Naomi Schor

Feminist and Gender Studies

Before the 1970s, readers and teachers of literature were assumed to be neutered beings who left their multiple subjectivities at the door of the academy. As students during that immediately post-Feminist era, we learned the impersonal rhetoric of both New Criticism and structuralism. We were taught to speak from the position of the universal, sometimes at the cost of painful marginalizations and self-denials, though our professors of the universal were, with insipidly few exceptions, white, male university professors of European ancestry who were either straight or closeted. Today, in this last decade of the twentieth century, a first-year graduate student, whether male, female, black, Hispanic, young, old, gay, lesbian, bisexual, Jewish or Arabic, postcolonial or metropolitan, or any combination of these “identities”—and the list of possibilities is constantly being updated and nuanced—enters a radically reconstructed institution, where various and complex subjectivities are accommodated on all sides of the seminar table in the “house of difference” and in processes of deconstruction (Lorde, Zami 226). But this house was not built in a day or by a single hand; the process of construction is collective and at times contentious. Of all the forces that have participated in this ongoing enterprise, none has had a more profound impact on feminism.

And yet the 1980 edition of the MLA’s Introduction to Scholarship contained no mention of feminist criticism, a revolutionary new approach to literary analysis and theory that emerged in the late 1960s and sought to recover and affirm the cultural specificity of women’s lives. The use of the term “women’s literature” has been identified and interwoven from the outset. It was only after some negotiation—an expected part of the complex process of assembling this volume—that the word feminist was added to my title.

This brief history of the respective places of feminist criticism and gender studies immediately suggests the approach I take in presenting feminist and gender studies in the 1980s. Although gender studies has evolved from feminist criticism and although feminist studies has always been a form of gender studies, the two cannot be simply collapsed onto each other. Such a move risks erasing the specificity either of feminist criticism and its radical challenge to earlier gender-blind studies of literature or of gender studies and their elaboration, questioning, and, ultimately, reconfiguration of the insights of feminist criticism. At a moment when many institutions are debating whether to opt for a program in women’s studies or for one in gender studies, it is important to understand that such decisions can be made only in terms of local contexts and situations. For instance, had the 1980 edition of Introduction to Scholarship contained an essay on feminist criticism, then I would now have less of a problem folding feminism into gender. But in an institutional context where feminism has not been marginalized, it is strategically important to feature it.

By identifying my own position—I speak as an American teacher of French whose postgraduate professional career developed along with feminism and feminist criticism and for whom gender studies is an intriguing yet problematic notion—I am already performing a feminist act, not only by refusing to speak from a position of supposed neutrality and pedagogical objectivity. Two chief axioms of feminist criticism state that all acts of language are grounded in the dense network of partial positions (e.g., sexual, class, racial) occupied by speaking subjects and that to claim speak for all (women, feminists, literary critics) is to speak from a position of assumed memory and false universality. This position is precisely one we as feminists seek to investigate and dismantle, even though, as many of us have participated in this ongoing enterprise, none has had a more profound impact than feminism.

Because feminism has proved to be the central and, thus, simultaneously, the most powerful and most vulnerable category of analysis elaborated by feminism, I have chosen to organize my account of feminist and gender studies around the category of gender and its associated, all the consequences such a choice entails. One result is that I violate precedence, not to say precedent, by placing Simone de Beauvoir ahead of Virginia Woolf as an initial figure of feminism. Among the other consequences, I single one out.

First, obviously and inevitably, making gender the focus means subsuming the other categories of difference that currently organize feminist analysis, notably race and class, under the privileged category of gender. The current vying of race, class, and gender can have the unfortunate effect of suggesting that these terms function as a harmonious, monolithic unit, that the articulation of these levels of analysis is nothing if not disturbingly delicate.

Of course, from the perspective of black and working-class women who are caught up in "a simultaneity of discourses" (Henderson 17), the very notion that such a choice exists at all is illogical, an indelible mark of privilege. As socialist and black feminists have argued, blindness and invisibility threaten those critics who fail to attend to the ways in which gender, race, and to a lesser extent class overdetermine the subjectivities of the unprivileged in our racist, sexist, and classist society. Certainly the possibility of intersessions and tensions among the stories of race, class, and gender are far more complex than current well-meaning calls for pluralism allow, and each critic working in the field of
gender studies must constantly negotiate conflicting and coordinate claims (see also the essays by Allen and Gates in this volume).

Second, because gender, at least in its emergent phase, was not the operative concept informing research on the social construction of gender roles, and since the late 1970s, social construction appeared as an alternative framework (D. H. Lawrence, Paul Czarniawska) to the idea of biological determinism, and a new form of "othering" in literature was the double muism/idealization, the reduction of female characters to variants of two types, the angel-mother and the vagrant-witch. Following in the tradition inaugurated by Beauvoir, pioneering feminist critics such as Katherine Ringer, Mary Ellinghaus, and Wendy Brown, though careful not to judge women on the basis of their sex, were not necessarily working against the "sex/gender" distinction to denaturalize the representation of women in romantic fiction. Post-Romantic feminism, with its focus on real lives and real experiences, sought to make women's lives the starting point for the study of gender. Beauvoir's work on the representation of women in literature, as well as the works of Elizabeth Maryell and bell hooks, showed the complexity of gender and how it can be studied in different contexts, not just through binary oppositions.

BEAUVOIR AND WOOLF

Where Beauvoir stood boldly in The Second Sex, "one is not born a woman, one becomes one," her performance of radical gesture whose far-reaching consequences even she did not foresee (301). For as much as much linguistic as epistemological—French has no strict equivalent for gender (one sex, "la différence sexuelle"), and in 1949 the category of gender had not yet been elaborated by scientists and social scientists (Bock, Haraway)—Beauvoir, the most avant-garde constructionist, never spoke of gender as such. The Second Sex, determined to liberate women from the disempowering constructs of patriarchy, Beauvoir studied an array of social and cultural artifacts to deconstruct the "naturalizing" of the female of the species, the processes whereby a human infant born female is transformed into the male child, privileging the category of gender as a mode to function as man's other. Beauvoir demonstrated, in several studies of the way five modern male authors (Arthur Breton, Stendhal, Henry de Montherlant, D. H. Lawrence, Paul Czarniawska) worked with the idea of female characters, the reduction of female characters to variants of two types, the angel-mother and the vagrant-witch. Following in the tradition inaugurated by Beauvoir, pioneering feminist critics such as Katherine Ringer, Mary Ellinghaus, and Wendy Brown, though careful not to judge women on the basis of their sex, were not necessarily working against the "sex/gender" distinction to denaturalize the representation of women in romantic fiction. Post-Romantic feminism, with its focus on real lives and real experiences, sought to make women's lives the starting point for the study of gender. Beauvoir's work on the representation of women in literature, as well as the works of Elizabeth Maryell and bell hooks, showed the complexity of gender and how it can be studied in different contexts, not just through binary oppositions.
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temned "narcissism" by Elaine Showalter ("Feminist Poetics"). Implicitly and in practice, the original goals of feminism was a female feminist.

Throughout the 1970s, many feminist critics contributed to work on male-authored texts from a feminist perspective and to engage theories produced by male (and often French) philosophers, psychoanalysts, anthropologists, and semioticians. Similarly, feminist film criticism, because of film's emphasis on the visual and because of the use of female-authored films, has sometimes been a "mirrored" kind of feminist, favoring questions of representation and often addressing the ways that gender has been constructed.

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The cutting edge of feminist criticism and theory in the United States shifted from revising the cultural productions of patriarchy (Rich, "Akwesasne") to recovering a gendered, gendered, and often forgotten corpus of women's writing and to elaborating a new literary history and criticism that is inclusive and more feminist, necessarily, a central concern of feminism itself (see Spade, "Spade"").

What The Second Sex was to "images of women's criticism," Woolf's Room of One's Own was to narcissism. Confronted, in the reading room of the British Museum, as Rockwell was some years later under the cupola of the Bibliothèque Nationale, with the overwhelming record of patriarchal objectification of women, Woolf, like Beauvoir, set out to ground a subjectivity for women. How, unlike Beauvoir, for whom subjectivity is ideally and necessarily universal, Woolf undertook through an archaeology of women's writing to theorize and valuate a specifically female subjectivity and sexuality, and that specificity was bound up with the maternal. Woolf writes, "We shrink back through our mothers if we are women" (179). Narcissism in its most productive form was an attempt to (re)construct a female literary tradition by exploring the complex and bifurcated workings of the literary reproduction of mothering. The reigning metaphor of modernism was maternal, even though there were others, many of them spatial (e.g., the attic, the pavilion).

THE MATERNAL METAPHOR

One of the last works by a woman author to be included in Columbia University's famed Humanities Course syllabus, which claims to account for the best thinking and writing in the entire Western humanistic tradition, was Marie-Madeleine Laforgue's La Princesse de Clèves. The novel, greatly admired as a central French text in the feminist rewriting of the canon, although it has not always held a privileged position in French literary history. Written in the seventeenth century by an aristocratic author close to the center of literary power, La Princesse has long been considered the inaugural work in the great French tradition of psychological fiction. From its anonymous publication in 1670, the controversial work has been the subject of a large body of criticism, most of which focuses on its treatment of the laws of female nature and on its representation of women as the Prince's impassible confidant to her love for another man and her enigmatic final renunciation.

In a well-known essay "On the Sexes" (Akhim, "Akhim"), Virginia Woolf boldly brought the question of gender to bear on the traditional debate over plausibility, by hypothesizing a link between the text's alleged implausibilities and the plausibility of women's writing. How to make a textual argument for plausibility specifically adapted to women's writing (Moore, "Moore""); the basic tenet of the "sex-scenarios" of an author asserts that to be both female and especially to be socialized as a woman in a society with its education, money, and cultural production design: is impossible to those born male and applied to men, is impossible to write with a difference, to write otherwise. The status of the signature has been the center of one of the longest-running debates within the Franco-American feminist community, beginning with Peggy Kaminski's "Writing Like a Woman," which has since become the privileged intersex debate in both the debate between Kaminski and Miller and in a series of pieces concerned with the place of men in feminism (Kaminski and Miller, Ginsburg, Messerly, Schuler, Fuss). Indeed, the debates over female signatures quickly shift into a debate over male readers, a move supporting the arguments that as soon as one attacks the biological foundation of women's writing, writing by women tends to drop out of the discussion and the emphasis shifts instead to the sex of the reader. Biology is not only eliminated, merely dismissed.

Even for those theorists willing to grant the premise of a sexually differentiated sexuality, the question of just what form this difference might take has continued to endlessly stimulate and frustratingly has largely centered on violent but unresolved (and perhaps unresolved) debates within feminism over the interplay of social constructionism and essentialism. For critics who hold the view of sexual difference as socially constructed, the specificity of women's writing up to the present has been tied to cultural factors that are largely historical and thus, at least in theory, unrecognizable. There is no identifiable, biological reason why women writers should write the double-voiced discourse in which they, like many domineering members of society (especially racial and sexual minorities), have traditionally reacted to critical recognition from the establishment while at the same time resisting and subverting it. They have simply been constrained to do so by bourgeois patriarchy. These theorists who subscribe to a view somewhat loosely labeled essentialist argue that a complex but presumably teleological and cross-cultural relation exists between women's language and women's bodies. Because women's pleasure is
polymorphous, because women are multiform, because woman's bodies are somehow bound up with the fluid (blood, milk, amniotic waters), woman's writing (as it should be) is essentially different: more fluid and multifigurative, less centered and hierarchized, than men's writing.

This belief in the bodily grounding of linguistic difference is referred to as *écriture feminine*, and it is somewhat misleadingly associated with the early writings of the French feminists, notably Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray. Yet that Cixous, Irigaray, and others did not at times push such unmediated relations between bodies and texts, for, of course, they did (Cixous, Irigaray, *This Sex*). But, as it is all too often forgotten, their speculations were fraught with significant contradictions and were, furthermore, unapologetic manifestos rather than the somewhat crude hand-line positions they have been cast into by their critics. The specters of teleological determinism these French feminists raised did have the virtue of summoning more empirically oriented American feminist thinkers that language was neither transparent nor purely instrumental and that to go beyond the sexual indifference of patriarchy (Irigaray, Speculum), it might be necessary to challenge prevailing symbolic and representational systems, such as realism, by exploring alternative experimental uses of language by women restricted to *écriture feminine*.

By 1981, when Miller first published "Emphasis Added," serious doubt had already been cast on the early assumption that female specificity might be located in a bodiless, gendered language, that what Woolf called a "woman's sentence" might be marked by specific tropes, such as metaphor or metonymy, that were somehow connected to aspects of the female body or sexual economy. Instead, Miller proposed that the elusive specificity lay in the way women writers infused the maxims that Gérard Genest had shown to ground plausibility: this was the "emphasis added." Women's writing manipulated the cultural rather than the linguistic code. From this perspective what seemed aberrant about *La Princesse de Clèves*—the ways in which it confounds readerly expectations based on masculine cultural paradigms—became suddenly intelligible, plausible. The Princess's famed remonstrations, her refusal to enter into a heterosexual marriage contract with the Duke, stemmed not from some sexual deviancy (i.e., Irigaray) but rather from a uniquely feminine economy of desire that privileged fantasy over consumption.

Now, then, we are told to account for this specifically feminine form of desire, a desire not oriented by the inevitable rush toward closure but one that, in Rachael Blué Duplessis's words, strains to go "beyond the ending"? The answer to this question, inevitably entangled another explanatory model, one based in psychoanalysis. Like other feminist readers working in a psychoanalytic rather than a formalist framework, some students of *La Princesse de Clèves* sought to locate that specificity in the psychological relationship between mother and daughter. Marianna Hech proposed a reading of *La Princesse* that located the text's femininity specificity in the representation of the intense pre-Oedipal bonds between mother and daughter that Freud had belatedly discovered to specify female sexual development.

In *The Pleasure of the Text*, Barthes made explicit a long-unspoken assumption that all narrative is Oedipal. Calling this idea into question, feminist critics working in a psychoanalytic perspective on texts ranging from the high classical *La Princesse de Clèves* to contemporary mass-market romances (Baudrillard) have challenged the assumed universality of a theory of narrative based on a normative Oedipal model tangential to male sexual development and entirely oriented by the quest for closure. Rejecting the dominant Oedipal grid as an exploratory model summed to women's writing, feminist psychoanalytic critics have sought to uncover obsessive forms of pre-Oedipal engagement with the mother chief in the form of a prelinguistic, prespectacular, prerepresentational "in(ther) tongue," similar to what Julia Kristeva has called in a slightly different context the semiotic. Molded by an isolated and seemingly unmediated relationship with her widowed mother and especially by a powerful maternal discourse, the Princess's relations with men—notably her husband, who comes to occupy the position of the mother—remains fixed at the stage of what Jacques Lacan has termed the imaginary, a dual mimetic relationship that precludes the possibility of a normative adult sexuality. Thus one of the standard plots available to the female protagonist in modern European fiction, the so-called marriage plot, is now circumscribed by the impossibilities of a maternally infantile desire. Unfortunately, of course, the escape from the marriage plot activates the only alternative closure available to the female protagonist: death.

The place of the maternal in feminism, as both Anglo-American and French psychoanalytic theorists agree, is thus at the very least ambivalent: empowering when it involves recovery of and reconnection to a lost maternal body and the resumption of an interrupted mother-daughter dialogue, potentially fatal when it involves unmediated fusion and an inability to enter the potential cultural order. When the maternal is located in cultural contexts other than the hegemonic white, European one implicit in both Anglo-American and French psychoanalytic theory, a difference red and even more poignant set of complexities emerges, even as the centrality of the maternal metaphor remains unchallenged. The legacy of slavery, with its violent disruptions of the mother-child bond and its myriad stereotypical figures of alternated motherhood (the maidservant, the maestría), famously problematizes the representation of mother-daughter relationships in African American fiction. When Alice Walker goes "looking" for Zora Neale Hurston, the mother through whom, to paraphrase Woolf, so many black women writers think, Walker's quest for origins is frustrated by obstacles peculiar to the African American woman writer, and at least until recently, the poverty and invisibility culminating in unmarked grave. Similarly, in the Asian American context of Maxine Hong Kingston's *Woman Warrior*, the Eurocentric paradigm of ambivalence proves inadequate to account for a mother-
daughter relationship embedded in the immigrant experience of cabin Western and Eastern cultures.

What is immediately striking about the readings I have been discussing is their exclusive focus on the female protagonist, on the operations of sexual difference in writing. Maternal feminist criticism is concerned with identifying the productions of the female imagination, charting female psychic growth, and analysing female desires, making once again audible the silenced maternal voice. Though concerned with the operations of gender, such examples of feminist criticism—chosen, of course, for what I take to be their representative status—remain almost exclusively woman-centered; that is, gender is taken throughout these texts to be synonymous with sexual difference, with woman. Even in the early 1980s when the interest in readings of La Provenzale moved away from the female protagonist and her mother to consider the construction and representation of male subjectivity in the novel and the tradition it inaugurates (Schor, "Portrait"), the underlying presumption of a female specificity in reading and writing remained largely unchallenged. It is perhaps no accident that the only article to approach La Provenzale from a truly bipolar gender perspective is Michael Dandie's "Social, Squad, and Human Spaces," the sole male-authored text in the cluster I am considering. Danny Foley exposes the feminist critics' concern with the Provenzale's attempted escape from the oppressive, image-ridden court world, but he tenderly shifts the grounds of discussion away from the specificities of woman's writing. Instead, he recognizes the novel's canny representation of the "oppressions of gender in the text's capital organization. Whereas male characters are given unreserved access to the various spaces in which the novel deploys its narrative, entering and exiting as they please, the female protagonist, even those with paternal power such as the Queen, are not free to initiate access and must struggle to find an acceptable space.

To begin to move from feminist to bisexual gender studies necessitates a microfascial analysis of male power and masculine privilege, a dismantling of the master's house not only with "the master's tools" (Lorde, Sade 110-113), but more importantly, by the master himself. As it quickly became apparent in the late 1970s and early 1980s, few men were initially willing to open the tool box.

THE RAPE OF FEMINISM

The sudden emergence, in the increasingly competitive "intellectual marketplace" (Jameson 18), of a disruptive critical approach representing a large and politicized constituency within the academy confronted the male-dominated critical-theoretical establishment with a challenge far more threatening than the earlier emergence of black nuclearity. While women's studies were initially modeled and with which they have often been compared. While feminist critics complained that their male colleagues did not read them (Gilbert), male critics eager to join the movement complained of the "segmentation" (Ruthven) of the leading practitioners. What exactly was, and what is, the place of men in feminism (Judith and Smith)? Should they be in feminism at all? Can they be kept out in the era of gender criticism in which validates all readers' responses irrespective of sex, race, or class? (Flynn and Schiavone)? What if sometimes compelling claims of race and gender in the race for gender? What is (is) the place of black men in black woman's studies or the place of black women in black men's criticism and theory? What did these men and women want?

It adding women authors to the male canon meant nothing less than rethinking the strands of creativity itself and invention, a new poetry, a new literary history, and the like, adding male critics to feminist criticism has entailed a similar upheaval. This process follows the familiar logic of the Derridean supplement, wherein all add-on reveal an insight in, a difference as, we shall see in a moment, differences within (Johnson). The emergence of gender studies were hard in hand with the refashioning of feminist criticism into a less provincial, more culturally diverse, more heterogeneous critical approach. But this does not happen all at once.

The understanding that gender is a social construct pointed to a mixed body a fundamental to feminist criticism, and it logically implies that both masculinity and femininity are cultural formations designed to secure the social organization known as patriarchy. Yet, significantly (though it is hardly surprising), most male critics' earliest attempts to deal with feminist criticism and theory did not apply the insights of gender study to deconstructing masculinity. These male critics sought instead to appropriate for themselves the insights of feminism to explain a long tradition of objectifying and mastering women, the privileges of the heretofore unmarked term in a binary opposition—whether he be madonna, witch, heterosexual, or heterosexual—are always the last to be interrogated by the members of the privileged class. In some instances, individual male critics—often gay critics in search of a criticism of their own—approached feminist criticism sympathetically, though as first it was hard to see the male "incursions" into feminist criticism as anything but a new wave of masculinity. Woman remained the object, man the subject.

Symptomatic of this first incursion of men into feminism was the inverse critical debt that briefly swirled around Samuel Richardson's Clarissa, a text seemingly predesigned to serve as an allegory for what I am somewhat melodramatically calling the rape of feminism. Two indissolubly linked features of Clarissa made it an appropriate text for simultaneously invigorating and mirroring the story of men into what had heretofore been a critical domain largely occupied by women: Clarissa is, as we know, an inveterate writer and the victim of a particularly societal raping. By looking rape with the attempt to silence a writing woman—an attempt that, of course, is particularly relevant on Whitsun to produce language and symbols even beyond the grave—Clarissa presents a particularly invasive textual body over which to erect the critical battle of the
to critique "essentialism" as a "me of metaphysics" (P Mossay 5v). This association of deconstruction and antirealism has led some materialist feminists to embrace deconstruction in their battle against ahistorical essences such as "woman." Others, more drawn to the problematics of sexual difference, resist it, suspecting Derridean antirealism as being a rape of patriarchy, all the while recognizing in deconstruction a powerful lever for excavating the paradigms of sexual difference and valorizing the previously devalorized term (Schor, Breaking Homon/cy). However, as the author of Clarissa observes, the tension between deconstruction and femininity also participates in the tensions between deconstructionist and ideologically based views of language: Decolonization, as applied by certain deconstructors, views woman as a trope and sexual difference as a pure linguistic effect, whereas, like other critics unwilling to assent to a disjunction between the world and the text that turns signifiers loose and renders all socially grounded meanings impossible, most feminists would insist that such signifiers do bear some relation, however opaque, to historical women and the contingencies of their lives. In a feminist perspective, race, like woman, can never be just a metaphor.

Interestingly, the first two books to free off against each other in the struggle, Warner's Reading Clarissa and Terry Castle's Clarissa's Ciphers, share the critical assumption that Clarissa is a text concerned with language. Both critics devote large sections of their analyses to charting the ways in which the struggle between Clarissa and Lovelace is in fact a struggle for control over the encoding and decoding of messages, over who shall produce interpretation, and over whether and how meaning will be decided. However, the two critics, operating as they do out of radically incompatible critical frameworks, differ irreconcilably in their readings of Clarissa's enigmatic ciphers. Living up with the Lovelaceans, Warner attempts to combat what he sees as the domineering traditional reading of Clarissa by deconstructing the seemingly clear-cut and rigid opposition between Clarissa and Lovelace, the repressed virgin and the rake. The inevitable and my mind regrettable result is that, in the end, the victim is in a sense blamed for her own victimization. Breaking with a tradition of so-called humanist readers stretching back to Richardson himself, Warner sets out to dispel the rape from the central meaning-giving position it occupies in the final version of the novel in order to bring out instead Clarissa's rediscoverable powers for controlling language and interpretation, and thus stretching her greater interpretive triumph from the jaws of violent sexual defeat. Warner's language vividly bodies forth his view of Clarissa's powers:

In urging Clarissa, Lovelace attempts to undermine the power of her wholesomeness, to break her into at ease—so that she's made of the same stuff everyone else is, and therefore can be read the text of the rape's cited: "once subdued, always subdued." All this will subject Clarissa to Lovelace's interpretation of her, and so the rape becomes Lovelace's venture to master, once and for all, Clarissa's meaning.
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But Lovell should beware. For even the comment that knows how to weave new web to cover his body with a seeming fiction. And Clarissa is not common.

(50)

These are a frightful words. In Clarissa’s Ciphers, Castle joins the furs, arguing that Warner forgets the key lesson of feminism: “The battles of interpretation, in the text, in the world, are seldom fought in the open. Clarissa and Lovelace are not equal combatants in a political sense. Lovelace has acquired to him ‘all the institution’s advantages of patriarchal power, including the power of sexual intimidation’ (193). Warner fails to recognize that struggles for interpretation, whether inside or outside the text, take place in a field where the laws of gender work to disempower some participants while empowering others, and this failure must decisively separate him from politically engaged readers of Clarissa’s rape such as Castle and Terry Castle. Indeed, one cannot but hastily that Warner’s and Castle’s readings differ because of their authors’ own positions in the field of gender. Egawton’s ‘applied numismatist’ of Clarissa, published the same year as Castle’s book, complicates the question. Egawton, a preeminent male Marxist, boldly makes common cause with the feminists and even goes much further in his ideological reading than Castle does, by asserting that Clarissa is not only a novel-centered on the patriarchal crime against women par excellence but ‘inextricably the main feminist text of the language’” (17). These strong texts by Warner, Castle, and Egawton form a curious critical triangle where alliances shift depending on the angle of vision one adopts but where Castle’s book occupies the central, mediating position. On the one hand, Warner and Castle share an essentially formalist view of Clarissa as a novel about language; on the other, Castle and Egawton share an essentially ideological view of the relation of gender and the world. If, however, one turns this critical kaleidoscope yet another turn, one sees a crucial third view of this text wherein Castle disappears, the triangle collapses, and Warner and Egawton are left fighting over the sexual body of a woman; in the end the struggle for interpretation is waged between them. This perspective takes over in Warner’s response to both Castle and Egawton, “Reading Rape: Marxist Feminist Figures of the Ideal,” where Warner ends his lengthy review article by summarizing all his assertions. In turn, Egawton votes against him. Warner accuses Egawton of being like Warner himself (like all men): Lovelace who restricts through his ‘character of the literal’—the lurk, prose in which he evokes Clarissa’s violation—the very rape of Clarissa he seeks to condemn.

In the final section of The Rape of Clarissa, however, Egawton makes an important shift that Warner does not account for and that might be seen as a sort of turning point in the essay in issues of feminism. Egawton, in his postscript, turns briefly to Richardson’s final novel, Sir Charles Grandison, which he describes as “the production of a new kind of male subject” (90), one constituted through the absorption of the noblest characteristics of female sensibility: chastity and altruism. Though the novel of male sensibility is essentially a didactic and the feminization of the male protagonist hardly a cause for feminist rejoicing, Egawton’s last-minute evocation of the ways in which the asymmetry of gender affect the construction of male subjectivity is a crucial and important one. It signals the beginning of a movement away from the attempt by male critics to master feminist critique even at the cost of phallicizing women—Egawton’s Clarissa ties in, as Showalter aptly points out, an asserting phallic woman ("Casting Down")—to a more sobering recognition that none has the critical phallic.

GENDER STUDIES

In the rapidly evolving field of critical theory, it is not always an easy matter to assign precise dates to major shifts, since these shifts occur slowly and in uneven, ragged patterns. In feminist criticism one must then settle for approximate periods: around 1970—through John Callen’s mode of periodization—feminist criticism began to constitute itself on the nuts of New Criticism and in the wake of the social upheavals of the 1960s; around 1981—again according to Callon—feminist criticism in the United States attained academic legitimacy as measured by such leading indicators as the exponentially growing list of feminist publications (journals, books, articles), the proliferation of feminist sessions at the annual MLA convention, and, perhaps most significantly, by the tenure of scholars primarily identified as feminist critics. Though one might argue that feminism’s success in the field of literary studies was not as profound as it merely statistical overview might suggest, by the early 1980s feminist criticism and theory were without question no longer marginal activities, practiced by an embattled corps of largely appointed and powerless women.

Around 1895 feminist began to give way to what has come to be called gender studies. As I indicated at the onset, I take it that feminist and gender studies are not counterproductive, though they share a central concern with gender. Instead of viewing gender studies as the inevitable transformation of feminist studies, the end of feminist literary history is as it were, we must be heuristic as well as political. This holds them apart so that we may grasp their specificity and carefully weigh the risks of prematurely abandoning early feminist concepts against the advantages of unmooring gender from feminist politics (Landhabers).

It is of course, equally important to subject the very notion of gender studies to close scrutiny, for, like feminism itself, gender studies is not a single entity. In fact, at this transits-inal moment, gender studies is an ill-defined and undertheorized label covering a heteroglossic set of current critical practices whose only commodity appears to be a rejection of a narrowly conceived, woman-centered eponymicism. Gender studies is, then, a convenient catchall term grouping together such diverse current critical practices as the feminist approach recycled into a new comparative (what N.K. Miller, in Subject of Change, terms "reading in pairs") (129), a men's studies that knowledgefully replicates women's
taken root in the United States as it has in no other country in the world. Because of the over-hauling influence of mainstream feminist studies, other forms of feminist study have found it difficult to constitute themselves without reduplicating some of the stages and postures of work done "in English" by American. Thus canons building has been as central, if not more so, to black feminist studies as it has to feminist studies in the national literatures (Washington, Bates; N. B. Miller, Subject to Change). And yet in the 1980s, the studies of marginal or subaltern subjectivities and cultural productions, without ceasing to follow the lead of mainstream feminist studies in some ways, emerged in others as one of the most powerful forces spearheading the formation of the new interdisciplinary field of cultural studies (Carby; Spivak; Bhabha) in this volume.

Meanwhile, other feminists who had struggled to construct subjectivities for women, even in the face of the much touted death of the author-subject, began to come to terms with some of the implications of the poststructuralist- or "posthumanist" (Hornor) critique of the unified subject. They brought feminism and theory together, legitimizing a union long held to be bound by a shotgun marriage (see Callin in this volume). As a consequence of these and other developments, the very ground of feminism—nominations such as a universal category of woman or the oppression of women by a universal patriarchy—began to be both fertile and crack, and the embolism's afternoons continue to be left today.

Perhaps no single work has proved more unsettling for feminism and more influential in the field of what I would term the new gender studies than La volonté de savoir, the first volume of Michel Foucault's four-volume Histoire de la sexualité. First published in French in 1976 and translated into English in 1978, this work has provided a tremendous impetus for rethinking not so much the operations of gender—which are not, as many of Foucault's feminist readers have been quick to point out and deplore, his concern—as the distinction between gender and sexuality. The disengagement of sexuality from gender has been a major determinant in the passage from feminist to gender studies as it is emerging today. Whereas gender can be a universal category and has been posited as such, albeit one with culturally inflected variations, sexuality was, according to Foucault, an invention of nineteenth-century Europe. It is, he would argue, free within the prison house of sexuality that we have constructed our views of gender as an intractable binary system of opposites. By historicizing sexuality, by interrogating sexuality's function as the key to an individual's most intimate and secret identity, by arguing that the association of hysteria with the female body and the association of perversion with the male body are but aspects of the ordination of pleasures and desires effected by the power-knowledge apparatus of the rising bourgeoisie, Foucault made possible a new look at and beyond the sex/gender system, including a questioning of the validity of that foundational distinction. Inspired by Foucault's analyses but also by Monique Wittig's pioneering critiques of the sex/gender system, "postfemi-

nistic" theorizations have begun to argue several issues: First, there is no distinc-

Studies (Brook), and gay and lesbian studies that increasingly call into question the very notions of sex and gender. I have chosen 1985 as the date that signals the rise of gender studies in part because it marks the publication of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's influential Between Men. In that book, Sedgwick articulates the insights of feminist criticism onto those of gay male studies, which had up to then pursued often parallel but separate courses (affirming the existence of a homosexual or female impetus in texts, recovering lost traditions, decoding the cryptic discourse of works already in circulation by homosexual or feminist authors). This unusual and explosive conjunction both in Sedgwick's book and elsewhere has driven gender studies in the field of literature and has arguably produced the field's finest readings and most significant theoretical advances. Before we examine this most innovative and promising area of gender studies, several other developments of the shift we are tracing need to be mentioned, for although Sedgwick's text crystallizes that shift, it is itself caught up in larger trends that need to be noted out. I mention three in passing—a generational shift, the exhaustion of a paradigm, the emergence of a new consciousness, and focus on the fact, the publication of Michel Foucault's History of Sexuality.

By 1985 a new generation of feminist scholars of remarkable daring and creativity had established the indisputable validity of a feminist approach to texts and their interpretations, and a second generation of student-daughters and in some instances student-sons had begun to refine the first generation's pioneering studies. At the same time, as with other paradigms, many of the paradoxes of feminism had become familiar, and, in large measure, the results of their application had become predictable. Against this backdrop, highly articulate and increasingly compelling voices that had too long remained marginal within the feminist community of literary studies—chiefly those of the voices of so-called minority women (African American, Cisca, Native American, Asian American)—began to be heard in a different way by the generally white, bourgeois, liberal, Euro-American women who had shaped the third stages of feminist studies. In an era of postcolonialism, of surprisingly acrimonious public debates over the canon and pluralism, and of the flowering of black women's writing, issues of race, class, and ethnicity, long submerged to the urgent task of criticizing from whose cloth a new way of reading texts and interpreting culture from a feminist standpoint, could no longer be ignored. In a series of publications (Doronga and Anahid; Hooks; de la Revetin; Hall, Smith) the multiple differences that divide women from one another and from themselves returned as a powerful force as a dominant feminist narrative viewed in a dangerous light, totalizing and exclusionary in its claim to speak for all women. Questions of identity that had been dismissed as pretentious were reopened from the standpoint of subjects unaccounted for by dominant theories. The supraind of sisterhood was displaced by the realistic recognition of struggle.

However much women's liberation has been an international movement, for economic, cultural, and structural reasons women's studies has taken off and
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between sex and gender, in that there is nothing outside or before culture, no nature that is always and already enunciated "sex," writes the philosopher Judith Butler, "by definition, will be shown to have been gender all along" (8). Similarly, the implied comparison or distinction between sex (male/female) and gender (masculine/feminine) and thus the very notion of gender serve to enforce a compulsory heterosexuality. What is at stake, then, in the postfeminist appropriation of Foucault's notion of sexuality is a radical questioning of the complicity of the sex-gender distinction and the hegemony of heterosexuality. If it can be shown that gender difference is the product of a series of normatively necessary practices that work to secure a binary sexual model and to marginalize other forms of desire and object-choice, then what needs to be questioned is gender itself. Paradoxically, then, gender studies in its most exciting and genuinely innovative form becomes a kind of cultural studies based on a radical questioning of the very desire to stigmatize the gay and lesbian body. It is an accident that this questioning has been carried farther by gay or gay-identified and lesbian theoreticians bent on disturbing, not to say dissolving, heterosexuality. What gender is or was to feminism, sexuality is to the antigayphobic critical approach. Sedgwick seeks to articulate as her most recent work, Epistemology of the Closet.

Between Men

It, after Foucault—and he has his detractors—one adopts a periodization that places the invention of homosexuality (as well as heterosexuality) in the Victorian era, if it follows that works of fiction produced in that era should occupy a privileged position in the study of the emergence of the novel. The last of Herman Melville's great sea novels, Billy Budd, has thus come to occupy a central position in the emerging field of gay studies. In Sedgwick's words, it has "made a centerpiece for gay, gay-affirmative, or gay-related readings of American culture, and for readings by gay critics" (Epistemology 92). The Foucauldian matrix of many recent gay or gay-related readings is most apparent in their attention to the presence in late-Victorian and turn-of-the-century works of the very taxonomizing discourses that serve to police and contain a dangerously mobile desire (D. A. Miller). Consequently, Foucault-inspired gender criticism has, like most other forms of applied theory, produced its own distinctive thematic: the themes of discipline. Some of the more prominent gay/gender studies today focus on the process whereby what is figured in literature is the very production of homosexuality as a category. Whereas an earlier generation of gay critics denounced the presupposition of homosexuality (Freudian psychoanalysis fares no better here than it does in early American feminism), more recent critics study its invention, thereby denying the view of homosexuality as a transcendental essence and provoking a debate on essentialism that is every bit as violent as that in feminism (Boswell). On the one hand, a gay-affirmative critic such as Robert K. Martin asserts in his reading of Billy Budd that the novel is "above all a study of repression" (107), and he takes it as a given that one of the principal things being repressed is homosexual desire: "In this homophobic world, charged with sexual potential, only strict control of the homosexual can prevent a mutiny" (108). On the other hand, Sedgwick in her very Foucauldian reading suggests that what is being produced in Billy Budd is homosexuality. She asserts that the same discursive mechanisms that produce homosexuality also work to break down the opposition between the normal and the pathological, the essential and private and the commonplace and public homosexual male, that is, between Captain Vere and Claggart.

Tragically, much of the energy animating gay-studies today derives from the renewed urgency of the fight against homophobia in the age of AIDS (Edelman). As demonstrated by the critical studies of the way fiction sets in place a rigidly binary heterosexual model of human desire, the cost of inventing a stigmatized homosexual male is a form of scapegoating, of which Billy Budd's exemplary punishment is just the most spectacular example. Though no analysis of homophbic discursive practices such as those surrounding AIDS can prevent a single death, one of the remarkable achievements of gay theory is its effectiveness against practices designed to make people with AIDS, chiefly homosexuals, culpable for their illness.

Between Women

At the outset, I alluded to the process of producing this essay, in turning to the question of lesbian studies. I would like to return once again to this process, because part of it involved circulating outlines of nearly all the essays in this volume for commentary among a wide and representative body of MLA members. No section of my essay provoked more spirited responses than the preliminary outline of what follows. What seemed unacceptable was my plan to focus not on the major figures that had emerged from the canon-building stage of lesbian studies—Gertrude Stein, Adrienne Rich, and Monique Wittig—but on the equally important but far more ambiguous (because bisexual?) figures of Colette andopcode. These objections are noteworthy because they reveal the communal nature of this topic. No one contested my equally debatable choice of Billy Budd as a focal text for my discussion of gay studies (rather than, for example, Wole Soyinka's more obviously affirmative and centrally canonical Song of Myself), but my notion of choice of texts by Stein, Wittig, and Rich provoked dismay. This dismay points not just to my own difficulties as an "outsider" to get it right but also to important unresolved tensions between feminist and lesbian studies, especially with the emergence of gender studies. What I had failed to make clear in my outline was my reason for wanting to go slightly outside the canon for my exemplum: The canonization of the great lesbian writers, I reasoned, corresponded roughly to the era of gynocriticism and feminist canon building. I was attempting to chart, looking ahead to the future, the effect of gender (and cultural) studies in the
area of lesbian criticism and theory. My view, as I see it now, was unwittingly to reduplicate a topical phallocentric gesture by expecting lesbian-gender studies to fit neatly into the template of gender studies. Not that the two fields do not share crucial assumptions. Lesbian theorists, most notably Wittig, were among the first to point to the imbrication of hetero-
sexualities and sexism and to call for an escape from gender, which Wittig describes as "the linguistic index of the political opposition between the sexes" ("Mark" 64). Because a woman is defined through her difference from man within the binary gender system, Wittig, in an essay entitled, in homage to Baudrillard, "OM Sex," concludes that, "Lesbianism is not a matter of sex; it is a matter of women" (110). Lesbian and gay studies differ significantly, however, in their views on sexuality. In gay studies, the escape from which Barthes called the "binary prison" (20) is a metaphoric one. Roland Barthes' (1977) goes hand in hand with the emancipation of sexuality; in lesbian studies, sexuality is in fact no more a given than is gender. And this brings us to Sula.

In her groundbreaking 1973 essay, "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism," Barbara Smith argues that Toni Morrison's 1973 novel Sula could be read as lesbian, not because, as she recognized, the central female characters, Sula and Nel, were lovers, but because their relationship was infused with an eroticized affective and physical intensity that undermined the institutions of heterosexuality (marriage and family). It is perhaps no accident that Smith proposed such a provocative and seemingly perverse interpretation of one of the most popular and widely commented on novels by a contemporary black woman author. As many critics have argued, in a harshly (hetero)sexist and racist society, female bonding or "woman identification" (Bettelheim) has offered black women a unique means of survival; hence the prominence of female friendship in such novels as Zora Neale Hurston's That Eye, We're Watching God, Alice Walker's Color Purple, and Gloria Naylor's Women of Brewster Place; hence also the symptomatic silence surrounding black women's sexuality (Spillers). The eroticization of black female friendship in the modern American black women's novel is the flip side of the appropriation of sexuality by women of the dominant white majority.

Although Smith's classification of Sula as a lesbian, and indeed an "exceedingly" lesbian, novel is correct and her reading is an important corrective to the third raises a crucial debate about the definition of lesbians. Some theorists, following Rich, subscribe to a broad definition of lesbianism that spans a "continuum" from female friendship to sexually consummated same-sex romantic relationships. Others, following Catherine R. Stimpson and Barbara Christian, among others, define lesbianism as necessarily sexually embodied. The very existence, within the spectres of lesbian theory, of a significant debate over the centrality of sexuality in defining lesbianism is an important difference between lesbian and gay studies, one that mirrors what Sedgwick describes as "an asymmetry between male and female"
SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

The quickest way for the beginner to get her or his bearings in the ever-expanding library of feminist and gender studies is to consult a combination of anthologies, introductory overviews, and a selection of representative or influential works. Many of these sources include substantial bibliographies that can in turn suggest further readings. In addition to those works already mentioned in the essay, I would recommend Tirtha Mitra's Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory and Gayle Greene and Coppelia Kahn's Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism, both of which give the reader a sense of the main issues in feminist criticism before the arrival of gender and postcolonial studies. Elaine Showalter's edited volume Speaking of Gender marks the emergence of gender studies as a distinct field. Among the recent anthologies on gender and the question of men in feminism, I suggest two companion books edited by Linda Kauthman, Gender and Theory: Dialogues on Feminist Criticism and Feminism and Institutions; Dialogues on Feminist Theory, as well as Joseph A. Boone and Michael Cadden's Engendering Men: Two works that might provide a useful entry point into the area of Marxist feminist literary and cultural analysis are Judith Newton and Deborah Rosenfeld's Feminist Criticism and Social Change; Sex, Class, and Race in Literature and Culture; and Cora Kaplan's Sex Changes: Essays on Culture and Feminism. For a diverse series of essays on the problems raised by the articulation of feminism and poststructuralism, see Elizabeth Weed's Coming to Terms: Feminism/Theory/Politics. Read side by side with Cheryl A. Wall's more theoretical Chasing Our Own Words, Joanne M. Braxton and Andréé Nicole McLaughlin's Wild Women is the Whitbread: Afro-American Culture and the Contemporary Literary Renaissance provides an excellent introduction to a wide spectrum of current black feminist literary criticism.

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