

APPROPRIATING WOMEN: THE VIOLENCE AND POTENTIAL LIBERATION
OF TEXTUAL REVOLUTIONS

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This dissertation relates the violence perpetuated by phallogocentric traditions of reading and writing to the violence of appropriating traditional categories of gender and asks whether or not and how texts that resist these traditions might help us change the way we think about identities, our own and others', opening up a space for new and as yet un-thought ways of exchanging texts and the identities they make possible. Focusing on the ways in which Jacques Derrida's *Éperons*, Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas*, and Elena Garro's "La culpa es de los Tlaxcaltecas" and "El árbol" interminably reverse the roles of readers and writers, further disorienting them with the complex blend of genres in their texts and the networks of other texts that they juxtapose with their own, leads to the conclusion that the ultimate revolutionary function of these texts is to be found in the ways that they suspend the processes of appropriation and identification indefinitely, giving time, namely the time of waiting, but also time that is filled with the constant weaving of narratives, maintaining the possibility that a way out of historical cycles of violence, especially the violence of being forced to fit within current categories, might be found.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Cristina Dahl received a Bachelor of Arts Degree in English from California State University, Chico in 1997, a Master of Arts Degree in English from California State University, Chico in 2001, and a Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from Cornell University in 2009. She currently teaches full time in the English Department at Butte Glenn Community College in Oroville, California. Her primary interests lie in comparing historical representations of gender in a variety of different genres and media in European and Mexican culture, including fiction, philosophy, painting, photography, sculpture, and film. She is also interested in the relationship between ethics, hermeneutics, and pedagogy.

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

The revolutionary nature of the three texts I have brought together, the way they expose the arbitrariness of gender and genre categories, creates a space for less violent discursive practices that could lead to less violent relationships more generally because they undermine epistemological traditions of appropriation and mastery.

However odd it may initially appear to bring these texts together, considering the different cultural and historical contexts in addition to the differences in their genres or in the different ways in which they play with genre, in doing so, we get to see that they all ask the same question: “Why do we try to communicate about and between gendered positions?”, and they all answer the question with another question: “Why do we read and write literature?” Each of these texts locates tentative answers to the former in the its tentative answers to the latter, each with its own emphasis: because we have always done so; because we want to explore the furthest reaches of our language and logic and their ability to determine who we are and how we live; because we take pleasure in the layering of narratives and media and genre, in complexity, in allusion, in mysteries that we know we probably can never solve; because it gives us something to do; because it allows us to forget and even to overcome the inevitability of our own deaths; because it makes being and becoming richer and more rewarding; because, by appropriating and performing multiple identities and by layering these performances, we get to imagine a different world, a better world, one that offers more possibilities for thinking, communicating, and being for more people, though there is always a risk of forgetting, of failing to recognize that we are not really escaping these traditions, that we have been consumed by them and

are supporting and enforcing their hierarchies even when we think we are escaping them, that we commit many unintentional acts of violence because of this forgetting and can, in turn, use this knowledge to excuse the intentional acts. The way all three texts invoke the visual in or as the literary is a particularly powerful reminder of this forgetting, of this inability to recall or master illusion or allusion.

Unlike Derrida, Woolf and Garro cannot “play” with the feminine position and are therefore received as particularly violent.

Discursive violence, like physical violence, occurs when a reader or writer convinces herself that her appropriation of a text, her reading, is a definitive reading, when she fails to acknowledge the way either a text or body of another exceeds her reading, making it only tentative and temporary, and calls for other readings. The violence of appropriation is both mitigated and sometimes reinforced in all of these texts, especially in the ways they appropriate what they consider traditionally feminine qualities or feminine performances. Derrida and Nietzsche appropriate the “feminine operation” of style and, to some degree, a feminine subject position, in order to undermine what they consider traditionally masculine desire for truth or completeness, all the while they pay homage to this desire. Derrida implies that Nietzsche represents a break with these masculine traditions, with phallogocentrism, which he both critiques and performs as a re-valuation of what they call the feminine operation. Though much of Nietzsche’s content appears to critique the feminine, this content is, in turn, undermined by his stylistic performances, his “feminine operation,” which Derrida defines as the use of style to call any content into question. Nietzsche and Derrida’s appropriations of his texts keep both traditional notions of masculinity and femininity interminably in dialogue as they try to imagine something outside of the phallogocentric categories. Nietzsche, and Derrida attempt to remain between these traditional categories, neither believing in nor disbelieving in the possibility of

coherent, communicable truth or knowledge. If nothing else, their truth can be read as their ironic performances themselves, their need to keep these categories in play in order for discourse to take place. However, when Woolf, and later Garro, attempt to re-appropriate the feminine, to equally locate a break with masculine violence in the traditionally de-valued feminine, they can no longer distance themselves from this position. They are not allowed to simply play with the feminine operation, thus their performances become increasingly violent, but perhaps, increasingly revolutionary.

Woolf identifies a possible alternative discourse to be found in the exchange of images under the premise that images will resist our traditional masculine pretense of mastery over the other (text or body), the audacity of defining the other and convincing oneself of the truth of that mastery. Garro's stories, however, complicate this alternative. For Woolf, the written image, the attempt to describe the self and the other, is as close as writing can get to the heterogeneity of the image, since these attempts must always be recognized by both writer and reader as partial, as the result of arbitrarily choosing to focus on and interpret this or that feature or gesture. However, for Garro, the body of the other, the image of that body, can invite violence as much as it resists that violence. It depends on how we choose to read that image, whether we choose to appropriate it and impose our own image upon it or let it remain other and let it influence our own images of our selves. The contrast between the two stories shows that as soon as we attempt to describe the other or impose our own logic upon her, we kill any revolutionary potential she might embody. The paradox is, of course, that to extend the revolutionary potential of the heterogeneous text to others, we must do so using language and logic, a paradox that is also unresolved in Woolf's proposal that educated women with enough to live on form an outsider's society that uses heterogeneous means to achieve the same end, to stop contributing to and valuing traditional categories and hierarchies in order to achieve a more peaceful world. The

outsiders would constantly remind themselves and one another of the arbitrary nature of their truths and explanations, making it impossible to pretend to master either truth or the other, and eventually ending the desire for this mastery, but how they would communicate with the “insiders” and encourage them to leave these desires behind remains a problem since they cannot posit a communicable position.

The most revolutionary of these texts may well be received by those attached to philosophical and literary traditions, as most violent.

It is important to address and understand the potential violence of these gender/genre bending texts themselves, precisely because in blurring traditional categories, they defy easy appropriation and demonstrate and ask us to take part in particular reading and writing practices that those of us who may still be attached to these categories and conditioned by them will resist because we fail to understand. The importance of respecting the otherness of these texts, the way our understanding of them must be always partial, tentative, and indefinitely postponed, is made most clear in the fictional narrative exchanges with which I conclude. Placing Garro’s two short stories in dialogue, we find a powerful staging of two radically opposed ways to receive or read a text, one of which refuses to appropriate it at all while the other completely appropriates the teller’s body and text, using it to reinforce rather than question her own body/text. The first exchange results in peace and the opening of a real space for change while the second exchange ends in mutual destruction.

In *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, Hegel proposed that the desire to be recognized by others is a fundamental human desire, which is troubled by the otherness of the images that they reflect back to us. Recognition, for Hegel, seems inextricable from mastery, from ownership. The image of ourselves that others reflect back to us displeases us only if we want to appropriate our image, if we want to believe that we alone control it or can master it. However Derrida, Woolf, and Garro

all reveal the equally fundamental desire not to be recognized, which is linked with the desire to perform multiple roles, to keep others reading and writing, but this desire, if not mitigated by the desire to appropriate our own image and the images of others, will baffle most readers and lead writers and readers to utter self-loss, to indefinite displacement, which has been traditionally defined and devalued as “madness” or what Nietzsche refers to as hysterical discourse (yet another metaphorical connection that has been used to devalue the feminine). Derrida links this to the desire of the artist, especially the writer of fiction, and suggests that the writer’s operation is quite similar whether the writer identifies her/himself as a woman or a man. Woolf claims that her motivation in *Three Guineas* is, on the contrary, to communicate her truths about the causes of violence as clearly and plainly as possible, in other words, she overtly states her intention to perform the “masculine operation.” However, those causes are complex and virtual, making it impossible for her to communicate them in easily accessible ways. She ultimately sees the sources of violence precisely as fictional (the truth of untruth), located, much as Derrida proposes, in the appropriation and exchange between traditionally masculine and feminine subject-positions that exposes the arbitrary and reversible valuation of the former at the expense of the latter. Both Woolf and Derrida cannot avoid committing discursive violence, even when they are most consciously trying not to. This is especially a problem in Woolf’s text, which was received by many of her readers as an overt act of violence against them and their ideals, but, I argue, that this may be an example of revolutionary violence, a violence that may be a necessary precursor to peace. Derrida, perhaps because he does not want to completely eschew traditional categories but instead to keep them “in play,” is only mildly critiqued, and even when his readers critique him, they demonstrate that they accept most of his arguments about the way discursive violence has taken and continues to take place. Instead, they merely continue his call for something other, a

way out of these violent exchanges between readers and writers, men and women, which most of his readers acknowledge might be possible if we perform the more affirmative reading and writing practices of deconstruction. They allow him to occupy the middle ground between these categories.

However, Woolf, whose performance and arguments propose precisely these kinds of reading and writing practices as a possible antidote to physical and political violence and not just discursive violence, received scathing responses from the few male readers who even deigned to acknowledge her work. Her attempts to distance herself from either position were critiqued as elitist or “Olympian”. Woolf does not want to keep traditional categories in play, but wants us to eschew those categories, however painful it might be for us, and her proposals for how we might do so and our reasons for doing so bewildered most of her readers. Even her most sympathetic readers either overtly admit their confusion, reveal their confusion in their attempts to explain her work, or posit it as the result of her “style”, which if we accept Derrida’s arguments, shows that they are taking her to task for her “feminine operation.” She gives her readers who are still very much located within phallogocentrism, no tenable solution, no clear position, not even one between traditional categories of masculine and feminine, and they do not value this. In retaliation, the interpretations of many contemporary readers and even the publishers cannot help but commit overt acts of violence against her text or remain indifferent to it, which Woolf reveals was for her the worst violence of all. This is especially true about her call for communication through images, which is perhaps her strongest and most consistent solution in *Three Guineas*, but it is an argument that she must communicate in practice. She cannot overtly state it because she wants it to perpetually resist language, and perhaps because of this, her readers dismissed her work with images and her claims about them as tangential if they even noticed at all.

Still, the mere fact that *Three Guineas* generated more response than anything else she ever wrote, and the nature of the responses that she did receive, many of which appropriated her call to extend the networks of reading and writing in her text, including the practice of writing and exchanging self-portraits, shows that some of her readers were more open to Woolf's reading and writing practices and willing to let themselves be changed by them. It is notable that the most careful readers and respondents to Woolf's essay are women, perhaps supporting her arguments that since women have been consistently othered by patriarchal traditions, since they have consistently been disempowered by these traditions, they are most open to the kinds of reading and writing practices she performs and the revolutions they enact and perpetuate. Those traditional categories have not helped them and have often hurt them in obvious ways, so unlike Derrida, they find it easier to let go of them and forge ahead into the unknown, even if it means they will no longer be understood. In fact, forcing others to acknowledge that they do not understand her, making it impossible for them to define her, can be very appealing when their previous definitions of her have been so overwhelmingly hurtful. The more painful the past, the easier it is to let go of it, though, as Woolf performs, perhaps because she, too, has been relatively prosperous within these traditions, she maintains the desire to help those who perpetuate them, both men and women, to communicate with them. The indigenous characters in Garro's stories, however, are even less interested in communicating with those who oppress them, especially when it becomes painfully obvious that they are incapable of listening, incapable of change. For them, the injuries of the past are redoubled, and they have suffered both because they are women and because they are indigenous women.

Garro's stories locate a potentially revolutionary discourse in the doubly silenced position of the indigenous woman and ready our ears to receive her words.

Garro's stories seem to support Gayatri Spivak's claim that the oppression between classes makes a more powerful model for study than the oppression between gender, which is especially true of the women in these oppressed classes or ethnicities, who as Spivak has consistently pointed out, are doubly silenced, as women and then again as indigenous women or working class women, a point that Woolf makes as well. However, Garro, unlike Woolf, does attempt, at least in part, to speak for these women, or rather, letting them speak in her fiction, she shows us first, why we cannot speak for them and second, the violence of any attempt to do so. The effect is to increase our desire for their voice, our openness to their solutions. As Garro's stories illustrate, these women, under the right circumstances, might be the our best hope for finding alternatives to discursive and political violence, insofar as, in their doubly displaced and silenced positions, they are most removed from phallogocentrism and are forced to perpetually re-invent their responses to those traditions if they even respond to them at all. In the contrast between Garro's two stories, we get a model of more effective strategies for attempting to communicate across any major differences or for less violent communication in general.

It is the character, Nacha, the indigenous servant talking back to her troubled *mestiza patrona* in Garro's "La culpa...", who best exemplifies the strategies for a successful exchange across differences. Nacha listens to Laura's story and never attempts to critique or challenge it, even when it seems least credible, but she does not remain completely silenced. She responds by affirming it and adding to it, and when Laura has finished her telling, Nacha merely helps her make her final escape into the webs of her narrative, into the virtual. Then, Nacha, in turn, acts upon the story, upon her own private response to it, which she never shares with us. We are simply shown that the narrative has changed her, freed her from her servitude, and she bravely sets out in search of something other. The second story, on the contrary, is particularly

violent because the *mestiza* insists upon the truth of her own reading of the indigenous woman's story and consistently uses that story to reaffirm her traditional roles and coherent self-image, which are reified by what she sees as the indigenous woman's abjection. She refuses to take any responsibility for that abjection or to even sympathize with it. Her obliviousness, her denial of her responsibility, is linked to her denial of her own mortality, using the same processes that patriarchal traditions have used to deny their mortality, namely subjugating others.

Like Derrida, Woolf and Garro locate a potentially revolutionary discourse in the practices of juxtaposing and super-imposing an infinite number of texts and then, but unlike Derrida and Nietzsche, instead of asserting or inserting ourselves even temporarily into these texts, instead of appropriating them, they ask us to simply add to them, to welcome the loss of self in these webs, or the richness of the always incomplete self that we find there.

Woolf's and Garro's works propose that real change will not be possible without the kind of reading that they demonstrate, the kind of self-loss within the webs of other texts that allows us to indefinitely suspend identity. In turn, the written responses that they propose would stay true to this reading, a writing that, unlike Derrida's, refuses to cut the text, to see reading as ever cutting and willfully appropriating the text, and instead, to propose reading as adding, interminably, to the text. What Derrida emphasizes as cutting or violently excerpting and quoting in order to appropriate, they take for granted as the fragmentary nature of any image, of any text that calls to be re-read and re-written indefinitely. The key difference between Derrida's performance and Woolf's and Garro's performances is that the women writers demonstrate virtually no desire for the integrity of their texts and hence no attempt to master them. They do not violate these texts, they merely juxtapose fragments of the already fragmentary, unapologetically weaving infinite webs of

possible readings. They remain neutral before the texts of philosophical, historical and literary fathers, simply turning their truths into questions and exposing the will to truth and completeness and mastery at any cost. They acknowledge that they cannot appropriate these texts (both written and image) but must simply continue to build upon and add to them. Unlike Derrida, they have never really presumed that they could or should appropriate these others. This may be why their examples seem more hopeful, especially Garro's, "La culpa...." These reading and writing strategies that resist easy categorization, that propose infinite layers of meaning through connections to other texts, other cultures, other lives, however different they may appear, open up a space for a new discourse, a new language, a new way for all human beings (whatever their networks of identities) to communicate that is less inherently violent because there is no pretense to mastery, but also, and I think this is where Woolf and Garro depart most clearly from Derrida's work, no nostalgia for mastery.

For example, in *Droit de regards*, Derrida criticizes the audacity of naming the women in the photographs and supplying the photographs with a narrative, which he proceeds to do anyway, reminding us that he also has other narratives that he wants to keep to himself, that he refuses to share. He performs, much as he does in *Éperons*, the contradictory desire to let these images or the figures of woman remain other and the desire to appropriate and define them. Woolf, however, simply refuses to write about the photographs of men that she includes, only providing generic titles in a prefatory page, which she calls "Illustrations." The status of this page on the margins of this text, and the silence within the text about the specific details of the photographs, allows the reader to do as she will with the photographs, including ignore them. Though they are clearly a part of her text, how they relate to it is up to us. We cannot even give the subjects fictional names, since they are photographs of actual people, not the fictional personas of Plissart's photographs that give Derrida the right,

however self-consciously, to name them. Woolf invokes history and biography in these photographs to undermine the “right” that fiction gives us to accept any narrative we give it as even our own personal truth. We cannot own our readings of these images, even temporarily. We can each supply our own narratives for them, and we are encouraged to supply those narratives and share them, but we simply cannot pretend to master them, even if we first expose our pretense as Derrida does. Through this lens, all the response Woolf received from her readers, even the most negative, validated her efforts and functioned as part of the process of opening this space. The violence in these exchanges was the violence of revolutionary discourse that could eventually lead to peaceful coexistence.

The following three chapters explore some of the webs that these writers weave, which Derrida in *Donner le temps* associates with the gift of writing, and I attempt to merely add my own texts, my own narratives and my own readings to these webs to perform this getting lost in the network of narratives as I argue it is ethically imperative that we do so. I ask whether we can simply take pleasure in open-endedness of our contributions, to revel in this collaborative construction with those whom we read and write about as well as those who read our work, in order to postpone the violence of definition, of a coherent reading, that must always appropriate the other’s self-image in more or less violent ways. I argue that the longer you take to respond, the more complex your response will be, the less violent it will be, at least against the writers you have read. If you can postpone having to assume what all of this layering means for any one person, and merely demonstrate how you “make” meanings and can continue to do so infinitely and call others to join you, we can work together to broaden the scope of what constitutes reading and writing, and, in turn, what constitutes being and becoming. My methods of reading, the tentativeness of my arguments about what I read as I read, are my way of limiting the

violence of my response against the texts that I read and against the readers of my text, but this can only work if we define knowledge in similar ways and if we read these texts patiently and openly. If we want a traditional form of critical reading that uses the details of the different readings to support one coherent argument, ironically, these texts and my readings of them will be received as violent since they will violate our expectations. The point is to work together to extend our own boundaries, to establish more creative and affirmative practices of reading and writing that still constitute a form of communication and interaction between selves and other selves.

All three of the works that I have brought together here, however much they play with and conflate other genres (and even media) including philosophical writing, biography, autobiography, published personal letters, epistolary novels, polemical essays, photography, spoken exchanges, historiography and myth, are always, in part, fictional texts for this very reason: They all play with alternative realities and identities that resist our attempts to establish a singular reality, using non-fictional genres merely as a way to prevent us from slipping fully into a coherent, subjective interpretation. They resist arguing for any simple truth or a simple solution (whether subjective or objective) to the problems and questions they raise, and, instead, play with the pros and cons of different solutions from different subject-positions. They ask us to read their texts in similar ways, exposing alternative sources of discourse in previously silenced others and alternative methods in the juxtaposition and superimposition of traditional discursive practices. These texts propose possible alternative practices in the way they incorporate intricate webs of narratives and genres that give readers the gift of complexity, the gift of a puzzle that we want to solve but that continuously eludes us, a labyrinth that we cannot escape and whose creator throws us a thread that appears to lead to an exit, but upon closer inspection, given more time, will always lead to other threads. We cannot even temporarily mistake the tentativeness of any

one reading for mastery, making us more passive, more open to what we see, read, hear, more creative and less assertive and destructive. The question of whether or not and how reading and writing might offer a way out of violent economies based upon violent practices of communication and identification remains unanswered, but as long as we are occupied by this work of reading and writing others, the problem of physical violence is suspended indefinitely.

The image is no more inherently a revolutionary form of communication than writing.

Moving from Derrida's invocation of the visual effects of writing itself, to Woolf's use of images, both photographic and written descriptions of images, to the written exchange between two speaking bodies in Garro's stories proposes an argument that the increasing ability of the visual to disrupt language makes it impossible to master. However, "El árbol" challenges this argument by showing us that, in practice, we can all too easily convince ourselves that we master the ultimately heterogeneous image, the speaking body of the other. For the visual to be more revolutionary, it has to be "read" as heterogeneous and impenetrable, which would have much the same effect as reading writing in this way, though perhaps it is easier to resist appropriating an image than it is to appropriate a sentence or an essay. Garro's second story returns us to the reading practices proposed in Derrida's essay where he invokes the visual as yet another network of meaning. The existence of language as always a citation of someone else's language and the visual appearance of writing itself can serve to remind us of the infinite heterogeneity of the written text, but, again, only if we read this way. Therefore, the written text can be just as revolutionary as the speaking body: for either one to challenge our pretense of mastery, we have to remain open to its heterogeneity, to its otherness, to the many allusions to other networks that

we may or may not have access to when we attempt to read and respond to these texts/bodies.

I have chosen to focus on communication about and across gender difference because these categories have become much more difficult to distinguish, and examining the effects of this difficulty can help us communicate more peacefully about and across other categories of difference that still appear more distinct.

It is for this reason that, unlike Spivak, I choose to focus more on gender difference and the communication about and across these differences. I think that precisely because gender categories are “messier”, because these differences can so easily be blurred and layered, we can, if we ask what constitutes successful communication about and across gender difference, find more peaceful and productive ways to communicate across multiple and multi-layered differences between us. When Derrida suggests that all writers must appropriate traditionally feminine identities, that they must perform as feminine, and demonstrates some of the complicated metaphors and exchanges, the web that these performances inevitably lead to, he builds upon an argument that Woolf already made in *A Room of One's Own*, that the writer must be both masculine and feminine at the same time. Derrida seems to argue that this position is and has always been the feminine operation, which he distinguishes from the question, “what is a woman?” The argument that the modern writer who is no longer convinced of his ability to reach a single, coherent truth, must appropriate a traditionally feminine position of playing with stylized images of masculine truths, shows us precisely why defining “woman” or defining gender difference depends upon such inherently violent assertions. Ultimately, these assertions are indistinguishable from our attempts to own language. The question of gender difference, Judith Butler argues, is “a particularly dense moment of irresolution in our language, one that marks the contemporary horizon of language as our own”

(Undoing Gender 177). The desire to define gender difference, to understand both traditional and contemporary definitions of what it means to be a man or a woman or something else that we don't yet have a word for, consistently takes us back to our own language, and the ways in which it eludes our attempts to appropriate it and control it, the ways in which it limits us and we exceed it. Furthermore, the desire to define sexual difference reveals the complex ways in which claims about what it means to be either a man or a woman are immediately confounded by claims of what it means to occupy other categories of social difference including race, class, religion, physical appearance, and sexuality.

Simply juxtaposing the writing of men and women is far more revolutionary than replacing one with the other or using one to critique the other.

The progression of the next three chapters, from the traditional discussion between men (Derrida and Nietzsche) about women to the discussion between women about women *and* men, can also be a move against violence, one that can inform our attempts to speak across gender difference insofar as they conflate the public (traditionally male-dominated dissemination of texts) with the private (traditionally female spaces of communication and empowerment), allow both men and women to occupy positions of subjects and objects, speakers and listeners interchangeably, and therefore, undermine traditional laws that have enforced the hierarchies made possible by the relatively easy definition of these categories. As we progress through this series of readings, what Derrida refers to as the "Law of Genre/Gender" begins to crumble, and this crumbling is necessary to seek alternative forms of communication and interaction, however much the loss of these laws might, in turn, be experienced as violent, mostly because they do make communication difficult. The decision to accept some degree of incommunicability as part of the revolutionary nature of these texts, the way they invite us, nevertheless, to communicate with them and about them, or

simply to superimpose our own versions of them, could liberate us from the often arbitrary and unnecessary laws that we accept as our own and challenge us to constantly revise these laws each time we make a decision, each time we communicate with an other. These possibilities evolve from our recognition of our ultimate fragmentation and our ultimate need for others to “add” to us (not to complete us) and for us to add to them.

CHAPTER TWO

THE SPURRED/SPURNED LOVER OF NIETZSCHE: JACQUES DERRIDA'S APPROPRIATION OF THE "FEMININE OPERATION" IN *ÉPERONS*

Let us pretend that from the moment we utter our first words, we learn to take part in a game where the goal is for each of us to define, to assert our definition and hence to appropriate and control others before they can assert their definitions and appropriate and control us. Let us accept Freudian arguments that as we stand on the threshold between the non-linguistic and the linguistic experience of our world, we begin to play that game.¹ What do we do when we write or paint, when we make any mark if not give that game a visually stylized form? Since we must draw inspiration for these styles from somewhere, let us say, since as with most games, the ultimate goal is often pleasure, we take the visual form of the game from the loci of our bodily pleasure, the surfaces, promontories and folds of our erogenous zones, and let us say, though in doing this, we immediately recognize our differences and the source of pleasure in these differences, that represent in those marks, our sameness, and the possible pleasure to be found there as well, or rather, the way bodily surfaces modeling the marks that we make, contain the differences within themselves, that in all cases, they are, at least in some sense, hermaphroditic. We represent them as

¹ See Freud's discussion of the *fort-da* game in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, where the child beginning to speak plays a game where he creates a controllable simulacrum of his mother leaving and coming back to him, thus giving himself agency or a sense of control over the ultimately uncontrollable loved other. This is a similar process that Freud follows in most of his narratives: the subject creates analogous narratives in order to displace or sublimate a problem, and thereby gives himself the illusion that he controls it. Revealing Freud's fetish, perhaps, as fictional narrative and why he has maintained such a privileged position in the humanities that he has not held in the social sciences. The importance of maintaining a consistent illusion of control over one's narrative is also implicit in his discussions of the Oedipus complex. In fact, Freud ends up consistently explaining psychological problems as the inability of a subject to take control of his narrative and willingly assume the roles that his narrative establishes for him. According to this definition, and given Derrida's argument about the woman has traditionally been the subject of narrative or subject in narrative, but she has never been able to convince herself that she controls her own narrative, which implies that these traditions have made psychoses inevitable for her.

letters, as promontories and abysses, as lines that curve around and define space, and we feel pleasure within us and between us, suspending any resolution to that difference to that pleasure for as long as possible.

However, for the game to continue, for there even to be stakes, we must threaten that pleasure or perform the threat against our own pleasure, which is ultimately, our inability to control the game and its certain end, our inevitable deaths. Reproduction is but a weak simulacrum of immortality, though more readily available than, say, becoming the immortalized subject of historical or fictional writing, or, even more arduously, immortalizing oneself as the author. Still, because it is so readily accessible for most people, it must be carefully guarded and appropriated by those in power in order to legitimize and maintain that power, and since women have the only certain connection to children because they carry them within the space of their bodies, the womb becomes the object of desire and resentment between the sexes. Perhaps because she has no cause to doubt the power and legitimacy of her connection with her children, she occupies herself in other ways as certain men focus singularly on finding increasingly insidious ways to wrest this power from her.² Through metaphor and analogy, the womb becomes associated with the ground that receives you upon death, with passivity, with weakness, with nothingness.³ Metonymically, woman becomes the void, this passive space before, beyond language, the radical

² See Gayatri Spivak's "Displacement and the Discourse of Woman," especially the following passage: "The institution of phallogocentric law is congruent with the need to prove paternity and authority, to secure property by transforming the child into an alienated object named and possessed by the father, and to secure property by transforming the woman into a mediating instrument of production and passage of property. In this narrow but 'effective' and 'real' sense, in the body of the woman as mother, the opposition between displacement and logocentrism might itself be deconstructed" insofar as logocentrism depends upon historical acts of displacement like these, debasing material or physical evidence of legitimacy and power and replacing them with linguistic and metaphorical abstract evidence of legitimacy and power like the father's name. She refers back to her critiques of Derrida's limits in *Éperons*, "not merely as the undecidable crease of the hymen or the envied place of the fetish, but also as the repressed place of production can the woman stand as a limit to deconstruction" (184).

³ See Judith Butler's close reading of the receptacle of becoming in Plato's *Timaeus* (*Bodies that Matter* 40).

heterogeneity that language and logic must work against and try to frame and control in order to stave off death, to promise some semblance of immortality. We continue to recognize the necessity of this figure of woman for our pleasure in the game, but it is also necessary to keep her at bay, to love her from a distance, to define that love, as yet another frame that we use to control her. Her resistance to those frames becomes another source of our pleasure, as do our imaginings that she mocks our attempts as futile, that she, like death, still holds sway over us, that she is always the winner of the game, that she humors us, plays along, and then laughs at our naiveté. Time passes, and we tire of merely loving this woman, of trying to understand her, and we long for something new, a revolution that will offer us a new language, a new truth, a new process, new ways of being and communicating that will not force us to repeat the same cycles of violence, ultimately against ourselves, over and over again. We decide that the first step toward this revolution is not merely loving this woman or hating and fearing her, but doing both as we become her, as we affirm her in ourselves. The thinking, writing subject here, the role I subject myself to in order to tell this story is not Derrida's and not mine. It has been chosen for me as it was for Derrida, and I have been encouraged to, like Derrida, accept it as desirable to try and speak from it, however much these traditions deny me that possibility. However, ethically, I feel less attached to them than he does, more compelled to seek a way out of this process of identification and appropriation, to seek another thinking, writing subject position both for me and for all others, whatever their identities, whom I care about and do not want to violate. But in my search, I do not want to give up the possibility of communicating effectively with those who, for whatever reason, remain caught in these traditions.

How Derrida affirms himself, in and of himself, in woman.

In *Éperons*, Derrida discusses Nietzsche's attempts to identify woman (and also himself) using three proposed positions and the process of working from within each. First, woman is "Negated as falsehood for the philosopher seeking truth" (97). This is the traditional, platonic definition of woman as void, as that which defies meaning, as the figure for all that is earthly and changing and therefore can never occupy the role of a philosophizing subject and must be relegated, instead, to the position of subject for philosophy. Then, in the second position, woman is "negated "censured, debased, and despised" because she is truth (as untruth)—here condemned by "masked artist who still believes in castration..." (97). The philosopher becomes an artist in this position because he is no longer looking for truth or wisdom, but he is an artist who still believes in castration, that woman is a man who has lost something, and that man should intrinsically hold power because he has the phallus. The artist/philosopher condemns woman as what threatens his power, but in order to maintain this power, he must play the role of the castrating man. He must presume that he is responsible for the woman's castration. Here the woman "is twice castration: once as truth and once as non-truth." Finally, in the third position, "she is affirmed as "dissimulatress, an artist, a dionysiac" but not by a man this time, instead "she affirms herself, in and of herself, *in man* [emphasis mine]. Castration, here again, does not take place" (97). At least, castration is impossible to locate between the masculine and the feminine, so there can only be affirmation through the appropriation of the masculine in the feminine operation. The woman recognizes that she, like the man, is both castrating and being castrated, her ultimate similarity to him, and then affirms her ability to perform as either man or woman as she desires.

All three of these positions, according to Derrida, belong to Nietzsche's woman. They are also the cycle of the eternal return of his writing selves, and the cycle does not necessarily progress from the first to the third stages and stop there. He

might occupy these positions in any order or occupy all three simultaneously, as Derrida argues Nietzsche often does. In the third stage, “anti-feminism, which condemned woman only so long as she was, so long as she answered to man from the two reactive positions, is in itself overthrown” (97). Here Derrida contextualizes Nietzsche’s antifeminism that has so bothered feminist readers, and this explanation will be similar to the one Woolf uses to justify her own antifeminism: basically, the feminist activists of their time merely appropriated the “masculine operation” of self-mastery at the expense of others. According to Derrida, in the third stage, woman stops answering to man. She cannot respond to being censured, debased, despised by men or she will be condemned as reactive, as merely reversing the roles and perpetuating the violence historically committed against her. She will be accused of merely trying to take their place. If they condemn her as falsehood, she could only respond by effectively taking either position: falsehood is truth or she is truth or vice versa, in which case she will still be censured, hence she has no position except for one already “in man.” In other words, Derrida is saying that she is always already in him, so when he performs the feminine operation, it isn’t a question of his penetration and appropriation of her. He is already affirming himself in her as he invites her to do in him. From a woman reader’s perspective, however, affirming herself in him and his affirming herself in her, especially when this self is defined as the operation of style that we carry out in the face of a possible void of truth, amounts to just doing what we’ve always done: assuming that woman has no identity outside of what has already been established as masculine identity, no desire that is distinguishable from his, and hence that there is no way out of the repetitions of traditions and the cycles of violence and oppression. Derrida is simply affirming as liberating what, to a feminist philosopher like Luce Irigaray, seems like damnation. For a woman writer/thinker, the only position where she is not condemned is the one where she has no separate

identity from man, where she has no voice to speak to him. What does it mean for the woman writer to affirm herself “in man?” What agency does she have here, and why is it still located “in” man? Would she have any more agency if she affirmed herself in woman? And if we reverse this sentence infinitely, does anything change?

In “Displacement and the Discourse of Woman”, Gayatri Spivak explains that she does see potential for change in Derrida’s deconstructive and recuperative reversals, but that “we” (and she speaks for women thinkers and writers here, justifiably or not) “respectfully” can share neither his desires nor the questions that these desires motivate him to ask: “we cannot share in the mysterious pathos of the longing: for a reason as simple as that the question of woman in general, asked this way, is *their* question, not *ours*” (184). She resists Derrida’s appropriation of the feminine operation to answer a masculine question, “what is woman?” and by implication, “what is art and style and truth?”, because she cannot comfortably assert these analogous relationships between woman, writing, truth, and art. She explains that ultimately, Derrida seems to perform, in *Éperons*, as a man playing with a fetish, specifically, written style, which he openly uses to disavow the possible arbitrariness of these analogies. Still, she allows Derrida his questions, respects his otherness and attempts to elaborate “our” questions, implicitly the questions for contemporary women writers and philosophers, which might begin by asking “the ‘question of man’ in that special way—what is a man that the itinerary of his desire creates such a text? Not, in other words, simply, what is man? All texts in the world are at our disposal, and the question cannot flounder into the delusions of pure, “what am I?” (186). She implies that Derrida’s attempt to ask what is woman, merely brings him back to himself, which is a symptom of his still remaining very much within phallogentric traditions, a symptom of his nostalgia for these traditions. However, since women have never been “allowed” to occupy a similar questioning subject-position, when *she*

asks the question, and in her case, not a generalization, but a specific question about what a specific text reveals about a specific author's desires, it really is impossible that these questions will take her back to herself, primarily, since she, like Derrida, doesn't really know what a woman's self might be and has never been allowed to assume it is anything. So unlike Derrida's question, which Spivak argues doesn't really get him anywhere (190), a woman asking what desires have produced such a text and how they help us define a concept of man,

restores to us the position of the questioning *subject* by virtue of the question-effect, a position that the sexual differential has never allowed women à propos of men in a licit way. This gesture must continue to supplement the collective and substantive work of "restoring" woman's history and literature. Otherwise the question "what is man's desire?" asked by women from the peculiar *sub rosa* position of the doubly-displaced subject will continue to preserve masculinity's business as usual and produce answers that will describe themselves, with cruel if unselfconscious irony, as "total womanhood." (186)

Spivak locates the failure, for her, of Derrida's text in its abstraction, in its focus on the texts of men. The process she suggests here as an antidote is a canny description of what Virginia Woolf does in *Three Guineas*. However, as I will explain in the next chapter, her attempts to ask the question of traditionally masculine desires and how they have produced certain texts and social hierarchies, which in turn, have produced the inevitability of war, which she then juxtaposes with a recuperation of women's texts and the desires they reveal, still ends up being read as "total womanhood" by both her male and female readers and either condemned or praised to the degree that the reader aligns her or himself with these traditional roles (many women praise it while some women and most men condemn it). Furthermore, Spivak does not acknowledge the ways in which she repeats Derrida's performance, which does not necessarily undermine her critical stance. On the contrary, as Derrida himself has made so clear, there is always both reverence and parody in any repetition of another's performance. Derrida asks this very question of himself. In fact, his entire essay can

be read as a reflection upon his own desires as a philosopher and writer, and how they relate to his masculinity or femininity, and, perhaps also out of respect or politeness, Spivak avoids responding to his answers.

Derrida desires to be adorned and therefore adored, so he appropriates the feminine operation of citation.

Derrida draws attention to his use of Nietzsche's letter, or, rather, an "erratic" exergue from a letter that Nietzsche wrote to Malvida von Meysenbug in "seventy two (The Birth of Tragedy)," which he writes in parentheses as part of his introduction of the letter (35). To those familiar with the timeline of Nietzsche's work, the reference would immediately suggest the year in which *The Birth of Tragedy* was first published. If you are a reader who isn't familiar with the work or who doesn't recognize Derrida's parenthetical as a reference to the text, it isn't, after all, italicized, you may read this as the year in which tragedy was born for Nietzsche, the birth or beginning of a tragedy that was Nietzsche's and that he shared, perhaps, with Malvida von Meysenbug.⁴ The ambiguity even in the most apparently accessible context for a

⁴ In part because it helps make my point about the webs of narrative that these fragments can recall, I will quote here a story about a possible tragic embarrassment that Nietzsche suffered around this time, which David B. Allison recounts in his essay, "Destruction/Deconstruction in the Text of Nietzsche" (1979). "There is an apocryphal story told about Nietzsche that might—if true—lend confirmation to the neutral, if not neuter character this resolution [to confound the "conventional" or "purported" feminine and masculine viewpoints]. It seems that on one of his frequent visits to Tribschen, Wagner's estate on Lake Geneva, Nietzsche fell somewhat ill. Wagner (who many critics perhaps too easily see as a father figure for Nietzsche at this period) recommended his own physician. Some weeks later, again at Tribschen, a banquet was held; and Wagner, cackling, urged his physician to make a toast to the young Nietzsche. The physician did so, and in the course of his toast, he recounted the event of Nietzsche's physical examination to the assembled guests. In an extremely rude form of humor, the physician pronounced that he had never, in his professional experience, seen such a miniscule penis. Nietzsche was of course mortified. He fled Tribschen and Wagner, never to return: an action that, perhaps, brought about to his own mind, the death of a second father. He realized afterwards, again perhaps, the excess of narcissism, his own fetishistic narcissism, that led to this humiliation. A neutral fatalism, a double origin, an enigmatic sexuality would henceforth characterize his texts." (218). In a sense, what Allison is doing by simply including this story in his essay, after he has criticized other Nietzsche "scholars" for exchanging these kinds of apocryphal stories as if they were true, and using them to make meaning from his texts, shows that this is what we do, what Derrida is doing and what Allison does, even when he's most conscious that others, including Derrida, invoke these narratives and create their own versions of Nietzsche's texts. This is precisely Derrida's argument about Nietzsche's style and about women, that they bring together so many contradictions, and that in

quotation emphasizes the function of quotation itself as a play of veils that postpones the possibility of a singular truth or meaning or the possible utter lack of meaning due to multiple possible reading and writing positions or perspectives.

The reader receives no more context as Derrida goes on to explain that he “cut[s], in his letter, the forms of an erratic exergue” (translation mine 34).⁵ He is now in the present, his own present, as he erratically cuts excerpts from Nietzsche’s letter that are also forms, figures, simulacra for other bodies, appropriating them for what now becomes his own letter. The fact that Derrida emphasizes the erratic nature of the cutting can simply be his way of reminding us that all citation, all choices of what to cite and what not to cite end up being rather arbitrary attempts to inscribe our meaning as *the* meaning of a text upon that very text. However, his performance here is yet another tease, another set of veils for him to use in his dance, since we are not really encouraged to take him at his word. Are the excerpts really erratic? Is the ambiguity and potential meaninglessness of the references in the letter for which we lack context the result of Derrida’s or Nietzsche’s omissions? Is Derrida merely telling us this to make him seem more radically performative than he is? In other words, is he being disingenuously disingenuous? This (downward?) spiral of increasingly agonizing questions mimics the questions of a lover who wants to understand the (traditionally feminized) beloved. Derrida is showing us that this is the traditional feminine operation by which she ensnares the lover and ensures her continuous position as object of his desire and adoration, which Nietzsche and now Derrida have appropriated to ensure their readers’ desire and adoration, which also implies that they

the process, they invite you to make what you will of their personas/texts. Rather than critique this at all, I think it is, as Derrida suggests, affirmative, for it provides the hope that in bridging even the most different texts, we might think something other, bridge and affirm even the widest differences. It is a creative reading that I think, especially teachers of literature, should encourage rather than discourage.

⁵ “Je découpe, dans sa lettre, les formes d’un exerge – erratique” (34).

no longer care all that much about finding a truth and perhaps they (philosophers in general) never did.

After his erratic cutting and quoting, displacing and replacing pieces of Nietzsche's letter and its references that perhaps would only be understood by the letter's intended recipient, or perhaps only understood by Nietzsche himself, or perhaps not even that, Derrida returns to his present work. Does the quotation mean that he has never left or that he occupies Nietzsche's time/work and his own simultaneously as he quotes? Does it mean, in other words, that he locates himself in a space/time over which he has little control, about which he can make few distinctions? He begins, "The title for this lecture was to have been *the question of style*. However—it is woman who will be my subject. Still, one might wonder whether that doesn't really amount [*revient* or return to] to the same thing—or is it to the other" (37).⁶ Again, the problem of distinguishing self from other is analogous to the problem of distinguishing one subject, woman, from the subject position of the other, which also raises the question of style and how it complicates identity: "The 'question of style' is, as you have no doubt recognized, a quotation" (37).⁷ The question of style, both the title of this essay and titles or names in general, are always stylistic performances and as such always quotations. The title as quotation demonstrates the impossibility of establishing a subject through/in written style or the ways in which all styles cite or refer to other styles and are always recombined styles of others. There cannot be a proper style anymore than there can be a truly "proper" name, one that doesn't already perform the name of many others.

Derrida references yet another matrix of possible identities for the essay when he explains that his work is part of a larger context of deconstructive readings, which

⁶ "Le titre retenu pour cette séance aura été *la question du style*. Mais – la femme sera mon sujet. Il resterait à se demander si cela revient au même – ou à l'autre" (36).

⁷ "La «question du style», sans doute l'avez vous reconnue, c'est une citation" (36).

he doesn't actually cite but for which his entire work can serve as a citation.⁸ His "present" work is therefore a "debt" that he owes to his colleagues, who are practicing this new kind of affirmative reading and interpretation, this new "trend" of deconstruction. Derrida reminds his listening audience, and later any reader, that those who claim he is the "founder" of deconstruction show that they do not understand deconstruction.⁹ He could not found a trend of interpretation and communication since it so fundamentally occurs in an ongoing process of communication between other readers and writers, including Nietzsche, without whom his attempts to practice a different kind of reading and writing for different ends would fail. Therefore, he cannot and should not accept either the fame or the burden of responsibility for these practices and their outcomes alone.

However, there is more to this disclaimer, yet another set of veils for Derrida's dance. He overtly tells us that he is not citing or referencing (giving credit) to many of the works to which he owes a debt here, and then he proceeds to name one:

I owe these readings a great debt and it is neither through omission nor in a spirit of presumptuous independence that I do not refer to them individually (not even to *Versions du soleil* which provided the title for this text). But, because they have opened up that problematic field to the very margin in which (aside from those moments when I deviate from it) I shall remain, that debt itself should not be fragmented here, but at each moment presupposed in its totality. (37)¹⁰

⁸ "J'ai voulu marquer que je n'avancerai rien ici qui n'appartienne à l'espace dégagé au cours de ces deux dernières années par des lectures qui ouvrent une phase nouvelle dans un procès d'interprétation déconstructrice, c'est-à-dire affirmative" (36).

⁹ This reminder is especially significant because by the time Derrida presented *Éperons*, scholars (especially Americans) were extremely eager to define him, and since these definitions seemed so clearly connected to their desire to ignore his work, he wanted them to know that deconstruction is not a theory but a practice, a practice of communication that, in Derrida's circles, developed from and contributed to lively and important communication between scholars, and as such cannot be attributed to any one of these scholars.

¹⁰ Si je ne cite pas ces travaux auxquels je dois beaucoup, pas même *Versions du soleil* qui me donne ce titre, ouvrant le champ problématique et jusqu'à la marge dans laquelle, à telle dérive près, je me tiendrai ce ne sera ni par omission ni par présomption d'indépendance. Plutôt pour ne pas fragmenter la dette et pour la présupposer à chaque instant en sa totalité" (36).

His title is a debt that he owes to Bernard Pautrat and his book, which deconstructs Nietzsche's work, *Versions du soleil*. In this statement, Derrida evokes the role of publishing as well as the role of the seminar in which both Derrida's work and the other works referenced within it were disseminated. He recognizes the importance (even if it is not always possible) to cite consciously, to credit those who came before, the identities of their works and bodies, which he has appropriated, if for no other reason than it makes it less likely that he will feel free to do excessive violence to their texts/identities in his appropriations of them, and he reminds us that the reasons for citation should be to make our acts of communication less violent and more responsible, not to glorify individuals. At the same time, if he identifies them, he makes them "founders" of their thoughts. He pins them down; he makes them bear the weight of their ideas alone, when the ideas were never theirs alone. Though he feels compelled to name the source of his title, if for no other reason than to provide further evidence that names are always citations, he prefers not to "fragment the debt" and would rather "presuppose it at every instant in its totality" to remind us that every act of communication, every act of reading or hearing the words of an other, many of which he may have forgotten, have informed his words and continue to inform them at every moment. The fact that he immediately contradicts his claim that he would rather not reference many of the writers to whom he owes a debt, to whom he is responding in this work, performs the paradoxical position of trying to find a way out of traditional academic discourse and the necessity of responding in kind, of repaying the debt that he owes to that discourse and to those who still communicate within it. At the same time, this claim can function as a disclaimer allowing him to escape having to respond directly to any one of these writers, perhaps one who may not, from his perspective, be quite "affirmative" in her deconstruction of gender roles: Luce

Irigaray. Throughout his attempts to deconstruct, appropriate, and perform what he calls the traditional feminine operation, Irigaray's silence in his text is notable.

Reading *Éperons* as his response to *Speculum de l'autre femme* makes sense on many levels. First, he explicitly tells us that this essay was drawn out of a talk that he gave in 1972 at a colloquium on Nietzsche's work, but he is publishing the essay in 1978. Something has occurred between 1972 and 1978 to motivate him to return to this talk and revise it into an extensive essay on the function of "woman" in and for Nietzsche's philosophy. Could it have been Irigaray's work on the functions of "woman" in Plato in *Speculum* published in 1974, which could be read as a response to Derrida's reading of Plato in *Positions*, published in 1972, the same year as the talk he gave on the feminine in Nietzsche? If so, is the published version of *Éperons* an attempt to displace/replace her arguments about the traditional place of woman in philosophy the way Nietzsche tried to displace and replace Plato within his own work? The essay could certainly have that effect, which would make Derrida's play with the feminine operation a relegation of this operation to the realm of aesthetics, a debasement of Irigaray's book as, already preempted by Nietzsche's feminine operation. His performance might be read as a parody of Irigaray's, in which case, in his reversal and re-appropriation of her strategic essentialism, he protects the traditions of philosophy, as he suggests Nietzsche wanted to do, from the threat of hysterical discourse, from the threat of women's discourse.¹¹ However, such a reading would not be very generous.

¹¹ It is notable that Irigaray does not remain silent for too long, though longer than Derrida did. She responds and parodies, though like Derrida, not directly, his claims and performances and those he identified in Nietzsche in her book, *Amante marine* (1991), written, as I argue of Derrida's essay, from the perspective of Nietzsche's often ambivalent lover, which undermines Derrida's response in much the same way that he undermines her own, but, if nothing else, as Spivak calls for, it returns her to the questioning subject-position from which she asks, "what kind of man is this that the itinerary of his desires would produce such a text?" and goes further to ask, "what kind of woman am I if I love him?"

We could also read his essay as a more positive response to Irigaray. He admires her style and attributes it to the way she appropriates the “feminine operation” and even envies it and wants to appropriate it for himself. He wants to be as adorned, adored, and as mysterious to her as she is to him, which still has the effect of undermining her claims to truth, to the position of a philosophizing subject, which Derrida suggests cannot be a position for a woman, and if she takes this position, she becomes instantly guilty of repeating the crimes of men. He, on the contrary, resists this position, he does not want to appropriate it for himself, though he never wants to let it go entirely, merely to suspend it as a question, primarily through his stylistic devices, e.g. juxtaposing it with poetry as he does with Plato and Mallarmé in “La double séance”.

According to Derrida, the feminine operation, the traditional way in which women and writers have affirmed themselves and asserted themselves is through style, which could take the form of the adornments covering the female body, the veils, stilettos, jewels, and other accessories to their fashion, or the manipulations of analogous adornments in “artistic” writing. He uses the examples of the stiletto, or the ubiquity of “points” and hard objects, of phalluses, in women’s fashion, including the corset and other costumes that transform the body into a phallus itself:

The question of style is always the examination (investigation) or weight of a pointed object. At times only a pen or a quill. But it can just as easily be a stiletto, or even a dagger. Surely with the help of these one can cruelly attack that which philosophy has called for in (under) the name of matter or the matrix, to carve a mark there, to leave an imprint or form there, but also to repel a menacing form, to keep it (her) at a distance, to repress her (oneself), to protect—thus folding and refolding, in flight, behind veils. (translation mine 36).¹²

¹²“La question du style, c’est toujours l’examen, le pesant d’un objet pointu. Parfois seulement d’une plume. Mais aussi bien d’un stylet, voire d’un poignard. A l’aide desquels on peut, certes, attaquer cruellement ce à quoi la philosophie en appelle sous le nom de matière ou de matrice, pour y enfoncer une marque, y laisser une empreinte ou une forme, mais aussi pour repousser une forme menaçante, la tenir à distance, la refouler, s’en garder – se pliant alors ou repliant, en fuite, derrière des voiles.” (36).

Style, according to Derrida, has traditionally been “the feminine operation,” the way in which she attacks and defends herself within her social confines through displacement of the play of phallus and veil, the exchanges of power between gender differences that she re-places onto her body in order to perpetrate some sense of control over these processes or simply to amuse herself as she watches her effects on men who believe in the power of these adornments (61). By turning more attention to style and even using it to undermine their content as an antidote to their disillusionment with the search for truth, he claims Nietzsche, like many “modern” writers, increasingly appropriated the operations that their fathers had called feminine for themselves, which, in turn, convinced them further that they had never come close to accessing any truth of woman in and of herself. Therefore, the figure of woman could remain as the possibility of the completely other.

For these writers even the most basic elements of writing, the marks or letters, are already stylized, already images, that perform (repeat, re-cite, displace, and re-place) other marks and other images, which is the case with Foucault’s lower case *p* that fortuitously proliferates the images of pipes in Magritte’s written sentence, citing and further undermining the ability of any image to identify itself as a pipe,¹³ or in James Joyce’s fallen *E* in *Finnegans Wake*, which performs the body of the fallen Earwicker or the Dublin skyline. These are instances that remind us that letters are images, that they visually frame and define space. As Kristeva argues, writing is already the veil, the fetish with which we cover nothingness in order to keep it in play.

Derrida’s performance reiterates his argument that style in writing, the punctuation, the dash that toys with the words, forcing them apart but also drawing them to one another, is yet another performance of the seductive call to interpret that inherently undermines any interpretation. Derrida focuses our attention to the ubiquity

¹³ See Michel Foucault’s *Ceci n’est pas une pipe*.

of these marks, the dashes, in Nietzsche's writing and to his practice of putting loaded words, and previously unexamined concepts in quotation marks. "Nietzsche's writing is compelled to suspend truth between the tenter-hooks of quotation marks—and suspended there with the truth is—all the rest. Nietzsche's writing is an inscription of the truth. And such an inscription, even if we do not venture so far as to call it the feminine itself, is indeed the feminine 'operation'" (57).¹⁴ The quotations that suspend the word in tenterhooks, reminding us of double, often blatantly opposed or merely radically different meanings in the same word, much as *grue* can mean crane, a symbol of fidelity, and a pejorative term for prostitute or "operation" can mean both a practice or set of practices and surgery—cutting into a body to save it as Nietzsche claimed that the perfect woman cuts you to pieces when she loves you (quoted by Derrida 107). In these ways, quotations and quotation marks to indicate multiple perspectives and irony, puns, other punctuation marks (for example Nietzsche's plethora of exclamation points and dashes), the writer plays with the reader. These written adornments function as adornments on a woman's body, mesmerizing, intriguing, promising significance, identity, beauty, spurring the lover out of his complacency. And once he's "hooked," these very adornments confound his ability to read, to define the identity behind the body text. They overwhelm and overtake him. One could argue that all of these adornments, that style in general, alludes to female genitalia, which was Georgia O'Keefe's point in her famous orchid paintings that resemble vulvas. For the flower uses the petals to entice the bee, to draw it in, and any kind of "drawing in", even if nothing comes of it, is always a pleasure heightened by risk and even horror, and could always become addictive, and eventually, an

¹⁴ "Cet écart de la vérité qui s'enlève d'elle-même, qui se lève entre guillemets (machination, cri, vol et pinces d'une grue), tout ce qui va contraindre dans l'écriture de Nietzsche à mise entre guillemets de la «vérité» -- et par suite rigoureuse, de tout le reste -- , ce qui va donc *inscrire* la vérité --et par suite rigoureuse, inscrire en général, c'est ne disons même pas le féminin: l'«opération» féminine" (56).

inescapable trap. Style or adornment, whether written or sartorial, performs the power and horror of sexuality, particularly female sexuality, the traditionally overwhelming effect it has had on men. It also recalls the need to keep it at bay, especially in the form of narrative, of stories, of cultural myths, from Pandora to Medusa to Astarte to Eve to Mary to Delilah to Judith.

Clayton Koelb explains that these cultural myths stem from the recognition of woman as a figure of ultimate power and not ultimate passivity. Here, the marked surface will never be sufficiently or satisfactorily framed, defined, and controlled by the pen. Koelb affirms woman by affirming castration, or rather focusing on castration as an object of desire, which is one way of reading Freud's fetishism. Female genitalia is no longer the reminder of a loss or of the possible fear of absence, but of her power. Koelb argues that,

A sufferer of castration anxiety fears the loss of power that accompanies the loss of the penis. But in Nietzsche's figuration of nature, the castrated body is not the locus of a loss of power; quite the contrary, the feminine body of nature is the most potent force imaginable—and not merely in spite of but to a large extent because of the void at its center. The anxiety Nietzsche depicts in the Greek facing the uncovered body of Mother Nature is not the fear that he might become like her; it is rather a fear that comes from the knowledge that he can never have a power anything like hers. He is in awe of the overwhelming negativity that defines her, a negativity which she ordinarily hides from view" (Burgard 79-80).

The reminders of this power in negativity are rare, normally hidden from view and easily forgotten beneath the many narratives that men have traditionally constructed in order to appropriate this power, to convince themselves that they ever could. Koelb, like Derrida, argues that Nietzsche experienced these moments when he recalled this feminine power in negativity as ultimately affirmative. However, these moments became fewer as he experienced the loss of self within his own narratives and could no longer convince himself even of the truth of this power. As I noted above, Derrida claims that the three positions in which Nietzsche "inscribes" women are the positions

he attributes to himself. He argues that the irreconcilable nature of the three positions may signal Nietzsche's own loss in his text, that "Nietzsche may well be a little lost in the web of his text, lost much as a spider who finds she is unequal to what has been produced through her" (translation mine 101).¹⁵ Playing so many roles, Nietzsche loses his place, is no longer able to reorient himself and goes mad. Derrida proposes that Nietzsche identified himself with all of these positions, "at once, simultaneously or successively, depending on the position of his body and the situation of his story"¹⁶ and that,

He was, he dreaded this castrated woman.
He was, he dreaded this castrating woman.
He was, he loved this affirming woman. (101)¹⁷

Derrida is arguing that Nietzsche's writing reveals that woman as subject, like writing as style, like reading in writing as citation, like castration, are all veils or fetishes that disavow ultimate powerlessness but also desire that powerlessness or at the very least require it to perpetuate their desire, which must remain irremediably bound to their dread. This truth of truths would equally be a problem for a woman writer and a male writer. The writer who does not convince himself of a truth to be sought cannot help but become lost in his matrix of conditioned and contradictory desires.

Sarah Kofman is one of Nietzsche's readers who according to Kelly Oliver "have emphasized, perhaps overemphasized, Nietzsche's identification with woman" (Burgard 62). She refers to the following passage in *The Gay Science*,

One should have more respect for the bashfulness with which nature has hidden behind riddles and iridescent uncertainties. Perhaps

¹⁵ "Dans le toile du texte, Nietzsche, est un peu perdu, comme araignée inégale à ce qui s'est poduit à travers elle" (100).

¹⁶ "...à la fois, simultanément y successivement, selon les lieux de son corps et les positions de son histoire" (100).

¹⁷ "Il était, il redoutait telle femme châtree./Il était, il redoutait telle fem castratrice./Il était, il redoutait tell femme affirmatrice (100).

truth is a woman who has reasons for not letting us see her reasons?
Perhaps her name is—to speak Greek—Baubô?
Oh, those Greeks! They knew how to live. What is required for that is
to stop courageously at the surface, the fold, the skin, to adore
appearance, to believe in forms, tones, words, in the whole Olympus of
appearance. Those Greeks were superficial—*out of profundity*. And is
not this precisely what we are again coming back to, we daredevils of
the spirit who have climbed the highest and most dangerous peak of
present thought and looked around from up there—we who have
looked *down* from up there? Are we not, precisely Greeks? Adorers of
forms, of tones, of words? And therefore—artists? (38).

Walter Kaufman's footnote to his translation above explains that Baubô is "a primitive and obscene female demon; according to the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, originally a personification of the female genitals." The Greeks, according to Nietzsche, were lovers of style out of fear of female genitalia, of looking at one and what it might tell us about ourselves and our world, and nobody, especially Nietzsche, believes that this sight would bring us the truth of "l'origine du monde" or the truth that, according to Plato, would allow the philosopher to defy death.

Sarah Kofman juxtaposes this passage from Nietzsche with the myth of Baubô and Demeter, where, Baûbo makes the mourning Demeter laugh by lifting up her skirts, which leads Demeter to end her punishment of eternal winter and bring back the spring and its life and fecundity. Kofman explains that "the connections between these Greek legends (like that of Bellerophon), and Irish and Japanese legends allow us to affirm that everywhere, when a woman raises her skirt, she provokes laughter or the desire to flee, as such, this gesture could be used in an apotropaic way: a woman's genitals play the role of Medusa's head" (translation mine 255).¹⁸ Kofman avoids discussing the figuring of female genitals as horrifying, or rather takes for granted that they are horrifying, connecting them to the hideous head of Medusa, which turned

¹⁸ « Le rapprochement avec des légendes grecques (comme celle de Bellérophon), irlandaises et japonaises permet d'affirmer que partout, lorsqu'une femme lève ses jupes, elle provoque le rire ou la fuite, de telle sorte que ce geste peut être utilisé comme moyen apotropaïque : le ventre de la femme joue le rôle de la tête de Méduse » (Kofman 255).

those who looked upon her to stone, as a figure of horror that can be both apotropaic and deadly, defensive and offensive as Derrida argues about the spur. She refers to Freud's essay, "Medusa's Head," in which he argues that horror inspired by the female genitals could have two purposes:

If Medusa's head takes the place of a representation of the female genitals, or rather if it isolates their horrifying effects from the pleasure-giving ones, it may be recalled that displaying the genitals is familiar in other connections as an apotropaic act. What arouses horror in oneself will produce the same effect upon the enemy against whom one is seeking to defend oneself. We read in Rabelais of how the Devil took flight when the woman showed him her vulva (Freud 213).

However, Kofman emphasizes the key difference between what is revealed through Baubô's genitalia and what is revealed through Medusa's head as the effect of laughter. Kofman interprets Demeter's laughter as her acknowledgement of the truth of simulacrum and the difficulty to mourn or to be too serious about anything, certainly not about the futility of rewarding or punishing humanity, in light of their naïve play with veils, their truths as nothing but play. For Kofman this truth is actually liberating, in fact it promises the eternal return of this play, the immortality of this return, the meaninglessness of death.

The figure of Baubô signifies that a simple logic could never comprehend life, which is neither profundity nor surface, that behind the veil, there is another veil, behind a coat of paint another coat; she also signifies that appearance need not awaken either skepticism or pessimism but affirmative laughter of the living who knows that, despite death, life can return indefinitely, that the individual is nothing, that the species is everything. (translation mine 255)¹⁹

Kofman argues that Nietzsche's naked or revealed Baubô and Dionysus celebrate the truth of appearance as "nudity that does not signify the revelation of a truth but the

¹⁹ La figure Baubô signifie qu'une logique simple ne saurait comprendre la vie qui n'est ni profondeur ni surface, que derrière le voile, il y a un autre voile, derrière une couche de peinture une autre couche ; elle signifie aussi que l'apparence ne doit éveiller ni scepticisme ni pessimisme mais le rire affirmateur d'un vivant qui sait que, malgré la mort, la vie peut indéfiniment revenir, que « l'individu n'est rien, que l'espèce est tout. (Kofman 255).

unveiled affirmation of appearance” (translation mine 257).²⁰ But, if nudity is comical, if it makes us laugh because it reminds us of the impossibility of nudity, of our bodies themselves, giving themselves to be read, as already veils, then why talk only about female nudity, female genitals? Is it, as Freud and Butler suggest, that men have traditionally displaced their own holes, their own voids, onto the woman, so that they could assure themselves of the inviolability, the integrity, of their own bodies? In

²⁰ “...nudité qui ne signifie pas révélation d’une vérité mais affirmation sans voile de l’apparence” (257). Derrida cites Nietzsche: “I fear that women who have grown old (altgewordene Frauen) are more sceptical in the secret recesses of their hearts than any of the men; they believe in the superficiality of existence as in its essence, and all virtue and profundity (sic.) is to them only the disguising (Verhuüllung) of this «truth,» the very desirable disguising of a *prudendum*—an affair, therefore of decency and modesty, and nothing more!» (*Joyful Wisdom*, 64,—*Sceptics* Cf. also the conclusion especially of the introduction to *Joyful Wisdom*). «Truth» can only be a surface. But the blushing movement of that truth which is not suspended in quotation marks casts a modest veil over such a surface. And only through such a veil, which thus falls over it could «truth» become truth, profound, indecent, desirable. But should that veil be suspended, or even fall a bit differently, there would no longer be any truth, only «truth»--written in quotation marks. *Le voile/tombe*.” The veil falls, and what it reveals is the *tombe* or death, its own meaninglessness and inevitability and the desire to forget it that is behind all acts, the most violent being the most willful forgetting of the futility of action. So Derrida is implying that the writer, whether man or woman, can not really want this veil to fall if for no other reason than it would completely make his writing or any other activity quite pointless. Derrida goes on: “So why then the fear, the dread, the «blushing modesty»? The feminine distance abstracts truth from itself in a *suspension* of the relation with castration. This relation is suspended much as one might tauten or stretch a canvas or a relation, which nevertheless remains suspended—in indecision. In the *ἔποχή*. It is with castration that this relation is suspended, not with the truth of castration in which woman doesn’t [sic.] believe anyway—and not with the truth inasmuch as it might be castration. Nor is it the relation with truth-castration that is suspended, for that is precisely a man’s affair. That is the masculine *concern*, [l’affaire de l’homme] the *concern* of the male [l’affairement masculine qui n’est jamais assez vieux—recalling Nietzsche’s old women] who has never come of age, who is never sufficiently sceptical or dissimulating. In such an affair the male, in his credulousness and naivety (which is always sexual pretending even at times to masterful expertise), castrates himself and from the secretion of his act fashions the snare of truth-castration. (Perhaps at this point one ought to interrogate—and «unboss» [«décapitonner»--decapitate—but also to remove the head, the leader—he who has the most power, which for Derrida, as a Frenchman, probably recalls the guillotine, and the head of the king—guillotine and guillemets—recalling quotations marks. The guillotine frames the head before it cuts it off. The analogy here is important for Derrida’s discussion of quotation/citation and cutting and the violence this does to text and that this text can do to the reader. As in this recollection, even when the quotation marks are not there, or even when we don’t take the time to unpack all of the ways the quotation marks are both undermining and proliferating meaning—the metaphorical fullblown sail of truth’s declamation, of the castration and phallogocentrism, for example, in Lacan’s discourse these plural meanings are still possible and can come back to haunt us or allow us to think that others, in their readings, have misappropriated ours.

which case, until the moment when they remember that they are always performing as feminine bodies, that everything they say about women they can say about themselves, both Derrida and Nietzsche perform this displacement, this sublimation, allowing themselves to revel rather uncritically within the patriarchal and misogynistic performances of this tradition. As soon as they utter that woman is their subject, and that everything they say about her applies to their own subject, do they perform the same ideal of removing difference, of valuing the metaphysical ideal over the physical, that they have critiqued in the operations of their philosophical forefathers? And does this reiterate what we already know to be an ambivalent relationship with their philosophical fathers?

Derrida performs the feminine operation to explore alternatives to the philosophical traditions that he both desires (since they have conditioned his desire) and fears (since they limit his experience).

Derrida immediately opposes the question of style to the question of philosophical tradition, focusing on the innovative function of style. He defines style as the exchange that takes place between the “pointed object” or the “object that points,” a stylus or object that writes or engraves, but most significantly attacks, and the feminine “matter” and the matrix or womb in which matter is always becoming. The pen as penetrating object evokes a genealogy of writing, Derrida’s text relating (to) Nietzsche’s text, extending back to the writings of the Greeks, the “origins” of western philosophy. This genealogy leads Derrida to the question *par excellence* for philosophy, for the Greeks, for Nietzsche, and finally for Derrida, the question over the significance of matter (feminine in the French *la matière*) as part of a context, space, environment or “matrix” (again feminine in the French *la matrice* but specifically evoking the womb) and how any philosopher’s claim to truth depends upon appearances or the observations of matter in its matrix. The relationship

between matter and matrix is the inaccessible object of desire, and philosophy has been the more or less accessible performances and products of the attempts to access it. However, instead of matter/matrix being equated with the feminine as is the case with Plato's *chora*, it would seem that both matter and the feminine are equally objects of desire precisely because they both have been repeatedly defined and sought by philosophers as that which resists language, meaning, and truth and that which they must control through language, meaning, and truth.

Matter is feminized in this sense, because both matter and the feminine have been linked as objects of the philosopher's desire and fear throughout history, and both have been described as indefinable and ever-changing, hence they have been repeatedly rendered analogous to one another. But this is more of a problem, which is Irigaray's point in *Ce Sexe qui n'est pas un*, of who is doing the thinking. The only reason that woman has been posited as the indefinable and ever-changing gender, is because she wasn't the one doing the writing and the thinking and this masculine operation allowed those who were doing the thinking to displace their own fears about their own lack of indefinable and stable subject-positions. Historically, when she has attempted to communicate, she has found her thoughts preempted by the overwhelming majority of male thinkers and writers who have already occupied any thinking position she might attempt to occupy.

In Nietzsche's and Derrida's work, but also in Irigaray's and Butler's, woman continues to appear and reappear as "the" object of desire, analogous to "truth," or to "writing," or to "matter." This is also the function of woman in Freud, which Derrida appropriates when he begins to address the role of veils or the simulacrum in Nietzsche's discussion of style and appearances as pointing to the subject of woman. Why does this figure of woman recur so often and so insidiously, even in women's writing? In all of these texts, it is clear that woman (and not simply woman as figure

or metaphor) continues to be described and inscribed as the void beneath appearance, the unnameable that is the cause for language, the absence or fear of fundamental absence that is the cause for all veils, and by the very fact of this lack can be constituted as anything by anyone at anytime in anyplace. Since all of these writers see identities, including gender identities as performances, as citations that both reiterate and undermine traditions, the only reason for focusing on the feminine as their subject in both senses must be that it gives them pleasure, even the simple pleasure of following a tradition of becoming complicit with hegemony.

When she appears in the work of woman writers, I think this overdetermined concept of woman is also the result of the paradoxical desire to defy traditional gender categories but to maintain the power and allure of being recognized as both the unknown feminine and the knowing masculine, however much those powers might be dependent upon our maintenance of these traditional identities. It becomes a question, as Woolf suggests so clearly in *Three Guineas*, of whether women want to enter “the procession” on the same terms, and many of these women writers, including Woolf herself, seem to answer both yes and no for good reason since forging a new path would, Woolf suggests, entail humiliation, isolation and impotence. If they do attempt to communicate a different system of values using a different discourse, most of the world would never understand them, and unless they could convince a majority to join them in your efforts, to recognize the ethical imperative to do so, change would most likely never come. This is in addition to the fact that woman writers and scholars have also been steeped in the writings of these philosophical fathers and that they have been taught to both love and fear them. The overdetermination of woman performs for the woman thinker very much as she performs for the male counterpart, the love-hate relationship between phallogocentric traditions of defining femininity and masculinity. Derrida is very clear about woman, or some ideal, negative concept of femininity as

the object of desire for traditional philosophy and the effects of this on our ability to think beyond gender difference.

It is impossible to dissociate the question of art, style, and truth from the question of woman. Nevertheless the question «What is woman?» is itself suspended by the simple formulation their common problematic. One can no longer seek her, no more than one could search for woman's femininity or female sexuality. And she is certainly not to be found in any of the familiar modes of concept or knowledge. Yet it is impossible to resist looking for her. (71)²¹

Derrida defines or claims that Nietzsche defines woman as the object of desire for the traditional philosopher or more generally, for any writer attempting to understand or express something about his place in a particular cultural context, to locate himself in his world. In other words, Derrida is explaining that most artistic and philosophical expressions, most thought, has been “spurred” by the search for woman, for the understanding of woman's identity and desire because they have convinced themselves of her otherness, of her originality, or of her nothingness, an object of desire, which Freud tentatively, perhaps for fear of the consequences, pointed out is perpetuated by the thinker himself. In his definitions of woman, he guarantees her absence and, hence, her continuing status as the ultimate object of desire and is allowed to continue his search for her, for the truth of/as her, his own philosophical operation.

Derrida wants to appropriate the feminine operation because, as a post-Nietzschean writer and thinker, he cannot really believe in truth, and yet he wants to be read, he wants to give his readers something of himself, to give himself for something, he wants his text to be desired, and as such he must entice us by appropriating and convincing himself and us of his/her mystery.

²¹ “Les questions de l’art, du style, de la vérité ne se laissent donc pas dissocier de la question de la femme. Mais la simple formation de cette problématique commune suspend la question «qu’est-ce que la femme?». On ne peut plus chercher la femme ou la féminité de la femme ou la sexualité féminine. Du moins ne peut-on les trouver selon un mode connu du concept ou du savoir, même si on ne peut s’empêcher de les chercher” (70).

Thanks to these philosophical and literary traditions, our pleasure in communication and more specifically in the exchange between reader and text rests upon an inherently violent struggle for appropriation of the other's "otherness". In fact, this is how we have defined knowledge, this is what it means, according to Hegel, to understand, to appropriate the other's otherness.²² Derrida shows us that he and Nietzsche as they attempt to find a way outside of these traditions cannot detach their pleasure from these traditions, primarily because these traditions of literary or philosophical pleasure are modeled upon sexual pleasure:

Nietzsche's analysis of the sexual difference, of the «eternal war between the sexes,» and the «mortal hatred of the sexes», «of love» eroticism, etc., are all based on what might be called a process of *propriation* (appropriation, expropriation, taking, taking possession, gift and barter, master, servitude, etc.). Thus, in numerous analyses (which it is impossible to elaborate here) the woman's appearance takes shape according to an already formalized law. Either, at times, woman is woman because she gives, *because she gives* herself, while the man for his part takes, possesses, indeed takes possession. Or else, at other times, she is woman because, in giving, she is in fact *giving herself for*, is simulating and consequently assuring the possessive mastery for her own self. (109).²³

²² Spivak quotes Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, "Since it is in thought that I am first at home (*bei mir*), I do not penetrate (*durchbohren*) an object until I understand it; it then ceases to stand over against me and I have taken from it its ownness (*das Eigene*), that it had for itself against me. Just as Adam says to Eve: 'Thou art flesh of my flesh and bone of my bone,' so mind says: 'This is mind of my mind,' and the alienness (*Fremdheit* as opposed to (*das Eigene*); alterity as opposed to ownness) disappears" (169). It is notable that the expression, *bei mir*, also means literally, with myself—so it is in thought that he is most at home and or more secure in his own identity, and then he elaborates on how he achieves that oneness with himself through the process of penetrating the object of his thought and appropriating it, tellingly using the analogy of Adam and Eve, redoubling this traditional narrative of what it means to know, to understand.

²³ I'd like to juxtapose this quotation with the initial passage where Derrida claims that woman "will be" his subject, which amounts to the same thing as the subject of styles (37) and another passage where he concludes in his reading of Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche, claiming that Heidegger tellingly "overlooks" the references to woman in several of his citations: "Heidegger demonstrates that the *giving* (*Geben*) and the *gift* (*Gabe*), which in fact amount to nothing (to neither a subject being nor an object being), cannot be thought of in terms of Being. Because they constitute the process of appropriation, the *giving* and the *gift* can be construed neither in the boundaries of Being's horizon nor from the vantage point of its truth, its meaning. Just as there is no such thing then as a Being or an essence of *the* woman or the sexual difference, there is also no such thing as an essence of the *es gibt* in the *es gibt Sein*, that is, of Being's giving and gift. The «just as» finds no conjuncture. There is no such thing as a gift of Being from which there might be apprehended and opposed to it something like a determined gift (whether of the subject, the body, of the sex or other like things—so woman, then, will not have been my subject)". The switch in tense to *futur antérieure*—in English future perfect (why?)

And, Derrida continues, “Not only is appropriation a sexual operation, but *before* it there is no sexuality. And because it is finally undecidable, appropriation is more powerful than the question *ti esti*, more powerful than the veil of truth or meaning of being.” In other words, gender difference is mobilized as exchanges of power, as difference in general, nothing more and nothing less, and it is precisely because we cannot decide, which “position” is more powerful when, which position owns what and when, which position gives itself or gives itself for (what?) and when that we keep communicating, keep playing the game and deriving pleasure from it.

Derrida adds that, “appropriation is all the more powerful since it is the process that organized both the totality of language process and the symbolic exchange in general” (111).²⁴ It is these cycles of “appropriation,” dependent upon difference, especially gender difference that Nietzsche wants to get out of, for only if we emerge from these cycles, will we ever be able to think anything new, to act in any way that does not repeat history, however much we try to break with especially its most destructive or violent tendencies. At the same time, he clearly takes great pleasure in writing about and in performing these appropriations himself.

It is this seeking for something other (a way out of the cycles of identity, power, and violence), which, Derrida explains, becomes Heidegger’s focus in his

prophecy—past in the future—the tense of the eternal return. The eternal return becomes the eternal feminine, woman and his attempts to find difference in her, to understand her as difference keeps coming back to him, to himself and his limits. He is his only subject, the only subject he can think about or write about.

²⁴ Derrida elaborates on the cycles of language and “appropriation” in *Donner le temps*: “Even before speaking of some gift or division [*partage*] of languages, it is not insignificant that one speaks of language as a given, as a system that is necessarily there before us, that we receive from out of a fundamental passivity. (The idiom—or the dialect [*Mundart*—says Heidegger speaking of J.P. Hebel, is not only the maternal tongue but also, indeed in the first place, the mother of the tongue.)[“Die Mundart ist nicht nur die Sprache der Mutter, sondern zugleich und zuvor die Mutter der Sprache,”] Language gives one to think but it also steals, spirits away from us, whispers to us [*elle nous souffle*], and withdraws the responsibility that it seems to inaugurate; it carries off the property of our own thoughts even before we have appropriated them. We will simply recall this necessary and well-known schema, its principle and its scope, which no doubt extends far beyond language in the strict sense of the spoken idiom, to all textuality in general” (80).

reading of Nietzsche, that leads him to ignore the significance of the figure of the woman in a key passage from "The History of an Error." Derrida argues that Heidegger is focusing on Nietzsche's desire for an outside, for something beyond these cycles of appropriation through his catachrestic use of Platonic negation for the purposes of then negating that negation, of seeking affirmation beyond given structures of exchange (of power). Nietzsche negates simple negation as the inversion of hierarchies, but this cannot lead to anarchy, for that too would reify the existing hierarchies. He is looking for something completely other, according to Heidegger, but Derrida argues that Heidegger approaches this search for the other from a traditionally philosophical standpoint. His is still a hermeneutic enterprise. Meaning is the ultimate (in the existing hierarchies) object of desire that is precisely what Nietzsche is trying to resist. Still, this does not mean that he successfully resists the search for meaning. To Derrida, Nietzsche seems locked in the web of these competing desires, in this case, that he wants woman to mean, but he also wants to be convinced of her "otherness" of her "non-meaning" and the possibility this might entail for a way out of these "vicious" cycles. Derrida is more convinced that he wants her to be radical otherness, but he is forced to recognize that if she is playing his game, as Irigaray seems to be doing in her work, she cannot be that radically other.

Instead, he may be willing her or some idea of her as more significant in her lack of significance when she is really as much and no more of a void and an ultimate plurality, an absence of all identification and a composite of too many identities, as he recognizes himself to be. In other words, the fear of woman becomes an analogy for the fear of truth, that the only truth lies in the play of styles, of surfaces, and as such is indeterminable. The acknowledgement of this indeterminability, which could lead the philosopher to his death and which may in fact "be" death, must be kept at bay at all costs, even if it costs the philosopher his sought-after "truth." This horror of woman

as void is of course the basis for Freud's theory of fetishism, where he explains that the fetishist actively and at all costs maintains his illusion (hence must also acknowledge it on some level as an illusion) of the woman's penis as present. This is why he opposes his use of "repression" to Laforgue's "scotomization," which Freud argues inaccurately implies that the fetishist's "perception is promptly obliterated."

On the contrary, in the cases Freud observes, "the perception has persisted and [...] a very energetic action has been exerted to keep up the denial of it" (216). He goes on to explain that "the horror of castration sets up a sort of permanent memorial to itself by creating a substitute. Aversion from the real female genitals, which is never lacking in any fetishist, also remains as an indelible stigma of the repression that has taken place" (216). Julia Kristeva subtly analyzes this memorializing tendency in fetishism, which like Lacan's "hommelette," developing Freud's prelapsarian bliss at the mother's breast, and "the drive integration elaborated by the maternal receptacle in the course of uterine life" according to Wilfred R. Bion, are all equally theories that "memorialize" a primordial state of bliss as indistinguishable identity between self and other in terms of its rupture. Kristeva exposes these theories as, themselves, veils or fetishes or the ways in which the philosopher, the psychoanalyst, the writer of fiction uses writing as fetish in an active process that denies ultimate unnameability, which in Freud, claims its ultimate expression as the fear of woman as void. According to Kristeva, what is more horrifying because it is impossible to analyze, because it cannot posit an outside, because it is the very medium of disavowal, is the void behind language itself, and the ultimate fear of woman as void is already a fetish by which Freud attempts to disavow language as always already the ultimate fetish. All other concepts defined as voids that must actively be disavowed, for Kristeva, are really disavowing the possibility of the ultimate "unnameable" behind all nameables.

The fetishist episode peculiar to the unfolding of phobia is well known. It is perhaps unavoidable that, when a subject confronts the factitiousness of object relation, when he stands at the place of the want that founds it, the fetish becomes a life preserver, temporary and slippery, but nonetheless indispensable. *But is not exactly language our ultimate and inseparable fetish?* And language, precisely, is based on fetishist denial (“I know that, but just the same,” “the sign is not the thing, but just the same,” etc.) and defines us in our essence as speaking beings. Because of its founding status, the fetishism of “language” is perhaps the only one that is unanalyzable [emphasis mine]. (Kristeva 37)

Kristeva goes on to apply this claim specifically to writing and to the writer. She explains that the phobic object, whatever is posited by the writer as the object he fears or ambivalently, as in the case of Nietzsche who is not completely uncritical of his claims about women,²⁵ as both the object of his fear and desire, is suspended by the writer in process of extreme proximity to and mastery over language²⁶.

Finally, and this is the second reason why phobia does not disappear but slides beneath language, the phobic object is a proto-writing and conversely, any practice of speech, inasmuch as it involves writing, is a language of fear. I mean a language of want as such, the want that positions sign, subject, and object. Not a language of desiring exchange of messages or objects that are transmitted in a social contract of communication and desire beyond want, but a language of want, of the fear that edges up to it and runs along its edges. The one who tries to utter this “not yet place,” this no-grounds, can obviously only do so backwards, starting from an over-mastery of the linguistic and rhetorical code. But in the last analysis he refers to fear—a terrifying, abject referent. We encounter this discourse in our dreams, or when death brushes us by, depriving us of the assurance mechanical use of speech ordinarily gives us, the assurance of being ourselves, that is, untouchable, unchangeable, immortal. But the writer is permanently confronted with such a language. The writer is a phobic who succeeds in metaphorizing in order to keep from being frightened to death; instead he comes to life again in signs. (Kristeva 38).

²⁵ Nietzsche’s suggestion that when he is talking about woman, he is clearly only talking about himself

²⁶ The function of the fetish as suspension is most clearly illustrated by Freud’s example of the man whose fetish was a suspensory belt. Freud argues that “in very subtle cases the fetish itself has become the vehicle both of denying and asseverating the fact of castration. This was exemplified in the case of a man whose fetish was a suspensory belt which can also be worn as bathing drawers; this piece of clothing covers the genitals and altogether conceals the difference between them. The analysis showed that it could mean that a woman is castrated or that she is not castrated, and it even allows of a supposition that a man may be castrated, for all these possibilities could be equally well hidden beneath the belt” (218-19).

Performing the feminine operation as a play of written styles then serves to stave off Nietzsche's and, in turn, Derrida's fears that there may be no truth and that this would mean there is really no point to philosophical discourse, that woman may not be any more significant than man and ultimately his equal, that turning over this feminine operation to actual women who would play with it disbelievingly would lead to a discourse of hysteria, of the madwoman's babble, upon which there can be no attempt to inscribe truth (even truth as non-truth), not even affirmation in the negative. All of these fears are mitigated by their appropriations of the feminine operation and they receive the bonus of pleasure, namely the pleasure of postponing the re-assertion of gender difference. Like Freud, Derrida sees the ultimate pleasure in the suspension, in the moment of pure possibility where all definition has been negated, like the fetishist wearing the suspensory belt. It is the moment where the veil makes anything possible, when it suspends us within the promise that truth will be revealed or re-veiled. Either way, this suspension intrinsically affirms any performance that follows.

Derrida continues to suggest that this pleasure in suspending castration as both the reality and merely one possibility is the ultimate question of style. For example, you could read his move at the beginning of the text in which he posits the trajectory of his thinking as moving from the "question of style" to the "subject of woman" as asking why should woman be a subject any more often, or with any more immediacy, than anything else? However, the subtlety with which he responds to the question shows his response to be an ambivalent one. He appears to argue that woman must continue to be the subject because she has always been the subject of philosophy, that the contemporary philosopher (whether man or woman) cannot ignore his context anymore than the philosopher of any other time, even a philosopher like Nietzsche who wanted so desperately at times to be "untimely." We recognize that her designation as a subject has always been arbitrary and nevertheless proceed to posit a

relationship with woman, as we do our relationship to castration, which Freud suggests and Kristeva argues is our relationship with language, as one of “yes, we know, but still...”²⁷ Then all definitions of the feminine become definitions of the masculine, or attempts to define the masculine, for as both Nietzsche and Derrida explain, “That is the masculine *concern*, the concern of the male who has never come of age, who is never sufficiently sceptical or dissimulating” and “in his credulousness and naivety (which is always sexual, pretending even at times to masterful expertise), castrates himself and from the secretion of his act fashions the snare of truth-castration” (59).²⁸ Derrida explains that at this point, he (the self-castrating man but also Derrida himself) must invoke the play of veils. Both Derrida and Nietzsche define man as what is lacking in style or rather, not playing the game out of ignorance, mistaking his consistent use of one particular veil for his true self and then ascribing the more interesting play of veils that is also more dangerous to the woman. Basically, he thinks he is more authentic, when really he just has no style. This is precisely what Nietzsche also says of feminists.²⁹ As soon as they develop a consistent identity or political platform, they lose their style, their aesthetic appeal. The argument here is that it is foolish of man to seek the truth of woman or the truth in general, but he still has to do it; however, when a woman, who does not have to seek this truth, attempts to

²⁷ I use “we” here very self-consciously, for I don’t believe any reader, writer, philosopher, feminist or otherwise, escapes the problem of needing to or desiring to (which is it?) talk about woman as subject or the subject of woman, and my own work is clearly marked by the desire to “get over” this, and my inability to do so.

²⁸ “La vérité-castration, c’est justement l’*affaire* de l’homme, l’*affairement* masculin qui n’est jamais assez vieux, assez sceptique ni dissimulé, et qui, dans sa crédulité, dans sa niaiserie (toujours sexuelle et qui se donne à l’occasion la représentation de l’experte maîtrise) se châtre à secréter le leurre de la vérité-castration” (58).

²⁹ “Feminism’s lack of style is denounced by Nietzsche: “Is it not the worst of taste when woman sets about becoming scientific (*wissenschaftlich*) in that fashion? Enlightenment (*Aufklären*) in this field has hitherto been the affair and the endowment of men (*Männer-Sache, Männer-Gabe*)—we remained ‘amongst ourselves’ (‘unter sich’) in this” (quoted in Derrida 65). Nietzsche’s quote of ‘amongst ourselves’ might be a reference to the same definition of understanding from Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right* or a reference to the master-slave passage from *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which defines understanding in basically the same way.

do so, it is both foolish and vulgar, since as he elaborates in another citation/appropriation, “From the very first, nothing has been more alien, repugnant, inimical to woman than the truth—her great art is the lie, her supreme concern is appearance (*Schein*) and beauty” (232). A woman who seeks truth, who desires wisdom, by definition, a woman philosopher, is an aberration. Derrida/Nietzsche accept this definition, which is why they don’t want to be feminine philosophers but artists who lure and engage their readers with their style, who perform the “feminine operation.”

Derrida seeks alternatives to traditional philosophical discourse in the hybrid genre of the philosophical tract and the published private letter.

Derrida further develops his answers to the question of why he wants to define and appropriate the “feminine operation” as style in his blending of genres, most notably, the philosophical tract and the already muddled genre of the published private letter. He associates this genre with the feminine operation and the ways in which this operation has been traditionally appropriated by the writer, which he initially invokes in his citation of the published personal letter that Nietzsche wrote to Malvida von Meysenbug. Derrida, in turn, plays with the notion of his own essay as a letter insofar as he includes postscripts and shows us how these postscripts can function as one of many manifestations of stylistic veils in his writing. Of course, Derrida’s “essay” differs from one of these published letters, first of all, because it does not really pretend to be a letter. It just plays with some of the qualities of a letter. The essay does not begin with a salutation, but instead introduces Nietzsche’s letter, as I cited above, and it does not end with a closing or a signature. These omissions suggest that Derrida’s performance of the private letter, like we will see with Woolf’s in the following chapter, is unabashedly public. He is drawing our attention to this letter as a counterfeit letter that exposes the perhaps less overtly counterfeit nature of the many

published collections of writers' letters and the pretty obvious consciousness on the part of the writers and their interlocutors that they are not communicating in a strictly private space, that these letters were most likely written and responded to with an eye toward potential, likely posthumous, publication. Still, like reading writers' diaries, these letters offer us the voyeuristic pleasure of believing that we know more about that person than we probably know, that we have penetrated some truth of his being, solved some of his mystery through this window into his private life. It is precisely this assumption that Derrida and later Woolf undermine in their performances of the private and personal element of the letter. Instead, they invoke the letter to remind us of the ultimate impenetrability of the other, though Derrida is much more focused on the desire to penetrate, which he admits to not being able to escape as much as he would like to.

Derrida frames his essay on his subject of/as woman, with two examples of Nietzsche's private writing, his letter, with which he prefaces the essay, and the fragment "I have forgotten my umbrella", with which he concludes. Both the letter and the fragment are examples of private communication, of communication that isn't (or we assume shouldn't be) intended for a general public, and a reminder that anything you write might one day be public and that everything made public is also to some degree private and inaccessible. In his use of a private letter as a point of departure, he invokes the history of women's writing being limited to the exchange of private letters by which they often carried out elicited attempts to empower themselves. His own version of letter writing, which is identifiable only in his inclusion of postscripts, performs (repeats and returns) Nietzsche's private letter, which he began by cutting and quoting, and then focusing on the most laconic passages, the private code that invited him to interpret and gave him little context with which to do so. If he began by responding to this seduction, by becoming Nietzsche's lover, in his

postscripts, he becomes the object of desire, he becomes Nietzsche's woman, mimicking the trajectory he sees in Nietzsche's writing from lover to, after his death, and especially upon the publishing of his previously unpublished fragments, the beloved, the obscure object of desire.

Derrida offers Nietzsche's fragment, "I have forgotten my umbrella" as an example of one of the strongest calls to interpret, to read and produce meaning from that reading. It is a simple statement that appears in quotation marks, which only adds to its allure, exemplifying Derrida's arguments and performance of punctuation as a particularly seductive stylistic device. It is the very fragmentary nature of this quotation within the context of Nietzsche's work and life that calls or lures him to interpret as it frustrates any interpretation. "There is no infallible way of knowing the occasion of this sample or what it could have been later grafted onto" (123). There is no date, and we cannot assure ourselves that any of our attempts to situate it or position it relative to his other works will be valid. "We never will know *for sure* what Nietzsche wanted to say or do when he noted these words, nor even that he actually *wanted* anything." The fragment challenges our desire for certainty, specifically certainty about the desire of another, traditionally figured in men's writing, as the desire of the woman, so once again, for Derrida, Nietzsche is performing as woman, replacing her. Freud lamented never learning what a woman "wants," but did he ask this of a man? Would he not receive the same response? Who knows what he/she wants, and why would you expect to know what another wants, or rather more to my point, what is the impetus for asking this question? The obvious answer would be that he/she wants to give or to promise to give the other what he/she wants, and whether this would amount to a pure gift or one that asks for something in return, often some degree of control or domination of the other, is only revealed in time. Here, Derrida is

asking us what it means to seek the desire of Nietzsche, of any text, of any body as text?

The ethical implications abound. He goes on: “And even this is still *assuming* [emphasis mine], of course, that there is no doubt that it is Nietzsche’s autograph signature here, assuming also that one even knows what is included under the concept of autography and the form of a *seing*” (123). Again, Derrida points to all of the “assumptions” (and isn’t assumption a discursive form of appropriation?) that we have to perform here to begin to think about the meaning of Nietzsche’s fragment, “I have forgotten my umbrella,” assumptions that amount to assuming Nietzsche’s identity, which Derrida admittedly does, of repeating his performances, which Derrida also admittedly does, which expose his performance as always inherently pretense, as fiction, motivated in ways that he can only partially be conscious of, by his own desires, ultimately the desire to invade the other’s privacy, to penetrate his body, which he explains as his desire to “know” him, but which is ultimately his desire to know himself. And this desire blinds him to the limits of his self and others. If we enter a text, perform as that text, as the identities we read within it, and then we allow it to both corroborate and contradict our performance, to exceed our performance in ways that call us to revise it, we may only end up convincing ourselves of the endless task of understanding those identities and be more likely to suspend judgment indefinitely. The time is filled with readings, with always tentative responses, like those that Derrida performs on Nietzsche’s fragment, and those readings continually confront our desire to assimilate inassimilable otherness.

After all, Nietzsche’s fragment is also a citation, and as such, for Derrida, is an appropriation, displacement, repetition, hence, performance, of another person’s words, even if that other is the writing self: “[...] if one is going to suppose that this sentence is not ‘his’ through and through, it is hardly necessary to recall the fact that it

appears in quotation marks in Nietzsche's text. Its mere readability alone would be enough to expropriate it" (127). Nietzsche's text is already a repetition of another's, even if he is quoting his own self or not consciously quoting at all. It amounts to the same thing, provokes the same response in the reader. Derrida suggests that it could be a secret code between him and some other, like the "little bundle" reference that Derrida cited at the beginning of his essay from Nietzsche's letter to Malvida von Meysenbug. What does it mean if readability alone equals expropriation? Namely, for him, that whatever has been written has already invoked a network of texts, often beyond any single writer's control and therefore invites appropriation, tempts us to impose our own limits upon it.

The imperative that Derrida draws from this fragment and his desire to read it is also, however, a recognition of one's powerlessness before the other: "We will never know. At least it is possible that we will never know and that powerlessness (impouvoir) must be taken into account" (127). For Derrida, citing Nietzsche's "styles," and his ethic of reading and writing based upon performative concepts of gender/genre, "Reading, which is to relate to writing, is to perforate such a horizon or the hermeneutic sail" (127).³⁰ Reading relates, but also "re-apporte" or re-brings about or re-gives (itself) to writing. They are inseparable as Roland Barthes became increasingly aware in his attempts to distinguish between readerly and writerly texts.³¹ Reading always "calls," to a potential writer to begin, and what Derrida seems to be trying to work out, what he intuits as something already intuited by Nietzsche, is that the call is strongest, more irresistible, when the writer or artist has let go of the will to mean through arguments in favor of the will to construct meaning through interminable dialogue within and between other texts, which he exemplifies in the way

³⁰ "Lire, se rapporter à une écriture, c'est donc perforer cet horizon ou ce voile herméneutique" (126).

³¹ See Roland Barthes' *S/Z*.

Nietzsche's style (irony, punctuation, fragments, aphorisms), together with the context of his life and works and their debt to the lives and works of others, confound his attempts to explain the significance of his writing in his arguments.

Returning to the "subject of" Nietzsche's fragment, Derrida tells us, "it is a matter of /it acts itself/one must *read* this unpublished work, this why/for what it gives itself as it undresses, like a woman or a writing" (127).³² Which is a warning against reading as writing, a reminder of its difference, insofar as writing always depends, as Derrida goes to great lengths to explain in the beginning of his talk/essay, upon an erratic exergue, a writer's cutting up, often arbitrarily, of what he has read, a citational practice that is always arbitrary and works against the demand to read the text as it undresses itself, to respect every step of its process, the way every sentence might annul or reify (or both) the one that came before. To argue for this kind of reading is to argue against writing, as Derrida defines it (cutting and appropriating, quoting and repeating) against responding at all, and yet, as Derrida explains, as will Woolf, the call is too strong, and the apparent cost of not responding too great.

In his preface to *Éperons*, Stefano Agosti argues that one cannot do anything but perform Derrida's text. One can only repeat it, mimic it, and prolong it.³³ He argues this in the form of a postscript, citing Derrida's own post-script, which in turn recalls his call to writing as a letter,

P.S. Is one obliged to justify the mimesis of these pages? If it were a case (as far as the object is concerned) of "literature" or "philosophy", of a "discourse", then indeed yes, one would be so obliged. But since in this case the text (the object) offers nothing outside itself, then the answer is no. If one is going to speak of Derrida's "text", one can, finally, but re-state it, only prolong it. This is precisely the case here. Here the text, my text that is, prolongs that other to the point of repeating it, to the point where this, my text, is a bit of magnetized and

³² "Et il s'agit bien de *lire* cet inédit, *ce pour quoi* il se donne en se dérochant, comme une femme ou une écriture]" (126)

³³ The preface is titled "Coup sur coup," or "one after another," also tellingly connoting one blow upon another, as in the repeated knock at a door but also, possibly, the exchange of blows in a fight.

commemorative jetsam, tossing in the wake of a ship, the solicitude of a *post-scriptum*.³⁴

For Agosti, Derrida's "text," like Agosti's, is neither literature nor philosophy nor letter nor fragment, but simply mimics all of these genres, and in response to it, Agosti can simply mimic Derrida's text with his own text, add to it, but not "justify" or critique it. He can "commemorate" it with his own text, but he cannot appropriate it or pretend to explain it. It functions as a body, as an individual's identity, Agosti's or Derrida's or our own, that only asks to be infinitely read and responded to but not understood or penetrated. However much we appropriate its practices, we cannot pretend to appropriate the text. The *post-scriptum* the after-writing or addendum that corrects itself before the reader can correct it, ultimately commemorates the forgetting of the text, the way the writer forgets himself within it and expects the reader to respond in kind. Ironically, Agosti's addition to Derrida's addition to Nietzsche's text can be received as violent if one attempts to explain it, but if we simply heed its call and add to it, if we let go of our desire to explain Nietzsche, Derrida, Agosti, and ourselves as the goal of our reading, this network becomes ultimately affirmative, even revolutionary. However, this is proposed in Agosti's reading of Derrida, but repeatedly undermined in Derrida's reading of Nietzsche. He clearly does not want to let go of the desire to explain so easily, or, perhaps, he is aware of the fact that he cannot, just as he cannot avoid his search for a concept of "woman." Perhaps both desires are motivated by his desire that others, especially readers and women, recognize his relevance. He must continue to explain himself, to correct himself as he performs in the post-scripts to his own "letter."

³⁴ P.S. Faudra-t-il justifier le mimétisme de ces pages? Oui, s'il s'agissait -- quant à leur objet -- de «littérature» ou de «philosophie», à savoir, somme toute, d'un «discours». Non ici, où le texte, (l'objet) ne donne rien en dehors de soi. Parler du «texte» de Derrida, ne peut revenir qu'à le redire, qu'à le prolonger. Comme dans le cas présent, justement. Où le texte, le mien, prolonge l'autre jusqu'à en répéter, épave aimantée et remémorative dans le sillon d'un navire, le souci d'un *post-scriptum*.

Letter-writing is inextricable from both Nietzsche's and Derrida's more and less conscious appropriation of a feminine operation. Or at least, the letter is one of the woman's traditional costumes, it is the sign of the castrated woman who is only allowed to express herself in letters, in private, often in code, to close friends or more or less elicited lovers. Of course, she can easily turn this around and use the letter to gain power. After all, it is the place where woman first picks up the pen to attack the blank matter of the page, to imprint her figures there, to enter discourse, citation, written performance. It is significant that Derrida's performance, specifically of/as a feminine subject is staged as a letter. In fact it is a letter about another's letter, another's letter within a letter as is Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas*, where the text is the body of a letter that ends up including two other letters to two other people, and eight partial letter drafts, within it. What are we to make of this proliferation of letters if not an attempt to protect one's privacy, one's identity and also an attempt to promise a possible entry into that privacy, that identity, to lure the reader in, to call the reader to respond, and as such, it is the ultimate "feminine operation" and for both Derrida and Woolf, a possible antidote to the traditionally masculine attempts to penetrate and control truth and otherness. If the letter itself fails to offer enough protection, there is always the apotropaic post-script. The post-script is a final word, often a disclaimer, often crucial information disguised as an afterthought, a caution against taking anything in the letter too seriously. Let us call it a flash of the genitals, meant to inspire fear and laughter and to make us grateful for the play of veils. Derrida's letter, a letter that tellingly lacks a salutation and a signature, makes up for these lacks with not one but three postscripts.

In the first, he writes about an exchange with Roger Laporte where they were sharing their "disagreement with a certain hermeneut who in passing had presumed to ridicule the publication of Nietzsche's unpublished manuscripts. "They will end up'

he said, ‘publishing his laundry notes and scraps like, “I have forgotten my umbrella”’ (139). Derrida then explains that they had discussed this with others on another occasion, and that these others, together with Roger Laporte, confirm its veracity, but, he assures us, “I have no recollection of the incident. Even today”. Then he dates the post-script, the first of April 1973, a year after he first presented the talk, and five years before he published the essay in its current form. Therefore, the talk was probably revised with this post script already in mind, with this recollection of what he had previously forgotten that may very well have informed everything we have just read, but only if we are keeping track of time, in which case it is a post script that is really a pre-script. He is again being both sincere and insincere at the same time, acknowledging a debt and refusing to acknowledge it, to return it.

In the second post script, he “recalls” a citation of Heidegger on “the forgetting of being,” which he tells us, “although I have read and quoted it, I no longer recalled this text of Heidegger from *Zur Seinsfrage*:” a fragment where Heidegger argues that forgetting is what cancels out being but also makes being possible. For the writer, forgetting is a prerequisite to arguing anything, especially arguing anything about the identity of a self or other. And at the same time, in this forgetting, the writer performs being as a play of opposites, as feminine and masculine, which loves and hates its other, which acknowledges and dissimulates, and which remembers and forgets its debt to the other.

A third post-script appears tucked away in an endnote, after Derrida recommends consulting the French edition of Nietzsche’s unpublished manuscripts, which he tells us say nothing about how and why the editors chose particular fragments, but only reveal that they didn’t include those “which correspond to what they judge to be an ‘over-wrought (*élaboré*)’ work of his” (125).³⁵ They don’t

³⁵ “...communiquent avec ce qu’ils jugent être un travail «*élaboré*» de Nietzsche” (124).

elaborate on the meaning of “*elaboré*”, and we are already called to begin interpreting: Are they judging the fragments based on assumptions about the degree to which Nietzsche “labored” over them, or elaborated upon them, or worked them out in his other writings? This is all about meaning, about the meaning of the inaccessible or its supplemental (sometimes clearly a dangerous supplement) to any act of seeking, creating, corroborating, disseminating meaning. He again provides a date for this third post script, which informs us that it was actually written a month before the first post-script, making it also a pre-pre-script.³⁶ This post-pre-pre-script that is also a footnote initiates the question of forgetting as first unawareness or willful exclusion of the editors:

See the editor’s Note justificative in the French edition, p. 294. P.S. If they had been aware of it, would the editors have soldered our fragment to yet another one, to be found in Human, All Too Human (430)? This fragment (whose reading I owe to Sarah Kofman) concludes with: “A wife not infrequently has the ambition to present herself for this sacrifice, and then the husband may indeed feel satisfied,--he being enough of an egoist to have such a voluntary storm, rain, and lightning conductor beside him. (um sich einen solchen freiwilligen Blitz-, Sturm- und Regenbleiter in seiner Nähe gefallen zu lassen).» Probably, for any number of reasons they would not have. Perhaps because Nietzsche sometimes regretted such a woman’s presence at his side.” (161)³⁷

The meaning we draw from Nietzsche’s fragments, in part, depends upon the context that publishers provide for us, what they decide is significant and insignificant, or

³⁶ In the Flammarion version, we encounter the three post-scripts in order since the notes are footnotes instead of endnotes. Since so much of Derrida’s text is reflecting on the process of dissemination of the work from his own readings and citation of the works of others to the different versions of this text in print, which are the conditions for the post-scripts in the first place, it is significant that the English translation, by putting the endnotes after the text, uncannily rearranges the chronological order of the post-scripts, which of course would affect the way one reads them.

³⁷ *Les éditeurs auraient-ils de loin soudé notre fragment à tel autre (430), dont je dois la lecture à Sarah Kofman, et qui se clôt ainsi: «Il n’est pas rare qu’une femme se découvre l’ambition de s’offrir à un tel sacrifice [protéger le grand homme et détourner vers elle l’agressivité qu’il suscite nécessairement] et le fait est que l’homme peut alors s’en montrer fort content, à condition, s’entend, d’être assez égoïste pour accepter auprès de lui cette sorte de paratonnerre, parafoudre et parapluie volontaire (um sich einen solchen freiwilligen Blitz-, Sturm- und Regenbleiter in seiner Nähe gefallen zu lassen) »? C’est peu probably, pour toute sorte de raisons, encore que Nietzsche ait parfois regretté la présence d’une telle femme à ses côtés. (158)*

simply what they are aware of or unaware of. He relates this to the limits of his own text, to his own forgetting or possible unawareness when he posits an argument, acknowledging a debt that he owes to “the reading of Sarah Kofman,” which can and probably does include both her reading of Nietzsche and his reading of her reading of Nietzsche as well as a response she may have given him at the lecture that he later revised and published as *Éperons*. He invokes another network of exchanges: an exchange that he is now able to extend in a written post-script, an exchange that he, citing his own work, suggestively calls a debt because she brought this fragment about the beloved/“umbrella” as also a lightening conductor, to his attention, which has added yet another network of possible texts and meanings to the fragment he discussed above.

He then repays this debt with his own further reading of, again suggestively, a different post-script in a letter from Nietzsche to his sister, supporting his claim that he “often regretted” not having by his side a self-sacrificing woman, but also referring to another exchange or network of responses to this same fragment that Kofman brought to his attention, or rather the way the fragment had offended Cosima Wagner and his lack of understanding of her response to him. In the fragment/postscript, this doubly private exchange, Nietzsche tells his sister,

«You too seem to transform yourself into a ‘voluntary victim’ and to take all the troubles on your own shoulders. And my brother-in-law, does he permit this role of yours as lightning rod?.. (Cf. Human, All Too Human –And for that matter why should Mrs. Wagner have taken offense at just this aphorism? On Wagner’s account? Or her own? This is still a mystery to me.)» (29-3-1973). (qtd. in 161)

Here Derrida’s post-pre-pre-script including Nietzsche’s post-script draws our attention to the infinite, abyssal structure of any reading and the act of willful exclusion that responds to the “call” to respond to a piece of writing as most compelling in its aporia, in what it doesn’t say, or in this case, what does this

postscript reveal about his relationship with his sister, and even more enticing, with Cosima Wagner? The point is made. The writer seduces through style, which is the feminine operation, the way he performs her resistance to interpretation and seduces those who desire to know her. The writer's arguments are merely pre-text or a series of afterthoughts, that he adds as he recalls his readings of others' readings *ad infinitum*. It is his stylistic performances, the way he suggestively juxtaposes these afterthoughts and adornments and gestures of his text, that spur his readers into an exchange with him, promising that the reader will learn something about his or her identity. Ultimately the adornments signal something that is not shown, is not worn, the secret that lies beneath the "original" or innovative juxtaposition of shimmering surfaces. And it is these very adornments that spurn the reader's attempt to identify the subject, the writer's and her own.

For a woman writer, then, it would seem that "plain speaking" could never be an option. She must either appeal to us with her style, her written dance of seven veils, and promise that we might invade her privacy, which she guards with infinite modesty or be condemned as an "easy woman." In the end, the letter functions as the ultimate "feminine operation," since it presupposes an immediate intimacy with the writer, but then continues to make that intimacy a question, a barrier to actual knowledge of the other. The woman writer cannot sincerely desire to communicate; she can only perform. It is for us to decide the degree to which these are limits on women's writing or on any writing or communication. Is communication ever anything but the call to another to begin playing the game of identity, to begin exchanging performances of identities? And is gender merely one set of costumes among many that can be assumed, that can be flaunted in this game? Should we be seeking to understand gender differences, or should we just play with them? What

happens when others do not allow us to simply play with them as Derrida and Nietzsche get away with doing?

In my reading of Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas*, I ask these same questions, and the answers I come up with are both liberating and troubling, especially when, as Woolf makes us realize, the stakes of these games, these exchanges, whether private or public, are as high as war itself. The stylistic similarities between Derrida's *Éperons* and *Three Guineas* are telling in themselves, and a testament to both Derrida's success in appropriating the feminine operation and Woolf's success impersonating what has always been the masculine view of the feminine operation, which she attempts to use to fulfill what she claims to be her own very different desires. Each uses the form of the letter, breaking with certain elements, namely the salutation and the signature. Though Derrida's essay includes postscripts and notes, Woolf's letter includes only notes, extensive notes for each of her three chapters.³⁸ Both Derrida and Woolf use fragments of other letters within their own letters, and rely heavily on citations, many of which are left to speak for themselves. Though Woolf's letter doesn't have a salutation, it is addressed, primarily to one fictional reader, whom she describes at length and addresses consistently using the second person, while Derrida rarely uses the second person and does not define an addressee. He never tries to speak to and speak for a woman as Woolf speaks to and for a man. His essay is more traditionally philosophical, a close reading and protracted discussion of Nietzsche's work, using the letter to highlight the way Nietzsche played with concepts of woman in his work. Woolf avoids general concepts and instead focuses on juxtaposing specific claims about what it means to be a man or a woman written by both men and women, in order to expose the relative scarcity of women's writing. She

³⁸ It would be interesting to read Woolf's responses to the letters she received about *Three Guineas*, most of which we can only access in the citations and references in the responses to her responses, as apotropaic postscripts.

then uses this lack of evidence to argue that as women begin to write their own lives, their own views, they might be in a position to reinvent traditional values and definitions of knowledge and power. Both writers highlight the importance of imagining the body of the other for communication, especially the body behind the letter (as in the actual material text and the correspondence). Both focus a great deal on fashion and symbolism as a bodily version of written style, a rhetoric of the body, meant to attract, to seduce, but also to overwhelm and consume the other.

Finally, acts of communication are crucial for both writers. They see the performance, the acts themselves, and the kinds of responses the acts provoke as crucial for meaning, the importance of a community of thought and discourse for a sense of humanity and fulfillment, but also the possibilities for violence inherent in that community and in that communication. For both Derrida and Woolf, communication is both the problem and the solution. Both seek to get outside of these conceptions of problem and solution via particular communication strategies that emphasize exchange of ideas over mastery, respect for difference over unity, freedom of the other to judge privately over public criticism. Most importantly, both Derrida and Woolf encourage us to prolong their texts, to question them, to add to them, to apply them to our own lives, and they do so in similar ways, by invoking irony and secrecy, making any final judgment or pronouncement on their work, inherently uncertain. But this also makes reading their work exceedingly difficult and especially open to misreading and misappropriation.

The similarities between them are innumerable, which makes the very difference in how each has been and continues to be read astounding. The only key difference between their texts is that Woolf claims to have no desire to recuperate anything about the masculine traditions that the feminine operation attempts to undermine and tries to convince us that we either have to completely let them go, even

what we find most pleasing in them, or accept war as a continued inevitability. Derrida wants to play with the possibilities of a complete other. Woolf desperately calls for a complete other at the expense of the “known” and even if it requires great suffering and sacrifice, so of course, at best, can only inspire ambivalence and is certain to provoke outrage, which was perhaps Woolf’s implicit, and contradictory, desire to her stated desire for less violent communication across differences.

CHAPTER TWO

“FINDING NEW WORDS AND CREATING NEW METHODS”: VIRGINIA WOOLF’S REVOLUTIONARY USE OF IMAGE IN *THREE GUINEAS*

Six years after he published, *Éperons*, Derrida published his response to series of photographs, which, because there are no captions, may or may not be a photographic novel, in a work that he (or was it the photographer, Marie-Françoise Plissart) titled, *Droit de regards* (translated as *Right of Inspection*), which could also mean right to look or the right to the look or to the gaze, but also the right to control or supervise (literally “oversee”). Since the series of photographs confound possible genres within them (the photographic novel, the film, the photo-montage), Derrida argues that it maintains genre as a question, and as soon as we ask, “What genre does this work belong to?” the “question of *genre* doubles over on itself, it suddenly becomes two while also being only one, it remains alone, a single double coupled as one” (6).³⁹ The question, in French, is particularly ambiguous, since *genre* also means “gender”, and the question uses the feminine, “relève t-elle”, referring to work (*oeuvre*), which is feminine in French, but also referring to any of the particular women in photographs, who appear particularly androgynous. While both their nudity and their dress codes them as women, they constantly play with the masculine and in their coupling with other women, undermine traditionally masculine roles, e.g. the phallic cigarette that threatens to burn one woman’s shoulder as it also “goes up in smoke”.

³⁹ “De quel genre cette oeuvre relève-t-elle? Mais voici que ladite question du genre se dédouble aussitôt, elle fait deux d’un coup, toute fois ne faisant qu’une aussi, elle reste seule, une seule double en une couplée” (VI). Above, I use the Arabic form of the Roman numerals in the French text, since the English translation does not include page numbers.

In *Droit de regards*, Derrida, like Woolf, turns to images, specifically photographs, in his search for the wholly other that requires an “othered” language, and like Woolf, he proposes that the photographs liberate us from the pressure of a single, shared, public narrative, and repeatedly refers to his many private narratives that he refuses to share with us, “You (vous) will never know, nor will you (tu), all the stories, not even the totality of one single story I kept telling myself” (3). Derrida’s address here, either to a respected but distanced interlocutor (vous), a group or the public in general (vous) or a single, intimate other, (tu), conflates all of these categories, making them all both distant and intimate, much as Woolf’s letter-writer does in her address to the educated man and Woolf, herself, does, in her decision to argue her points (which may not be hers) through a fictional persona. She maintains a distance, guarantees her privacy, reminds us that we cannot equate her words with truth, either ours or her own, but that we must continue to supply her with our own words, which may not be our most intimate truths either, and that this very act of exchanging, that respects the private in the public, a less violent form of discourse can set the stage for a peaceful world.

Like Derrida, Woolf confounds genre categories in her attempts to confound gender categories; she also proposes the exchange of images as an alternative language outside the economies perpetuated by these categories. Many readers have pointed to the rather odd blend of the biography, the personal letter, the polemical essay, and the literary/visual analysis in *Three Guineas*, but few have taken great pains to analyze the effects of that play between genres and the play of subject-positions they make possible on Woolf’s arguments. In fact, most readers assume without question that the arguments in *Three Guineas* are Woolf’s, though, as Naomi Black argues, there are plenty of inconsistencies between the subject-position described by the letter-writer and Woolf’s own. The conflation of narrative perspectives together

with the uneasy blend of fact and fiction, functions to undermine many of the arguments made by the letter-writer to her addressee, a barrister, who signs his name with K.C. (Kings Council) at the end of his signature. The consistent displacement of perspective made possible by Woolf's invocation of fictional and private interpersonal modes of discourse in what otherwise appears as a polemical essay is clearly intentional, however much Woolf insisted, in her diary entries at the time and in her response to Vita Sackville West's criticism, that she wanted to "get up the facts and state them plainly" (Banks 403). Part of Woolf's argument in *Three Guineas* is precisely this inability to speak those facts from her own subject-position. The facts, as she sees them, are only to be found in the interplay between more and less fictional voices and in exposing the pretense of mastery, both self-mastery and mastery over others in these voices, but this argument, one that she could not explicitly make, was lost on most readers, who easily conflated Woolf's identity with that of her letter-writer.

Woolf's letter-writer attempts to explain the rudeness of her tardy reply to the barrister's letter and to help him understand why she has resisted responding to his letter and his request that she sign a "manifesto pledging ourselves 'to protect culture and intellectual liberty', that we should join a certain society whose aim is to preserve peace; and, finally, that we should subscribe to that society which like the others is in need of funds" (102). She explains her hesitation is prompted by the gap between their two positions and identities, which she feared was too wide to bridge until recent events (the rise of fascism) both reduced that gap and made communicating across it all the more urgent. These differences, she immediately suggests, are their historic roles in the perpetuation of war, which she argues are dependent upon their social differences, the power men have exerted over women in the private spheres of the home and the public spheres of education and the professions. It is for these reasons,

she tells the educated man, that if they truly want to prevent war, she must turn from his letter to two others that lie next to his on her table: the first is from the honorary treasurer of a women's college asking for funds to help rebuild their school, and the second is from the honorary treasurer for a society of women entering the professions asking for money or "cast off" clothing for these women. Her reasoning is that if a woman is to answer him effectively, she must understand his question, and in order to do so, she must have the same access he has to education and to the professions. Otherwise, she can neither understand what he thinks causes war nor effectively help him prevent it. However, in each of her letters to these women, which she quotes within his letter, including initial and revised drafts, she finds herself in a quandary. Just as she couldn't respond to his letter before responding to theirs, she cannot respond easily to their letters in light of his. The letter-writer, by comparing the three letters, begins to question the entire system of educational and professional advancement as possibly complicit with war, and realizes that by responding to any of the three letters on their terms, she may become complicit as well.

This practice of juxtaposing texts, especially texts written by men and women, is Woolf's initial performance of a strategy that she will continue to develop in the rest of her essay: the juxtaposition of different perspectives that makes it difficult to easily appropriate others and their texts, which, in turn, compels us to position ourselves outside of all of them. In this case, juxtaposing the three letters, she finds that to achieve his potential power and efficacy in English society, which is what the president of the woman's college and the honorary treasurer of a society for women in the professions are trying to do, she has to follow the same paths he has, and it is precisely these paths that have led to war, but even more significantly, to his own perpetuation of and obliviousness to its causes. She suspects that his current systems of education and professionalism, the values that they teach and encourage in English

youth (namely pride, the legitimacy of traditional hierarchies, mindless participation in ceremony, patriotism, nationalism, competition, and imperialism) posit success as something that an individual achieves at the expense of others, and as such, these values depend upon increasingly public wars. However much she wants to understand and help him, she argues, she must deny his requests and help him by finding alternative ways to achieve his goals to those which he proposes. Instead, she suggests that we work on possible alternatives to current economies with a group of outsiders, an outsiders' society, which initially will be limited to the daughters of educated men who have enough to live on and who, as a result, can practice reading and writing "their own tongue" in ways that will "protect culture and intellectual liberty" but remain "free from unreal loyalties", a group that is already on the margins of these current values and economies and can afford to remain disinterested and develop their opinions through protracted communication with others like them, focusing on reading and rereading and writing about the products and views emerging from the system. The hope, however slight, would be that eventually, from all of this reflection and communication, different paths and different values might emerge. However, we must remember that Woolf, herself, as a successful writer among men, was already implicated in these traditions. The position of outsider is really something that she can only call for, play as, and even aspire to within the space of her fictional persona, the letter-writer.

The "Outsiders' Society" that she proposes would work to prevent war as readers, writers, and conversationalists, and their only goal for their reading and writing and talking would be to exchange ideas, especially ideas about ways of being, of living, with one another. They would exchange and compare perspectives on "life stories", on history, on current events, and they would exchange and compare their images of themselves and others that they carefully and responsibly describe and

revise in response to one another. Each individual would be responsible for communicating images of self and others as clearly as possible and for responding to the images constructed by others and revising and helping others to revise those images, something like a dialogic exchange and perpetual revision of written “portraits.” From her initial argument that she must first write a portrait of the educated man before she can respond responsibly to him, to her call to read biographies and autobiographies as if they were images, to the images she includes in *Three Guineas*, we see a consistent implicit argument: if we are to find an “other” language, a language of the other, which is the only hope to get outside of the current systems of exchange that perpetuate war, we must look toward the image, precisely because the image provokes language, calls us to interpret and narrate, at the very moment it denies supremacy to any one narrative or interpretation. The image makes it impossible to convince yourself that you “know” the other all the while it makes you want to know him.

The hybrid and revolutionary use of traditional genres, which together, functions in much the same way as the image, and the reading and writing practices performed in Woolf’s *Three Guineas* serves to demonstrate these goals and methodologies of the outsiders’ society, but also, even more significantly, provokes a similar kind of exchange, across social classes and genders and ideologies, to the exchange proposed by Woolf’s letter writer, with the key difference being that her respondents do not always share the same goal of breaking with patriarchal traditions as a way to end cycles of violent appropriations of others. Her performance and the responses it has yielded reveal the solution to violence as paradoxically dependent on the very exchanges that make violence possible, primarily on the exchange of money, power, and ideas. The solution lies, for her, precisely in the private and public paradoxes of difference and communication. In order for communication, both public

and private, to take place, differences must be bridged, and at the same time, interlocutors must insist on these differences and continue to examine the impossibility of appropriating and defining them. Furthermore, before peaceful coexistence between nations can become a possibility, current economies or systems of exchange (of ideas, money, goods, and human beings themselves) must be replaced with new, as yet unimaginable systems, and these systems cannot be thought unless we are outside of our own traditional economies.

Woolf's letter-writer proposes that we might begin to effect these changes if we value dialogue and comparison above argument, the unfinished or fragmentary above the complete and whole, difference above unity and the uniform. She proposes that this reversal of traditional values would allow us to both understand other positions and remain poised to revise our own as we achieve new understanding, but this will never be possible as long as our pleasure depends upon a sense of superiority over others. And, the letter-writer argues, this kind of superiority, of hegemony, is precisely what the current education systems teach us to value.

Outsiders and women deciding whether or not to “join the processions” of educated and professional men should read and compare biographies, to better understand the processions of educated and professional men and to judge for themselves upon which terms they should join if at all.

For Woolf's letter-writer, the question of whether or not to join the historical procession of educated and professional men and on what terms is paramount. In her letter to the honorary treasurer of the society to help women entering the professions, she imagines the expression of her interlocutor as she ponders the difficult situation in which women now find themselves:

And since your expression is decidedly downcast, it seems as if these quotations about the nature of professional life have brought you to some melancholy conclusion. What can it be? Simply, you reply, that

we, daughters of educated men are between the devil and the deep sea. Behind us lies the patriarchal system; the private house, with its nullity, its immorality, its hypocrisy, its servility. Before us lies the public world, the professional system, with its possessiveness, its jealousy, its pugnacity, its greed. The one shuts us up like slaves in a harem; the other forces us to circle, like caterpillars head to tail, round and round the mulberry tree, the sacred tree, of property. It is a choice of evils. Each is bad. Had we not better plunge off the bridge and into the river; give up the game; declare that the whole of human life is a mistake and so end it?" (90).

There is, however, an alternative, a glimmer of hope, which lies specifically, in different practices of reading and communicating, beginning with the study of biography:

Another answer may be staring us in the face on the shelves of your own library, once more in the biographies. Is it not possible that by considering the experiments that the dead have made with their lives in the past we may find some help in answering the very difficult question that is now forced upon us? At any rate, let us try. The question that we will now put to biography is this: For reasons given above we are agreed that we must earn money in the professions. For reasons given above those professions seem to us highly undesirable. The question we put to you, lives of the dead, is how can we enter the professions and yet remain civilized human beings; human beings, that is, who wish to prevent war?" (91)

She proposes that since they have just discussed the biographies of professional men, most of whom expressed a great deal of dissatisfaction with the ways their work consumed their lives, leaving little time for family and for pleasure, for beauty, the way the hierarchies that dominate the workplace make them petty, competitive, and mean, they should now seek alternatives in the lives of professional women. But they both realize immediately that biographies of professional women are too few to be of any use, partly because, as the private exchanges of these women, mostly available to us in the form of letters and diaries, seem to prove, they were not interested in personal glory. Josephine Butler, a leading figure in the British suffrage movement, even refused to have her biography written, seeing it as vanity. Still, as the letter writer now experiences, such biographies would be important points of comparison for future men and women trying to negotiate their own choices. The biography, for her,

is that “marvelous, perpetually renewed, and as yet largely untapped aid to the understanding of human motives” (9). The biography communicates individual desires and the successes and failures of their attempts to achieve them. They would be especially valuable for women, who at her time, were beginning to be accepted in institutions and professions traditionally limited to men. Women entering the professions as well as those remaining outside could use these biographies and the always incomplete portraits that they create, compare them to their own lives and choices, and judge what the best path might be that would benefit these women and the world more broadly. However, the letter-writer acknowledges that the scarcity of these biographies remains the first great obstacle that women need to overcome. More women need to write their stories and share them, but another paradox springs forth. Does writing your story already demonstrate a pretense toward mastery?

In their selflessness, many of these “model” professional women have cut themselves off from communication, which illustrates the paradoxical position of an outsider who desires to effect change. For to affect the insiders, the outsider must still attempt to communicate; she must help the educated man “prevent war not by repeating [his] words and following [his] methods but by finding new words and creating new methods” (170). For this strategy to be effective, she must either encourage the educated man to learn her new language or find a language that is outside of his but that he can still understand, which is, again, paradoxical, leaving her with the only option of encouraging him to learn her language once she has developed it. Nevertheless, the letter writer acknowledges that things are changing. She repeatedly refers to the year 1919, when the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act was passed, legally making most professions available to women. As further proof of impending change, an “educated man” is asking an educated (though in not quite the same way) woman for her opinion on how we might prevent war. He is asking her to

influence him, which is why this fictional call, the fictional letter she has received from him, is so important. She needs this scenario to demonstrate what must first take place before she can begin to develop and demonstrate a different language, a different value system for him. If this is to work, he has to recognize his own insufficiency, his own confusion, and ask for her help. Only then will he remain open to her language, which the letter-writer demonstrates in her response, is the language of image.

To begin with, the letter writer repeatedly asks the educated man for both elasticity and a notion of secrecy that must surround any discussion of the methods and goals of an outsiders' society. He must understand what he cannot understand, and use this awareness to be readily adaptable and open to whatever he receives from her readings of the images. To approach the following suggestions as a "road map" or a set of instructions for how to prevent war, would undermine the most fundamental goal of the outsiders' society: individual intellectual and physical freedom. She explains that the individual members of an outsiders' society may agree that preventing war and violence is their primary goal, but the means must be "created" individually and dialogically, in the exchanges that such honesty and individual creativity could inspire. Still, Woolf's letter-writer has her own opinions about how to achieve that individual freedom from "unreal loyalties" and the ability to write and speak those ideas candidly, and she attempts to communicate them and how she draws them from different sets of images, which she either describes for him or includes in her letter, allowing them to communicate directly to him. Her proposed methodologies include: reading, discussing, and even writing their own biographies; comparing English culture with the cultures of other nations and the roles of men and women in constructing and perpetuating them, which should free them from "unreal loyalties" in the form of patriotism and nationalism; reading and writing their "own tongues" not for economic or personal gain, but for pleasure, either individual or shared "privately";

practicing only spoken or at least privately exchanged criticism of the work of other writers, speakers, and thinkers in the form of private interpersonal letters; refusing to act in anyway that directly or indirectly influences war, including participating in or attending lectures, church services, political rallies, caring for the injured in battle, working to make munitions or to raise money for war; and, finally, remaining “indifferent” to war, neither “violently” against nor supportive of war and those who participate in it or support it.

Reading biography in order to study and compare the lives of individuals and form opinions based on those comparisons could give us the courage and the perspective we need to help one another to resist violence and injustice in both private and public spheres. Though they are few and mostly confined to the “daughters of educated men,” the writer repeatedly invokes these examples of women, many of them fragments and bits from letters lamenting their lack of access to education, their poverty, their dependence on fathers, brothers, and husbands. Nearly all of her examples are women, who, in the nineteenth-century, attempted to enter the professions, despite the obstacles presented by fathers, potential male colleagues, the education system, and the law.

Woolf’s letter-writer begins with Mary Kingsley’s claim that she worked at home to support the family that spent £2,000 on her brother’s education (94), but, she laments, “to learn German was *all* the paid-for education I ever had” (6). She also draws on the obscure life of Mary Astell, a woman who, in the late seventeenth century attempted to found a woman’s college and even received support from Princess Anne, but was eventually thwarted by the Church on the grounds that such a school would encourage Catholicism. She refers to the stories of Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Charlotte Brontë, both of whom struggled against tyrannical fathers for the right to marry the man they loved. She also cites many examples of women who

leave the home to earn a living, and still manage to turn their fortune into the fortunes of others, a lesson, Woolf argues, that they have learned from the “four great teachers”: “poverty, chastity, derision, and freedom from unreal loyalties” (96). However, the letter-writer resists Macaulay’s argument in his *History of England*, that women are “naturally” more charitable than men (119). She has little evidence to support this argument. Since women have been barred from the powerful, wealthy, corrupt lives that men have enjoyed for centuries, there is no way for the writer to know whether, if given the same opportunities, they would be just as likely to wield their power as selfishly and violently as men have. We now have more evidence, though by no means enough, to conclude that this is probably true, primarily because women still achieve power only if they accept (or at least appear to accept) traditional values. Still, since she hasn’t proven herself to be as violent and tyrannical as man in the public sphere, and is often responsible for mitigating conflict in the private, there might still be a chance that given enough power, woman could change the course of civilization toward peace and cooperation, especially if she is consciously aware of her historical role as an outsider and the lessons she learned by occupying that role.

Near the conclusion of her letter to the educated man, she compares two very different biographies, that of Sophia Jex-Blake and Barbara Leigh Smith. Jex-Blake struggled first with her father for the right to earn wages for her work as a mathematics teacher and then again, against the law, the university, and her potential male colleagues who marched out in protest when the college admitted her, for the right to study medicine, and was nevertheless successful. On the other hand, there was Barbara Leigh Smith, whose father believed that education should be equally accessible to women. He educated her at home. Woolf proposes that “it would be interesting to discuss Mr. Leigh Smith’s educational methods; how he had masters to teach them; how, in a large carriage built like an omnibus, he took them with him on

long journeys yearly all over England, but like so many experimentalists, Mr. Leigh Smith remains obscure” (161). Whatever the nature of that education, it was not at one of England’s major institutions, and it made Barbara a human being who believed strongly that all oppression and violence should be actively resisted and that such resistance should begin at home and with education. She used her yearly pension to found a school that was “open not only to different sexes and different classes, but to different creeds; Roman Catholics, Jews and ‘pupils from families of advanced free thought’” (162). Woolf refers to this school as a school of outsiders. Barbara Leigh Smith also worked for the Married Women’s Property Bill, ratified in 1871, and then went on to co-found Girton, one of the two women’s colleges at Cambridge. She shows us that all of this was accomplished by one woman with an outsider’s education.

Besides actual biographies and autobiographies, Woolf’s letter-writer suggests that an outsider should compare life-stories or fragments of other persons and their perspectives by comparing news-stories and different versions of current events. In fact, most of Woolf’s ideas for *Three Guineas* can be identified and extended in her reading notebooks, where she cut and pasted news-stories juxtaposing perspectives on women’s rights, their place in the professions, in athletics, in the home, and arguments about fascism, violence, and dictators. The letter-writer proposes that should “we” (the educated man, the writer, other potential outsiders), “begin by summoning, if only from the world of imagination, some daughter of an educated man who has enough to live upon and can read and write for her own pleasure” then, upon seeing the stack of daily and weekly newspapers on her table, we would be moved to ask, “‘ Look, Madam,’ [...] ‘at the newspapers on your table. Why, may we ask, do you take in three dailies, and three weeklies?’” (113). The woman, who exemplifies the position and role of the outsider explains:

“Because, [...] I am interested in politics and wish to know the facts [and she knows] that each paper is financed by a board; that each board has a policy, that each board employs writers, as you may remember after a moment’s reflections, find themselves unemployed in the street. Therefore if you want to know any fact about politics you must read at least three different papers, compare at least three different versions of the same fact, and come in the end to your own conclusion.” (114)

Only by juxtaposing many perspectives, can we hope to position ourselves outside of the “unreal loyalties” that compromise all of the texts we can access. This critical practice of juxtaposition and flexibility as more perspectives are added as the only way to construct always tentative positions is very similar to the practice of deconstruction. Woolf’s notebooks, however, did not compare many versions of the same story, but, instead, juxtaposed many different stories, often, as discussed by Merry Pawlowski, in very suggestive ways.⁴⁰ By placing apparently radically different subjects alongside one another, like she does with the photographs, which initially appear to have no correspondence with the text, one is called to work at finding connections, and the connections one finds can reveal some of our most insidious values, thus we begin to understand how the systems of disseminating knowledge perpetuate themselves and perpetuate war.

However, it isn’t enough for women, both inside and outside of current systems to read and compare biographies and news stories, they must also write them, especially working-class women, whose lives have remained mostly inaccessible. Woolf did not believe that an upper class woman could or should speak for working class women or the poor, and she supported the efforts of working class women, to tell their stories. She was asked by Margaret Llewelyn Davies to write the preface to *Life*

⁴⁰ See Merry Pawlowski, “Exposing Masculine Spectacle: Virginia Woolf’s Newspaper Clipping for *Three Guineas* as Contemporary Cultural History” in *Woolf Studies Annual*. 9 (2003) : 117-142. Also, in the spirit of *Three Guineas* and its call to “extend” the text, Merry Pawloski and Vara Neverow have made an entire facsimile of Woolf’s scrap books available online, for which I am extremely grateful. See *Reading Notes for Three Guineas: An Edition and an Archive*. <http://www.csub.edu/woolf_center>.

as *We Have Known It* (1930), an anthology of autobiographical tales by working class women, which she agreed to have published by Hogarth Press (Childers 71). In several letters to working-class correspondents, she appears to have encouraged them to write their own stories. However, Woolf's preface and public response to actual examples of these stories has been strongly criticized as elitist, primarily because of a lack of attention to this consistent refusal to speak directly to, and hence for, what she considers other in Woolf's thought.

Mary Childers suggests that Woolf evades taking responsibility for her elitist and even offensive views of both the women and their work by writing the preface in the form of a letter, addressed, not to the working class women writers but to Davies, a woman of her own class. Childers condemns Woolf for not speaking directly to the working class women, but if we consider the ethical imperative of first imagining a portrait of your interlocutor, which Woolf's letter-writer states in *Three Guineas*, then this move is either a confession that she cannot write a portrait of working class women because they remain, even after reading their stories in this collection, too much her "others," so she cannot presume to speak for them, and hence, to them without doing them great violence. It is also her refusal to address a group instead of an individual in writing. She had addressed groups before, for example, the group of women students in *A Room of One's Own*, but in that address, she consistently frames the discussion with her own experiences as a woman student, calling her addressees to decide for themselves the degree to which their experiences and the truths they can draw from them have been similar. Given this context, to address working class woman would be a gross act of hypocrisy for Woolf and would only heighten the discrepancies between her experiences and their own. Ultimately it would be an insult to them, an act of impropriety, of violent appropriation, so she chooses instead to write a self-consciously personal letter about their stories and her tentative reception of them

to Davies as the best she could do under the circumstances. In the letter, Woolf recounts a guild meeting, where the women were rising up to share their demands for better treatment, and she repeatedly describes them as colorless, “automotons,” as vulgar, and she apparently denounces their writing for similar reasons. She imagines the perspective of a literary critic, suggesting that the pieces “lack detachment and imaginative breadth, even as the women themselves lacked variety and play of feature” (qtd. in Childers 68). She also points out that this critic, whom she specifically genders male, “might object” to the lack of a unifying view of life and “no attempt to enter the lives of other people,” but the fact that she removes herself from this “masculine” critique, even as she acknowledges the way it has influenced her reading, suggests she is taking a critical position against this kind of reading.⁴¹ Childers would call such a reading, one that takes into account the layering of narrative perspectives and Woolf’s consistent use of irony to undermine and critique her own practices, a “crafty” reading, suggesting that those who read Woolf this way are all deviously complicit with Woolf, helping her avoid responsibility for her own words and the effects they might have on the reader. However, anyone who has carefully read Woolf’s work could see that this is how she deals with the issues of class difference. She only speaks from and to her own class, regularly invoking the working class, but never assuming a working class perspective. Childer’s explains that,

Woolf’s critique of their writing clearly announces an individualistic aesthetic and a refusal to support publicly writing that does not qualify

⁴¹ Interestingly, this critique repeats, practically verbatim, a critique of Forster’s work in her essay, “The Novels of E.M. Forster”. She discusses his “lack of mastery of his perspective” and the absence of an all-important gift, “the power of combination—the single vision” (qtd. in Pawlowski 61). Merry Pawlowski discusses the damage this criticism did to their relationship. Forster never quite recovered, and this offense may have been behind his own ambivalent reception of *The Waves*, though he was very positive in his letters to Woolf, he criticized it in his conversations with others, which got back to Woolf. Likewise, he said nothing about *Three Guineas*, but in a speech after her death, which was later published it, he criticized it sharply, basically suggesting that it was irrelevant and outdated.

as literature on such terms. In fact, her standards of evaluation are so stunningly inappropriate that they may well be read as a defense against the impact of these essays. Of course, other readings are possible. For instance, one could read a devastating irony in the fact that the preface, which begins by showing that middle-class women could not enter into the lives of the working-class women, criticizes the writing of the working-class women for not entering into the lives of other people. However, one has to strain the preface considerably to make this irony resonate sufficiently to overturn the obvious way its surface words mock working-class women much more than middle-class women. (Childers 68-9)

Most significant for Childers, is that for a thinker and writer who stressed so much the importance of communication, especially across differences, and who is given this singular opportunity to address working class women, there seems no real attempt at communication and understanding here. “It is important,” Childers posits, “to remember that this preface was written for a book that was likely to draw more of a working-class audience than anything Woolf ever wrote, and yet Woolf produces a cruel but comic description of the cooperative women as militaristic automotons” (70).

Still, Childers underemphasizes Woolf’s acknowledgements of the moving content of the stories, which suggests that Woolf, herself, unlike the literary critic is not judging these stories as “literature,” and primarily supports these women in their endeavors to share their stories and explains the great need for more of these stories, for more voices, very much in the spirit of *Three Guineas*. She quotes from the stories, explaining that she must let the women speak for themselves, and tells Davies, that in reading these stories, the women become “individuals,” altering her initial portrait of them as colorless automatons. She can no longer view them from a distance, as a class or as a gender, hence why she cannot write directly to them as a group. According to the terms for ideal communication between outsiders, these stories for Woolf have been a success, though she acknowledges their “literary” limitations. However, these limitations, insofar as they further illustrate their differences in terms of education, leisure, and financial security with which to write

are also crucial elements of their stories and their performances in writing and disseminating them.⁴² In order to criticize Woolf's preface, we have to forget (or more or less willfully exclude) a great many of her arguments and performances. However important it is as part of the continued dialog on Woolf's work, Childers' harsh criticism is yet another example of a reader wanting something from a writer that the writer, herself, cannot give.

Outsiders and potential outsiders should study and compare different cultures, their music, their literature, their painting, sculpture, and architecture, as a cure for nationalism and ethnocentrism, and then form opinions based on those comparisons, free from unreal loyalties (128).

Woolf's letter-writer suggests that English outsiders should study and compare their culture and their place within it to the cultures of other nations, even "enemy" nations, in order to question their own patriotic duty to support war and the "romantic notion that Englishmen, those fathers and grandfathers whom she sees marching in the picture of history, are 'superior' to the men of other countries" (128). By reexamining her relationship with these forefathers and their relationship to other forefathers of other countries, outsiders will see, the letter-writer proposes, that history compels her to respond to war with utter indifference, which for Woolf as we will see in her response to her friends' refusal to respond to *Three Guineas*, becomes the severest form of criticism:

⁴² As Gayatri Spivak suggests in her essay, "Can the Sub-altern speak?" However much the intellectual desires to hear the words of the sub-altern, of the "people," these words will likely disappoint in the degree to which they will reveal nothing new, but, instead, what will appear to the intellectual as very unsophisticated repetitions of the insidious systems from which the intellectual hopes to emerge. Rather than providing some wisdom of the "quite-other," the words of the sub-altern are more likely to emphasize the foolishness of the self-same, the self in an altogether less flattering light. I will explore this further in my readings of Elena Garro's stories in chapter 3. Suffice it to say that this explains both Woolf's desire to hear the words of the working-class women and her disappointment when she actually does. Childers is right to accuse her of idealism, but she may go too far in what amounts to a self-righteous critique and violent appropriation of Woolf's text.

When all these comparisons have been faithfully made by the use of reason, the outsider will find herself in possession of very good reasons for her indifference. She will find that she has no good reason to ask her brother to fight on her behalf to protect “our” country. “Our country,” she will say, “throughout the greater part of history has treated me as a slave; it has denied me education or any share in its possessions, ‘Our’ country still ceases to be mine if I marry a foreigner. [...] For,” the outsider will say, “in fact, as a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman, my country is the whole world.” (129)

After coming to the conclusion that her loyalties belong to the world, the writer suggests, if the outsider still bears some particular emotional attachment to her country, then she can best serve it by “giving to England first what she desires of peace and freedom for the whole world” (129), which further supports her argument that positioning oneself as an outsider is the first step toward peace. As Woolf repeatedly argues, the oppressed, by no merit of their own, lack the attachment to power and domination that motivates violence, but they do have a greater potential capacity of empathy for others who are and will be oppressed, and, may have a greater desire to help them. The fascists, she argues from the beginning of her letter to the educated man, are now oppressing many of the former oppressors of women. She elaborates further in the conclusion to her letter:

And abroad the monster has come more openly to the surface. There is no mistaking him there. He has widened his scope. He is interfering now with your liberty; he is dictating how you shall live; he is making distinctions not merely between the sexes, but between the races. You are feeling in your own persons what your mothers felt when they were shut out, when they were shut up, because they were women. Now you are being shut out, you are being shut up, because you are Jews, because you are democrats, because of race, because of religion. (122)

Franco, Mussolini, and Hitler have proven their intentions to crush certain men, which she hopes will help the educated man sympathize with those whom he currently oppresses or whose oppression he indirectly and unknowingly supports, but he and others like him have to realize their own complicity with fascism. She can attempt to communicate with him and subtly and peacefully suggest to him his complicity as well

as her own with the problems he identifies, but history has shown that it is very unlikely that he will listen, that he will want to, especially if she directly blames him for what is happening in England and abroad, not to mention that blaming him would instantly draw her back into the cycle of violent exchange.

There is very little the outsider can do without becoming part of the system and therefore undermining, in her own practice, her aims. The outsider must resist by remaining consistently on the outside, by not taking part or supporting any of the current systems of exchange, even charitable organizations, which have their own hierarchies, leaders, awards, all of which undermine their ability to effect lasting change toward truly peaceful relationships between human beings. Likewise protesters and activists are part of the system, contributing further to its violence, considering one individual's or group's ideas or methods superior to another's, engaging in public criticism.

For Woolf's letter-writer, violence begins when you convince yourself that you understand another's motives, even in the case of men and war, and she takes great care to explain to the educated man that she cannot understand male motives but can only recognize that the war instinct appears in the many historical portraits of leaders and warriors, whether biologically or simply traditionally, to be primarily a male instinct. Whether it is something intrinsically part of his identity as a man or something that his social status compels him toward is a question the writer can only put to him, it is her address to him, her call to him to join the conversation, to examine himself and his place in the world scrupulously and to try to explain to her why men want to use violence, both physical and spiritual, to dominate others. She tries to understand by looking at several soldiers' and military leaders' memoirs, but they only attest to a pleasure they find in battle and don't go far enough in examining why that is or even question it at all. And this is what she wants the educated man and all men

and women who might support war, or engage in war-like domestic practices, to do: to reflect upon and question their behavior, especially towards women.

Still, she can only ask to hear their thoughts, their contributions. To assume them herself would be to commit the same violence against them that, as a woman, they have repeatedly subjected her to. She proposes all explanations as merely hypotheses, as challenges to future interlocutors, as provocations, hoping others will respond. She suggests very early in her letter that they both remember as they talk to one another that “complete understanding could only be achieved by blood transfusion and memory transfusion—a miracle still beyond the reach of science” (9). Though this point is subtle and not fully developed in Woolf’s essay, it is extremely important. It is the reason why she calls for “indifference” instead of active protest and that she only speaks to the “daughters of educated men,” both of which were and continue to be the primary targets for those who criticize *Three Guineas*. In the end, she suggests, she is limited by herself, or by her own imagination of an ideal self that might find ways to function outside of the dominant system of exchanging ideas publicly and still speak successfully to those inside of those systems who continue to suffer from them.

Woolf’s letter-writer demonstrates that in order to bridge these gaps, you have to imagine another’s differences instead of assuming sympathy. The utter danger of assuming you understand the other’s reasons and feelings is why ongoing communication is necessary and why it is so important to challenge one another, and try to be as open as possible to those challenges and provocations that you receive in return. It is in this type of communication that Woolf sees the only hope for peaceful coexistence. Woolf does not see hope in the traditional goals of advocates for peace--not in unity, in unification, or in the uniform. She powerfully demonstrates in her many uses of written and photographic images that these concepts are already very much complicit with war. Instead, she sees the only possibility for change in her

honest, self-reflective attempts at communication that remain aware of the difference and inaccessibility of her other, respects his differences, and attempts to communicate her own position as accessibly as possible and to use the other's difference to question her own position constantly instead of asserting herself over him.

This argument appears to most of Woolf's readers as poorly timed, since this is obviously not how she suggests they should respond to Hitler's aggression, which, by the time *Three Guineas* was published, clearly demanded immediate and violent response. Many of her respondents acknowledged this as a problem with the argument and performance in *Three Guineas*: that the other can force you to respond violently, especially when he threatens your life, but the letter-writer is talking about long-term solutions that might prevent these threats, that might prevent these violent others from developing as she sees so many of them continuing to develop in England. In part, the bad timing of her argument supports her point about the price one must pay for the time of reflection, which she acknowledges to her letter-writer, was the reason for repeatedly postponing her response along with the hope that the problem would resolve itself, that others would resolve it for her. Ironically, she has been forced to speak, just as England feels forced to enter war, by others who refuse to see the broad portraits of themselves that they and others will create and disseminate, the long-term effects of their actions, and the ways in which their violence will return to them. This kind of reflection takes time, and the results of it will always be untimely, until the majority of human beings recognize its necessity, its own immediacy.

Woolf's fictional call from a fictional educated man to respond performs an alternative to the violence she experienced in her exchanges with educated men, and the possible revolutionary effects of an alternative relationship between them.

For Woolf's letter-writer, it is crucial that in the process of reading and writing others' opinions, you do not attempt to violate the others' culture and intellectual liberty. Though Woolf, herself, may have benefited from exchanges with literary friends and critics, she also suffered from many of these private conversations. She repeatedly acknowledges in her diaries and letters, that this was primarily the result of her own vanity but also of her intimidation, due, in part, to many occasions where her thoughts were either criticized angrily or dismissed, by male friends. She was also aware of the several instances where she had criticized the work of these friends, publicly instead of privately, most notably E.M. Forster's, and as she immediately expressed to him in a letter, she feared she had hurt him and undermined his ability to read and review her own work and/or damaged her own ability to interpret his criticisms as honest. There would always be the possibility that his critiques might be spiteful. In the end, these experiences contributed significantly to her inability to speak her mind, especially to the men in her own "circle," and they also made her painfully aware of the fact that she responded to the violence of these men by adopting their positions and retaliating, often virulently, against their own thoughts and work.⁴³

Her male friends who often openly admired her writing, regularly dismissed her in conversation, and sometimes they overtly attacked her arguments, or what was more painful for her, simply dismissed her thoughts as unimportant. She listened

⁴³ Merry Pawlowski suggests that Woolf wrote *Three Guineas*, in part, to "expose the domestic fascism of her literary friends and her male writer contemporaries, including H.G. Wells, Wyndham Lewis, T.S. Eliot, E.M. Forster, D.H. Lawrence, and W.B. Yeats" and that the "educated man" she addresses "stands for an audience Woolf wanted badly to reach—her fellow writers, the founders of 'male' modernism" (48). She was motivated by the many failures to communicate with or to reach these men with her writing, and she was significantly disturbed by Wyndham Lewis' criticism of her in *Men Without Art*, though she never brought herself to admit his complete dismissal of her as an artist. She mistook his argument that she had some real significance as "symbolic landmark—a sort of party-lighthouse" (qtd. in Pawlowski 49) as suggesting she had merit as an artist, when, in the context of the chapter, it is pretty clear that he is saying that her only merit is as a very clear indicator of the move toward the "feminine mind" and toward "decay" that "true artists" are finally beginning to recognize and rebuke. She is basically the artist that has pushed English culture over the precipice from which, Lewis argues, it needs desperately to be recovered.

patiently to John Meynard Keynes' lavish praise for T.S. Eliot's lectures upon their publication as *Strange Gods: A Primer for Modern Heresy*. Keynes suggested that the lectures admirably took up the importance of morality and the problems with the current generation receiving the benefits of Christianity without devoting themselves to the beliefs. But when she tried to "press" Eliot to "define belief in God," he "sheered off" (D4 208). At a dinner party, where she shared her views, supposedly about the irony of preserving English culture against the fascists when she and many others felt oppressed by that culture, she apparently shook them from their indifference. In this case she tells us that "all the gents" were "against her" (D5 268). Early in the composition of *Three Guineas*, she was approached by Forster, who told her that she had been considered for a position on the London Library Committee, but they decided against it. She recounts the exchange in her diary:

"And Virginia, you know I'm on the Co[mmi]ttee here" said Morgan. "And we've been discussing whether to allow ladies— It came over me that they were going to put me on: & I was then to refuse: Oh but they do--I said. There was Mrs. Green..."

"Yes yes—there was Mrs. Green. And Sir Leslie Stephen said, never again. She was so troublesome. And I said, haven't ladies improved? But they were quite determined. No no no, ladies are quite impossible. They wouldn't hear of it."

See how my hand trembles. I was so angry (also very tired) standing. And I saw the whole slate smeared. I thought how perhaps M. had mentioned my name, & they had said no no no: ladies are impossible. And so I quieted down & said nothing & this morning in my bath I made up a phrase in my book on Being Despised [one of the early working titles of *Three Guineas*], ...yes, these flares up are very good for my book: for they simmer & become transparent: & I see how I can transmute them into beautiful reasonable ironical prose. God damn Morgan for thinking I'd have taken that...And dear old Morgan comes to tea today, & then sits with Bessy [Trevelyan] who's had cataract.

The veil of the temple—which whether university or cathedral, was academic or ecclesiastical I forget—was to be raised, & as an exception she was to be allowed to enter in. But what about my civilisation? For 2,000 years we have done things without being paid for doing them. You cant bribe me now. (D4 297-98)

The influence of this exchange on the arguments in *Three Guineas* is significant, yet another testament to the wounds it caused her. The reference to her own father's belief in male superiority; the shared goal within bastions of learning and of religion of veiling and silencing women; and the location of male power in those institutions and their ceremonies and honors; the obliviousness of her own "friend" to the effect that this would have on her; the overwhelming fact that she, in her current milieu, and distinctly unlike the narrator of *Three Guineas* doesn't even get the opportunity to refuse this honor; and the pleasure she takes in transforming this slight into "beautiful reasonable ironical prose" basically expose and reiterate the major themes and aims of *Three Guineas*. In the book, she gets the opportunity to perform a more successful relationship with an "educated man," one who shows his respect by "asking" her instead of telling her, by seeking her opinions, which, she hopes, means he plans to actually listen and respond to them.

From her initial conception of *Three Guineas* as a "sequel to *A Room of One's Own*," the work went through a series of prospective titles, most of which further emphasize the importance, in Woolf's thinking, of a successful exchange of opinions between an educated man and an educated woman: "*Professions for Women; The Open Door; Opening the Door; A Tap at the Door; [...]* *On Being Despised; P. & P.; The Next War; What Are We to Do?; Answers to Correspondents; Letter to an Englishman; [...]*" (D4 6). The many versions of the title that referred to the appearance, at her door, of the educated man, the significance of his "call" for her response, is especially crucial, because it is clear, from her explanation in *Three Guineas*, that the letter-writer experiences the call as a sort of violence, insofar as she feels forced to respond to it. At the same time, she is extremely flattered by the call and recognizes its importance as the first step toward a revolutionary new language that they both might be ready for. In her fictional letter, Woolf gets to toy with the

fantasy of what the world might be like if one of these men actually wanted to talk to her about important questions, to really listen to what she had to say, and to respond in kind. In her own life, however, the reception of her opinions on major political issues, even among her closest male friends, could be described as the letter-writer describes them:

You may have observed it in real life, you may have detected it in biography. Even when they meet privately and talk, as we have boasted, about “politics and people, war and peace, barbarism and civilization,” yet they evade and conceal. But it is so important to accustom ourselves to the duties of free speech, for without private there can be no public freedom, that we must try to uncover this fear and face it. (142).

The letter-writer attempts to understand the source of this fear, invoking, though not by name, Freud’s theories of the Oedipus and castration complexes, which is what she refers to, following an analysis ordered by the Anglican church to explore why women could not be considered for high church offices, as a male “infantile fixation” with his fundamental superiority and dominance over the female. The psychologist, after consulting the Bible, can find no support there for the church’s refusal to let women reach the highest church offices, but he finds plenty in male psychology and in the extreme resistance they show to women attaining power. After a long discussion of the findings of the Report of the Archbishops’ Commission on the Ministry of Women, she returns to that private conversation between herself and the educated man for further evidence:

Let us suppose, then, that in that conversation about politics and people, war and peace, barbarism and civilization, some question has cropped up, about admitting, shall we say, the daughters of educated men to the Church or the Stock Exchange or the diplomatic service. The question is adumbrated merely; before we on our side of the table become aware at once of some “strong emotion” on your side “arising from some motive below the level of conscious thought” by the ringing of an alarm bell within us; a confused but tumultuous clamour: You shall not, shall not, shall not....The physical symptoms are unmistakable. Nerves erect themselves, fingers automatically tighten [note the phallic symbolism here] upon a spoon or cigarette; a glance at the private psychometer shows that the emotional temperature has risen

from ten to twenty degrees above normal. Intellectually, there is a strong desire either to be silent; or to change the conversation; [...].
(153)

It would have been painfully clear to Woolf throughout the writing of *Three Guineas* that this was what did and would continue to happen when she shared her ideas with her male colleagues, which is enough to call the seriousness of all her proposals, including the outsiders' society, into question. After all, she would only be making these proposals if she lived in a world where an educated man sincerely addressed her and asked her for her opinion. She writes *as if* this were the case.

Woolf frames *Three Guineas* as a set of published private letters to locate an alternative language emerging from but also breaking with traditional feminine performances, a language that would juxtapose public and the private desires and depend upon written exchanges of images making it more difficult to appropriate the other.

The decision to couch the arguments in *Three Guineas* within a series of letters, within the contexts of English literature and of Woolf's own work, reverberates with significance. She draws upon a specifically English literary tradition of the epistolary novel, referring subtly to a seventeenth century movement where women as readers and writers suddenly became influential, where a woman writer allied herself with others oppressed by her country to great effect, where society suddenly became concerned with the social pressures faced by women. The history of the epistolary novel in England is inextricably bound with the history of the novel as a genre, and both indicated the rising consciousness of and concerns about women's rights in English society.⁴⁴ Arguably, the first English epistolary novel, *Letters Between an*

⁴⁴ Though many argue that Aphra Behn's *Love Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister* (1684) didn't quite have the psychological depth and coherent structure that most agree distinguishes the novel from other literary forms, it was clearly a precursor to Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*, which most consider the first British novel. It is also significant that Aphra Behn went on to write *Oroonoko*, which tells the tale of an African prince who is made a slave and inspired and was repeatedly invoked "during the long battle against the slave trade" in England (Abrams 1866). Critics note that "women especially

English Nobleman and His Sister (1684), was written by a woman, Aphra Behn. The title itself is significant since Woolf repeatedly uses the example of the successful private relationships and correspondence between brothers and sisters, like that between William and Dorothy Wordsworth, as models for what the public relationship between educated men and women should be. But it was in the work of Behn's descendent, Samuel Richardson, namely *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarrisa* (1749), where the novel began to be associated with an increasing concern for women readers and their social predicaments. Hence, the English novel, appearing at its inception as an epistolary novel, in which letters were written by women, often to and about men, for the consumption of women readers, was also a major step toward the critique of patriarchal traditions and actual resistance in the form of exchanges between readers and writers.⁴⁵

These first epistolary novels also emphasized the importance of close, psychological study, the importance of attempts to understand the other, his motives, his goals, to sympathize and empathize with him, and then to respond prudently to his acts, especially his violent ones against your own person. They were studies in violence and passive resistance that greatly influenced Woolf's psychological dramas, which reached their apotheosis in *The Waves*, her "failed" experiment with a plot based completely on psychological "exchanges" between characters, a sort of empathic correspondence. In Richardson's epistolary novels, as in Woolf's psychological fiction, communication and miscommunication (delayed, lost,

identified with the experience of personal injustice and everyday indignity—the pain of being treated as something less than fully human. Perhaps it is appropriate that the writer who made the suffering of the royal slave famous had known the pride and lowliness of being a 'female pen'" (Abrams 1866).

Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarrisa* (1749) both are concerned throughout with the importance of a woman's chastity (a key theme throughout *Three Guineas*) and the unreasonable pressures and expectations 18th-century society placed upon women (Abrams 1784).

⁴⁵ In Woolf's notebooks (volume 1, page 22), she cut and pasted a rather disparaging review of Richardson's work in the *London Times*, in which the critic calls Richardson's talent "entirely feminine" and claims that he was "the first important woman novelist."

intercepted, interrupted, and misread letters) become the major concerns, and since the relative impossibility of communication that isn't always to some extent miscommunication across varying degrees of difference is perhaps the major point of *Three Guineas*, it makes sense that she would invoke the tradition of the British epistolary novel and the ways it had influenced her own thinking and the thinking of the many daughters of educated men that had gone before her, namely the inherent possibilities to be found in bridging the gap between private and public correspondence and the importance, for successful, non-violent correspondence, of imagining the other's response.

Woolf also had a contemporary exchange of letters that served as both inspiration but also as examples of what she was trying to distance herself from: the Einstein/Freud correspondence, published as a pamphlet called "Why War?" by The League of Nations in 1933 (Black 80). In this very public exchange of letters, Einstein wrote to Freud, a humble invocation of Freud's expertise on the "mind of man" and as a fellow leader of educated men:

Dear Mr. Freud:

The proposal of the League of Nations and its International Institute of Intellectual Co-operation at Paris that I should invite a person, to be chosen by myself, to a frank exchange of views on any problem that I might select affords me a very welcome opportunity of conferring with you upon a question which, as things now are, seems the most insistent of all the problems civilization has to face. This is the problem: Is there any way of delivering mankind from the menace of war? It is common knowledge that, with the advance of modern science, this issue has come to mean a matter of life and death for Civilization as we know it; nevertheless, for all the zeal displayed, every attempt at its solution has ended in a lamentable breakdown.

[...]As for me, the normal objective of my thought affords no insight into the dark places of human will and feeling. Thus, in the inquiry now proposed, I can do little more than to seek to clarify the question at issue and, clearing the ground of the more obvious solutions, enable you to bring the light of your far-reaching knowledge of man's instinctive life to bear upon the problem. There are certain psychological obstacles whose existence a layman in the mental sciences may dimly surmise, but whose interrelations and vagaries he is

incompetent to fathom; you, I am convinced, will be able to suggest educative methods, lying more or less outside the scope of politics, which will eliminate these obstacles. (Nathan)

Like the educated man in *Three Guineas*, Einstein assumes sympathy with his correspondent, subtly invoking their Jewishness in his acknowledgement that he is “one immune from nationalist bias” and their shared status as the potentially oppressed in his reference to other manifestations of war-like tendencies to be found in “the persecution of racial minorities.” He also calls to him as a fellow educated man, and acknowledges the failures of the many well-intentioned educated men before them in “delivering mankind from the menace of war.” Likewise, in Freud’s response, there are constant affirmations of their “likemindedness.” He is in complete agreement with everything Einstein has suggested and can only add “humbly” to his suggestions, his own findings about human nature and his hope that eventually “men,” for they are clearly and consistently talking only about men and to men, will evolve away from the savagery of war through continued and increased availability of education and culture. Like Einstein, he agrees that a group of moral and intellectual leaders from all of the nations, as is the goal of the League of Nations, might be a step in the right direction, but that they can never be effective as long as the majority of the world’s population is not united in their utter repudiation of war as a solution to conflict. The only hope Freud finds is in time and in the continued education and evolution of a more civilized society.

One could read *Three Guineas* as Woolf’s fantasy that someone of Einstein’s stature might ask her or any woman that he found most venerable for her perspective. For, she argues in *Three Guineas*, as an outsider to the educational systems that she sees primarily as bolstering the power of an elite group of men over other men and all women, she would be loath to offer education as an answer as easily as Freud does. Still, no reader of these letters could deny the greatness of these men, the way each

humbles himself before the other, the way each genuinely attempts to communicate, but most of all, the kindness and generosity of each in his personal address to the other in the service of peace. Theirs is a model of communication, the communication of the respectful and the like-minded, and as Woolf suggests in *Between the Acts*, one receives intimations of the possible answer to violence in that sincere and generous attempt to understand and talk “with” the other. As a member of the audience suggests, “if we don’t jump to conclusions, if you think, and I think, perhaps one day, thinking differently, we shall think the same?” (*BTA* 200). But first, we need a model of successful communication between two people who are not “like-minded,” as are Freud and Einstein. We need to be able to communicate across even the most egregiously different subject positions, showing the “quite-other” the same respect and sympathy that we show someone we consider one of us or like us.

Within the pages of *Three Guineas*, the letter-writer shares a total of twelve letters and letter drafts. She begins by referring to the educated man’s letter to her where he asked for her opinion on how they might prevent war. The response to the educated man, like the letters of Einstein and Freud, is immediately concerned with communicating her own position (her self portrait) and explaining that, though it is impossible for her to do so, she must attempt to describe his: “A whole page could be filled with excuses and apologies; declarations of unfitness, incompetence, lack of knowledge and experience; and they would be true. But even when they were said there would still remain some difficulties so fundamental that it may well prove impossible for you to understand or for us to explain” (*TG* 5). She adds that it is precisely because of these difficulties that she has waited so long to answer his letter, longer than three years. During that time, she has “hoped that it would answer itself, or that other people would answer it for [her]”, that there would no longer be an imminent danger of war, that the men in charge would recognize what was at stake

and find some other way to solve their conflicts, but those hopes have not been realized, and war is now imminent, and communication of her opinion, however untimely, is now critical.

She explains that she must begin by drawing “what all letter-writers instinctively draw, a sketch of the person to whom the letter is addressed. Without someone warm and breathing on the other side of the page, letters are worthless” (*TG* 5). Here, Woolf performs her own ironic version of the “turn-of-the-century handbooks on how to write a proper letter,” in which “women were advised to be self-effacing. Ladies, they were told, do not begin a letter with ‘I’. They begin instead with something that will interest their correspondents, chiefly themselves” (Banks vii). The letter-writer dutifully begins by referring to his letter and apologizing and explaining her tardy response, but her immediate turn to his portrait walks a fine line between flattery and irony:

You then who ask the question, are a little grey on the temples; the hair is no longer thick on the top of your head. You have reached the middle years of life not without effort, at the Bar; but on the whole your journey has been prosperous. There is nothing parched, mean or dissatisfied in your expression. And without wishing to flatter you, your prosperity—wife, children, house—has been deserved. You have never sunk into the contented apathy of middle life, for, as your letter from an office in the heart of London shows, instead of turning on your pillow and prodding your pigs, pruning your pear trees—you have a few acres in Norfolk—you are writing letters, attending meetings, presiding over this and that, asking questions, with the sound of the guns in your ears. For the rest, you began your education at one of the great public schools and finished it at the university. (6)

Simply writing this portrait is crucial because, especially if she gets it wrong, he will be able to understand who she thinks he is and why she responds to him as he does, and can then respond to her by correcting and developing his portrait and her response to it as he develops her self-portrait. Her portrait of him is one of a perfectly respectable educated man, perhaps a bit mundane, made remarkable solely by his address to her, asking her opinion, “a letter perhaps unique in the history of human

correspondence, since when before has an educated man asked a woman how in her opinion war can be prevented?” (5). This man is no Einstein or Freud, but unlike these “eminently” educated men, he has recognized that given the long history of failures of educated men to move civilization away from resolving conflict through war, he should ask someone else, someone who might be less obviously complicit with these histories. Though his decision to address her acknowledges their similarities, it also depends upon an assumption of her position outside of his immediate circles and his own gender identity. His call is also an acknowledgement of and an appeal to her difference, which gives her a glimmer of hope.

The letter writer repeatedly demonstrates why imagining the other on the other side of the letter is crucial for mitigating violence that she might unknowingly perpetrate against that person. It is the height of empathy to imagine the face of the other responding whether favorably or unfavorably to her words and then to respond to that response as she writes, before any offense might become too great, before it is too late to withdraw it and therefore set the cycle of retaliation in motion. Woolf’s letter-writer, like all communicators, does not escape acts of violence, primarily her need to assert her own views upon her interlocutor, to deny her interlocutor’s requests, to resist his images of her, to contradict them with her own. On the contrary, there are moments when she makes “incendiary” remarks about her addressee, but she immediately imagines the face of that person and revises her thinking in response to that face. The performance at these moments is exaggerated, precisely, to make the point as clearly as possible that these imaginary images are the key to successful communication across difference instead of trying to “unite” herself with the other, which usually means assuming that he shares her own perspectives. These images constantly re-assert themselves and immediately challenge her attempts to appropriate the other and his or her responses to her text. This is precisely what she does in her

third major letter to the honorary treasurer asking for help for women entering the professions:

What other conclusion then can one come to but that the whole of what was called 'the woman's movement' has proved itself a failure, and the guinea which I am sending you herewith is to be devoted not to paying your rent but to burning your building and when that is burnt, retire once more to the kitchen, Madam, and learn, if you can, to cook the dinner which you may not share..."

There, Sir, the letter stopped; for on the face at the other side of the letter—the face that a letter-writer always sees—was an expression, of boredom was it, or was it of fatigue? The honorary treasurer's glance seemed to rest upon a little scrap of paper upon which were written two dull facts which, since they have some bearing upon the question we are discussing, how the daughters of educated men who are earning their livings can help you to prevent war, may be copied here. (55)

Upon imagining the other's facial expression in response to these harsh words, the letter-writer decides to revise this version of her letter, to revisit the problem, gathering more perspectives more information to respond more responsibly to her reader. She quotes two statistics that testify to the relative poverty of women. She then uses the metaphor of a trial, explaining to the honorary treasurer that she has been acquitted, on the basis of this new evidence, of "certain charges made against [her] by educated men", led by H.G. Wells, who suggested that women are not taking advantage of their differences to change the world, and, on the contrary have "slavishly" imitated men and male power (72). She decides, in recognition of the impossible position that she finds this honorary treasurer in, to send her a guinea and leave it to her to do what she will, though she halfheartedly urges her to do everything in her power to ensure that women entering the professions do not enter on the same terms and commit the same violence against their fellow men and women that professional men have committed.

Besides the rhetorical force of the violent accusation and the use of evidence to acquit the honorary treasurer, this exchange performs an example, for the educated man and for potential outsiders, of how the image one must write as one writes a

personal letter humanizes the other, forces the letter-writer to resist jumping to conclusions, opens her up to the possible differences of the other and to her own inability to bridge them, and focuses her goal as communication, as an invitation to a continued dialogue. In a sense, the letter-writer reflects the honorary treasurer's image alongside her own, reminding the treasurer that she cannot master her own portrait anymore than she can master hers and inviting her to reply to and revise both of those images with her own versions.

Joanne Trautman Banks uses the image of the mirror to explain the effects of Woolf's ethics of letter-writing and the way she transformed traditional expectations of interpersonal exchange:

She told Gerald Brenan that one of the chief purposes of a letter was 'to give back a reflection of the other person' (2078). The mirror is an arresting image for her epistolary method and philosophy. Unlike a realistic novel, which has been famously described by Stendhal as a mirror riding along a roadway, a letter from Virginia Woolf was not a large, flat mirror. Virginia would not have liked it half so much if it were. She would not have valued a reflection of a friend that included so complete a view of his or her surroundings as to overwhelm the real person, who was that small luminous creature in the corner of the mirror. Nor would she have believed in the accuracy of such a reflection. That sliver of a mirror, a letter, that scrap of paper quickly covered, suited her aesthetic and philosophical purposes. (Banks v)

The image is always fragmentary, incomplete, and as such it functions as the call. It asks to the letter-writer to develop it, to add to it indefinitely, instead of assuming that she knows the other. She communicates her impressions and lays bare before her reader the ways in which her responses are based on those particular impressions in hopes of generating empathy and understanding.⁴⁶

Banks explains further that, "While holding up the mirror to her friends' advantage, Virginia discovered that it was two-sided. Her own image was on the

⁴⁶ This analogy helps us better understand the value that Nietzsche's fragment has for Derrida as a metonym for all of Nietzsche's works and for any image of the man, himself, that we might derive from them, but also for Derrida's own image of himself as Nietzsche's interlocutor.

back: ‘This sheet is a glass’ (2162). Now the letter was an emblem of mutuality, a potential fulfillment of the offer of aesthetic love made by Bernard to Neville in *The Waves*: ‘Let me create you. (You have done as much for me.)’” (quoted in Banks xi). Woolf’s letters function in similar ways to an actual conversation, where she has access to the other’s face, to the other’s gestures, that help guide her responses to his words and his own responses to hers and constantly remind her of the incompleteness of her knowledge of that person. It becomes increasingly clear that Woolf felt ethically obligated to create the image for the other. She recognized, that even in person, we negotiate identities virtually by creating and recreating our images of the other in response to their words and actions. “In the final analysis, she doubted her ability to know her friends too. Behind her back, some of them agreed that, in spite of her brilliant characterisations, she knew less than anyone. She asked Vita Sackville West: ‘Do we then know nobody? –only our own versions of them, which, as likely as not, are emanations from ourselves?’ (1622)” (quoted in Banks xiii). She saw in this virtuality, the cause of all violence, and likewise, the possible solution, one that could function on all levels of interpersonal communication, even via the new technologies that had emerged in her day. In *Jacob’s Room*, the narrator reflects on the new possibilities for inter-personal communication:

And the telephone ring. And everywhere we go wires and tubes surround us to carry the voices that try to penetrate before the last card is dealt and the days are over. “Try to penetrate,” for as we lift the cup, shake the hand, express the hope, something whispers, Is this all? Can I never know, share, be certain? Am I doomed all my days to write letters, send voices, which fall upon the tea-table, fade upon the passage, making appointments, while life dwindles, to come and dine? Yet letters are venerable; and the telephone valiant, for the journey is a lonely one, and if bound together by notes and telephones we went in company, perhaps—who knows?—we might talk by the way. (93).

The letter-writer in *Three Guineas* refrains from attempting to penetrate the other (perhaps her thoughts about communication have recognized the violence of this

desire). She does try to show him to himself alongside herself, to speak with him instead of to him. He has called, and she invites him in and provokes him to share her conversation, assuming the position of “the proper female letter writer”, which is “simply another version of the hostess, a role Virginia had observed closely. Her exquisite mother, Julia Stephen, played it for years to rave reviews” (Trautman Banks vii), but she also ironically detaches herself over the course of her letter to him, giving an overabundance of evidence to explain her final failure as a hostess, as a correspondent, to give him what he asks. This may be yet another instance, like the many in her personal correspondence, where she recognizes the rhetorical power of preserving a traditionally feminine identity and using it as a means to alternative course of action. Instead of “strangling” the Angel in the House, she shows us, in powerfully immediate terms, why the Angel must be “transformed” (Trautman Banks vii). It is clear that the letter, and particularly, the genre of epistolary fiction and the way it bridged public and private, fact and fiction, is crucial for this transformation of the woman reader/writer and of the world she inhabits. She has learned, better than anyone, how to let someone down gently.

She informs the educated man that she cannot join his society in her own efforts to prevent war because his societies have proven time and time again to be failures, but she hasn't given up on him. Still, she promises to work in her own way towards his goals, enlisting the aid of a small population of educated men's daughters with enough to live on, to form a small (perhaps as few as 250 potential members) outsiders' society that, “remaining outside, will experiment not with public means in public but with private means in private” (134). Her own letters to the educated man, the honorary treasurer of a women's college, and the representative for a society of professional women serve as models for how they might, through continued communication and without traditional forms of organization that depend upon

hierarchy, bring about change. Naomi Black argues that the intended audience for *Three Guineas* was not men at all, but women, and that the genre of the letter is particularly significant for women who had been traditionally silenced in the public sphere, since

as historians have come to realize, the letter is a classic way for women to communicate privately among themselves; even without rooms of their own, they can write and read letters with some privacy. *Three Guineas* then seems to represent something of a paradox, for printing 23,750 copies of a published letter is the opposite of private [...] But if we see the intended recipient as plural—all the women who might be supportive of Woolf’s version of feminism—then circulation is more to the point than privacy” (76).

Black focuses on Woolf’s work as intended for a woman audience insofar as she is asking them to help her redefine feminism, explaining how the private letter made public that “calls” for a continued exchange of more private communication might provide a way to communicate outside of the current systems of exchange and value and still communicate with those who remain within the system at the same time.

Though Black proposes that Woolf’s intended audience was exclusively made up of the educated men’s daughters who were her potential outsiders, there is ample evidence that she genuinely attempts to communicate with educated men if not, as Merry Pawlowski suggests, focuses especially on communicating with them or what it would take to communicate more effectively with them, in part, perhaps, because many of the educated women she is trying to reach have been taught to share traditionally patriarchal values, and to focus on communicating with men and asking them to reflect critically upon those values also addresses the women who have appropriated them. However, as her letter-writer repeatedly acknowledges, it is unlikely that real change can occur until men and women rethink their gender roles and the ways in which they communicate with one another: men, as the traditional bearers of power, can also be a powerful force for change once they come to recognize

the ways in which their empowerment has resulted in relentless violence for which they continue to pay dearly.

Woolf's letter writer challenges the traditional violence of the polemic and subverts patriarchal discourse through her radical use of images to convince potential outsiders that they should agree on the goal of preventing war and violence and encourage them to communicate outside of this discourse and its values, which, as the publication history of the images suggests, inherently risks becoming incommunicable, hence insignificant.

It seems that since 1943 until very recently, most publishers have regarded the images Woolf originally included in *Three Guineas* as insignificant. The uncaptioned, images of “great men,” many of whom would have been recognizable to Woolf's readers in 1938, but to which she refers in a table of “Illustrations” as simply *A General, Heralds, A University Procession, A Judge, and An Archbishop*, were excluded in both the British and American versions, until 1986, when Hogarth Press included reduced versions of the images in its reprints. Between 1938 and 2006, when Harcourt Incorporated published an annotated edition, introduced by Jane Marcus, all versions published in the U.S. excluded the photographs completely.

In excluding the images, publishers, executed a particular kind of misappropriation of Woolf's text, probably the result of an inability to “accept” the radical reading practice that Woolf's letter-writer proposes in her use of images, which both reiterates and proliferates a general inability of readers to open themselves to these practices. Julia Duffy and Lloyd Davis argue that

the exclusion of the photographs implies that they are viewed as expendable—a subsidiary part of the text, illustrative of and dependent on the written word. A generic hierarchy is constructed and enforced, in which a dominant verbal medium is asserted. Moreover, there is pressure to fix the reader and her reading practice within this hierarchy [...]. The tacit removal of the photographs smooths out the processes of

response and interpretation. With the grounds for a range of different readings foreclosed” (129).

The publishers were not alone in their dismissal of the photographs. In the eighty-two letters Woolf received in response to *Three Guineas*, though several mention her arguments about the sartorial splendors of professional men and about their ceremonies and processions, only one of them overtly discusses the images, and this respondent completely “misreads,” or rather, “misappropriates” them. The respondent, Woolf’s niece, Judith Stephen, tells her, “The pictures are lovely, especially the General, who has completely won the hearts of all whom I have shown him!” (Snaith 24). Given that she immediately transitions to T.S. Eliot’s honorary degree and the ceremony it entails, excitedly telling her aunt, “I’m going to try to sneak my way in & see him [...] receiving the purple or whatever one does receive”, it doesn’t seem that she is being sarcastic. She completely ignores the photographs as parodies of precisely these kinds of ceremonies. However, before we too easily call this a misappropriation, we should try to understand how Woolf’s text makes it possible. A reading like this may even illustrate important communicative effects of including these images as she does.

Perhaps responses like Stephens’ are supported by the lack of captions beneath the images; the letter-writer refuses to identify them in her letter. As Duffy and Davis suggest, upon initial readings, the photographs seem randomly inserted into the text. In other words, their frames, in several ways, are severely compromised, both in how they are framed by text and how they are framed in space (in the original version, the images take up the entire page, there is no margin left). The table at the beginning of the book, titled “Illustrations,” does suggest that we should view the photographs as “illustrations” of the text, and though we can propose possible places in the text that they could be construed as “illustrating” in some sense, there are always other ways in which the image might contradict or at least question that same text or remain wholly

outside of it. Finally, the photographs are never dated, and Woolf's sources are nowhere credited, removing further context for the reader's response.

As Duffy and Davis suggest, the way in which these photographs are presented serves to concentrate what Roland Barthes refers to as the "third meaning," which images make possible. According to Barthes, the third meaning is "simultaneously emphatic and elliptic" (62). It is "a new—rare—practice affirmed against a majority practice (that of signification), obtuse meaning appears necessarily as a luxury, an expenditure with no exchange. This luxury does not *yet* belong to today's politics but nevertheless *already* to tomorrow's" (Barthes 62-63). The third meaning appears to be the result of a proliferation of possible meanings inherent in an image and the particular hermeneutic practices that follow our inability to explain an image "away" (to satisfactorily interpret it). The letter-writer's use of images proposes a future politics that maintains awareness of the need for this "expenditure with no exchange", the possibility of a pure gift that cannot be returned, that continues to give in unpredictable ways. This politics of reading images, in turn, implicates our readings of any text, proposing that no single reading can adequately explain that text or use it to confidently justify any particular action.

The image, according to Barthes, always exceeds our ability to communicate about it in a way that we can remain fully conscious of, but it is precisely this lack of consciousness that makes the third meaning the "the epitome of counter-narrative; disseminated, reversible, set to its own temporality" (63). The third meaning resists a politics of mastery, which is perhaps the letter-writer's primary goal in her response to the educated man, and the goal of her anti-war performance in the writing of her letters within letters. Furthermore, the temporality Barthes suggests is precisely the temporality of reading and communicating proposed by and performed in *Three Guineas*. The text becomes a network, an extended text, that cannot be explained

away, that keeps reasserting itself and calls for further response. It requires the time of reading and re-reading as the image requires the time of seeing and re-seeing.

Woolf's use of images further highlights the status of *Three Guineas* as text in Barthes' sense of a "network". He explains that, "if the Text extends itself, it is as a result of a combinatory systematic (an image moreover, close to current biological conceptions of a living being)" (161), and that the text "practices the infinite deferment of the signified" (158), is "always *paradoxical*" (158), and "requires that one try to abolish (or at the very least to diminish) the distance between writing and reading." The text invites the reader to participate in a protracted discussion or exchange of narratives or written, spoken portraits of self and other, repeating its signifiers, displacing them, revealing the differences—related to the third meaning, or rather, the presence of the third meaning serves as the call to respond by subverting the singularity or completeness of any single response. The inclusion of the images is crucial for these possible readings and responses, including an initial response like Judith Stephens' that sees them as charming, whimsical asides to the serious arguments of *Three Guineas*.

Woolf's images, for example could be read, especially by her contemporaries, as her response to Leonard Woolf's claims in his own "polemical pamphlet" against fascism, published in 1935, *Quack, Quack!*. In his pamphlet, he "maintained that a reversion to savagery was taking place, he juxtaposed pictures of Hitler and Mussolini with those of primitive war gods" (Duffy 128). In light of *Three Guineas*, Leonard Woolf's pamphlet becomes another self-congratulatory disavowal of responsibility for what is happening in the world, along the same lines as the Einstein-Freud exchange.

Virginia Woolf, proposes that fascism is not at all a “reversion to savagery,” but on the contrary, a clearly traceable product of what we have been calling “civilization.”⁴⁷

The letter-writer’s first references to “pictures” are not pictures in a literal sense. She calls her image of the educated man a picture, not a photograph, but a written drawing. She also refers to the biographies and news stories as fragmentary images of human beings, of their lives, which she sets “beside” actual photographs that she has received in a letter from the “Spanish government,” we assume asking her to support their cause against the fascists.⁴⁸ She has just compared several different opinions from several different men, some supporting war as arduously as the others denounce it, and acknowledges the paradox, the inability to understand and forge an opinion that this method of comparing biographies, the suggested practice for members of the outsiders’ society, has created for her.

Indeed the more lives we read, the more speeches we listen to, the more opinions we consult, the greater the confusion becomes and the less possible it seems, since we cannot understand the impulses, the motives, or the morality which lead you to go to war, to make any suggestion that will help you to prevent war.

But besides these pictures of other people’s lives and minds—these biographies and histories—there are also other pictures—pictures of actual facts; photographs. (14)

⁴⁷ In Woolf’s diaries, she says very little about the content of *Quack! Quack!*, which may suggest that she didn’t want to read Leonard Woolf’s work critically. She is overwhelmingly supportive and uncritical—deferring consistently to Leonard’s pride, taking reviewers to task for showing that they did not understand it (*Diary 4*, 317). Her implicit criticism in her own work is further evidence of Woolf’s suppression of her own opinions before the men of her circle and the way she unleashed them in her writing.

⁴⁸ A letter to Julian Bell, dated November 14th 1936, describes a similar situation where the Spanish government sent her photographs of the devastation of war. “This morning I got a packet of photographs from Sapin all of dead children, killed by bombs—a cheerful present” (cited in Duffy 140n). Naomi Black suggests that “Given its source and timing, this letter would most probably have used photographs of the devastation occurring during the siege of Madrid, and it would have sought the end of the weapons embargo imposed on both sides for the war in Spain by a group of nations under British leadership. The embargo blatantly ignored by the fascists led by Generalissimo Franco, who with the support of weapons and troops from Italy and Germany, were destroying the leftist, democratically elected Spanish republic” (88). Virginia and Leonard Woolf signed a public letter calling for British support of the Spanish republican army against the fascists, hence, as Black observes, acknowledging a “righteous side of a civil war” (88).

It seems, and the letter-writer allows us to believe this indefinitely, that these actual photographs might offer an antidote to the indecision, the confusion, left by the comparison of those other “pictures” drawn in the biographies and speeches, for these photographs “of dead bodies and ruined houses” she repeatedly tells us are indisputable “facts.”

Those photographs are not an argument; they are simply a crude statement of fact addressed to the eye. But the eye is connected with the brain; the brain with the nervous system. That system sends its messages in a flash through every past memory and present feeling. When we look at those photographs some fusion takes place within us, our sensations are the same; and they are violent. You, Sir, call them “horror and disgust.” We also call them horror and disgust. And the same words rise to our lips. War, you say, is an abomination; a barbarity; war must be stopped at whatever cost. And we echo your words. War is an abomination; a barbarity; war must be stopped. For now at last we are looking at the same picture; we are seeing with you the same dead bodies, the same ruined houses. (14)

The initial claim that the photographs are facts that address themselves to the eye, is immediately undermined by the connection of the eye to the brain to memories and feelings. The fact immediately becomes a “violent” response that awaits interpretation, a “fusion takes place”, and their “sensations are the same”, and they are moved to utter the same words, or almost the same words. The men say, “war is an abomination; a barbarity; war must be stopped at whatever cost”, and the women, tellingly, echo the words of the men, but the echo trails off before “at whatever cost”. This “shared” response before a horrifying image, which the letter-writer invokes throughout the text as the call of “last resort”, the most effective potential stimulus that might encourage outsiders to communicate with insiders when all else has failed, is not quite fully “shared.”

The “call” of the photographs is undermined yet again, when we read more about the letter-writer’s opinion of “facts” namely, that they often “prove double-faced”, the use of the face here, the invocation of a portrait, of an image, of the other,

is no accident. The reader must acknowledge that the images of “dead bodies and ruined houses,” are also double-faced, insofar as, for the letter-writer, they reflect her own image, that she sees herself and the educated man in those photographs, while he continues to distance himself, even as he calls for action. In this case, the letter-writer tells the educated man that they both experience viewing the images as “violent.” These facts provoke an emotional response. They hurt them, they disgust and horrify them, and hence, they can easily inspire violent reactions instead of peaceful reflection, provoking the man to add “at whatever cost,” to his response, suggesting, whether interpersonal or international, he can only imagine resolution of this conflict as a “war against war.”⁴⁹ As Susan Sontag explains, “Harrowing photographs do not inevitably lose their power to shock. But they don’t help us much to understand. Narratives can make us understand. Photographs do something else; they haunt us” (94-95). They haunt us because they defy our attempts even to repress them, they keep returning to us, but at the same time never allow us to penetrate them or explain them. They give us nothing solid to respond to, no solid ground from which to understand them. For the letter-writer, the initial shock and horror is a kind of shared understanding, or at least a shared reaction, but as soon as they begin to interpret it, to act in response to it, the two viewers begin to diverge. Perhaps this is precisely why the letter-writer refrains from including “harrowing” photographs of war, and, instead,

⁴⁹ *War Against War! (Krieg dem Kriege)* was the title of a series of harrowing images from the first world war, published in 1924 by Ernst Friedrich. Susan Sontag describes the work as “drawn mainly from German military and medical archives, and almost all of which were deemed unpublishable by government censors while the war was on. The book opens with pictures of toy soldiers, toy cannons, and other delights of male children everywhere, and concludes with pictures taken in military cemeteries. This is photography as shock therapy. Between the toys and the graves, the reader has an excruciating photo tour of four years of ruin, slaughter, and degradation: wrecked and plundered churches and castles, obliterated villages, ravaged forests, torpedoed passenger steamers, shattered vehicles, hanged conscientious objectors, naked personnel of military brothels, soldiers in death agonies after a poison-gas attack, skeletal Armenian children” (82). Sontag also tells us that “by 1930, the book had gone through ten editions in Germany and been translated into many languages”. It was enormously popular, but clearly, an irony that would not have escaped Woolf, not effective in unifying response against war.

merely provides written descriptions of them.⁵⁰ Perhaps she believes that this strategy would amount to responding violently to violence.

The photographs she does include, however, are not necessarily placed “arbitrarily” in her text as Duffy and Davis suggest (Duffy 136). Or, rather, their placement is filled with possible significance, as is the order in which they appear, though the placement within the text by no means functions as a caption. According to Walter Benjamin, for the spectator of photographs, “captions have become obligatory. And it is clear that they have an altogether different character than the title of the painting” (226). They are “directives” given “to those looking at the pictures” intended to unify their response for overt or implicit political purposes. They limit and control the spectator's field of vision. Contradicting the letter-writer’s claim, these photographs do not unify our response, though the text suggests particular responses. For example, the appearance of the first photograph, that of the general, is the first image we see after reading the description of the photographs sent from Spain showing us a dead body that “might be a man’s body, or a woman’s; it is so mutilated that it might, on the other hand, be the body of a pig. But those certainly are dead children” (14). On the penultimate page to the image of the general, the letter-writer describes how the man’s world appears to outsiders, namely women. She describes her image of London: Within quite a small space are crowded together St. Paul’s, the Bank of England, the Mansion House, the massive if funereal battlements of the Law

⁵⁰ Another possible reason, which a letter Woolf wrote upon receiving photographs like these supports, is that, at best, these photographs inspire shame and overwhelm a viewer with her inefficacy before the problem, and at worst, make war into a kind of spectacle or aestheticizes it. Sontag explains: “There is shame as well as shock in looking at the closeup of real horror. Perhaps the only people who have the right to look at images of suffering of this extreme order are those who could do something to alleviate it—say, the surgeons at the military where the photograph [a soldier whose face has been “shot away” in the First World War] was taken—or those who could learn from it. The rest of us are voyeurs, whether we like it or not” (88). Though I think we can always learn from a photograph like this, the voyeuristic element is always present, and one that Woolf effectively (at least effective for the discerning reader) redirects toward the “great men” whose photographs she does include. In both cases, as Sontag suggests, “the photograph gives mixed signals. Stop this, it urges. But it also exclaims, What a spectacle!” (94).

Courts; and on the other side, Westminster Abbey and the Houses of Parliament” (23). The buildings are described as crowded, funereal, even in their initial grandeur, but “the first sensation of colossal size, of majestic masonry is broken up into a myriad points of amazement mixed with interrogation” (23). Upon closer scrutiny, these “houses” appear to be ruined.

Her scrutiny then shifts to the bodies that occupy them:

Your clothes in the first place make us gape with astonishment. How many, how splendid, how extremely ornate they are—the clothes worn by the educated man in his public capacity! Now you dress in violet; a jeweled crucifix swings on your breast; now your shoulders are covered with lace; now furred with ermine; now slung with many linked chains set with precious stones. Now you wear wigs on your heads; rows of graduated curls descend to your necks. Now your hats are boat-shaped, or cocked; now they mount in cones of black fur; now they are made of brass and scuttle-shaped; now plumes of red, now of blue hair surmount them. Sometimes gowns cover your legs; sometimes gaiters. Tabards embroidered with lions and unicorns swing from your shoulders; metal objects cut in...(23)

The reader turns the page and beholds the image of the general, covered with medals, sashes, gilded ropes, his head topped with fur and an erect plume, with a thick chin strap that cuts into the skin around the very small part of his face that is visible (25). The general pictured is Baden Powell, the founder of the Boy Scouts, a paramilitary organization for male children, a possible ironic illustration of “dead children.” Her description continues: “star shapes or [...] circles glitter and twinkle upon you breasts. Ribbons of all colours—blue, purple, crimson cross from shoulder to shoulder” (24). Most of the accoutrements the letter-writer describes appear on the general’s body, which, following the description of ruined houses and dead bodies, suggests that his is a dead body, unidentifiable, dehumanized, standing before those ruined houses pictured before the stone walls of the great institutions of England. Even his wrinkled, leathery skin could suggest mummification. His body is encased, entombed in gold, leather, and fur. But, the letter-writer, who again assumes a shared spectatorship with

her proposed outsiders, tells the educated man that “when our eyes have recovered from their first amazement” they see something even more remarkable:

Not only are whole bodies of men dressed alike summer and winter—a strange characteristic to a sex which changes its clothes according to the season, and for reasons of private taste and comfort—but every button, rosette and stripe seems to have some symbolical meaning. Some have the right to wear plain buttons only; others rosettes; some may wear a single stripe; others three, four or five. And each curl or stripe is sewn on at precisely the right distance apart—it may be one inch for one man, one inch and a quarter for another. Rules again regulate the gold wire on the shoulders, the braid on the trousers, the cockades on the hats—but no single pair of eyes can observe all these distinctions, let alone account for them accurately. (24)

Symbolism is related to violence here, against the bodies of the men who are forced to wear these symbols, to identify themselves with them, and against the viewer who is overwhelmed by this symbolic play of spurs and veils. The symbols are stronger than nature or the comfort of any individual man. On the contrary, these symbols become symbols of man’s dominion over nature, of civilization over savagery. The uniform unifies, removes or at least minimizes difference. It dehumanizes; it kills. Hence, these images of men in uniform are also images of dead bodies posed before the ruined houses that have been created by and upon them.

The letter writer then begins to introduce her next image, one that illustrates the relationship between the uniform and the violence that men have committed against life and the living:

Even stranger, however, than the symbolic splendour of your clothes are the ceremonies that take place when you wear them. Here you kneel; there you bow; here you advance in procession behind a man carrying a silver poker; here you mount a carved chair, here you appear to do homage to a piece of painted wood; here you abase yourselves before the tables covered with richly worked tapestry. And whatever these ceremonies mean you perform them always together, always in step, always in the uniform proper to the man and the occasion. (24).

“The procession” of civilized men is a funeral procession. It moves away from life; it is necrophilic.

Besides illustrating one such procession, the next image, which the prefatory table calls “Heralds”, might obliquely illustrate several points made in the preceding pages. On the page facing the image, the letter-writer introduces the second of her three main addressees, the honorary treasurer of a women’s college, requesting a donation to rebuild that college. The letter-writer turns from the treasurer’s letter to ask the educated man about the terms “they” should impose on her donation. She suggests that they tell her, for she assumes he should respond as well, ““You must educate the young to hate war. You must teach them to feel the inhumanity, the beastliness, the insupportability of war.’ But what kind of education shall we bargain for? What sort of education will teach the young to hate war?”(28) Beside the more direct connection between the Heralds and all of her discussion about the processions of educated men, there is a possible ironic connection between text and image here in a story that appears in Woolf’s notebooks of a rape committed by a herald, an educated young man’s physical and mental domination of a woman through an extreme form of violence or violation of her body. The third image is of a procession of educated men, which she titles in her table of illustrations, *A University Procession*. The images of many of the men in the procession are obscured with the exception of the first three, the leaders, dressed in the greatest finery, two carrying staffs, and the middle, wearing a long, ornate coat and a young man who carries the train of this coat. All of their faces are equally expressionless. Likewise, the faces of all the heralds are obscured or partially obscured. We can see the eyes of the herald in the foreground looking upward as they all blow their horns. The fourth herald is slightly superimposed upon the rear-end of a horse. At best these are ridiculous figures, a gathering of “horses asses,” at worst the walking dead or, even, perhaps, rapists and murderers, and they refuse to face us, to take responsibility. Most of them are

unidentifiable, making it possible for all of us to see our own images there, and acknowledge the obliviousness of our own expressions.

The next photograph, which she calls *A Judge*, could illustrate the facing page where she describes yet another procession:

It is a solemn sight, this procession, a sight that has often caused us, you may remember looking at it sidelong from an upper window, to ask ourselves certain questions. But now, for the past twenty years or so, it is no longer a sight merely, a photograph, or fresco scrawled upon the walls of time, at which we can look with merely an esthetic appreciation. For there, trapesing along at the tail end of the procession, we go ourselves. And that makes a difference. We who have looked so long at the pageant in books, or from a curtained window watched educated men leaving the house at about nine-thirty to go to an office, returning to the house about six-thirty from an office, need look passively no longer” (74).

These institutions, their uniforms, and their ceremonies dehumanize. War would not be possible without the oppression through loss of identity and hierarchy that these institutions make possible. The letter-writer turns to women for alternatives to these professions, for redefinitions and re-valuations of them and those who strive for them, only to find them “there, trapesing along at the tail end of the procession” like the young man carrying the professor’s train in the photograph of the university procession. This is why she cannot sign the educated man’s manifesto. She and other educated women must find alternatives to these values, and they must begin to seek these values in precisely what these professions and the men who occupy them do not value. They must resist all forms of glory, honor, and success in the traditional sense. They cannot accept degrees or lecture to the public or to “impressionable” young minds. They can only seek to earn just enough money to survive upon, and they must repeatedly, because of their alternate values, face ridicule from others, for she argues, these women “would be the butt of all who have an interest to serve or money to make from the sale of brains” (113). It then remains a question of whether or not anyone would be willing to truly be an outsider and how effective outsiders could actually be.

Ironically, the writer suggests, these outsiders would also be beyond any means of persuasion that they should work in their own ways toward the common cause of preventing war. “Since these terms are so hard,” she proposes, “and there is no body in existence whose ruling they need respect or obey, let us consider what other method of persuasion is left to us”, and she turns again to the photographs of dead bodies and ruined houses.

Can we bring out the connection between them and prostituted culture and intellectual slavery and make it so clear that the one implies the other, that the daughters of educated men will prefer to refuse money and fame, and be to be the objects of scorn and ridicule rather than suffer themselves, or allow others to suffer, the penalties there made visible? It is difficult in the short time at our disposal, and with the weak weapons in our possession, to make that connection clear, but if what you, Sir, say is true, and there is a connection and a very real one between them, we must try to prove it. (113)

Here, the writer subverts her subversion of her position that photographs of great men can prove this connection. Instead of referring directly to those photographs as making the connection between ruined houses and prostituted culture, she worries that she will not have the time or the “weapons” to make that connection clear. She implies that to “make a connection clear” requires violence, and her reference to time, suggests the imposition on the readers’ time of any argument or address, including the educated man’s letter to her, which lay there for more than three years before she begrudgingly was forced to respond. She implies that the photographs she has shown and described are insufficient to “make” the necessary connections, the connections she believes that the educated man should make on his own. There is one more image left in her arsenal, perhaps the most violent act she will commit against the reader:

But it is not the same picture that caused us at the beginning of this letter to feel the same emotions—you called them “horror and disgust”; we called them horror and disgust. For as this letter has gone on, adding fact to fact, another picture has imposed itself upon the foreground. It is the figure of a man; some say, others deny, that he is Man himself, the quintessence of virility, the perfect type of which all the others are imperfect adumbrations. He is a man certainly. His eyes

are glazed; his eyes glare. His body, which is braced in an unnatural position, is tightly cased in a uniform. Upon the uniform are sewn several medals and other mystic symbols. His hand is upon a sword. He is called in German and Italian Führer or Duce; in our own language Tyrant or Dictator. And behind him lie ruined houses and dead bodies—men, women and children. But we have not laid that picture before you in order to excite once more the sterile emotion of hate. On the contrary it is in order to release other emotions such as the human figure, even thus crudely in a coloured photograph, arouses in us who are human beings. For it suggests that the public and the private worlds are inseparably connected; that the tyrannies and servilities of the one are the tyrannies and servilities of the other. But the human figure even in a photograph suggests other and more complex emotions. It suggests that we cannot dissociate ourselves from that figure but are ourselves that figure. It suggests that we are not passive spectators doomed to unresisting obedience but by our thoughts and actions can ourselves change that figure. (168)

At this point, the cat really is out of the bag, but it isn't only a Tom.⁵¹ We are all, men and women alike, that dictator. Women and men alike, are guilty, in whatever spheres they might be allowed to occupy, of accepting their oppression, of redirecting their bitterness to whomever might appear weaker than themselves, or even, sometimes, toward their own selves. Most significantly, when we look at this photograph, just as when we look at the photographs of war that she implicitly conflates with photographs of great men and their processions, our guilt and shame quickly turn to blame. We want to locate the causes for our own insufficiencies and those of our fellow human beings outside of ourselves, to avoid responsibility for them, and our culture and the “civilization” it has produced has allowed us to do so. We all oppress, experience oppression, resent, and destroy, but we also have the capacity to create, to love, to elevate ourselves and others. However, our best qualities have been repeatedly suggested by poets as those that unify us, as if, the writer suggests, there might be “a unity that rubs out divisions as if they were chalk marks only” (169). “But,” she tells the educated man, “with the sounds of the guns in your ears you have not asked us to

⁵¹ After listing several overtly misogynistic explanations for why women are excluded from the professions, the letter-writer tells the educated man, “There! There can be no doubt of the odour now. The cat is out of the bag; and it is a Tom” (63).

dream. You have not asked us what peace is; you have asked us how to prevent war. Let us then leave it to the poets to tell us what the dream is; and fix our eyes upon the photograph again: the fact” (169). From that photograph, she now has told us overtly, violently, we must derive our own complicity, our own responsibility, and recognize what is at stake. We must all act, he in his way and she in hers, “not by repeating your words and following your methods but by finding new words and creating new methods” (170). But whatever the words and methods, we must all, she suggests, overtly accept responsibility for the dictator instead of shifting that responsibility solely to other people, other nations.

Susan Sontag discusses the fact that the United States has museums commemorating the Holocaust and the Armenian genocide, but, tellingly, no museum dedicated to African slavery. She explains this apparent paradox:

To have a museum chronicling the great crime that was African slavery in the United States of America would be to acknowledge that the evil was *here*. Americans prefer to picture the evil that was *there*, and from which the United States—a unique nation, one without any certifiably wicked leaders throughout its entire history—is exempt. That this country, like every other country, has its tragic past does not sit well with the founding, and still all-powerful, belief in American exceptionalism. The national consensus on American history as a history of progress is a new setting for distressing photographs—one that focuses our attention on the wrongs, both here and elsewhere, for which America sees itself as the solution or cure.” (88)

This is precisely what Woolf’s letter-writer is suggesting about the British response to the rise of fascism in Spain, Germany, and Italy as an exceptionalism that she is desperately trying to resist, that she feels particularly able to resist as still somewhat of an “outsider”, and that she believes we must all resist before we can begin to prevent war. As an outsider, she has not received all of the rewards for this nationalism, either in her access to education or in her political and social autonomy. The daughter of the educated man, for the most part, has not directly benefited from British prosperity, so it is easier for her to detach herself critically. Therefore, she can only appeal to the

educated man's daughter, since his own attachments and motivations are beyond her appropriation. She can only perform her own critique and try to help him understand where she is coming from. She is not suggesting that he should critique his country in the same manner, and she empathizes with his resistance to her own responses. In *Between the Acts*, she represents the violence that such a general and overt call to question British nationalism has on the audience.

Between the Acts, written shortly after *Three Guineas* was published, takes place in July of 1939. A theater director, Miss La Trobe, presents a historical pageant play, beginning with Elizabethan England and ending with the present-day, which is represented by the actors holding up a series of mirrors of all shapes and sizes reflecting the audience, a sort of play of fun-house mirrors. As they hold up the mirrors, an anonymous voice (could it be Miss La Trobe's who otherwise never speaks during or after the play?) recites the following:

Before we part, ladies and gentlemen, before we go...(Those who had risen sat down)...let's talk in words of one syllable, without larding, stuffing or cant. Let's break the rhythm and forget the rhyme. And calmly consider ourselves. Ourselves. Some bony. Some fat. (The glasses confirmed this.) Liars most of us. Thieves too. (The glasses made no comment on that.) The poor are as bad as the rich are. Perhaps worse. Don't hide among rags. Or let our cloth protect us. Or for the matter of that book learning; or skilful practice on pianos; or laying on of paint. Or presume there's innocency in childhood. Consider the sheep. Or faith in love. Consider the dogs. Or virtue in those that have grown white hairs. Consider the gun slayers, bomb droppers here or there. They do openly what we do slyly. Take for example (here the megaphone adopted a colloquial, conversational tone) Mr. M's bungalow. A view spoilt for ever. That's murder...Or Mrs. E's lipstick and blood-red nails...A tyrant, remember, is half a slave. Item the vanity of Mr. H. the writer, scraping in the dunghill for sixpenny fame...Then there's the amiable condescension of the lady of the manor—the upper class manner. And buying shares in the market to sell'em...O we're all the same. take myself now. Do I escape my own reprobation, simulating indignation, in the bush, among the leaves? There's a rhyme to suggest, in spite of protestation and the desire for immolation, I too have had some, what's called, education... Look at ourselves, ladies and gentlemen! Then at the wall; and ask how's this wall, the great wall, which we call, perhaps miscall,

civilization, to be built by (here the mirrors flicked and flashed) orts, scraps and fragments like ourselves? All the same here I change (by way of the rhyme mark ye) to a loftier strain—there's something to be said: for our kindness to the cat; note too in today's paper "Dearly loved by his wife"; and the impulse which leads us—mark you, when no one's looking—to the window at midnight to smell the bean. Or the resolute refusal of some pimpled dirty little scrub in sandals to sell his soul. There is such a thing—you can't deny it. What? You can't descry it? All you can see of yourselves is scraps, orts and fragments? Well then listen to the gramophone affirming... (187-88).

The music begins to play, and the “distracted” unite. The narrator includes herself amongst the audience: “On different levels ourselves went forward; flower gathering some on the surface; others descending to wrestle with the meaning; but all comprehending, all enlisted [...] they crashed; solved; united. And some relaxed their fingers; and other [sic] uncrossed their legs” (BTA 189). But the shared goal, the attempts to comprehend immediately turn to resistance. The clergyman speaks, and completely missing the point, tells the audience: “we act different parts; but are the same” and “I speak only as one of the audience, one of ourselves. I caught myself too reflected as it happened in my own mirror...” (Laughter) ‘Scraps, orts and fragments! Surely, we should unite?’” (BTA 192). And then he immediately sends around the collection plate. As the audience “disperses”, the song on the gramophone keeps chanting, “*dispersed are we*” and the audience chatters:

“I do think,” someone was saying, “Miss Whatsername should have come forward and not left it to the rector...After all, she wrote it...I thought it brilliantly clever...O my dear, I thought it utter bosh. Did *you* understand the meaning? Well, he said she meant we all act all parts....He said, too, if I caught his meaning, Nature takes part....Then there was the idiot....Also, why leave out the Army, as my husband was saying, if it's history? And if one spirit animates the whole, what about the aeroplanes?...Ah, but you're being too exacting. After all, remember, it was only a village play[....]” (198).

Their conversations progress in a similar vein, discussing the need for a civic center, a building that would bring them “all together”, and referring to the anonymous “voices in the bushes” as possibly signifying oracles and questioning modern spirituality.

They offer their judgments first without giving reasons why, and then continue to make meanings, primarily attaching the play to local concerns or dismissing its difficulties as caused by a lack of thought or resources, the fact that the play was produced “on the cheap”. And then they turn to the subject of their identities and the mirrors:

It’s true, there’s a sense in which we all, I admit, are savages still. Those women with red nails. And dressing up—what’s that? The old savage, I suppose....[...] And the mirrors! Reflecting us...I called that cruel. one feels such a fool, caught unprotected...[...] [The rector] said she meant we all act. Yes, but whose play? Ah, that’s the question! And if we’re left asking questions, isn’t it a failure, as a play? I must say I like to feel sure if I go to the theater, that I’ve grasped the meaning...Or was that, perhaps, what she meant? [...] that if we don’t jump to conclusions, if you think, and I think, perhaps one day, thinking differently, we shall think the same? (199-200)

They continue discussing the play and the rector’s response, interrupted by the church bells announcing the evening service and the practical concerns of finding their cars. Then they get in their cars and go their separate ways, we assume, never to discuss the play again. As they leave, the gramophone “gurgles”: “*Unity—Dispersity*. It gurgled *Un..dis...And ceased*” (201). And Miss La Trobe is left thinking about her “gift” and what the audience has “made” of it.

She could say to the world, You have taken my gift! Glory possessed her—for one moment. But what had she given? A cloud that melted into the other clouds on the horizon. It was in the giving that the triumph was. And the triumph faded. Her gift meant nothing. If they had understood her meaning; if they had known their parts; if the pearls had been real and funds illimitable—it would have been a better gift. Now it had gone to join the others
“A failure,” she groaned, and stooped to put away the records. (209)

In the end, the audience, though they tease her with intimations of understanding, do not show her that they recognize what is at stake for her. Most significantly, they continue to seek responsibility for the meaning of the play outside of themselves, both the writer and the subject matter, are replaced outside of themselves, despite (or maybe even because of) Miss La Trobe’s overt attempts to place at least some of the

responsibility upon them, to invite them to join the conversation, to actively take part in history, and, she hopes, to change it. The parallels between the audience response in *Between the Acts*, Woolf's final work before her suicide on March 24th, 1941, and the actual responses she received to *Three Guineas* are clear. Even many who openly praised the work, explained insufficiently if at all, their understanding of her arguments. None took upon themselves anywhere near the level of personal responsibility for war and violence that Woolf had taken in her arguments. This point, perhaps the most significant of all, was missed, and her refiguring of the work and the audience response in *Between the Acts* suggests that she also took a large responsibility for that misreading. She wonders, if her gift had been more genuine, if the "pearls had been real and the funds illimitable", perhaps if she had said her piece more plainly, less artfully with less artifice, less vainly, "the gift would have been better." But in order to do that, she would have had to fully sacrifice her belief in the resonance of art, of fiction, in the virtuality of existence and understanding, she would have had to "sell her brain," and forfeit her style, so the paradox of trying to communicate with those on the inside while still positioning herself on the outside and performing a possible outsider's language through the perpetual and recursive exchange of always fragmentary images of selves and others remained unresolved and possibly not resolvable.

***Three Guineas* did generate a network of responses, some of which provided the exchange of portraits that Woolf so longed for, especially of the working class, but those closest to Woolf, those within her "circle" either avoided any kind of response or responded negatively.**

Woolf's letter-writer begins with a clear argument about why her attempts to respond to his question are doomed to certain failure, and, for many readers, namely the educated men that Woolf most wanted to reach, the text failed. Most of the

readers in her circle remained silent about it, waiting until her death to condemn it outright. They refused to respond to her. In a diary entry dated September 13th, 1938, she is “depressed by praise of Morgan’s Credo” while there was nothing but “silence on all my friends part about my own.” (D5 169). In another entry dated the 22nd of November, she realizes, “my own friends have sent me to Coventry over it” (D5 189). Finally, on December 19th, 1938, she writes, “not one of my friends has mentioned it” (D5 193). Of her closest friends, only Vita Sackville West communicated her displeasure to Woolf directly. Both E.M. Forster and Quentin Bell waited until her death to respond to *Three Guineas*, while the rest of her educated male contemporaries remained perpetually silent. Forster begins his lecture on Woolf, which he gave at Cambridge on May 29th, 1942, with an outright condemnation of the book on the basis of its feminism:

Feminism is also responsible for the worst of her books—the cantankerous *Three Guineas*—[...]There are spots of it all over her work, and it was constantly on her mind. She was convinced that society was man-made, that the chief occupations of men are the shedding of blood, the making of money, the giving of orders, and the wearing of uniforms, and that none of these occupations is admirable.[...]She refused to sit on committees or to sign appeals, on the ground that women must not condone this tragic male-made mess, or accept the crumbs of power which men throw them occasionally from their hideous feast. Like Lysistrata she withdrew.” (Forster 32)

Initially, he appears to strongly dislike the work, calling it cantankerous and “spotted” with feminism, but at the same time, he acknowledges how important these thoughts were for her, and his summary of these thoughts seems sympathetic. By the time he completes the summary, her form of non-violent protest, her refusal to participate in the “occupations of men” whom she sees as purveyors of violence seems heroic. Indeed, he compares her to Lysistrata, whose means of severing the support, which Woolf repeatedly argues, women have given men and their violent occupations, however comical, by the end of the play, proves to be shrewd and extremely effective.

As the lecture continues, his biggest issue with the text no longer appears to be its feminism, but on the contrary the way in which she overlooks the progress made by women's rights movements.

By the 1930's she had much less to complain of, and seems to keep on grumbling from habit. She complained, and rightly, that though women to-day have won admission into the professions and trades they usually encounter male conspiracy when they get to the top. But she did not appreciate that the conspiracy is weakening yearly, and that before long women will be quite as powerful for good or evil as men.

Like Merry Pawlowski, I'm "appalled at Forster's seeming unawareness of the true state of affairs in the 30s (apparently either he had hardly read *Three Guineas* or he had discounted the wealth of Woolf's evidence and statistics) but we are also stunned by his prediction. What would Forster think if he could but know that his prediction for women has not yet come true?" (65). But most appalling for me is what appears to be an almost willful misreading of her arguments, suggesting that she solely blames men for the problems of society, especially since Woolf claimed in her Diaries that she had talked to Forster about these issues on more than one occasion and that she clearly argues throughout *Three Guineas* that women are no more "naturally" predisposed to peace or to good, not to mention all of the examples she uses to show the many ways women have and continue to be complicit with war. He also seems to have completely overlooked the layering of narrative voices in the text and her strongest imperative, to identify ourselves with the image of the dictator and take responsibility for his actions at home and abroad. Like all of the men and most of the women who responded to *Three Guineas*, he refused to let the text, to let her portraits of him, of others like him, and of herself, fragment his integrity, alter his self-image, question the way he has traditionally empowered himself.

Even Leonard Woolf, who read her work most closely as her editor, seemed to either ignore or misunderstand her arguments in *Three Guineas*. Though he finally

agreed to publish it after she had revised it several times, his response, for her, begins a “horrid anti climax,” and she explains that she “didn’t get so much praise from L. As [she] hoped” (D5 133). His tepid and vague response may be explained by her acknowledgement that, in the early stages of conceiving of *Three Guineas*, when she told Leonard that she was considering writing an “anti-fascist pamphlet,” he told her that she should “take account of ‘the economic question.’” This was the standard Leftist approach” (Black 65). Woolf acknowledged this in her diary and responded privately that though his knowledge would be “an immense gain,” in the end it would be her “own edge that counts” (D4 282). She did take up the “economic question,” but chose to focus on economy through a different lens, instead of exchanges of labor and currency between men, she focused on exchanges of labor and currency between men and women, which she felt got more to the roots of the problem. Likewise Quentin Bell’s animosity for the text was also based on his Marxism, claiming that she avoided economic realities and chose to focus on frivolous issues like fashion (see Bell’s biography of her v.2 186-87). Finally, Vita Sackville West told Woolf that she didn’t agree with fifty percent of it, and that she was “exasperated” by her “misleading arguments.” In her response, Woolf playfully mimics the violence of her former lover’s critique, suggesting they take up their quarrel in a fist-fight:

Of course I knew you wouldn’t like 3 gs—thats why I wouldn’t unless you had sent a postcard with a question, have given it to you. All the same, I dont quite understand. You say you don’t agree with 50% of it—no, of course you dont. But when you say that you are exasperated by my ‘misleading arguments’—then I ask, what do you mean? If I said, I don’t agree with your conception of Joan of Arc’s character, thats one thing. But if I said, your arguments are ‘misleading’ then we shall have to have the matter out, whether with swords or fisticuffs. And I dont think *whichever we use*, you will, as you say, knock me down. It may be a silly book, and I dont agree that its a well-written book; but its certainly an honest book: and I took more pains to get up the facts and state them plainly than I ever took with any thing in my life. However, I daresay I’m reading more into ‘misleading’ that’s there. But oh Lord how sick I get of all this talk about ‘lovely prose’

and charm when all I wanted was to state a very intricate case as plainly and readable as I could. (Banks 403)

It is possible that West was referring to the many rhetorical reversals in the work, some of which I demonstrated above with the photographs, where she pulls arguments out from under a reader just as a reader begins to rest upon them. For Woolf, this part of her strategy, namely to suggest the ways in which a particularly coherent and convincing argument does the thinking for the reader instead of letting the reader do the thinking for herself, was lost on most of her readers.⁵² Even less well-received were her points about communication, empathy, and responsibility. In her response to West, Woolf performs, perhaps intentionally, a parody of reader's inability to get out of her mind and how such an inability leads directly from written threats to physical violence. Of course she doesn't want to accuse her dear friend, Vita, of missing the point, so she performs the role of the "daft" correspondent who cannot imagine the other's position and the validity of her points and, hence, resorts to "having the matter out" with either "swords or fisticuffs." The violence of *Three Guineas* and of some of the responses it would generate was also prophesied in a letter to Woolf from A.G. Sayers: "Of course its a tremendously shrewd thrust, & you will be prepared for the bludgeon & the rapier in the retorts" (47).

However, there were a few women in Woolf's own class, who appreciated *Three Guineas*. Philippa Strachey, who presided over the London National Society for Women's Services, which is where Woolf gave the speech that would become "Professions for Women," after which she first conceived her plan to write *Three Guineas*, immediately wrote to thank her. She praises Woolf's wit and style, and the

⁵² It is also telling that she ends with a lament that Sackville West insists on complimenting her style, on reading it as ornament, instead of seeing her stylistic manipulations as the only possible way of saying what she couldn't say. She refused to read her essay as, foremost, an attempt to communicate clearly with her reader. Juxtaposing *Three Guineas* with Derrida's *Éperons*, suggests that this kind of reading (or mis-reading) may be gendered. As a woman writer, perhaps Woolf is only allowed to perform multiple styles. She is not allowed to communicate the truth. She can only be the truth as non-truth. She can only be the subject of all writing, the muse, instead of the writing subject.

way she patiently builds her arguments until that last letter (actually the conclusion of her frame letter), which Strachey calls a “sledge hammer,” another acknowledgement that Woolf’s text was received as violent, even by those who agreed with it (Snaith 20). Ray Strachey, Philippa’s sister-in-law also greatly appreciated the book, and she, too, wrote immediately after its publication, saying that “if the imbeciles in high places are not now pulverized it will only be because they are so densely stupid” (23). The fact that these responses are expressed in such unselfconsciously violent terms reveals their will to either ignore or forget the letter-writer’s argument about the dictator in all of us or at least not to read it as a call to remain aware of the effects of their own discursive violence. Still, in both letters, the women vow to send copies to many friends and “enemies,” which, besides their taking the time to write the author, is further proof of their desire to extend the text, to keep talking about it with others, both inside and outside of patriarchal privilege. At least this part of her argument seems to have been accepted.

Perhaps the keenest example of the desire to extend the text was performed in the correspondence between Woolf and Shena Simon. Apparently, Woolf and Simon met in 1931, but their relationship deepened over the course of their correspondence on *Three Guineas* (Snaith 30). Simon, immediately wrote to tell Woolf how much she appreciated her book and how Woolf had “said what so many of us have felt, so much better than anyone else could have said it” and that she was “personally grateful” to Woolf, especially for her new awareness of how much energy she had spent throughout her life trying to please others at her own expense, and that she now realized that she “can afford to be unpopular” and will “probably become more & more of an Outsider” as a result. Simon, in several of her letters, takes pleasure in reporting the responses of others. She tells her that she sent the book to a friend who called it “not a book, but an experience” (50). She also sent Woolf news clippings to

“add to [her] collection”, all of which demonstrate her commitment to extend the text of *Three Guineas*, to continue the discussion (62).

Simon wrote to tell Woolf about the responses that were aired during a meeting of fifty members of the Fabian Society, devoted to the discussion *Three Guineas*: “Only one man got up & wholeheartedly agreed with you,” she tells Woolf, but, she goes on, “What surprised and amused me, was the reaction of the men to your remarks about their dress. Last night they seemed to mind that much more than the “infantile fixation” argument. One young man who tried to explain it away only proved all that you had said—to the merriment of the rest of the company” (Snaith 104). She told her that “Several speakers—men—tried to argue that war was the fault of capitalism & would disappear when socialism came—but I don’t think the audience felt that they had made their point” (104). And she interprets the response of this middle-class society of educated men and educated men’s daughters as further proof that Woolf’s arguments were well-founded and necessary: “It was a most interesting evening & since the audience was entirely composed of middle class Fabians it was a revelation—to me—to find how amply justified you are in all that you have said” (104). Finally, she imagines Woolf’s pleasure in the responses, “I think you would have enjoyed it & would have realized—if you have not already done so—what effect *Three Guineas* has had even in the few months since it appeared. People are thinking in a different way about the relation of the sexes” (104). Woolf, in her response to this letter, confirms Simon’s assumptions, explaining that she was amused to hear that “the dress charge rankled”, but most significant for her, is the simple fact that “fifty intelligent people should think it worth while to talk about 3 gs.” (quoted in Snaith 104).

At one point in their correspondence, Woolf asked Simon to “give” her “views on Women and War”, to which Simon replied “it would be merely handing back to

you in rags and tatters the arguments in *Three Guineas*”, but she reports that she was glad Woolf persisted, because especially since the war broke out (she writes in January of 1940), her “own [views] were in a muddle” and she needed to “try and sort them out” (158). What follows is a discussion of the current war that analyzes the hesitance with which the British entered compared to the first world war, as proof that ideas are beginning to change about war, that “Men—for the most part—are going in to this war not as an adventure” (162). In this case, Simon explains, war is evil, but a necessary one against an enemy who would “have children all over Europe gassed” (158). Still, however terrible the “enemy”, neither side in a war should ever feel “it is behaving in a noble way—both sides are engaged in a beastly undertaking” (159), and she argues that the church should remain completely indifferent to war, that there should be no chaplains in the military and that nobody should be allowed to attend service in military dress, all of which, given the teachings of Jesus Christ, seem a terrible hypocrisy. Simon thinks war is evil, but she cannot call herself a pacifist because she thinks that, especially in cases like these, to defend oneself or one’s friends against an attacker, it is necessary. In this case, if Hitler is not “defeated our chance of discrediting force will be put off for a long time”. She adds a post script to her letter: “This war has already given us two delightful footnotes to *Three Guineas*. 1, the announcement by the B.B.C. on the day that war was declared that the King and his Household had donned military uniforms, and 2, the picture of the King broadcasting on Xmas day wearing an Admiral’s uniform!” (163).

Simon’s response adds more evidence to support the tentative arguments in *Three Guineas*, questions those arguments and her own position in response to the current war, draws attention to the different attitudes displayed by the men who are leaders and the men who fight in this war, steps back from the ideal response of “indifference” that troubled so many, challenges it, but also maintains it as an ideal,

which reiterates the response of many thoughtful letter-writers to this quandary. The novelist Naomi Mitchison, who was also actively involved in the struggle for women's rights, interpreted Woolf's society of outsiders, and the letter-writer's call to "indifference," as an indication of Woolf's idealism, which, its moral implications aside, could negatively affect a writer's perspective: "I can't help wondering whether a writer does not lose something if he or she is remote from action, only a looker-on, dispassionate as a god?" (Snaith 42). Mitchison suggests in a later response to Woolf's clarification of what she means by "indifference", that another writer with a similar point-of-view will soon be publishing an article on *Three Guineas*, and that Woolf should read it. "Obviously," she explains, "what bothered us both was 'indifference'; perhaps it is a word which has wrong connotations and should have something else substituted for it" (48). Several other readers resisted Woolf's suggestion that we remain completely indifferent to war, especially with the rising menace of Hitler, most believed that, unless you get all German women to stop any and all support of the war effort, there was little left to do but fight, if just to defend themselves. But these responses perform an extension of the paradoxical cycle of discursive violence (and its sanctioning of physical violence) that Woolf's letter-writer already performs and in doing so further supports her call for untimely and unpopular responses to violence, which she also performs in *Three Guineas*. To her respondents who claimed that there was nothing they could do but fight, Woolf responded that there was nothing she "could do but write."⁵³

Among both readers in Woolf's class and social circles and her working-class readers, the interpretations of *Three Guineas* varied widely, further evidence of both

⁵³ In response to all of the trouble she is having with a writer's society to which she belongs and the constant requests she receives to join societies of all kinds and sign petitions, she writes in a letter to Julian Bell, "What can I do but Write? Hadn't I better go on writing—even by the light of the last combustion?" (Banks 376).

the freedom Woolf grants the reader and the lack of authorial control that such freedom entails, for both good and ill, but what mattered most to Woolf was that people were thinking and talking about the work, far more than they had talked, especially to her, about her previous works. Apparently, the essay was interpreted by those who were most open to it as everything from a call to militant feminism (which might seem so obviously to run contrary to so many of the pacifist arguments in the essay as well as the overt call to do away with the word feminism and most everything it has stood for up to the point when Woolf is writing) to a manifesto for female nudists. Woolf, herself, was both frustrated and amused by these responses: “I’m getting the oddest letters, which I shall collect as a valuable contribution to psychology” (L6 247). But it seemed abundantly clear to almost all of the readers that the book “called” on them to respond and freed them to frankly express their perspectives. Even the reviewer in the *Times Literary Supplement* responded to the essay as a call for individual response, a call to continued dialogue: “All should read it, not only for their enjoyment of its admirable style and wit, but that they may define in their own minds their answer to her arguments” (Majumdar and McLaurin 400).

In the eighty-two letters Woolf received, there is ample evidence that readers from all classes answered Woolf’s call. Some, like the letters from Agnes Smith, a working class weaver from Yorkshire, were the kinds of responses, the self-portraits, Woolf sought. Smith shared her own story with Woolf and provided her with some of the working class perspectives that were absent in *Three Guineas*. Though none of Woolf’s responses to Smith have been found, from Smith’s responses, it is evident that Woolf offered to publish Smith’s autobiography through the Hogarth Press. We also know that after Woolf’s death, Smith did publish *A Worker’s View of the Wool Textile Industry* through Hillcroft Studies in 1944.

Ironically, it is perhaps Woolf's nastiest response, which came closest to performing the kind of frank discussion across difference between men and women that Woolf had hoped would be the result of *Three Guineas*. However, it did not come from an educated, middle-class man, but from a relatively uneducated, working class man, Ernest Huxley, a bus conductor from Birkenhead who was very offended by the essay. He was so offended, in fact, that he retaliated in what must have been more than forty hand-written pages, arguing about the ridiculousness of women's fashion, the lack of any significant contribution of women to best cultural institutions of England, beginning with its universities, the fact that their chief value is beauty, that they are selfish and cruel, especially to other women, which is why they cannot organize. His only evidence, the few times he supplies it, rests on personal anecdote. Still, Woolf read through his letter and replied, apparently sending him a letter that he acknowledged was a "well deserved and swift rebuke" (Snaith 138). And he followed this rebuke with another lengthy hand-written letter, though this time only about thirty hand-written pages, but with a much more personal address, sharing his self-portrait, narrating the conditions of his work, his interest in a beautiful woman as a "friend," but a friendship, which society's immediate assumptions about married men and single women, made impossible. Though he continues to insist on his arguments about women's fashion as vain and frivolous and men's fashion as culturally important, as elevating body and spirit to solemn heights, he apologizes for his more offensive comments about women, noting the ways in which Woolf's own work proves they are equal and sometimes even superior to men. Even his revised ideas, including his conclusion in which he rather deviously asks Woolf not to respond further and quotes Shakespeare's *Love's Labours Lost*, "'A woman I forswore; but I will prove,/Thou being a goddess, I forswore not thee'" that he really hasn't revised his opinions of women, only his opinions of Woolf. Still, the correspondence,

however frustrating it must have been for Woolf, was fruitful and indicative of the heightened importance for Woolf of responding to even the most offensive responses, and drawing the addressee a little nearer to her position if she could without undermining his own position. And in the end, Huxley did value “the time she [had] taken in becoming his correspondent” (Snaith 5). She never had the opportunity to respond in this way to the honest responses of her educated male readers.

Snaith foregrounds the fact that Woolf apparently read and replied to most, if not all of the letters very carefully, whether or not she knew the writer personally, and the ways in which this correspondence performed the success of the essay, not in convincing anybody of the truth of her arguments, but more significantly for Woolf, in generating a continued dialogue, and in widening her own and others’ perspectives as a result. As she tells the educated man, *Three Guineas* was a “free gift, given freely, without any other conditions than you choose to impose upon yourself” (170). Most of the men in her own circle, decided not to impose conditions upon themselves, not to respond to her. But other men and women did, and she accepted those responses equally as gifts, though often, as gifts tend to be, they were “double faced.”

In *Given Time: I Counterfeit Money*, Jacques Derrida explores the implications of the gift of writing, especially fictional writing. Through a close reading of “La fausse monnaie,” one of Charles Baudelaire’s prose poems, he questions the economies that fiction sets up between reader and writer. *Given Time* is a protracted response to and exploration of a question that he asks repeatedly throughout his work, a question that he “owes”, primarily, to his reading of Maurice Blanchot: “Why literature?” The answer to this question, which includes many other questions: why we need literary fiction, why we take pleasure in reading it and writing it, what it contributes to our culture, our psychology, our politics, is, in this work, that it gives time but it also takes time (and that many but not all seem to believe that the time it

gives warrants the time it takes). Derrida first explains the implications of giving time inherent in the concept of the gift, what distinguishes the “gift” of fiction, or attempts to distinguish it from a “simple” act of exchange:

The gift is not a gift, the gift only gives to the extent it *gives time*. The difference between a gift and every other operation of pure and simple exchange is that the gift gives time. *There where there is gift, there is time*. What it gives, the gift, is time, but this gift of time is also a demand of time. The thing must not be restituted *immediately and right away*. There must be time, it must last, there must be waiting—without forgetting [*l’attente—sans oubli*]. (41)

The gift assumes a return, as Woolf assumed a response to *Three Guineas*, but, as Derrida emphasizes, the return must come after an unspecified period of time has passed without forgetting, obviously on the part of the receiver, since the gift has obligated her to remember and respond. This indefinite period where the effects of the gift are received without return is its gift of time, the suspension of time’s passing.

For the giver, however, things are more complicated. Derrida, drawing upon the work of Marcel Mauss, explains that there can be no “pure gift”, since a gift always presupposes a response of some kind. A gift always bears within it the concept of exchange. It becomes a question of time. The more time that passes, the greater the chances of forgetting, in which case, the gift might actually become something like a pure gift, since even if the receiver responds, the giver may have forgotten about his own gift and could receive the response as a separate gift. But this is unlikely. Even if the receiver had forgotten, the response would remind him, and it would probably compound the insult of not returning the gesture in a timely manner. It could even sever the relationship that it was supposed to foster. So, paradoxically, the closer a gift comes, in its gift of time, to being the definition of a pure gift, the more it will call into question the purpose of the gift as strengthening the relationship between giver and receiver.

There is another way by which a gift can approach the definition of a “pure gift,” that it can take both the giver and the receiver outside of all economies (exchanges and values) without causing insult for either party: a gift might function as a “pure gift” if neither the giver nor the receiver can control or comprehend an end to the meaning or to the effects of the gift and if both experience its effects as immeasurable. Basically, a pure gift would be a gift that keeps on giving, and, therefore, would always exceed any receiver’s single attempt to return the gesture.

This, Derrida suggests, is what happens for givers and receivers of fictional narratives, especially those that include meta-fictional layers. Read in this way, Miss La Trobe’s lament at the end of *Between the Acts* that the “world had taken [her] gift” and that it amounted to nothing, that the receivers, her audience, could not recognize or distinguish it from what was already their property, their proper thoughts, that it had become “a cloud that melted into other clouds on the horizon”, is precisely defining one possible outcome of the work of fiction as a gift, a risk that the giver takes, but also, ironically, what reinforces the status of her work as a gift. She says that “it was in the giving that the triumph was,” which recalls Mrs. Ramsay looking back on her dinner party, reflecting on the fleeting triumph of her gift and the fact that it had already been forgotten, “it had become, she knew, giving one last look at it over her shoulder, already the past” (111). In both examples, the act of giving, its evanescence (its timelessness), and the infinite possibilities for how it was and will continue to be received, is the gift itself. It is beyond any economy and any attempt to appropriate it, “outside” of any current system of value and exchange.

That this same notion of the gift of fiction returns in Woolf’s final work, the return of her concept of fiction as gift throughout her work, is telling in itself. There are traces of this in all of her diary entries that discuss the responses or lack of responses to her work, especially for *Three Guineas*. Readers either appropriated her

gift (often in the forms of misreading or, rather, they appropriated her thoughts in ways that Woolf didn't agree with), they ignored it, or some combination of the two. However, in her responses to the *Three Guineas* letters, she had the opportunities to reiterate its distinctions from her readers' appropriations, to re-appropriate it and re-assert it, which is rarely afforded the writer. Even in this case, the effects of these reappropriations were only temporary, and Woolf still wasn't able to predict or control them. The work itself still functions as a gift and not an exchange between reader and writer, even if the writer desires and has the opportunity to engage in this kind of exchange. As Derrida, discussing Baudelaire's dedication of his collection of prose poems to a specific reader, his friend Arsène Houssaye, explains, "from the moment" the writer's work is published,

and even if he had not published it, from the moment he wrote it and constituted it by dedicating it to his "dear friend," the presumed signatory (Baudelaire or whoever effectively signed this text *beneath* the patronymic and accredited signature of Baudelaire—for let us not be so gullible as to believe that the effective signatory of *that* comes down to a Charles Baudelaire, any more than we believe the dedicatee goes no further than the name Arsène Houssaye), from the moment he let it constitute itself in a system of traces, he destined it, gave it, not only to another or in general to others than his "dear friend" Arsène Houssaye, but delivered it—and that was giving it—above and beyond any determined addressee, donee, or legatee (we are speaking here of an unconscious figure represented by a "dear friend" or even by a determinable, bordered configuration of public and readers). The accredited signatory delivered it up to a dissemination without return. Why without return? What history, what time, and what space are determined by such a "without return"? Whatever return it could have made toward Baudelaire or whatever return he might have counted on, the structure of trace and legacy of this text—as of anything that can be in general—surpasses the phantasm of return [the simulacrum or simulated return or possible returns represented in the text—between the friend/interlocutor or between the beggar/speculator] and marks the death of the signatory or the non-return of the legacy, the non-benefit, therefore a certain condition of the gift—in writing itself. (100)

Once the writing leaves the writer's mind, it "calls" to be appropriated, to be interpreted, and often writers, but also readers, desire to resist this, hence Woolf's letter-writer's appeal to the visual existence of text, her juxtaposition with text and

image, illustrates her desire to perform and delimit the reader's response, but, especially the way she inserts and frames photographs, as Derrida proposes in *Droit de regards*, helps her resist her desire to appropriate the reader's response by calling to him and multiplying, indefinitely, the possibilities for his intervention.

This is also why her letter-writer emphasizes the "significant" amount of time that had to pass before she could bring herself to respond to the three letters in *Three Guineas*. In this case it took her more than three years, which, for any exchange of letters, especially between strangers, would be too much time. The educated man would have long since given up on her response. His letter would have become an unintentional gift with no return instead of the clear exchange that his requests initially made it. After all, his was a letter asking for signatures and money as were the two other letters from the women honorary treasurers. Because of their tardiness, Woolf's letter-writer's "donations," her three guineas/*Three Guineas* initially would have appeared moot for the fictional addressee, the educated man, and her "less fictional" audience, "the reader," by the time she "sent" them.

As I mentioned above, many of Woolf's readers/letter-writers confirmed the "untimeliness" of *Three Guineas*, since an anti-war tract on the eve of Britain's reluctant entry into war against an enemy that most agreed needed to be stopped, however valid its arguments, was not well-received. Her "timing" could not have been worse. But this untimeliness is a significant, if not the "signifying," element of her performance of writing as an "outsider." It comments on a different present, drawn from the past, inherent in the "present" of her contemporaries, a present that functions to foretell the future. Ultimately, this untimeliness that conflates past, present, and future, makes the reader's facile appropriation of her arguments impossible, and, hence, guarantees that her gift will remain undetermined, undeterminable, suspended, but most importantly, in circulation.

The letter-writer also opens up a dialogue that resists appropriation of the other for either side by continuing to remind us of the human, the body or bodies, behind all written communication. It isn't as if she believes that communicating through images, or even more effectively, in person will always be less violent than communicating in writing, but, as her many attempts to invoke the writer's body in the text, behind and within his writing, performs, in the presence of the body of the other, it is much more difficult to appropriate his words against his wishes. He will continue to reappropriate them, and, in turn, to attempt to appropriate your image. His body, his gestures, his expressions will resist your violence and will acknowledge when your gift is not poisoned, when your words bring him pleasure. But we will take Woolf's suggestions on credit. To explore them further, we will turn to a less-troubled version of fiction, specifically, a set of fictional conversations that juxtapose private with public forms of violence to help us better understand the value of fictional narrative as a gift or a practice of giving and receiving that entails possible ways out of violent economies, especially economies of gender and racial identities.

CHAPTER FOUR
THE GIFT/POISON EXCHANGE OF TEXTS IN ELENA GARRO'S "LA CULPA
ES DE LOS TLAXCALTECAS" AND "EL ÁRBOL"

The question of who speaks to and for whom, and what provokes the speaking, specifically, the telling of one's story is equally important for Elena Garro as it was for Woolf, and the possible answers she comes up with complicate and question Woolf's own suggestions and practices. In Woolf's case, she avoids taking up the question of communicating with and/or for women of the working class because, as she explains in both *Three Guineas* and in her letters about it, she cannot call upon working class women since their time is completely consumed with their work in and out of the home, and whatever opportunities they may have to reflect upon and communicate their situations and that of other women will be impaired by this mental and physical exhaustion, lack of time, and, often, lack of education. Most of these women, however brilliant they may be, lack the necessary tools and spaces required for effective communication. In Woolf's work, the subaltern woman cannot speak and the privileged woman proceeds to speak for her in bad faith, fooling herself and others. For Garro, however, failing to speak for the subaltern guarantees her interminable silence, and it is not enough to merely call her to speak. Since you are part of the culture that has injured her and her foremothers and fathers, you must demonstrate that you are ready to listen. You must actively open up the space in your discourse for her words and her perspectives by recognizing your complicity with the oppressive categories and the violence they perpetuate, and you must do so more consciously and overtly than the educated man did in *Three Guineas*.

Elena Garro published her first collection of short stories, *Semana de Colores* in 1964, after she had worked for several years as an advocate for the rights of

Mexico's indigenous people and for agrarian land reform, which would end in exile and a request by then president López Mateos that she cease future interventions on these matters. Garro, like Woolf, could be considered an "outsider" within Mexican culture insofar as "national identity was essentially masculine identity" forcing her to position herself elsewhere (Franco xi-xiv). This partly explains why the work of both writers moves from inner worlds to outer worlds, engaging history and politics through the lens of individual psychology and the familial dramas of the private home. However, Garro, unlike Woolf, studied at the university and pursued a career. She worked as an actress and then as a reporter. She married Octavio Paz in 1937 and traveled with him to Spain during the civil war, returned to Mexico and wrote for the leftist journal *Así*, then returned to Paris with Paz in the latter half of the 1940s, where they found themselves surrounded by artists and intellectuals, especially those recently exiled from Franco's Spain (Stoll 32-33). In many ways, Garro was privileged. Still, she repeatedly performed and chose to identify with outsiders, the marginalized, and the oppressed, and eventually, found these identities forced upon her.

As a reporter for *Así*, she spent three weeks undercover in a woman's prison to expose the abuse of prisoners there. Her article led to the prison director's dismissal. Around 1957, she became an active supporter of equal rights for indigenous Mexicans, especially their rights to their own land. She faced extremely influential and powerful people, writing letters and gathering signatures for petitions, and met with a significant degree of success. She co-founded a journal dedicated to the issues faced by peasants and indigenous populations, and by 1959, she was asked by President López Mateos to temporarily leave the country, "forcing her to abandon her commitment to agrarian reform problems" (Stoll 35). She didn't attempt to return to Mexico until 1963. By that time, Paz had filed for divorce, and upon her return, she ran into trouble with her nationality for the second time. Since she was born in Mexico and her father was a

Spanish citizen, she was supposed to choose a nation before she turned twenty-one. She never did so, and in 1944 found herself stateless. “She had to go through the process of naturalization and was treated like a foreigner”, which, together with the repetition of this statelessness in 1963 when they confiscated her Mexican passport and refused to let her enter the country until the president’s brother intervened on her behalf, affected her greatly (34-35). She identified herself as Mexican, and to be rejected twice by her country, deeply wounded her.

Her most traumatic experience as an “outsider” occurred in 1968 when she was implicated as one of the key instigators of a student movement that led to the killing of many students. To make matters worse, the papers published lists of other intellectuals who had supposedly played a role in the revolt, claiming that Garro had been their informant. She was virtually ostracized, and forced to leave the country in shame. She never recovered from this event and considered herself unjustly persecuted throughout her life (Stoll 36). Though Garro’s “story,” her own and other versions of her life, doesn’t explain her fiction, nor does it foreclose on any of the many possible readings her stories provoke, it does show us that, unlike Woolf, she had a much more ambivalent, even a horrified attitude toward being an outsider. Writing and existing on the margins, as is often the case for the increasingly marginalized, bore little of the romance that it often has for those who have never actually experienced having those positions and identities forced upon them. Garro experienced, especially when she attempted to speak for the indigenous people of Mexico, the violence of not having options, of not having freedom to choose, to express, or even to own your desires. She also seems to understand the dangers inherent even in her most noble attempts to speak for the “indian”, for the “quite-

other,” since we have a long tradition of figuring the other in order to kill it and replace it with our own ideal identities.⁵⁴

Like Woolf, Garro finds hope in reexamining public histories and identity politics through private relationships and self-reflection, hoping to construct more fluid (and less violent) concepts of emerging identities. In her stories, plays, and novels, Garro explores the political possibilities that may emerge from private exchanges between women across different cultural classes and ethnic identities. The two short stories that frame *Semana de Colores* (1964), “La culpa es de los Tlaxcaltecas” and “El árbol”, both represent conversations between an indigenous woman and an upper-class mestiza or *patrona*. In the first story, “La culpa es de los Tlaxcaltecas”, the protagonist, Laura, tells her version of the events that take place during two separate encounters with an indigenous man to her cook, Nacha. According to Laura, she and her mother-in-law were driving to Cuitzeo, when the car broke down, and Laura was left alone while her mother-in-law went to get help. As soon as she was alone, she saw a wounded indigenous man, and time suddenly shifted and she found herself in Tenochtitlán (Mexico City) at the time of the Spanish

⁵⁴ This is how I read the thesis of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”. In the essay, she reads the political interventions of Foucault and Deleuze alongside Marx, Said, Kant, Lacan, and Derrida. In the work of all of these theorists, she sees the “persistent constitution of Other as the Self’s shadow,” which always already corrupts any attempt to listen to the subaltern, to the marginalized, and to communicate their position to other intellectuals. Behind all of these theories, for Spivak, there always appears to be an essentialist agenda, though she exonerates Derrida from this charge, insofar as he asks, not for an understanding of the other, but “invokes an ‘appeal’ or ‘call’ to the ‘quite-other’ (*tout autre* as opposed to a self-consolidating other), of ‘rendering delirious that interior voice that is the voice of the other in us’” (294). Instead of trying to know the other, we should recognize the “unknown” and allow it to remind us of our own unfathomable selves, and use dialog to continue to explore possible bridges between us. In imperialist attempts to define the colonized, Spivak sees a stronger “allegory” for the inherent violence of any attempt to “know,” than she finds in psychoanalytic attempts to “know” woman. Derrida’s main difficulty, she suggests, is that he has excluded, or may not be able to include, a focus on colonization as epistemology in his own work. For Spivak, the subaltern is by definition, she who has no voice, who cannot speak, and she addresses the ways in which feminine members of subaltern groups are doubly effaced. Those who speak to the intellectual are always already compromised and compromising, as Spivak reveals by using examples from the practice of *sati* or Indian widow suicides and a more recent woman’s suicide as provoking a vortex of interpretation around an irremediable silence or absence.

conquest. The man she sees turns out to be her indigenous first cousin husband, whom she had betrayed out of fear, fleeing to the future and to her new husband Pablo, while her first husband was left alone to fight the Spanish.

Laura meets her first cousin husband (*primo marido*) three times, and, while she remains with him longer each time, she again leaves him in fear. It is only at the end of her story, which Nacha has to tell for her, that she finally remains with her first husband, who comes to take her to the “other world”, neither her past nor her present, but some place wholly other. Nacha, who is left to complete Laura’s tale, to clean up after her, then sets out herself to “find another destiny.” Throughout the story, Nacha works around the kitchen preparing coffee for Laura, cleaning up when they are done, listening attentively, and picking up Laura’s tale in her own thoughts whenever there is a pause in the telling. Nacha’s responses to the story are rarely verbal. She reveals her “sympathy” with and affirmation of Laura’s story, primarily, through the narrator’s report of her thoughts in free indirect discourse, her physical gestures, and her sincere, sympathetic facial expressions. She only addresses a few short phrases or single words directly to Laura, which simply reiterate or confirm Laura’s words.

In the final story of the collection, “El árbol,” it is the indigenous woman, Luisa, who calls upon Marta, the upper-class *mestiza*, and tells her story with dire consequences for both of them. Luisa tells her extremely resistant interlocutor the story of how she was abandoned by her first husband shortly after the birth of their first child and was forced to return home to her parents. She, in turn, abandons the child to search for her husband,⁵⁵ and encounters a woman who “said things”, who

⁵⁵ Garro’s narrative uses almost the exact words to describe Luisa that Paz uses to explain the *mestizo*’s response to the betrayal of *La Chingada*, the archetype of which is La Malinche: “[...]it is appropriate to associate her [*La Chingada*--the fucked woman] with the Conquest, which was also a violation, not only in the historical sense but also in the very flesh of Indian women. The symbol of this violation is Doña Malinche, the mistress of Cortés. It is true that she gave herself voluntarily to the conquistador, but he forgot her as soon as her usefulness was over. Doña Marina [the Spanish name for Malinalli] becomes a figure representing the Indian women who were fascinated, violated or seduced by the

“knew,” so she murders her and ends up in a woman’s prison. It is only when she begins to recount the tale of this woman’s murder, which as the reader increasingly becomes aware, will be Marta’s fate that Marta becomes, at least intermittently, an “ideal” listener. She attempts to engage with Luisa’s telling and with Luisa herself, as Nacha did for Laura, but her attempts come too late, and Luisa refuses to “let her in.”

Instead, Luisa focuses on the details that will explain and justify her eventual murder of her listener. Luisa tells Marta that, after murdering “the woman,” she found joy and community with her fellow prisoners and had to be forced to leave the prison. She explains that the prisoners warned her that she must never tell anyone her story, so they will not be able to use it against her. Life after prison, for Luisa, has consisted of guarding her secret and caring for her second husband, Julián, who she claims is a bad man who beats her. Throughout the rest of the telling, Marta vacillates between belief and disbelief, ultimately denying her own role in the story and dismissing both Luisa and her story, and, in turn, all “indians”, promising to treat them more severely in the future. It is at the moment of this final judgment, which Marta makes to herself in her own private thoughts, that Luisa appears in Marta’s room, murders her with the “same” knife, and returns to prison, only to find that all of her previous companions have gone.

In Garro’s stories, La Malinche becomes a storyteller, and readers become active listeners, complicit in the different versions of *her* story.

Spaniards. And as a small boy will not forgive his mother if she abandons him to search for his father, the Mexican people have not forgiven La Malinche for her betrayal” (86). Comparing this passage with Luisa’s story reaffirms the presence of La Malinche who is otherwise unnamed in the story. Unlike Laura, Luisa is never overtly described as betraying anyone in the story, even by Marta who insults her in just about every other way. She even tells her that she doesn’t deserve to cry over the children she left behind. Marta repeatedly represents the position of the patriarchy, and, in this example, like Paz, that she cannot forgive Luisa/Malinche for leaving her children/the *mestizos*, though this time, she isn’t searching for her husband, but, it appears, for a sympathetic listener, for Marta herself to become that listener.

Establishing an ethical framework that, like Woolf's *Three Guineas*, is dependent, specifically, upon fictional narratives, upon the virtual exchange of stories that must take place in any form of exchange of identity, Garro's stories exemplify the need for a particular kind of temporality or layering of temporalities, which allows the *mestiza* woman to come to terms with a long history that sets her up as doubly treacherous. A hybrid of Spanish and Native American, as Octavio Paz argued in his renowned essay, "Los hijos de La Malinche," (1950) the *mestizo* is poised for self betrayal from the outset, his body, his face, is a living sign of the way Mexico's indigenous people betrayed their own kind upon the arrival of the Spanish. The *mestizo* man performs the complex subject positions of both betrayer and betrayed, the inextricability, in his own identity, of identities of Cortés and La Malinche. However, Paz consistently posits feminine identities as passive (betrayed and violated) and easily makes La Malinche a simple archetype, an Eve, a betrayer of her own people. The implications of his essay for the "*hija*" de La Malinche, is that she is the origin of betrayal, that her body is the living sign of that betrayal, that she bears upon herself, the double burden for the identity crisis that afflicts both men and women in her country, and that she can have no agency and is thus condemned to repeat an endless cycle of passive guilt and passive betrayal that ensures her defenselessness before the *mestizo*'s attempts to blame her for his own failures.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ It is telling that both Woolf's *Three Guineas* and Garro's *Semana de colores* can be read as public responses to their husband's thinking about masculine identity: Leonard Woolf's claims in *Quack! Quack!* and Octavio Paz's claims in "Los hijos de la Malinche," which he published in 1950, while they were still married, though it took her fourteen years to respond, which she didn't share publicly until 1964, shortly after their divorce and her fraught return to Mexico. In Leonard Woolf's essay, the fascist is the savage opposed to his "civilized" man. For Paz, the *mestiza* is the curse of passivity against which the *mestizo* must assert his independence. In both cases, the women writers indirectly expose their husbands' limited perspectives that allow them to ignore or at least violently simplify the other in their conception of the complex self. And in both responses, the difficulty of establishing blame is foregrounded. Like Woolf, Garro emphasizes the cyclical nature of violence, specifically of betrayal, and the basis of culture, which she allegorizes as a process of storytelling, in this violence. Most of all, she returns the possibility of practical agency to her feminine identities.

The narrative of Garro's "La culpa es de los Tlaxcaltecas" reveals the problems of Mexican and especially Mexican women's identities to be far more complicated than Paz makes it seem, troubling the judgments that he bases upon binary oppositions that structure the identities of Mexican men and women as conqueror and conquered, closed and opened, violator and violated or *chingón* and *chingada*. According to Paz, the *mestizo* struggles to emerge from a complex mix of the two binaries, and to renounce the violated mother, La Malinche, but the *mestiza* is forced to perpetually perform as the passive, even her betrayal is forced upon her. She can have no agency. Garro's Malinche is as complexly active and passive as Paz's *mestizo*, and her layering of narrative voices, including upper class and working class, *mestiza* and indigenous voices, and the exchanges between them that function as simulacra of possible exchanges between reader and the text, reveal the difficulty of finding a way out of the cycles of violence that plague Mexican history, primarily because *both* men and women are never certain of their place or time within the cycle.

The story of La Malinche was appropriated most obviously by Bernal Díaz del Castillo, which is the text that Laura Aldama is obsessed with in "La culpa". Díaz' account was an overt attempt to challenge the other Spanish accounts that he had read, which he found fictional and self-interested. He asserts constantly that he was there, that he saw and heard the stories he tells, and he repeatedly addresses and contradicts other accounts of his contemporaries by name. In his version, which weaves the Biblical narratives of Eve and Mary, but also of Moses, he suggests that La Malinche, or doña Marina, as the Spanish named her, was a "gift" from God to the Spanish.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ It is significant that La Malinche has no name, or rather, as Sandra Messinger Cypress explains, she has many (Stoll 118). La Malinche is the *mestizo* appropriation of the Spanish appropriation of what is only believed to be her indigenous name, Malin-tzin, which the Spanish ear received as Malinalli, meaning herb, the symbol of the day of her birth, the fourteenth day of the Mexica calendar. It is interesting that the Spanish named her Marina, which invokes both the sea and specifically the harbor, the passive receiver of the Spanish ships. It also brings my own reading/writing back to Nietzsche's work through one of his most famous feminist readers, Luce Irigaray, who calls herself and her work, a

According to Díaz, Marina was the daughter of a *cacique*, or chief of a town called Paynala, and after her father died, her mother remarried and bore her new husband a son. Because they feared for their son's inheritance, they sold Malinalli as a slave to the people of Xicalango, who gave her to the Tabascans, who, in turn, gave her as a "gift" to Cortés, which Díaz emphasizes was far more valuable than any other gift they had received or would receive from those they defeated. Because she spoke several of the tribal dialects in addition to Nahuatl, she was instrumental in helping Cortés to unify several tribes, including the Tlaxcalans, against the Mexica, which made it possible for him to capture Tenochtitlán. So the story of the Tlaxcalan betrayal returns to the story of La Malinche, who, like the Tlaxcalans, empowered herself by helping the Spanish.

Díaz's version of her story praises "Marina's" conversion to Christianity, and tells how "God had been very gracious to her, freeing her from the worship of idols

troubled homage to Nietzsche, *Amante marine –Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*, where she speaks to Nietzsche from the perspective of water, the fluid, which she argues he fears because he associates with femininity, the power of woman/water against his attempts to reason and understand.

Even more revealing of the complexities of identity that surround La Malinche and all who identify with her, is that the name 'Malinche' was actually the name the indigenous people gave to Cortés. "In every town we passed through and in others that had only heard of us, they called Cortés Malinche, and I shall call him by this name henceforth in recording any conversations he had with Indians, both in this province [Tlascalala] and in the city of Mexico, and I shall only call him Cortés in such places as it may be proper. The reason why he received this name was that Doña Marina was always with him, especially when he was visited by ambassadors or *Caciques*, and she always spoke to them in the Mexican language. So they gave Cortés the name of 'Marina's Captain', which was shortened to Malinche" (172). Frances Karttunen claims that it was the Tlaxcalans who first called Cortés "Malinche," which they began to do after their first encounter with him in 1519 during which Malinalli took center stage as his interpreter (Karttunen 9). She cites Bernal Díaz as her source, whom I have cited above, but she does not cite the specific place in his text where he says that it was the Tlaxcalan's who began this practice, and I have not been able to find it myself. Anyhow, Malinche was the name the indigenous people gave him because Malinalli spoke to them for him, and he was her "captain," confounding the relations of power—he belongs to her, depends on her, but is also her superior, which performs a complex reversal and reiteration of a traditional marriage where the wife takes her husband's name. The narratives of "La culpa" and "El árbol" both suggest that marriage makes a woman suspect insofar as her decision to take her husband's name has made her complicit with patriarchy. And to further complicate things, the nick-name "Malinche" returned to Malinalli over the course of time, with all of its sullied connotations. She is forever memorialized, named as Malin-tzin's captain, as her conquest of the Spanish conquest of herself. This process of reversed appropriations and others like it perform the labyrinth of storytelling become myth that confounds time and identity.

and making her a Christian, and letting her bear a son to her lord and master Cortés” who then married her to a “gentleman” Juan Jaramillo. In return for all of the “gifts” she received, Díaz tells us that she “would rather serve her husband and Cortés than anything else in the world, and would not exchange her place to be the Cacique of all the provinces in New Spain” (69). We can only begin to imagine the complicated mixture of identification and resistance with which Laura Aldama reads these words, but we know that in her version, the indigenous woman betrays because she is afraid, afraid of the Spanish man, but also, of her own people.

In “El árbol,” Luisa speaks further as and for La Malinche, suggesting that, like Laura, patriarchal mores have kept her isolated from other women, have not allowed her to forge a real sense of community and hence responsibility for her people. Phallogocentric versions of myths and legends have further compounded the problem, making her the origin of sin, the bearer of guilt, and the passive receiver of male violence. In Garro’s first novel, *Los recuerdos del porvenir*, Isabel Moncada, who functions as another betraying Malinche figure, is juxtaposed with Julia who is figured as a conflation of Greek and indigenous goddesses, admired for their beauty and blamed for the misfortunes that befell these civilizations.⁵⁸ Isabel, like La Malinche, replaces the mythical ideal woman with a more material, historical version. Julia’s escape from the town of Ixtepec and from the story, opens the door for Isabel’s betrayal of her own family and community by becoming the lover of their sado-fascist military ruler, General Rosas. Isabel goes to the top of a mountain to ask the virgin for forgiveness, but on her way, she “gets lost”, and her maid, Gregoria, finds her at the bottom of the hill, turned to stone. She is terrified and crosses herself, “something tells her that Isabel didn’t want to save herself: that she was still very much rooted

⁵⁸ The name Julia is also Herrick’s muse as Laura is Petrarch’s, invoking the European poetic tradition as yet another narrative in this network that builds upon and contributes to the oppressive, especially for the woman writer, figures of the ideal feminine goddess-muse in western literature.

within the General Francisco Rosas” (294)⁵⁹. Suggesting that she refused to renounce her love for Rosas by replacing it with some love she is supposed to feel for the equally oppressive figure of “the Virgin.”

Garro wrote and published the stories in *La semana de colores* two years after *Los Recuerdos del Porvenir*, and, as Sandra Messinger Cypress suggests, in her later work, she seems to “appeal more to the possibility of change [and] transforms the closed stone-like circularity of *Los recuerdos* into an open-ended textuality” (Stoll 128). Cypress uses textuality in Barthes’ sense, as always a network of texts that extends any response to the text. The hope in “La culpa...” lies not in Laura’s escape from time, which like Julia’s end, seems an apocalyptic desire for the end of all earthly things, but in her ability to share her story with Nacha and the possibilities that she gives Nacha for a new identity, a new destiny emerging from the layered temporalities and identities of the text. Garro suggests that the problem is that La Malinche has never been allowed to speak back to Díaz and to Paz, and to explain that her experience is just as complexly positive and negative as their own, that she is not, as Isabel tells Rosas, “the only guilty one” (273). Laura’s story suggests that La Malinche was a victim of her circumstances, torn from her family, sold as a slave, who

⁵⁹ En su carrera para encontrar a su amante, Isabel Moncada se perdió. Después de mucho buscarla, Gregoria la halló tirada muy abajo, convertida en una piedra, y aterrada se santiguó. Algo le decía que la niña Isabel no quería salvarse: estaba muy sembrada en el General Francisco Rosas” (294). I have translated “sembrada” rather awkwardly as “rooted within the General Francisco Rosas” because I want to maintain the meaning of the word sembrar (to sow or to plant) which, besides the story of the tree/woman’s body as the locus of the secret in “El árbol” invokes another story, passed down in oral traditions from the Mexica, of “The Hungry Woman,” whose body is covered with mouths, and whom the gods accidentally break in half, and then plant in the ground. She becomes the earth, that however much it drinks is still thirsty for rain, and however many bodies it consumes, is still always hungry for more bodies, though Isabel’s story reverses the roles. In her version, it is the woman who is “planted” in the insatiable man. I also want to maintain the sexual connotation of both the story of the Hungry Woman and Isabel’s story. The suggestion may be that she, like Malinche, was pregnant with the seed, the child of her betrayal, perpetuating that cycle of betrayal, fear, and guilt. In which case, Gregoria’s pronouncement that she didn’t want to save herself can be read as, she wanted to save us—Isabel becomes a martyr as well, she breaks the cycle at least temporarily, in the sacrifice of herself and her unborn child. A reading like this immediately challenges Cypress’ reading of the earlier novel as an example of “stone circularity”. It already exceeds itself and opens itself.

empowered herself by listening and learning the languages of her captors, and who was, as a result of these circumstances, much more flexible and able to turn the Spanish conquest to her advantage. Her private history made it certain that she was no more loyal to her own people than she was to the Spanish. On the contrary, she found more “freedom” under Spanish rule in much the same way that Luisa finds more freedom in prison. The stories warn men and women that their identities are inextricably bound, and when you dehumanize another, whether because he is a different color, a different gender, or a different class, you ultimately dehumanize, and in a very real sense, kill yourself. Oppression, as we see with Pablo and with Marta, is a form of self-hatred ultimately culminating in suicide. This is what Paz might have learned if he would have let La Malinche speak.

In both stories, the narratives give time, specifically mythopoetic time, in which to perform different subject positions of storyteller and listener that function analogously to the positions of writer and reader, and allow us to learn from the more or less violent effects of those positions and exchanges.

Garro’s stories, like Derrida’s *Given Time*, suggest that the possibilities of finding a way out of this cycle of oppression and violence, or at least of temporarily suspending it, depend almost solely upon our ability to play in and with fictional bodies, spaces, and temporalities. This is the ultimate gift of fiction, as stated above, that it gives time, but it also depends upon a certain credulity, a certain generosity, a certain sacrifice of time and self on the part of the reader.

The gift gives, demands, and takes time. The thing gives, demands, or takes time. That is one of the reasons this thing of the gift will be linked to the—internal—necessity of a certain narrative [*récit*] or of a certain poetics of narrative. That is why we will take account of “Counterfeit Money” and of the impossible account [*compte-rendu*] that is Baudelaire’s tale. The thing as given thing, the given of the gift arrives, if it arrives, only in narrative. And in a poetic simulacrum of narrative” (41).

As the “poematic simulacrum of narrative” suggests, it isn’t just the virtuality of fiction that opens up the possibilities for new identities, new exchanges, it is the degree to which fictional narratives are about narrative itself.

Derrida wants to explore the analogy he finds between fictional narrative, or more precisely, between meta-fictional narrative, and this possibility of a gift, both the possibility of the existence of something like a “pure” gift, but also the possibilities for alternatives, in Woolf’s words, “for finding new words and creating new methods” that this gift may open. This *mise en abîme* of narratives, like Laura’s and Luisa’s narratives within narratives that are also narratives “about” other narratives, exposes the “counterfeit” nature of fiction insofar as it depends upon a doubling, upon simulacrum. Like counterfeit money, the meta-narrative performs a false copy of an already false thing that upon closer analysis exposes our tendency to forget the falseness of its models, any account of life itself, the way Nietzsche’s fragment could lead some to forget that his other work was also, inherently, “fragmentary.” In the case of counterfeit money, it helps us forget that legitimate currency is nothing but a promise of value that is realized only in the “process” or “acts” of exchange.⁶⁰ It is always already counterfeit, in the French, “*fausse*” or false, insofar as it is not what it appears to be or what we take it for and its functions depend upon that falseness and the promise of value or the credit that we lend it that may never need to be called, just perpetually exchanged. This promise and the conditional nature of the term of this promise (its temporality as necessarily conditional since it must not be clear, either in the case of the gift or in the case of currency, when, exactly, it will be discovered or recognized as valuable or not) is made possible by the temporality, the relation to chronological time, of the fictional narrative.

⁶⁰ The currency itself, has no value. The word currency or *la liquide* as the French call it, implies its fluidity, its lack of its own “proper” identity.

The meta-fictional narrative, in particular, gives time by layering or multiplying the narratives and possible responses to those narratives, prolonging indefinitely the time of response. No response can be commensurate with the work itself, though any single response may exceed the work in unforeseen ways, or, in the opposite extreme, possibilities may become overwhelming and preclude any kind of response at all. Indeed, in the case of Garro's stories, as with Woolf's, we have a writer's narrative, a narrator's narrative, the characters' narratives, the characters' narratives of other characters' narratives, and many possible readers' narratives, making a network of exchanges that results in our inability to calculate what is given and what is received and by whom, offering a way out of what Derrida calls a "cold economic rationality" (42), which both Woolf and Garro associate with patriarchal attempts to oppress its "outsiders." The layering of narratives, which constantly requires different narrators to speak for or as an other, to speculate or to recall what the other might have done or did, blurs boundaries and identities, a suspended melding of selves and others in an example of Lacanian *jouissance* that can have both pleasurable and horrifying effects, but, I argue is a necessary precondition for responsible action, for our ability to recognize always tentative assertions from which these actions emerge.

In "La culpa", Laura tells Nacha that each time she meets her first husband, they are in the midst of battle, and that this battle marks the "end of man." It is an apocalypse, after which, there will be no more distinctions: she and her first husband, her future and her past, her mestiza and indigenous identities will all collapse, representing an apocalyptic/erotic solution to the problem of identity, a mythical solution, and one that clearly, as most mythical solutions tend to do, depends upon and perpetuates violence.

Each time Laura disappears, her own sense of time becomes increasingly mythical. An afternoon for her is two days for Nacha who remembers that, upon her second return, Josefina had to show Laura the local paper where Pablo and Margarita had placed a missing person report two days prior. By the third return, the one which begins the narrative, Nacha tells Laura that Pablo has been away for ten weeks. That the several months he spent searching for her had weakened him terribly. This time, Laura isn't surprised. Laura's experience of time as slowing, marks her increased separation from the "material" world, which is finally severed when the coyotes appear (indigenous mythological figures of passage between the world of the living and the world of the dead) followed by her first cousin husband, who comes to take her away, fulfilling the prophecy that time will end for them and they will become one. The implication is that Laura, from the moment she first appears at the door, is already dead, that Nacha's hesitant decision to let her in is a decision to open herself up to a ghost story, but the narrator insists on the material traces that Laura and the indigenous man leave behind, the lines of blood and burns on her dress, and puddles of blood at the window, the lipstick marks on a cigarette, all of which function as tropes for the writing on the page.

Perhaps the narrator is trying to tell us that all writing is ghost writing, that whenever we truly open ourselves up to a story, it always turns out to be a ghost story, and that, like Nacha, we have to accept it and participate in it, to receive it as a gift. Otherwise, it will be a curse, as it is for Pablo and Margarita and for Marta in "El árbol." The function of storytelling in Garro's stories, emphasizes the need for receptivity, for memory on the part of the listener. The story is a violent web that invokes many other stories of violence, and once we allow ourselves to receive one, we receive all of them and are better able to understand the degree to which we depend upon these myths and the violence they perpetuate for our sense of self and to

question whether or not this sense of self is necessary. Perhaps this is what Nacha does; this is why, after listening to Laura's story, "she no longer finds herself in the Aldama home," and why she sets out to seek a new destiny, not even waiting around long enough to collect her wages. Her reward for accepting Laura and her story is the possibility of a new destiny, though we wonder whether this destiny represents false hope, whether it will confirm her initial hesitation before she allowed herself to receive the narrative. Only time will tell.

Nacha, as soon as she hears the call and opens the door, performs as the ideal receptive and active listener, allowing herself to receive Laura's story as a gift and responding simply by adding to it.

Both of Garro's stories, like early versions of Woolf's letter, begin with a call, literalized in the representation of a knock at the door. In Garro's case, the interpellation is re-presented as a call that pulls a hesitating "listener" into a conversation against her will. "La culpa" opens with a narrator telling us that "Nacha oyó que llamaban en la puerta de la cocina y se quedó quieta." Her immediate response to the call (she avoids calling it a knock) is to remain still.⁶¹ After "they" (the indefinite pronoun is plural—in this case evoking the unidentifiable plurality of interpellation, of an address that is always also the appeal to being and to identity) "insisted again" or "volvieron a insistir", Nacha opens the door "con sigilo" implying secrecy or stealth. At first she only sees the night, and suddenly, "la señora Laura apareció con un dedo en los labios en señal de silencio" (27). Nacha whispers an

⁶¹ Tabea Alexa Linhard compares Nacha to Josefá Bórquez, whom Elena Poniatowska interviewed and then retold her story, transforming her into the character Jesusa Palancares in *Hasta no verte Jesús mio*. In Poniatowska's novel, the tension between Josefá's telling and her refusal to tell and the writer's attempts to get her to speak is incorporated into the narrative, which Linhard argues, using Spivak's concept, becomes a story about "a native informant who wants to sleep" (148). Linhard compares Jesusa and Nacha to Carmen Boulosa's "indígena de 'las manos tibias'" in her novel, *Duerme*, arguing that each of these indigenous women's characters function in the narratives as the silence upon which the narrative depends, the ultimate objects of desire for the narratives and the bodies that the narratives sacrifice, sometimes violently, in order to assert their own existence, their own discourse.

exclamation, identifying Laura as her marital status: “¡Señora!...—suspiró Nacha”, and the narrator tells us that Laura “looks at *the cook* with interrogating eyes [emphasis mine]”, identifying her as her work, and “[t]hen, confidently, she sits next to the stove and looks at her kitchen as if she had never seen it before” (27).⁶² Laura’s call is hesitatingly answered by Nacha, who immediately calls back to her, each emphasizing a particular aspect of the other’s identity. Laura is “the wife” and Nacha is “the cook.” The plural, unidentifiable call immediately provokes the exchange of identities, the desire to identify self and other.

Nacha immediately shows Laura that she “has given herself over to the call” by returning her call, an exchange which is repeated or redoubled when Laura calls back to Nacha, this time by name, “Nachita, dame un cafecito...Tengo frío.” Nacha responds, addressing her again, as “the” wife, and revealing why this identity takes precedence for her at this time: “Señora, el señor...el señor la va a matar. Nosotros ya la dábamos por muerta.” The first words Nacha speaks to Laura are about her husband, and her fear that he will certainly kill Laura this time, that they had all already “given her up for dead”. This thought may be further explained by the fact that Laura’s body has already addressed Nacha, for we are told by the narrator that Nacha saw that Laura is “still wearing the white dress, burnt and soiled with earth and blood”, which re-appears throughout the narrative (in free indirect discourse between the narrator’s and Nacha’s thoughts) as the sign of her betrayal to which Pablo has already reacted with physical violence by beating her. Laura responds to Nacha’s concerns by turning her statement into a question, “¿Por muerta?” Then she performs her self-effacement by curling herself into a ball on the chair, wrapping her arms

⁶² “La señora Laura entró de puntillas y miró con ojos interrogantes a la cocinera. Luego, confiada, se sentó junto a la estufa y miró su cocina como si no la hubiera visto nunca” (27). All translations in this chapter are mine unless otherwise specified.

around her knees, and thinking while Nacha goes to work boiling the water for her coffee.

It is only when Nacha furtively looks at Laura “out of the corner of her eye,” that the narrator identifies her differently, not as Pablo’s wife, but as equally (with Pablo), Nacha’s boss, “miró de reajo a su patrona”, and then Nacha can no longer speak, “no se ocurrió ni una palabra más”. She only sees that, again referring to her as the wife, “la señora recargó la cabeza sobre las rodillas, parecía muy triste” (27)⁶³. It is important to remember that it isn’t clear when we have access to Nacha’s thoughts in the narrator’s telling, the possibility that we never access anything in this story that is Nacha’s, remains throughout, and compels a very different reading. However, if we assume that these are Nacha’s thoughts, what the narrator recounts here is Nacha’s ambivalence, the degree to which as a woman, as a wife, as a victim of her husband’s violence, Laura provokes Nacha’s sympathy, all the while her status as *patrona*, as complicit with the patriarchy, with the law of the *pater*, distances her from Nacha. Her response to Laura’s call is held in reserve, suspended.

Derrida cites Jean Luc Marion, explaining that what the gift of fiction actually amounts to depends upon the receptiveness of the receiver, her willingness to temporarily allow herself to be called into being.

What is given is given only to whoever gives himself over to the call and only in the pure form of a confirmation of the appeal, repeated because received....The call thus appears as the originary schema of the two former reductions, precisely because it alone permits one to go back to...in that it demands that one give oneself over to the call as such—to answer the call, in the double sense of abandoning oneself to it and of going toward it...It would already suffice to specify that which, before or without *Dasein*, receives or challenges the call, in short hears it. Neither the constituting *I* nor *Dasein* which is—if

⁶³ “Laura looked with surprise at the white tile of the kitchen, drew her legs upon the chair, hugged her knees and remained in thought. Nacha put the water to boil to make the coffee and looked at her *patrona* from a different perspective; not another single word came to her. The *señora* lowered her head upon her knees, she seemed very sad” (27).

precisely it can still be—the one that gives itself over to the call that gives?” (Jean Luc Marion quoted in Derrida fn.51-52).

But Garro’s story questions the degree to which the reader’s receptivity must be tempered by her creativity, her ability to both listen to and construct the story herself, and proposes that interpersonal exchanges are more successful when the teller is merely lead to believe, whether it is true or not, that the listener is completely receptive, a “captive” audience. The listener, as Nacha performs, must be equally engaged in the exchange of identities with the teller, without disrupting the tale. In “La culpa es de los Tlaxcaltecas”, Nacha whatever her reservations, convinces Laura that she is nothing but receptive. If she hesitates, initially, she keeps her hesitations to herself. She doesn’t allow Laura access to her distance. On the contrary, after looking “interrogatingly” at Nacha, Laura feels confident that she can go on with her story.

When she begins her story by restating the title of the story as a rhetorical question posed to Nacha, “Sabes, Nacha? La culpa es de los tlaxcaltecas”, the narrator tells us that Nacha does not respond, using the word “contestar,” which could imply both response and objection or denial. Instead, we are told that Nacha “prefers” to watch the water that wasn’t boiling.⁶⁴ She withdraws from the conversation into her work. The narrator makes Nacha’s withdrawal, analogous to the space of the kitchen, which is “separated from the world by an invisible wall of sadness, by a compass of hope”, emphasizing the walls and boundaries, particularly the circular boundary of hope itself in the time and space of telling as necessarily time outside of time and space outside of space, a suspension of both. The fact that the narrator and perhaps Nacha conceive of this hope she places in the story as precisely this circular process, this return, explains Nacha’s reservations and why she prefers to watch the still water on the stove. She is not sure whether the dangers inherent in this withdrawal, in this

⁶⁴ “Nacha no contestó, prefirió mirar el agua que no hervía” (27).

suspension of time and space, and in the temporary giving of herself or the temporary lending of part of herself, her decision to “lend an ear,” will outweigh the benefits.

Nacha’s work functions as an alibi for the “crime” of not wanting to listen to the story, of assuming that the hope it might offer will be false, that the promise of an alternative to her misery or at least the meaning of it will not be kept. Her work gives her the time to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of accepting Laura’s story, and she apparently decides to suspend judgment, to listen, and unlike Luisa, the storyteller in “El árbol,” Laura never has any inkling that Nacha doubts the validity of her story. After the brief pause, which is filled with Nacha’s thoughts and her work in preparing the coffee, Laura follows her statement that it is the fault of the *Tlaxcaltecas* by directly asking Nacha if she agrees that they are, in fact, to blame. She doesn’t even have to tell Nacha what she thinks they are guilty of. Nacha responds with a simple, “Sí, señora.” Nacha either already knows or doesn’t think she needs to know their crime.⁶⁵ Laura then identifies herself with the Tlaxcalans, saying that she is treacherous like they were. Then she asks Nacha if she is also “*traidora*.” The narrator reports Laura’s thoughts that “if Nacha shared her treacherous nature, she would understand, and Laura needed for somebody to understand her that night.”⁶⁶ Again, what Laura does here, which in a sense, is also what Luisa will do in “El árbol,” is confirm that her audience is receptive before she even begins to tell the story. This is a key difference between a spoken conversation and a written conversation, even of the most personal kind, like a letter. In the spoken conversation,

⁶⁵ --¿No estás de acuerdo, Nacha?

--Sí, señora...

⁶⁶ --Yo soy como ellos: traidora...—dijo Laura con melancolía

La cocinera se cruzó de brazos en espera de que el agua soltara los hervores.

--¿Y tu, Nachita, eres traidora?

La miro con esperanzas. Si Nacha compartía su calidad traidora, la entendería, y Laura necesitaba que alguien la entendiera esa noche.

the speaker can decide whether or not her audience is willing to receive her story before she decides to tell it. She has more control over her decision to give her tale to an individual receiver.

In Laura's case, since she is so cautious, we could assume that if Nacha doesn't answer to her liking, she will not share her story. In "El árbol," Luisa doesn't ask Marta questions to find out whether or not she understands her. More like a traditional writer or lecturer, she keeps asserting the same statements, which Marta chooses to deny. Luisa, in turn, responds by denying the statements that Marta asserts, until finally, Marta asserts a statement that she cannot deny. Marta tells her that she is possessed by a demon, which provokes Luisa to tell the story that becomes a form of revenge against Marta. Marta, in turn, tries and fails to appropriate Luisa's story and redirect it as another assault against Luisa. Still, Luisa waits to tell her story until she finds out that her listener does, in fact, understand something about her, even if the understanding appears as a judgment, a condemnation of her that Luisa is forced to accept, not a question about her own identity that she asks the listener to confirm as Laura does. In fact, the entire "transaction" between teller and listener that frames the tale in "El árbol" is the violent obverse, or rather, the dangerous supplement to the openness of both Nacha and Laura in "La culpa".

Laura, like Luisa, needs Nacha to understand her, to agree with her. Nacha realizes and we along with her, that she needed to hear Laura's story. In response to Laura's question of whether or not Nacha shares her treacherous nature, Nacha, after a few more moments of reflection filled with the work of preparing and serving the coffee, sits beside her *patrona* and tells her, "Yes, I too am *traicionera, señora Laurita*". Her use of the word *traicionera* instead of *traidora*, signifies her identification of herself and also of Laura as distinct from the Tlaxcalans, as, specifically a woman who betrays a lover. She develops Laura's self-condemnation as

well as her own, and then acknowledges her affection for Laura in her use of the diminutive form of her name, “Laurita.” It is only at this point that Laura begins to tell her story to Nacha, and, as her repetition of the story’s title suggests, her story is a simulacrum of the narrator’s narrative, repeating but also commenting on that narrative in the series of three exchanges between Laura’s indigenous self and her indigenous husband.

She tells Nacha that while she waited near the stranded car for her mother-in-law, Margarita, to return, she found herself upon the white bridge over the white, arid lake, paved with flat, white rocks. She looks at the sun, which had also turned white, signaling a reversal of time and the arrival of the girl she once was. At that moment, she looked at the hem of her white dress, and she heard footsteps and looked up to see her first cousin, husband, an indigenous man battling the Spanish, who with the help of the Tlaxcalans, have invaded ancient Mexico City, Tenochtitlán. Laura, who suddenly finds herself in the midst of this battle, taking place in 1521, can only think of the “magnitude” of her own treachery. She is afraid and wants to flee, but “time closes in around her,” and she is forced to face him.

His call, which functions analogously to Laura’s call to Nacha, is first the sound of his footsteps, and then, it is visual, as Laura’s call is to Nacha (and Luisa’s is to Marta). However, in the case of the indigenous man and indigenous woman, the body is clearly racially identified, whereas Laura’s body, that of “white” privilege is neutral. Nacha focuses on her gestures and her clothes, not on the color of her skin, eyes, and hair. In fact, Laura’s features are never described throughout the narrative, indicating the way in which Nacha’s thoughts are completely subsumed by Laura’s perspective, that of the teller who cannot see herself telling. She also assumes the role

of the privileged person who does not recognize her own privilege.⁶⁷ She describes her first cousin husband to Nacha, his silence and the blood running from a wound on his shoulder that is “so red it looks black.” As she describes him, his blood becomes ink that will memorialize his return in the form of written lines on Laura’s white dress.⁶⁸ The red/black blood/ink on her dress, his black eyes and black hair against the white light are all tropes for the writing on the page, functioning analogously to the ancient stories passed down orally and, at least partially, inscribed in a dialectic relationship with figures, “written,” in red and black ink by the sacred scribes of the Mexica. The images of Laura’s dress and the body of her first husband function as a palimpsest communicating their shared history as one of both indigenous and contemporary Mexican storytellers, and the many influences in between. The palimpsest, multiplies the network of communication that already existed for the Mexica, whose scribes used a combination of spoken words, written symbols, and painted images to communicate a single story. A multimedia presentation where each medium illustrates, diverges from, and even contradicts the other. The indigenous man need not speak, she tells Nacha, his body tells Laura that he is fleeing in defeat,

⁶⁷ Laura already performs a more subtle and self-conscious version of Marta’s blindness to her own privilege, her limited perspective. The suggestion is that when the privileged has to listen to the subaltern speak, however much she is able to recognize material and physical differences between herself and the subaltern, she cannot account for the effects of those differences on her discourse. The subaltern cannot speak unless she is able to use the discourse of the oppressor, and if she does so, she is no longer subaltern. What this means is that if we really want change, if we want to end oppression, we have to change the discourse of the oppressor. Spivak explains: “what I really want to learn about is what I have called the unlearning of one’s privilege. So that, not only does one become able to listen to that other constituency, but one learns to speak in such a way that one will be taken seriously by that other constituency. And furthermore, to recognize that the position of the speaking subject within theory can be an historically powerful position when it wants the other actually to be able to answer back. As a feminist concerned about women, that’s the positions that interests me more” (*Postcolonial* 42). Marta, we will see is oblivious to her own privilege, and she expects the same discourse from the subaltern, similarly to the way Pablo expects Laura to speak within his discourse and judges her mad when she does not. The result of these impossible expectations is, in both cases, physical violence.

⁶⁸ “The *tlacuilo* or artist-scribe, ‘the master of the black ink and the red ink’ as the Mexica poetically referred to him, was a respected and essential figure in the preservation of indigenous culture. We should notice, however, that this skill and knowledge was socially limited. Only a few people, always boys, were trained to be a *tlacuilo* and the books or codices they produced became the exclusive possessions of the priesthood, rulers, and nobility” (Schwartz 21).

that she deserves to be punished by death, and that, at the same time, her death would mean his own. This visual communication will reiterate and undermine the many versions of their story, suspending our judgments indefinitely. Are they ghosts? Is she mad? Is he a rapist? Or, ironically, if we receive Laura's first lesson that she draws from her story as the truth, is the most incredibly complex explanation, the truth?--a significant reversal of Okham's razor and the epistemological traditions it reiterates and perpetuates.⁶⁹

Laura tells Nacha that she breaks his silence, repeating to her first husband the title of the story and her first words to Nacha: "La culpa es de los tlaxcaltecas." He looks at the sky and then into her eyes, and asks her, "what are you doing to yourself?" She tells Nacha that "she couldn't tell him that she had married, because she is married to him. There are things that you cannot say, you know this, Nachita" (29)⁷⁰. She simply assumes Nacha's knowledge, which serves as one of the several ironic reminders that Nacha doesn't really tell Laura or the reader anything. Her assumption of Nacha's understanding is repeated in her assumption of her first husband's knowledge. She tells him, "you already know that I am afraid, and because of this, I betrayed," explaining her betrayal as well as the Tlaxcalans' with whom he has just been fighting. He confirms her assumption, "I already know." She addresses Nacha again, explaining that she knew him since they were children, that they grew up together, and that on that bridge she felt shame. She refers again to the blood running down his chest. She tries to clean him, but he grabs her hand, telling her that it looks

⁶⁹ Laura's first lesson that she draws from her own story and shares with Nacha and the reader is that "todo lo increíble es verdadero", which she claims to have realized the instant that she recognized her first cousin husband (29).

⁷⁰ "—La culpa es de los tlaxcaltecas—le dije.

"El se volvió a mirar al cielo. Después recogió otra vez sus ojos sobre los míos.

"¿Que te haces?—me preguntó con su voz profunda. No pude decirle que me había casado, porque estoy casada con él. Hay cosas que no se pueden decir, tú lo sabes, Nachita" (29). Laura's assumption that Nacha knows there are things you cannot say, is also yet another ironic reminder that Nacha doesn't tell her story, that she only facilitates Laura's telling.

pale, that it looks like one of their (the Spanish) hands. She explains the source of the difference: it has been a long time since the sunlight has touched her.⁷¹ They remain silent as the “threads” of blood “write on his chest that his heart will continue to hold/guard her words and her body”. She shares her second lesson with Nacha, that “time and love are only one”. She continues to share these discoveries or lessons with Nacha throughout her telling, interrupting her narrative to address her directly. Neither Nacha nor the narrator responds at any of these moments. Laura simply continues her telling, suggesting that these discoveries are silently accepted and may or may not bear the importance for Nacha that they do for Laura. Almost all of her insights reveal her desire for the erasure of differences at any cost, a sort of erotic apocalypse, ending history and time with the unification of all things, which, for Nacha, could affirm the falseness of the hope she has placed in the story as a possible way out of the problems of her own identity. But there is much more to Laura’s story than the lessons that she claims to have drawn from it.

There is another possible explanation for Nacha’s silence each time Laura shares the most profound insights that her story has yielded for her. In a similar exchange between Laura and her first husband, he tells her that he will always have a place for her in his heart, and he draws two parallel lines in the earth that extend until they become one. He tells her that the lines represent the two of them. She addresses Nacha, explaining that she is left “without words.” He has foreshadowed the course of the narrative, and in “figuring” that narrative, has appropriated her own “telling.” He tells her that they will soon become one, and that is why he went looking for her. She tells Nacha that she had forgotten her indigenous belief that once time ended, they

⁷¹ “—Está muy desteñida, parece una mano de ellos—me dijo.”

“—Hace ya tiempo que no me pega el sol—bajo los ojos y me dejó caer la mano. Estuvimos así, en silencio, oyendo correr la sangre sobre su pecho. No me reprochaba nada, bien sabe de lo que soy capaz. Pero los hilos de su sangre escribían sobre su pecho que su corazón seguía guardando mis palabras y mi cuerpo. Allí supe, Nachita, que el tiempo y el amor son uno solo” (29).

would remain, each within the other, only one. But just as he reminds her, the battle draws near, and he tries to protect her. She tells him that “this is the end of man,” and he confirms her words, “‘it is’—he replies with his voice around hers [...]”, writing “signs of blood on her breast and on her white dress, which becomes striped like a red and white tiger.”⁷² These moments in the indigenous man’s telling reiterated in Laura’s telling and performed in the narrative itself, defy response. The end is always a repetition, a return, another end to another story a return to potential or endless possibility. The “truth” or the germ of wisdom of the story, the moral or lesson, becomes a crux, a welling up of meaning, a superimposition of stories as both means to an end and as ends in themselves that resist language. At these moments, there is only silence, and these pregnant silences are perhaps for Laura, for Nacha, and for the reader, the moments when they accept the story as a gift. But not everyone “reads” and listens this way.

Upon her first return, her mother-in-law, Margarita, sees the signs on her dress, the blood on her lips, and the dirt in her hair. She asks her if she’s wounded. The mechanic that Margarita has brought to fix the car assumes that Laura has been attacked by a “savage indian”. Laura’s report of their “interpretation” of the story told by the writing on Laura’s dress as a story of a rape is consistent with their later interpretation of her behavior as madness brought on by the trauma of that rape, an interpretation that runs parallel to and calls into question Laura’s “epic” tale of history, violence, and identity. The “psychoanalytic” interpretation of the story is developed as Pablo and Margarita’s version when they ask a doctor to come. Laura tells Nacha that he “asked about her childhood and about her father and her mother, but I, Nachita,

⁷² “Éste es el final del hombre—dije.

“Así es—contestó con su voz encima de la mía. Y me vi en sus ojos y en su cuerpo. [...] Su voz escribió signos de sangre en mi pecho y mi vestido blanco quedó rayado como un tigre rojo y blanco” (30).

didn't know which childhood, nor which father, nor which mother he wanted to know about. It is because of this that I talked about the conquest of México. You understand me, right?" (37) Nacha agrees, but the narrator tells us that she is nervous and that she tries to look out the window and can barely see beyond the shadows. Though Nacha, as an ideal listener, reveals no signs of disagreement, places no obstacles before the teller, her thoughts reveal that she, like the reader, is feeling caught in the web of Laura's narrative. There are too many narratives here. In addition to Laura's personal narrative, she invokes Aztec mythology, the story of La Malinche and the conquest of Mexico, the "betrayal" of the Tlaxcalans, and the Freudian family romance. But Nacha doesn't visibly respond to her confusion. Instead, she reflects on Pablo and Margarita's interpretation of the doctor's story. When he tells them that she was only interested in talking about Bernal Díaz del Castillo's story of the conquest of México, they both interpret this as madness. Perhaps Nacha heeds their example and the suffering it causes for them, and suspends her own judgment, her own re-action. These competing narratives, like the two lines the indigenous man draws on the sand, are resolved by Nacha's disappearance at the end of the narrative, and with her, Laura's story, at least for Margarita, Pablo, and Josefina, unless it returns one day as Nacha's telling, perhaps even as her writing.

Laura asks Nacha if she remembers her first return. Nacha confirms that she does by nodding her head, but the narrator reports her memories, which are completely focused on filling in the gaps of Laura's narrative from her own perspective. She is participating in and contributing to the telling, letting us know that it had been two months since Laura and her mother-in-law had gone to Guanajuato, and how Josefina, the chambermaid, and she had seen the blood on Laura's dress and her "absent eyes," but that Margarita had signaled them to remain silent. She tells us that Laura insisted on wearing the dress to dinner, which provoked the ire of her husband, who asked her

if she “likes to remember the bad?” His mother silences him. Nacha remembers how Pablo changed the subject and began talking about President López Mateos, which reminds her of a conversation she and Josefina had where they noticed that this was all he ever wanted to talk about and how this must have bored Laura. Apparently, Pablo cannot tell a good story.

Laura interrupts her thoughts, confirming and reiterating them the way Nacha’s thoughts confirm and reiterate her own narrative. She tells her that she “never realized until that night what bored her about Pablo” (31). Nacha responds, again, by merely nodding her head. She still hasn’t spoken since Laura began her story. She breaks her silence for the first time after Laura explains the similarities and differences between her first husband and Pablo. She tells Nacha that Pablo has no memory and only knows about “everyday” things, again distinguishing him from a storyteller.⁷³ But they look alike, they enjoy the water and a cool home, they both look at the sky in the afternoons, but Pablo speaks impatiently in fits and starts. He speaks in “letters not in words,” and he gets angry over nothing and is always asking her what she’s thinking.⁷⁴ She tells Nacha that her first husband “doesn’t do any of these things” (32). Nacha confirms her statement, ““Very true! Very true that *el señor* is annoying!’ said Nacha with disgust.” The narrator reports Laura looking “at her cook with relief. Thank goodness that she had her as a confidant.”⁷⁵

⁷³ ““Es verdad que se le parece, Nacha. A los dos les gusta el agua y las casas frescas. Los dos miran al cielo por las tardes y tienen el pelo negro y los dientes blancos. Pero Pablo habla a saltitos, se enfurece por nada y pregunta a cada instante: “¿En que piensas?” Mi primo marido no hace ni dice nada de eso”” (32).

⁷⁴ A question that Pablo shares with Octavio Paz, though the latter begins to criticize the question itself as a precursor to sadism, he nevertheless identifies himself as one of those who asks: “Woman is a living symbol of the strangeness of the universe, and its radical heterogeneity. As such, does she hide life within herself, or death? What does she think? Or does she think? Is she the same as we are? Sadism begins as a revenge against feminine hermeticism or as a desperate attempt to obtain a response from a body we fear is insensible” (66).

⁷⁵ “--¡Muy cierto! ¡Muy cierto que el señor es fregón!—dijo Nacha con disgusto
Laura suspiró y miró su cocinera con alivio. Menos mal que la tenía de confidente” (32).

Nacha corroborates Laura's claim that her first husband came to look for her at the house while she and Pablo were asleep, remembering that Josefina had seen him, and that all of them saw the "sign" of the blood on the window sill, which provoked Pablo's anger. He immediately turned to the stained white dress lying on a chair and impatiently asks Laura to explain "the origin" of these stains. When Laura doesn't respond, he starts beating her, and Nacha tells us that it was Josefina who heard and saw all of this. When Laura interrupts Nacha's thoughts, again picking up where they leave off, she explains that his violent behavior is as "incoherent as his words," which Nacha affirms simply by saying "It is true" (33). This scene of violence is repeated after Laura's second return, when Pablo, again "reads" her dress, which is now written upon by both blood and burn marks, and when Laura tries to tell him what happened, he flies into another rage, refusing to hear her talk about "the vile indian," telling her that he didn't think she could be "so low" (36).

As Laura's story continues to develop, Nacha takes over more and more of the telling, though her appropriation of the narrative is virtually imperceptible for the reader because it merges so seamlessly in and out of Laura's telling. And, since the narrative is relayed primarily in indirect discourse that constantly slips into free indirect discourse, it cannot be completely appropriated by Nacha, either. Nacha's knowledge is always, at least partially, appropriated by the narrator.

When Nacha pours Laura more coffee and encourages her to drink, she stimulates Laura to tell the story of how she met Pablo and why she fell in love with him. She tells Nacha that she had forgotten about her first husband and only now realized that Pablo must have reminded her of him. When she first met him, she felt a vague sense of "recognition," and throughout their relationship, she had been waiting for Pablo to become a different man, and she never fully understood her disappointment until now. The basis of her "current" love in misrecognition, reiterates

her desire to identify herself in the loved other. This identity as misrecognition reveals the way that Laura's story is really the story of her search for an identity, a national, historical, racial, and gender identity that only becomes possible, that she can only resolve, once she finds a listener who is completely willing to, at least temporarily, "cede" her own story, her own history, her own identity, her own desire. The narrator conveys Nacha's confirmation of Laura's story, again, by "remembering" Pablo's violence, which, as she recounts, is always provoked by Laura's story and his inability to accept it, which Laura then juxtaposes with her first husband, who repeatedly acknowledges her identity as treacherous, explaining that he always knew and that he loves her anyway. Both Laura and Nacha realize that Pablo is merely doing to Laura what she had always done to him, expecting her to be someone else, denying her story, her identity.

Her story signifies the return of what she had previously repressed: her indigenous self, her treacherous self, together with the love of her first husband, and her identity as inextricable, not just from the conquest of Mexico, but from the conflicts that existed before the conquest between her people, the Mexica, and enemy peoples like the Tlaxcaltecas. This is Garro's response to Paz's "Los hijos de la Malinche," where he claims that he and Mexican culture behind him, has arbitrarily chosen the Spanish conquest as an origin for his troubled identity, which she argues, was already troubled before the Spanish came. The Conquest acts for Paz as fascism acts for Virginia Woolf's male contemporaries, basically, a sublimation of their own inherent violence against women and men who they, themselves, have conquered. Laura, in her story, becomes an archaeologist of identity, searching through history, that is always a history of violence, for a way out of that violence, an "other" identity, and all she finds is repetition, the eternal return, even the return of the desire to get outside of violence by getting outside of identity. Nacha, however, because she

engages with Laura's story, helping her work through it by filling it in and extending it without trying to interpret it for herself or for us, learns from the story and shows us how we might learn from it.

While “La culpa es de los tlaxcaltecas” can be read as a story about a “successful” gift of storytelling and the behaviors of both teller and listener that make it possible, “El árbol” emphasizes the destructive potential of the story, and the violent appropriations of teller and listener that contribute to their own destruction.

One of the many possible readings that “El árbol” gives us, suggests that the story is as much a lesson on how not to tell and receive a story as “La culpa” is a portrait of an ideal storytelling transaction. Primarily, in “El árbol,” the ability to listen to the other is significantly disrupted by the relative distance between the class and racial identities of the teller and the listener, placing into serious doubt, the ability of narrative exchanges for bridging the most pronounced gaps. On the contrary, which “La culpa...” suggests as well, we only tell stories to or receive them from those with whom we have already identified. If this identification with the “teller” isn't there, then the exchange becomes more like a struggle for appropriation. In “El árbol,” the narrator tells us that “Saturday, at three in the afternoon, Gabina left.” (123). Gabina is Marta's “Nacha.” From the repeated reports of Marta's thoughts and the way she constantly refers to Gabina's statements, her judgments of Luisa, especially, it is clear that she puts a great deal of stock in Gabina's wisdom, or, and this reaffirms a reading of Nacha as “ideal” listener, Gabina is very good at telling her *patrona* what she wants to hear, which means, repeating and reiterating the *patrona's* thoughts. Gabina's wisdom, her thoughts, like Nacha's, may not be hers. Rather, they may be always already the property of her mistress. This is not at all the relationship between Luisa and Marta.

After watching Gabina leave, Marta returns to her home, surveying its decor, her carpets, and her “densely” woven curtains that “isolate her from the noises and lights of the streets/streetgoers (*callejeras*)—but also a suggestion of women of the street or whores. She is drawn from her thoughts by a loud ring at the door. She is being called by one of those *callejeras*, by Luisa, who will be the storyteller, suggesting a connection between a storyteller and a prostitute.⁷⁶

Marta “cautiously draws near the door,” and before she decides to open it, she asks, “¿Quien?” She hears a childish voice ask, “¿Luisa...?”, suggesting that Luisa is questioning her own identity while the ellipsis shows us that she has more to say but is interrupted. The interruption arrives in the form of another call, an identification, this time Marta’s or the narrator’s address: “Marta opened the door and let the indian enter.” She is further dehumanized by the narrator/Marta who identifies her as “el bulto sombrío y renegrado”, “the blackened, gloomy form”, that enters quickly, passing by Marta, stealing a glance at her “from out of the corner of her eye” (*mirando de reojo a Marta*). Luisa’s entry is the antithesis of Laura’s, which is silent, self-effacing, allowing Nacha the time to look at her and reflect upon her identity. If

⁷⁶ As we explored in the last chapter, Woolf focuses a great deal on the link between writing and prostitution. For Woolf, if you write stories, fictional, biographical, autobiographical, primarily to sell them to an audience, to make money, then you “prostitute your brain.” She argues that if we are to use reading and writing practices to resist violence, these practices must be disinterested, removed from exchange, given purely for the pleasure and the awareness/knowledge they might give both writers and readers. Above all, one cannot read and write for financial gain or out of a desire for personal fame. But the story itself seems inextricable from trade and ultimately the trade of bodies. Walter Benjamin discusses the ways in which storytelling in the most traditional forms of myths, legends, and fairy tales, bears within it the signs of commerce, of sea traders, traveling merchants and such. He refers to *The Arabian Nights* as examples of the ways in which trade appears as a fundamental concern within the stories that Scheherazade tells, but also in her own transaction, whereby she postpones her execution and eventually gains a kingdom in exchange for her stories, which in turn give the king wisdom and morality (101). Likewise, there is the story of Shakespeare’s Othello, who gains Desdemona’s hand by wooing her with tales. Whether telling a story ultimately amounts to selling yourself or merely selling the story, these examples remind us that the concept of storytelling is inherently economic, ultimately sold in exchange for “love.” But, as Derrida, Woolf, and Garro suggest, fictional stories, because they multiply and superimpose these economies, reveal the concept of economy, itself, as always a network of exchanges with all kinds of surplus effects and meanings, a “densely” woven fabric, both apotropaic and dangerous, like Marta’s curtains.

Laura's body was self-effacing, invisible, even ethereal, Luisa's is a shapeless, dark, and bulky mass that throws itself clumsily around Marta's home. This time, it is the storyteller who looks furtively at her listener from a different perspective once she enters the room. Though, as the story develops, it is pretty clear that Marta is the primary obstacle to communication, the aggressive nature of Luisa's call, the violence in her gestures and even in the mere appearance of her body may have already provoked Marta's violent foreclosure of Luisa's story.

The darkness, "provoked by the silk curtains" that protected Marta from the world outside her home, doesn't allow Marta or the narrator, hence the reader, to "distinguish [Luisa's] angular face." Luisa can see Marta, it seems, but Marta cannot see Luisa. "She [Luisa] falls into a chair and waits," and Marta smells the "nauseating" smell that "escapes her person" and looks at her "blackened [darkened first by her race and again by the dirt roads] feet, bare and exhausted from so much walking" (123)⁷⁷. Though Luisa's call, like Laura's with her blackened, blood-stained dress, is partly visual, in this case, Luisa's odor doesn't allow Marta to objectify her in quite the same way. She cannot simply gaze at her undisturbed; she is forced to contend with Luisa's gaze, her odor, and to acknowledge the physical toll of Luisa's journey on her bare feet.

Perhaps this is why, in this story, it is Marta who provokes the story by asking Luisa what has happened to her, what has "brought her to Mexico City?" To which Luisa responds, again, not by talking, but by showing Marta the "enormous bruise on her scrawny leg", then, "convulsing," she shows her bruised nose and her ear that trickles "black blood" that has partly dried. Only after her body has appealed to (or fully repelled) Marta does she begin to speak, exclaiming the name of her husband,

⁷⁷ "En el penumbra provocada por las sedas de las cortinas apenas se distinguía su cara angulosa. Se dejó caer en un sillón y esperó. Un olor nauseabundo escapaba de su persona. Marta miro sus pies renegridos, descalzos y gastados de tanto caminar" (123).

“¡Julián!”, which Marta repeats as a question, ¿Julian?, which Luisa immediately answers, “¡Si! Julián me pegó.” Unlike Nacha’s view of Laura’s curled-up body, the image of Luisa’s wounded body doesn’t inspire sympathy for Marta. The comparison suggests that the displaced image of a wounded body as bloodstains on a dress or words on a page inspires more sympathy than an actual wounded body, an image of that body, because the latter inspires only guilt and shame that immediately turns violent. Perhaps, as Levinas suggests, the wounded body ultimately reminds us of our own fragility that we desperately want to deny.⁷⁸

Luisa is a dark, bruised, and bleeding body, filthy and foul-smelling, that Marta cannot really see. The implication is that if she denies the signs of Luisa’s body, she will deny her words, and by denying both, she can escape her own guilt. She responds to Luisa, “‘That is not true, Julián is a very good man!’—and Marta remembered Gabina’s words, ‘A good man will only attract a bitch.’ Luisa was a bitch, chasing after her husband until she finally drove him crazy” (123).⁷⁹ The immediate juxtaposition of Luisa’s words with those of her servant, emphasizes the

⁷⁸ Judith Butler explores a quote from Levinas in which he says that the face of the other, “‘in its precariousness and defenselessness’” tempts us to kill it at the very moment that it interdicts such a killing. Butler asks, “Why would it be that the very precariousness of the Other would produce for me a temptation to kill? Or why would it produce the temptation to kill *at the same time* that it delivers a demand for peace? Is there something about my apprehension of the Other’s precariousness that makes me want to kill the other? Is it the simple vulnerability of the Other that becomes a murderous temptation for me? If the Other, the Other’s face, which after all carries the meaning of this precariousness, at once tempts me with murder and prohibits me from acting upon it, then the face operates to produce a struggle for me, and establishes this struggle at the heart of ethics” (135). I’m suggesting here, that if the body is wounded, the desire to kill it is compounded as is the interdiction. Perhaps there may even be some deep-seated biological instinct to preserve the community in our desire to eliminate the most vulnerable that the laws of civilization, whether Freud’s super-ego, Moses’ commandments, or the many versions of these that we’ve drawn up throughout history, function to resist. This may have also been one of the functions of excessive sacrificial practices of the Mexica, a government sanctioned performance of killing the vulnerable self that they imagined would please their gods for the same reasons it pleased them. It is also interesting to juxtapose this explanation with Susan Sontag’s explanation of our response to photographs of war victims, which I discussed in the previous chapter. The guilt and shame she proposes as a response would be significantly heightened by these murderous desires as would the coinciding violence.

⁷⁹ “¡Eso no es cierto, Julián es muy bueno!—y Marta recordó las palabras de Gabina: ‘Al hombre bueno le toca mujer perra’”. Luisa era una perra, perseguía a su marido hasta volverlo loco” (123).

distinction between the two women. Luisa, unlike Gabina, and by implication Nacha, is outside of the privileged *patrona's* space, even, as we will see, outside of the space of her own telling.⁸⁰ She tries to speak; her body corroborates her words, and vice versa, yet, Marta continues to deny her story. Luisa even uses the diminutive form of Marta's name to establish their intimacy: "¡Siempre me ha golpeado, Martita!...¡Siempre!" but the narrator/Marta just describes her voice as "squeaking like a rat's" and tells us that "Marta was certain that she slandered her husband."

She had "known" the couple for many years, and she always saw them going to their country house in the village of Ometepec. When she first met them, she thought Luisa was a woman-child; it wasn't until much later, that she recognized her laughter and her behavior as more than strange, as evil. She lost all affection for her and never lost an opportunity to treat her harshly. It angered her, that woman who chased her husband around with stupid tenacity. She never left him alone, come rain or shine; where he went, she went, smiling malignantly. Everyone loved Julián; nobody sought Luisa's company. He put up with her with resignation. The *india* started to laugh and looked at Marta maliciously as if she divined her thoughts. (124)⁸¹

Marta shouts at Luisa not to laugh, and when Luisa tells her that Julián is "bad, very bad" she tells her to be silent, but Luisa insists, "He's bad, and he makes me cry!"

⁸⁰ In addition to using Spivak's categories of the native informant and the subaltern, one could read the distinction between Gabina or Nacha and Luisa as the distinction Malcolm X drew in his famous speech about the "House Negro and the Field Negro." He explains that the house negro loved the master's property even more than the master did, and that, if there is a fire, he'd die trying to save everything. "If the master was sick," Malcolm X explains, the house negro asked him, "We sick?" In other words, the house negro fully identified with his master, primarily, he explains, because he was treated better, he wore better clothes, ate the same food, slept in a nice bed. The house negro, like the native informant, becomes complicit with the oppressor, identifies with him, and rejects the abjection of the truly subaltern in exchange for a more privileged position or the promise of privilege if he upholds the current system. The subaltern field negro, like Luisa, has nothing to lose and can therefore resist the master's domination and assert his own identity, his own, separate desires. However, as Malcolm X's words were often received, these assertions are often violent and met with more violence. An excerpt from this speech can be viewed on Youtube, using the following address: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=znQe9nUKzvQ>.

⁸¹ "Hacía muchos años que conocía a la pareja. La veía siempre que iba a su casa de campo, en el pueblo de Ometepec. Al conocerlos, pensó que Luisa era una mujer-niño; no fue sino mucho después cuando notó que sus risas y su conducta no solo eran extrañas sino malvadas. Le perdió el afecto y no desaprovechó ninguna ocasión para tratarla con dureza. Le indignaba esa mujer que seguía a su marido con una tenacidad estúpida. No lo dejaba solo ni a sol ni a sombra; adonde él iba, iba ella, sonriente y maligna. A Julián todos lo querían; en cambio, nadie solicitaba la presencia de Luisa. Él la soportaba con resignación. La india se echó a reír y miró maliciosa a Marta, como si adivinara lo que estaba pensando.

Marta responds by telling Luisa that she deserves to be hit, which Luisa denies, “No, I don’t deserve it. He is bad, very bad...”, and using free indirect discourse, the narrator/Marta’s thoughts interrupt Luisa, explaining that Luisa “insisted” on accusing him, that her “misery evoked nausea”, that her smell “extended throughout the room, penetrated the furniture, was released by the silks of the curtains,” violating the sanctuary of her home that may have otherwise been the space of a storytelling. Instead, Marta thinks again of Gabina’s remark about Luisa that “it was enough to smell her and one would be cursed.”⁸² For Marta, the story that emerges from this body can only be received as a poisoned gift, a curse.

But it gets worse, Luisa, again, forces her body upon Marta, kissing her, and then sits back down. Marta sees her “squalid” tears fall without feeling the slightest compassion. When Luisa repeats that he hits her all the time and that he is “bad, very bad,” Marta responds by looking at herself in the mirror, “to check if her hair is well-combed.” The narrator tells us that she is “disturbed by the disgust that the indian inspired, and then directly quotes her thoughts: “My God! How do you allow a human being to adopt such behavior and form?” It isn’t clear whether Marta is thinking about Luisa’s body or her own, the one she is gazing upon in the mirror, and the narrator extends this ambivalence, explaining that the “mirror returned (“devolvía”) the image of a woman/wife “señora” dressed in black and adorned with pink pearls. She felt shame in front of this unhappy person, stunned by misfortune, devoured by the misery of centuries. Is it possible that this is a human being?” (124).⁸³

⁸² “Insistía en acusarlo. Su miseria producía nauseas. Su olor se extendió por el salón, invadió los muebles, se deslizó por las sedas de las cortinas. ‘Basta con olerla para que esté uno castigado’, había dicho Gabina, y era verdad. Marta la miró con asco. Luisa se levantó de un salto y, como era su costumbre, empezó a cubrirla de besos. Luego se detuvo y se volvió al sofá. Marta vio que le corrían unas lágrimas escuálidas por las mejillas, pero no sintió compasión alguna” (124).

⁸³ “Las dos mujeres guardaron silencio y se miraron enemigas. Marta se volvió a un espejo para observar sus cabellos bien peinados. Estaba turbada por la repugnancia que le inspiraba la india. ‘¡Dios mío! ¿Cómo permites que el ser humano adopte semejantes actitudes y formas?’ El espejo le devolvía la imagen de una señora vestida de negro y adornada con perlas rosadas. Sintió vergüenza frente a esa infeliz, aturdida por la desdicha, devorada por la miseria de los siglos. ‘¿Es posible que sea un ser

For a moment, the narrator/Marta whose identities remain ambiguous, again, in free indirect discourse, also suspend the differences between Luisa and Marta, each equally identified as women and wives, who suffer “the misery of centuries,” of their shared histories. The mirror, in the context of Luisa’s insistence on her story, could return Luisa’s image as Marta’s own, but only temporarily if at all, for Marta proceeds to reassert her identity through the thinking of her community, those of her own class, who “sustained” the belief that “indians were closer to animals than to men, and they were right” (124). Marta immediately forecloses on the ways her image of Luisa might help her question her own image, and as soon as the ambiguity is resolved for the reader, it is resolved for Marta, notably in her reference to her own community of white privilege. She becomes a person who “knows”, who recognizes the supremacy of reason, and she tellingly does this in a discourse that conflates the language of her class with the language of patriarchy (and the language of racism). She goes from talking about “human beings” to identifying those of her class as “men”, an ironic reflection of the narrator’s reference to her as the “señora”, the wife, who is therefore complicit with the laws of man. She becomes increasingly nauseated, asking herself, “Why did I have to hear this woman?” But, she decides it is too late to throw her out on the street and, as she begins to “feel” Luisa’s cries “at her back”, suggesting that she is behind her, but also that she feels her sobs upon her own body, she decides that “she will give her something to eat since she cannot give her compassion” (125).⁸⁴ But her good will is very short-lived.

Marta’s insults escalate. Besides telling her that she’s lying about Julián, that he isn’t bad, that she deserves to be beaten if he does, in fact, beat her, Marta goes so

humano?’ Muchos de sus familiares y amigos sostenían que los indios estaban más cerca del animal que del hombre, y tenían razón” (124).

⁸⁴ “¿Por qué tenía que oír a esa mujer? Ya era tarde, estaba en su salón y no tenía valor para echarla a la calle. La sintió llorar a sus espaldas. Le daría algo de comer, ya que no podía darle afecto. No era posible dejarla sentada en el sofá con toda su miseria, su desamparo, su fealdad a cuestas” (125).

far as to tell her that she cannot cry over the children she has left behind with Julián. Luisa sobs and simply insists that she *can* cry over them. Marta suggests that Luisa take a bath and offers to show her how to work the bathtub. When Luisa says she already knows, Marta denies her knowledge, arguing that it's impossible since there is no running water in her village. Marta falls asleep while Luisa is in the bath and is awakened by the sound of Luisa's voice talking on the telephone. As Marta approaches her, Luisa hangs up, and when Marta asks her what she's doing, Luisa tells her that she answered the phone while Marta was sleeping. Marta absurdly responds, telling her that she doesn't know how to use a phone since there are no phones in her village. Marta believes she "knows things," but her knowledge is blatantly false for Luisa, which ironically keeps Marta safe. However, when, inadvertently, in the process of insulting Luisa, she reveals to her that she does, in fact, know something about her that is true for Luisa, when she tells her that she is "possessed by a demon/the devil" (*endemoniada*), she empowers Luisa to tell her story. She tells her this upon their return to the kitchen, after Luisa has bathed, and Luisa surprises her, this time, by confirming her words instead of denying them. Marta, unwittingly, opens herself to receive the curse of Luisa's story.

Once Marta begins to listen to Luisa's story, she proves to be an appropriating and manipulative listener, as opposed to Nacha's receptivity and active complicity with the telling, and as a result, she receives Luisa's story as a curse.

At first, Marta wants to hear about Luisa's visits with the devil because she believes she can use her suspicions to frighten her into "better behavior."⁸⁵ She is still

⁸⁵ John Bierhorst explains that most of the stories and legends of the Mexica survived because there were certain Spanish friars, primarily the Franciscans, who believed that the best way to convert the indigenous peoples was to learn their language and their culture (3). Some, like Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, who gathered the accounts included in what is now referred to as the *Florentine Codex*, even became great admirers of the Mexica culture and were often criticized by the Dominicans and even the more conservative members of their own order for "preserving too much of the ancient beliefs and thus [...]the works of the Devil" (Schwarz 25). Marta's intentions are similar to the "official" intentions of

not the credulous listener that Nacha is for Laura in “La culpa”. On the contrary, she is a devious, manipulative listener, ready to appropriate and use Luisa’s story for her own purposes. She tells Luisa that if she doesn’t behave better, the devil will return and pursue her the way she pursues Julián. Marta sees that her words anger Luisa, so she gathers her dinner and leaves her alone in the kitchen “so she could reflect” upon her behavior. As she walks out of the room, she tells Luisa, “What you owe in this world you will pay in the next. You should think about what I’m telling you and when you return home, behave yourself,” and she walks out of the room unable to control her laughter (128). Luisa responds, “somberly,” “Go ahead, Martita,” and we assume that Marta doesn’t hear her. She continues to laugh once inside of her room, and her thoughts are communicated in free indirect discourse, “Poor old woman, what a fright I’ve given her! It’s easy to manipulate the indians: it’s enough to merely name the devil to get them to do whatever you want them to” (128).⁸⁶

After finishing her dinner, the narrator tells us that she hesitates to return to the kitchen. She begins to think about Luisa’s “strangeness,” and she repeats Gabina’s words to herself, “The insane are evil, they believe everyone is out to get them and because of this they’re out to get everyone, and Luisa is insane, Señora” (128).⁸⁷

Sahagún and others like him, though, in her case, instead of successfully using Luisa’s fears against her, she is the one who is increasingly frightened.

⁸⁶ “—¡Ah, con que ya lo vio dos veces! Pues cuídese, el día que se muera, el demonio la va a perseguir como usted persigue a Julián.

Luisa la miró con rencor. Se agazapó en su silla y retiró el plato. Marta la observó con el rabillo del ojo y al ver su mal humor, colocó su cena en una bandeja y se dispuso a salir. Quería dejarla sola para que reflexionara. El miedo la haría cambiar de conducta.

--Lo que se debe en esta vida se paga en la otra. De manera que piense en lo que digo y cuando vuelva a su casa pórtese bien.

Pensó que se iba a echar a reír y se apresuró a llegar a la puerta. Luisa guardó silencio y le lanzó una mirada oscura. Marta, para disipar la mala impresión, agregó antes de salir.

--¡Sea Buena!

Marta siguió riendo en su cuarto. ¡Pobre vieja, qué susto le había dado! Era fácil manejar a los indios: bastaba nombrar al demonio para hacer con ellos cualquier cosa.” (128).

⁸⁷ “Los locos son malos, creen que todos persiguen a todos y Luisa está loca, señora’, le repetía Gabina, mientras le alcanzaba las sales del baño y las toallas perfumadas de romero. Y era verdad, Luisa tenía algo singular, sobre todo esa noche. Era como si todos sus años de desdicha empezaran a tomar forma y estuvieran encarnando en un ser de tinieblas. Marta se asustó de sus propios

And, she thinks, “it was true that Luisa had something singular about her, especially this night. It was as if all of her years of misery had begun to take form and were incarnated as a being of shadows. Marta scared herself with her own thoughts [...]” It soon becomes apparent that in trying to frighten Luisa into behaving the way Marta thinks she should, Marta has only managed to let loose those demons within the safe and isolated space of her home. She locates those demons in Luisa’s “singularity” her impenetrable strangeness, especially “this night”, where she appears to have been transformed by her many years of oppression, literally her inability to speak (*desdicha*) into a being of shadows. Again, Marta’s thoughts could easily use her reading of Luisa’s words and body to question her own identity and open herself up to the downtrodden woman, but she refuses to do so. Her focus remains on distinguishing herself from Luisa’s “singular” embodiment of “plural” difference (her body of shadows).

Perhaps she intends to attempt to communicate with Luisa, but before she can return to the kitchen, she hears “barely audible” footsteps, and Luisa appears at the door, and tells Marta that the first time she saw the “Evil-one” (el “Malo”) was when she killed “the woman.” Marta, who “feels she has to tell her something to get her to stop staring at her with those intense eyes,” turns her statement into a question, “you killed the woman?” (129). The reference to a specific woman, which could ambiguously be a concept of woman, rather than simply an unknown woman, and the reiteration of these words in Marta’s question, suggesting that she, too, knew this woman implies that this woman that Luisa killed, which she later tells us “knew” things and “said” things, is the traditional phallogocentric concept of woman that is implicit in the oppression, especially of subaltern women. Marta has already

pensamientos y miró en derredor suyo para cerciorarse de que era el miedo lo que la hacía pensar extravagancias” (128).

identified her self and continuously reified herself as precisely this woman. The narrator reports Marta's concern that Luisa looks at her as if she can hear something that Marta cannot hear, and Luisa immediately confirms that what she is hearing are Marta's own thoughts, "Martita, I'm listening to your thoughts," and she moves toward her, and, and tells her, "Fear is very noisy, Martita" (129).⁸⁸ The suspense continues to build as Luisa tells her that she first saw the "Evil-one" when her parents gave her away to her first husband. As a result of the birth of her first child, her whole body was left swollen and misshapen, and her husband, disgusted by her appearance, returned her and the child to her parents, who told him that he could not leave her that way, since he had not found her that way. He responds, tellingly, "¡Vayanse a la chingada!" (130). His words together with the story of her parents giving her away and her husband's rejection after the birth of their first child, all invoke the story of La Malinche, and Luisa, specifically as a Malinche figure.⁸⁹ However, unlike Malinche, Luisa does not accept her abandonment. She goes looking for her husband, leaving her child with her parents.⁹⁰ This, she tells Marta, is when she encountered the woman, the one she murdered.

⁸⁸ "--La primera vez que vi al "Malo", fue antes...

--¿Antes de qué, Luisa?

--Pues antes de que matara yo a la mujer.

[...] Sintió que tenía que contestar algo, para evitar que siguiera observándola con sus ojos intensos, mientras que de sus labios colgaba la misma sonrisa fija.

--¿Usted mató a la mujer?"

[...] La india seguía observándola y riéndose en silencio, sólo con la mueca de la risa, como si estuviera ocupada en oír algo que Marta no escuchaba (129).

--Martita, estoy oyendo sus pensamientos...--dijo con su mismo sonsonete infantil. Y avanzó veloz hasta ella y sin ruido se sentó a sus pies sobre la alfombra.

--El miedo es muy ruidoso, Martita—agregó. Y luego guardó silencio"(129).

⁸⁹ In Bernal Díaz del Castillo's account, he praises completely unselfconsciously, the noble Doña Marina, who bore his captain a son and then, when he found her a husband, gladly married him and obeyed him for the rest of her life, which glosses over the illegitimacy of the child and the fact that, as Paz says, when she was no longer useful, Cortés may, in fact, have found a convenient way to get rid of her. Certainly, this was not the behavior of a man in love.

⁹⁰ You will recall that this was the analogy Octavio Paz used to explain the resentment of the *mestizo* man felt toward La Malinche, that like a son abandoned by his mother to go look for his father, he cannot forgive her. Likewise, as I referred to previously, he makes her the prototype of "La Chingada" and the many ways the modern Mexican continues to use that word.

She raises her arm and emphatically tells Marta, “I lived here!” And the narrator tells us that she, “gestured toward some point in space, as if Tacubaya was inside the room. Marta guarded a tumultuous silence. She sensed that the indian confided in her out of some interest that she hadn’t succeeded in divining. She had to impede her from continuing her story” (130).⁹¹ She asks Luisa not to tell her any more of the story, that it is better to forget, but before she can finish her sentence, Luisa interrupts. “No, Martita, I don’t have to forget. It was here where I lived and here where I met the woman!” (130). The narrator tells us that Marta could not bring herself to respond, that “the voice of Luisa and the silence of the house overwhelmed her. What did she want from her? Why did she look at her that way? She was a whore! [*zorra*]” (130).⁹² It becomes evident that Marta’s fear adds fuel to her hatred of Luisa and reveals this hatred as always having been aroused by fear. In this case, her fear is inextricable from her story, from the “interest” for which she tells it, what she is hoping to gain from Marta, by giving her the story. And, she is identified as storyteller/whore, as selling her body and her story, for a price that Marta can’t quite figure out yet. But Luisa’s immediate response to Marta’s condemnation of her in her thoughts begins to explain her price, if the reader hasn’t already suspected it. She announces, “it was here where I killed her!” Though we know what Luisa has in mind, Marta, for the same reasons that she remains oblivious to the wounds on her

⁹¹“ --¡Aquí viví!

Y señaló un lugar en el espacio, como si Tacubaya estuviera adentro de la habitación. Marta guardó silencio con turbación. Presentía que la india le hacía sus confidencias movida por un interés que ella no alcanzaba a adivinar. Tenía que impedir que continuara con su relato” (130).

⁹² “—Luisa, ya no me cuente más, es mejor olvidar...

--No, Martita, no hay que olvidar. ¡Aquí fue donde viví y aquí fue donde conocí la mujer!

Hizo otra pausa, Marta no se sintió con fuerzas para decir nada; la voz de Luisa y el silencio de la casa la agobiaban. ¿Qué quería ella? ¿Por qué la miraba así? ¡Era una zorra!”

--¡Y aquí fue donde la mate!

Al decir esta frase, su voz y su rostro adquirieron sus rasgos infantiles. La mató y lo decía con ese aire inocente. Se arrepintió de haber sido suave en su trato con los indios: sentada a sus pies estaba la prueba de su error. La vieja repugnancia criolla hacia lo indígena se sublevó en ella con violencia. ¡No merecían sino latigazos! Miró a la india y se sintió segura, atrincherada en sus principios.” (130).

body, to her gestures, and ultimately, to the veracity of her words, shows us that she is also oblivious to her own fate. All she can think is that Indians “deserved no more than a good beating” (130). The sight of Luisa, together with her words, Marta feels “sure, entrenched in her principles” (130). She still refuses to question her own vulnerability. She feels protected by her principles, by her status, her lavish home, and her community, but the reader cannot share Marta’s certainty as we watch her fate unfold.

Luisa adds to our suspense, explaining that woman she killed “went around saying things.”⁹³ Marta asks her what things, and Luisa tells her that she accused her of seducing her husband when she didn’t even know him. She already knows that Marta won’t believe her, but before she can say anything, she exclaims, “I didn’t know him...! Nor did I ever see him, and she was saying things...” (130).⁹⁴ Marta doesn’t respond, and Luisa tells her that she threatened to kill the woman if she didn’t stop talking about her, but, she ironically tells her doubtful listener, “Can you believe it Martita, that she didn’t understand me?” She dramatically builds up toward the murder, saying that it was a beautiful day in the market, and she saw her coming with a basket full of fruit, and told herself, “Now you are going to be silent, *paloma...*”, and she buried the knife into her. She pauses after uttering these words, and the narrator tells us that Marta is “sure that these silences were premeditated. Frightened, she breathed the heavy air of Luisa’s words accumulating upon their heads” (131).⁹⁵ Luisa pulls out a knife that she had hidden beneath her shirt, and the narrator reports,

⁹³ “--Porque andaba diciendo cosas...”

--¿Qué cosas?—preguntó otra vez con dureza

--Pues cosas...que andaba yo con su marido, y yo ni lo conocía...” (130).

⁹⁴ “--¡Ni lo conocía...! Ni nunca lo vi y ella decía cosas...” (130).

⁹⁵ “[...]¿Cree, Martita, que no me entendió?[...] y me dije en mis adentros: ‘Ya vas a callar, paloma...’, y le enterré mi cuchillo.

Luisa dejó de hablar. Marta tuvo la certeza de que sus silencios eran premeditados. Asustada, respiró el aire pesado que las palabras de Luisa acumulaban sobre sus cabezas” (131).

“Marta barely had time to suffocate a scream of horror that wanted to escape from her breast. Mute, she watched her disembowel a non-existent being” (131).⁹⁶ As Luisa shows her how she did it, Marta, hesitatingly becomes something like an ideal listener, insofar as she begins to be complicit in the telling. She begins to fill in Luisa’s story with her own imagination: she imagines her “cruel eyes,” how people made way for her to leave and then ran after her, and she wants to know more.

Unlike Laura, Luisa is a storyteller who actively denies her listener’s desires instead of taking them into account and anticipating them in her telling.

As she becomes increasingly interested in Luisa’s story, Marta asks her questions, apparently in the attempt to participate in the construction of the tale, but Luisa refuses to give her what she asks for. Perhaps, Marta’s interest appears too late. Unlike Laura who is generous with the details, giving them to Nacha before she even has to ask, reading her thoughts and developing her details in response to them, Luisa repeats, “who knows?” to all of her questions. The narrator tells us that Marta wants to know about the murdered woman. She needs to be able to identify her, so she can continue to deny that she is not the murdered woman. Marta asks her to identify the woman, and Luisa responds, “¡Ah! Pues eso sí quién sabe?” (132). Then Marta asks her what her name was, and she responds again, “¡Pues eso sí quién sabe?” The narrator reports what may or may not be Marta’s thoughts, that “Luisa realized her interest and didn’t want to give her anything of her dead woman [*su muerta*]. Jealously, she kept her for herself and hid her name and her face. Marta became irritated.”⁹⁷ Luisa is guarding the secret of Marta’s death, but also, appropriating her very body, her name, her face, without Marta’s knowledge, or rather refusing to

⁹⁶ “Marta apenas tuvo tiempo para sofocar un grito de horror que quiso escaparse de su pecho. Mudo, la vio despanzurrar a un ser inexistente” (131).

⁹⁷ “Luisa se dio cuenta de su interés y no quiso darle nada de su muerta. Celosa, la guardaba para ella y escondía su nombre y su cara. Marta se irritó” (132).

confirm Marta's increasing suspicion that this will be her own fate. Luisa's decision to withhold the identity of the murdered woman correctly assumes Marta's desire, according to the narrator, and cruelly uses it against her, increasing her tension and her fear, and therefore giving and taking away her time.⁹⁸ But this performance of suspense as the postponed horror of meeting one's fate is also the suspense of knowledge. The reader and Luisa become complicit insofar as we have knowledge that Marta does not. Marta is still in a suspended state between knowledge and ignorance of her fate, which Luisa "knows." However, Luisa doesn't recognize her own possible fate in Marta's. As is always the case when the fate is our own, the knowledge will come too late, and, for Marta, it will be experienced as the ultimate violence, as a murder.

In her frustration, Marta asks how can she not know her name, to which Luisa replies that she was nothing but a woman who "said things," and that "because of that, [she] buried her knife into her" (132). Similarly, when Marta asks her how long she remained in prison, she responds, "Who knows? Long enough to forget the street" (133). And, later she asks her again how long she was with the other prisoners, and she responds, "Who knows? But it was a long time, I don't have to tell you that I no longer knew neither the street nor the world" (134). With each of Marta's questions, it becomes increasingly apparent that Luisa, the storyteller, has her in thrall. Just when

⁹⁸ In *Coldness and Cruelty*, Gilles Deleuze analyzes the function of suspense for the masochist as a performance of "pure waiting," which he "divides naturally into two simultaneous currents, the first representing what is awaited, something essentially tardy, always late and always postponed, the second representing something that is expected and on which depends the speeding up of the awaited object. It is inevitable that such a form, such a rhythmic division of time in two streams, should be 'filled' by the particular combination of pleasure and pain" (71). Deleuze argues that "at the same time as pain fulfills what is expected, it becomes possible for pleasure to fulfill what is awaited." The doubling of time that is an effect of suspense is basically the combination of pleasure and pain experienced when watching a horror film. We know what is going to happen to the foolish victim who goes down to the basement to check on a strange sound, and we experience pain in the very inevitability of that person's fate, as Marta experiences here in the inevitability of her own fate. At the same time, as the narrative extends the time before the actual murder, often filling the time with a series of false alarms, we experience the pleasure in the potential surprise, in potential itself, that is also the hope we place in the narrative that the victim, and hence we, may be able to change our fate.

some detail of her story causes Marta to doubt its veracity, Luisa reveals another that convinces her. For example, she doubts Luisa's claim that the police returned the knife to her when they freed her, but when she tells her that it was after the murder that she saw the devil for the second time, she is convinced that her story must be true. The narrator reports her thoughts, "The "evil one" appeared again: there was a certain logic to her story, what she told was true. Marta discovered that it was she who had provoked her confidences telling her that she was possessed. She had wanted to scare her, and she had only succeeded in opening the door and allowing her demons to escape. She began to worry again" (132).⁹⁹ Marta is only now convinced of the logic of Luisa's story, ironically, in its seemingly least logical element, the appearance of the "Evil-one", but it is precisely this figure by which Marta provoked the telling, so perhaps it is this logic that Marta sees, and she begins to understand the consequences of her many acts of violence against Luisa, especially against her right to tell her story, and that these acts will be returned to her as ever-increasing violence, but it is too late.

Each time Marta is forced to acknowledge the "truth" of Luisa's story, and the violence of Marta's prior accusations, the narrator tells us that she begins to worry or feel troubled. When Luisa tells her that it was in prison that she learned how to bathe, that the prison had running water and "a bathroom just like hers except that it wasn't yellow," she reminds Marta of her previous accusation, forcing her to acknowledge that she doesn't lie. Marta clearly has been one of those women who "says things." She does this again when she tells her how the prison allowed them to make phone calls, this time, when Marta repeats, "It is true Luisa, you don't tell me lies," Luisa responds with chilling laughter. As Luisa speaks nostalgically about her time in

⁹⁹ "Otra vez aparecía el "Malo": había una lógica en su historia, era verdad lo que contaba. Marta descubrió que ella había provocado sus confidencias diciéndole que estaba endemoniada. La había querido asustar y lo único que había logrado era abrir la puerta por la que escapaban sus demonios. Se volvió a preocupar" (132).

prison, how she only “found herself” there with her fellow prisoners, her *compañeras*, Marta’s fear builds. She tells her that she didn’t want to go free, that she told the prison doctor that she didn’t know what to do, that she didn’t “know the road” and that she didn’t “have money,” and that, as she tells Marta, “the road is money,” but they forced her to leave. The metaphor of the road as money frames the prison as a place that was outside of these economies, and as such, for Luisa, a place where she could finally find community and a sense of self.

The final moment of suspense, which performs and presages Luisa’s impending murder occurs when Luisa tells Marta that her *compañeras* warned her never to tell a soul about the murder and her time in prison. They warned her that “people are bad, very bad” and that they knew about the “temptation to tell. One is obligated to confess one’s sins, ones own sins. You have yours and they are for nobody but you; and you also have the sins of the woman, and, together, they will weigh heavily upon you” (135).¹⁰⁰ She interrupts their warnings to tell Marta that when you kill someone, you take on their sins, and the woman she killed had far more sins than she had, and she returns to the words of her *compañeras*, explaining that if the burden ever became too great, if “the sins made [her] legs fold and emptied [her] stomach” then she could go to the country and find a tree far away from all people, “embrace it and tell it everything that you want to tell” (135). At this point, Luisa tells us that the place of her telling is that tree, and, she implies, the story that we read performs as that tree, repeating but always also altering the space of telling, hence the possible effects of that telling. She tells Marta and the reader, that after many years, she fell very ill due to the weight of her sins and those of the woman, so she had to

¹⁰⁰ “—Antes de salir de la cárcel, mis compañeras, que me querían harto, me dijeron: ‘Mira, Luisa, a nadie le digas nunca que mataste a la mujer. la gente es mala, muy mala’. Así me dijeron. ‘Ya sabemos que vas a tener la tentación de contarlo. A uno lo obligan a confesar los pecados, los propios pecados. Tú tienes los tuyos y son nada más para ti; y tienes además los pecados de la mujer y juntos te van a pesar mucho.’ “ (135).

leave Julián and find a tree. She passed four hours telling the tree everything, clearly more than she has told Marta and the reader, and when she later returned to the tree, she found that it had completely dried up. Her sins had destroyed it.

Marta, and by implication the reader, is horrified as we realize we have just been cursed by Luisa's telling. Luisa keeps repeating, "It dried up. It dried up", and Marta forces her to stop, she tells her not to be afraid, that "they are both happy and the past has flown away. You can never recover it" (136). Luisa keeps repeating that it dried up. "How alone we are, Martita!" she says, and when Marta asks her why she said that, "conscious of the immobile silence of the furniture and the curtains," Luisa simply answers that they are so alone because Gabina will not return till the morning, and goes to bed. But Marta's question resounds beyond Luisa's simple answer, they are so alone because the many stories woven into Luisa's story, symbolized by the dense, silk weave of the curtains, have ensured their "labyrinth of solitude" that is ultimately destructive and not productive, as Octavio Paz suggests. The sins in this particular layering of stories destroy us, the pages, like the tree, have dried up. If we're not sure why that is, why this layering of possible identities has been so destructively deployed by Luisa and received by Marta, we are immediately reminded. As she lies in bed, Marta moves further and further away from the truth of this shared solitude that could potentially be a source of shared understanding, back into the denial brought on by fear and guilt that immediately turns to violence and finds a scapegoat. "Stupid old woman! She was the same as all of the indians. She only loved those who accepted and admired her, like Gabina. Sometimes she was kind to them out of boredom, but at the bottom of her heart there was an irremediable hardness" (136).¹⁰¹ It is notable that her thoughts, or are they the narrator's since

¹⁰¹ "¡Vieja estúpida! Era igual a todos los indios. Ella no los quería y solo aceptaba a los que la adulaban, como Gabina. A veces era amable con ellos por pereza, pero en el fondo de su corazón había

throughout the story the degree of access that Marta has to her own thoughts has been questioned, turn from her hardness to Luisa's hope, the "interest" with which she credited her telling of her story to Marta, which ironically, she believes she found in prison. What she found in prison and has since been incapable of finding is love, the possibility of telling her story to someone who loves her, and the kind of reception this love made possible. Marta's explanation of this love is simply identification, the way she identifies herself so completely in her community and their phallogocentric beliefs and practices. "In prison," Marta thinks, "she found others like her, and she had learned how to dance. In the world, she had been returned to her place, and she had only confided into a tree." Marta still refuses to acknowledge the violence of Luisa's "placement" in "the world", she merely states it as a fact, which, of course means she will never question her own placement in the world and the violence she has been subjected to as a result. She doesn't experience this history as violent, because unlike Laura, who became aware of the impossibility of white privilege, namely that she had no access to her own thoughts, Marta accepts this without question, and even welcomes the security that she believes it gives her. That is, until Luisa's words begin to echo in her ears.

Marta hears Luisa repeating that "it had dried up." She imagines Luisa coming to the door; she reflects upon the solitude of Luisa's crime, actually identifying with her own murderer; she wishes that she had a pistol, so she could "kill her like a rat." When she hears her silent footsteps on the rug, she calls out to her, but nobody answers. She then foretells her fate, "she wouldn't even have time to get up and lock the door. She would leap upon her like a savage cat". She calls to her, frantically, "Luisa! Luisa! Cursed indian!" (137), but she only hears footsteps. She

una dureza irremediable. En la cárcel Luisa había encontrado a sus iguales y había aprendido a bailar. En el mundo, había vuelto a su lugar y solo se había confiado a un árbol..." (136).

covers her eyes, and the narrator tells us that in the morning, Gabina discovered her dead body and called the police, who found Luisa in a neighboring home with the bloody knife. When they return her to the prison, all of her friends are gone. The story ends with the narrator's free indirect discourse, ambivalently giving Marta the "last word" of "reason," an acknowledgement on Luisa's part that, like Marta's earlier acknowledgement of Luisa's story, comes too late. "Martita was right [*tenía razón*]: the past is irrecoverable" (137). The hope that she placed in the telling, has not been realized. Marta was right to deny her, to resist her. The word *irrecoverable* plays with the double meaning: you cannot recover the past and you cannot re-cover it or bury it to keep it from returning. You can neither learn from it nor cover it up and deny it. Luisa's desire in telling the story was to return to it, to relive it, while Marta's desire was consistently to deny it. These competing desires, the struggle to appropriate self and other that they perform, the refusal of each to even temporarily cede her desire for the sake of the other and her story, leads to the destruction of both.

The "laybyrinth" of fictional and meta-fictional narratives within each of Garro's stories, presupposes a network of response and performs mythic time by superimposing past, present, and future storytelling, specifically women's storytelling, and extending indefinitely the effects of her gift/curse for feminine identity.

The kitchen and then the tree are both traditional spaces of telling for specifically women story tellers, and also as sanctuaries for women, function quite differently. In the case of the kitchen in "La culpa", it is a bridge where women of all identities can come together and talk. It functions for women as the metaphor of "the bridge" itself functions for both Woolf and Laura as a space where men and women may come together to talk, but the kitchen, for Nacha and Laura's exchange, is re-appropriated as the space of women's storytelling. Mara L. Garcia. argues that the

kitchen is a space that functions analogously to the narrative itself, as a device of meta-fiction. In “La culpa”, Nacha’s body becomes analogous to the kitchen as well as the narrative, as the locus for a secret, drawing the speaker and listener together in suspense, free from boundaries, waiting for an answer. Even in “El árbol”, the kitchen is the only possible place where Marta can show kindness to Luisa, but, unfortunately perhaps for both of them, Luisa doesn’t end up telling her story in the kitchen.

Nacha, however, and perhaps even Laura, emerges from the kitchen to proceed down what they hope will be a new path. In “El árbol,” the tree replaces the kitchen as the only possible space for Luisa’s telling, a space that is immediately destroyed by that telling. And if Nacha’s body functions analogously to the kitchen as another space where the story is borne, we can say the same thing about the tree and Marta’s body, and in the story, they are both destroyed upon receiving Luisa’s story. The problem, the narrative suggests, is the extreme racial and class difference between Luisa and Marta. Luisa, unlike Nacha, who at least plays the part of a “native informant,” is clearly the subaltern, and as such, she is forced to keep her story, her “sins” to herself, as her fellow subalterns warn her to do. She can only whisper the story to a tree when it becomes too much for her to bear, and even this, she can do only once, which, her story suggests, along with her desire to return to prison, is her motive for killing Marta. She cannot tell another person, especially one who is as clearly unsympathetic as Marta, her story. Marta is precisely the audience that her *compañeras* warned her about. And yet, she is suffering from keeping the story to herself, another possible explanation for her wounds. Luisa’s story, like the exchanges between Pablo and Laura, becomes another allegory for the relationship between discursive and physical violence. If one cannot speak, if nobody will listen, one is forced to kill. And because so many who have spoken, who have shared their stories, have been killed, one is forced to remain silent.

Still, as long as there is hope, stories will be told, and as long as stories are told, their will be the promise of hope. The space of telling, in both stories, is always a palimpsest or a labyrinth, where stories are layered upon stories, and where a reader who attempts to plot her way through always ends up, as my work has shown, constructing yet another labyrinth to be layered upon the others. Garro's stories, like most fictional narratives, invoke and proliferate stories. The story is always a network of stories that, based upon oral tradition, builds upon the stories of the ages and promises the continuation and proliferation of these stories into the future. In "Ariadne's Thread," J. Hillis Miller explores the role of repetition in storytelling, not merely repetition of similar events within a narrative, such as Laura's repeated visits with her first husband, where each visit is slightly altered, performing the impossibility of pure repetition (wherein lies the hope for future change), but also enabling the memorializing function of the story, which, as Benjamin explains, was the primary goal of the storyteller (Benjamin 91).

Miller is interested in exploring the way stories always repeat and invoke other stories appropriating them as their own but also allowing them to function within them as unassimilable other, a sort of "delirious experience of their own otherness," to quote Derrida. He reveals how the Greek myth of Ariadne, who helped Theseus escape the labyrinth by supplying him the thread he used to find his way out, invokes the story of Icarus and Daedalus, another narrative of success and failure to "escape" discursive labyrinths. Miller reads this as an allegory of reading, the thread as the course a reader plots through the "labyrinth" of narrative "crinkled to and fro as the retracing of the labyrinth which defeats the labyrinth but makes another intricate web at the same time—pattern is here superimposed on pattern, like the two homologous stories [Ariadne's and Daedalus'] themselves" (62).

The story of Ariadne, who is abandoned by Theseus and then loved by Dionysus, invokes another labyrinthine tale, that of Theseus' dance, which later becomes the dance of the Bacchantes—basically the story not only repeats the labyrinth, it keeps returning to the characters who can never really “escape” the story, from Theseus to Daedalus to Ariadne, to Dionysus, to Theseus back to Dionysus to Arachne (which invokes the craftsperson wielding the thread and therefore returns the story to Daedalus and the homology between Arachne and Ariadne, together with the related positions of the weaver and the craftsman, returns the story to Ariadne). This specifically mythic pattern upon pattern of repetition and return is invoked by Garro, who uses it to further explore the complexities of Mexican, feminine, identity, specifically the tradition of the woman weaver, ultimately the weaver in and of these stories, the way all of these stories return to Ariadne, which invokes and questions the traditional roles of the women weavers of the Mexica culture. As in the Greek culture, Mexica women were not allowed to write the stories in which they figure so prominently, and instead, were given the sublimated role of the weaver: they wove cloth instead of words, another example of the metaphorical power reversal of phallogocentrism.

Furthermore, in “La culpa”, Garro uses the mythic concepts of repetition and return in Mexica myths of cyclical time. At the time of the conquests, as evidenced by the famous Sun Stone or Calendar Stone of Tenochtitlán, the Mexica believed that their civilization was the fifth of five suns. The first four suns were destroyed, each in a different way that was directly related to the god or goddess that presided over that civilization. Because of the repetition and return of each sun, the Mexica believed they could predict the end of their current sun with the arrival of the god Quetzalcoatl by sea. The fifth sun, which they believed would be the “earthquake” sun, would end with his arrival, and, if it followed the same pattern, their civilization would be

completely destroyed and replaced by a new civilization, a new people (Bierhorst *History and Myth* 7-10).

The pattern of mythical texts for the Mexican is repeated in their historical texts. It is believed that the arrival of Cortés was interpreted by the Mexica as the arrival of Quetzalcoatl, which may explain why Montezuma capitulated so easily. However, the Mexica had many enemy tribes, including the Tlaxcaltecas, whom they had subjugated for years and over the course of many battles, especially whenever the Mexica needed sacrificial victims. The point that Laura makes in “La culpa es de los Tlaxcaltecas” is that these stories, both mythical and historical, repeat violence and oppression and reveal the way violent acts always return against those who commit them. This is also a possible lesson to be found in the myth of Coyolxauqui, who led an army of her 400 brothers to kill her mother, but just as the army approached, Huitzilpochtli, the war god, was born fully armed, and destroyed Coyolxauqui, dismembering her and throwing the pieces of her body down the side of Coatepec mountain, which is “re-presented” by the stone pieces at the foot of the great pyramid of Tenochtitlán. This story, specifically of feminine empowerment and agency, warns against empowering ourselves as men have done, through war, and specifically by killing or denying the maternal. We must seek other options.

In “El árbol,” the stories of Mexican history and indigenous myth are again replaced by legends juxtaposed with Greek mythology, both Mexican and western, with a pronounced gothic turn. “El árbol” is a more traditional example of a ghost story than “La culpa”. It draws upon and reflects Mexican gothic traditions, specifically the story of “La Llorona,” in Luisa’s abandonment of her children and her repeated tears throughout the process of her telling.¹⁰² At the same time, the story of the tree draws

¹⁰² Cherríe Moraga conflates the story of La Llorona with the Greek myth of Medea and both with the story of “The Hungry Woman” in her play, *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea*. Also, for more about the importance of La Llorona for Mexican identity and the way the story has proliferated and

upon mostly Asiatic versions of the myth of King Midas and his Ass's ears in extremely telling ways, layering yet another possible reading upon the narrative. In most of the versions of the myth, a barber or other servant becomes privy to the king's secret, usually a secret about a deformity that monumentalizes a sin that he has committed and the punishment he received. In the case of Midas, he judged a flute-playing contest between Apollo and Pan, deciding that the latter was the winner. His punishment for going against the "order of things," for suggesting, with his verdict, that a mortal might be in some ways superior to a god, was to have his "faulty" ears turned to those of an Ass. The story of punishment for not knowing one's place is repeated, in the story of the barber or servant who learns of the king's deformity, and is told he has to keep the secret or face certain death. The secret, in most versions, causes the servant to become ill or to suffer greatly, and he finds relief by whispering his secret either into a hole in the ground, which he then covers up, or in some versions, into a tree. In the versions where he chooses the hole in the ground, a reed or some plant or bush grows up from the hole, revealing how the hole eventually evolved into the tree itself over the course of repeated tellings. When the wind blows through the reed or tree, or when someone chops it down to make a musical instrument (either a flute or a drum), the sounds "speak" the king's secret, and in many versions the man is condemned, though in a few, the servant's strategy actually works, and the king is the one who is condemned upon the revelation, "in nature" of his sin.¹⁰³

The many versions of this myth, which repeat and alter many other myths in which gods competed with mortals or servants with kings, function in the "expiatory" sense by which myths are supposed to function according to Theodor Reik. Reik's

been appropriated, see Domino Renee Perez *There Was a Woman: La Llorona from Folklore to Popular Culture* <http://www.utexas.edu/utpress/excerpts/expertthe.html>.

¹⁰³ I have been able to compare these versions gathered in a talk by W. Crooke, which was delivered on December 21st, 1910 at a folklore society meeting and is available in a collection, titled *Folklore*, published in 1911.

analysis of the link between the mythic function of the cross and that of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, adds yet another network of possible readings to “El árbol”, the many myths of original sin. Myth displaces the guilt of oppression upon narrative, oppression that is repeated in both Greek and Hebrew myth, associated with the guilt of knowing or the pretense to knowledge that one must assume is the sole property of the oppressor in that story, the enforcer of the law (280). These myths allow oppression and violence to continue unchecked, unquestioned as the way of the world, but they also, especially once juxtaposed, challenge that violence and the legitimacy of the laws and the fathers who perpetuate it, opening up the possibility of revolution. These myths suggest the arbitrariness of all hierarchies and the notions that a community will immediately lose its stability when some of its members, whatever their status, do not recognize their place within these hierarchies, and they point to the precarious nature of these places and these hierarchies and their dependence upon continued violence. You either kill the king (or indirectly cause his death) or you suffer from keeping the secret of the illegitimacy of his power, for becoming complicit with that power at the expense of your own self and community.

The versions of both original sin, whether Pandora’s or Eve’s, like the many versions of Midas’ Ass Ears, also emphasize the significance of the temptation to tell and listen to the story of one’s sin, and the ways in which the listener immediately shares the teller’s guilt. However, it is clear that the story must be told, whatever the cost, and even the king (like God) is subjected to and has to share his secret, though in most versions, he usually immediately executes the barber or the servant upon telling him, as Luisa does to Marta. Even in most of the versions where the servant escapes, the secret, and specifically the restraint required to suppress it, usually causes his death. If he seeks an alternative, burying the secret in the ground or within a tree, it always returns to the fortune of some and misfortune of others. The network of these

myths invoked in Garro's story help us work out the pain and the cost of knowing, the necessity to tell what we know, but the possible violence that the act of telling what you know could subject you and your listener to, which returns us to Derrida and Nietzsche, for Nietzsche famously appropriated the figure of the Ass become God in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, and he is of course, the philosopher, or even more tellingly, the philologist, who made famous the concept of eternal return as both hopeful and futile, as both endless "stone" circularity, and endless hope in the act of listening and telling itself, for the story of Midas, is the story of an ear. Like Nietzsche, the problem of identity as defined by and defining opposites, whether upper class or lower class, whether indigenous or mixed-race, whether masculine or feminine, in the stories that all of these writers tell, becomes "coiled in the labyrinth of the ear" (Derrida *Éperons* (43). In the end, we must act, and action usually depends upon some act of self-assertion placing limits on ourselves and others, upon some decision about what a text means and some degree of appropriating it, but if we do so after lingering as long as possible in that labyrinth, if we remember the fragility of characters like Nacha, setting out, with her "ojos viejísimos", her very old eyes, in search of a new destiny, that is also always the fragility of our own hope, the hope remains that our responses will become more responsible.

CONCLUSIONS

All texts are hypertexts.

Much has been made of the “innovative” hypertext books and interactive texts that have been published over the past twenty years, but if the acts of reading and writing presented here illustrate anything, it would be that all texts have always already been hypertexts, that every written word in the context of every written sentence can function as a link to ever-growing networks of texts. As with many innovations or revolutions, the hypertext book, posits a weak distinction between itself and its predecessor as if it were revolutionary. In his article, “How the E-Book Will Change the Way We Read and Write”, Steven Johnson excitedly proclaims, “Think about it. Before long, you’ll be able to create a kind of shadow version of your entire library, including every book you’ve ever read [...]. Every word in that library will be searchable” (2), taking for granted that those words were not searchable before the e-book. However, if the writer has created the links for these hypertexts, she has done the searching for the reader, which can have the effect of making the reader think he no longer has to search for himself. This, in turn, could continue to limit the body of texts that we are exposed to, while leading us to believe that we have unlimited access to texts. Our false sense of mastery over these texts and their links will depend upon the writer’s false sense of mastery in providing them for us, which depends upon his assuming the mastery of any one of his links (and the writer of that page or link) over the word to which it is linked. If anything, celebrating the revolutionary nature of the hypertext book is more symptomatic of our search for an easy way out of the search, which ironically could have the effect of foreclosing upon what is most revolutionary in the processes of reading and writing any text. A text that makes the connections for us could foreclose on the pleasure of searching what we must always recognize as an

infinite network of possible connections for ourselves, none of which is any more inherently masterful than another, but only if we forget that these links are always limited and tentative. The more we search, the more connections we find and make, the more arbitrarily chosen these connections appear. We can only be assured of mastery when our context is relatively limited (whether we limit it ourselves or others limit it for us).

The search for non-violent discursive practices takes time but also gives time.

The desire for easy mastery of any text or body of texts can quickly and easily become the belief that one should and does master other bodies and other minds. This desire prefaces acts of physical violence, both interpersonally and internationally. If we can resist discursive violence, we might be able to prevent physical violence, but in order to do so, we must decide that we truly want an end to physical violence, that we can no longer take pleasure in it, that our pleasure no longer depends upon it. Once we have decided this on our own and without coercion from others, we have to focus on finding alternative discursive practices that are both pleasurable and productive in terms of communication and development. The texts and the readings of them performed here might propose those alternatives, namely reading as respecting the others' otherness, as adding texts to other texts, as juxtaposing and superimposing our own and others' texts upon any single text while recognizing it as already plural, filled with many possible links that we may never access. This kind of reading takes time, as much time as you want to give it, and even if it doesn't lead to an end to violence, it has the effect of suspending violence, of removing the reader, at least, from violent economies and hierarchies. Those in power depend upon the credulity of readers, writers, and listeners. If we expose ourselves and our various circles of readers and writers to the pleasure to be found in difficulty and in merely following various threads within these networks wherever they may take us, it will be much more

difficult for any one voice to manipulate us and for us to manipulate others. We will be much less likely to accept their simple explanations, their simple truths. This is the ultimate gift of these texts and a gift that we can, in turn, share with others.

If it is easily recognizable and comprehensible, it is probably not revolutionary.

As is the case with the e-book, our history has been filled with revolutions, with changes, that merely return more of the same. Cycles of economic depression to oppression to war to prosperity have become all too predictable, and no amount of education has changed this so far, so perhaps if we look at what we are really teaching and learning and how we are doing it, we might better understand why education often has the effect of encouraging and perpetuating violence rather than impeding it. If the goal of education were to closely and recursively read and compare as many texts as we could in order to identify possible non-violent alternatives for communicating with one another, if the methodology allowed us to engage in potentially infinite processes of examining ourselves as already plural texts juxtaposed with the plural texts we read and to simply make meaning in constant dialogue with others, if we redefined knowledge as this kind of awareness, might education become truly revolutionary? This is the hope with which I have read and written upon Derrida's, Woolf's, and Garro's texts, which are never properly theirs but simply their writing upon other texts. This practice of merely writing upon other texts, of setting our own writing alongside them, and never pretending to appropriate them or master them, if we could maintain it and act, in the world, as if this is the only way to respond to other texts, could effect real change, function as a real revolution. However, it is one thing to recognize a truth and quite another to act as if it were truth. Even those of us who might already know all of this, for whom nothing in these past pages is new, still find it difficult to act accordingly.

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