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**LITERATURE, FEMINISM AND THE ALPHA MALE:
A SEARCH BEYOND THE DOMINANCE METAPHOR**

Sara Castro-Klarén
Johns Hopkins University

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Preface

The Latin American Program is pleased to publish the following work as part of its occasional Working Paper series. This paper by Dr. Sara Castro Klarén, Professor of Latin American Literature and Culture at Johns Hopkins University, is one of three commissioned by the Latin American Program for the workshop, "Contemporary Gender Studies in Latin America: An Interdisciplinary Perspective," held at the Wilson Center on October 29, 1993.

The project, "Contemporary Gender Studies in Latin America: An Interdisciplinary Perspective," was designed to promote a greater exchange of ideas among scholars in various disciplines concerned with the study of women and gender. As we consider contemporary gender studies in Latin America, it becomes evident that various disciplines are involved, that their approaches vary significantly, and that there is a wide divergence among practitioners on how to carry out their work. Many scholars clearly recognize this divergence and are seeking to further the study of gender by promoting an interdisciplinary exchange.

In response to this concern, the Woodrow Wilson International Center's Latin American Program initiated a project to test the hypotheses that different perspectives are of value to one another and that, like women's studies programs in many universities in the United States, an interdisciplinary approach would enrich our understanding of the general problematique. Our project aimed to review major issues, methods of research, and new work in the field of Latin American gender studies from the perspective of three disciplines. Dr. Sara Castro-Klarén of Johns Hopkins University was commissioned to write a paper examining gender studies from a literary perspective; Dr. María Patricia Fernández Kelly, Research Scientist and Associate Professor of Sociology at the Johns Hopkins University Institute for Policy Studies, was asked to write a paper providing a political economy point of view; and Edna Acosta-Belén, Professor and Director of the Center for Latin America and the Caribbean at the State University of New York in Albany, was asked to write a paper examining gender studies from a historical perspective. Each author was asked to discuss the evolution of gender studies in her field, examining major issues, research methodologies, and supporting literature.

In the paper, *Literature, Feminism and the Alpha Male: A Search Beyond the Dominance Metaphor*, Dr. Castro-Klarén examines the relationship between feminist literary criticism and Latin American literature by women authors. Based on the premise that Latin American letters have developed in close contact with theoretical developments in the United States and Europe, Dr. Castro-Klarén analyzes how North American and European feminist literary theorists have addressed the question of a universal feminist speaking subject. The paper looks at two distinct theories of the feminine subject: gynocriticism and French (anti-) feminism. While the former asserts women's writing as part of an essentialist female tradition, the latter rejects the assumption of an authentically female voice and focuses on examining the constitution of sexual difference. Dr. Castro-Klarén

outlines the influence of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis on feminist literary theory and examines how various feminist theorists, including Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous, and Judith Butler, have challenged its theories of women. In conclusion, Dr. Castro-Klarén presents the ideas of Nancy Chodorow, Jane Flax, Judith Butler, and Gayatri Spivak to encourage a move away from an essentialist view and assert that, as cultural constructs, gender differences are relational. As such, feminists and other subjects outside of dominant literary traditions may be best examined from a local rather than universal context.

The following essay provides a useful analysis of the impact that North American and European feminist literary theory has had on the study of literature by Latin American women authors. It represents an important contribution to the study of women's literature in Latin America.

LITERATURE, FEMINISM AND THE ALPHA MALE: A SEARCH
BEYOND THE DOMINANCE METAPHOR

SARA CASTRO-KLAREN

"The history which bears and determines us has the form of a war rather than that
of a language"

Michel Foucault, Power / Knowledge (114)

"Si me permiten hablar"

Domitila Barrios de Chungara (Viezzler, 1977)

"Woman herself does not exist"

Jacques Lacan, Feminine Sexuality (144)

Preamble

The purpose of this essay is to examine and analyze the dialogic relation between feminist studies in the North American academy--from which we speak--and feminist literary criticism concerned with Latin American letters. During the last twenty-five years the field has been marked by a tight, if not always comfortable, embrace of theoretical developments in Europe and the United States. Further as we stand today, we can no longer afford the notion that "what goes on in Latin America" is insulated or isolated from discursive forces deployed from the centers of power/knowledge. Feminism and women's studies--Estudios de la Mujer--in Latin America have developed in close contact with, and perhaps been prompted by, the growing strength and interest in women's studies here.¹ But feminism in Latin

¹It is striking to note that the publication of books and even the operations of "centros para el estudio de la mujer" are supported by US and European foundations. For instance, the Center for Latin American Social Sciences (CLACSO) sponsored the "Primer Concurso Latinoamericano de Investigaciones y Formación Sobre la Mujer" (1987-88). It also supported the publication of "Mujer y Sociedad en América Latina," Buenos Aires, 1991. Likewise, the Centro de la Mujer Peruana Flora Tristán published the proceedings of two workshops that took place in Mexico City (1983) and Lima (1985) with funding from the Social Science Research Council and the Ford Foundation. The Centro de la Mujer Peruana Flora Tristán published Mujeres latinoamericanas: Diez ensayos y una historia colectiva in Lima in 1988. The editors of the volume see it as a first attempt on the part of women intellectuals to engage with the political struggle that other women are carrying on in other--deprived and oppressive--institutional or para-institutional settings.

The very active La Morada: Centro de Estudios de la Mujer in Santiago de Chile carries out many of its functions, including health outreach programs and radio broadcasts, with funds from various NGOs. Finally, the Programa Interdisciplinario de Estudios de la Mujer at the Colegio de México is closely modeled on North American women's studies centers. This program and its counterpart at the University of Concepción, Chile, are probably the only two degree granting programs in all of Latin America. But the lion's share of feminine and feminist writing, as well as feminist studies, has taken

America has also been part and parcel of women's political activism in several different areas of the body politic.² The feminist struggle has consciously included the domestic arena. For example, the groups of Chilean women who risked their lives to organize an effective resistance to Pinochet's dictatorship coined the felicitous strategy and phrase: "La democracia empieza por la casa." And this grass roots activism has colored the meditations of Chilean sociologists, philosophers, poets and literary critics.

However this feminist praxis and bold assertion of the capacity for self agency has not coincided with feminism in the academy, nor has one necessarily taken the other by the hand. One of the best examples of this bifurcation between the academy and activism can be found in the now-famous scene that took place in Mexico City during the meetings of the Tribuna del Año de la Mujer sponsored by the United Nations in 1975. There, Domitila Barrios de Chungara, a labor organizer in the Bolivian mines, questioned the language and the political assumptions of a highly placed Mexican bureaucrat. Domitila was irritated by the bureaucrat's use of the nominative "*nosotras las mujeres*." The Bolivian miner could not see how that "we" had come to exist:

Señora, hace una semana que yo la conozco a usted. Cada mañana llega usted con un traje diferente; y sin embargo, yo no. Cada día llega usted pintada y peinada como quien tiene tiempo de pasar en una peluquería bien elegante y puede gastar buena plata en eso; y, sin embargo, yo no.... Y, sin embargo, nosotras las mujeres de los mineros, tenemos solamente una pequeña vivienda prestada y cuando se muere nuestro esposo o se enferma o lo retiran de la empresa, tenemos noventa días para abandonar la vivienda y estamos en la calle.

Ahora señora, dígame: ¿tiene usted algo semejante a mi situación? ¿Tengo yo algo semejante a su situación de usted? Entonces, ¿de qué igualdad vamos a hablar entre nosotras? ¿Si usted y yo no nos parecemos, si usted y yo somos tan diferentes? Nosotras no podemos, en este momento, ser iguales, aun como mujeres. (Viezza, 225)

place in the field of literature in the United States. Besides a plethora of anthologies, translations, critical books, and articles published on nuns, travelers, and educators, the best measure of the vigor of the field can be taken in the annotated bibliographies that have appeared here in the last ten years. Sandra Cypess's Women Authors of Modern Hispanic South America and Diane E. Marting's Spanish American Women Writers: A Bio-bibliographical Sourcebook are excellent examples of the well-developed state of the field here. The lopsided comparison with women's studies in Latin America cannot be missed.

²See the chapter on exile in Amy Kaminsky's Reading the Body Politic. Besides the well-known cases of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina and the resistance to the Pinochet dictatorship, Kaminsky also studies the life stories and the writing of the women who had to seek exile because of their controversial politics. In this regard, it is also worth noting the appearance of "testimonios" given by women engaged in regional, ethnic, and national political struggles. The most successful example of these life stories is, of course, the narrative of Rigoberta Menchú's life. For her struggle and her ability to represent it, she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

While most clearly addressing issues of economic and ethnic identity, Domitila's questions go to the heart of the matter. How is it possible to assume oneself to be an authorized speaking subject? Was the fancy Mexican bureaucrat merely carried away by the power of the Spanish grammatical (gender) categories when she named the audience "nosotras"? Or is it possible to posit a gendered yet universal subject different from the always already masculine subject? After all, had one single member of the masculine gender been included in the referent of the Mexican woman, the rules of plural formation in the Spanish language would have forced her to use the institutionalized "true universal" *nosotros*.

The question of the speaking subject and "his"/"her" relation to (self) knowledge and representation (*¿tiene usted algo semejante a mi situación?*) is not only on Domitila's mind. It has indeed become the paramount problem in feminist studies everywhere, including Latin America. Among theorists, Alice Jardine was one of the first to recognize this impasse between theory and praxis. In *Gynesis: Configurations of Women and Modernity* (1985), she detects in French theorists such as Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva a disturbing disarticulation between theory and praxis: "theories of woman or the feminine and their insistence on the (always) potentially subversive power of the feminine in patriarchal culture had produced either no possibility for social and political praxis or had resulted in a praxis that I perceived as being reactionary for women. At the same time, those who had chosen to reject or ignore the major theorists and texts of modernity, those who had chosen to remain deaf to contemporary conceptual reworkings of the 'male' and 'female,' most often produced no theory at all, and, in any case--in their refusal to listen to their own discourse--their praxis was often more reactionary than that of their more feminine-minded sisters" (260).³

More recently and attesting to the protracted nature of the constitution of the subject and the corollary problems of self-knowledge and representation the Chilean poet and critic Soledad Fariña unfolds Domitila's concerns into a series of questions, all of which are yet to be resolved: *¿Cómo podré re-presentarme, re-escribirme?...¿Cómo nos pensamos? ¿Dónde van a caer nuestras reflexiones, que no son acogidas por un discurso.... que nos dejan fuera?"*⁴ In this essay Fariña goes on to establish inescapable links between the exploration of self, the search for a (feminine) speaking subject and the appearance of one's body as the baseline answer. However, upon further meditation, she must ask, once again: "Pero, ¿qué cuerpo?...¿el social? ¿el mío? ¿el uno como metáfora del otro? Relación

³Debra Castillo, in *Talking Back: Toward a Latin American Feminist Literary Criticism*, notes a similar theory/praxis impasse. She also feels that the refusal to engage theory does not save us from the impasse but rather prevents women from listening to their own patriarchal-founded discourse. Castillo sees in this refusal to engage theory the continuous growth of a debilitating "theoretical deficit" (33).

⁴ Soledad Fariña. "En busca de la palabra. Reflexiones en torno a la emergencia de una escritura femenina". In *¿Y nosotras latinoamericanas? Estudios sobre género e raza*. São Paulo, 1992.

demasiado compleja....Se llena la página de balbuceos en busca de una mínima certeza: se mira el cuerpo, se palpa, se escribe, se inscribe--o cree inscribirse-- utilizando como primer recurso la paradoja de escurrirse de la historia--textal-- que va silenciando el cuerpo" (46).

However, what lays hidden does not appear with clarity even when the poet writes and peels away layers of previous thinking and writing on "woman". She wonders if filling the page with words will allow the emergence of a new narrative subject capable of speaking what has remained unnamed. Will such a subject be able to overcome the alienation suffered at the hands of history? Will such a subject be able to rescue its self from the one part that became dominant and repressed all other aspects of the self in order to comply with patriarchal cultural logic?

Indeed how does a repressed and mutilated speaking subject write a protagonic self? Which is the body, that together with exploding words "quiere comparecer desde su diferencia"?(46). Fariña concludes that the speaking subject can only speak in a fragmentary manner and from a provisional sense of self. Writing is accompanied by the beat of the refrain: "¿Pero, es mi palabra, la palabra?" (46).

Since it is the subject as elaborated by psychoanalysis which is at the base of the theory/praxis impasse, I will focus my examination of feminist literary criticism on the problem of the subject--the subaltern subject to be precise. This is the dominant question for any literary critic and as such has exerted a pervasive influence on what has been written on women writers, even though its importance has not been acknowledged by critics who examine "desire," the "object," "jouissance," the body, "language". Further, the subject, as a master category of psychoanalysis, is also now being deconstructed by feminist thought and so an examination of its deployment in literary criticism is even more timely here.

But first, a word on gender and feminist thought. When Gayle Rubin showed that "woman" in the opposition male/female corresponded to the nature part of the corresponding nature/culture opposition, "woman" was released from our vocabulary, and we took up "gender." Despite this newer category's reminding us of the cultural constructedness of "women," in the social sciences and to a lesser extent in the humanities, gender too has been naturalized,⁵ collapsed with the received (biological) notion of women. The naturalization of gender affects the dialectic discursive place that it occupies. Such collapse provides the basis for an obliteration of historically specific "gender" studies. Teresa de Lauretis in Technologies of Gender (1987) formulates four clarifying propositions concerning gender:

"1. Gender is (a) representation.

⁵Studies that rely heavily on the disinterring of "data" from archives, statistics, and fieldwork are good examples of the naturalization of gender. See, for example, Lavrin and Banchs et al.

2. The representation of gender *is* its construction.
3. The construction of gender goes on as busily today as it did in earlier times.... in the academy [and] especially in feminism.
4. Paradoxically, therefore, the construction of gender is also effected by its deconstruction" (3).

Because gender is a category of analysis, like class or ethnic identity, it is crucial that it remain under critical consideration in feminist studies.

I wish also to note a difference between a feminist inquiry into the constitution of knowledge and the current naturalized "gender" studies approach. The first radicalizes our received knowledge; the second does not. Feminist studies means a critical inquiry into all possible topics--not just women. Gerda Lerner, in The Creation of Feminist Consciousness (1993), identifies five essential positions of a feminist approach to knowledge as (1) an awareness of belonging to a subordinate group; (2) a realization that subordination is not the result of any natural difference, rather, it is socially determined; (3) the awareness of subordination corresponds to a solidarity among those who respond to such group identification; (4) a feminist consciousness searches therefore for an autonomous definition of woman; which (5) may provide society with an alternative vision of the rupture (5).

Writing and Difference

Feminist studies have exploded, and it is no exaggeration to say that questions of feminist theory have come to occupy the center of disciplinary epistemologies.⁶ Feminist inquiry devolves on the question of the production of difference and identity. It either relies upon or calls into question the basic oppositions of Western metaphysics: nature/culture, female/male, subordinate/dominant, man/God, evil/good, chaos/order, sex/gender. This essay will explore the terms of that questioning: how difference and identity inform feminist inquiries into the constitution of the subject--from Virginia Woolf's call for a "room of one's own," to Sor Juana's kitchen chemistry, to Diamela Eltit's narratives of the body.

Many feminist efforts to recover silenced presences have relied upon textual and cultural theories which assume that "woman" responds to a common-sense, self-evident category. These efforts have been greatly modified by the theoretical corollaries of the assertion, "woman is not born, but made," first deployed by Simone de Beauvoir in The Second Sex and carried to its logical extreme in Lacan's famous conclusion, "Woman does herself not exist and signifies nothing" (Feminine Sexuality, 145). The simple male/female opposition is not self-explanatory. A revision of the debate between gynocriticism, now better known as humanist feminism, and the French (anti-)feminist philosophers serves here as an instructive point on the polemics of subjecthood, subjectivity, and identity. These two distinct theories of the feminine subject have had a widely felt impact on the study of Latin American women writers.⁷ Gynocriticism assumes "woman" as a replicate subject of the Enlightenment. French (anti-)feminism departs from the critique of the unified subject--a critique central to post-modernism.

Several instances of humanist feminism illustrate the impasse created by the claims embedded in the epistemology of "a literature of their own." I choose Elaine Showalter's study of British women writers, thus named, because of its enormous influence on all fields of literary analysis. In opposition to the literary patriarchy in

⁶See, for instance, the table of contents of Maggie Humm, Modern Feminisms: Political, Literary, Cultural. Under "Part II: Theories, Political Documents and Debates," the editor organizes materials under the following subheadings: Second Wave Feminism; Socialist/Marxist Feminism; Asian, Black and Women of Colour Lesbianisms/Feminism; Lesbian Feminism; Liberal Feminism; Difference; Psychoanalytic Feminism; Nature; Sexuality and Reproduction; Peace; Philosophy and the Sciences; History; Culture; Language and Writing; Feminism and Education.

⁷Gynocritics directly influenced much of the existing scholarship in search of the women forgotten by the patriarchal record of history. Thus, single-author studies have proliferated and in doing so have posed a challenge to the canon. Good examples of this renewed interest in neglected authors are Hernan Vidal, María Luisa Bombal: La femeninidad enajenada; Lucía Guerra Cunningham, La narrativa de María Luisa Bombal: Una visión de la existencia femenina; Marjory Agosin, Los desterrados del paraíso, protagonistas en la narrativa de María Luisa Bombal. Also see Maureen Ahern, Homenaje a Rosario Castellanos.

which male authors succeed each other in an endless and exclusive line of descent, A Literature of Their Own constructs a parallel chain of women writers who indeed saw their work as part of a female heritage of authorship that could and did authorize them as writers. This historical reconstruction relies on the isolation of one factor: textual autograph. However, the unexamined identification of a female autograph with a feminine and even a feminist kind of writing, an assumed corollary in Showalter's line of descent, is fraught with problems.⁸

Further analysis points out the problems created by a critical theory that neglects the question of local reader response, that is, of the community of interpreters most closely connected to the text's production. There is no question that the reader brings to these texts an a priori conceptualization of what feminine writing is. Showalter, for instance, faults Virginia Woolf's novels for failing to textualize an "authentic" female experience. This North American literary critic is disappointed also in Dorothy Richardson because the English novelist "rationalized the problem of her 'shapeless outpourings' by working out a theory that saw shapelessness as the natural expression of female empathy, and pattern as the sign of male one-sidedness. . . . She was claiming that the entire tradition of the English novel had misrepresented feminine reality." Showalter's disappointment in Richardson grows when she realizes that the novelist, "in pursuing a distinctly female consciousness, rather than attempting to explore female experience," (256) seems fascinated by idealist theories of language. Women writers' inability to "imitate" properly naturalized literary conventions has often been the "reason" major literary critics such as Anderson Imbert, Rodríguez Monegal, Angel Rama and González Echevarría have left them out of their critical appraisals and processes of institutionalization.⁹

Implicit in A Literature of Their Own and in any *historia de la literatura hispano-americana* is a model of strong women writing in order to create fictional accounts of the silenced feminine subjectivity. The key assumption sustained in the paradigm demands authenticity. In the case of Showalter, as in the case of Latin American women writers, it leads to the rejection of Woolf's androgyny as well as Richardson's "shapelessness" and the search for a "woman's writing" or a *palabra propia*. In a counter move, but still operating from the a-priori basis of a local readership of what a feminist writer should or can be-different- Susana Reisz attempts a typology of mimicry, ironization and improvisation for recent feminine fiction.¹⁰

⁸See Domna Stanton's chapter, "Autogynography: Is the subject different?" in The Female Autograph.

⁹See Sara Castro-Klarén. "By (T)reason of State."

¹⁰ See Susana Reisz. "Hipótesis sobre el tema 'escritura femenina e hispanidad'". Tropelias. Revista de teoría de la literatura y literatura contemporánea. Zaragoza. No.1, 1990, 199-213. In her unpublished essay, "Conflictos de "género" (y de "género") en la poesía de nuestro fin de siglo," read at the Congreso del Instituto Internacional de Literatura Iberoamericana in Pittsburgh (6/1994), Reisz advances the

In Sexual/Textual Politics, Toril Moi argues that the demand for a tidy, unified, authentically feminist self identity is a demand for none other than the traditional humanist self at the center of the patriarchal ideology that Showalter's feminist ideals repudiate. It is this shared ideology that leads the critics to misread Woolf's androgynous proposal and to overlook the radical undermining of the unitary self--a project later taken up by post-modern theory. Moi's post-modern reading rescues Woolf from the self-sameness demand made by the humanism of A Literature of Their Own. She stresses that "Woolf rejects the metaphysical essentialism underlying patriarchal ideology, which hails God, the Father or the phallus as its transcendental signified" (9).¹¹

However, one could argue that much of what we have called the avant-guard of the early part of this century had as its project the dismantling of the transcendental unified subject of humanism. In fact such a project reaches its apex in the fiction of Julio Cortazar. In this regard it is also important to remember that the production of fragmented and hybrid subjects is not only confined to recent times or to the writing of women from positions of sub-ordination. Sylvia Molloy in At Face Value: Autobiographical Writing in Spanish America (1991) gives new meaning to the hybrid subjects of Sarmiento's Recuerdos de Provincia and Victoria Ocampo's Autobiografía. Moreover, if one is going to reexamine the production of fragmented subjects as Moi does with Woolf, Reisz does with Blanca Varela, and Fariña does with her own texts, one need not stop at Sarmiento, the retrospective line leads us back to "colonial" texts and the question of the sub-altern.

Though Showalter's humanism bears the trace of the phallus as the transcendental signifier, her search for antecedents has uncovered texts authored by women and other subaltern subjects previously dismissed or discarded in a male-supremacist literary tradition. The emergence of these woman-authored texts has modified our sense of the past. Subjects self-portrayed or defined as "women" no longer appear as a simple passive nexus within the links of kinship and other forms of social organization.¹² In later works, Showalter herself has proposed quilting as a metaphor for the social and creative processes to be read into texts authored by

notion that writing against the grain from a position of "falsedad, ficción, robo o plagio", the young peruvian poets she studies question the subjectivity of the European lyric and establish themselves in a "poética del zafarrancho".

¹¹Moi continues "Woolf's refusal to commit herself in her essays to a so-called rational or logical form of writing, free from fictional techniques, indicates a similar break with symbolic language" (11).

¹²There have been two currents in the search for predecessors among Latin American women authors. The search for any written trace at all has been undertaken by historians, who have wished for another Sor Juana lying hidden in some archive. Asunción Lavrin, a pioneer in Colonial Studies, often laments that "En tanto que la mayoría de las mujeres del México colonial apenas si sabían leer, el grupo más numeroso de mujeres ilustradas estaba constituido por monjas" (Las mujeres latinoamericanas, 35). More recently, Francine Masiello's Between Civilization and Barbarism: Women, Nation and Literary Culture in Modern Argentina provides an excellent example of this labor of recovery and reconstitution of cultural history.

women. This quilt metaphor casts in a positive light the fragmentary quality of the prose of women writers--Woolf, Bombal, and Langhe, for example. In Spanish America, women writers, such as Marta Traba, Rosario Ferre, and Tamara Kamenzai, have spoken of the "estética de la cocina" or "de la costura" or "del zafarrancho" in an effort to find a link between writing and the traditional work done by women, to propose an aesthetic of difference. "La estética de la cocina" conveys also the idea of makeshift work, a work created of the bits and pieces already available, a work destined for the immediate pleasure of consumption rather than the timeless canonization always available for a text of male provenance.¹³

Other Latin American women writers were quick to reject the whole idea of a writing with specifically essentialist feminine characteristics. For very different ideological and aesthetic reasons, Julieta Campos, Nérida Piñon, Clarice Lispector, and Elena Poniatowska stated that for them there was only writing. Writing could not be marked a priori by either a masculine or a feminine sign. They rejected also the idea of a female tradition. Instead they saw themselves as national writers, at once heirs to and critics of their nations' masculine tradition.¹⁴ Despite their statements, Piñon, Poniatowska, and others are read, valued, and devalued as "women writers." They are read within the framework proposed by gynocriticism which means to study "the history, styles, themes, genres, and structures of writing by women [as well as] the psychodynamics of female creativity" (Showalter, "Feminist Criticism," 25).

Madness and Creativity

The need to understand women's creativity--criticized for lacking rigor and form, a makeshift working from fragments and leftovers, indeed a kind of cooking--led many feminist literary critics to psychoanalysis. The Freudian "science" experienced a fascinating reincarnation in the writings and teachings of Jacques Lacan.

Freud's theories of repression and anxiety were brilliantly used by Harold Bloom in his reading of the anxiety of influence in English Romantic poetry. This reading made its grand entrance as a theory of female psychodynamics in the widely read Madwoman in the Attic: A Study of Women and the Literary Imagination in the Nineteenth-Century, by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. The madwoman, a characterization used to emblemize both protagonists and authors of fiction, has its obvious provenance in Freud's portrayal of female hysteria. But the madwoman of Gilbert and Gubar's title is taken from Jane Eyre. As I wrote elsewhere, it is more

¹³See also Patricia González and Eliana Ortega, La Sarten por el mango. In trying to advocate a theory drawn from both the local praxis of women writers and current theoretical trends in the North American academy, Debra Castillo makes use of the cooking metaphor as a method suitable to attain women's goals of self definition; see Talking Back.

¹⁴See Sara Castro-Klarén, Sylvia Molloy and Beatriz Sarlo, eds. Women's Writing in Latin America.

difficult for a Latin Americanist to ignore the fictional fact that the madwoman locked in the attic of the great and somber house is a creole woman, the master's first wife. It is her inheritance that makes possible his good fortune and return to England. She, of course, does not fit into manor society in the English countryside, and eventually her unhappiness requires that she be locked up.

The cultural specificity of the model notwithstanding, the idea of the anxiety-ridden author proposed by Gilbert and Gubar was quickly imported into the study of Latin American women writers. Anxiety of authorship, claustrophobia, rage, and suicide seem to parallel naturally the lives of authors and characters in Recuerdos del Porvenir, Balum Canaan, Se llama Sabina y tiene los cabellos colorados, the poetry of Alfonsina Storni, and even Sor Juana's reckless charity during the cholera epidemic that killed her.

According to the anxiety-of-authorship thesis, women labor to overcome the patriarchal definitions of self that intervene between woman's self and her emerging self. Moi points out, "The dire consequence of this predicament is that the woman writer inevitably comes to suffer from a debilitating anxiety of authorship" (Sexual/Textual Politics, 58); thus, when women write, they tell the truth but with a slant. Female schizophrenia explains and/or reinforces the stereotype of the duplicitous female, of the suicidal manic heroines of the fictions authored by Delmira Augustini, Elena Garro, Adelia Prado, Alejandra Pizarnik, Clarice Lispector, and others. In an unusual conflation of text and autobiography, the assumptions in Madwoman in the Attic furnished feminist criticism with an image of the woman writer and her textual self-representations which, in hindsight, would seem more romantic than revolutionary. Anger animates the writing power of the angels of the house, and it is the source of female creativity. Real (mad) women, obscured in the text, authorize the truth of their fiction. As in gynocriticism, Gilbert and Gubar employ the mainstay of patriarchal individualist criticism: the author stands as the source of meaning in the text. Feminist criticism thus constituted--a literature of their own enraged, self-identical, and yet alienated selves--would soon have to face the tidal wave of post-modern theory and its radical critique of the unitary subject. Post-modern theorists not only propose a de-centered subject which is not the subject of consciousness, but they also present us with the death of the author.

While both gynocriticism and the anxiety-of-authorship thesis authorized rage and confusion as the result of oppression, neither theory offered an explanation for the historical oppression of women. It was the ready assumption of woman's inequality, grounded in biology or culture or both, that sustained the thesis of the madwoman and the feminist writer. Simone de Beauvoir's reading of the objectification of woman by a metaphysical male subject removed woman's subjectivity from the framework of hysteria and reinstated it within the problematic of cultural production. Beauvoir argued that Western metaphysics, which works on the basis of oppositions, had produced man as self (identity) and woman as other (alterity). Woman was thus the other side of the moon; male cogito, the very thought that illuminated the visible side of the disk and kept the other side in

darkness, needed to be subjected to a radical scrutiny to discover the reasons for its failure to think woman (alterity). Latin American women attempting to clear a theoretical space for themselves appear particularly sensitive to the status of woman as other.¹⁵ Olga Grau speaks perhaps for many poets and theorists who have grappled with the problem of women's absence from Western epistemology when she writes, "Opto por hablar desde el revés, o al revés, mas que hablar desde el lugar del no-poder. Más bien desde la potencia que desde la carencia" (58). But Beauvoir's existential sense of the denied other, the underside (revés) of "man's" self made its way into the feminist debate and textual interpretation at the same time when Lacan's radical concept of the unconscious circulated another, powerful concept of the Other.

Lacan: The Subject Is Always Already Masculine

The debate over psychoanalysis is perhaps one of the most important topics to be considered in the study of Latin American culture and feminist theory. This debate not only frames the question of gender and identity, but it also holds at its center an entire myth about the pre-cultural status of the mother and child dyad. Much has been said about *marianismo* and *machismo* as staples of Catholic cultures, but the understanding of woman and the mother posited by psychoanalysis sidesteps or reaches over the powerful myths of the Virgin Mother and Divine Child dyad venerated at all levels of cultural production in Latin America. Further, the debate over psychoanalysis is fueled by a paradox of particular interest for Latin America and its peripheral relation to the West: born out of the post-modern collapse of the unitary subject of the Enlightenment and the suspicion of all master narratives, psychoanalysis bases its claims to "scientific" status on essentialist and universal axioms that disregard local knowledges and specificities.

Here, the exploration of the unconscious seems to hold the key to the understanding of both the male and the female psyche; it is expected also to reveal the primary processes and relations by which the virtual universal oppression of women might be explained. Immersed in deconstruction and schooled by Lacan himself, theorists such as Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, and Julia Kristeva have tackled, often at a critical distance from the masters, the mystery of the construction of sexual difference as well as the question of a specifically woman's language. The opaque language of Lacan, the complexity and seduction of his style and thought, and the brilliant quality of his speculations have proved to hold an intense magnetism not only for the French (anti-)feminists but also for others under the spell of his ever-dissolving subject.¹⁶ However, the initial fascination experienced

¹⁵See Rosemary Geisdorfer Feal, "Feminism and Afro-Hispanicism: The Double Bind," and "Feminist Interventions in the Race for Theory: Neither Black nor White."

¹⁶It is important to note the immediate availability of French theorists in Spanish translation. Foucault, Kristeva, Lacan, and others were often translated into Spanish *before* they became available in English. The editorial house Siglo XXI played and continues to play an important role in the rapid

by many feminists has been followed for some by challenges to Lacan's writing the feminine out of culture. His theories on the original alienation suffered by the subject, as the infant becomes aware of its separateness from the mother, have consistently been disputed and contested by analysts whose work centers on object relations. Many of the feminist theorists who take to task Lacan's view of the mother are themselves practicing analysts.

Feminist readings in the wake of Lacan's most influential concepts--the Imaginary and the Symbolic Order--have constructed a simile between the female body and feminine writing. This interpretation of Lacan's own reading of Freud's drive theory has provided an appealing space for feminist theorists wedded to the idea of oppositional differences as the basis for gender identity and the forever new and fascinating "discovery" of women's oppression as the chief means of textual signification.

Lacan posits the Imaginary in place of Freud's pre-Oedipal stage. At this stage the child believes himself to be continuous with the mother. HE perceives no separation between HIMself and the world. In this space, the Imaginary, there is no absence; there is only continuous existence. Freud's Oedipal crisis, the time when the BOY realizes that he is not like the mother and that he is actually--because of his penis--more like the father, is characterized by Lacan as the child's entry into the Symbolic Order. For the French theoretician, the rupture with the mother is actually pre-Oedipal, inasmuch as it takes place with the inception of language and the ability to name that which is absent (m/other). Both the presence of the father, who claims the mother for himself, and the inception of language (absence) split the original pre-linguistic and thus pre-cultural mother-child dyad.¹⁷

Suffering from a full-blown Oedipal crisis, the child learns to repress the desire for the m/other's body and to accept the Law of the Father or the Symbolic Order. For Lacan this primary sense of loss and repression inaugurates the unconscious. The split in the dyad also marks the split between the "I" and the world. According to Lacan, when the speaking subject says "I," it is saying "I am that which I am not." All speaking subjects are therefore produced by the loss, and the awareness of the lack is language itself.

Irigaray questioned Lacan's theories on the constitution of the subject, for his logic would make woman "the sex that is not one"; within Lacan's phallogocentric system of representation, woman constitutes the unrepresentable, she is the mark of a linguistic absence. Irigaray argues that both the subject of Lacan and his Other (m/other) are masculine functions of a closed phallogocentric signifying economy

circulation of theoretical propositions. In this regard, one must not forget the widespread practice of psychoanalysis in Argentina, Chile, Mexico, and Brazil, an aspect of Latin America's cultural history that has been profoundly neglected. See Moises Lemlij. [Psychoanalysis in Latin America](#).

¹⁷See Jacques Lacan, [The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis](#) (1978).

founded on the exclusion of the feminine.¹⁸ Julia Kristeva, dealing also with the exclusion of woman from the symbolic and her Lacanian location in the space of the pre-cultural, attempts to recover the repressed m/other and to shift her muted location into the field of the symbolic. She deploys her concept of the "semiotic"--a dimension of language coincidental with the maternal body--and not only refutes Lacan's primary premise but also posits the "semiotic" as a permanent source of subversion within the phallogentric economy of meaning. For Kristeva, the "semiotic" expresses multiplicity, and its best illustration is poetic language. Kristeva's theory of poetic language and its connection with the female body has been very influential among younger writers in Latin America. Four outstanding Chilean women--Diamela Eltit, Soledad Fariña, Carmen Berenguer, and María Eugenia Brito--explore in their fiction, poetry, and critical writing the relation of eros and semiosis.

Despite the head-on critique of Lacan in both Irigaray's and Kristeva's readings, the central tenets of Lacan's stages by which the subject becomes "one" and accedes to the Symbolic remain in place. The m/other remains in the realm of the libidinal even when poetic language makes its appearance; the maternal body bears a set of meanings that are prior to culture itself, a move that marks culture as a paternal structure--exclusively. In the end Kristeva's argument accomplishes the reinscription of the paternal at the level of the "semiotic" itself. This approach to woman as the abject and the nonrepresentable "semiotic" has been widely used to read male-(master-)authored textualizations of the female body. Assuming the abject enables critics to speak of the author's fear of woman and to read misogynist texts as the representations of the monstrous in the imaginary world of the great master.¹⁹

Androgynous Writing

Lacan's theory of the subject has been as influential in literary interpretation as Derrida's theory of meaning or, rather, the critique thereof. But Lacan's

¹⁸Readers of Lacan note that he uses his concept of the Other in various and often confusing ways. For the purposes of this discussion I have chosen to follow the generalized view of the Other as "the always alienated Other of the Imaginary which is one with language" (Moi, French Feminist Thought, 101). This Other is also the locus of the constitution of the subject, the structure that produces the subject. The unconscious thus emerges as the result of the repression of desire, but the unconscious is also desire itself, for desire is structured like language. Desire moves ceaselessly from object (signifier) to object (signified), and it can neither rest nor achieve satisfaction. Therefore, texts, which are themselves but instances of the structure of language, are none other than the unconscious, that is, desire. It is impossible not to recognize Lacan's appeal to and influence on any self-conscious reader or interpreter of texts. See, for instance, Lucía Guerra Cunningham, "Algunas reflexiones teorías sobre la novela femenina."

¹⁹For a critique of Kristeva's theory of poetic language see Domna C. Stanton, "Difference on Trial"; see also Nancy K. Miller. "Arachnologies: The Woman, the Text and the Critic" in Miller, ed., The Poetics of Gender.

postulates have been of interest to feminists for two reasons: the place he assigns women's bodies in the formation of the subject, and the phallogentric linguistic theory that accompanies his analysis of the human psyche.

Given that the Symbolic Order is marked by the intervention of the prohibitions of the father and that it gives way to a phallogentric system of representation of subjectivity, feminists in search of woman as other have found Lacan's scheme insufficient and hostile. Hélène Cixous proposes, for instance, a search for the mother's body which would devolve on a practice of naming, describing, and rescuing the female body as the site of its own pleasure. She maps the pre-Oedipal stage--the period before the Symbolic Order muffles the body and voice of the m/other--as the arena for such an exploration. But Cixous, like Irigaray, has to face the possible reinscription of the system of oppositions in her search for the feminine as excluded other. Thus, asserts Moi, "Against any binary scheme of thought, Cixous sets multiple heterogeneous *difference* [or] the open-ended play between the presence of one signifier and the absence of others" (Moi, Sexual-Textual Politics, 105-6).²⁰ Cixous attempts, by making use of Derrida's concept of *écriture*, to attain levels of reading which, despite the sex of the author, enable one to decipher the libidinal feminine. Cixous's concept of *écriture féminine* is founded on the idea of a bisexual nature inherent in all human beings. With such a concept of *écriture* she can deny the possibility of ever defining a feminine (as opposed to a masculine) practice of writing while asserting its possible representation. For the author of "The Laugh of the Medusa"(1976) feminine writing as practice "can never be theorized . . . which doesn't mean that it doesn't exist. But it will always surpass the discourse that regulates the phallogentric system; it does and will take place in areas other than those subordinated to philosophico-theoretical domination" (as quoted in Moi, Sexual/Textual Politics, 109).

Thus, Cixous writes of the glory of the mother's body, the sweet economy of its fluids, the multiplicity of its pleasures, and the endless layers of its psyche. Cixous's writings are relevant here not only because she makes an important, if contradictory and utopian, proposal for the recovery of the feminine, but also because she has found in the fiction and poetry of the Brazilian Clarice Lispector exemplary manifestations of a libidinal presence which theory can neither encode nor speak. Moreover, through her keen intelligence and style in writing on the female body, Cixous has uncovered erogenous and analytic areas thus far obscured and neglected by those disciplines that currently study Latin Americanist culture. Future research into the cultural figuration of woman's body will find their definition of woman greatly expanded and enhanced by Cixous's search.

Freud on his Head

²⁰For further discussion "Tiempo femenino, tiempo ficticio," Adriana Mendez Rodenas's study of Elena Garro for an example of a reading inspired by Cixous and Kristeva.

By far the most radical critique of Freud is found in the writings of Luce Irigaray, a psychoanalyst and former student of Lacan at L'École Freudienne at Vincennes. In the now classic Speculum of the Other Woman (1974) and The Sex Which Is Not One, (1977) Irigaray shows that, despite his progressive views, Freud's theory of gender differentiation (penis envy, Oedipal crisis) reinscribes the Western misogynist tradition. Using the sharpest of deconstruction and a great deal of irony, Irigaray turns Freud on his head. She shows how woman, castrated and barred from access to civilization because of the lowly pleasures of her body, figures as the necessary negation (speculum) of HIS own erect image. Irigaray argues that Freud's analysis, not unlike Lacan's own version, situates women outside representation. Woman is absence, negativity, a lesser (human) being. Thus Irigaray claims that psychoanalysis elaborates only one sex--the masculine. According to the ontology of substances (penis, penis envy, castration), women can never "be." Commenting on Irigaray's argument, Judith Butler writes, "Women are also a 'difference' that cannot be understood as the simple negation or 'Other' of the always-already-masculine subject . . . they are neither the subject nor its Other, but a difference from the economy of binary opposition, itself a ruse for a monologic elaboration of the masculine . . . sex appears within hegemonic language as *substance*, as, metaphysically speaking, a self-identical thing. This appearance is achieved through a performative twist of language and/or discourse that conceals the fact that 'being' a sex is fundamentally impossible. For Irigaray, grammar can never be a true index of gender relations precisely because it supports the substantial model of gender as a binary relation between two positive and representable terms" (Gender Trouble, 18-19).

The paradoxical foundations and promises of psychoanalytical theory are brought to the fore from another angle by Sarah Kofman's The Enigma of Woman: Women in Freud's Writings (1981). Kofman uses psychoanalysis as a double-edged sword to analyze some of Freud's dreams. She describes the "paranoid" origin of his fear of women and the relationship of this paranoia to his later elaboration of the phallic, monstrous mother. Kofman goes on to argue that the fear of the mother is in fact grounded in Freud's own (paranoid) thesis of paternity. Freud had argued in Moses and Monotheism (1939) that paternity is a purely social relation, lacking in substance. Kofman reveals that Freud's dreams conceal a fear and resentment of the mother-teacher: "To endow woman with an 'immature' or incomplete sexuality is indeed to castrate the mother, she who for the child is a *phallic* mother, androgynous like that Egyptian goddess Mut who had the head of a vulture: 'her body was female, as the breasts indicated, but it also had a male organ in a state of erection'" (72). Kofman contends that the phallic mother is Freud's "solution" to the insecurity of fatherhood. This solution represents the inverse of the fantastic omnipotence that the child confers upon the mother. It is what ought to make it possible to cut the umbilical cord, to triumph over the immediate belief in the senses, "to carry out both the passage from mother to father and the passage from the senses to reason, and thereby to accomplish the 'progress' of civilization--even if the mother's death (or at least her castration) has to follow" (72). But is a little girl to see, fear, and dream of her mother? Does she, as Lacan would have her, remain

with her mother all balled up in a non-symbolic universe of feeling and what not (*¿no sé qué?*)?

Several feminists have recently written about the feared phallic mother (of the boy), the ascription of penis envy to the little girl (mother), and the endless alienation from the alienating mother of Lacan's Imaginary. Some of the prominent arguments against the Imaginary come from the post-Freudian school with which Lacan himself often bitterly debated. The work of Nancy Chodorow, to cite only one of the most prominent feminist authors, uses object-relation theory as the base from which to question Lacan's speculations on the mother and her causal relation to the formation of the subject.²¹

Chodorow's work is concerned specifically with the dangers of drawing upon fantasy (that is, the Imaginary, penis envy, castration) to inform a theory of politics that would be its corollary. Her clinical and scholarly work attempts to provide a theory of subject formation by which one can envision little girls growing up into self-hood and identity marked by stages that do not correspond to that of boys--a difference made possible by the girl's relation to the mother not being marked by the alienation experienced by the boy. Chodorow's differential model has given rise to a host of historical and literary studies that focus on the relationships of mothers and daughters--a set of relationships that the Oedipus complex by necessity effaces. This topic has been independently explored in Latin America, but its currency in the United States has facilitated the publication of fiction and critical studies concerned with mothers and daughters. The stories told in Lispector's Lazos de familia, Elena Garro's Recuerdos del porvenir, and Rosario Castellanos's Oficio de tinieblas, for example, have mapped new territory in which to explore the configuration of daughters in the family. One of the best examples of this renewed interest in family relations is Jean Franco's chapter on Recuerdos del porvenir in Plotting Women: Gender and Representation in Mexico (1989).

The essentialist interpretation of difference--"biology is destiny"--is reconsidered in this polemic between Lacanians and object-relation analysts. Chodorow concludes, "Gender difference is not absolute, abstract, or irreducible; it does not involve an essence of gender. Gender differences and the experience of difference, like differences among women, are socially and psychologically created and situated. . . . Difference and gender difference do not exist as things in themselves; they are created relationally, that is, in relationship. We cannot understand difference apart from this relational construction" (100). Such an assertion rejects all essentialist views implicit in contemporary feminism. Moreover, this statement demands the specific dismantling of Lacan's theory of separation and gender differentiation and its privileging the point of view of the infant at the narcissistic stage and fixing such a vantage point upon the world.

²¹For an example of Freudian theory in the interpretation of Latin American texts see Kemy Oyarzun, "Edipo, autosugestión y producción textual: Notas sobre crítica literaria feminista". In Hernan Vidal, ed. Cultural and Historical Grounding.

Chodorow maintains that separateness, too, is a relational differentiation: "True separateness, cannot be simply a perception and experience of self--other, presence--absence. It must precisely involve two selves, two presences, two subjects. Recognizing the other as a subject is possible only to the extent that one is not dominated by felt need and one's own exclusive subjectivity" (103).

The Narcissist Subject

It is on the question of exclusive subjectivity (often the illusion of many a writer who fashions himself or herself as the creator of totalities) that Lacan's theories are thoroughly examined. Jane Flax engages Lacan's narcissistic child, and though she tolerates the master's view of desire as part and parcel of pre-cultural drives, she finds it difficult to agree with his own self-characterization and relation to Freud. In Thinking Fragments (1990), Flax contradicts Lacan's own view of his work as a "supplement or contribution to the development of feminist theorizing." She argues, instead, that Lacan's work is profoundly misleading as a theory of gender for it is "even more pervaded by masculinists' assumptions" (91). Flax demonstrates that Lacan transforms Freud's concept of narcissism into an ontology; his linguistic turn effaces the complex relations between mind and body--relations Freud does recognize. Thus historical variables and changes in the relations of domination become impossible to detect in Lacan's static model of entrance into the Symbolic (desiring) Order.

Flax brings the universalist and foundational claims of Lacan under the suspicion of post-modernist thought and proceeds to dismantle his four major concepts of subjectivity, all devolving on an overriding narcissism: that narcissism is an 'irreducible' aspect of human 'nature'; that language has an invariant, universal structure and always functions to 'split' or castrate all 'subjects'; that language (the Other) operates as an independent force, and its effects on the subject have no dependence on or interaction with the child's relations with actual 'others,' especially the mother; and that the phallus is in no way related to or meant to signify the 'penis' (92).

Much like Sara Kofman's analysis of Freud via Freud, Flax's critique of the Lacanian universe depends on confining the master to the realm of his own narcissism. The very reading of his texts provides a powerful evocation of the narcissist personality. Moreover, Flax argues, "Narcissistic fantasies and perspectives pervade Lacan's work" (93). Even the opacity of his language can be interpreted as an index of narcissism. Lacan's mirror stage (in which the child engages his own gaze in the mirror rather than the mother's, at whose breast he nurses) carries the narcissistic position to the absurd since, for the purposes of this foundational scene, Lacan's child might as well be an orphan. Flax adds, "Significantly, for Lacan this I comes into being alone. . . . This I already has a paradoxical quality, being both fictional and the most real and permanent aspect of mental life. Lacking an other who is truly outside for comparison and reliable control, any narcissist faces a painful, persistent dilemma of the relation of image

and reality. The I is fictional because it is composed of a 'succession of phantasies that extends from the fragmented body image to a form of totality'" (93-94).

Within the frame of the obliteration of the mother, theorized as the unrepresentable object by Kristeva, Lacan's subject appears split by the impersonal operation of an ahistorical language rather than by a dependence on an actual m/other. The narcissist considers any and all loss a crisis, for it amounts to the loss of omnipotence and a threat to the unity of the self. Thus relations with others entail the release of aggression and paranoia. Such a narcissist concept of the self produces an "I" incapable of reciprocity. Any failure by the other to meet the demands of the "I" are experienced as betrayal and loss. Flax's reading of Lacan emphasizes his elevation of these narcissistic dilemmas to ontological "truths" about human nature, and his failure to see them as consequences of his own conception of the nature of human demand (95).

These speculations on the primary stages of the "I" make Lacan's theory of the subject the centerpiece of any discussion of interpretation and meaning. In "From Love to Libido," he writes, "I is the subject who, alternately, reveals and conceals himself by means of the pulsation of the subject unconscious, we apprehend only partial drives....the subject as such is uncertain because he is divided by the effects of language. Through the effects of speech, the subject always realizes himself more in the Other, but he is already pursuing there more than half of himself. . . . [For] the subject is subject only from being subjected to the field of the Other (my emphasis), the subject proceeds from his synchronic subjection in the field of the Other. That is why he must get out, get himself out, and in the *getting-himself-out*, in the end, he will know that the real Other has, just as much as himself, to get himself out, to pull himself free" (Lacan, Four Fundamental Concepts, 188).

Thus the subject appears indeed subjugated to language. It is structured by language, a binary chain of arbitrary relations: "the unconscious is made of language" (197). Determined by language and speech, the subject begins in the locus of the Other and it is there that the first signifier emerges as that which represents the "I." It is not a distinct "I." Therefore the unconscious is structured like a language, and the "Other is the locus in which is situated the chain of signifiers that governs whatever may be made present of the subject" (203). It thus is easy to see how any inquiry into the constitution of subjectivity must come to terms with Lacan's views on language, the subject, and the m/other.²²

²²Soledad Fariña notes how frustrated the Taller de Lecturas de Mujeres grew with the problem of the subject and the search for "su palabra, su representación en el discurso" (49).

She is Not and She Cannot be Satisfied

Critics of the split subject resist not only the narcissistic fixation in the elaboration of the subject's relation to language but also the formulation of the mother's castration. A formulation in which she lacks the penis on which the little boy erects his entrance into civilization projects onto the mother fears and desires which correspond to the little boy's gaze upon his own body. The mother is here imperfect and incomplete because she is seen as having a hole instead of a penis. According to the boy's fantasy, she desires the phallus in order to relieve her own "narcissistic injury. The mother cannot [like the boy] possibly be satisfied by anything 'real' a baby has to offer" (Flax, Thinking Fragments, 98). However, the phallus exists only in the economy of the Symbolic Order, a realm to which she does not belong. Here we find that the castration of the mother does not really refer to anything biological. It is "an effect of language and desire, not anatomy or physical injury" (98). The formation of the split subject stands as a circular argument which moves from the biological to the Symbolic in order to efface the first term and result in a masculine monopoly of all terms of the argument.

Endowed by the name of the father, the child leaves the pre-cultural realm of the mother and enters the Symbolic Order which the phallus inaugurates. Women, as we have seen, by definition lack access to the phallus. They remain consigned to nature, or the out-side of meaning. In Lacan's master narrative, "there is woman only as excluded by the nature of things which is the nature of words." Faced with women's displeasure and desire, Lacan explains: "There is one thing they themselves are complaining about enough at the moment, it is well and truly that [women are excluded by the nature of words] only they don't know what they are saying, which is all the difference between them and me. It nonetheless remains that, if she is excluded by the nature of things, it is precisely that in being not all, she has, in relation to what phallic function designates of jouissance, a supplementary jouissance. Note that I said supplementary. Had I said complementary, where would we be! We'd fall right back into the all" (Feminine Sexuality, 144-45). Therefore, without the separation which produces the split subject and language, without the relegation of women to the outside, where would paternity be? Culture (the appropriation and the subordination of women) would be an impossibility.

New readings and evaluations and a more benevolent rendition of woman are always sought in Lacan's writings and teachings. Jacqueline Rose, for instance, argues that Lacan's early exclusion of women from the Symbolic relied too directly on Lévi-Strauss's views of kinship and structural views of the oppositional world of the raw and the cooked. In her introduction to Feminine Sexuality, Rose states that in later writings, Lacan modifies his views of the symbolic and no longer posits sexual differences as anatomical, pre-cultural entities: "In later texts, Lacan located the fantasy of 'sameness' within language and the sexual relation at one and the same time" (46). In this reading, woman is no longer constructed even in the shadow of social relations as objects of exchange. Gender difference is simply the

effect of the same fantasy of sameness which is also always already in language. Rose reasons that Lacan does not mean to say that "woman does not exist" but rather that she is a "symptom for man" and as such her status as an absolute category and guarantor of fantasy (exactly the woman) is false (48).

This conclusion might be satisfactory for those in search of an ever greater coherence in the logic of Lacanian speculations, but to others, the more Lacan's teachings on the question of woman are pressed, the more his split subject suffers one more turn of the screw. In "The Sexual Masquerade," Ragland-Sullivan finds in her reading of Lacan that male wholeness is the result of an oppositional illusion: "Woman was Lacan's signifier for the anti-thesis of masculine certitude, based on an identification with rules, order, law" (53). The feminine constitutes an attitude towards knowledge and procedure, rather than a category defined strictly by gender. The feminine is on the side of Woman, and as such it is an imaginary fantasy calling into question reason and common sense. Ragland-Sullivan offers the feminine thus constituted as the stumbling point in interpretation of both texts and knowledge itself (56). "Embodying the real and the enigmatic, she speaks because she is not-all, because she knows even if she denies this knowledge that something is missing in knowledge *qua* knowledge. She speaks in and through her body, in a voice irreducible to grammar, and from a body that never ceases to pose questions about desire, whether she is nubile, pregnant, a sex bomb, or old and withered" (77). One more turn of the screw, and we are right back to the body.²³

Once Again the Body

No matter how hard we try to escape anatomy and however much it is claimed that the phallus is a signifier without the penis as its referent, the body, as the concretion of agency, reasserts its presence. Whether a woman's body is thought of as the site of a lack (castration) or the place of excess (clitoris, womb), its materiality is the source for the myriad metaphors that try to stand for the history of her subordination. Gayatri Spivak asks of herself, but also of the field: "What has been the itinerary of my thinking during the past few years about the relationship among feminism, Marxism, psychoanalysis, and deconstruction?" (*In Other Worlds*, 77). Spivak steps away from the pitfalls of universalizing sciences or philosophies and assumes the dissolution of the man/woman dichotomy. Consequently, one can speak only in *provisional terms*.

But even if one is to speak of woman only provisionally, one must try to break out of the assumptions of patriarchal discourse. In this case it is necessary to break out of the Lacanian corporeal (Symbolic) economy and recognize that woman's body differs not so much because it lacks a penis, but rather because it has a clitoris and womb. Penis envy meets its deconstruction in womb envy. Womb envy circulates a new energy, not only in Freud's own Oedipal theory, but also in

²³For one of the most illuminating treatments of this theoretical corpus, see Sylvia Molloy's essay on the body and the book in Victoria Ocampo in Molloy, *At Face Value*.

Lévi-Strauss's social economy of object exchange. The womb occupies the center of the material and social reproduction of humanity. The link that Spivak articulates here, between the production of discourse and the production of social order, brings into question not only Freud's theory of femininity but also the production of other subject/m(other) relations in the work of the great masters. For those of us interested in Latin American cultural history, one narrative in need of questioning is the Catholic construction of the mother's virginity and its corresponding *mater dolorosa*, herself always linked to the absence of the biological father. The *sagrada familia* should replace, for us, the romance of the Freudian family, for it is Mary's story that best represents Spivak's contention regarding the material and cultural appropriation and occlusion of the womb.

Spivak moves feminism from a fictional, theoretical realm into the politics of interpretation. This calls for a subject capable of much more than the semiotics of poetic language or the impossibility of the real. Implicit in her deconstruction of psychoanalysis as science is a questioning of the heretofore sexed subject. Her critique goes beyond the production of Freud's masculine sovereign subject and calls into question the romanticization of the bourgeois family as a socioeconomic historical unit responsible for the production and reproduction of patterns of domination that have privileged the discourse of some subjects at the expense of others. Spivak wishes to place psychoanalysis and some feminist theses under a general concern for the cultural conditions within which colonial discourse is produced (*In Other Worlds*, 82). Indeed, we may ask here, what is the place of psychoanalysis in neo-colonialism? How is the discourse of race and ethnicity, as constitutive of difference, to be related to differences spelled out by the Oedipus complex or the Ur-object (phallus)?

The work of Spivak and others writing about subaltern subjects and colonial and post-colonial discourses brings these concerns to both the universalizing tendencies embedded in psychoanalysis and the feminist positions anchored in it. Throughout her collection *In Other Worlds*, Spivak argues that it is time to move beyond the texts privileged by the French (anti-)feminists and to recognize their critique's association with the "'specificity' of other discourses that spell out and establish the power of the patriarchy" (150). The strategy to break out of masculinist theory and ideology entails also the recognition that male and female sexuality are asymmetrical. Male orgasmic "pleasure 'normally' entails the male reproductive act" while the female does not necessarily (80); "The clitoris escapes reproductive framing." Spivak writes, "In legally defining woman as object of exchange, passage, or possession in terms of reproduction, it is not only the womb that is literally 'appropriated'; it is the clitoris as the signifier of the sexed subject that is effaced. . . . Clitoridectomy has always been the 'normal' accession to womanhood [and] it relates to every move to define woman as sex object . . . with no recourse to a subject-function except in terms of those definitions or as 'imitators' of men" (151).

A Return to Agency

This effacement of the womb and clitoris brings to the fore once more and recasts the question of the body. In what way is the biological political? In what ways do the constructions of gender and race intersect?²⁴ In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler brings to bear the question of power in discursive formations. Her argument assumes that gender is but one such formation, and her inquiry into the ideological conditions under which knowledge of sexual identities is produced shows two things clearly: sexual identities are culture-power constructs, and heterosexuality is the ideology by which the male/female difference is rooted in "nature." In dismantling the metaphysics of substance, Butler posits regulatory practices as the point of constitution for gender identities. Thus, identity is not predicated as an a priori construction of anatomical features. The same regulatory practices that govern gender also govern culturally intelligible notions of identity. "In other words, the 'coherence' and 'continuity' of 'the person' are not logical or analytic features of personhood, but, rather, socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility" (17).²⁵ She argues further that the "cultural matrix through which gender identity has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of 'identities' cannot 'exist'--that is, those in which gender does not follow from sex and those in which the practices of desire do not 'follow' from either sex or gender" (17).

If regulatory practices can be identified with the effect of compulsory heterosexuality, Butler cautions that it is not one single regime of power which produces concepts of gender in a phallogocentric discourse. Once again, the spectrum of French (anti-)feminism and the post-modern challenges to the binary hegemonic discourse that produces woman as the point of silence rather than subversion' provide good examples of the problem feminist theory encounters when the psychoanalytical Law of the Father is not read through the tissue of regulatory practices.²⁶

²⁴For an empirical study of how sex and race intersect in the web of colonial power, see John Russell-Wood, "La mujer y la familia en la economía y en la sociedad del Brasil durante la época colonial" in Lavrin, *Las mujeres latinoamericanas*.

²⁵The idea of sexuality as a form of intelligibility is grounded in Foucault's subtle and complex opposition between sex and sexuality and its relation to power and the law. In *Power/Knowledge* Foucault explains what he means by sexuality exceeding the notion of prohibition: "Now, I believe, setting up this opposition between sex and sexuality leads back to the positing of power as law and prohibition, the idea that power created sexuality as a device to say no to sex. My analysis was still held captive by the juridical conception of power. . . . Now there is a trait that is fundamental to the economy of the pleasures as it functions in the West, namely that sex acts as a principle of measure and intelligibility. . . . These two notions, that sex is at the heart of all pleasure and that its nature requires that it should be restricted and devoted to procreation, are not of Christian but of Stoic origin. . . . Sex then became the 'code' of pleasure. Whereas in societies with a heritage of erotic art the intensification of pleasure tends to desexualize the body, in the West this systematization of pleasure according to the 'laws' of sex gave rise to the whole apparatus of sexuality" (190-91).

²⁶"The feminist appropriation of sexual difference, whether written in opposition to the phallogocentrism of Lacan (Irigaray) or as a critical reelaboration of Lacan, attempts to theorize the

Thus "power, rather than the law, encompasses both the juridical (prohibitive and regulatory) and the productive (inadvertently generative) functions of differential relations. Hence, the sexuality that emerges within the matrix of power relations is not a simple replication or copy of the law itself, a uniform repetition of a masculinist economy of identity" (Gender Trouble, 29). Butler extends Foucault's notion of a productive power which "doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that . . . traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body" (Power/Knowledge, 119). Power can inadvertently mobilize subjects that exceed and/or expand the bounds of the culturally intelligible. Subjects can constitute the site of subversion, the exit place from a claustrophobic phallographic production of identity. This seems to be the case with the recent phenomenon of testimonial literature coming out of Latin America.²⁷

This argument runs counter to the utopia of "a room of one's own." The most logical strategy left to feminists is the rethinking of the subversive possibilities of sexual identity within the terms of power itself. This critical task presumes, of course, that to operate within the matrix of power is not the same as to replicate uncritically relations of domination (Gender Trouble, 30). Butler's stance precludes going back to the humanist concepts of presence, person, individual author, and feminine writing, for gender is not the representation of fixed substances or essences.²⁸ Gender emerges as the "repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time" (Gender Trouble, 33). The body itself is constituted within a repertory of cultural meanings and as such it is but a set of boundaries, social and individual. It is politically signified and maintained in a series of enactments.

feminine, not as an expression of the metaphysics of substance, but as the unrepresentable absence effected by (masculine) denial that grounds the signifying economy through exclusion. . . . As [Jacqueline] Rose points out very clearly, the construction of a coherent sexual identity along the disjunctive axis of the feminine/masculine is bound to fail; the disruptions of this coherence through the inadvertent reemergence of the repressed reveal not only that 'identity' is constructed, but that the prohibition that constructs identity is inefficacious" (Butler, Gender Trouble, 28).

²⁷See Doris Sommer, "Rigoberta's Secrets" and George Yudice, *Testimonios*.

²⁸Though not exactly informed by the thorough critique deployed in Gender Trouble, Amy Kaminsky's study of writing done by women in Latin America, Reading the Body Politic, Debra Castillo's Talking Back, and Emilie Bergmann et al.'s Women, Culture and Politics in Latin America: Seminar on Feminism and Culture in Latin America, make substantial contributions in the direction of reading woman as a set of regulatory practices embedded in a power matrix. However, still suspicious of the ontology of the Western subject, Nancy Hartsock in "Foucault on Power" points to several outstanding difficulties with Foucault's theory of power. Implicit in his theory she sees the Left Colonizer's political ineffectiveness. Hartsock is concerned with Foucault's explicit "attempts to limit the power of his critique by arguing that unmasking power can have only destabilizing rather than transformative effects"; thus, she calls for a theory of power that will enable women, as subjects, to understand the power which oppresses them, to transform the existing set of social relations and to build a different world (165).

Butler provides a return to praxis in which it is possible to envision feminine agency, but such agency is no longer tied to any a priori "self"; it is instead to be discovered in the praxis. Gender attributes do not express an inner identity, rather they are socially performative (Gender Trouble, 141). Butler closes with a cautious contribution to the clamor for agency evident in the writings of women theorists underscoring the disjuncture between Euro-American feminisms and the subject positions of women in other and "othered" societies.²⁹ She suggests that the question of agency should not be addressed through recourse to an "I," for the substantive "I" appears through a signifying practice that seeks to conceal its own working and to naturalize its effects (Gender Trouble, 145). Her suggestion is instead to take full advantage of the deconstruction of gender identity: "Paradoxically, the reconceptualization of identity as an *effect*, that is, as *produced* or *generated*, opens up possibilities of 'agency' that are insidiously foreclosed by positions that take identity categories as foundational and fixed. . . . Construction is not opposed to agency; it is the necessary scene of agency, the very terms in which agency is articulated and becomes culturally intelligible. The critical task for feminism is not to establish a point of view outside of constructed identities; that conceit is the construction of an epistemological model that would disavow its own cultural location and, hence, promote itself as a global subject, a position that deploys precisely the imperialist strategies that feminism ought to criticize. The critical task is, rather, to locate strategies of subversive repetition" (Gender Trouble, 147).

If neither agency nor "identity" can be assumed to correspond to authentic or unified subjects--the subjects of gynocentrism--the question of woman as a subordinate in search of a place from which to speak (act) and therefore constitute herself as a provisional subject of knowledge can perhaps be approached within the concept of the local. Foucault distinguishes between the "universal intellectual," an offspring of the jurist, and the "specific intellectual," a descendant of the biologist and the physicist. This distinction seems to reinscribe the old separation between humanists and scientists; but Foucault also says that "the intellectual *par excellence* used to be the writer: as a universal consciousness, a free subject: . . . *writing*, as the sacralizing mark of the intellectual, has disappeared. And it has become possible to develop lateral connections across different forms of knowledge and from one focus of politicization to another" (127). In the same interview, he points out that a global process of politicization of intellectuals is underway. Extending Foucault's views on the taxonomy of knowledges, one can see how the concept of local knowledges can include not just biology but also other knowledges produced in other locales and under different rules of formation.

²⁹See for instance, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo and Lourdes Torres, Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism. Also see Tejaswini Niranjana, Siting Translation.

The idea of local knowledges--geopolitically dispersed knowledges--themselves traversed by a set of power contingencies³⁰ offers in the eyes of some feminists (this one included) a possibly though not entirely safe ground for the elaboration of interpolations of specific naturalizations of the dominance metaphor.³¹ Although it is not a panacea, and although it is a construction, the concept of the local (denigrated and occluded subjects and knowledges) offers feminists and other othered subjects a starting point for an interpolation of the power/knowledge matrix.³² Simians, Cyborgs and Women, by Donna Haraway, on one end of polar extremes, and Una pasión prohibida by Cristina Peri-Rossi, and Rigoberta Menchú's Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia at the other end, provide examples of contestatory knowledges which at once risk reinscription into the ontology of the Western subject and yet subvert the existing order of discourse and power. The women in the Taller "Lecturas de Mujeres" in Santiago de Chile seem to have developed a theoretical position of their own which accounts provisionally for subject production. They use the term *comparacer* to signal the emergence of a feminine *mestiza* subject. In Latin America, *comparecer* means to present one's body and proper identification when summoned by the state. *Comparecer* means also to show presence, bear witness in oral or written deposition before the law. Thus the subject of the women of the *taller* appears in the interstices of its power relations with the law, that is the public, discursive manifestation of the State.³³

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³⁰Foucault states that the political economy of truth is characterized by five important traits: "'Truth' is centered on the form of scientific discourse and the institutions which produce it; it is subject to constant economic and political incitement . . . it is the object, under diverse forms, of immense diffusion and consumption . . . it is produced and transmitted under the control, dominant if not exclusive, of a few great political and economic apparatuses . . . lastly, it is the issue of a whole political debate and social confrontation" (Power/Knowledge, 131-32).

³¹Elsbeth Probyn has analyzed the question of local (locale, location) knowledge in relation to feminism. She writes that for Foucault, "It is therefore through a process of location, of fixing statements in relations to other established statements, that knowledge comes to be ordered. It is through this process that knowledges produced in locale are denigrated as local, subaltern and other. Foucault's complex model of power suggest that these subaltern knowledges are not directly oppressed but are merely occluded" (185).

³²See, for example, Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

³³For further reading on the question of feminism, Latin America, and the "public" see Jean Franco, "Going Public: Rehabilitating the Private."

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