and sentiment that takes precedence over the formal rewriting in which Boas is reformulated as 'the greatest anthropologist alive'. This claim is constructed in the discourse of objective statement; discourse that does not have to ground itself in testimony, but rather just seems to know. By whom (to reinvoké my familiar rant) is it 'well known'? And is it only me who hears another version of that inflationary/deflationary process in the detailed specificity of 'Dr Franz Boas of the Department of Anthropology of Columbia University' aligned with the immense generality of 'the greatest anthropologist alive', and who hears the deflationary echo loudest and longest in 'for two reasons'? It calls to be heard as absurd. As hooks points out in her discussion of Hurston's description of her paymistress, Mrs Mason, as 'the world's most gallant woman',¹¹ if one pays attention to Hurston's writing across all genres the fantastical exaggeration is part of the history of southern black story-telling. And are we to read these 'two reasons' as also 'well known' and therefore old knowledge, or are they to be read as produced by Hurston as an act of 'research'? For if the latter, then Hurston can tell the world something new about 'the greatest anthropologist alive' and what does that make her? There is for me in Hurston's writing a constant sense of a knowing disjunction between what is said and how it is said: there is no seamless surface enactment of meaning in form, and how could there be when her existence depended on living with difference. Form is meanings. The disjunctions mark and embody her vision. The humorous 'lying' that transcends the horror in *Mules and Men* hovers around *Dust Tracks*. There is a game at play, though, as for Carter, it is a serious one. These themes of constant undercutting, of infecting the world of academia with the world of feelings, and of writing with speaking, continue to

¹¹*Mules and Men* (p. 6). Discussed by hooks in *Yearning* (p. 138).

permeate this text once it can be glanced at from the perspective not of looking for what you expect to find but of looking at what is there.

In accordance with traditional academic mode, once having established her mentor's credentials, Hurston can derive her own from these:

So knowing all this, I was proud that he trusted me.

'Knowing' leads to pride: Boas's 'pure objectivity' incorporates trust just as it did inclination ('felt like'). The whole inflationary/deflationary project is wonderfully encapsulated in the final act of transition:

I went off in a vehicle made out of corona stuff.

This sudden personal, colloquial, dislocating switch is the fantastic outcome of that 'formalized curiosity'. And yet, I'm still 'poking and prying' into what that 'corona stuff' might be.¹² In other words, for all her undercutting of 'research', perhaps because of it, Hurston can inspire 'curiosity' without recourse to formality. Such 'curiosity' has leaked back into the ordinary world, which, too, is full of fantastic stories.

To some extent, my reading of this passage seeks to establish that Hurston is looking for new meanings for old words and for old ways. It does not however attempt to define her or her intentions, but rather to insist that we read her as problematizing what it is that she writes about. Martin seeks to pin her down, to find Hurston 'tucked under like the hem of a dress'. It was Martin's hostility to *Dust Tracks* which led to my 'poking and prying with a purpose' into Hurston's writing practice. I wonder if there is any other Introduction to a text which takes up such a negative relationship to it, and in part have been motivated to redress this imbalance through drawing close attention to Hurston's own words, a way of keeping the

¹²Ironically, this lead me to read all I could on Hurston, where I had before resisted being told what she was like. I do know that she had a 'little' or 'shiny gray' Chevrolet, but I found that out from *Mules and Men* (p. 5 and p. 65 respectively). I soon returned to Hurston's own texts.

conversation going since Hurston is not here to reply in the way that Butler is able to correspond with Nicholson's introductory remarks. For the moment I am reading Introductions as a way of controlling in advance the reader's approach to and expectation of the ensuing text. I have been suggesting that Hurston should be read as delighting in multivocality, as confounding simplistic oppositional analyses, as throwing the value of things into question. She is ahead of her time. This is not at all the same thing as saying (as is too often mistakenly said of deconstruction) that no value can be attributed to anything or that all things are of equal value, but rather to call once more on Elam's 'politics of the undecidable': all judgments must be open to close and continuous (re)assessment. I suggest that Martin does not recognize the multiple and interactive voices in Hurston's writing; or does not value them; nor hold them up to continuous (re)assessment.

Paradoxically, if one produces writing imbued with many voices (and *Mules and Men* is an explicit version of this intent) then one also produces a very singular voice, one that is like no other, distinctive in its multiplicity. This might in turn somewhat ironically produce something like the voice of Kristeva's individualized feminism (or indeed Cornell's 'specificity of the feminine'), the *I* which is so singular that, it is feared by feminists like Whelehan and Evans,¹³ it speaks for no other so that no group action may be possible at all. I prefer to see Hurston's practice as a constant process of problematization: therein lies its art. I recognize that the voice that I hear loudest in the text - and there is that same constant shifting of foreground and background that I experienced in 'A Country House' - depends on my attitude at any one time. Hurston creates that space for me. This is where I locate the limitation of Martin's reading: she takes up one fixed attitude towards Hurston's text. I will identify that attitude through the words of bell hooks in relation to her students:¹⁴

¹³See opening chapter for references.

¹⁴Whom she does not identify by colour here any more than I am in a position to identify Martin in such terms. hooks does later discuss the risks in teaching 'about people of color [when] the students present are nearly all white' (p. 132).

They want to see the current focus on black women writers solely in positive terms. (p. 8)

hooks wants to get her students beyond this point. But Martin, I believe, sees Hurston as having failed because she violates this desire, since her text does not enshroud solely positive visions of black people. Martin has already decided what she should hear (which I figure as an essentialist representation of black womanhood)¹⁵ and judges that Hurston has failed to produce this, rather than taking to wondering over what she has produced. And in the process Martin herself fails to produce a positive vision. What she sees is a series of oppositions, rather than a text which revels in multiple voices. She envisages Hurston as 'two souls in conflict in the one dark body' (p. xii).

I will quote Martin at some length both to show that this 'conflict' is the only way that she can see Hurston, and to effect a reintroduction to ethical reading into this conversation:

We know now as Hurston knew then that race/ethnicity and universality are not necessarily mutually exclusive and that constant attempts to pit the one against the other serve no useful purpose. However, considering the strong case that Hurston makes for the beauty, health and viability of Afro-American culture, and considering Hurston's close encounters with the hard, cold reality of American racism, as well as her acute awareness of international colonialism, the two perspectives clash stridently, and the reader is sorely disappointed that she does not take a firm stance one way or the other. (p. xiii)

Martin only ever sees things 'one way or the other' rather than in many different ways. She does not 'glance, elastic in the warmth' of Hurston's room. This makes me think about how I am reading Martin. In my delineation as inadequate her reading of Hurston, am I not simply perpetuating the same act, reading Martin inadequately, not hearing her voice? Perhaps, in talking to myself about this need to hear Martin's voice ethically, I can state my resistance to her use of structures such as 'we know now' and 'the reader is sorely disappointed'. These

¹⁵She quotes Mary Burgher's description (1979) of 'the life stories of Black Women [as] poignant and sensitive definitions of self and compelling expressions of the unchanging needs and ideals of the Black race'.

formulations tell me what I know and how I feel: they induce a passive reader rather than the active one that Hurston's text demands.¹⁶ In further support of my contention that Martin, in looking for what she wants to find ('a firm stance one way or the other'), fails to see what is actually there, the same claim that can be made for the narrator and some readers of 'A Country House', I recite Hurston's declaration of Dr Franz Boas's *modus operandi*, now applying it to her own agenda:

[Hurston] outlines [her] theory, but if the facts do not agree with it, [s]he would not warp a jot or dot of the findings to save [her] theory.

Hurston allows herself to hear many voices as well as to speak them. It is not 'stalemate' that is present in *Dust Tracks*, but a vibrant engagement with 'the facts', and the facts are not always a cause for celebration.¹⁷ However, does this argument not depend on a straight reading of Hurston on 'research', which I earlier sought to deconstruct? It does, but this straight reading is there, too, if I switch the focus of my glance for a while. Then again, I might reply that Hurston's presentation of 'the facts' is not 'warp[ed]' but instead leaves space for the reader to do her/his own research. I began to tell the story of Hurston's encounter with Lucy in my introductory chapter. This story crosses texts. There are insinuations in *Dust Tracks* and in biographical texts that Lucy was after Zora because she

¹⁶Barbara Christian says 'I consider it presumptuous of me to invent a theory of how we *ought* to read. Instead, I think we need to read the works of our writers in our various ways and remain open to the intricacies of the intersection of language, class, race, and gender in the literature. And it would help if we share our process, that is, our practice, as much as possible, since, finally, our work *is* a collective endeavor': 'The Race for Theory', (p. 227, her emphasis). I came upon these words late in the day of my thesis, but I like to think that I always had them in mind.

¹⁷There is a level of violence as everyday behaviour in Hurston's work which I find distressing, as it is violence perpetuated within families who have themselves been subjected in slavery to horrific violence. I offer no explanations: it makes me think. In 'Characteristics of Negro Expression', Hurston does point out that such expression encompasses living all aspects of one's life in the open. Nothing is hidden away, however discomfiting. This article first appeared in *Negro*, ed. by Nancy Cunard (1934): it is now available in part in *The Gender of Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Bonnie Kime Scott (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990). By making this point I am in danger of trying to have it both ways - re-essentializing even as I resist essentializing. It is highly visible to me in this moment that this happens because I want to make sense of what I cannot.

was too friendly with Lucy's old man, Slim,¹⁸ but the truth of this is never spelt out in *Mules and Men*. The reader is never actually told whether Lucy has a point, nor what Zora's take is on all of this, only the fact that Slim is helping Zora to perform John Henry songs (*Mules and Men*, p. 70). On the other hand, there is Big Sweet's claim that Zora doesn't 'even sleep with no mens' (*Dust Tracks*, p. 189), but here as in the next moment Zora allows Big Sweet's words ('I wanted to be a virgin one time, but I couldn't keep it up' (p. 189)) to stand on their own merit.¹⁹ There is no authorial direction, no judgment given for the reader to latch onto, nor are there sufficient 'facts' for the reader to come to her/his own judgment. Research does not in this case provide definitive answers and the reader must not 'warp [...] the findings [...] to save his theory'. Hurston often creates this moral gap in her writing. The reader, far from being 'sorely disappointed' as Martin dictates, must work with these spaces, and, I would suggest, not try to fill them in from biographical sources. There are layers upon layers of potential irony in Hurston's style and this is what makes her writing so rich and challenging: we do not know, we must keep reading.

And, in the same way that I have just reread Hurston, I might now reread Martin. Perhaps her Introduction is a thoughtful interjection into disjunctive feminist project. Just as the form of a text might deliberately collide with its semantics (*I use long words all the time*), so might an Introduction which seems to read against the subsequent text now produce an active reader who has to think about the relationship between the two: for, as I pointed out earlier, it was my reaction to Martin's claims which led to my 'poking and prying with a purpose' into Hurston's work. Thus an apparent oppositional structure produces a new active voice. Is this

¹⁸The very ones I am trying to forget. But see Robert E. Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), and Paul Witcover, *Zora Neale Hurston* (Los Angeles: Melrose Square, 1991).

¹⁹There are many transgressions (a word that we need to scan with positive intent?) between *Dust Tracks* and *Mules and Men* - retellings of the same story. See for instance the story of Sis Snail (*Dust Tracks*, pp. 64-66, and *Mules and Men*, p. 137).

a Hegelian synthesis in the manner of Nancy Fraser? I suggest that it is not. It may be a 'moment of achievement',²⁰ but it is not an ending. Rereadings add something more.

Glancing at Mitchell and Rose

In order to try to retain a sense of the reader as active researcher and interpreter as I read Mitchell and Rose's Introductions to Lacan's *Feminine Sexuality*, I shall produce my own brief introduction which is open to the same process. Like most introductions it is written at the end, after the event: it is not innocent of the text that it addresses.

Some writings, like some readings, are wrong. I never want to be able to read of slavery or the holocaust as positive events. If form is meaning, then some forms of writing are wrong too. This is the kind of reaction that I have to Mitchell and Rose's texts. At the same time they enable me to keep 'still harping on about'²¹ grammatical representations of subjectivity and agency in relation to feminist theory; about how feminists converse with each other; about what language can do: and to keep nagging about the relationship between others' words and one's own; about the relationship between feminist theorists and male predecessors. I continue to reflect on multiple writings and readings; on how to speak.

These writers have a foregrounded awareness of their writing practice. Because the themes of my conversation are interrelated and shifting in focus over time I do not try to separate them out but rather move amongst them as they speak to me and each other: I move not 'in straight lines' but 'in intricate interlocking circles'. To help me make certain observations, I return to Elam's *Feminism and Deconstruction*, which foregrounds language use. I am drawn to all of these writers through a combination of my different responses to their project

²⁰Adopted from Elam, *Feminism and Deconstruction* (p. 120).

²¹Adopted from Lisa Jardine, *Still Harping on About Daughters: Women and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1983), rather than from Shakespeare's Polonius in *Hamlet*, in other words calling on the female line.

and to their formulation of it. They make me think. At times though I see only problems rather than ways of problematizing. In this subsequent presentation I share these problems even as I search for ways to move **beyond** them, to see and hear in different ways. I shall read with theoretical issues to the fore and linguistic practice as the backdrop, before refocusing. In this way meaning and form undergo another separation even as they are always also together.

Mitchell and Rose, like Martin, have a project. At one level this is to translate Lacan's text into English, to make it accessible to a wider audience. But, in their Introductions as I read them, their aim is to translate Freud and Lacan's theoretical ideas into the feminist theory. That definite article is no accident: the reason for it will emerge. Their Introductions are not an insignificant part of *Feminine Sexuality*. Taken together (and I do take them together as well as apart), Mitchell and Rose's introductory remarks constitute just over one third of the whole book. It is my contention that their texts are a reformulation of the words of Freud and Lacan. This reformulation returns again and again to the fragmented nature of subjectivity as the cornerstone of Lacan's theory, and is explicit about Lacan's 'mirror[ing]' of this content in his style of writing:

The matter and manner of all Lacan's work challenges this notion of the human subject [a real or true self]: there is none such. In the sentence structure of most of his public addresses and of his written style the grammatical subject is either absent or shifting or, at most, only passively constructed. At this level, the difficulty of Lacan's style could be said to mirror his theory. (Mitchell, p. 4)

Mitchell and Rose in their own writing practice seem not only to 'mirror' but to extend this linguistic embodiment of meaning in form. That is to say they avoid *I* constructions almost entirely, although giving examples of Freud's ('I object to all of you' quoted Mitchell, p.1) and Lacan's (see Rose, p. 39, and p. 45 for example) personal input. It is worth noting that it is English which presents such a singular signifier, *I*, in the first place and that Monique Wittig, when writing in French, can represent something of the split within and of the sense

of being beside oneself in her 'j/e'.²² Mitchell and Rose's avoidance of *I* formulations, as enactment of the theory that no such *I* can be said to exist, which is to be (in academic time) taken up in a different way by Elam and Wiegman, produces a preponderance of forms in which 'the grammatical subject is either absent or shifting or, at most, only passively constructed'. Mitchell needs to 'reformulate' what 'the grammatical subject' might be: all sentences still have 'grammatical subjects',²³ what Mitchell's do not have is human actor as subject. I want to propose that it is this construction of the absence of human actor/agent which carries with it the same kind of issue that I identify in the discourse of Halliday and of *Frankenstein*: where does (any sense of) responsibility lie in the following:

It is certainly arguable that (Mitchell, p. 1)

Psychoanalysis does not produce that definition. It gives an account of how that definition is produced. (Rose, p. 57)

For, one consequence of this stylistic patterning is that this reader struggles to determine where Mitchell and Rose stand in relation to what they recount. They have chosen to remove the personal from the political in their mirroring of Lacan's claim that there is no personal which can be coherently represented. Paradoxically, this practice of mirroring is my best evidence that Mitchell and Rose concur with Lacan's analysis (and Martin's Introduction has been a salutary reminder that there is not always such a simple correspondence between introduction and main text). If I were to reformulate this mirroring as *Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose believe that there is no possibility of the coherent self* this would already be an inaccurate rewriting in that it contradicts their embodiment of theory in linguistic practice,

²²Although I must acknowledge that Wittig's intent is that 'the bar [...] is a sign of excess' ('The Mark of Grammar', p. 87) and that it is Mary Daly who critiques this 'j/e' as 'self-splitting' which she finds negative for women who are 'silenced/split by the babel of grammatical usage', in *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (first published USA: Beacon Press, 1978; this edn London: Women's Press, 1979), pp. 18-19.

²³Until English grammar undergoes revolutionary 'reformulation' and tells a different story that I cannot yet imagine.

since I have reintroduced the personal into the equation. And this recognition and linguistic representation of the necessarily fragmented nature of subjectivity is the crucial perception, borrowed from Lacan, from which all their other understanding flows.

So why do I find in me such resistance to Mitchell and Rose's style? After all, I have insisted on ethical readings of what is actually there rather than what I might like to be there in my dissection of Martin's critique of Hurston, and yet my introduction to Mitchell and Rose's Introduction is equally critical. This resistance stems from the singlemindedness of Mitchell and Rose's project. As I shall later show in some detail, there is no room for alternative visions. Like Martin, they tell me what I should think rather than create a space into which I must enter in a spirit of continuous inquiry and wonderment. For Mitchell and Rose, feminism, and I use the singular advisedly, must embrace the concepts of Lacanian psychoanalysis: that is the only way towards freedom from the oppression of patriarchy. There might be an interesting conversation between them and Cornell who embraces Lacan up to a point but cannot overcome what she reads as his pessimistic prognosis for the non-category of woman without bringing Derrida and deconstruction to her Lacanian perspective. It is not my intention to argue for yet another feminist position on this notion of the undecidability of what woman is/might be but rather to show how Mitchell and Rose's reading, which rescues rather than problematizes Lacan (and Freud) for feminism, comes perilously close to Frankenstein as creator-without-responsibility in its linguistic enactment of theory. It seems to me that the difference between psychoanalytic notions of the fragmented self and deconstructive notions of not-self is that the former, as represented in feminism by Mitchell and Rose, endorses psychoanalysis as the transcendental discourse, that which gives the truth of all else including feminism, whereas the latter, in Elam's evocation of the *ms. en abyme*, seeks to constantly undercut its own authority as text and resist all sense of a transcendental discourse. This is why, in *Feminist Contentions*, it is consistent that Butler resists labels like postmodernism which others use to try to claim to know what it is that she says/knows when her project must always be provisional, a kind of work in progress

with ethical intent but no ending. In response to psychoanalysts' claims that theirs is the transcendental knowledge (the third term) which explains, I want to propose as a weak disclaimer that psychoanalysis is just another story, living out its time as an explanation of the world, but a story that may have as many gaps, assumptions and illusions as can be found in 'A Country House' by the attentive reader. In the strong version of this disclaimer, psychoanalysis is the twentieth century myth which consoles, confounds and deludes our vision. It creates a different sense of the self but then seems to want to stop looking. At this point, I am still reading Mitchell and Rose in just one way because I cannot find others, and I allow myself a laugh at this story of the truth of the lack of a focused and controlling self which is paradoxically presented in the focused and controlling discourse that is psychoanalysis. As Freud felt able to say in a footnote:

See, however, in this connexion my remarks in 'A History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement' (1914), where I assumed the entire responsibility for psychoanalysis.²⁴

There is no fragmentation or loss of control there then. *Assume*: to take upon oneself; to lay claim to, to usurp; to pretend to possess (*OED*).

Introducing The Voices of Maggie Humm

Mitchell and Rose see the future flowing from the accommodation of feminism within psychoanalysis, having identified the key as being the inevitability of the fragmented self. This is marked in linguistic terms generally by a telling discourse and specifically by

²⁴'First Lecture', in *Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (first published 1909, footnote dated 1923; London: Penguin, 1995), p. 1.

formulations which refuse agency. Maggie Humm has a much more explicit political agenda in that she is concerned with the actual lives of women and how they need to change. My focus in reading her will be on her particular relationship of the personal to the political as it is represented linguistically. Humm embraces neither deconstruction nor psychoanalysis as a source of discourse, but instead looks to her own ways of hearing and expressing the voices of others as well as her own, which she continues to sound as a political act. She finds a number of ways of encoding this multivocality, which she helped me to find in Hurston, albeit expressed in very different ways. I shall identify some aspects of this practice before engaging Humm in imaginary and productive conversation with Mitchell and Rose.

Humm, in my reading, seeks to present an *I* that is not patriarchal, all-knowing and controlling, but rather one that is seeking emergent versions of subjectivity rather in the manner of bell hooks, sounding different, multiple, open to the other. This is a theoretical perspective embraced by many: it is easily aligned for instance with Lorraine Code's ethical call to know the other; and with anti-postmodernists who acknowledge some version of the fragmented self story (and I am not ever saying that I cannot hear this story, but rather that I cannot hear Mitchell and Rose's claim to the definitive version). What is interesting for my purposes is that Humm, like Mitchell and Rose, consciously engages with linguistic strategies as a means of embodying her ideas. This practice calls out the question of discourse as performative. Does speaking in these different ways produce something different: at its simplest, and its hardest, if the signifier *I* was removed from discourse would the concept follow it into oblivion? I think Humm would respond to her concerns in these ways:

Yes, I give to readers a sense of myself. I give personal information because I have not left behind me the profound importance that the practice of consciousness-raising has had/still has for women in their daily lives - the sharing of information and experience, the strength and understanding that this process brings. So I talk about my astigmatism and forced elocution lessons: I might even rewrite them as stories of having had different ways of seeing and speaking imposed upon me. And yes I surface in my text through the parenthetical 'I think,' (p.17), able to admit the possibility that others will think differently, and to express the doubt and uncertainty of 'perhaps' (p. 2). This hesitant 'I think,' stands stylistically and semantically in contrast to Rose's emphatic, isolated and prescriptive 'I think it is crucial that' (Rose, p. 45). Furthermore (and now like Mitchell and Rose), I not only talk about the theoretical views of Bakhtin on multiple voices, but I enact them in my own writing practice.

I apply polyphony (hearing many competing voices in one text) to my reading of Zora Neale Hurston, and produce extopy (hearing other voices altogether by writing in the style and from the perspective of someone else - an imaginative leap into the other) in my presentation of my students' (engagement with this) practice. I look for many ways of producing text that is not governed by a patriarchal 'I'.

Whilst I declare my greater empathy with Humm's stylistic endeavours,²⁵ and the framework from which they come, I will for now raise two questions in relation to these practices. The first is a potential issue, the second an immediate concern. The potential issue: how much hesitancy, doubt, and questioning, however strategically developed, can feminists bring to the surface in academic discourse before it is, like Frankenstein's creature, rejected on sight in its entirety? I say 'potential' since I do not think that Humm has stepped too far over this particular border yet. The immediate concern: what is the difference between the practice of extopy and the appropriation of the voice of the other, the latter act being all too familiar to oppressed persons? What if, in my earlier imagining of Humm's voice, I have 'misconstrued' her own text but my reformulation is read as Humm's own? I return, in partial response, to Elam's *ms. en abyme* as another creative means both of envisaging doubt and uncertainty and of seeing from multiple perspectives out there hanging above the abyss, endless unrestricted vision. However, my endorsement of Elam can only be partial since I believe that we have as yet neither the experience nor the grammar of event feminism and we must be very careful with the experiences and grammar that we do have. The notion of the separate rational autonomous self has been so highly developed and sustained in Western culture that those denied it aspire to it. The sense of other ways has still to be learned. I for one cannot quite see far enough **beyond** to a selfless world. I can however make the Carterian move into **I contrive** which so effectively encapsulates that sense of a simultaneously knowing and not-knowing self, never stabilized, always both ways.

²⁵And this takes a step along another line since Maggie Humm, in her review of Janet Wolff's *Resident Alien: Feminist Cultural Criticism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), comments on Wolff's 'engaging non-assertive rhetoric, full of ... "I think", "my suggestions"', in *Feminist Review: Consuming Cultures*, 55 (1997), p. 146.

Making a Discovery

I am insisting here on the capacity for change; for invention rather than discovery, somewhere between Cameron's 'radical discourse' and Cornell's 'performative power of language'.²⁶ All of the writing that I discuss in detail shows some sense of the need to *say what you mean*. In Mitchell and Rose, this takes the form of replicating Lacan's insistence that language is always already there, the external source of the necessary divisions within the self.²⁷ Mitchell explicates this external status thus:

The human animal is born into language and it is within the terms of language that the human subject is constructed. Language does not arise from within the individual, it is always out there in the world outside, lying in wait for the neonate. (p. 5)

The 'at most, only passively constructed' human animal's encounter with predatory language lies on the grammatical and semantic surface of this moment of text. The fact of language as the control is then presented by Rose as a Lacanian 'reformulation' of Freud's external event - the fear of castration - and carries with it that same sense of inevitability: there is no way it could be other. The truth has been discovered. Yet, in his own use of language, as Mitchell has told us, Lacan seeks to represent the fissured self. This move suggests to me that the relationship between language and self is not one-directional as the third term (or external unchanging factor) analysis imputes, but two-way, able to bring about a change in perceptions in itself rather than merely to produce a changed recognition of how things are. That is to say there is a path towards reinvention rather than only discovery. What might it mean to be born into a symbolic order (of language) which already always produces this sense of the fragmented nature of being? If that were to become established as the dominant

²⁶Both discussed in my opening chapter.

²⁷I am not claiming that this has necessarily held true for their subsequent writings but that it is true of this text and that, even if it were to be superseded, its value for my purposes lies in the still relevant issues it raises for feminist linguistic practice.

mode? Already there would be emergent challenges to it. There is no end.

I return, in questioning mode, to reread Rose on psychoanalysis:

Psychoanalysis does not produce that definition. It gives an account of how that definition is produced. (p. 57)

The first reading of the first part of this might include a recognition on the part of the reader that this is true since psychoanalysis is not capable, as an abstract entity, of producing definitions: that requires psychoanalysts (who plurally might and do produce many definitions). This reader holds to the world view that humans can and do do things on purpose as well as have things done to them: Halliday's proposition that *I do* is the 'UNMARKED' congruent form carries no ideological load in this moment. And for this moment I am that reader, who then resists the succeeding statement which, far from meeting my expectation by establishing human involvement, rather rewrites what it is that psychoanalysis does do. This move is entirely consistent with Mitchell and Rose's practice of echoing of Lacan's 'mirror' writing style, though to me it enacts Elam's 'turning away from subjective agency', rather than evoking the fragmented subjectivity which is the hallmark of Lacanian psychoanalysis. Rose's presentation of a singular and productive psychoanalysis both gives an imaginary coherence - a coherence denied to the individual human subject - to that discipline, and also provides a point outside of the human being from which things happen. Psychoanalysis was always already there waiting to be discovered. It is accorded the same external status as language. I shall later show in more detail how Mitchell and Rose endorse both this coherence and the godlike nature of psychoanalysis throughout their Introductions to the active exclusion of other points of view. As they see it, there is, paradoxically, only one way to know the multiplicities of subjectivity. I should at this point acknowledge once more that it might be thought that in my own practice I am calling on grammar as the transcendental discourse. I can only reply that I continually

engage other discourses including that of what grammar might become. It is a place from which to speak which is itself subjected to critique.

A Necessary Reintroduction

In contrast to this discourse of certainty and exclusion that I identify in Mitchell and Rose, I shall posit Humm's introductory text as one of openness and inclusion. The ensuing conversation, which dwells amongst different ways of writing/speaking feminisms, takes up, in relationship to the academic world, matters of boundaries between and amongst various fields of knowledge. This kind of academic 'border traffic' is addressed with great linguistic care by Elam to whose words I return to help me scan the discourse of the others. In her opening salvo, 'Unnecessary Introductions', she discusses the text's title (*Feminism and Deconstruction*) at some length: in terms of the 'and' as both break and join, what she calls a 'disruptive linkage' (p. 13, her emphasis); and in terms of her decision to retain both feminism and deconstruction as independent nouns so as to avoid both the subordination of one to the other as 'the descriptive term for the correct noun' (p. 13), and the collapsing of two things into one event as she wishes to acknowledge that there is also a 'non-relation' (p. 13) between these terms. She wishes to keep the relationship as 'fluid' (p. 14) as possible and marks this by sometimes inverting the terms within her text to produce 'deconstruction and feminism'. She does not claim that such attention to grammatical construction offers her an ideal solution since she 'cannot avoid this grammatical reduction [to a pair]' (p. 13), and this is why she develops the accompanying 'landscape of metaphors'. This limitation of grammar, I want to suggest, need not always be with us. New forms can be engendered beyond those now available, once we start playing that game. I do not now mean new words but new grammar. This claim that conscious remaking is possible veers from Elam's own philosophy of event. To rewrite my own story yet again: I might think that Elam's revisioning of feminism and deconstruction is ethically and politically correct, but I am also

still mired in the story of *I*: it may be 'that red mark on my forehead'.²⁸ I can however try to imagine a place **beyond** where 'paint' and 'powder', words and grammar, can 'mask' the old ways until they fade away. Feminists must keep reading - and writing.

A Diverting Story

This injunction to myself to keep reading has particular resonance in relation to Elam's text since I do keep reading it in order to try to grasp her story and there each time I find different things since I have participated in other conversations in the meantime. It seems then important that I should tell how I read her right now since I am aware that I want to foster her notions of the ethical content of undecidability for feminism even as I find it difficult to adopt with sincerity her notion of 'turning away from subjective agency'. What I do not simply want to do is take from her what I want and add it on to something else that appeals (in the manner of Fraser) for that would not enact the ethical strategy that Elam proposes. So here is my story of *Feminism and Deconstruction*.

I have posited Diane Elam's 'turning away from subjective agency' as one representation of the not-*I* position that proves such anathema to those feminists who identify this move as postmodernist and postpolitical. I choose Elam's version since she concentrates on outlining and responding to such claims. Hers is the politicization of the move away from the autonomous rational being as the source of action. For this alone I find it essential reading. If her version is not to be embraced it must be answered. Sometimes I think I know just what she means: things happen but *I* can only ever produce an interpretation of, a story about them; *I* cannot tell the truth. This is the sense in which event discourse seems more real and *I* discourse metaphorical. But, in *Feminism and Deconstruction*, Elam does not yet dismiss 'that red mark' of history that may be *I*: in this text she speaks in the mode of *I* in the very

²⁸'The Bloody Chamber', p. 41.

moment that she questions what it means: 'I have already discussed [...] how feminism and deconstruction problematize the category of the subject' (p. 106). She invokes event agency not insistently through grammar but through a series of highly effective and memorable slogans such as 'ethical activism', 'groundless solidarity'. In conjunction with the *ms. en abyme*, this strategy does produce for me a visualization of what she is saying. It feels like a metaphoric glance. So what is this *I* that Elam leaves in? It is one that is marked by its difference from all and any other *I*, so that its condition is one of singularity and not identity.²⁹ How then in this insistence of the 'singularity' of each one of us is there any sense of something that is shared by all women, something that we can all know? The answer is that it is precisely this condition of singularity, of not knowing (the other) that is shared. To put it back into Elam's own words:

As feminists, we are all concerned for women, yet we don't know what they are. And what binds us together is the fact *that we don't know*.
(p. 84, her emphasis)

The key phrase that helps me call this perception and its political import to mind is 'the freedom of a collective uncertainty' (p. 84). This lets me glance without fear. Moreover, I can begin to take on the move towards 'political practices made possible by *solidarity* which is not based on identity' (p. 69, her emphasis). 'Ethical activism' is the name of this difference. The old ways of politics sustain the notion of our shared identity as autonomous agents. Clinging to this powerful and dominant vision, and extending it to include women, 'will finally merely perpetuate forms of oppression' (p. 25). The concept, *I*, must be erased. (The foregoing may be perceived as a backward reading of Elam's text in more ways than I intend.)

²⁹This is a similar position to that taken up by Drucilla Cornell in *Beyond Accommodation* with its frequent references to the 'specificity' and 'difference' of each of us. I was long troubled to envisage what this combination meant: I have come to my understanding through imagining a conversation between Cornell and Elam.

When I hear this story, it sounds effective, but on further reflection I am left with two trains of thought. The first is that here again there seems to be no space for an interactive process of creation, the **contrived** vision, always both knowing and not-knowing. It is not that Elam does not engage with politics directly, for she repeatedly does, pointing out that no decision would ever be either final or known to be right at the time of its making, which necessitates constant ethical involvement. I find this a productive way to approach the issue I raised earlier: child abuse. We can never know if what we do is right since the consequences of a course of action are not visible at the time, but must always try to imagine what it might be right to do. This entails a constant process of reassessment. What I find harder to envisage is that I should never have a sense of myself as agent in this endless process, the agent who takes responsibility for her endless readings of Elam. The other train of thought is that it is intriguing that Elam, for all her careful and perceptive linguistic comment, did not then look for a grammar that enacted her ‘turning away from subjective agency’. This text contains her ‘singularity’ which I still hear as agency. *Feminism and Deconstruction* does cast abstract entities as doers at crucial junctures but it does not insist on this as the only way of speaking a claim. Elam does make the next turn away in the company of Wiegman. She will go on, I think, to try other ways of embodying event feminism in grammar as a way of producing the experience of what it is that this means.

In a sense (to simplify things grossly for a moment), I suggest that no one is speaking in the right voice as I am listening for it: Elam has yet to eliminate agency from her discourse; Mitchell and Rose speak as I might anticipate that Elam would yet their intent is to try to convey a notion of subjectivity founded in fragmentation; and the discourse that I might have expected Mitchell and Rose to use is closer to what I will find in the writing of Maggie Humm, who, ironically from my perspective, seeks to draw out coherence from multiplicities. What all this shows up for me once more is that the grammar of agency is not yet sufficient to its emergent tasks. Even I cannot **contrive** every moment, as I suspect such writing would be unreadable, but feminists can imagine what such a grammar might be. I cannot lose the

notion that I can choose to intervene into the politics of writing and reading even as I refuse to label such interventions as truth, final, or solely within my control.

Talking About Disciplines

I want to look at the nature of academia's disciplinary debate, and feminist perspective within this, with particular reference to Elam's linguistically acute intervention. I shall then imagine places for Mitchell and Rose and Humm within this framework before justifying my choices through attentive readings of their texts.

I shall call the first position in this debate the dominant one. Patriarchal and academic are virtually synonymous descriptions. Disciplines are kept separate. Each has a separate body of knowledge. Expertise is born out of specialism. Feminist response is to intervene to break down such boundaries, arguing that they are artificial and preclude imaginative interaction amongst ideas. In this scenario, the exclusive approach is anti-feminist since it rules out other ways of seeing, of making different kinds of connections. The interdisciplinary approach is posited as an alternative. I suspect that it is itself now dominant within feminist discourse and I know that it is not only within feminism that it is held.

Elam's different response, born out of Derrida, might be encompassed in her term '*disruptive linkage*'. She borrows Derrida's representation of ~~discipline~~ to convey a better sense of her intention than the marker 'interdiscipline' would.³⁰ Of the latter, she says:

in my mind it leaves too much of a sense that old disciplinary boundaries still hold up, even if special interdisciplinarians are allowed to traverse them [...]. By contrast, crossdisciplines, as a way of calling into question the very boundaries of disciplines, can potentially expose the impossibility of containing thought/action within the walls of the ivory tower. (pp. 11-12)

³⁰The word is under erasure but the trace of it remains.

I would like to imagine a fourth position, which is the confounding of boundaries neither through a line of argument nor metaphor, if I might use that term in Lloyd's sense of the most visible or surface 'layer of metaphor', but through linguistic strategies. I do not think that Elam has exhausted the potential of this approach as will become clear in my exploration of Carter's grammatical game with boundaries in my final chapter.

It may already be apparent where I will place the others. A major problem that I have with Mitchell and Rose is that they are ensconced in the first position: psychoanalysis will admit nothing else into its realm. Perhaps not surprisingly in view of the fact that 'border traffic' is her subject matter, I find Humm hovering on the borders of the interdisciplinary and the crossdiscipline response. Without losing sight of my search for linguistic elision of boundaries, I turn to justifying these claims.

Psychoanalysis All Alone

Juliet Mitchell begins her Introduction by citing Freud as the founding force which seeks to establish psychoanalysis as a separate and exclusive field of knowledge:

I would only like to emphasize that we must keep psychoanalysis separate from biology just as we have kept it separate from anatomy and physiology (Freud, letter to Carl Muller-Braunschweig, 1935, quoted by Mitchell, p. 1)

Mitchell later confirms this Freudian isolation:

For Freud it is of course never a question of arguing that anatomy or biology is irrelevant, it is a question of assigning them their place. He gave them a place - it was outside the field of psychoanalytic enquiry. (p. 20)

My immediate response to this statement is a recognition that it is still important to me to know what position Mitchell is taking in relation to this statement, coexistent with the awareness that she would refute the possibility of such one-to-one correspondences. I

reiterate that in the mirroring of the style of the 'absent grammatical subject' lies confirmation that Mitchell does endorse what it is that she tells. However, this absence, which I reformulate as the "absent human subject", is not necessarily an imaginative linguistic leap which will be read as enacting the impossibility of the coherent speaking subject. It may be read in a much more traditional way, as the appropriate discourse for science. As Bazerman, one of my earlier conversationalists, puts it in his enunciation (which he is not endorsing) of the advice long given to writers of scientific articles: 'the scientist must remove himself from reports of his own work and thus avoid all use of the first person'.³¹ This mode of writing has a history of being associated with objectivity, discourse cleansed of subjective input, of being the very style that dominant feminist responses to patriarchal concepts of objective knowledge have sought to expose as a fantasy construction which has ruled for too long. It is the mode into which Lorraine Code wants to bring subjectivity to account. It is not possible for Mitchell, more than anyone else, to restrict the meaning of this 'absent' style to the one that she intends. Its meanings overflow, not only into images of scientific discourse but also into images of Frankenstein, the patriarch who shifts responsibility for what it is that he does by absenting his self. Ironically, I have just risked recovering Mitchell's intentions, but only to recognize that, like Frankenstein's creation, they always have other unintended meanings. This is not to deny that Mitchell might intend to reflect the assumed objectivity of scientific discourse, since psychoanalysis is being set up as the external event which explains all else. But it is to begin to deny that such an approach in terms of form or meaning has much to do with feminist impulse. This initial reaction is followed by others. The boundaries that are so clearly drawn around 'psychoanalytic enquiry' are drawn by psychoanalytic enquirers. This produces no more than a self-perpetuating hermeneutic circle: no way in/out. Yet within its own terms there is no coherent speaker who can know what psychoanalysis is or does. Attempts to make

³¹Bazerman, 'Modern Evolution of the Experimental Report in Physics: Spectroscopic Articles in *Physical Review*, 1883-1980', in *Social Studies of Science*, 14 (1984), 163- 96 (p. 163).

psychoanalysis speak for itself are never acknowledged as imaginative acts - which might then have some value as alternative ways of seeing. Mitchell's formulation here is, in miniature, a discourse of certainty and limits ('of course', 'never') which swallows up within itself the illusion of an enquiring approach, for though the lexical items of the latter are present ('question' twice, 'arguing') they too are 'assign[ed] a place - outside'. Mitchell's term 'psychoanalytic enquiry', itself a reformulation of Freud's 'psychoanalysis', begins to sound oxymoronic to me, because those points from which one might enquire are consistently excluded. They are excluded by Freud and by Mitchell. I shall return to this point later. Much as I delight in the inventive overflow of oxymoron, I now recognize that there is a downside to the style. It is at such moments that Elam seems so right to say that something completely different must be envisaged. It is not just Mitchell who only gives the appearance of asking questions:

The fact [...] does not close, but leaves open as still unanswered, the question as to why (Rose, p. 56)

The question of the body of the girl child [...] becomes the question of the woman's body as language. (Rose, p. 54)

There are no markers of conversation such as *what if*, and no room for *perhaps*. One description of the style that is there, the telling style, might be that it validates the written over the spoken form in its presentation of the result of thought and discussion rather than the workings, the in-progress. In this sense, it is only fair to recognize how different Mitchell and Rose's agenda is from my own, even as I use their text to illustrate why I do not find its style one that creates 'the warmth' in which glances can become 'elastic'. It will be evident by now how I am reading Mitchell and Rose, but I wish to extend my justification of their text as one characterized by exclusion, telling rather than engaging the reader, closing down rather than opening out. Any hint that I am setting up a binary opposition here between two ways of speaking/writing (closed/open) is confounded by the recognition that there are no

simple one-to-one correspondences between a form and a meaning - and here I both agree with Cameron that this recognition frees us from 'the tyranny of the sign' (1985, p. 139) and sense that Halliday is right to advise against analysing isolated phenomenon.

It is not, to extend my critical reading of Mitchell and Rose, only the older fields of enquiry that are to be excluded from psychoanalysis:

A psychoanalyst could not subscribe to a currently popular sociological distinction. (Mitchell, p. 2)

How is one to read this? I hear the singular indefinite 'a' of 'a psychoanalyst' as having the unexpected force of *all* or *any*. The article is being used with generic force. This *allness* is reinforced by the subsequent abstract 'psychoanalysis cannot make such a distinction'. There is no space for in-betweens, no 'border traffic' admitted. I hear negative overtones in 'subscribe'. Where it might simply mean *to give one's assent (OED)*, I also hear *make one's submission (OED)*. This may be because I have become a resisting reader to this text or because it is intended that the reader should take up the same negative position to subscription as 'a psychoanalyst'. Then 'currently popular' carries the implication that this 'sociological distinction' is no more than a passing fad, a mere fancy in contradistinction to the permanence and solidity attributed to psychoanalysis as a whole. This 'distinction' refers to the sex/gender debate and is, in my reading, a misrepresentation of the sociological perspective at that time (Mitchell has reversed the terms), which, whether or not accidental, has the effect of making less sense of and diminishing the other point of view.³² This sense

³²The sex/gender debate used to be a relatively simple one. Sex is a biological category; gender is society's interpretation of that category. Judith Butler and Elam amongst many show how this interpretation rests on patriarchal categories and that there are many more stories to be told and imagined about how we might be (anything at all). See *Feminism and Deconstruction*, pp. 42-58, for an extended story which takes on board and goes **beyond** Lacan. Consistent with Elam's approach throughout, she suggests that just as culture produces nature as its fictional origin so does gender produce sex (p. 51).

I am intrigued in the context of Mitchell's claim on sex/gender here that, in reviewing the recent *Who's Afraid of Feminism* (1997), ed. by Ann Oakley and Juliet Mitchell (the same), Katherine Whitehorn comments:

that one is either a psychoanalyst of total Freudian conviction or else not a psychoanalyst permeates Mitchell's text from the outset:

To say that Freud's work contains contradictions should not be the equivalent of arguing that it is heterogeneous and that it is therefore legitimate for everyone to take their pick and develop it as they wish.(p. 1)

Semantically, boundaries are again confirmed and discussion closed down: it is Freud, the whole Freud and nothing but Freud. This production holds particular irony since, having told the rest of us that we cannot pick and choose, in her delineation of her own project, the one occasion on which Mitchell announces her own presence in this text, she does just this herself. Here is the flavour of her own selective discourse:

In the presentation that follows I have not adhered to [...] because the purpose of my selection is [...]. I shall leave aside details. (p. 8)

This sounds to me just like the very practice disallowed to others in their approach to psychoanalysis. As I suggested earlier, selectivity applies to Mitchell's evocation of sociology, just as it applies to my evocation of Mitchell for 'the purpose' of showing the limitations of her discourse. Mitchell might choose to respond here that she has already acknowledged that contradictions are an immanent feature of psychoanalysis (in her 'heterogeneous' comment given above) in its mirroring of the contradictory nature of the human subject. That seems fair enough, but then it is fair enough for others too.

Ann Oakley's own essay on gender left me more bewildered than before, though I did finally grasp the difference between sex (the bits you are born with) and gender (what you are brought up to be). *Observer Review*, 30 March, 1997.

Mitchell is responsible neither for Oakley's text, nor for Whitehorn's reading of it, but I am left wondering.

Bringing Others In

If I have begun to show that Mitchell erects boundaries which exclude different voices, I want now to contrast her approach with the inclusive, boundary-crossing writing practice of Maggie Humm. This is not to say that I have had a remarkable insight into Humm's project since she signals it in her title, *Border Traffic*, as well as throughout her text, but rather that there are interesting things to be said about her modes of writing which, like that of Mitchell and Rose, consciously set out to emulate her theoretical input. Where I might hope that my own text has moved towards Elam's call for crossdisciplines in its refusal to signify any kind of text as superior to another or to separate out writing from speaking, in a process of absorption, so I will now look at Humm's polyphonic text in this kind of light. Just as she will go on in her main text (for she still makes that distinction) to show how a range of women writers challenge dominant border territory, so does she challenge the borders of academic and non-academic discourse; autobiography and theory; literary theory and other kinds of theory such as social anthropology: and, the one which holds particular significance and, as it turns out, problematic moments for my purposes, that is between her voice and the voice of others. Humm also enables me to bring back into the conversation the relationship, yet another kind of border, of feminist theorists to male ones. I shall make some general remarks about her style before embarking on an attentive reading.

Humm sets out to breach the walls surrounding academic discourse, as does bell hooks through her simple refusal to provide its trademark footnotes and indices. Humm's transgressive action is born out of her understanding of the 'poetics of displacement' (p. 1) which encapsulates her view of woman's relationship to the master narrative. Humm both recognizes this displacement in the writing of other women and also mirrors it in her own practice:

The contemporary phenomenon of border journeys, in which women writers adjust their writing to their experiential and historical sense of

gender exclusion rather than to the demands of the academy is one illustration of the traffic across disciplines and writing codes now transforming literary studies. (p. 1)

Border discourse infuses this passage: in the semantics of ‘across’, ‘codes’ and ‘transforming’; and in the (surface) metaphors of ‘traffic’ and ‘exclusion’ (Humm has an untroubled reading in this text of what counts as metaphor and I keep this in mind when discussing her work). Humm introduces her own voice as an engaged thinking speaker,³³ with a concurrent movement towards forms associated with conversation (echoes of the good bad writing in ‘A Country House’) rather than formal text:

It seemed that much could be understood about borders when I got to this point. (pp. 13-14)

These words also illustrate her strategy of lapsing from jargon into the prosaic, which is definitely not to say that she does not also cross the border into technical, metaphoric and poetic forms as she wills. In her own terms this might be described as speaking in ‘double tongues’ (p. 16) were it not so much more multiple than that, inspired, as I shall return to show, by the voices of Mikhail Bakhtin and Gayatri Spivak (and Hurston). I am reminded of the multiple discourses of the protagonist of ‘The Bloody Chamber’: since she can speak them all, none retains a special power. Humm creates space for a vision which goes **beyond** self to include her not-self, the other. I read this as a positive ethical extension, in the manner of Lorraine Code, into other selves, rather than a psychoanalytic fragmentation of self into selves. Humm’s text is not always clear nor is it always technical language which produces the indistinctness. I am still rereading the following:

each [writer] creates an image of woman derived from a feminist compulsion, which poses an equally weighted challenge to the limits of social narratives. (p. 9)

³³With undoubted influence on this speaker.

What is 'derived'? the 'image' or the impulse to create? What does the relative clause beginning with 'which' define? I cannot read this with any confidence but I do not think that this was Humm's intent: she is quite clear that endless deferral of meaning is not (in) her interest.

Bordering on Autobiography and Theory

Humm introduces a meditating *I* into this text which establishes her theoretical groundings. This is one feminist attempt to produce a version of subjectivity that is not the masculinist coherent *I* that Elam seeks to avoid. This engaging *I* emerges in the parenthetical 'I think' raised earlier. Beyond this not unusual feminist step, Humm also begins to insert autobiographical details which could be said to mirror her own perception of Hélène Cixous' writing, which she characterizes as 'avowedly metaphorical and quite explicitly autobiographical' (p. 21). Humm's practice is not signalled in advance but such moments are especially marked by being both inserts and italicized, visually adding to the sense that this is live information:

We open our mouths with double tongues. One tongue uses words like 'astigmatism' metaphorically, hoping to exercise a livelier criticism. This tongue likes talking about the 'gaze' to Polytechnic students taking Feminist Theory WS201. The other tongue speaks painfully if at all about her recent and severe astigmatism and her goggle eyed appearance. Yet feminism, I know, is eloquent only at the border of criticism and autobiography. (p. 16)

This movement between metaphorical and literal speaking and seeing signals both Humm's continuing commitment to the personal as political and her intention to move **beyond** dominant conceptions of what that 'personal' and 'political' might mean in an academic framework. Her practice of making tongues stand in as speakers might be seen to mirror fragmented subjectivities and disintegrating bodies rather than positive extensions of the self.

I hear echoes of Frankenstein.³⁴ Yet the style and content mirror not only Humm's interpretation of Cixous in being 'avowedly metaphoric and quite explicitly autobiographical', but also her own reading of Hurston's tactic of engaging the 'abruptly shifting pronoun from first to third person and the referents which they identify' (p. 117). This strategy does invoke extension and unity rather than fragmentation of selves. Her practice of mirroring the very styles inherent to the writers she discusses has the beginning of another effect, one that I find wholly positive as feminist strategy: it develops a female line of reference. In my own approach to Humm's 'double tongues' as being not only a source of information and ideas but also a source of justification for my own stylistic adventures, I hope to constitute a further small step along this particular line.

Bordering on Other Theories

Humm draws on an eclectic range of disciplines, specifically 'dialectics, anthropology, the sociology of education [and] French Feminism all of which are shot through with boundary tremors' (p. 16). This 'all of which [...] boundary tremors' formulation figures the tension between unity ('all of which') and fragmentation or difference ('boundary tremors') that permeates Humm's text. At times I want to compare it in magnitude to Mitchell's exclusive picking and choosing. The paradox lies in Humm's continuous seeking of similarity and connection in each evocation of difference. This is everywhere:

women writers [...] write 'differently' in similar ways (p. 1)

But the strategy is clear. It is to assert the underlying unities of border women (p. 9)

³⁴Or of Eveline's disintegration mirrored in her reduction to 'cheeks', 'lips', 'heart', 'body', 'hands', 'white face', and 'eyes' at the end of James Joyce's 'Eveline', in *Dubliners* (first published Richards, 1914; this edn Harmondsworth: Penguin, repr. 1968), pp. 34-39 (38-39).

and most comprehensively

Border women are not decentred fragmented individuals but writers who have begun to cohere a core identity by entering the transitional space between self and other. (p. 6)

This simultaneously connective and differential process is extended beyond subjectivities into the variegated disciplines with which she engages. I read this as traditional interdisciplinarity, making safe, rather than a catastrophic erasure of disciplines that leaves only the trace of what once was held to be true. Humm establishes theoretical lines which link and integrate both male (Bakhtin, Bernstein) and female (Douglas, Cixous) theorists; but such connections can have strange inverted force:

The striking feature of border texts is the fact that they are extremely varied. (p. 5)

I read this with double vision. I see it as a feminist joke: our turn to have it all ways; for after all it is Humm who has controlled the selection and definition of what constitutes a border text in the first place. But as I read it again, the tail surely does disappear into the snake's mouth. It means nothing or anything. It is at best an imaginary resolution of the one and the many. This enactment is not only a grammatical, counting one in the progression from the singular to multiple - from 'feature/is/fact' to 'texts/they/are' - or rather, I should say, the interaction between the singular and multiple - 'feature/texts/is' and 'fact/they/are' - but also a semantic one in the movement from 'striking' to 'varied'. But whilst it may, like the previously mentioned coexistence of 'differently' and 'similar', seek to sound 'double tongues', I hear rather that different things are being made to sound the same. I do not laugh for long. I do read it again seriously; as a counterpoint to patriarchal logic, and to the kind of individualized feminism that Kristeva advocates. Humm, in celebrating difference, wants also to establish the common ground that ferments shared political response (p. 14) though it seems to me that Elam's claim that what we have in common is our difference from each

other is more effective. Whilst I resist the sound of Humm's 'double tongues' as I hear them in her own discourse, I find the idea enticing, and I do think it effective when expressed as

the idea that double tongues could be duplicitly truthful (p. 16)

for this fully represents an endless process of doubling, since 'duplicitly' always holds two meanings: it always contains both deceitfulness and doubleness (*OED*). The word itself is 'duplicitly truthful' thus creating an abyssal image, infinite deferral. Here, I realize that I am relishing the deconstructive potential in Humm's text which exceeds her own theoretical boundaries ('postmodernism [...] ultimately unsatisfactory [...], is cut off from actual *agency*' (p. 14, her emphasis)), and at the same time resisting her effort to say what she means. In my own terms this would be unethical if it were not that I say what I am doing and why, and invite responses.

Humm's establishment of a theoretical relay (Bakhtin to Douglas to Bernstein to Cixous) both incorporates the doubleness of her project, and also induces doubleness of response from me. There is a clear starting line:

Mikhail Bakhtin is generally regarded as the first, and possibly greatest, theoretician of literature in the twentieth century. (p. 16)

This sounds just like Hurston on Boas (though I hear no irony now) and it sounds just like Mitchell and Rose too. Where is the 'actual *agency*'? Who is doing the regarding? Who is judging the 'possibly'? In the absence of knowing, I shall imagine. I suspect that 'generally' in this instance, far from referring to the general (multiple), actually refers to the much more specific (singular) that is, other 'theoretician[s] of literature'. I can see why Humm might have chosen to write it this way. It is a means of both beginning a new line of theory ('the first') and of simultaneously establishing the validity of this line ('generally [...] possibly [...] greatest') in a format that I can imagine applying strategically and gynocritically to a feminist theoretician, in a moment wiping out all male practitioners as Humm has wiped out all pre-

Bakhtinians. But I find Humm's style problematic here. Bakhtin appears out of the air: one might say that is a Derridean event, no origins, but, in fact, Humm seeks to establish Bakhtin as the origin ('the first'). Ironically, Humm's style here conforms to much standard academic discourse but in that very form that is unacceptable in that it seems to produce knowledge and source at the same time as it begins to establish a power structure, a hierarchy ('possibly greatest'): it sounds in other words just like the patriarchal discourse mimicked in 'A Country House', even to the extent of the imaginary first moments plucked from nowhere, which feminists must read through and **beyond**. I do not wish to say that Humm is guilty here of something that I never do, but rather use her formulations to elucidate the difficulties that face feminist discourse.

Humm's game of theoretical relay goes on to establish each link in the chain:

The anthropologist Mary Douglas has similar and equally ambitious aims [to Bakhtin]. (p. 18)

These two are then connected to the next before it is separated from them:

Bernstein draws on similar cultural and anthropological connotations of boundary to those in the work of Bakhtin and Douglas but bases his understanding of boundaries firmly on a psychosocial model. What distinguishes Bernstein's work from that of his predecessors is his emphasis. (p. 19)

I note that in the context of Humm's own discussion of Douglas (with Humm's references to 1966 once and 1975 twice) and Bernstein (1971, three times) there is no such chronological security to justify the label 'predecessors'; women's time? This linking and separating process continues:

Bernstein's sense of the relationship between subjectivity, and social control leans forward to the more radical writings of Hélène Cixous. Where Bernstein's is [...], Cixous, alternatively, takes the meaning. (p. 20, punctuation of first sentence as in text.)

The point that I wish to make may already be visible: it is that on the basis of this double-voiced difference-in-similarity and similarity-in-difference which permeates Humm's text and thesis there lies the danger that anything can be made to fit somehow, and that it can all begin to lose meaning. Perhaps new thoughts and ideas do most often spring from an unexpected conjunction of two or more previous ideas but I think that Carter's subtle play on linguistic connections and separations in 'The Bloody Chamber' offers up more exciting possibilities for the attentive reader than does Humm's overt imposition of such categories.

Who needs such tight control?

Humm's imagery of associative logic in *Border Traffic* is 'rather like beads on a necklace' (p. 3). She has strung her chosen beads/theorists into place in imaginative relationship to each other, each bead similar but different from the last, and once in place always in place. I might prefer to try to break the thread that binds, and keep my multifaceted beads in a magic box so that they make different patterns and connections each time I look. Humm's 'necklace' strikes me as too convenient and expandable in comparison to Elam's closely argued evocation of the '*disruptive linkage*' (that is 'and'), which is itself the explicit grammatical version of that story of connections in 'The Bloody Chamber'. Grammar can do more than (the visible layer of) metaphor in this game. Then again, speaking in 'double tongues', I recall Hurston's account of Boasian dictate:

He outlines his theory, but if the facts do not agree with it, he would not warp a jot or dot of his findings to save his theory. (*Dust Tracks*, p. 174)

I do not want to suggest that Humm warps her theory, but I do want to insist that her style creates too much space for such an interpretation. Nor do I want to exclude the possibility that it might be a viable feminist strategy precisely to warp some theory in order to bring about changing perceptions (and that this might be one - rather stretched - way of reading Martin's Introduction). The paradoxical danger for feminisms of the endless flexibility of Humm's strategy is revealed in the ease with which her position can be assimilated into the

interdisciplinary model: it does not move to erase that model. Retold, it offers the comforting circularity of telling beads rather than the abyssal encounter. This, I am aware, is to compare two unlikes out of time (Elam post-dating Humm), but Humm does this too (reading La Malincha, sixteenth century, through Hurston, twentieth). Furthermore, her voice then represents a feminism active now, and it is in this instructive sense that I engage with it.

Bordering on Other Voices

Humm's 'beads on a necklace' imagery is, as the reader of her text will later discover, an unattributed (feminized) borrowing from Basil Bernstein. In his theory of restricted codes, meanings appear to be 'strung together like beads on a frame, rather than one following a logical sequence' (Bernstein, 1971, quoted by Humm, p.20). This borrowing is no oversight. She gives the reader both texts, but the borrowing comes first and is not made explicit. Talking in other voices is, I think, the most subtle way in which Humm crosses borders and again I read with double vision. The tactic occurs at an explicit level: just as Humm interpellates her own voice signalled in italics, so she introduces that of one of her students. I think we are to experience this process as one that enables the sound of another voice to be heard within the text (an enactment of Bakhtin's polyphony) as well as a political act:

*I pose these issues very much here in Britain in the 1990s.
Chitra Aloysius is now an MA student with me at the Polytechnic of East London.
'My father was an author who also translated many English books into Sinhalese [...] As a child who had never experienced winter or snow, I was fascinated by my father's descriptions of icy cold winters at Lowood and the warmth of the nursery fire at Gateshead.'* (p. 23)

There are border crossings within the student's text: translation is a recognized minefield; and note how the 'descriptions' now belong to her father, not Brontë. My concern here however is with the nature of the boundary between the two speakers. The first person baton is passed on from Humm to Aloysius, allowing her voice to be heard. We will subsequently

learn from Humm that it was silenced by British immigrant controls for twenty years (p. 24). But is this Humm in her practice of Bakhtinian polyphony (usually envisioned as multiple simultaneous and fragmentary voices rather than singular and linear, turn-taking, as here), or is this Humm in her practice of Bakhtinian extopy:

In women's studies we learn to speak in 'extopy' [...]. Students write alternative solutions to their research in the style of each other. (p. 17)

There is no further distinguishing marker in the text. The voice of Aloysius might then be an example of Humm writing in the style of her student, so that the reader only seems to hear her voice, which has been silenced for so long and is now borrowed by another. Whilst the uncertainty thus produced might reflect both psychoanalytic and deconstructive approaches to subjecthood, it seems to me that there is a political downside, that the practices are double-edged as well as double-voiced, since they can appropriate the voice of the other who only seems to speak. This replicates what has happened to the voices of women for centuries. Feminist adaptation of practices which seem entirely positive and ethical in not only giving voice to the other but in imagining that one is the other, crossing the borders between self and not-self, is not unproblematic. My response to such a problem continues to be to try to develop conversational discourse to include listening to the voice of the other, to build in responses, reworkings, reassessments. This approach aims to reach **beyond** dialogue. New technology might well lead to one version of live, interactive conversations and in its turn affect writing practices. Of course, my thesis circulates on my borrowing of the words of others. Poaching and pirating are designated postmodern acts by those who say that words do not to belong to anyone. But I still choose to be explicit about who is speaking, with a few ironic chronological exceptions which will soon become visible. It is time to reintroduce Mitchell and Rose on this matter of the voices of others.

Reformulations and Recastings

To recapitulate: Mitchell and Rose produce an English translation of Lacan's *Feminine Sexuality*. They provide Introductions (in which their voices are quite separate) which I read as a translation of Lacan's theory into feminism. I have already indicated that I find their duplicit mode of presentation problematic, whilst acknowledging that it is integral to their endeavour. What I want to explore now is whether they go beyond translation into reformulation and what it might mean to cross this particular border.³⁵ Reformulation is a concept that I have already borrowed to talk about Mitchell and Rose. I borrowed it from Mitchell:

Jacques Lacan dedicated himself to the task of refinding and reformulating the work of Sigmund Freud. (p. 1)

These words 'refinding and reformulating' resonate throughout both Mitchell and Rose's texts. How much, I am then led to wonder, do they produce their own acts of reformulation? Mitchell tells us that 'Lacan would argue' (p. 24). This may sound like one of those conversational tactics that I advocate, but the problem as I experience it is that, since Mitchell and Rose have consciously removed themselves from their texts, such reformulations are never acknowledged. Such acknowledgement would produce something like *in my view, Lacan conceived his own project differently*. I have borrowed the last six of these words from Mitchell (p. 1). In her version they stand alone. Has Humm also reformulated theoretical history and the voice of Aloysius? Are such duplicit modes specifically feminist? desirable? Perhaps the answer depends on what other features accompany them and I turn now to expand and interrogate my earlier claim that Mitchell and Rose, like Martin, tell me what to think and exclude other readings.

³⁵Whilst this exploration could also extend into their translation of Lacan's text, I have neither the competence nor the time here.

In their discourse I detect an anticipation and address to challenges and objections, which themselves are not expressed. This is a standard academic approach, one against which I again posit conversational modes: leave all the stages visible; do not write out the voice of the imagined other. Here is that telling opening paragraph of Mitchell's in full. In her text it is preceded by the quote from Freud's letter given earlier:

Jacques Lacan dedicated himself to the task of refinding and reformulating the work of Sigmund Freud. Psychoanalytic theory today is a variegated discipline. There are contradictions within Freud's writings and subsequent analysts have developed one aspect and rejected another, thereby using one theme as a jumping off point for a new theory. Lacan conceived his own project differently: despite the contradictions and impasses, there is a coherent theorist in Freud whose ideas do not need to be diverged from; rather they should be set within a cohesive framework that they anticipated but which, for historical reasons, Freud himself could not formulate. The development of linguistic science provides this framework.

To reformulate: to formulate again or to formulate differently (*OED*). Like 'contrived' and 'duplicity' the word already encompasses doubleness. Which meaning might Mitchell wish to tell? and which do I hear? Perhaps to read Mitchell in more than one way is to find another route to the recognition that there is no unified subjectivity, no single thing. Already though, I hear something similar to Humm's absorption of difference-in-similarity in Mitchell's management of 'contradictions' and 'coherent'. I am not convinced either by her attempt to rein such contradictions in nor the need to do so, although I see her need to do so. However I shall try to read again, but not alone; amazement accompanies me. The crucial point that I hear Mitchell stating is that others have misconstrued or misrepresented Freud (formulated differently): Lacan has not (formulated again). The further unstated implication is that Mitchell has the measure of them all. Such a reading is reinforced and echoed in Rose's use of the 'failure' motif in her reformulation of Lacan:

For they [most analysts] failed to see (p. 28)

He [Lacan] argued that failure to recognize (p. 29)

He [Lacan] considered that the failure to grasp. (p. 32)

This formulation does not allow for alternative views. It conveys instead incompetence, negligence or stupidity in the other. I might argue that it is a psychological ploy designed to draw the reader to Lacan through not wishing to be identified with such 'failure'.³⁶

To continue my amazing encounter with Mitchell: remember Freud's insistence that psychoanalysis must stand alone from all other fields of enquiry; and remember that Lacan has understood Freud. How then can the separate discipline 'linguistic science' be added on to provide the essential 'cohesive framework'? I have made another unattributed borrowing which is itself an imaginatively attributed borrowing:

[their sexuality] could not be 'added' to him or her. (p. 2)

This declaration follows and arises out of Mitchell's dismissal of that sociological distinction in which a person is born with their biological gender to which society 'adds a socially defined sex, masculine or feminine' (p. 2). Mitchell borrows 'added' from herself. And amazement shows me that this 'added' is thus being established as the sociological (to reflect the text's avoidance of nominalization status to this discipline) negative to psychoanalysis's positive '*through*' (p. 2, her emphasis). So I borrow it in the spirit in which it is intended. It is designed to reveal Mitchell's sleight of hand in drawing cohesion out of 'contradictions and impasses'. And, added to this, note the paralleled contrast between the logic and control of 'development of linguistic science' and the oppositional flippancy implied by 'jumping off point for a new theory'. The psychoanalysis of Freud as reformulated by Lacan is validated through the formal discourse associated with writing: everything else is jettisoned through the casual discourse of speech. Where 'development' conveys an ordered and inevitable

³⁶This reminds me that I was fascinated to be told by several of my readers of 'A Country House' (female and male) that they felt that Dorothy Edwards was overhearing their responses to her text and that this affected what they could admit to. The gaze is everywhere. This aspect of reading had not occurred to me at the outset so I do not have sufficient data to justify more than this comment.

progression, 'jumping off' suggests an erratic leap into a void. The underlying verbal nature of the latter intensifies this sense of lack of planning, loss of control. Note too that 'theory' (a body of ideas) is here set in opposition to 'science' (a body of knowledge), though admittedly applied elsewhere to Lacan and Freud.

It seems then that an outside development can be added to psychoanalysis to throw further enlightenment - as long as it is a newly developed one rather than an old one like biology. Mitchell's 'reformulation' contains 'contradictions', like Freud's original, necessary if she is to get beyond 'impasses'. She tries to subsume these into 'a cohesive framework' and I am trying to take them back out. Mitchell's paradoxical voice echoes Lacan's in his claim to know what he claims it is impossible to know, and his denial of coherence as a possible subject position. The paradox is not surmounted simply by denying that *I* speak: other features of the discourse show up the problem. The masterful paradox is acknowledged in the preface and in footnotes by Rose (see note 15 and 19), never in the body of the text. What kind of border exists between text and footnote? I suspect that footnotes can be a way of sidelining or side-stepping certain information: mentioned but discounted as integral. Of course, being a perverse reader, I pay them great attention. Feminists steeped in Kristeva's 'Stabat Mater' will be used to sauntering back and forward amongst different writings. I want to celebrate variegated workings of my mind, readings of texts, linguistic forms: Mitchell wants to reformulate 'today's variegated discipline' - already the many is incorporated into the one - into one unmitigated thing. Where I seek to enlarge space for discussion, she seeks to eradicate it.

There is another intriguing contradiction. That 'today's', alike in superficial time to 'currently popular', is set in contrast to the subsequent elegiac recall that 'we have lost the possibility of a clarification of an essential theory' (p. 1). I give due recognition to those indefinite articles where I might have expected the further conviction of definite ones: *the clarification of the essential theory*. However, this loss conveys the primary sense, through the semantics of 'clarification' and 'essential', of a timeless ahistorical truth which is there to

be regained, like Milton's Paradise. This discourse of revealed truth is perpetuated in Rose's 'fundamental discovery' (p. 30). Yet, the explanation given by Mitchell in her opening salvo for Freud's failure to finish the story is 'historical reasons'. And the ending is provided by 'the development of linguistic science', not its discovery. It will come as no surprise that I want to know who developed it. (The answer turns out to be - Lacan.) Here the removal of agency through nominalization (writing rather than speech) implies a natural development rather than one dependent on human action. This event mode contrasts with the earlier, active, representation of 'subsequent analysts [who] have developed one aspect', the strayers from the path of rightness. Diane Elam might endorse the choices that Mitchell has made: I want to keep on showing that such choices do not necessarily bring a lightening of the patriarchal load (and here I equate patriarchy with the act of telling me what to think). To summarize my 'currently popular' reading: those (the others) who have added to or subtracted from Freud's theory have got it wrong: Lacan's 'reformulating' of Freud has got it right. It is a difficult position to hold when the crux of that theory is that there is no centre that can hold. Resolution of this paradox is sought in linguistic devices. The more I read the more I feel oppressed as a reader, struggling to find my own space '*through*' this relentless imposition of the one way to read Freud through Lacan through Mitchell. In a different context, 'contradictions', 'developments', 'aspects', and 'jumping off point' might herald a positive view of feminist divergence, space to keep on speaking/writing, even abyssal spaces. Mitchell, however, offers a glimpse of such possibilities early on only to refute and repeatedly close them down even as she laments the one essential lost possibility that 'the multiplication of fruitful ideas' (p. 1) has brought about. The recurring ploy is the classic (Freudian) Catch 22. If you produce a different reading then you have, like those 'subsequent analysts', 'failed to grasp' the truth. Only if you read Mitchell's way have you greater vision than these failures. Or, to put it into more conversational terms, that is the only way to read if you do not want to seem foolish. Of course, this strategy has another stage (often used in satire) which plays on the psychological import of the first. Now the reader is drawn into

aligning him/herself with the argument but suddenly the tables are turned: the reader wants to be one of those with vision so goes along with what is said, but does not have the vision to see that it was all a trick; in the effort not seem foolish s/he has turned out to be just that. I suppose that I claim to have superior vision with regard to Mitchell: I have not taken the bait; I have succeeded in reading her as satire; and will continue to look for (linguistic) abyssal 'jumping off point[s]' wherever (I think) I find myself. I have tried to read Mitchell's text in different ways but, whilst its meanings multiply, paradoxically they all head one way - towards fundamentalism. The many are repeatedly reduced to the one.

Where Mitchell opens with Lacan's 'refinding and reformulating' Freud, Rose has his texts 'return to and extend the debate' (p. 27). Others 'added', 'diverged' (p. 1), 'elaborated' (p. 3), or have made 'attempts' (Rose, p. 29).³⁷ Such distinctions permeate their texts. Their difficulty here as I interpret it lies in their own enactment of the exclusion of all interpretations of Freud that are not Lacan's. They have to convince the reader that this is not a question of variation but a matter of wrong and right. This seems a highly selective process embodied in lexical choices, one whose purpose is never acknowledged. I however can only read the pattern one way because I also come up against such occasional gems as 'in the Freud that Lacan uses' (Mitchell, p. 4). I fail to grasp how this is different from the selective, interpretative approach of other post-Freudians. And in this context it is perhaps particularly ironic that Mitchell has Freud 'end [...] his life with an unfinished paper' (p. 24). I laugh at this unexpectedly duplicit tongue. But the serious reading hears the acknowledgment that Freud himself continued to reformulate and rewrite his own views, and never finished

psychoanalysis. In this sense there can be no 'fundamental discovery' as Rose claims, for Freud is always only work-in-progress. How is it that Lacan's extensions to this can be judged to be more truthful than others' 'jumping off'? They are all versions of the story of

³⁷Though I note Rose's use of 'reformulations' in connection with the other side (Jones), p. 40. That is to say I mention it but do not include it.

life. They all should be heard and talked about, but as aspects of conversation, not as fundamental truths.

I am talking about Mitchell and Rose's attempts to restore this 'variegated discipline' to a state of purity. I see 'contradictions' everywhere that I do not think are successfully contained by their efforts to write form as meaning. After that particular effort on Mitchell's part to emphasize the discrete nature of psychoanalysis even as she wants to give it the framework of 'linguistic science', we are told by Rose that Lacan 'goes beyond psychoanalysis to feminism' (p. 27). How are boundaries operating now? Humm would have no problem with such an interpretation but I wonder what system of logic is in operation where the insistence that psychoanalysis stands alone is then corrupted by both 'linguistic science', which provides the controlling frame, and feminism, field for expansive manoeuvres. Having it both ways is the expression that springs to mind. This encapsulates, ironically, potentially feminist and deconstructive moves. Here are double tongues: 'duplicity truthful'. Perhaps I should pause to read again, to think more of Mitchell and Rose's choices. The crucial aspect which Rose identifies as taking psychoanalysis into feminism comes out of the various stages set up by her and Mitchell. In brief: Lacan's reformulation of Freud shows that subjectivity is constructed through entry into language, that it is subsequently always fragmented and that this is perceived to be true through analysis of female sexuality; Rose's reformulation of Lacan shows that 'woman' is always only a construction (through language) and has no essential qualities. This claim could be the 'jumping off point' for all kinds of stories, but Mitchell and Rose cannot jump as they desire only to make the claim true, a conclusion in itself. This is the sole focus that I detect in their texts. Paradoxically, they use an essentialist (in that it declares exclusive and universal truth) theory to elucidate and support an anti-essentialist view of 'woman'. Each time I read I see more of the same.

The central paradox then that I identify in Mitchell and Rose's claim for psychoanalysis as the revelation of truth is that this truth of the fragmentary and linguistic nature of 'woman'

('man' still seems to have more basis for knowing what he is since he has a different relationship to sexuality, although he too is revealed, through female sexuality, as fragmented) which might free her to be anything she wants to be must itself be constructed in a way which leaves no room for manoeuvre: discourse that tells, rather than imagines or explores. In my reading, they have recognized this problem and tried to overcome all difficulties through a linguistic enactment of the displaced subject, but this strategy collapses from the weight of its surroundings into the patriarchal form of disembodied knowledge. I would posit in contrast Irigaray and Cixous as others who, in ways different from those of Cornell and Elam, have kept the story going and jumped off from Lacan into the unknown to look for other visions reflected in other linguistic modes, to borrow Elam's 'future anterior', of 'what women will have been' (*Feminism and Deconstruction*, p. 41). Mitchell and Rose cannot take or value this path since to do so would refuse the Lacanian truth that woman is constructed out of language and instead reverse it to construct language out of woman. For them, there is no such relationship between woman and language. Rose is explicit on this point in her return to Lacan:

Woman is excluded *by* the nature of words, meaning that the [phallic] definition poses her as an exclusion. Note that this is not the same thing as saying that woman is excluded *from* the nature of words, a misreading which leads to the recasting of the whole problem in terms of woman's place outside language, the idea that women might have of themselves an entirely different speech. (p. 49, her italics)

This allows me to rejustify and summarize my readings of Mitchell and Rose, which are always reducible to one. Note (a direction I borrow from Rose, and see earlier unattributed usage) that Mitchell's dismissive 'jumping off' is here reformulated as 'a misreading'. Rose allows no possibility of multiple readings (and might therefore consider it a success that I keep reproducing the same one of her and Mitchell's text although I suspect she would also find it a 'misreading'). This 'misreading' leads in turn to the erroneous process of 'recasting' which can only be heard within this text as the negative of 'reformulating'. On what criteria,

I ask again, are such distinctions of rightness and wrongness made between two seemingly synonymous acts? These acts of distinction increasingly contrast with Humm's acts of elision, crossover. Note too - and now I say that that's a powerful telling format, both in its grammatical and its semantic imperative, with the implication that what is to be noted is fairly obvious, just a drawing of the reader's attention to what s/he will have already seen - that, as with Elam's 'and', it is the little words ('by', 'from') that count. I can cite this emphatic style as both further evidence that Rose writes with attention to the detail of language and also as evidence that the use of simple short words does not necessarily translate into simple understanding though, I think, their combination with the simple force of 'note' implies that this should be so. I have difficulty here in recasting Rose into a version that I can make sense of: what I can hazard is that she chooses to read 'white ink' literally,³⁸ and can allow no space to the notion of the performative potential of linguistic forms even as she writes to transform dominant perceptions. For Humm on the other hand, 'language is not a static entity'(p. 14): feminists can intervene. In my search for the excess of meaning in Rose's controlling text, I have imagined jokes. I have heard 'the division it enjoins' (p. 56) as a play on oppositions. I have been assured that my imagination runs riot. Sadly, I find that the excess of meaning lies in the fact that the text exposes its own attempts to stay inside a 'cohesive framework'. It is ultimately as full of illusions and trickery as 'A Country House'.

On Establishing Lines of Contact

Having only allowed Humm an occasional word for a while, I want now to return primarily through her to the issue of feminist responses to predecessors, but to recast this into how we might (want to) establish alternative female lines. It would still be true to say that most

³⁸Drucilla Cornell writes well on Anglo-American tendencies in this direction in *Beyond Accommodation*, pp. 5-20.

theory comes through male lines (and I am talking gender here) because of the reality of power structures and historical access to acquiring and disseminating knowledge. It is possibly true to say that there is no idea which is not born out of other ideas; no determinable origins. In their reformulation of the line of psychoanalysis, Mitchell and Rose begin with Freud (though he freely acknowledges his antecedents), move on to Lacan and then insert their own interpretative acts. En route they discard, amongst many, Melanie Klein as interpreter of Freud, and Cixous as interpreter of Lacan. This process does not trouble them since sex/gender issues are outside of their debate. There are only two positions available: that of the male and that of the female signifier; anyone can be either. While this may seem a revolutionary breakthrough **beyond** sex/gender distinctions, there are many feminists who would not consider themselves essentialists but who believe that there is still the political need to establish a comparable female line so that future gender choices (though I do not hear it as a matter of choice in Mitchell and Rose, but rather psychic necessity) are made from even ground.

This relatively old but still appealing feminist strategy, which owes a lot to Elaine Showalter's practice of gynocriticism,³⁹ takes place to some extent simply because the growth in feminist studies leads to a network of cross-referencing amongst women writers. Humm deals with the issue of both male and female antecedents once more at the level of both form and meaning (and I increasingly feel able to separate these out). On content, in announcing her own programme she tells us, with specific reference to 'Bloomian psychoanalysis' (p. 4), that

chapter five [...] argues that her [Adrienne Rich's] 'separatism' stems, in part, from her 'completion' of her male precursors. (p. 4)

Humm's enunciation of Rich's project will extend to demonstrating that Rich 'actively

³⁹See for instance 'Towards a Feminist Poetics, in *The New Feminist Criticism*, ed. by Elaine Showalter (London: Virago Press, 1986), pp. 125-43.

appropriates the voices of the male poets Robert Lowell and Paul Goodman' (p. 9). I might reformulate all this to say that the female new beginning ('separatism') arises out of the act of taking the male voice into herself (appropriation) thereby finishing off the male line ('completion'). It will have been noted that some of these words have already been placed by Humm in quotation marks. What is the status of 'separatism' and 'completion'? There is no clarification within the text. I will suggest three options which will lead me into an exploration of Humm's evocation of relationship to precursors through her style, in which, I return to suggesting, she 'actively appropriates' the words of others in subtle ways.

One possibility is that the quotation marks are used in a way similar to that of Drucilla Cornell. She uses them to indicate a representation of fantastic imaginings **beyond**: 'The quotation marks indicate the recognition of the fantasy, and that it cannot be completely erased by the symbolic'.⁴⁰ Or they might be intended to place the meanings of the words thus contained into a state of doubt or jeopardy, equivalent to *¿separatism?*, a way of indicating, as Spanish does,⁴¹ in advance as well as retrospectively that there is a question around this point. This understanding is not entirely separate from the first but carries a different, less celebratory, emphasis. The third possibility is that this practice is a further instance of extopy, of speaking in the manner of another by appropriating their words but giving no acknowledgment or source. This indeed brings into question the border between one voice and another, bearing in mind that most discourse does consist of words that have always already been spoken and are being appropriated by the current speaker. I say 'most', since I wish to continue to assert that there is space for creative and imaginative linguistic acts which are not 'always out there in the world outside, lying in wait for the neonate' (Mitchell, p. 5). In my reading of Humm it is no accident that the status/ownership of words remains undecidable, for this is enactment of border traffic at a crucial level: linguistic visions of

⁴⁰*Beyond Accommodation*, p. 65. Cornell is talking about Cixous on 'the mother'.

⁴¹And so does Stephen King, writer of horror stories. As Humm says, no practice is 'inherently feminine' (*Border Traffic*, p. 1, her emphasis).

merging selves. It is a kind of 'assault' (Humm, p. 1) on those patriarchal patrols designed to protect ownership and individual identity. This linguistic strategy, I think, would not appeal to Mitchell and Rose, for it might also represent the merging of fragmented subjectivities into one, a false path in their analysis. It might however hold some appeal to Diane Elam as a way of representing the 'politics of the undecidable'.

So what are the ways in which Humm 'extend[s]' (for does this word now belong to Rose on Lacan? or just lie in wait?) 'this complex criss-crossing of the margins of identity and writing possibilities' (pp. 1-2) and what are the implications of such practice? I suggest that through strategic deployment of quotation marks she finds grounds for confusion, disguise and fertile border crossings:

As Sheila Rowbotham points out: where else can an alternative consciousness of ourselves come from? (see Rowbotham, 1973).
(p. 2)

Academic expectation might have been that a clearly designated quote from Rowbotham would follow the colon. But there are no markers. Then it might be a paraphrase of Rowbotham's point, but the reader is provided with only the vaguest of means of checking this out: '(see Rowbotham, 1973)'. How accurate a representation is it of Rowbotham's views and what are Humm's responsibilities with regard to this? I might choose to read this as an attempt to express an 'alternative consciousness of ourselves', freed of patriarchal notions of discrete selves, form-as-meaning. Humm's thesis, drawing on the female line that is Rowbotham to Humm, is that language is the only source of this 'alternative consciousness'. She subscribes to the view, counter to Mitchell and Rose, that we can work on language even as it works on us. Part of her strategy is to borrow Bakhtin's concept of extopy. With this in mind, I might now read the above extract in a slightly different way: Humm, in the spirit of extopy, is alternating her consciousness with that of Rowbotham without drawing the distinction. This then becomes an active example of Humm's 'criss-crossing of the margins of identity' with Rowbotham. This is not necessarily with

Rowbotham's knowledge. It is an imaginative enactment of the possibility: it is possible in language. As a practice, it could be compared with Dorothy Richardson's (and later Elam's) fusion and transference of identities through the simple use of the pronoun *she*. It does not take too much to achieve this effect: sl(e)ight acts of grammar. It is the kind of linguistic possibility to which Deborah Cameron does not give sufficient attention.

This interpretation of Humm's writing practice would not be too convincing if it stood alone but such acts of 'criss-crossing' multiply in her text:

More than most modernists, André Gide claimed that his texts were designed to break the limits of literature so that the 'body' of writing would melt away 'deliciously' like sugar. (p. 7)

Leaving to one side the fact that Humm specifies that Gide's claim does not grant him entry to feminist discourse since he like other male modernists, including Joyce, was 'colonising and domesticating the urban space' (p. 7), which of these, if any, are Gide's own words?

There is no reference or source given. I must acknowledge that I still want to know, at least in one of my readings of any text, whose words, which is why, when it is not specifically to illustrate a point in action, I have retained the practice of telling whose words they are. This *I* is the one who, like Gertrude Stein, enjoys reading old-fashioned detective stories for their illusion of total revelation and understanding. Extropy still feels like too big a leap, another creation of Frankenstein's, too newly emergent. For, at one level, I still read to know. I want to have to think about it, not be told, and I want to have to think again, but I want to be able to work out the rules of the game. How then do I read Humm on/to Gide? I translate 'body' as being marked as non-literal, fantasy. I read this 'body' as (the surface layer of) metaphor, partly because it has become a familiar one in feminism particularly in the context developed here, that is, aligned with the process of writing.⁴² In this reading, it is difficult to tell if Gide

⁴²I am thinking of Cixous' 'white ink'; Irigaray's *parler-femme*; Jeanette Winterson's *Written on the Body* (London: Cape, 1992). I am however increasingly aware that the label, metaphorical, is one that is applied to them and not necessarily one that is invoked by any of them.

wrote the body first or if that feminist development is being projected back onto him. Perhaps though it is my misreading which imposes these mysterious connections. Though I give as supporting evidence the fact that Humm later discusses Cixous in the context of 'writing the body' (p. 21, Humm's quotation marks). Perhaps I should read 'body' as a quote from Gide, but encompassing a more prosaic sense of bulk, mass. I have no reference point from which to check my reading out. Such absence is another simple but effective way of traducing traditional academic forms and expectations even as it legitimizes different levels of meaning and refuses yet another boundary, that between author and reader, for the meanings do not seem to come alone from one or the other but to 'criss-cross'.

If I cannot settle for whose 'body' it is, what then of 'deliciously'? Though constructed in exactly the same format, it sends out to my mind quite a different message and point. I read this unreservedly as Gide's word, albeit in translation, and I do so in part because I do not have the same access in my own experience to other literary/theoretical uses of this word as I had for 'body'. But if I read this as Gide himself then I want to read the extension and development of the theme, that is the discourse of 'deliciously' which includes 'melt' and 'sugar', as also belonging to Gide. However, these associative words do not have the same mark of conceivable ownership in Humm's text. In this way Humm succeeds in bringing this reader at least to reconsider how to read, how I am caught up in determining who speaks, and wondering anew whether one needs to know. If Humm's style were to come to be the dominant form might it erase such a need and produce that abyssal move into acceptance of undecidability?

What's In a Word?

Humm 'appropriates' and 'borrows' from the other. The first of these terms is predatory: it takes without consultation or return in mind. The latter implies a contract of agreement of a temporary nature: it includes giving back. Feminists may wish to fill old words with new

meanings which emerge out of their writing practices. I suggest that words of seeing are successfully transformed in the course of *Pilgrimage*. Paradoxically, I also suggest that the word *conversation* must retain all of its old senses of meaning to be effective as a feminist strategy, therefore resisting the Rortyan appropriation of the term,⁴³ for instance, as a narrowing of meaning, a convenient shorthand. What is different about my old notion of *conversations* is precisely not the meaning but rather the attempt to bring all of this meaning into the world of academic discourse. This is a roundabout way (for such is the nature of much conversation) of wondering what status words of appropriation have in *Border Traffic*. Is this desirable discourse? Rowbotham and Gide have had no say in Humm's creative interaction with them. Humm also silently 'appropriates' a metaphor for her own use (electric circuits, p. 10) before later sourcing it: take first, tell later. I have perpetrated similar acts. Perhaps the fact that these are fantastic voyages, Humm's being an imaginative journey into linguistic representation of a world without borders, mitigate the undertone of theft. Humm wants her readers to glance at this world, unburdened by old stories.

'Appropriation', in the sense of taking without consultation, belongs to two sets of discourse: in the first place I can assign it to the discourse of *acts of taking*, which includes 'borrow' and, as I shall later show, 'follow'; in the second I can assign it to the discourse of *violent action* and here I begin to notice how this particular mode of speech pervades Humm's text - 'assault' (p. 1), 'contestation', 'targeted' (p. 2), 'struggle', 'resistance', 'contest' (p. 3), reaching an apotheosis in 'infiltrates the terrain of literature with the guerrilla tactics of history' (p. 4). I suspect that this deliberately aggressive tactic is one that belonged to its day and that 'female resistance' (p. 3) to it is on the increase.⁴⁴ There must be other ways of speaking. I prefer Willa Cather's glorious debunking of the discourse of war:

⁴³Discussed in my opening chapter.

⁴⁴Though Humm has not stopped using it. In her recent *Feminism and Film* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997) she says: 'The goal of feminist aesthetics is to appropriate the power, if not the privilege, of such dominant images', (p. 3).

Though spring first attacked us through the orchard, the great assault, for which we children waited, came on the side of the hill next the river; it was violent, blood-red, long drawn-out, and when it was over, our hill belonged to summer.⁴⁵

I want to continue to scan this discourse of *acts of taking* within the recognition that it relates once more to the issue of feminist management of predecessors. I suggest on the basis of Humm's primary appropriations (Bakhtin and others) that she wishes to establish and maintain a male line even as she develops a female one, a position consistent with reaching the point where gender is no longer a distinguishing feature, although I am not sure that this is Humm's 'target' in the way that it is Mitchell and Rose's. Humm's undisclosed appropriations of the words of others also move towards the perspective that it is not who is speaking (though I still ask to know) but what is being said that matters: it begins to privilege event over agency in the manner of Diane Elam, and approaches other acts of linguistic piracy, though again I am not sure that this is Humm's intention. Perhaps 'borrowing' brings a different sense to Humm's borderline strolls into the speech of the other. If I choose to say 'borrow' over 'appropriate' what value pertains? In my own practice have I done any more than simply disguise acts of appropriation? This is just another version of the story of 'glance'. What power lies in a word to produce different perceptions in the reader? I think we have to try to find out and be aware that we are trying to change the story. But I will not choose to try through 'borrowing'. Having wondered whether this is a more feminist version of speech *acts of taking*, and having used it on occasion, I now turn away from it. This is because I have followed the discourse of 'borrowing' through. It troubles me in two ways: it is only a disguise unless the words/concepts are given back, or else 'borrow' loses its positive connotations of temporary rather than permanent possession; and it belongs too easily to another discourse, that of economy, so that *debt, repayment, obligation, creditor* also come

⁴⁵'Uncle Valentine', in *The Short Stories of Willa Cather*, select. and intro. by Hermione Lee (London: Virago, 1989), p. 284. ('Uncle Valentine' first published in *Woman's Home Companion* Feb/March, 1925).

into play. I am aware that the transformative notion of the gift economy of the feminine is a favourite of Irigaray's:⁴⁶ I can only say that that story never works for me.

If I am proposing that 'borrow' may express a problematic ethics in relationship to the work of precursors just as 'appropriate' may do, what then of *follow*? What ethical value might this term hold for feminisms? I hear it in the first instance as implying a lack of divergence from what goes before. I might wonder for instance if Mitchell and Rose 'follow' Lacan whereas Irigaray is 'recasting' him. Humm has 'Julia Kristeva, in particular, following Lacan,' (p. 5) and posits herself as 'humbly following Spivak' (p. 9). She does not therefore apply gender criteria to this choice. *Follow* has many meanings and might therefore seem to appeal to feminist project of multiplicity and non-specificity. However, these meanings do not produce the double vision of **contrive** but rather more of the same: to go or come after (a person or thing proceeding ahead); to come after in order of time; to take as a guide or leader; to conform to (*OED*).

Follow does not produce feminist space, and why does Humm follow Spivak 'humbly'? I have to reread this word in order to make it sound right and I believe that such rereading is justified. 'Humbly' seems ironic and perverse. If the wider context is taken to be a re(e)valuation of the ways in which theoretical lines are established, then this 'humbly' can be read as gently mocking of this process. If that context is taken to be the re(e)valuation of the female line, then it can be read as positive, as a marker of the esteem in which the female precursor is held. I also read it as a little joke about the process of producing meaning but I have to confess that I do this as a way of managing it rather than because I find it amusing. Suspicions of words to do with ongoing relationships have accumulated. I have intended to problematize Mitchell and Rose's positive reformulations and extensions and their negative recastings and jumping offs just as I do Humm's appropriations, borrowings and followings.

⁴⁶The economy of the gift without expectation of return is set up as an alternative vision to 'the dominant phallic economy': *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. by Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 24. It is not the idea that I resist, but the word 'economy' has many transformations to go through before I can hear it as *giving* without *taking*.

These semantic choices mirror the larger projects of those writers. I have no perfect alternative to offer: I want to show that we need to talk about such things. Into my own speech I have tentatively brought acts of *adoption, fostering*. These words have many meanings which include but also go **beyond** those of child care. *Adopt*: to take (a child) into a relationship which he did not previously occupy; to take up (a practice) from someone else, and use it as one's own; to accept responsibility for maintenance; to accept, embrace and formally approve. *Foster*: to promote the growth or development of; to encourage or harbour; to be favourable to; to bring up (a child) that is not one's own by birth; to cherish, nourish, indulge in a habit (*OED*). Even as I hear much more positive feminist space here for a moving relationship to one's precursors, I also hear an intriguing reversal taking place. In a moment of speech Harold Bloom's 'anxiety of influence' is erased as the ideas of our predecessors become not punitive parents but children to be cherished and nourished.⁴⁷ I might fantasize about how this productive discourse could be extended.

In this chapter so far, I claim that Hurston writes in multiple ways opening out spaces for the reader to find and move around in. I claim that Mitchell and Rose do not do anything like this, however hard I try to hear it, and that Humm treads on some dangerous ground in her attempt to listen **beyond** herself. I make a parallel claim that openness and variety evoke feminisms as I want them to be heard, just as Mitchell and Rose's telling mode fails to do so. To this extent I do express a wish that space and multiplicity in all their complexities might come to figure as "inherently feminist" (a (p)rewriting of Humm, p. 1, see later). I have been showing preference even as I recognize that I can not see where that preference would go. I want to take some responsibility for myself even as I write of fragmented, multiple

⁴⁷Though I note Bloom's claim that 'I have never been able to recognize my theory of influence when it is under attack, since what is under attack is never even an apt travesty of my ideas [...] The anxiety of influence is not an anxiety about the father, real or literary, but an anxiety achieved by and in the poem, novel, or play. Any strong literary work creatively misreads and therefore misinterprets a precursor text or texts', *The Western Canon* (p. 8). Many have 'creatively misread' Bloom. This is not how I would characterize my readings as I show how they come from the text even as I acknowledge that they may not be intended.

subjectivities and try to look **beyond** to that world in which the notion of the centrality of human agency no longer holds. Like Beckett's *Winnie* I keep on talking, telling stories within stories: I **contrive** to have it both ways.⁴⁸

These paradoxical aspects to my thinking are no less central though rather more visible than the ones I identify in the writings of Mitchell and Rose, and of Humm. Is it enough to 'recast' the problem as a solution, to say that paradox is an integral part of feminist strategy, a constant enactment of contrivance? Part of my strategy has been to spell out what I see through 'variegated' (ironic borrowing? or reincorporation of Mitchell and Rose into my story?) means, returning to the scene for yet another look from another direction, and doing so through an *I* which is cast into uncertainty through linguistic practice (*perhaps, might*) as well as a reading practice which produces multiple visions. Mitchell and Rose's enclosed world of psychoanalysis (to cast them out again) has no space for such uncertainties, though they are well within Humm's tactical armoury. Yet, to tell the larger story of that 'humbly':

I know perfectly well, humbly following Spivak (p. 9)

not only does Humm specifically place herself in the text, but it is on this occasion an intensely 'knowing' Humm. There is in grammar a hierarchy of knowing (that feminisms might seek to dissolve):

I know
I know well = an intensification
I know very well = increased intensification
I know perfectly well = absolute knowledge

Humm's knowing strategy is however placed within a text which recognizes that it is always already a story, the story of a way of writing. Here it is:

Before my narrative can fall into place, I know perfectly well, humbly following Spivak, that the strategy of these chapters must be polyphonic to match their content. (p. 9)

⁴⁸Samuel Beckett, *Happy Days* (1961), in *The Complete Dramatic Works* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), pp. 135-68.

And here is my reading and rewriting of that story. 'Narrative' semantically echoes and extends Humm's earlier recognition (which word in contradistinction to *claim* is intended to indicate that I support her) that 'feminist theory like feminist fiction is a series of useful stories' (p. 3) and justifies my 'story' reading of it. Humm's ironic 'double tongues' sound out here since it is the one voice of the absolutely knowing 'I' who chooses the many-voiced path. Coherence dictates fragmentation. This is a voice that is 'self conscious about translation' (p. 6) since it adopts a 'strategy'. Form should be as meaning (*I should say what I mean*).

Whilst Humm differs from Mitchell and Rose both in her open approach of acknowledging that her style is strategic (a stage that I suggest Mitchell and Rose also enact but do not say) and in her notion of subjectivity ('border women are not decentred fragmented individuals' (p. 6)), I start to feel a strange resonance between them which is not entirely overcome by Humm's strategic polyphony, which to some extent I have adopted in a move to extend the female line, though not at all 'humbly'. The resonance I hear is the constant eruption of certainty into texts which in different ways seek to resist this status. I have told of Mitchell and Rose's telling style, and am about to retell it in the tale of discovery and truth. Humm's knowing 'I' is not confined to the explicit representation of it in 'I know perfectly well'. I think that her overwhelming aim to find common ground, similarity-in-difference, to establish a unified feminist voice that can speak and act, leads her to produce this kind of construction:

The point of these stories is to emphasise that women's writing is flexible and lively, pregnant from living in dangerous intimacy with tradition.
(p. 9)

My question is: how can Humm 'know perfectly well' what 'the point' is and, what is more, that it is the subject of emphasis? As she has just said, 'each writer's story, each writer's crossing, cannot easily be amassed into a single perspective' (p. 9). But, in then reaching 'the point', she seems to be creating just such 'a single perspective'. If Humm were to

acknowledge that this (repeated) collapse of the imaginative many into the knowing one is also a strategy, perhaps born out of political necessity, then, I think she would herself be in less 'dangerous intimacy with [the] tradition' which claims that there is one right and same 'point' to be reached within each and every text, however different each might appear. It sounds too much as if this pregnancy arises out of union with an old ghost.

Discoveries and Inventions

Why? Why must I? Why must I be realistic about an invention?⁴⁹

This status of knowing in both Humm's and Mitchell and Rose's texts, as differentiated from Elam's 'politics of the undecidable' and 'moments of achievement', can be put into question again from other angles. It has always been in the background of my thoughts on Mitchell and Rose and now comes to the fore. It is a lively issue within feminisms and is one more way of approaching Martin's reading of Hurston: Martin wants Hurston to tell us what (Martin thinks) we need to know;⁵⁰ Hurston shows us many different things told in many different voices. Knowing becomes a shifting terrain. I want to explore this terrain through drawing on the distinctions in meaning between discovery and invention. I am aware here that I am constructing a boundary rather than eliminating it and setting up a binary opposition within which I favour one term over the other - the very processes that feminisms have taught me to resist. I can only acknowledge this as a conscious strategy for now, hoping that an old

⁴⁹Jeanette Winterson, *Art and Lies: A Piece for Three Voices and a Bawd* (London: Cape, 1994), p. 102. Henceforth referred to as *Art and Lies*.

⁵⁰She is not the only one to have such a prescriptive programme. Cheri Register, in 'American Feminist Literary Criticism: A Bibliographic Introduction', in *Feminist Literary Criticism: Explorations in Theory*, 2nd edn, ed. by Josephine Donovan, (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1989), pp. 1-28, wants and outlines 'a "prescriptive" criticism that attempts to set standards for literature that is "good" from a feminist viewpoint' (p. 2). The author of such literature 'need only describe the problems and offer some solutions, if the character herself can find them. The remaining tasks involved in consciousness-raising are left to the reader' (p. 24). This may have had some weight in 1975 when first published, but in spite of Donovan's attempts to explain and enlarge upon Register's ' "prescriptive" criticism' in the second edition (pp. xii-xiv and p. 75) it has found little support.

transporter will take me to a new land. And in doing so, also acknowledge that I cannot shake free of dominant ways so easily to (e)merge into the other. As I will go on to show in the next chapter, Angela Carter explores grammatical enactments of boundary fusions, but I read this practice as an exploration, the question behind it being the persistent one: what might it mean if all kinds of boundaries could be elided?⁵¹ It would not be difficult to deconstruct this particular boundary between discovery and invention, for, as *Art and Lies* tells, they both come from the same Latin root meaning ‘to come upon [...] to find that which exists’ (p. 199). My retention of it then can be read as an artificial construct. For I want to call on the difference between the process of discovery, that is of finding (out) what is always already there, and of invention, that is of creating by thought, devising (*OED*).

Both Rose and Elam, in their different ways, say that the category *woman* is an invention of patriarchy: there is no essential feature that marks her so. There is no *woman* to be found. Other feminists believe, also in different ways, that there is a truth about woman which patriarchal structures have concealed and which it is the aim of feminism to discover. Their story has an ending though it has yet to be written. My concern lies in the representations and embodiments of these various theoretical positionings. The discovery story might be briefly told: feminists will discover the truth of woman. The invention one would require something like (and here I take on Rose’s mantle): psychoanalysis has discovered that the truth of *woman* is an invention.

The problem I then identify is that all sense of discovery must be suspect in this inventive story. This problem returns me to Lacan’s borrowed tale, ‘I am lying’. How, philosophically, can you say *I know it to be true that there is nothing true* without raising doubt about the status of the first *true*? Rose’s footnote reading of this Lacan finds evidence

⁵¹The boundary between child and adult is a moveable invention across histories and cultures. In Britain, for instance, the Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1885 raised the age of consent for girls from thirteen to sixteen. In the other direction, the issue of the age at which criminal responsibility is accepted is under discussion in England and Wales. The imposition of artificial boundaries may be viewed from feminist perspective as both necessary and positive.

of the fragmented self in that it contains two speaking subjects - the speaker of the truth and the speaker of the lie. I prefer to read it now, in a Derridean moment, as a endless chain of attempts to make definitive statements: the truth is at best always deferred. Consequently, and against my best intentions, I now put "discovery" into questionable status. From here, I want to reread Mitchell and Rose (who may consider that I have crossed one border too many in taking their texts as one here) through looking at their story as the discovery of the invention that is *woman*.

Mitchell and Rose, I claim, claim for Freud the status of the discoverer of the truth that has always been there, rather than the inventor who creates yet another version of the story that tries to make sense of human being, one that feminism(s) might embrace and indeed embroider. The whole force (and I choose that word) of their text is to establish the essential truth that there is no truth which is woman.⁵² I can find no justification within the text for reading this as a strategic move since they adopt the style of reporting events rather than engaging in a debate on processes. All the action is written out just as they have written out themselves. Here is an episode from their story which will illustrate some of their discursive patterns of knowing:

For Lacan, the description of sexuality in developmental terms invariably loses sight of Freud's most fundamental discovery - that the unconscious never ceases to challenge our apparent identity as subjects. (Rose, p. 30)

There are lexical markers of rigidity here in 'invariably' and 'never ceases': these leave no space for exception or variation. The present tense conveys the endless continuation of this

⁵²I might find this less surprising if the status of 'man' was equally brought into question, rather than seeming to be confirmed through woman's absence. The fact that anyone can take up the position of man or woman does not resolve the initial differentiation between the relative status of each position. Diane Elam does acknowledge that man is equally 'unknowable' (Note 2, p. 128).

position.⁵³ And crucially, in a revival of the grammatical hierarchy of intensification, this ‘discovery’ carries the heaviest possible weight of its revelatory meaning. We could have

Freud’s discovery
Freud’s fundamental discovery
Freud’s most fundamental discovery

For the latter, with its double intensification, to exist, so must the others: there have been Freud’s fundamental discovery and Freud’s discovery. Rose’s Freud is riddled with discoveries. Once more, this format closes down debate and discourages an active reading. It tells rather than suggests or imagines. Meaning is given rather than explored. The text does require an active reader but the activity is born out of the complexity of the text and the need to know what is being told rather than a responsive engagement. This telling, which I have referred to throughout as the tone of both Mitchell and Rose’s texts, is enhanced by their propensity to anticipate and close down challenges as in Mitchell’s evocation and resolution of the contradictions in Freud’s own work. To put my problem with their tone in another way by returning to their absence from the text: what is the ethical relationship of Mitchell and Rose to their predecessors? Rose’s story above began, ‘for Lacan,’ but then proceeds to her interpretation of Lacan’s view, rather than a direct quote (and without the ambivalence of Humm on Rowbotham). Mitchell goes a step further into Lacan’s shoes with ‘Lacan would argue’ (p. 24 and again p. 25). This is a blatant form of supposition and assumption. But someone might say that it enacts a principle both of conversation (introducing another voice) and of ethical engagement with the other. I would hear *Lacan might argue* as encapsulating that imaginative moment of communion, where the modal works to assure rather than to concede qualification; and *Lacan argues* as implying direct reference. The problem would not arise if Mitchell or Rose were present, as in *I think that*. I am not accrediting Mitchell and Rose with sole ownership of the style they do choose: it might be explained away as traditional academic style. Indeed, this is part of my problem

⁵³Present tense is the norm for academic discourse but this must be set against Mitchell and Rose’s use of the past tense on many an occasion: ‘Lacan conceived’ (p. 1), ‘Freud assumed’ (p. 11).

with it. What it cannot be explained as, to my mind - to put it at its strongest - is feminist discourse. Nor is it in my reading an embodiment of form as meaning. The paradox is in there. 'Lacan would argue' suggests that the speaker of these words has access to Lacan's mind, to how he would respond. This might be expected of a writer who is a psychoanalyst, and one who seeks to enhance the overall presentation of psychoanalysis as a complete and known identity ever since 'Lacan offered psychoanalytic theory the new science of linguistics' (Mitchell, p. 5). (She might have said *invented*.) Within this completed scenario, imaginative responses are inappropriate. But, at the same time, this knowing the state of the other is strangely in contradiction to the crucial psychoanalytic insight that there is no unified subjectivity, no single mind within to which anyone could have access. Bearing in mind Mitchell and Rose's central project of adopting the decentring of the authoritative *I* (for feminism), is it not particularly ironic that Mitchell, who largely excludes herself, encloses her text into Lacan's most concentrated self? For Mitchell begins:

Jacques Lacan dedicated himself

and ends

Lacan dedicates himself.

Mitchell's discourse seems to have revived him. And the very text (and now I have separated it from Rose's) which sets out to negate coherent subjectivity is already always encompassed within its own contradiction both semantically - since 'dedicated/s' implies a single-mindedness of pursuit - and grammatically - since that repeating, obligatory complementary 'himself' sounds out an intensification of that self. Does it not begin to echo another dangerous male inventor voiced by a woman:

I had dedicated myself.⁵⁴

⁵⁴*Frankenstein*, p. 38.

Mitchell had choices. She could have chosen the less intense *Lacan was dedicated* or she could have chosen to 'mirror' his theoretical position throughout by avoiding such authoritative pronouncements. Her actual choice gives an intensely paradoxical status to her text: in effect the reiterating dedicated self, returned to itself, could be said to undermine the contrary argument which is enclosed within it. This might be the ironic and ethical feminist act after all. I wonder.

What Have I Done?

As Humm recognizes throughout *Border Traffic*:

it is impossible to argue a convincing case that there is anything *inherently* feminine in any one literary form. (p. 1, her emphasis)

I have begun to answer back to this. I have tried to keep the conversation going on questions around how women might practise writing - and reading writing. I have intended to place the emphasis on feminist necessity to think and write about the detail of how language works, and begun to think how we might intervene into these processes. Another discourse in the making. I have not been kind to Mitchell and Rose and perhaps I should come to recognize that it is not that they should not write as they do but that we must produce more resources with which to read such writing. I shall continue to wonder if feminist theories can find space in grammar: ways of saying what *she* means and meaning what *she* says. In my last chapter, I will look to Angela Carter for some grammatical adventures in wonderland as a way of starting another conversation even as I draw this one to a close.

Chapter Five: Way Out Through Opening Doors, Reading *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* and *Heroes and Villains*

There had been two cases of suspected plague.¹

Through the previous chapters, I have begun to look at ways of speaking that feminists may choose to adopt and foster. In drawing this particular conversation to a close I want to show that the attitude I propose - that certain grammatical options and propensities favour feminist intentions more than others - can have wider application than to those issues raised so far. I shall turn to the grammar of border crossing and of women's time. This move does not necessarily endorse these ideas as central to feminist thinking but rather seeks to advance the claim that any feminist notion can be given grammatical voice once we try to hear it. This claim comes with warnings (of the need for continuous engagement and assessment) but also with hope. It aims to produce an attitude towards a process rather than a conclusive feminist grammar. For these explorations, I return to the writings of Angela Carter.

Infernal Border Crossings

There is a considerable history of border crossing in both feminist theoretical and fictional texts. I have already engaged with Maggie Humm's version of the former,² and would identify Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* as one well known example of the latter. At first sight, Carter's *Dr Hoffman* may seem to be once more a sustained investigation into the construction of subjectivity and indeed it can be read in this way. I also read it as a parodic enactment of the theories of Freud and Lacan pushed in practice to the point of absurdity:

¹*Dr Hoffman*, p. 21

²And Haraway's 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs' is 'an argument for pleasure in the confusion of boundaries' (p. 191).

Dr Hoffman's gigantic generators sent out a series of seismic vibrations which made great cracks in the hitherto immutable surface of the time and space equation we had informally formulated in order to realize our city and, out of these cracks, well - nobody knew what would come next. (p. 17)

And, like Nicole Ward Jouve, I read it as a critique of *écriture féminine*:³

life itself had become nothing but a complex labyrinth and everything that could possibly exist, did so. And so much complexity - a complexity so rich it can hardly be expressed in language - all that complexity ... it bored me. (p. 11)

But it is as an exploration of grammatical border crossings that it really entices me. I call this the enactment of (con)fusion.

The discourse of boundaries infuses the text on narrative, semantic and visibly metaphorical levels:

Dr Hoffman appeared to me to be proliferating his weaponry of images along the obscure and controversial borderline between the thinkable and the unthinkable (p. 22)

I strolled beside the margin of the water [...], watching the dancing white lace hems of the petticoats of the ocean (pp. 60-61)

and the chapter that I focus on to begin with, 'The Mansion of Midnight', is itself 'on the crepuscular threshold' (p. 55) between one strange world and the others about to come. If boundaries between one thing and another can be shown to be constructions of our minds rather than in any way real, then we are well on the path towards erasing binary modes of thinking as valid. This seems to be a story of feminist value. However, in asserting my claim that *Dr Hoffman* may be read as an imaginative exploration of the consequences of a range of

³She reads *The Passion of New Eve* and *The Sadeian Woman* as 'counter-tracts' to Lacan and Cixous 'in particular'. She also believes that 'it is almost certain [Carter] knew exactly what she was doing', in 'Mother is a Figure of Speech ...' (sic) in *Flesh and the Mirror*, pp. 136-70 (p. 163).

contemporary theories brought to life and revealed in all their folly, I do not absent border crossings from this absurd scenario, for:

it seemed that nature had absolved her creations from an adherence to the formal divisions so biology and botany were quite overthrown and the only animals we saw, green-fleshed, marsupial, one-eyed, crawling things, seemed more an ambulant vegetable than anything else. (p. 171)

What I am interested in is the ways in which Carter plays this (e)mergent game with punctuation. Perhaps I will find that she does things that feminists might foster even if this was not her intention. Specifically, I will tell a story about the presence or absence of a comma. Here I diverge to create a background for this tale.

In a 1995 interview, the journalist and playwright, Patrick Marber, is asked if there is ‘anything he doesn’t do well?’⁴ He replies:

‘I can’t punctuate [...] I’ve never really understood the difference between a colon and a semi-colon.’
How about the humble comma?
‘I’m completely conversant with comma. Comma I can do.’

I would suggest that this confidence arises because Marber has yet to glance at the comma and see what it can do. He has not looked beyond Gertrude Stein’s ‘servile’ comma which ‘by helping you along holding your coat for you and putting on your shoes keeps you from living your life as actively as you should lead it’.⁵ Both Quirk *et al* and Dorothy Richardson see further. The former, noting the potentiality of the ‘humble’ comma, define three main purposes for its presence: it can produce clarity; it can produce a moment of suspension, a gap; and it can produce optionality, as in non-defining clauses. It affects meaning. There is a wealth of difference between *a solid silver dish* and *a solid, silver dish*. It is a trick that was known to potentially devastating effect by the late Conservative Government. Referring to

⁴*Observer*, 5 February 1995, p. 5.

⁵‘Poetry and Grammar’, in *Writing and Lectures 1911-1945*, p. 129.

the Anglo-Irish Declaration, always in a delicate state of negotiation, the *Guardian* comments on a now notorious government statement:

Even the declaration that John Major's government has 'no selfish strategic or economic interest in Northern Ireland' is not what it seems. One British minister is alleged to have said: 'I hope you noticed that there's no comma between selfish and strategic.'⁶

The comma, in its presence or absence, can have a devastating effect on meaning. Perhaps, to revert for a moment to form and meaning, in a way this 'declaration' illuminates the intricate distinction that I have tried to draw out. For the *Guardian* reporter comments that it 'is not what it seems'. The implication of this is that it will be misread, an incorrect meaning taken from it, unless one reads with attention the form in which it is presented.⁷

Dorothy Richardson, too, is well aware of the flexibility and power of the comma. In 'About Punctuation' she characterizes it as 'the angel, or the devil, amongst the stops' which 'plays its pranks unobtrusively' (p. 994). She draws out the primary effects of the presence or absence of 'helpful' punctuation and shows how it can be made to match the mood of the moment. Thus, in her own writing practice in *Pilgrimage*, the expansiveness of 'the great dark open space in front of the church' (II, p. 30) contrasts with 'the tedium of the long series of small, precise, attention-demanding movements' (II, p. 40). Richardson also shows that it is the absence of commas that makes the reader listen to the text as well as see it: the required 'slow, attentive reading demanded by unpunctuated texts' gives us this time to listen ('About Punctuation', p. 990). Quirk *et al*, in their recognition of the waywardness implicit in the comma, suggest some guidelines. Its presence or absence should reflect 'a measure of our wish that the punctuation should endorse the meaning' (p. 1617) bearing in mind the principle that 'the closer the relation between the parts of a sentence, the less need there is for

⁶Michael White, 'The Gift of Tired Tongues', *Guardian*, 30 September 1994, p. 26. It was Peter Brooke who made the 'no selfish strategic or economic interest' statement. It was incorporated into the joint framework document.

⁷A similar kind of process has been brought to light through the infamous claim of the then (1996) Conservative Minister, David Willetts, that 'he wants our advice'.

punctuation'. In a different emphasis from that of Richardson, they advise that a comma 'is also desirable on occasion where its absence might cause the reader to stumble' (p. 1627). I want to suggest that Carter exploits 'the devil' in the comma and relishes making her reader 'stumble'. The rules of grammar have no more certain status in her text than the rules of reality have in Dr. Hoffman's creative hands. Both lead to (con)fusion, the unexpected. Old boundaries no longer hold: new kinds of connections come into being. I shall tell the first part of this grammatical story of *Dr Hoffman* by showing an abundance of commas:

Inside each one, underneath the item it represented, was a sign, clumsily lettered by hand, giving a title. (p. 44)

It would be possible to reproduce this text omitting all commas without introducing confusion as to its meaning:

Inside each one underneath the item it represented was a sign clumsily lettered by hand giving a title.

Indeed this reformulation flows from one piece of related information to the next, rather in the manner of Quirk *et al*'s steps, or a series of building blocks, and, I think, it is the presence rather than the absence of commas which causes the reader to 'stumble' through repeated moments of suspension. I might further venture that Carter's comma-bound version mimics writing as speech which has been reworked to the point of absurdity. Yet again I risk attributing intent to the author through showing specific moments of text.⁸ And these two dangerous aspects of my thesis, form and meaning, and authorial intent, come together in the second part of this story, the absence of the comma:

A startled gull started up from a perch upon an iron wheel with a wild beating of wings as I came in and swooped around the interior until it found the exit. (p. 42)

⁸I have in fact a longer story to tell about commas in *Dr Hoffman* which reinforces this claim that their presence or absence is strategic, but that is for another occasion. I do think that the close proximity of these two very distinct ways of punctuating supports my claim that they are intended (to be noticed).

Simply, who 'swooped'? This time it is not that there are no contenders but rather that there is one too many. Desiderio's statement is full of startling complexities of textuality and grammar. Several linguistic games come together to create this effect. The reader is quickly confronted with the close link, in visual, aural and semantic terms, of the adjective 'startled' and the verb 'started'. Already the concentrated process to (con)fuse boundaries is under way. The total absence of commas serves to produce misreadings and rereadings. The reader has no choice but to listen to the text as well as see it, producing a 'slow attentive reading'. This process is heightened because textuality and punctuation are in opposition to each other. At the level of textual cohesion, 'gull', 'perch', 'wings' and 'swooped' can all belong to the category of birds and indeed may do so. Against this is the difficulty, in a first reading at least, of sorting out where all those prepositional phrases belong. The reader may surmise that, as in the earlier example, each builds upon the one that precedes it. I might call this the patriarchal reading - linear, progressive. But any such reading, able to manage 'upon an iron wheel' as a development of 'from a perch', is in some difficulty with the subsequent 'with a wild beating of wings' which, in its switch from inanimate to animate, requires some readjustment. The reader is likely to reassess that this latter phrase harks back to the 'startled gull'. A progressive reading is shifting into a circular one.

The next double take however is insoluble: who 'swooped'? The general rule of grammar is that if there is subject elision in the second of two clauses then the expectation is that the same subject holds for both actions. This would produce a scenario here which can be reformulated as *I came in and I swooped around the interior*. I will call this the forward reading. However, as the reader continues, there is a strong impulse to reassess this reading and to substitute the gull as the one who 'swooped around the interior until it found the exit'. I will call this the backward reading. My claim is that there is no easy resting place in either: neither can be established as correct: no clear boundary exists between what the gull does and what Desiderio does: every reading of this sentence has the reader 'swooping around [its] interior' looking for 'the exit'. And this is so because the absence of commas draws out the

inherent complexities of other linguistic features. Any attempt to insert clarity is to alter, restrict or impose meaning. I read this sentence as an exploration of not-patriarchal ways of speaking, strategically produced, and created out of accessible tools of grammar in contrast to the complexity of *écriture féminine*.

This is not the only boundary game played with commas to be found in *Dr Hoffman*. In the chapter, 'The Acrobats of Desire', where the fluid antics of the acrobats might be said to be reflected in the grammar, a different kind of uncertainty is invoked by the following:

this was a very difficult task for the essence of the Hoffman theory was the fluidity of its structure. (p. 100)

I want to insist here that Carter is exploring the possibility of enacting the semantics of the text in its grammar: this is not to insist that she exhibits the practice as feminist, but rather that I find it an altogether intriguing prospect for feminisms. Not so much form and meaning as grammar and meaning, encapsulating 'a measure of our wish that the punctuation should endorse the meaning', so that the grammar above endorses 'the fluidity of its structure'. In the absence of commas the 'double tongue' inside the English language becomes visible. This works through the associated choice of *for* over *because* as the link word. A reading of *Dr Hoffman* which investigates *for* will reveal multiple examples of its use as a conjunction denoting explanation where *because* might reasonably be substituted.

Punctuation is not always absent. We are told of the Alligator Man's

picturesquely crazy father, who spent his time building an ark on the bayou, for he believed the second Flood was imminent. (p. 111)

For reverberates with more meaning than *because* since it is also a preposition. The following creations may help to draw out the points that I want to make:

I went to the shop on the corner for butter. I went to the shop on the corner for butter was cheaper there. I went to the shop on the corner for you. I went to the shop on the corner for you were unwell.

In the absence of commas, the first time reader (and this is where John Bayley, in limiting himself to one reading of Carter, produces a limited reading) is not sure where to stop for *butter/you* may signal a moment of suspension in both instances. It is only by reading on, and then rereading with adjusted tonality, that the reader can overcome this duality. And as Fish insists, 'mistakes' and 'false surmises' are part of meaning (p. 163, see also p. 47 and p. 159). Textual boundaries have the same 'fluidity' of 'structure' as Hoffman's theory and the acrobats. For, the reader does not know at the outset where to pause or whether *butter/you* is the complement of what has gone before or the subject of what is still to come. 'The essence of the Hoffman theory' might have been the end of the matter. The irony in the punctuated occasion of the Alligator Man's father's activities is that such double tongues are not present, since, with the exception of *you*, English grammar distinguishes the case of its pronouns so that 'he' immediately signals the start of a new clause and the potential 'false surmise' is quickly averted. The game can however be played with any noun, as English does not have case markings, and it can be prolonged: 'I would go to the Opera House for the inhuman stylization of opera naturally appealed to me very much' (p. 16). In my readings, I have stopped in 'false surmise' after 'opera' and 'naturally': rereadings draw attention to the sounds that I attribute to words as I read them. Carter induces the reader to follow Dorothy Richardson's injunction to listen to the text as well as to see it. Whereas it can never be established who 'swooped', attentive rereadings here will bring out clarity of meaning. The comma, in conjunction with other linguistic features, can produce both permanent and temporary uncertainty. It is 'angel' and 'devil' but never 'humble'.

My insistence that Carter intends to play such linguistic games is sustained by comments in her Preface to her radio plays, *Come Unto These Yellow Sands*.⁹ She talks of 'play' and 'tricks', but these games are always also serious fun. She sets out in the wider sense

⁹(Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1985). Further reference is given to this edition after quotations in the text.

to explore ideas, although for me, that is the same thing as telling stories since, for me, a narrative is an argument stated in fictional terms. (p. 7)

More specifically, for my purposes and understanding, she claims that

language itself [...] can release itself entirely from the conventions of everyday speech, can explore all kinds of rhetorical devices and linguistic tricks in order to do the work of sustaining an imaginary world. (p. 8)

I have adopted her notion that the process is one of exploration, and I might visualize that one of the 'imaginary worlds' that might thus be sustained is the world in which feminist perspective is woven into the very fabric of its being. I want now to turn to another 'argument stated in fictional terms' and to begin to read *Heroes and Villains* as an exploration of women's time. Although this notion may be best known through Kristeva,¹⁰ I take it in a wider and more general sense to mean all senses of time that do not conform to the linear, progressive, building blocks approach to time that is associated with the straight line illusion that patriarchy strives to maintain.

A Timely Intervention into *Heroes and Villains*

Pythagorean opposites abound in *Heroes and Villains*. This text can be read as the confrontation between the forces of patriarchy, the old ways, represented by the Professors and their obedient soldiers, and those of the irrational wild chaotic world of the left hand side come to fruition in the Barbarians. Marianne is the one who crosses from one world into the other, and significantly, there is no clear line as to whether this is an act of escape (Marianne as agent) or of kidnap (Jewel as agent):

'If I come with you, remember I'm coming of my own free will.'
'Oh, yeah. Sure.' (p. 24)

¹⁰I discuss Kristeva's version in chapter two.

I might say then that somehow Marianne **contrived** to find herself in the other world.

My reading of this text as an exploration of notions of time has a basis in its textuality, which is mirrored in its grammar. It is a post-apocalyptic tale, 'surviving the blast' (p. 2), so already outside of time. Yet it is recounted in the traditional past tense narrative, so it is already in some strange world of the past in the future. Within this other time, there is a blatant distinction made from the outset between the old time of the father who 'owned a clock which he wound every morning' (p. 1), and the alternative time of Marianne, the girl-becoming-woman, whom that clock 'did not impress' (p. 1). Marianne is always already outside of the old idea of time: 'she never felt that time was passing for time was frozen around her in this secluded place' (p. 1). The grammatical tales of multiple times that I will tell are figured in the text for

the time-scale of the community stretched out years for ever and also somehow cancelled them out, so an event could as well have taken place yesterday or ten years before. (p. 9)

Once I begin to read *Heroes and Villains* as a story about time certain aspects come to the fore.

My first grammatical tale depends on the interplay between the fact that 'it can [...] be rather difficult, in practice, to distinguish the different meanings of the past tense' (Quirk *et al*, p. 187), and the absence of time adverbials which would aid this distinguishing act:

Marianne found a piece of biscuit in her pocket and ate it. She wore a checked skirt and a brown sweater. She had long, blonde pigtails. She broke things to see what they were like inside. (p. 4)

These four sentences consist not only of a parallel declarative structure, thus encouraging the reception that they share further parallel conditions, but also a structure most simple and direct. It is that kind of structure which Frankenstein avoids at crucial moments. There is a pattern, but it seems to be one of excessive simplicity. There is no confusion of referents; none of the garden-path features found in *Dr Hoffman*. And yet there is something complex

going on here. It is the story of time. I might say, taking liberties with Carter's writing times, that here is the beginning of an exploration and representation of Mendoza's dream of 'fissile time - of exploding the diatonic scale with its two notes, past and present, into a chromatic fanfare of every conceivable tense and many tenses at present inconceivable because there is no language to describe them' (*Dr. Hoffman*, p. 103). I will say that Carter has created, through the simplest of strategies, a sense of multiple coexisting times, both stretching and shrinking time. How do I justify this reading?

Each main clause, in a series of assertions,¹¹ has a verb in the simple past form: 'found', 'ate', 'wore', 'had' and 'broke'. Already there is deceptive potential since 'had', the simple past of 'have', is so often used and experienced as an auxiliary verb to represent a different temporal aspect (*had gone, had been going to go*) that it can disguise its place in time. Each of these parallel verbal constructions, however, against the pull to read them in the same way, expresses a different sense of time. Of course, in this explication I am doing the very thing that the text does not: I am putting time back in to show how it has been left out; and doing so by relying on norms and conventions. I have to accept the world of the father before I can disassemble it: 'that red mark' is still visible. Quirk *et al* once more provide aid and vocabulary.

They outline three primary time-scales which exist, in different ways, in all tenses (pp. 177-87). These are: **state**, **event** and **habitual time**.¹² An example of each, using the simple past, will help to convey the difference.

State: *she had a bad cold*

Event: *she had a cup of tea*

Habit: *she took the bus to work (everyday)*

¹¹The embedded clause, 'what they were like', is of a different category and therefore excluded from the discussion.

¹²These technical terms are marked in bold simply for purposes of clarity in the argument that follows.

As Quirk *et al* point out (p. 178), *have* can carry both a **stative** meaning (bad cold) and a dynamic one (cup of tea). They make a ‘rough-and ready’ distinction (p. 178). Borders bleed. They make a further ‘rough distinction’, important for my argument, between **states** and **qualities**, where the latter marks ‘relatively permanent and inalienable properties’ (p. 200).

State: *she had a bad cold*

Quality: *she had blue eyes*

This distinction makes visible the ways in which grammar interacts with our sense of how things are. As more and more of those aspects thought ‘relatively permanent’ (**quality**) become changeable - with contact lenses for instance - different grammatical explanations and categories will emerge. This is one of those moments where, like bell hooks, I can only show what I mean by invoking the very categories (of time) that I want to bring into question, through my reading of *Heroes and Villains*:

Marianne found a piece of biscuit in her pocket and ate it.

‘Found’ and ‘ate’ are dynamic verbs: they mark an **event** that happened and is completed. The semantics (‘a piece of biscuit’, ‘it’) convey that this event lasted moments rather than hours, days or years.

She wore a checked skirt and a brown sweater.

Wear is one of those verbs which hovers between **state** and **event**:

She wore her hair long: **state**, though not necessarily **quality**

She wore her everyday dress: **state, event**, (or **habit**), depending on context

She wore her best dress: **event**?

She wore a secretive air: **event**, of variable duration

I hope it will be apparent that context could turn something from **state** into **event, event** into

habit: *she wore a secretive air every time she opened her diary.* I hope it will also be

apparent that the absence of textual markers will open up multiple time-scale possibilities. There is room for confusion. Less is more. I want to draw out the potential for playing on such possibilities.

Marianne 'wore a checked skirt and a brown sweater'. For how long? Your reading determines whether this encapsulates a **state**, **habit** or **event**. What expectations inform your reading? Dominant structures do not remain unchanged. Muriel Spark writes of her grandmother having two dresses, one for everyday wear and one for special occasions.¹³

What markers of convention operate in a world in which 'Marianne's nurse, a Worker woman with six fingers on each hand [...] puzzled Marianne for she herself had only five' (p. 2)? In this world beyond time, as the reader accompanies Marianne, s/he loses the notion of abiding conventions (a world where most people had five fingers) against which all else can be measured (but the nurse had six). Another time I might read this moment as a play on the inadequacy of a binary system of thought: comparing oneself to the other does not produce knowledge. Philosophical themes are engaged at the level of grammar as well as narrative. There are several ways in which the time-scale could have been established unequivocally. Such clarity can be induced through either modification of the verbal construction or insertion of a time adverbial, or both:

She used to wear a checked skirt

She wore a checked skirt everyday/once

She used to wear a checked skirt everyday/once (where *once* changes its temporal aspect)

Perhaps I have not been entirely fair, since the reader is informed that the Workers and other women 'pressed best clothes' for the May Day Festival. But it is precisely this occasion from which Marianne is 'scooped' (p. 3), so its rules cannot apply to her. However, I propose that the wearing of these clothes lasts longer than her 'piece of biscuit' does. There is a different sense of time expressed in these two similarly voiced assertions.

¹³*Curriculum Vitae: Autobiography* (first published UK: Constable, 1992; this edn London: Penguin 1993), p. 88.

Then again

She had long, blonde pigtails.

For how long? Is it **quality** or **state**? Once more the reader cannot pin this down. However it does seem fair to propose that, whether **quality** or **state**, having 'long, blonde pigtails' would be of longer duration than the **state** or **event** of wearing 'a checked skirt and a brown sweater'. (Though in this text of 'curious reversal' we learn that, on the borderline of her entry into the other world, Marianne 'found a pair of scissors and chopped off all her long, fair hair' (p. 15), drowned her father's clock, and once into this other world 'had scarcely taken off her clothes for weeks' (p. 114).) Time is being stretched out with each succeeding sentence.

She broke things to see what they were like inside.

The question is not how long this time but rather did this happen once (**event**) or is it a **habit**? I feel a strong pressure to make sense by placing it in **habitual** time (and this is to acknowledge once more that this act of making sense is still a powerful one for me), thus indicative of a recurring activity with every expectation that it will continue into the future. This reading attributes to this simple past tense the recurring time of past and future. And, ironically, the one time that Marianne can not break things is the present, since she is 'miraculously translated from the business of the kitchens' to 'the bare boards' in 'a high room nobody used' (p. 3).

It is when I reformulate Carter's text by clarifying the time structures as I have chosen to understand them, that is by putting time back in, that I really see how Carter, by omitting such indicators, has 'miraculously translated' the reader's perception of time through grammar rather than theory. In my rewriting, the time indicators are underlined:

Marianne found a piece of biscuit in her pocket and ate it straight away. That day she was wearing a checked skirt and a brown sweater. She still had long, blonde pigtails. She used to break things to see what they were like inside.

Carter has thrown off such limitations. She produces four different times from one form, four different times in one form. Less is very much more.

But that is not the end of this particular story. It continues:

Her brother was sixteen, ten years older than she. Her nurse said: 'You ought to love your brother' and Marianne asked: 'Why?' Now she was left alone and forgotten, high in the tower on such a beautiful day. (p. 4)

The games go on. In the first of these sentences, in a structure common to English, two times are present as one: 'her brother was sixteen' at that particular point in time, the narrative's present, but he will always be 'ten years older than she'. Except, of course, in this world of 'curious reversals', Marianne is about to see her brother die so that he will always be sixteen, no longer to be 'ten years older than she'. There follows a series of observations, side by side, bereft of explanatory indicators. Are we to read this as the enactment of a child's thought processes,¹⁴ and/or as a more general attempt to disestablish the old ways of making connections?

Her nurse said: 'You ought to love your brother' and Marianne asked 'Why?'

Adrift without temporal indicators, I am left to wonder if this was a one-off **event**, like eating the biscuit, or a **habitual** activity, like breaking things. A *once* or a *used to say* would clear the matter either way. But such are not the rules of Carter's game. There is an overt textual link between this sentence and the previous one: her brother. If it is once more the absence of time links which creates a sense of double time, the insertion of one such link does nothing to establish clarity:

Now she was left alone and forgotten, high in the tower on such a beautiful day.

¹⁴It is very difficult to be sure in *Heroes and Villains* whose point of view is being shown. There are mysteries from the outset (see its second paragraph) but my evidence for this claim constitutes another story.

This dramatic intervention of the present and proximate deictic, 'now', (as opposed to the past and remote *then*) throws the reader into another time. S/he may read it as a signal of interior monologue, as evidence that we are inside Marianne's mind. And s/he may read it further as expression of Marianne's child-like perception of causal relationships: *I asked why I ought to love my brother and now this has happened*. But these are only possibilities, not certitudes. Gertrude Stein tells us that 'sentences are not emotional but paragraphs are' (p. 131). This paragraph of Carter's is a fine demonstration of this perception since the last sentence completes the charmed circle like the 'snakes tattooed round her wrists; the tail of each snake disappeared succinctly into its own mouth' (p. 44). For we are returned to the opening event, only this tail has another twist to tell:

When she finished her biscuit, she was still hungry and gnawed the end of her plait for want of anything better. (p. 4)

That earlier 'ate', of which I was so confident, is not such a simple past tense after all. In Quirk *et al*'s analysis, the verb *to eat* is presumed to have 'resultative meaning' (p. 211), but this seemingly instantaneous action turns out to have stretched to last over the intervening reflections. I might now amend my temporal reformulation to read *began to eat*. Carter shows in this 'emotional' paragraph that, simply by the omission of temporal clues, the common resources of English can enact the expansion and contraction of time. Again, I find myself insisting that Carter, in this text of time, knowingly plays with such ideas, though not insisting that she endorses them as either valuable or necessary to feminisms. She shows some grammatical possibilities, and I want feminisms to think about their potential.

Carter can differentiate between general and specific time as well as produce double or multiple time, as this exchange between Jewel and Marianne illuminates:

'Are you scared of dying?'
 'What, you mean generally?'
 'No,' he said. 'This minute.'
 'Not until you mentioned it. Then I felt a pang.' (p. 29)

Already, Jewel's present, is Marianne's past. As Jewel will shortly tell his tribeswoman, Marianne 'knows which way time runs' and it is not the way of the old world, for he continues: 'a snake bit her but she didn't die, she walked on' (p. 31).

Heroes and Villains, like *The Magic Toyshop* before it, ends on a note of silence, of nothing more to be said:

'No more,' he said and relapsed into silence. (p. 151)

The speaker, the 'idiot' boy, is, like Marianne, outside of the outside world of the Barbarians. This is not merely a one-off event, a lapse into silence, but a relapse. It signals recurring, habitual time. I read it as an indicator that the reader should relapse into the text, try one more time to fathom its unfathomable message and in so doing begin to have a new kind of habitual experience for herself. If I might reformulate Carter one more time, out of the world of her creation where 'homicide was very rare and usually happened shortly before a Barbarian raid' (p. 9),¹⁵ "the read will continue to be an expected surprise".¹⁶ There is no end to the process: we must develop new habits of reading, of glancing at the text, new acts of attention. Play is continuous.

'The Sense of An Ending'

I have set out to problematize ways of writing, ways of speaking, ways of meaning for feminisms. Along those ways I have indicated some possibilities about which I can feel positive. I have come to insist that such possibilities are always strategic or tactical and themselves open to rereadings and rewritings. I have tried to unwrite some old stories and talk about some alternative ones; disconnections and reconnections. This work has had a

¹⁵I want, in the old way, the dominant sense of time, to read *after* for 'before'.

¹⁶'The raid was an expected surprise', (p. 9).

grammatical bias, grounded in how language works in use but also concerned with how feminisms might and do intervene with intent into these processes. I have tried to create my own space in which to converse about the strategies open to feminist speakers and what these might mean to hearers: writers' intent and readers' reception are held under constant scrutiny. I have used texts of different times and genres as a means of contextualizing the implications and possibilities of a range of linguistic strategies that feminists do or might use.

The first, loudest and most enduring tale has been of feminist representation of subjectivity. I have shown that there are no simplistic equations. Grammar tells more stories than has been acknowledged. *I* statements do not necessarily correlate to the notion of an autonomous controlling self any more than not-*I* statements necessarily correspond to the disinterested dis(as)semblage of such a self. The grammatical story of *Frankenstein*, of its 'creator' and 'true murderer', who comes apart and will only be reintegrated after death alerts its attentive readers to the fatal outcome of such ways of speaking meaning. The 'contrived' tale of 'The Bloody Chamber' acts as an antidote, embodying the notion of the self who simultaneously knows and does not know what she does. 'The Bloody Chamber' also provides a way in to looking at how feminists might in their grammar enact philosophies which posit different systems of connection between events, or indeed the lack of such connections.

In 'A Country House', having shown how the notion that there is a male and a female sentence is no longer a productive one for feminisms, I found many familiar patriarchal illusions exposed, as the necessity of attentive rereadings is imposed by the text. I showed my own experiences of rereading 'A Country House' and the way in which these led to a larger conclusion that the story itself could be said to be about the relationship between the processes of writing and reading. I suggested that it is a successful story about failure. I called on real readers to help confirm or refute my hypotheses. I claimed that a number of events considered to be postmodernist occur in this (1926) short story since *I* do not control things as *I* would like to think; time and place have no coordinates; the opposition between speech and writing is dissolved. Think again about what *I* tell you.

Turning then to feminist theoretical texts, I considered their strategies in the light of the stories told so far. This became something of a meditation on ways to speak of feminist selves, troubled rather than elegiac in tone. Where I found much to relish in the multiple voices of Zora Neale Hurston's writing, I resisted the discourse of Mitchell and Rose which I characterized as exclusionary and as telling me what to think rather than encouraging me to think. In Humm's discourse, I felt a particular concern about that mode which seems to re-enact the appropriation of the voice of the other, even where the authorial intent behind such writing might be quite other. I also found that, in her concerted impulse towards expressing similarity-in-difference, meaning was diminished rather than expanded.

Since this episode was on the whole critical and problematizing rather than uplifting, I then returned to the fruitful and dynamic writings of Angela Carter to explore how some feminist ideas might come to be embodied in grammar. I went so far as to suggest that Carter sets out on just such explorations, but in the spirit of endless adventure rather than endorsement. In *Dr Hoffman* I found grammatical ways of crossing boundaries; and in *Heroes and Villains* grammatical ways of representing women's time. I developed an insistence on the need to read, write and mean with attention, along with a recognition that this is an abyssal process; there can be no standpoint, only endless conversation with others about the possibilities. One story that I have left in need of some revisioning is that of metaphor: or perhaps it is rather that the old stories about it should be unwritten so that feminists can turn to ever new and always open ways of seeing. I have intended to contribute to the latter.

The aims of my thesis can be rewritten:

- an investment in feminisms as source of change, without impositions (though with preferences) as to which feminisms these might be. This openness is reflected in the representation of my own mode of thought as one that is undoubtedly influenced by conventional and prevailing ideas, but also experiences glimpses into the abyssal dream of what new ways of seeing might produce.

- an insistence that grammar has intriguing stories to show feminisms. And the beginnings of an exploration of what these might be, marked by the persistently foregrounded question as to whether enactment of feminist perspective in grammar as well as narrative is possible, and, hovering in the background, the question as to whether such enactment might change the way things are seen.

- an exploration of ways to think, speak, write, read and mean with feminist and deconstructive intent without recourse to complex methods and within texts that do not conform to the experimental tag; and with recognition that such explorations can never cease.

These aims produce some keys to opening doors:

- a realization of the notion of subjectivity on which this thesis comes to rest. *I* know what *I* do even as *I* do not know what *I* do: ***I contrive***.

- a glance at grammar's expansive openings for representation of feminist notions of cause/effect, border crossings, and time.

- an approach which gets (and keeps) the reader going. It might even start a plague.

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Appendices

'A Country House' by Dorothy Edwards

and

Publisher's Letter of Permission

A COUNTRY HOUSE

FROM the day when I first met my wife she has been my first consideration always. It is only fair that I should treat her so, because she is young. When I met her she was a mere child, with black ringlets down her back and big blue eyes. She put her hair up to get married. Not that I danced attendance on her. That is nonsense. But from the very first moment I saw her I allowed all those barriers and screens that one puts up against people's curiosity to melt away. Nobody can do more than that. It takes many years to close up all the doors to your soul. And then a woman comes along, and at the first sight of her you push them all open, and you become a child again. Nobody can do more than that.

And then at the first sight of a stranger she begins talking about "community of interests" and all that sort of thing. I must tell you we live in the country, a long way from a town, so we have no electric light. It is a disadvantage, but you must pay something for living in the country. It is a big house, too, and carrying lamps and candles from one end of it to another is hard. Not that it worries me. I have lived here since I was born. I can find my way about in the dark. But it is natural that a woman would not like it.

A COUNTRY HOUSE

I had thought about it for a long time. I do not know anything about electrical engineering, but there is a stream running right down the garden; not a very small stream either. Now why not use the water for a little power-station of our own and make our own electricity?

I went up to town and called at the electricians. They would send someone down to look at it. But they could not send anyone until September. Their man was going for his holidays the next day. He would be away until September. Now I suddenly felt that there was a great hurry. I wanted it done before September. They had no one else they could send, and it would take some time if I decided to have it done. I asked them to send for the electrician. I would pay him anything he liked if he would put off his holiday. They sent for him, and he came in and listened to my proposal.

At this point I ought to describe his appearance. He was tall, about forty years old. He had blue eyes, and grey hair brushed straight up. His hair might have been simply fair, not grey. I cannot remember that now. He had almost a military appearance, only he was shy, reserved, and rather prim. His voice was at least an octave deeper than is natural in a speaking voice. He smiled as though he was amused at everyone else's amusement, only this was not contemptuous.

Do not think for a moment that I regard this as a melodrama. I do not. I saw at once that he was a nice fellow, something out of the ordinary, not a villain at all.

He smiled when I asked him to put off his vacation. Nothing could be done until he had had a look at the place, and he was perfectly willing to come down that evening to see it. If it were possible to start work at once, something could perhaps be arranged. I was pleased with this, and I invited him to stay the night with us.

At five o'clock he was standing on the office steps with a very small bag, which he carried as if it were too light for him. He climbed into the car, and sat in silence during the whole long drive. When we reached the avenue of trees just before we turn in at my gate (although it was still twilight, under the trees it was quite dark, because they are so thick), he said, "I should imagine this was very dark at night?"

"Yes, as black as pitch," I said.

"It would be a good thing to have a light here. It looks dangerous."

"No, I don't want one here," I said. "Nobody uses this road at night but I, and I know it in the dark. Light in the house will be enough."

I wonder if he thought that unreasonable or

not. He was silent again. We turned in at the gate. My wife came across the lawn to meet us. I do not know how to describe her. That day she had a large white panama hat and a dress with flowers on it. I said before that she had black hair and blue eyes. She is tall, too, and she still looks very young. The electrician—his name was Richardson—stood with his feet close together and bowed from the waist. I told her that I had brought him here to see if it was possible to put in electric light.

"In the house?" she said. "That would be lovely. Is it possible at all?"

"I hope so," said Richardson in his deep voice. I could see that she was surprised at it.

"We don't know yet," I said; "we must take him to see the stream."

She came with us. The stream runs down by the side of the house, curving a little with the slope of the garden, until it joins the larger stream which flows between the garden wall and the fields. We followed it down, not going round by the paths, but jumping over flower-beds and lawns. Richardson looked all the time at the water, except once when he helped my wife across a border.

"There is enough water," he said. "and I suppose it is fuller than this sometimes?"

"Yes, when it rains," said my wife. "Some-

times it is impossible to cross the stepping-stones without getting one's shoes wet."

Now I will tell you where the stepping-stones are. Where the stream curves most a wide gravelled path crosses it, and some high stones have been put in the water. When we came down as far as that Richardson said, "This is the place where we could have it. We could put a small engine-house here, and the water could afterwards be carried through pipes to join the stream down below, forming a sort of triangle with the hypotenuse underground."

I asked him if he was certain that it could be done.

"I think so," he said seriously.

My wife smiled at him. "I hope the building will not be ugly; it would spoil the garden."

Richardson smiled in the amused way and answered, "It will, but it will not be high. We must have it at least half underground, with steps to go down to it. Would it be possible to plant some thick trees round it? Yews, so long as they do not interfere with the wires."

"Oh yes, thank you," she said. "I believe we could have that."

Richardson looked about him a bit more, and he took some measurements with a tape-measure from his pocket. Then we went back to the

house. At dinner I asked him where he meant to spend his holiday.

"I am not sure," he said seriously. "I thought perhaps the Yorkshire moors would be a good place."

"You won't find anything better than this," I said. "Put off your holiday until September."

My wife moved to the door. "Would you have to stay here during the work?" she asked.

"Or somewhere near here, madam," he said.

"Yes, of course, here," she said, and walked out of the room. Richardson bowed from the waist again.

We arranged it easily. He would not put it off, but he would make this his holiday. He would bring his motor bike here and explore the country around. He could be here always when there was anything for him to do, and he considered our invitation to him to stay here more than enough compensation for the change of his plans.

Afterwards in the drawing-room he asked my wife if she was fond of music.

"That is what she is fond of," I said. "She plays the piano."

What can anyone do with a strange man in the drawing-room but play the piano to him? She played a Chopin nocturne. Now I could watch girls dancing to Chopin's music all day,

but to play Chopin to a stranger that you meet for the first time! What must he think of you? I can understand her playing even the nocturnes when she is alone. When one is alone one is in the mood for anything. But to choose to play them when she is meeting someone for the first time! That is simply wrong. Chopin's nights are like days. There is no difference, except that they are rounded off. That is nonsense. Night does not round things off. Night is a distorter. These nocturnes come of never having spent his nights alone, of spending them either in an inn or in someone else's bedroom. No! How do I know what Chopin did? But I tell you they are the result of thinking of darkness as the absence of the sun's light. It is better to think of it as a vapour rising from the depths of the earth and perhaps bringing many things with it.

But he liked it. That is, Richardson liked the nocturne. He asked her to play another. While she turned over the pages I said aloud, "Night isn't like that. Night is a distorter."

My wife looked into the darkness outside the window.

Richardson looked at her, then he looked at me in uncertainty. She began to play, and he, for a moment pretending to be apologetic, studied her music with concentration.

Why didn't they ask me what I meant? I

could have proved it to them. In any case it was an interesting point.

She played a lot of Chopin. Then as she came from the piano she said, "You are fond of music too. Do you play?"

"No," he said. "It was my great ambition to be a 'cellist, but I never learnt to play it well, and I haven't one now. It is my favourite instrument."

"It is only the heavy father of a violin," I said. But I said it only because all that Chopin had annoyed me. I like the 'cello very much.

"I have never liked anything better than the piano," said my wife. "I am sorry you do not play."

"He sings," I said.

He smiled with amusement.

"Do you?" she asked eagerly.

"Yes," he said, half bowing from where he sat.

"I knew by your speaking voice," I said. "Please let us hear you."

"I will bring some songs with me if you wish it," he said. "That is very kind of you," and he leaned back in his chair and cut off all communication with us.

We sat in silence until my wife left us. Then we talked a little about the electric light and then went to bed.

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The next day the work began. Until the small building was up and the pipes laid from it back to the stream, Richardson could do nothing more than see that the measurements were right. He carried a small black notebook, and kept looking at it and then looking up at us and saying, "This is no work at all, you know; it is simply like a holiday."

He brought his motor bike down, but he went for few rides. Most of the time he spent looking at the first few bricks of the building, or crossing and recrossing the stream over the stepping-stones, with no hat on, and his black notebook open in one hand, as though he were making some very serious calculations. I do not suppose he was for a moment.

As I said before, I do not regard this as a melodrama. I do not consider him a villain, but, on the contrary, a nice enough fellow, but it was irritating to me the way he wandered round in a circle looking for something to do.

In the daytime he could look after himself, but in the evening we treated him as a guest.

The second day he was here, after tea I suggested taking him for a walk. He bowed with one hand behind his back, and he kept it there afterwards. I noticed it particularly. My wife came too. We walked down the garden. Richardson, still with his hand behind his back,

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walking just behind her, talked to her about the work, and he said the same things over twice.

When we got to the bottom of the garden and through the door which opens on the bank of the stream she gave a cry of horror. And I will tell you why. It was because I had had the grass and weeds on the banks cut.

She turned to Richardson. "I am so sorry," she said. "You should have seen this before it was cut. It was very pretty. What were those white flowers growing on the other side?"

"Hemlock," I said. "It had to be cut."

"I don't see why," she said. "It is a pity to spoil such a beautiful place for the sake of tidiness." She turned to him petulantly.

Now that is all nonsense. A place must be tidy. There were bulrushes and water-lilies as it was. What more must she have? A lot of weeds dripping down into the water! There is a difference between garden flowers and weeds. If you want weeds, then do not have gardens. And I suppose I am insensible to beauty because I keep the place cut and trimmed. Nonsense! Suppose my wife took off her clothes and ran about the garden like a bacchante! Perhaps I should like it very much, but I should shut her up in her room all the same.

We walked along in silence over the newly cut grass. It was yellow already with having been

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left uncut too long. I went first across the bridge, and my two friends who admire Chopin so much came after. We were in the cornfield now, and I will tell you what it is like. There is a little hill just opposite the bridge, and the corn grows on top of it and on its slopes. It is a very small hill, but the country around is flat, and from the top of it you can see over the trees a long distance. We began to walk up the path to the top. The corn was cut and stood up in sheaves. That is what I like.

When we reached the top Richardson took his hand from behind his back and looked around him. There is a lake a few miles away, and on either side of it the land rises and there are trees. Beyond that again is the sea. And from the hill the sea looks nearer than it is and the lake like a bay. Richardson thought it was a bay. I thought so too when I was a child.

"I did not know the sea was so near," he said.

"It isn't near," I answered. "That is a lake. There are even houses in between it and the sea, only you cannot see them."

He took a deep breath. "You know, it is very kind of you to let me stay here. It is very beautiful. I have not seen a place I like better. I am most grateful. And the work is simply nothing. It is a real holiday." At this point

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he fingered the black notebook which stuck out of his pocket.

If things had not happened as they did he might have come down often; he might have spent his week-ends here. He was not a bad sort of fellow.

He did not want to leave the hill, but my wife did not like walking about on the stubble in her thin shoes. We walked back by the path which leads between a low wall and some small fir-trees to the back of the house. I had the path made for her, because she prefers that walk.

After dinner Richardson sang. His voice was all right, deep like his speaking voice, only not so steady. She played for him, and he stood up at attention, except that, with his right arm bent stiffly at the elbow and pressed to his side, he clutched the lapel of his coat. He sang some Brahms. It was quite nice.

I went to write some letters, and afterwards I walked about in the garden. When I returned they had left the piano and were talking. He was very fond of Strauss. She had not heard the *Alpine* symphony. We were so far from everywhere here.

The time went on. Richardson grew more restless every day. And yet he was lethargic too. He hardly left the house and garden, and he still wandered back and forth by the work.

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He did not interfere with the men by giving unnecessary orders, but he still studied his notebook as though there were important calculations there. I know all this, because I watched him as if he were my brother.

My wife used to go down there to sit sometimes in the mornings. But he hardly spoke to her then. It is natural that a man would not care to talk about music and all that when the men were working in the sun. It was curious how much interest we all took in the little building and the pipes and the water, and yet when we thought of the electric light in the house, which was to be the result, all the romance was gone out of it. This is not simply my experience. It was so with my wife and Richardson too. I know by my own observation of them. The minute the building was finished we went down to see it. Nothing but a yellow brick hut with steps to go down, and an opening like the mouth of a letter-box in the wall nearest the stream.

"The water is shut off now," said Richardson. "We have to put a grating in it before the water comes through."

There was a hole in the concrete floor too, and from that the pipes would lead back to the stream. The first pipe was there with a big curve in it. It was nice to see it getting on. After that they

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dug a ditch and put the pipes down. He helped them to dig.

Every night he sang and my wife played, but I did not always stay in the drawing-room. One night, though, I remember particularly, he sang a song by Hugo Wolf about a girl whose lover had gone, and while the men and women were binding the corn she went to the top of a hill, and the wind played with the ribbon that he had put in her hat. It was something like that; I have forgotten it. I asked him to sing it again. I suppose they were pleased that I liked something. He sang it.

"An dem Hut mein Rosenband, von seiner Hand
Spielet in dem Winde."

Now I should think that the hill that she climbed in that song was like the hill in our cornfield, and the girl sat there for hours "like one lost in a dream."

The days passed, and everything remained the same except the work, and that went on quickly. We walked about together sometimes. One evening we went again through the door to the little river where the grass had been cut. We were going along the bank talking when we heard a splash, and there was a boy swimming in the water. I shouted to him, and told him to come out and not swim there again. His

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white back flashed through the water to a bush on the other side, and he began to dress behind it. When I turned back she said, "Why did you send him away? It looked so nice."

"He can go somewhere else to swim," I said. Richardson said nothing.

"He does no harm here, surely?" she said.

Bulrushes and water-lilies are not enough for her. She must have weeds and naked boys too. And do you think *she* ever bathed in a river when she was a child, and hid behind a bush when someone was coming? No, of course not. And does she think the boy wants to be seen bathing? And if he is not to be seen when he is here, he might as well go somewhere else.

We never talked about anything except the work, and he talked about music with my wife. They never said anything illuminating on the subject, though. It is a funny thing that you can spend days and weeks with a man and never mention anything but water-pipes and electricity. But, after all, you can't talk about God and Immortality to a man you hardly know. Anyhow, it is nice to see someone so much interested in his work. No. That is nonsense. He was not interested in his work. When the engine came we were enthusiastic, and he was as miserable as sin. What business has an electrician to get excited over yellow bricks and water-pipes? He

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was restless. He could not settle to anything. If he read a book, half the time it would be open on his knee and he looking away from it. I noticed him very particularly.

The day before everything was finished and he was to go—he was not waiting to see the light actually put in the rooms—I was chalking out a garden-bed just at the bottom of the garden by the door. It is a shady place, and I meant to plant violets there, especially white violets—not in August, of course, but it was better to get it prepared while I thought of it. I heard them coming along on the other side of the wall.

She was saying, "Before I was married I stayed with my music master in London. He had two sons but no daughters. His wife was very fond of me. That was the happiest time of my life. One of the sons is a first violin now. I went to a symphony concert when we were in London once and saw him play. I don't know what happened to the other one."

"Let us sit down here," said Richardson.

I knew there was something wrong with him by his voice. I detected that at once.

I suppose they sat down on the large tree-stump outside. They were silent for a moment. I suppose she was looking at the water and he was looking at her.

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Then he said, beginning as though he were talking to himself, and yet apologising too, "Please forgive me, I ought not to say it. I have never been to a place which has given me such pleasure as this. I have never noticed scenery or nature much before. When one likes a place, it is because one went to it in childhood or something of that sort. But this has been so very beautiful while I have been here. I suppose from the beginning I knew I could not come here again. It is impossible. Forgive me saying so." His voice became deeper as he went on, I noticed that.

"Oh, but you must come here again," she said anxiously. "There is no one here at all, and we have so many tastes in common."

"No," he said; "you think I don't mean it. I walked up and down in the garden just now and I came to a decision. At first I thought I would not speak a word to you, but afterwards I decided it would not make any great difference if I did. People do not change their lives suddenly. That is, they don't except in literature. And now I feel at peace about it. No harm at all—none. I do not mean that literature is artificial, you know, only that it is concerned with different people."

Now what word had he spoken that a husband could not listen to? And yet we would have

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looked very interesting from an aeroplane or from a window in heaven.

And do you suppose she wanted to know what he was talking about?

All she said was, "Oh, but my husband has asked you to come here himself. You must come often, and bring your songs. There is no one here to talk about music to. And I cannot go to any concerts, we are so far from everywhere."

He was silent. They stood up, and I waited for them to come through the door. I suppose nobody could expect me to hide behind a tree so as to cause them no embarrassment. "Excuse me, I was just passing at this moment. Please go on with your pleasant conversation." However, they chose to go back by the other way along the bank of the stream.

We spent dinner very pleasantly. Nobody spoke a word. Richardson was not fully aware that we were in the room. He looked at the tablecloth. I did not go away to write letters after dinner. I never left the drawing-room. I suppose no one could expect me to do that. After the music we sat round the empty grate and said nothing, and we went very late to bed.

The next morning, after breakfast, I went up to the flagstaff. If you climb up the steep bank at the left of the house and walk along until you

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come to a narrow path with trees growing there, you come to a ledge, and the flagstaff has been put there, because it can be seen above the trees. I was standing there disentangling the rope to pull the flag up when he came up to me.

"What time are you going?" I asked, and pulled out my watch.

"At eleven," he said.

"I suppose you think it funny that I should be putting the flag up on the day that you go?"

"I did not know you had a flagstaff," he said.

"I suppose it can be seen even from the sea?"

"Yes."

He was silent, and he looked across at the house.

"Where is my wife?" I asked.

"In the drawing-room, practising."

"I hope you will send in your bill as soon as possible."

"Oh yes," he said. "It will come from the firm, you know. They pay me. I wanted to walk round the cornfield before I go."

I pulled up the flag and fastened the cord. "I'll come with you," I said.

We walked in silence to the top of the hill, and he stood and looked all round, at the house and at the sea. Taking leave of it, of course.

"In the village down there," I said, "there is

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a very nice girl called Agnes. She isn't pretty, but she is very nice."

Now Agnes was the name of the girl in the song by Hugo Wolf, but I knew he would not see that. He looked at me in surprise. Then he took out his watch and said he must go. There was no need for that. If you go away on a motor bike why go exactly at eleven? He had to keep himself to a time, that is what it was. We turned to go down the hill.

"I put up the flag because it is my birthday," I said, though that was not true.

He looked at me without listening to what I said.

When we got back to the house his motor bike was standing outside the gate ready. He went into the house to fetch his cap, and my wife came out with him. Half-way to the gate he turned to her and thanked her. He had never experienced such pleasure in a holiday before. Then he shook hands with me and said nothing.

"Come down to see us often," I said. "Come whenever you like, for week-ends."

"Oh yes," said my wife, "please come, and bring your music."

He looked embarrassed. I was watching him. I knew he would be. He looked at the ground and mumbled, "Thank you very much. Good-bye." Then he turned and went out through

the gate, and in a few minutes he drove away under the trees.

She went into the house. She thinks he will come again, call, and listen to her playing Chopin.

I went to sit down by the engine-house. The engine was working, and it throbbed noisily, while there was hardly any water in the curve of the stream. It has made a great difference to the garden. Up above the flag waved senselessly in the wind.

LAST summer, just before my proper holiday, I went to stay with an aunt who lives on the borders of Wales, where there are so many orchards. I must say I went there simply as a duty, because I used to stay a lot with her when I was a boy, and she was, in those days, very good to me. However, I took plenty of books down so that it should not be waste of time.

Of course, when I got there it was really not so bad. They made a great fuss of me. My aunt was as tolerant as she used to be in the old days, leaving me to do exactly as I liked. My cousin Jessica, who is just my age, had hardly changed at all, though they both looked different with their hair up; but my younger cousin Ruth, who used to be very lively and something of a tomboy, had altered quite a lot. She had become very quiet; at least, on the day I arrived she was lively enough, and talked about the fun we used to have there, but afterwards she became more quiet every day, or perhaps it was that I noticed it more. She remembered far more about what we used to do than I did; but I suppose that is only natural, since she had been there all the time in between, and I do not suppose anything very exciting had happened to her, whereas I have been nearly everywhere.

LITTLE BROWN

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7 October 1997

Liz Knowles
Department of English Literature
Edinburgh University
David Hume Tower
George Square
Edinburgh EH8 9JX

Dear Ms Knowles,

I am replying to your letter of 19 September 1997.

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Yours sincerely,



Patricia James
Contracts Manager.



Brettenham House, Lancaster Place, London WC2E 7EN; Telephone: 0171 911 8000; Fax: 0171 911 8100