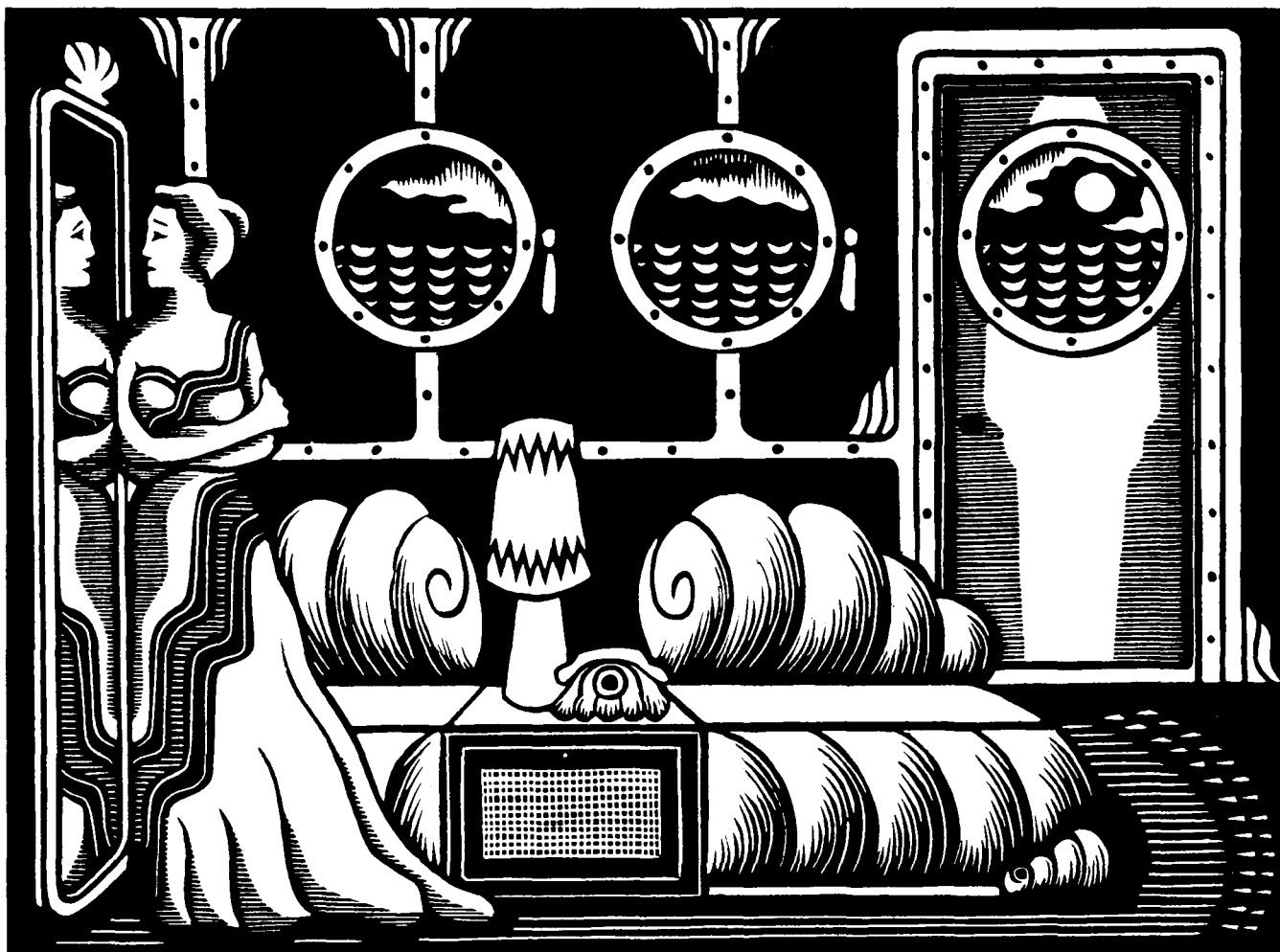


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John Mosier

TRAMPS ABROAD: THE ANGLO-AMERICANS AT CANNES

In 1986 the Anglo-American film presence at Cannes was completely disproportionate in both quality and quantity. Of the twenty-five feature length films screened as part of the "Competition" Section, ten were from the United States, Australia, or Great Britain.¹ Of the nineteen feature films shown in the "official" sidebar, *Un certain regard*, there were eight.² Although there is little point in trying to make exact numerical comparisons, given the numerous co-productions, and mix of finance and international talent, these figures are probably twice the historical average for Cannes. Given Sidney Pollack's presence as head of the main jury, the affair had an overwhelming Anglo-American tinge to it, something the jury capped off by its prizes: the palm for best film to Roland Joffe's *The Mission*, the palm for best director to Martin Scorsese for *After Hours*, the palm for best actor to Bob Hoskins for his role in Neil Jordan's *Mona Lisa*.

For the first time in at least a decade, the prizes awarded by the main jury were ludicrous, although perfectly consistent with Sidney Pollack's filmmaking, and the heavy dosage of American and Australian product is hard to justify on any grounds other than pure expedience, i.e., the depressed state of world film production. With the exception of *The Mission*, none of these films were bad, and some of them were distinctly enjoyable. But taken as a group, they look like the selections for a cable television programmer, not a major film festival.

If the aim of the current management of the festival is to move Cannes backwards into the 1950s, this is precisely the way to do it. These are

the sorts of films, and the sorts of prizes, that led the young film critic and universal *enfant terrible* of the cinema, Francois Truffaut, to his celebrated attacks, and led to the snide remarks by such reference works as the *Oxford Companion to Film* about "commercial glitter" rather than cinematic art.³ It also reveals a way of thinking that virtually an entire generation of French intellectuals have labored to eliminate.

Of course the management of a film festival only controls the selection of films. It has nothing to do with their production, and much less to do with the decision of the jury than one might suppose. And the organizers of Cannes are faced with the same problem that currently bedevils everyone else working in the cinema. There are not nearly so many interesting or significant films as we should like. All over the world the causes are different. In Poland, as in Czechoslovakia a decade before, the political situation has resulted in the emasculation of the Polish cinema. In Italy, where serious film production has virtually collapsed, the causes are more complex. They include the impact of television and the precarious Italian economy, but these are by no means the chief causes. As in France and Germany, at least part of the problem is internal: a group of untalented directors, whose films literally drive national audiences out of the theaters, appear to have a virtual strangle hold on national film production.⁴

Even in countries which, like Hungary, have been largely unaffected by politics, economics, or mediocrity, film production has fallen off markedly. This is particularly true of quality film production. Globally speaking, of course, there

¹Roman Polanski, *Pirates*; Robert Altman, *Fool for Love*; Neil Jordan, *Mona Lisa*; Martin Scorsese, *After Hours*; Steven Spielberg, *The Color Purple* (Out of Competition); Roland Joffe, *The Mission*; Andrei Konchalovsky, *The Runaway Train*; Bruce Beresford, *The Fringe Dwellers*; Woody Allen, *Hannah and Her Sisters* (Out of Competition); Jim Jarmusch, *Down By Law*.

²Stephen Bayly, *Coming Up Roses*; Graeme Clifford, *Burke and Wills*; Jane Campion, *A Girl's Own Story*, *Passionless Moments*, *Two Friends*; Eugene Corr, *Desert Bloom*; Glen Pitre, *Belizaire, the Cajun*; Bill Bennett, *Backlash*.

³Ed. Liz-Anne Bawden (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1976). Compare the entries on Cannes and Venice: "Cannes . . . is essentially a marketplace, providing publicity and sales opportunities for films and talent alike. Each country selects its own entries . . ." (109). "Venice has provided the archetype. It has always retained an artistic influence contrasting with the commercial glitter of Cannes . . ." (727).

⁴This situation, with particular reference to Italy, was discussed in "Cannes Ordinaire." NOR 12.3 (1985): 8-10.

are countries where the opposite situation is true. There are excellent films coming out of Argentina, Colombia, Spain, and the Far East, and there appears to be a resurgence of sorts in other, smaller areas, such as Austria, Switzerland, and Finland.⁵

But the countries of this second group have two gigantic problems to surmount. Their art is not globally known. The global intelligentsia simply does not queue up for Finnish or Austrian films. While there are certainly small but still significant audiences for Spanish and Latin American film, these remain but perturbations on the total. They are likely to remain so because the filmmakers of these countries are largely—and correctly—absorbed in their own national audience. Their films are aimed primarily at their own countrymen, and are thus doubly incrustated in their own national culture.

Into this hopefully temporary void the films of the English speaking world have flooded. They are technically acceptable films, with easily decipherable narratives. Being aesthetically conservative, they make no demands on the audience, and they are entertaining enough. They also have the important cachet of being Anglo-American. Since it takes some time for movies to be financed and made, they will probably fill this void for some years to come. Generally, these films are no worse than their European or South American counterparts. So it is therefore doubly a shame that the Jury picked the ones that were at the expense of the handful of interesting films.

Whether or not Hollywood movies of the sound era really were all of one piece is an interesting question. But by now almost everyone appears to believe that they were, and the idea of a Hollywood film has become firmly fixed. It involves casts of thousands, a story of epic proportions handled by someone with comic book sensibilities, glamorous men and women in

performances developing peculiar, muddled, or completely inane characters, and a general sweep and rhythm of great extravagance—all of this built on very slim intellectual and cinematic foundations.

Visually, the best that one could say about such films was that the cinematographers had a pretty good sense of their craft, a big budget, and some of the latest gadgets. To the latest in equipment they brought the most timid and ossified of sensibilities. In general the practitioners of the medium were so far removed from developing what we might think of as film language that they believed the directors who were doing things with the camera to be technically deficient.

It seems almost pointless to talk about the intellectual level of Hollywood, because one instinctively thinks that there wasn't one. But this is not precisely the case. The problem was not that the industry was generally witless, but that the mental qualities of its directors were so depressingly low. Although attracted to history, for instance, they usually reduced it to a set of costumes and sets. These artifacts, although preposterous, harmonized with the script itself. Novels were perverted so as to be virtually unrecognizable. History became a series of travesties.

The best of our directors were no more immune from this than the worst. Hitchcock's film *Sabotage* is allegedly based on Conrad's famous novel *The Secret Agent*. But except for the names of the characters, and one or two situations, all resemblance ceases. It isn't quite as bad as musical comedy based on the life of Oedipus, but the intentions seem almost as wicked. So in a perverse way, those directors who tackled the classics, or classical ideas (and the use of the verb is intentional), produced such preposterously deficient works that they validated the claims of those studio spokesmen who were adamantly opposed to an intellectual cinema.

The Mission, like *The Killing Fields* (and like Pollack's *Out of Africa*), is the sort of film that brings all of these old Hollywood stereotypes back to life. Its subject is Men and History, its sweep Epic, its intentions Serious. The result is one of those ponderous flops whose intentions are so good that it seems mean and heartless to criticize it, and whose technical accomplishments, modest though they may be, are nonetheless sufficient to impress the average moviegoer, whose knowledge of the geography of South America, much less its colonial history, is pretty shaky.

⁵The competition films from outside the English-speaking world will be discussed in the second article on the Cannes Film Festival, "Twenty Years Later," which will appear in 14.1. Films included: Bertrand Blier, *Tenue de Soiree*; Claude Lelouch, *Une Homme et une Femme: Vint Ans Apres*; Lakhdar Hamina, *La Derniere Image*; Andrei Tarkovsky, *Sacrificatio*; Mrnal Sen, *Genesis*; Andre Techine, *Le Lieu du Crime*; Margarethe von Trotta, *Rosa Luxemburg*. The films from other sections of the festival will be the subject of a third article, "Welcome to the Unknown," which will also appear in 14.1. Films included: Rauni Mollberg, *The Unknown Soldier*; Elie Cohen, *Ricochets*; Axel Corti, *Welcome in Vienna*; Paulus Manker, *Schmutz*; Denys Arcand, *Le Declin de l'Empire Americain*; Glen Pitre, *Belizaire, the Cajun*.

Joffe had brought much the same sort of ingenuous approach to the second Indo-Chinese war in *The Killing Fields*. The story, largely true, concerns New York Times correspondent Sidney Schanberg, who covered the collapse of Cambodia. Schanberg coerced one of the natives into staying on and helping him even after the fall of Phnom Penh, and its attendant consequences were evident. Not surprisingly, this poor fellow, Dith Pran (admirably played by Haing S. Ngor), was dragged off by the Khmer Rouge and given the same treatment that they meted out to millions of his countrymen, which is to say he was put into a concentration camp whose aim was to work him to death. Meanwhile Schanberg, back at home in New York, was collecting a Pulitzer Prize for his reporting on the war, and using the ceremony as a soapbox on which to propagandize his own peculiar theory that the United States government, acting entirely on its own, had destroyed Cambodia.⁶

Perhaps one should pass over the film's gross historical lapses (which it shares with Schanberg's reporting: Joffe was either too embarrassed or too smart to bring up the real life Schanberg's ingenuous dispatches from Phnom Penh, which suggested that the Khmer Rouge government would be, given the situation, a model regime). After all, the situation is confusing, even to specialists, and, as Costa-Gavras' supporters have argued in defending him against the same sort of historical muddle, Joffe's purpose was presumably to give us "moral history," not factual history.

So the point is not to give us a cool analysis of the war, but a hot analysis of Schanberg and his sidekick, Dith Pran. But it is precisely at this point that the film collapses. As Schanberg goes to the toilet after receiving his Pulitzer Prize, one of his colleagues in Cambodia lambasts him about the fate of Dith Pran. There he is suffering inside

Cambodia, he says, and here you are. But that's not fair, Schanberg protests. I'm suffering. I'm writing lots of letters to people about this. Meanwhile, Dith Pran is trying to survive in a country where the victors may ultimately have killed as many as three million of their seven million countrymen.⁷

It's the great Western shell game. As Praskovya Federovna remarks of the dead Ivan Ilyich, "For the last three days he screamed incessantly. It was unendurable. I cannot understand how I bore it; you could hear him three rooms off. Oh, what I have suffered!"⁸ The truly bizarre thing about *The Killing Fields* is that, analogically speaking, we are supposed to see Praskovya Federovna as the heroine. In other words, leave aside the political complexities, grant that all of Schanberg's paranoid theories about what the United States did to Cambodia are true. The fact still remains—as the bathroom scene reminds us—that Schanberg did to Dith Pran exactly what he was accusing his country of doing to Dith Pran's.

The bizarre point about this scene is it seems entirely to have escaped the mind of anyone connected with the film that it might be drawn. When Dith Pran slogs his way out to freedom, no thanks to Schanberg, he greets his old buddy in a paroxysm of ecstasy. While this may be what actually happens, it is an ending arrived at only by resolutely ignoring the impact of what the audience has seen. One would think that the real life Dith Pran would by this point feel about Schanberg pretty much the way John Rambo felt about the jerk who ordered him to be left abandoned on the ground a few hundred miles away. A good point could have been made out of this: Pran is the real hero, a man whose morals are infinitely superior to those around him, and who forgives Schanberg, a man who obviously, to paraphrase the Biblical allusion, did not know what he was doing. But there is no evidence that Dith Pran has these feelings at all—or any feelings except for a very sensible terror at what he

⁶Schanberg's views were widely shared. As was the case with *State of Siege*, sophisticated distinctions about moral versus factual history quickly disappeared. In most cases Joffe's film was treated as though it were a documentary: "At the end . . . Waterston put a question to the audience: 'How many of you did not know that these things happened?' A third of the people in the large hall raised their hands" (quoted by Anthony Lewis, "Cambodia's Fate Captured on Film," *Times-Picayune* 16 Dec. 1984). It does not seem to have occurred to Lewis that many of the things that the film portrays did not really "happen" at all, but only existed either in Schanberg's mind or in Robinson's script. For a more sober discussion of the complex reasons behind the collapse of Cambodia, see Robert Shaplen's "The Captivity of Cambodia," *The New Yorker*, 5 May 1986: 66-104.

⁷In his *Variety* review of 31 Oct. 1984, McCarthy mentioned these same figures. Shaplen sets the much lower total of one million dead, but adds that some "estimates place the dead at two million or more" (66). Pauline Kael, whose largely negative review of *The Killing Fields* appeared in *The New Yorker* (10 Dec. 1984), came up with the (guess what? surprised?) figures of three and seven million (165).

⁸Leo Tolstoy, "The Death of Ivan Ilyich," trans. Louise and Aylmer Maude, *Short Novels*, ed. Ernest J. Simmons (New York: Modern Library, 1966) 2: 9.

foresees is going to happen to him. As a result, although in real life Dith Pran is undoubtedly both a hero and a man of great moral courage, on screen he comes across as a bit of a chump, just as Schanberg comes across as a consummate jerk. So it is precisely and exactly as moral history that this film fails.

The failure of *The Mission* is even worse, because the characters and the situation are both

prevail, and the mission above the falls is sacked, its inhabitants slaughtered or sent into slavery. The intrepid Father Gabriel is killed as he marches his flock out to the slaughter. So is Robert De Niro, who plays Rodrigo, the film's other hero. He's a Spanish slave trader who Gabriel found sulking in a monastery after he killed his brother in a duel over a woman. Father Gabriel abuses him into becoming a Jesuit, but he never forgets



Bridles too new, buildings too old
The Mission

so muddled that it is impossible to ascertain what was intended. The plot, insofar as there is one, is simple. It is sometime in the 1750s. Up above the falls in Paraguay, an intrepid Jesuit (Father Gabriel, played by Jeremy Irons) has Christianized the Indians and gotten them to work the land communally growing bananas. No one knows who this part of Paraguay belongs to, the Portuguese (that is to say Brazil) or the Spanish. Both groups would like to get their

his warlike background. When the Spaniards attack the mission, he dies trying to lead a somewhat confused defense. There's some sort of point here, although, as in the earlier film, it seems undercut by what we actually see.

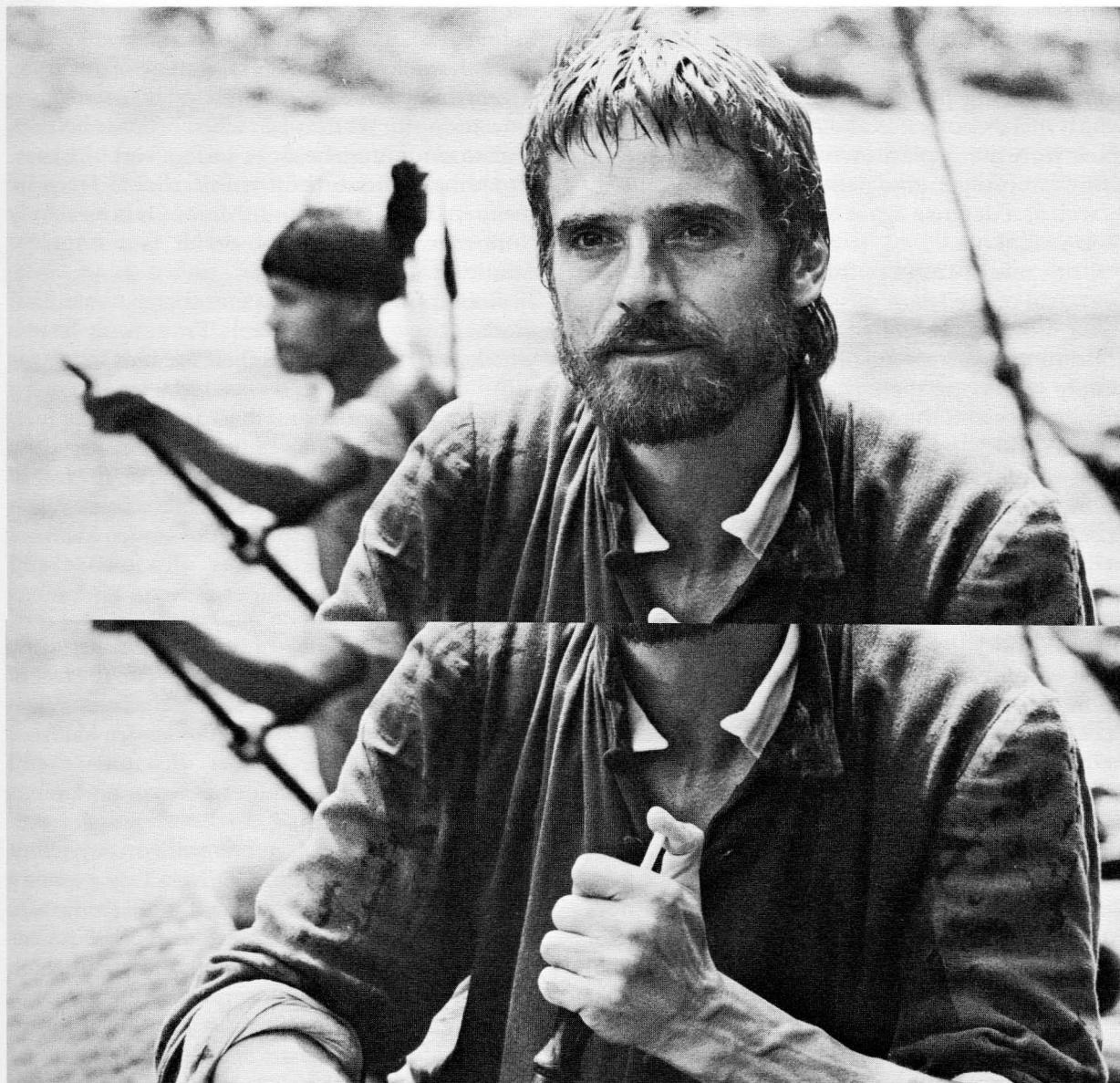
If this is moral history, it's hard to see what the subject is. The historical reality, of course, was complex. The Jesuit order had nevertheless undertaken, in its development of Paraguay, both to convert the Indians and to improve their life

productive and stable region was simply too much for their secular neighbors to stand. The struggle between the religious orders, who primarily wanted to save the natives, and the local Europeans, who generally wanted to enslave them, had started with the planting of the first flag.

But by the middle of the eighteenth century, the conflict had become moot. Communicable

by now normal, that is to say Byzantine, state of political affairs in declining Catholic Europe, triggered the downfall first of the missions and then of the Society of Jesus itself.

Notwithstanding their somewhat anti-religious bent, Voltaire's remarks in *Candide* call attention to the quintessential looniness of the affair: Spain, that most Catholic of nations, happily appropriated the good works of an order founded



Jeremy Irons as Father Gabriel
The Mission

diseases had decimated the ranks of the Indians. The Spanish possessions were in decline, the greater part of their wealth already removed to Spain (and squandered on foolish projects like paying for the Hapsburg infantry in the Thirty Years War). Things were slightly better in Brazil, where gold and diamonds had been discovered, but if one were to make a broad generalization,

by one of its most outstanding citizens, contradicting both its religious beliefs and its chauvinism in one bizarre stroke. More than any other thing, this disreputable episode marks the end of that moral ascendancy which had in the final analysis been the only substantive claim the Spanish Hapsburgs (and their Austrian cousins) could make. The regimes that had fought

possible, with only a little work, to see what was happening in this insignificant part of South America as a watershed in European history. But Robert Bolt brings the same tunnel vision to the incident that he previously brought to the retelling of the Bounty mutiny. There too a great story was reduced to an inconclusive standoff between two cardboard characters, neither of whom was particularly sympathetic, interesting, or memorable.⁹

Bolt claims, of course, to be deeply interested in the period, and there are some incidental bonuses along the way. It is good to see a film which makes no bones about an important point: there were many places where the natives saw in Christianity a genuine path towards betterment, as well as a defense against centuries of abuse by their neighbors.

One might argue that the sympathetic portrayal of the Jesuit missions in Paraguay is in itself new, that we're used to seeing our conquistadores as all of one piece, and that simply portraying the tensions between the early missionaries and the state's representatives in the New World is in itself novel and important. In other words, simply seeing the Jesuit missions as exemplars of all that was best in early Christianity (a basic socialism, an emphasis on works and self-help) is in itself something quite important.

But one fears that this point is actually somewhat incidental to the story and accidental new world is in itself novel and important. In other words, simply seeing the Jesuit missions as exemplars of all that was best in early Christianity (a basic socialism, an emphasis on works and self-help) is in itself something quite important.

But one fears that this point is actually somewhat incidental to the story and accidental to the film. Nothing else in the film indicates much of an interest in, or an understanding of, Latin America, so it's hard to give the authors much credit. It's difficult to believe that a director who has the production of small Central American bananas the chief crop of the oldest Jesuit mission in Paraguay has much of an understanding of that region and its history. It's even more difficult to believe that a scriptwriter who speaks of the Portuguese and Spanish "empires" returning to "blows at the start of the Nineteenth Century" has all that an acute a knowledge of what went on earlier.¹⁰

The basic emphasis in the film is not on how the actions of men make us see what is at work in history, but on the actions of men without any regard for history whatsoever. This is an historical drama, but only in the sense that the

actors are wearing costumes and situated in some exotic time and place. Nor are the characters in any way a part of the period they purport to live in. Jeremy Irons remains an enigma throughout. He's not bland, but he's far too modern. He plays the role like he's one of Zanussi's nobler scientists. You can sense the moral outrage, the tight control, the essential passivity. These are all characteristics of the modern alienated hero. Irons does a great job at this role. He would make a fine Sidney Schanberg. But he's too modern to be convincing as a religious man of his time. Everything about his character is a screaming anachronism. At the end, when he leads his flock out to slaughter, he does so in a sort of trance. Does he believe they won't shoot? Does he believe that God will intervene? Or is he simply following orders? The result is a hopeless muddle.

Robert De Niro goes to the other extreme. That isn't entirely De Niro's fault. Presumably he was stuck with a part that called for him to kill his brother in a duel over a deceitful woman, enter a convent in remorse, and then drag his armor from Argentina to Paraguay (most of which, peculiarly enough, seems to involve climbing up the face of a cliff) as a sort of penance. There is some vague historical resonance there. Alessandro Manzoni made just such extremes of violence and religiosity one of the centerpieces of his famous novel *I promessi sposi*.

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Unfortunately, Manzoni was writing about events that happened in Northern Italy a century before the events of the film, and that's the rub. Rodrigo's sorts of extremes are too late for his period. As Voltaire reminds us, the Eighteenth Century was an awfully sophisticated place. But neither Bolt nor Joffe paid any attention to Voltaire, to South America, or to that other recent historical film of this period, *Amadeus*. The characters are all in some way like Rodrigo. Irons and his fellow missionaries are stereotypes from this century, Rodrigo one from the Seventeenth, and the villains refugees from Kazan's film on Emiliano Zapata. Cardinal Altimirano, who was sent to the New World to sort this mess out, seems to have wandered in from one of Visconti's historical epics: he's tired and cynical and understanding. You keep waiting for Burt Lancaster to come in and say something about Sicily. And like De Niro and Irons, he's not only

⁹See the extensive discussion in NOR 12.1 (1985): 66-68.

They're transposed from radically different times and sensibilities, something that seems typical of the old Hollywood historical epics as well—or not even old: turning Italians into Mexicans or Spaniards is something done relatively recently with Richard Brooks' *The Professionals*, where Claudia Cardinale plays the Mexican heroine.

Unfortunately—and here is where *The Mission* parts company from both *The Bounty* and *The Killing Fields*—the cinematography doesn't do much to redeem the rest of the film. These other films had some tremendous visual components. Donaldson had a marvelous feel for the way the Pacific looked, and he transmitted that feel to his audience, giving one something that seemed at once intuitively authentic and yet disturbingly different from anything seen before. Of course Chris Menges, who's done the camera work for both of Joffe's films, had some serious problems in *The Killing Fields*. Some of the footage was pretty poor, and there were some disturbing technical lapses. But there were also some truly great things, shots that redeemed the whole film and made it finally something worth experiencing. Menges made you aware of one of those great paradoxes of the cinema: that an intellectually and emotionally febrile work could rise to moments of greatness simply by virtue of the images.

Strangely enough, Menges' work here is to a much lower standard. David Puttnam, Joffe's producer, made great claims for the technical difficulties involved in shooting a film in Colombia (and to a lesser extent in Brazil), managing to convey the impression that making a film in Colombia was like Stanley's expedition through Africa.¹¹ An audience unaware of the technical standard of some of the recent Colombian films might buy this, although there's little doubt that either *Time to Die* or *Pisingaña* is a substantially better film than anything Joffe has yet done.

And despite the hoopla by Puttnam, what Menges has ended up with is pretty standard stuff. There are some nice shots of the falls at Iguassú as the film opens. It's probably a low

blow to point out that Brazil's major international airline uses some similar shots of the falls as part of its in-flight wakeup service, but it reminds us that there's nothing particularly difficult about photographing them. The falls are a major tourist attraction. Shooting them is no more of a big deal than shooting the Rhine Falls.

But after this grandiose and generally accomplished opening, the film becomes almost claustrophobic. The missions covered vast expanses of fertile land. In fact probably the dominant impression one gets of this part of South America is vastness of space. But there's no real sense of it in the film. In fact, there's not much of a sense of anything here, except the relentless effect of watching a big production slogging through its paces.

These perhaps overly harsh remarks are by way of explaining how curious the Jury decision was. It has generally been the case that if one discounted the eccentricities of the mass media North American critics, that there has been a high correlation between critical consensus at Cannes and Jury consensus. The informal press jury whose votes are recorded in the daily *Screen International* have been particularly sensitive in that regard. For 1986 their top choices, in order, were: *The Sacrifice*, *Down By Law*, *After Hours*, *Fool for Love*, and *Tenue de Soirée*. *The Mission* was somewhere toward the middle, after *Mona Lisa* and *Thérèse*.¹² It has virtually never been the case that the prize winning film was buried so far down in the critical ratings.

There are numerous complicated explanations possible, but there is also an extremely simple one. To the director of *Out of Africa*, Joffe's film must have looked like a superior product. It must have also looked like a familiar product. The two films both have the same curious disregard of history while trying to appear to be historical. They both rely on scripts which are utterly at odds with even the most trivial knowledge we have about the subject, and, finally, they feature major actors who are forced to realize parts that are virtually impossible to make any sense of. *The Mission* is a comforting film to anyone who comes out of the old Hollywood tradition, because it

¹¹"It was really difficult, as there is no infrastructure out there and film is such a technically difficult thing," was how Puttnam was reported as putting it in *The Business*, 18 May 1986: 27. It's worth pointing out that Puttnam's press blitz at Cannes, which included including stills of himself and Fernando Ghia in the Press Kit at the expense of stills from the film, is also in the old Hollywood tradition. And it was successful: the film won the prize, and Puttnam landed himself a job in Hollywood.

¹²This jury is composed of twelve critics from the working press. Each member indicates whether the film is fair, good, or very good. If this system is converted into a three point scale, and the scores totalled (for a maximum of 36 points), one has a generally reliable indicator as to critical judgments. The 1986 scores for the films discussed: *The Sacrifice* (32), *Down By Law* (26), *After Hours* (26), *Fool for Love* (24), *Mona Lisa* (22), *The Mission* (20).

says that the same old stuff will always work.

Although saying so is perhaps heretical, that same sense of *déjà vu* holds true for Woody Allen's *Hannah and Her Sisters*, shown, as by now has become customary, "out of competition." One can only admire the outburst of Zeffirelli during the festival, who said that films shown there should be shown in competition. It's a doubly idiotic gesture on Allen's part because his films are deeply popular with the European critics. He's become Altman, Welles, and Cassavetes all rolled up into one for them. In any reasonable competition he would win, and this is absolutely the case with the latest film, which has been greeted with near universal acclaim.

For Allen it confirms that the trend towards the hopelessly lightweight that was begun with *A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy* will continue. What we have now is two Woody Allens. The first one, whose career began with scripts and bit parts in films like *What's New Pussycat* and *Casino Royale*, was a true comic genius. Sometimes he went too far, or not far enough, and there was always the consciousness that he was still learning his craft. But there's nothing wrong with an audience sensing that there is some tension between the artist's desires and what he is actually able to accomplish.

The wild and inventive Allen peaked somewhere just after *Manhattan*, although in retrospect *Annie Hall* may be his best work. What's certain is that after *Stardust Memories* the old sarcastic and innovative director disappeared. *A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy* marked the beginning of a new, more commercial, director. It's not that his films from this point on weren't enjoyable. They are. But there's very little to them.¹³

There isn't much to the latest film, either. The idea of three talented sisters, who come from a talented theatrical family, whose troubled lives ebb and flow around the holidays and one

another, is by no means a thin idea. But *Hannah and Her Sisters* is a sort of sneaky reworking of *Fanny and Alexander*, celebrating many of the same things: the theater, the artistic bourgeoisie, the extended family, playful and harmless sex.

One certainly has the feeling that one has seen it all before, either in one of Allen's own films, or in one of Bergman's. But whatever this film is (*Interiors* with a happy ending, *Fanny and Alexander* grown up and living in New York), there isn't very much there. So the most disappointing thing is that after decades of successful filmmaking, Allen hasn't gotten past being derivative, and the only trick he has left is to do stand-up comic routines.

The film resembles a stand-up comic's routine in its neatness and implausibility as well. The lives of its characters are tied up so effortlessly, their psychic tensions resolved so easily, that *Hannah and Her Sisters* resembles one of those television comedies where all the problems of the first twenty-eight minutes are polished off in the last two. So it is here. After their brief fling, Michael Caine and Barbara Hershey go on about their lives. Caine remains with Hannah, played by Mia Farrow, while Hershey ultimately dumps Max von Sydow and finds happiness with someone else. Hannah's selfish and crazy sister strikes it rich as a dramatist and marries Allen, Hannah's old husband.

You would think that the central situations of the almost incestuous feelings men have for their wives' sisters would call for some objective voice, some sense of self realization or psychological awareness, no matter how vague. In *Manhattan* Allen at least had the social sense to be worried about whether his infatuation with an eighteen-year-old girl was normal. Ultimately the film argued that it probably was, but treated it as an argument that had to be probed and tested.

But here none of the characters has any self-consciousness at all. They are all self-indulgent, facile, and superficial in the extreme. That pretty much sums up the film. It's funny, and it's enjoyable, but there isn't much there. If, as he's often said, Allen admires Bergman, this film, which plays like a travesty of his work, is the most negative sort of tribute possible. It is difficult to imagine a movie that brings to the screen anything more antithetical to what Bergman stands for. Allen gives us trivial solutions to fake problems, and fake solutions to trivial problems. That American audiences and critics love such films is understandable. *Hannah* is an easy film to like. If it were treated as though it were a sort of

¹³The standard idea about Allen, of course, is quite the opposite: "At the time of *Love and Death* you would have had a hard time persuading anyone that Woody Allen would develop into one of the world's most important filmmakers," Paul Attanasio wrote in his glowing feature article/review of *Hannah*, titled "Stardust Triumphs, Woody Allen: the Growth of a Master from *Bananas* to *Hannah*," *The Washington Post* 16 Feb. 1986: F1. So far as I know, the idea about Allen's films being enjoyable but insubstantial begins to raise its head with the 14 July 1981 *Variety* review of *A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy*, and has been gone into at some length by Pauline Kael in her somewhat unfavorable *New Yorker* review of *Hannah and Her Sisters* on 24 Feb. 1986: "It's likeable, but you wish there were more to like" (64).



Griffin Dunne (right) and friend
After Hours

Sixteen Candles for grownups, picking it apart would be unfair. But it is being taken very seriously by critics as a film which sets a new and high standard for American film. It in no way justifies the extravagant claims made for it, and that anyone could even make such claims is a telling indictment of just how lowbrow American film critics are.¹⁴

One of the reasons that films like *Hannah and Her Sisters* do so well critically in this country is that they pander to New York audiences and critics. That's one of the reasons for the paradox that as Allen's films have gotten thinner and thinner, his critical reception has gotten better

and better. It also explains why *Stardust Memories*, the one film Allen has made which could genuinely be called a satire, was universally panned. By poking fun at New York critics, producers, and audiences he was literally biting the hand that fed him. New York critics and their

¹⁴Caryn James quotes Vincent Canby as comparing Allen with Keaton and Chaplin (Canby, who has championed Allen vigorously of late, recently argued that *Hannah* sets "new standards" for American filmmakers). See James' "Auteur! Auteur! The Creative Mind of Woody Allen," *The New York Times Magazine* 19 Jan. 1986: 18. This article, which is a fair distillation of what is currently being written about Allen, sees his latest work as being like his earlier, only as good or better.

audiences, of course, have a relentlessly partisan axe to grind in this regard. Never having completely forgiven the industry for moving to the West Coast in the first place, they have generally been dubious about its products. While it may not be true that any film dealing favorably with New York as a crazy zany sophisticated whacko megalopolis will do well there, it's pretty tough to think of an exception. There's always some spoilsport like Pauline Kael (who trounced *Hannah*), but in general the city takes care of its own.

So a film like Scorsese's *After Hours*, in which the hero experiences the true zaniness, eccentricity, and loveable lunacy of The Big Apple, is bound to be regarded well. Scorsese's film is basically nothing more than a proficient

only had to go a few blocks to see American films virtually the identical twin to Scorsese's. In the *Quinzaine* there was Spike Lee's *She's Gotta Have It*, a first film about a young black girl's independent life style and eccentric friends. Done in an accomplished black and white, the film was probably too insubstantial to be fleshed into feature length. But Lee has a keen eye (and ear) for his peers, and, allowing for some overacting, a good sense of the whacky elements of New York life.

In the *Semaine* there was Sara Driver's *Sleepwalk*, an ambitious and extremely flawed feature debut by another young New Yorker. The film is ambitious in the best senses. One wants to see directors who are willing to take risks in order to get effects (like Allen once did), even when they



Griffin Dunne (left) and friend
After Hours

piece of student filmmaking. Like *Hannah*, there's a superficial gloss of sophistication to it, just enough to intimidate audiences into the fear that if they don't like it, if they don't get it, they're rubes.

European critics, blissfully unaware of what goes on in student filmmaking in this country, can see a film like *After Hours* and be fascinated by it, because the clichés (straight young hero immersed in a fantastic night world of eccentrics) seem fresh to them. But at Cannes in 1986 you

have trouble achieving those effects. The heroine of Driver's film, given a Chinese manuscript to translate, discovers that it has magical properties. Strange things happen to her and to her small son. But even in normal life she too is surrounded by eccentrics, and so forth and so on.

Neither one of these young directors is yet able to come up with a film as accomplished as a veteran like Scorsese can, and they can't get the actors they need to realize the parts, either. But their imagination, when turned on the same

subject, is at least as good, and a good deal fresher. Nor are they particularly unusual and talented filmmakers, either.

The real problem with this flow of mediocrity is that it diverts critical attention away from the things of real interest that are happening in the English language cinema. By their very numbers such films divert attention away from exactly the kinds of film that festivals like Cannes have historically promoted. In other words, it is not that *Hannah and Her Sisters* is a bad film, but that its presence diverts attention away from a film like Jim Jarmusch's *Down By Law*, which is exactly the kind of movie that needs critical attention if North American film is to flourish as an art form.

Down By Law is far funnier than Allen, and it deals with characters far goofier than anything in Scorsese. The big difference between the two is that Scorsese's film relies on stereotypes and Jarmusch creates new types. Down in New Orleans there are three men. There's Zack, a disk jockey who gets arrested when he agrees to drive a car across town and park it (there's a body in the trunk). There's Jack, a minor pimp who's set up with a minor by an acquaintance, and he's arrested as well. Then there's Roberto, an Italian tourist who is hauled off because after a game of pool he hits a man with a pool ball and accidentally kills him.

Here they are, sharing the same cell, and Roberto has an idea for an escape. Jarmusch has a great eye for New Orleans and its environs, and his black and white scenes, done by Robby Muller, are just right. But this is a blatantly mythical city: when they escape from the parish prison, they find themselves right out in the bayous (the real parish prison, of course, is almost right downtown). They bicker and wander, and Roberto catches a rabbit and cooks it for them, and then he goes into a remote little place, improbably named "Luigi's Tin Top," and discovers a real life gorgeous Italian girl, Nicoletta. Roberto and Nicoletta promptly fall in love and settle down, and Zack and Jack wander off towards Texas.

The difference between Jarmusch and Allen is also instructive. As in some of Allen's best works, there's not much plot, and what there is of it is crazy. What fleshes out the skeleton are the actors, and what's striking here is that Jarmusch is able to work with his three leads (Tom Waits, John Lurie, and Roberto Benigni) to produce exactly the sort of sophisticated slapstick in word and gesture that Allen is always trying for. It's not the sort of achievement that one expects of a

director at such an early stage in his career, because the work is surprisingly polished.

So are the interactions between the characters. The Italian carries around a notebook in which he writes peculiar English phrases. One of them is the phrase "I scream for ice cream." This pretty much tells you what sort of English he speaks. The other two are so taken with this that they make a little parade around their cell screaming (of course), "I scream for ice cream." They march and yell and finally get the entire prison yelling with them. The fact that Jarmusch came up with this, and then filmed it and made it work, is convincing proof that he has the ability to establish himself as a major talent in American cinema.

This is Jarmusch's third feature film, and frankly there wasn't all that much in the first two attempts to enable one to differentiate him from the dozens of other young independent directors. Although his first feature, *Permanent Vacation*, won some prizes in Europe, and although the second, *Stranger Than Paradise*, won the *Camera d'Or* at Cannes in 1984, the sad truth is that the world, even in the United States, is full of talented young directors who never get past the hurdle and make a third film. But *Down By Law* is more than just another feature film; it's an incredibly strong work, more imaginative and sarcastic than anything by Scorsese and with infinitely better pacing and timing than Allen.

There's a tempting parallel here between Jarmusch and Robert Altman, whose most recent film, *Fool for Love*, was also shown at Cannes in competition. There is a great disparity between these two men as far as their age and experience goes, but Jarmusch already has the ability to convince you that he can do anything he chooses to do on the screen. For nearly thirty years now, Altman has consistently reminded us of the same thing. Alone of all the American directors, he has the capabilities to make virtually any sort of film he wants to (and can get the funding for). This quality, which is both technical competence and a breadth of artistic vision combined, is very rare. But it is much commoner in Europe than it is here, where it is difficult to think of anyone who is in Altman's class. Even movies like *Quintet*, which audiences and critics alike hated, remain intriguing films and powerful technical exercises.

In the sweep of his work, in its great variety, in his deep interest in his country's social and cultural fabric, he reminds one of Poland's pre-eminent director, Andrzej Wajda. There's another similarity as well, which is their mutual

fascination with bringing the theater to the screen. Both men have consistently returned to this, and with varying degrees of success. Ultimately, it's hard to see this as a line of aesthetic exploration that will ever pan out. Whatever their similarities, the cinema and the theater have now come to arouse such divergent expectations in their audiences that it is probably almost impossible to keep them together.

Fool for Love is too much like Wajda's *Danton* in that one is perpetually conscious of how really different the two forms are, so that the more one

modern American theater, and while he's immune to the faddishness of it, he's rarely afraid to shock the audience, or to force them to watch the characters undergo some deep psychoanalytic ordeal on stage. But, also like Bond, his themes are extremely limited. *Fool for Love* takes us back once again into a closed and tortured world of brother-sister incest, hatred for the father, and flight from responsibility. The themes are congruent with what happened in *Paris, Texas* as well as with the plays.

The script unfortunately reduces the dialogue



Zack, Jack, and Roberto in jail
Down By Law

watches, the more dissatisfied one becomes. The problem certainly isn't that Altman has fouled things up. Sam Shepherd, who wrote the play, adapted it to the screen for this film, and he plays Eddie. While it would be misleading to say that Eddie is the most important part, there are only two other major characters (May, played by Kim Basinger, and the old man, played by Harry Dean Stanton), so this film has very much of Sam Shepherd in it.

As a playwright, Shepherd seems consistently underrated by the critics. One could almost go so far as to say that along with Edward Bond, he is the most consistently satisfactory playwright around. He's deeply immersed in the idea of the

to a set of monologues, and the actors, although they do the best they can (and Altman can get his actors to do things that hardly anyone else can), seem to veer between the world of the cinema and the world of the theater. This wobble in the performance is much more evident here than it was in the Wenders film, probably because Wenders has never had the fascination for the theater that Altman has. Those long monologues require the kind of technical proficiency that we associate with the stage. Yet having that proficiency involves doing things in ways that are at odds with what we see in the screening room, where the actors are no longer human beings seen from a distance, but giant heads and faces

towering over us.

The other problem, which was not inherent in the project, and was well within Altman's control, was the decision to build the motel in which all the action takes place. Altman was probably aware of this risk, because there is a long defense of it in the press kit. Whatever the reasons for building the motel from the ground up, it doesn't work. What the crew ended up with was a sort of giant set. But everything else in the film, including the flashbacks, is "real." There are real horses in real trailers towed by real trucks.



Roberto and his one true love
Down By Law

So the set emphasizes the inherent problem in the project, and the result, unfortunately, is that *Fool for Love* is, like many of Altman's films, only an interesting experiment. Nonetheless, what Altman is doing deserves support. It's a commendable effort by one of our greatest directors, even though ultimately it is not a particularly satisfactory film.

So it's tempting to see these directors in pairs. There's Jarmusch and Joffe, two younger artists who have chosen different routes, with the result that one of them has less visibility but an infinitely greater control over his medium. There's the contrast between Altman and Allen. Allen, who has always made serious claims about the movie

pantheon he admires, can do whatever he wants, and chooses not to do very much. Altman, whose career has been one long uphill battle, persists in trying to bring some intellectual respectability to the American cinema.

Then there's the contrast between Scorsese and Konchalovsky (whose latest film was also at Cannes). They're both talented, and they both seem to have an interest in peculiar subjects, which means that no one knows exactly what to do with them. They're also both directors that encourage critics to think in stereotypes, in this

case, national stereotypes: what could be more Russian than some interminable film about the colonization of Siberia? What could be more American than a film about a taxi driver who massacres a bunch of hoodlums?

But their entries at Cannes established something else. With *After Hours*, Scorsese seems set in the familiar Allen path of harmless entertainment. It's a good film, but it's been done before. It confirms the director as someone puttering on the margins of the art form. But after seeing *Runaway Train*, one emerges with an entirely new impression of Konchalovsky.

Runaway Train is a powerful action film. Like *The Mission*, it's also a "big" film, set in the wilds

of Alaska, and photographed there (with some notable exceptions: the interiors of the train were done in a studio, the prison in Montana). It features two hardened and implacable heroes, the hardened convict Manny, played by Jon Voigt, and his accomplice Buck, played by Eric Roberts. What the audience gets is two extremely tough criminals who escape from a prison in Alaska. This breakout is one of those man triumphs over nature and the odds affairs, but Konchalovsky emphasizes the actual details of how it is done sufficiently so that it is believable.

That's probably the most impressive thing here. He has taken a really crazy idea of a story and made it a surprisingly believable one. Having hiked through the sub-zero temperatures, the two cons end up in a railway yard where they hop the first train that goes by. The engineer has a heart attack and falls out of the cab, and the train goes speeding off. So we have a speeding train that no one can figure out how to stop, a lunatic prison warden after the convicts on it, and above all, the train itself.

The idea for this film, weirdly enough, came from Kurosawa, who apparently suggested Konchalovsky as the director.¹⁵ Out of this scrambled situation, with a Russian director doing a film about Americans based on a script by a Japanese director, emerges (not unexpectedly) something of a puzzle. There are some very fine things about this movie. In a peculiar way, one can see why Konchalovsky would be so fascinated with prison life in the arctic, and why he would also be fascinated with the almost superhuman exercise of will by the convict Manny.

When the film opens Manny has been in solitary confinement for years, welded into his cell by Chief Warden Rankin ("Some of you may feel that the discipline on this ship is a trifle on the harsh side of strict," as Captain Hughes puts it in *Yellowbeard*). Jon Voigt, who previously has always been a sort of hulking nice guy, is here transformed into an implacable creature. In this intensely detailed and realistic setting, he makes Charles Bronson look like Michael Caine,

Sylvester Stallone like Woody Allen. He's all controlled energy. After watching him stroll through the arctic, you wouldn't be surprised to see him stop the train by picking it up and throwing it off the tracks.

There's no doubt that Konchalovsky, like Altman, is one of those directors who can get whatever effect he wishes on the screen, and one who can manage to bring out the very best in his actors. Manny and Buck come across with the sort of driving force that makes us believe their eccentricities. Neither the director nor the actors make any attempt to humanize the pair. Voigt is the more obviously twisted of the two. Whenever he speaks, it's like the speech is what he's doing instead of tearing someone apart, and he obviously would prefer the latter.

But Eric Roberts manages in a remarkable way to suggest a kind of likeable and talkative redneck psychopath, the sort of fellow who turns a little mean after a few bottles and goes after you with a chainsaw. These guys are convicts, and there isn't any attempt to have you see them as the pathetic victims of society. When Rankin, who's almost as bad an animal as Manny (maybe worse), has the cell opened up because the court has told him he has to, our sympathy is already built up for the poor fellow who's been locked up like an animal inside it. You wait to see him, to see what sort of terrible effects this has had on him. And then you see Jon Voigt. He's busily engaged in working out, and his look is the purest and nastiest sort of evil imaginable. All this solitary confinement has had no effect on him at all. From that point you realize that he's not like the rest of us. It's a measure of the success of this team, and of the failures of Irons and De Niro and Joffe, that these contemporary scum are more believable and sympathetic than two almost wholly admirable men from the Enlightenment.

Then there's the train. Like Altman's motel, it becomes an integral part of the action. But in Konchalovsky's hands the train itself is marvelous. Since *The Great Train Robbery* the movies have always been fascinated by locomotives, and there have been some classic films in which the railroad and its hardware are much more than some cutesy prop. Konchalovsky's film is up there with the best of them in this regard. Seeing his train speeding through the snow, and hearing it from the perspectives of the convicts, is one of those experiences that the cinema is all about. In *The Mission*, everything about the exotic setting is simply a prop. But here the props determine the

¹⁵After what must have been a good deal of fiddling with the rights as well as the story itself, Cannon ended up as the producer. Interestingly enough, both this film and Altman's were produced by Cannon, which in recent years has emerged as one of the driving forces in international cinema. One always associates them with a sort of Grade B exploitation product, which has been somewhat unfair, but in 1986 Cannon had no less than three films in competition: these two and Zeffirelli's filmed opera, *Otello*.

course of the film, just as the old steam locomotive did in Keaton's *The General*. From the viewpoint of sheer artistry, these things are the difference between the real artist and the craftsman.

Where the problem with Konchalovsky's film starts is that, like *Pale Rider* (shown in competition in 1985), one is expected to see in the plot some "great metaphor: the existential point of view and the image of the train as something—perhaps the arms race, perhaps civilization—out of control," or, as Konchalovsky also has said, "Some really serious thoughts about the relativity of evil and freedom."¹⁶

One can see how this is intended. Manny represents the quest for absolute freedom, just as Rankin represents the eternal jailer/torturer. When Manny deliberately lets himself and Rankin be killed as the train crashes, he not only enables Buck and Sara to escape and start new lives, he dies asserting those freedoms—standing up on the top of the locomotive as it crashes into the buildings at the end of the track. But all this seems like a puzzlingly sophomoric exercise in symbolism, almost as though Konchalovsky was afraid to come out and confess that after a career of chokingly intellectual exercises for Mosfilm he wanted to cut loose and make a really terrific piece of bourgeois entertainment.

That he did so suggests one of the problems inherent in the world of Hollywood (here obviously used only in the metaphorical sense). It is most successful when it is doing the sorts of things that we see in *Runaway Train*. Those things are an important part of the cinema, but they are not the cinema. It is at its least successful when trying to be intellectual and serious. The intellectualism is ludicrous, as with *The Mission*. The inertia of the system is probably what creates people like Allen and Scorsese, talented directors who finally end up puttering around the edges because the system has marginalized them. So sensibly enough, they carve out specialized niches for themselves in those same margins. They're successful enough at it, but their work ultimately remains unsatisfactory.

By sheer numbers alone, the products of the machine choke out the talented and the independent. This is not to say that these people

don't get to make films that are seen. But if it were left up to Hollywood, they wouldn't be seen. Cannes has been the major introducer of American film talent. Over the years it has supported Allen, Altman, and Coppola (and others). It has introduced Jarmusch and Seidelman (and many others) and made them in some way "respectable" for North Americans. But that was when the rest of the world was producing enough films, both in terms of quality and quantity, that Hollywood films were simply one product among many. That is less true today, which does not bode well for the future.

It is also a sobering thought when one realizes how much of what is really good bears a foreign signature. The cinematography in *Down By Law* is of an entirely different order than in these other films. It was done by Robby Muller, from Holland. *Paris, Texas*, directed by the German filmmaker Wim Wenders, seems a much better introduction to and realization of Sam Shepherd than *Fool for Love*. *Runaway Train*, directed by a Russian émigré, is unquestionably one of the best films of the convict subgenre which has been a staple of American film.

Going one step further, the striking thing is that the three most interesting films from the English-speaking world were all films about places on the margins of it. Although both *Down By Law* and *Belizaire, the Cajun* were made in the United States by American artists, both are set in one of the least American cultures there is, South Louisiana. Similarly, by far and away the best of the Commonwealth films was Denys Arcand's *The Decline of the American Empire*, a film set in the French part of Canada and made by (and for) its inhabitants.

One might argue that Arcand's film isn't part of the English-speaking world at all, although its concerns, and the lives of its characters, are indisputably North American. But this dilemma suggests the distinct possibility that some of the most interesting works of our culture either come from foreigners or are about fringe (or conflict) areas of our culture.

But perhaps this emphasis on Hollywood and the various reactions to it is in itself distorting. In the film world in recent years we have seen the emergence of Australia and the regrouping of Great Britain. The United States is no longer the sole producer of the best English language films. *The Mission*, produced by David Puttnam for Goldcrest, is a case in point. In fact, the careful reader, having already observed that Puttnam produced both of Joffe's films, may already have

¹⁶Quote is from the Press Kit for this film. Or, as Dilys Powell puts it in her review of the film in the 2 July 1986 issue of *Punch*: "Psychology has got into the works. The simple adventure which is at the heart of the cinema is lost in a confusion of motives, and the audience, lured into unsuspected complexities, leaves puzzled and disappointed" (42).

noticed the apparent inconsistency. It is ironic that *The Mission*, technically and ostensibly a British film, should embody all of the attributes of the classical Hollywood production.

But this is not nearly as ironic as the fact that virtually everything of note that has happened in British film has been the result of two centers of activity. On the one hand the various members of the Monty Python comedy team have virtually all by themselves been a new film wave. Leaving aside the two compilation films of their skits, in the last decade the various members of the group, acting singly or in parcels, have come up with at least eight movies: *The Quest for the Holy Grail*, *Jabberwocky*, *Time Bandits*, *The Life of Brian*, *The Missionary*, *Brazil*, *Yellowbeard*, and a third anthology film, *The Meaning of Life*. There's been something there to offend practically everyone, so much so that the sheer creativity involved has been largely ignored.

But for anyone who genuinely loves the cinema, or even pretends to be infatuated with it, those films have been treasure-troves of filmic imagination. *Brazil* may be a film flawed to the point of narrative incoherence, but it is the first time anyone has tried to give us a visual equivalent of what Orwell was trying to do with words. In fact, much of the group's real genius has consisted of being able to create images out of what had always been strictly verbal. The blood and gore in the two medieval films may have seemed gratuitous, but one has to go no further than the old editions of King Arthur, illustrated by Howard Pyle, to find that all of that violence was still there.

Medieval literature itself abounds with such scenes. When Beowulf grapples with Grendel, he rips his arm out of its socket, and when Gawain cuts off the Green Knight's head, the blow is described in graphic detail. That scene is certainly the intellectual progenitor of a similar scene in *Jabberwocky*, where the herald's head goes rolling off beneath the benches.

That may be precisely the problem: the humor is not simply visual; it rests upon what used to be thought of as wit, which involves learning as well as imagination. The impact that Agamemnon's adoption of Kevin would have had on Greek literature, the portraiture of Queen Anne's court, the warping of Eisenstein in *Jabberwocky* are intellectual jokes of a high order. Hopefully at some point it will be more obvious just how good some of these films are. But until then British film will be thought of as things like *Chariots of Fire*.

And that film, which was very much the start

of the big wave of British films, was the creature of producer David Puttnam. Like the Python group, Puttnam has been single-handedly responsible for most of what has happened, producing an incredible percentage of all British films: *The Duellists*, *Midnight Express*, *Cal*, *Local Hero*, *Chariots of Fire*, *The Killing Fields*, and now *The Mission*. There have of course been some Goldcrest productions that didn't involve Puttnam, most notably Hugh Hudson's most recent fiasco about the American Revolution. And there have been a few decent films made outside of the Puttnam-Python axis, such as John Mackenzie's *The Long Good Friday*. But there have been few enough of those, few enough to suggest that Puttnam's departure for Hollywood from Goldcrest will probably be the final blow for both the company and for the latest British film wave.¹⁷

Ironically, it's a film like *The Long Good Friday* that tells us why this is likely to be the case. It's an interesting film, although not an outstanding one. What is very good about it, however, is Bob Hoskins, who plays Harold, a petty gangster boss in London whose world collapses around him because he can't deal with the fact that the world has changed. Harold's idea of crime is charmingly old-fashioned. It isn't genteel, but it resonates with the old Jimmy Cagney movies. People behaved in fixed ways. The world of crime had its limits. It was predictable, even gentlemanly. What Harold has to learn is that this is 1981.

So the result is an interesting film with an excellent performance by an underrated actor. But the idea certainly isn't good enough to make it all over again with a different title. Nonetheless, that is pretty much what Neil Jordan's *Mona Lisa* is. Bob Hoskins again plays the sort of fellow described above. He's lower down the social scale of crime now. Instead of a boss he's a flunkie. But it's the same performance. It's even the same car.

Now presumably the audience either doesn't know, or it doesn't care. It just wants to watch Bob Hoskins do a reprise on his role. The plot is of course drastically different. Out of prison, George ends up driving around a pretty black prostitute, Simone (played by Cathy Tyson). The two of them bicker, but George falls for her. He becomes involved in her life enough to become enmeshed in the sordid world of vice and drugs.

¹⁷As the lead-in to an interview with Puttnam put it: "After the incompetence of *Revolution* and *Absolute Beginners*, its [*The Mission*'s] added mission was to single-handedly salvage the idea of Britain as successful providers of international big-budget pictures" (*Cannes Daily* 16 May 1986: 26).

He's appalled by what he sees, mainly, one supposes, because he comes from this older, more old-fashioned world of crime.

Now this whole conceit is preposterous. Crime has always been a uniquely dirty proposition, as Leone pointed out in *Once Upon a Time in America*.

Doyle, like Dickens, was well aware of what a sordid place the lower side of London was, it was just that they left intimate descriptions of it up to the French, thank you.

In the cinema such understatement doesn't work at all, which is why the Sherlock Holmes



Bob Hoskins and Cathy Tyson
Mona Lisa

The idea that it was in some way genteel probably comes from Conrad's *The Secret Agent*, where he points out that the police preferred to deal with thieves rather than anarchists.¹⁸ But Conrad's point was merely that anarchists were a messy lot who didn't play by the rules, not that common criminals were gentlemen. The problem with the people who wrote these scripts is that they had read too many Sherlock Holmes stories without realizing just how much was between the lines.

films we have had so far have been so outrageously awful. There's some basic understanding of this in both Jordan and Mackenzie because they've made their hero a

¹⁸"He could understand the mind of a burglar, because, as a matter of fact, the mind and instincts of a burglar are of the same kind as the mind and instincts of a police officer. . . . The mind of Chief Inspector Heat was inaccessible to revolt" (Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent* [Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1921] 86).

typical Cockney ape. Whether Hoskins is playing George or Harold, he has to appear somewhat dim, or the idea won't work. In Mackenzie's film he appeared simply a little slow on the uptake. But in Neil Jordan's film he's so thick that even Pauline Kael found him a bit slow.¹⁹

There are some nice touches here, all of them overdone, including the use of the title song itself, a picture of Mona Lisa on a refrigerator, and the like. Presumably these conscious touches, together with some references to film noir, all put together in an extremely cerebral fashion, are supposed to redeem the film, make it into a minor masterpiece. It isn't, although it isn't a bad movie. *Mona Lisa* is a serious film, which will probably delight everyone who liked *The Long Good Friday*, or other mannered self-conscious examples of this exceedingly minor genre. It's a better picture than *Thief of Hearts*, although not by much.

But in its febrile intellectualism, its somewhat cute reference system, and above all in its intensely derivative approach, it is a grim reminder of just how starved the British/Irish cinema really is. Take away the Pythons and there isn't anything very interesting happening. Take away David Puttnam and there probably isn't too much going on at all.

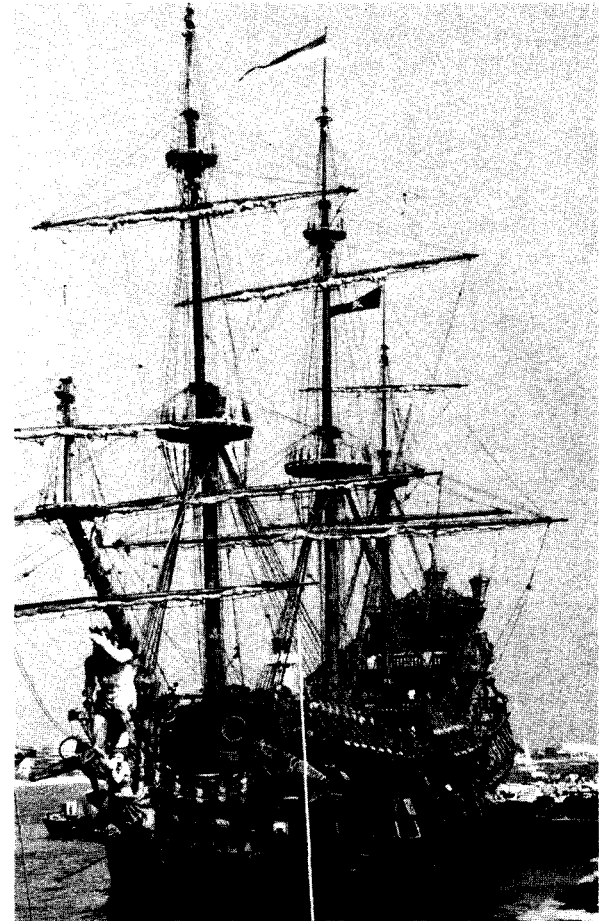
At one point in the previous decade, it appeared that a combination of Australian and/or émigré talent would redeem us. Of those émigrés, the chief certainly was Roman Polanski, who proved himself able to make brilliant films both in Great Britain and then in America. At a certain point one could begin to perceive that there might be a falling off of effort. But perhaps this was unfair. Every director has his weaker films. But *Pirates*, quite bluntly, is so awful that it seems difficult to take Polanski very seriously any longer. Like *Mona Lisa*, it's derivative, but it is even less remarkable than Jordan's film. It is too vulgar for children, too stupid for adults, and too drearily made for the cinema. Quite the best thing about it is the ship itself, which was moored at Cannes directly by the new palais. Rumor has it that the city of Cannes may buy it and turn it into a tourist attraction. If so, Polanski may have inadvertently left a lasting mark on Cannes.

The Australians were represented by a host of films. Some of them were pretentious, others simply dull, and all of them extremely feeble. Beresford's *Fringe Dwellers* is yet another story

¹⁹See her review in *The New Yorker*, 16 June 1986: 114-18. The *Variety* reviewer thought the film a "stylish and genuine original" picture (14 May 1986: 43).

about the problems of the aborigines in Australia. It is somewhere between a documentary and a television drama, and as a result it is, no matter how good the director's intentions were, terribly tedious.

There were two curiosities. One was a genuinely Australian film about a young man who falls in love with the attractive young French wife of an Italian. The film is set during World War II, and so the Italian has been interned. Paul, the young man, is able to get the affair with



The best thing was the ship
Polanski's *Pirates*

Marthe started, but it ultimately collapses. Scott Murray based his script on Raymond Radiguet's novel, *Le Diable au Corps*, and this certainly had something to do with the film being selected for the *Semaine*. The idea of an Australian movie based on a French novel, but with the added fillip of the heroine being French, was presumably too much for the French to pass up. The result isn't by any means a bad film, but it's an extremely limited and modest one. Poor Paul is so wooden that he never really seems to catch fire with that peculiar mixture of love and lust that we would

expect him to feel for the beautiful Marthe. Supposedly this is because he's so engrossed with himself that he can't really give anything. But it still seems a major fault.

Nonetheless, there was at least some attempt to do something, which is more than one could say for the Australian film which, much to everyone's surprise, turned out to be something of a minor hit. The screenings were surprisingly crowded for Graeme Clifford's *Burke and Wills*, two fellows who, as every Australian knows, were famous explorers. Their epic trek across the center of the country, which in the last century

or philosophically bent, is there much there either.

Burke and Wills is one of those peculiar films that although beautifully photographed, leaves only an impression of wasted opportunities. One leaves the theatre with a sense of having been slowly beaten to death with hot towels. It is also an unexpectedly apt allegory of what has happened to Anglo-American films. Our filmmakers, with the best of intentions, go lumbering off into the wilderness, largely to prove some point that upon reflection seems totally pointless. They take with them far too



Another tense moment in the down under
Burke and Wills

was as unknown and unexplored as Africa, is perhaps analogous to the Lewis and Clark expedition in the United States.

The key difference, however, is that Lewis and Clark came back to fame and glory, while Burke and Wills didn't, technically speaking, come back at all. Since every Australian knows this, there isn't much tension to the story. But to foreigners the idea was fascinating. Clifford's film is, unfortunately, one of those slow and ponderous works that goes on forever. If there was any real point to what we see, we lose it as the hours pass. The result is essentially a Western without any action whatsoever. Nor, since none of the participants involved were particularly talkative

much baggage for the task, and compensate by having far too little of an understanding either of what they're about, or about the basics of their craft. They count on their determination to see them through. It doesn't. What's left is some splendid moments and memories of bickering and confusion, but above all, a sense of utter waste and misplaced energy. As went our nineteenth-century explorers, so go our artists. □

This is the first article of a three-part series on the 1986 Cannes Film Festival. The second part of the series will appear in the next issue.

John Mosier is the Film Editor of the New Orleans Review.

Max Aub

IMPOSSIBLE SINAI

Translated by Will Kirkland

A PRELIMINARY NOTE

These writings were found in the pockets and backpacks of Arabs and Jews who died in the so called "Six Day War" in 1967. The translations are due, in great part, to my students. I am indebted to them.

I take no sides here; I have only chosen for publication—with the kind help of Alastair Reid—those that seem to me to be the most representative.

THE EVENTS

June 1967 (from the 5th to the 10th)

The First Day, Monday

Israeli aircraft cross the border at dawn and destroy the Egyptian air force on the ground. Similar incursions occur simultaneously in Jordan, Syria and Irak while the Algerian air force is lured into occupied airports and disarmed.

The Arab countries begin their attack through the Gaza Strip, Jerusalem and the north of Galilee. Syrian and Iraki airplanes bomb Haifa, Tel-Aviv, Netanya; Jordanian artillery shells the border from Qalquiliya.

Israeli tank columns cut through the Gaza Strip and advance across the Sinai Desert, capturing El Arish. Israeli paratroops land in Sharm el Sheikh, on the Red Sea, while in Jerusalem bloody fighting takes place (some at bayonet point) resulting in the capture of Mt. Scopus, to the north of the city, by Jordanian troops under the command of Hussein.

Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Irak, Algeria, Sudan, and Kuwait declare war on Israel. Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Yemen, and Tunis promise aid.

General Dayan, the Israeli Defense Minister, declares that Israel has no territorial designs.

De Gaulle suspends the shipment of war material to Israel.

The USSR states that it will not intervene unless the US does.

The United States promises to be neutral in "thought, word and deed."

The Second Day, Tuesday

Israeli tanks advance towards the Suez Canal. Another armored column

succeeds in overrunning Kuntilla and turns towards Sharm el Sheikh to reinforce the positions taken by the paratroops.

The coast at Tel-Aviv is shelled by Egyptian warships, and in the north of Galilee the Syrians succeed in penetrating Israeli territory.

An Israeli offensive along the Jordanian border results in the silencing of the enemy artillery and the taking of Jenin and Qalquilaya. In Jerusalem the air force bombs the Jordanian positions.

Nasser accuses the United States and Great Britain of taking part in the air operations on behalf of Israel, breaks diplomatic relations with the United States and closes the Suez Canal.

The US and Great Britain deny Nasser's accusations. Syria and Irak break diplomatic relations with the US and Great Britain. Algeria also breaks with the US and nationalizes the oil companies while Kuwait and Irak hold back all deliveries of petroleum to North America and England.

England suspends shipment of arms to the Arab countries, while Germany offers a shipment of gas masks (!) to Israel.

The USSR says that Israel is the aggressor and demands the withdrawal of troops from Egyptian territory. In the UN a resolution is passed unanimously, calling for the cessation of hostilities.

The Third Day, Wednesday

Israeli forces enter Gaza and continue toward the Canal in the North, taking Romani, and towards the Mitla Pass in the South, where they are engaged by the Arabs near Port Taufiq. Landing forces complete the capture of Sharm el Sheikh, as well as of the islands in the Straits of Tiran.

In Galilee the Syrians are thrown back from their positions. Israeli forces conquer Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Ramallah, and Jerico, thus occupying the entire east bank of the Jordan River.

Israel and Jordan accept the cease-fire called for by the UN. Egypt refuses.

The USSR threatens Israel with the rupture of diplomatic relations if it doesn't observe the cease-fire.

Jordan accuses Israel of violating the cease-fire.

Yemen, the Sudan, and Mauritania break relations with the US.

The Fourth Day, Thursday

When an Israeli column comes within sight of the Suez Canal in the North, the Egyptians counterattack in the area of Bir Gafgafa along the main line of march. There is a great tank battle in which the Israelis crush the Egyptians.

In Galilee the Syrians withstand the thrust of the Jews, who are now reinforced due to the end of resistance on the Jordanian border; the war ends on the Sinai front.

Israel broadcasts a recording of a telephone conversation between Nasser and Hussein in which they agree to accuse the United States and Great Britain of participating in the air attacks.

Egypt and Syria accept the cease-fire.

The Fifth Day, Friday

Israeli airplanes bomb the Syrian positions, silencing their artillery and

allowing the advance of their own troops toward the interior of Syria where they occupy the heights near the sea of Galilee.

Part of the forces of the UAR which are surrounded in Bir Gafgafa are able to break out and retreat to the African side of the Canal. Those remaining scatter and wander, without arms or equipment, until they are taken prisoners by the Jews.

Nasser, in an emotional speech, resigns as the President of the UAR, accepts responsibility for the disaster and puts himself at the service of his country as a private citizen. His resignation is refused by the National Assembly and produces, paradoxically, an upsurge in popularity of the Rais, with demonstrations in the streets of Cairo.

The Sixth Day, Saturday

The Israelis cross into Syria all along the border. There are air battles near Damascus.

Israel and Syria agree on a cease-fire.

The USSR breaks diplomatic relations with Israel.

With the cessation of the fighting on the Syrian front, at 6:30 PM (Middle East time) the Arab-Israeli War is over. As they say.

* * * * *

ALI FAKUM NAZZAR

Born in 1942, in Alexandria, I could find out nothing about him; either they don't remember, or they shrug their shoulders. Some men go through life like that, undeservedly, it goes without saying. He died on the last day.

A man says: *sweet*
and he understands.

A man says: *salt*
and he understands.

A man says: *cock*
and he understands.

A man says: *God*
and he understands.

But when he says: *death*
not one understands.

And it lies before and behind.

* * * * *

ANONYMOUS PALESTINIAN SONG

I am neither Arab nor Jew
I am of Palestine.

Not one will remain.

I lived in the desert
and here I will die.

Not one will remain.

Ours is the desert: ours
is the earth and the sky—
deserts the two.

Not one will remain.

Here I lived
and here I will die.

Not one will remain.

These fair-haired Jews
are well put together
for skeletons;
many are better than few.

Not one will remain.

Not one will remain. (rep)

I don't believe in Allah.

I don't believe in anything.

But the desert
is ours.

I am neither Arab nor Jew.

I am of Palestine.

Not one will remain.

* * * * *

AMIN IBN IBRAHIM AL-ATTAR

One of those whose fanaticism knows no limits, a fervent believer in his faith and a propitiatory victim to his own bullheaded zealotry. He does not believe in weapons; he does not believe in the superiority of one kind of airplane over another; his one belief is that the One True God, alone, is capable of granting victory. Into this greatest of all blindnesses (not nationalist) we can see that humankind will once again fall, now that the tolerance of maturity seems to have passed. Amin Ibn Ibrahim Al-Attar was born in Cairo in 1948. He died on the second day. He was a celebrated poet in a few select circles and little interested in revealing his true feelings. All the poems of his divan have reference to people that would seem to be foreign to him.

The Fool

Let them say what they want: I lived on this land. Call it anything you want—it has lots of names—it doesn't matter to me. Here I lived. Here I was born. Here discovered woman. Here my children were born. Here I had a garden. Here I had my goats. Here I had my house. Here I had my wife. One day some men came (it matters nothing to me who they were) and told me to leave.

Then others came who spoke to me of justice and of getting my own land back.

Of the first I know nothing, of the second, much: I remember very well what it was like. And now they tell me I can only get it back by gambling my life. How strange:

My life is worth nothing.
My house is.

* * * * *

SALOMON CHAVSKY

A soldier in the Signal Corps, a witty young man and fond of practical jokes; he could run like a gazelle and they called him "Kangaroo." Happy in his complete lack of culture, but a very capable broadcaster. A fine performer of popular songs. He was born in a kibbutz near Genezaret. He died on the fifth day near Bir Gafgafa.

Night time still.
Sand.
Horses.
Sheep.
Soldiers.
Camels
asleep.
Dark skinned
Bedouins
Tanks!
Radio!
Too late!
Surrounded!

Poor Arabs,
Arab poor.
Which is the adjective,
which the substantive?

Who is responsible
for this disaster?
If you don't tell anyone
in part it is . . .

* * * * *

IBN MUSA AMIR

A Bedouin. He was in a tank, his corpse half burned, about twenty meters from the highway, two hundred kilometers to the south of Gaza. I don't know, of course, the day of his death.

Yes, certainly the land you offer me is better, richer than my
own. But it's not the same.
Every piece of land is different: some have water, some have
none, some are high and some are low, some are steep and some are
level, good for sheep and bad for goats, close to the sea and far
away, hot and cold.
But none of this matters.
There are only two kinds of land: mine and all the rest.
You can offer Paradise to me; what I want is the desert I was
born in and which you stole from me.
You can give me a palace made of richly colored marble. What I
want is the tent where my two horses and three camels gave birth.
Don't give up yet. Kill me, so my dust can return with the wind
and mix with the desert sand.

* * * * *

MANOCE MOHRENWITZ

A traveling salesman, witty and coarse, a good storyteller; no one ever knew where he came from during that period, shortly after 1948. During the war he was a cook more than anything else. Dark featured, with curly hair, he talked to himself. He died on the fifth day. Originally from Alto Adigio (though that is not certain), some thought he was an Egyptian spy. There is no proof of that, and I don't think it is true.

I have come this far. Not even God himself can make me take another step. If they were to tell me I was fighting for you I would go on till I died, but to die just for the sake of dying is more absurd than having been born a Jew.

I became a Jew little by little, because I wanted to, but without believing in Synagogues, or Fridays, or Holy Saturdays, or in Abraham or in Jehova or in David. Only in you Israel.

I worked for others with a passion; I became a man for them and for you and I helped to build a homeland, as far as it was possible; a homeland for you, something to shelter you in. I will go no farther in order to kill Arabs who have nothing to do with you, who know nothing of you, who do not know you exist and who—it is said—believe in Allah or in Jehova, because there are Arab Jews and Jewish Arabs who have nothing to do with you or with me. “We are blond and we speak Yiddish.” Why must I keep on and kill more Arabs who look like Jews, or Jews who believe in Allah? I have no interest in Politics: I love the land, the sun, good coffee; I love you as much as all of these but that does not justify having to kill this father or that mother. I will not go on. Shoot me if you wish. And that crime will have a name—because I don't believe in God, and neither do any of you, and so it will have our own names. I didn't come here to defend Him. Nor did you. I am an atheist. You are an atheist. He is an atheist. If all of this were to convince the Arabs to become atheists—in any way possible—perhaps I would take a few steps more. But it is not to do this. . . . Then, let them do with me as they wish. I will be just as good dead as alive if I am not at your side. My heart can take me no farther. Because I no longer trust it and because I cannot get this weight from me; even tearing it away.

But here I shall rest in the earth.

* * * * *

SIGMUND BAGINSKY

Of Lithuanian origin, he was born in a boat in the Dardanelles and was 8 days old when he was disembarked in Haifa in 1947. He never wanted to listen to anyone. The little he did learn was because he was forced to. Cowardly, and in love with American movies, "My kingdom for a horse!" could be the title of the following lines which I here translate because they demonstrate a strange feature of the Orthodox, and not only the Mosaic.

Jehova, if you exist, make the earth turn faster so I can see the
sun rise one more day.
Only this I ask: let me die by daylight, don't take my breath
from me now, at night.
I only ask to see the light being born, to close my eyes in the
light of the sun, not in the candlelight!
Jehova, if you exist, don't forget that I have died for you.
Keep me conscious at least till dawn, so I may see the upper corner of
this window edged in gold just one more time . . . !
Jehova, I would trade you for a piece of dawn!

I never lied to anyone; so what
am I doing here?
I only do it out of duty, not of pleasure.
But duty must be borne
so Israel may be.
That's what my parents say, my wife,
the Rabbi and my neighbor.
They didn't force me to it, no. I chose. I am.
I never lied to anyone, not even to me.
So I don't know why I'm here.
I'm going to die
for you
even though I don't know who you are, Israel.
Oh may you be, one day, the land
of milk and honey!
Remember me!
I never lied to anyone
Will you never lie to me?
The heavens say no.
The heavens say yes.

* * * * *

FRANCES H. MELZINER

Born in New York on the 4th of June, 1945, the son of a famous Talmudic Scholar. Brought up to honor the Torah, his loss of faith coincided with puberty. His parents sent him to Israel fifteen days before the commencement of the hostilities, the conclusion to which he would not see, on the day he turned twenty-one. He had a fine sense of humor and constant headaches which nothing was able to relieve. Blond, tall, curly hair, small, fat, waxy-colored lips, chin without even peach-fuzz yet. He died of a heart attack during the first bombing raid.

The 39 Prohibitions for Saturday (Shabbat 73a VII,2)

The primary labors are forty less one: sowing, ploughing, reaping, binding of sheaves, threshing, winnowing, selecting, grinding, sifting, kneading, baking; shearing wool, bleaching, carding, dyeing, spinning, stretching the threads, making two meshes, weaving two threads, dividing two threads, tying, untying, sewing two stitches, tearing out in order to sew two stitches; hunting for deer, slaughtering, flaying, salting, curing the hide, scraping it, cutting it up into pieces, writing two letters, erasing in order to write two more letters; building, tearing down, extinguishing, kindling, forging, carrying from one place to another. These are the primary labors less one.

On the other hand you can also try: shooting, stoning, wounding, mutilating, throwing off cliffs, stilettoing, hanging, choking to death, blinding, castrating, poisoning, slitting throats, shooting with arrows, randomly killing, slaughtering like pigs, killing by mobs, amputating, disemboweling, putting an end to, impaling, tormenting, garroting, hanging, shackling, pillorying, whipping, torturing, crucifying, beheading, beating, crushing, thrashing, jabbing, biting, stabbing, lacerating, slashing faces, beating to a pulp, machine gunning, and always to men, from Friday through Saturday, from first star to last. These are the forty primary labors less one.

The Mirror
Here is death before me
looking like nothing I have seen.
Be nothing, you, be nothing.
Here I am, faced with Death,
face to face, at the front.
Is it yours? Or mine?
What does it look like?
Daytime or nighttime?
What does it seem like? What color?
Is it black? Why must it be so?
It must be
just like the desert,
but more so;
like life itself
only bigger.
Perhaps dead with fear
seeing itself in a mirror
as I am here.

* * * * *

A DIALOGUE, TRANSLATED FROM LADINO

An old woman who used to live near the mill that is still standing, near Sion, told this to me.

"It might interest you."

We were friends. I took down what she said to me in her Spanish from Salonica. When she was 74 years old she went to school to learn Hebrew. She died on the fourth day from a stray bullet. The text refers to the 1948 war, I suppose.

"We can argue about whether I am a Jew or an Israeli and whether you are an Arab or a Moslem."

"One is the same as the other."

"In this war, is it Jews against Israelis and Arabs against Moslems?"

"What are we doing here?"

"Let's go up to this cave. Help me. Hold me up. Let's talk for a while: you and I are from here. What are all these Russians, these Germans, these Poles, these North Americans doing here?"

"You are a Jew, I am a Moslem. Neither of us were hurting the other.

Both Semites, both dark-featured, four black eyes, curly hair."

"Now we are both dead: dark-featured, white-eyed, curly-haired. If they changed our uniforms. . . ."

"Besides that, frankly, it isn't worth the trouble:

Russians here and there; all these Englishmen or Turks; North Americans, there and here.

I am a Moslem and an Israeli.

You are a Jew and a Syrian."

"Who is waiting out there?"

"No one, the night."

"I'm glad we are dead."

"Let's go."

"Where to?"

"To where they say the dead go."

"Do you know where that is?"

"No."

"How do we get there?"

"I don't know that either."

Dawn came.

* * * * *

SELOMO WEITZEL (JASPER REID)

He was born in Trieste in 1927. Took part in the French Resistance before immigrating to the United States in 1948. Well thought of as a reporter, he went to Havana in 1960. He went to Israel on the eve of the war, only partly for professional reasons. Wounded on the fifth day, he died two weeks later.

To Yevgeny Yevtushenko
Do you not remember now, Yevgeny, the night you read your "Poem
for Babi Yar" to me?
Do you not remember now, how excited you became when Shostakovich
said he would use it as the inspiration for a symphony?
Do you not remember now, fire breather?
Do you not remember now, how you shouted: "Today I am a Hebrew!"
Yevgeny?
Because, how could you be one, if your leaders say that we are
acting like imperialists?
The odd thing is, we were in Cuba and you said you felt yourself
to be a Jew, although you said:
"I have no Jewish blood in me."
I didn't notice then, but, do "true Russians" believe there are
"true Jews," or "Jewish blood"?
You will say to me that time does not pass in vain. Sadly that
is true: I feel very old today, as though I were at Babi
Yar, in the pit, at the bottom of the trench and were
listening to the wind for Yevgeny Yevtushenko's answer.
It sounded different then.
But you, are you the same?
They didn't let us,
those of Babi Yar, be even refugees,
nor those in Dachau, nor in Belsen
nor in Mauthausen nor in Babi Yar.
It makes me want to cry,
not to think of Babi Yar
but just because of you, Yevgeny Yevtushenko,
with this piece of Russian steel
that has torn my heart from me.

* * * * *

IBN AL-ARRAFAT

Born on the slopes of Mt. Ararat, he lived from early youth in Jerusalem. He was a guard at the Rockefeller Museum, where he took the place of an uncle of his who had been wounded, just days before his own death. He could mangle both English and French. He died in the garden of the museum on the first day.

What am I? A stone? Grass? A snail? The sky? He who will
sing to Jerusalem. I will now sing to Jerusalem. I will
sing of my dreams but I am not me but somebody else.
Iron, rubber, bottle or hottle, a little shoe button or little
rose button. Or am I, all of those things at the same time:
flour, clove, odor, grass, stone or piece of lead knocked from
that drainpipe by a bullet my brother shot? Or am I a bush
in the museum garden? Or some frying pan fruit from one of
Jerusalem's gates? Or am I a bit of stale bread? The
bakers are carrying their rifles hung in their slings
instead of kneading the dough. Gone with the wind, gone
with a dream. Say nothing to no one, Noemi.

"I am hungry. I would eat you, Noemi. Yes, you.
I sing, I sing, I who have no voice,
who am no one: iron and rubber, bottle and hottle, button . . .
Or am I now someone, from this day on?
And if I am, who am I?
No one knows. Are the stones singing
as though they were wind?
I think they are. No. No one is singing.
Everything's dark.

But I am hungry, Noemi.
Hungry for you, but hunger, nothing more,
hunger alone and gnawing,
to eat you piece by piece
to begin with your lips
to eat you piece by piece
and then to your tongue
to eat you sleeping, as I am sleeping.

But I am only here to kill."

* * * * *

ELIAHN KIMRON

The following was written on the eve of the first day. He was 19 years old. I don't think this is a poem, as are some of the other pieces gathered here. Or perhaps it is. Or it could be a letter. If it is, it wasn't addressed to anyone but just stuck in a blank envelope. Kimron was born on a kibbutz in Galilee where his parents are still working; Lithuanians. He died on the second day.

The night is falling, filtering in from Jordan, as clear as the
rest of the sky.
The sun ignites the other side.
The evening star is shining.
Tomorrow morning, early, the same
will happen, on the other side.
It will be another day. But not for me.
It will be true night for me.
I must cross the border,
cut some wires,
lay some mines.
I won't return.
I don't know why I know this.
But I know.
I volunteered to go. I don't know why.
I thought it wouldn't matter to me.
I thought that and I did it.
I didn't think I was a hero.
You didn't either my life.
Now as I see the last of the light I think I did a foolish thing.
If I lose my life for something foolish is that to be twice
foolish?
Possibly yes, possibly no.
I only know I love you
and you will never be mine.
I will go.
The night is falling.
It's like any other day for all the others:
tomorrow will be another day.
But not for me.

* * * * *

ISSAC KAPLAN

At the Office of Foreign Affairs they knew perfectly well who I was talking about but they refused, courteously, to give me any details concerning his life and miracles. I was assured that he worked in the UN from 1945-1946 as part of the British Delegation. I know nothing more than that he went to Israel in 1948.

They offered us some of the finest sites in the world. The English first of all, as is their custom: Uganda, Africa. (No one remembers what Max Nordau told them.) Hitler, generous as always, thought of Madagascar, beautiful island. But there is more (and less is known).

It makes a nice story:
Mr Truman was a great admirer
of the Jews of North America
—they have many votes, many, many thousands, thousands!
and in 1946
declared himself for us.
But he wanted to have it a nearby state
and the closest one was: California,
Mexico, and if not that then further south,
the Amazon, for example, green
between Brasil, Peru, Colombia. There is proof.
And he sent Cordell Hull to the United Nations
to tell this to the only diplomat
from South America
with a vote on the Council. In the end
—he said—
he would agree to Palestine
“If there is no other solution, of course.”
When that was known Mexico took
all precautions necessary.
And neither was it possible in South America.
(Hitler, by then, had died.)
—How much they all love us! It was
for the best:
We got Palestine that way, I swear.
And if they later say America
supported Israel
they know why now:
one Jew, one vote
Republican or Democrat;
'can or 'crat, 'crat or 'can.
But if I were North American
what a vote they'd get!

General de Gaulle
received them standing.
He asked Abba Eban:
—*Alors, Messieurs, nous attlaquons?*
The earth swallowed them up
(The ambassador was there)
they have not yet returned.
This is what they call
having a Secret Service.
In May it was, Abba Eban,
in May.

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GUSTAV FLEISHMAN

Born near Ramle, died in Hebron on the second day. The dates are his. Uglier than a camel; I say this because of his huge underlip, because when it comes to ears he beats them. A very good violinist and very fond of sour cucumber.

Ballad of a Sabra
I don't know who is right,
if Eshkol or Ben-Gurion;
it matters not to me:
I know that I was born
on the kibbutz
where my parents work,
and I will tell you, I am twenty,
I studied at the university,
Hebrew is my language
and this, my land and strength.
It matters not to me
who is right or wrong.
For me Ben-Gurion will do as well
as the other one, Eshkol.
This is my home
I will defend it as best as I'm able
and if for its defense
we must attack then attack I will,
because I was born here
and no one will take me
from my land
unless they tear me from it by the roots.

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Max Aub was an adopted Spaniard born of a German Jewish father and a Parisian mother. Exiled after the Spanish Civil War, he lived out his life in Mexico City. He made a trip to Israel late in his life, which formed the impetus for this collection.

Will Kirkland lives in San Francisco, where he translates from Castilian, from Catalan and, in courageous bursts, from Basque. His work has appeared in *New Directions Anthology* #45, *The American Poetry Review*, and elsewhere.

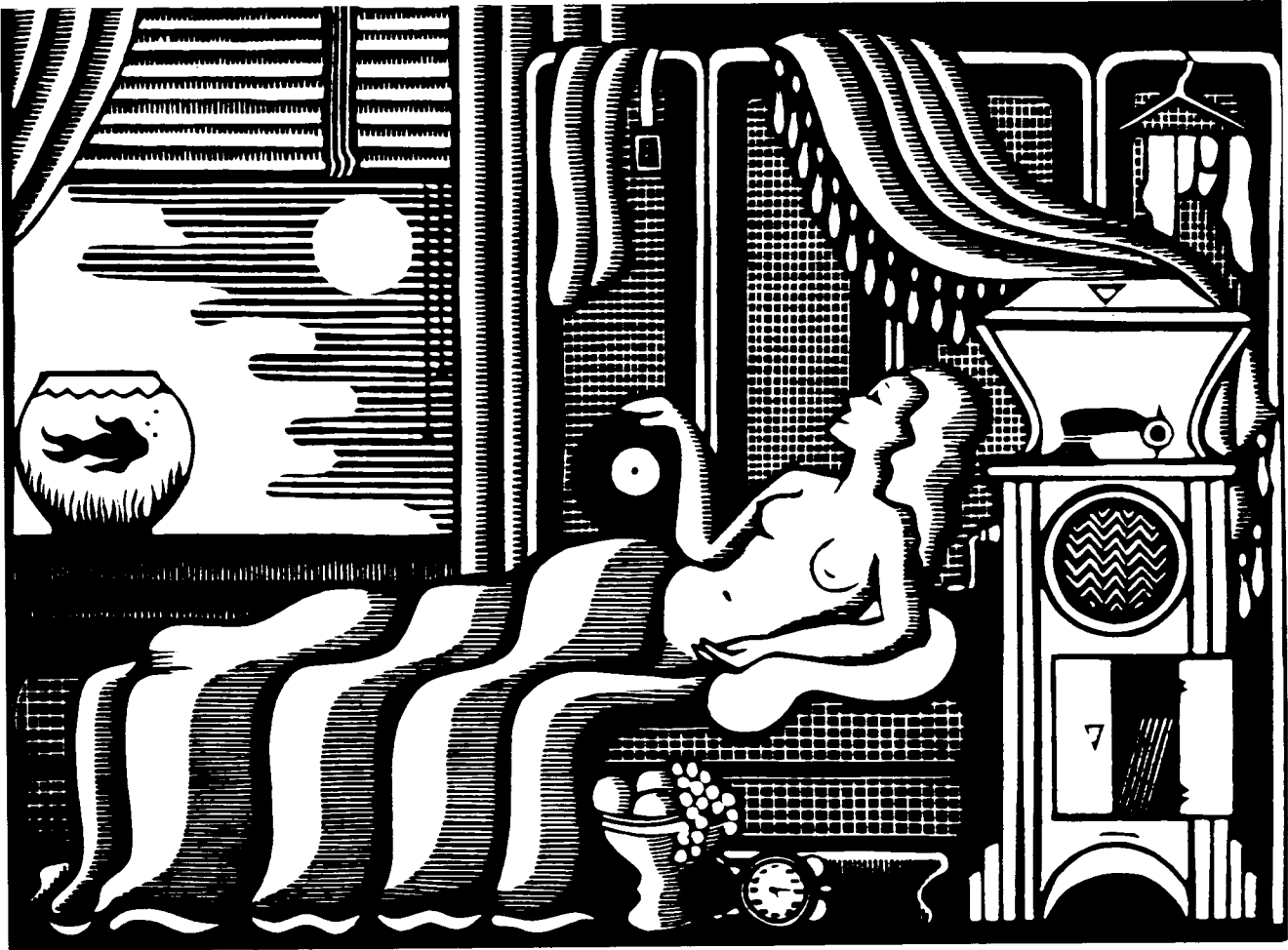
Michael Murphy

PORTFOLIO

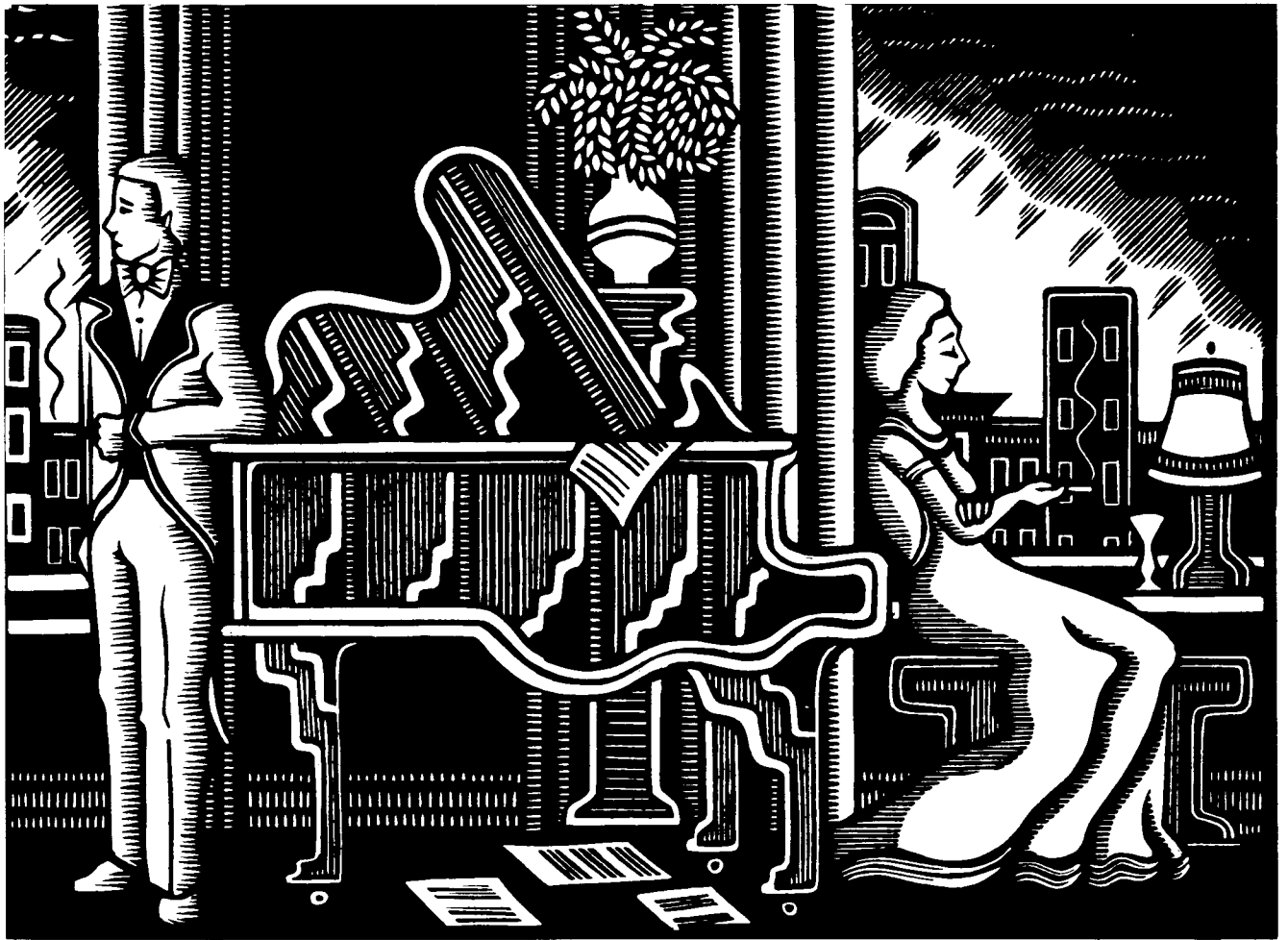


You Can't Be Mine





Time on My Hands



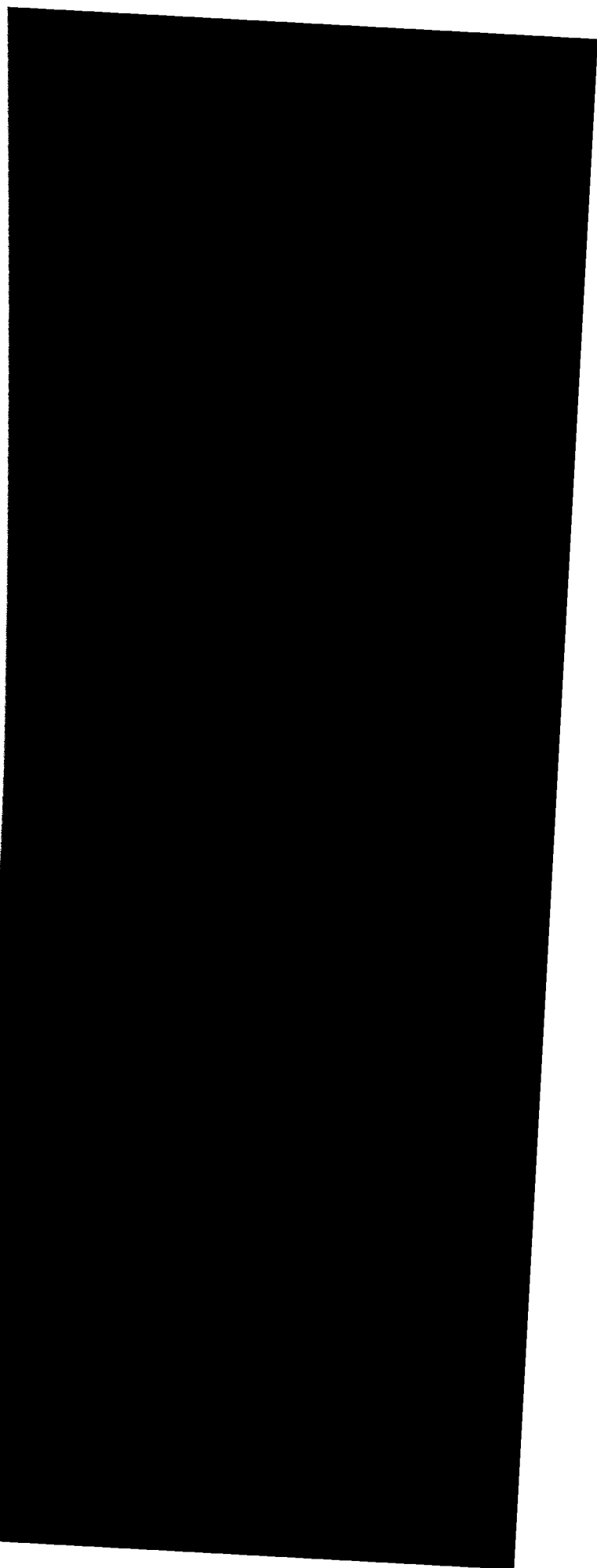
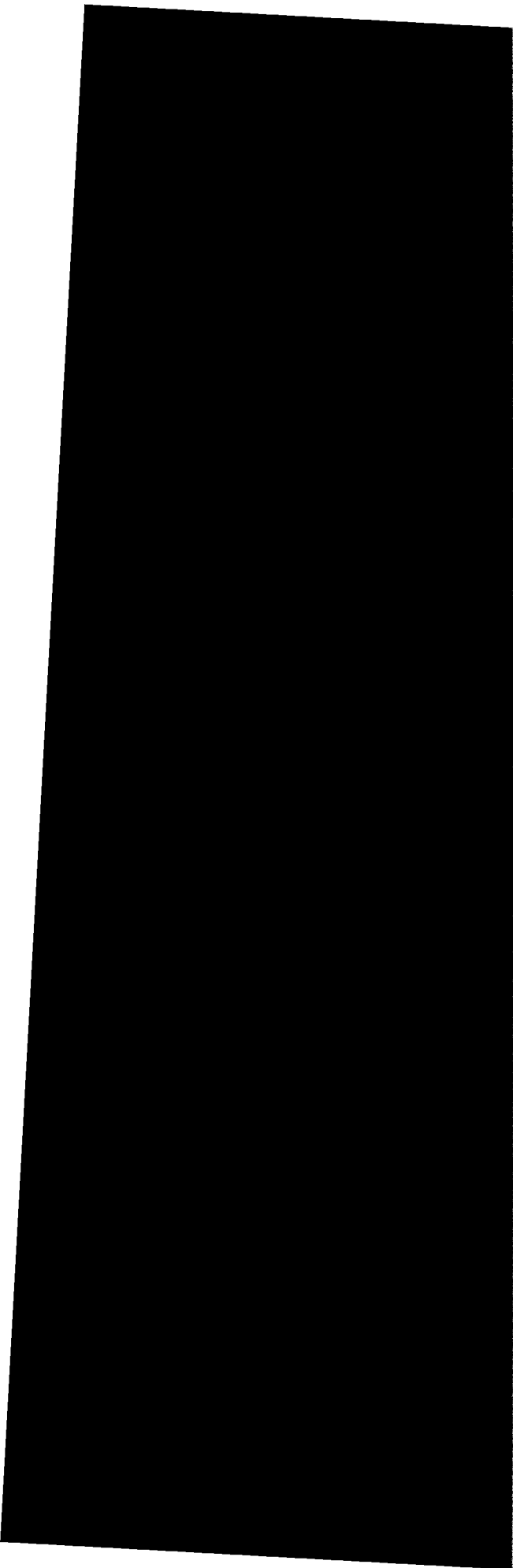
Mean to Me



That's My Weakness Now



But Not for Me



Do you think men can be feminist critics?

In the long run, yes. In the short run, they've got a lot of work to do. . . . Let me just backtrack one second; there is something else I wanted to touch on in the first question. Because feminist literary criticism is such an aggregate of different kinds of criticisms done under that umbrella term feminism, feminist literary critics have a particular problem in academe; every time one identifies oneself as a feminist critic, anybody who doesn't know what feminist criticism is all about assumes that that person does exactly what some other person does, assumes that we all do the same thing when in fact we are all very different. So that every time a feminist literary critic either gives a public paper or writes an article, in some way she has to say in her article I do this as a feminist critic, that is I do this criticism as a feminist, but this criticism is not characteristic of all feminist criticism and neither is the kind of criticism I do. I am part of a shared enterprise, but the way in which I participate in the enterprise is not characteristic of the way in which anybody else participates in the enterprise, and the trouble is that most of our male colleagues and non-feminist colleagues hear one of us and think they have heard us all. They read one book, and they think they've read them all. They hire one feminist in their department, and they don't need another. And that is killing us; it makes us marginal because every time one of us gets on a conference program, the conference coordinators think that they have dealt with feminist criticism. They haven't; they have only made available to their audience that one particular feminist critic who is not in any way characteristic of any other feminist critic. So I've gotten to the point now where, when I'm invited to conferences, I always insist . . . I refuse to accept the invitation if I am the only feminist critic on the program on the grounds that it is false advertising; you are misleading the audience if they tote me out as their token feminist critic, then the impression being given to the audience is that I am somehow or other typical or characteristic, and I'm not. So what I insist is that they have at least one and, if it's a large conference, two or three others so that there can be variety demonstrated. More of us need to be doing this sort of thing, that is, prefacing everything we say with the statement, "I'm a feminist critic, and other feminist critics do things very different from me; do not think when you have heard me, you have heard what feminist criticism has to say. You have only heard

what I have had to say as a feminist critic."

That is my strongest impression during the last week (at MLA). But what about Marxist feminism, since they are one group that insists upon having an ideology?

It's not that the rest of us don't have ideologies, it's just that we have different ideologies.

Yes, but it is they who insist that they are doing feminist criticism.

Yes, that's OK; it's okay if every group under the umbrella says what they're doing is the best way to go. It's all right as long as each of those groups is willing to continue the dialogue with all the other groups so that we can keep interpenetrating and exchanging. When one group sets itself up dogmatically as the only way, then you have a problem that would defeat the real energy and creativity of feminist criticism. So far, it hasn't happened. So far no group or individual has emerged as dominant, which would hinder a lot of very exciting interplay.

Has there been an effort on the part of lesbian critics to deliberately set themselves apart?

No, I don't think so. I think that's bad press. A number of lesbian critics are doing criticism that is not in any way perfectly demarked as lesbian. You might not know that the author is lesbian. Other lesbian critics who are, who define their work under the rubric of lesbian feminist criticism, like the rest of feminist critics, do such a variety of work. If you think about the lesbian feminist critics and the variety they represent—which includes women who work on texts by males, women who examine the encoding of women in texts by males, lesbian feminist critics working on texts by women, both heterosexual and homosexual women, and lesbian feminists working exclusively on texts by lesbian women—like the rest of feminist criticism, they come into the text from a variety of methodological and ideological standpoints. There is a great deal of heterodoxy there, and my sense is that those who don't wish to deal with lesbianism write it off as narrow and marginal. And for those who don't wish to deal with feminism, they write us off as narrow and marginal, when in fact, if you really immerse yourself in it, it's energetic; it's full of variety; it participates in a lot of different schools and methods.

That's wise.

Yes, feminist theory doesn't want to be written off as marginal; neither does it want to be ghettoized. That would defeat the purpose of doing this kind of criticism. All of us doing this kind of criticism are doing it because we want to change the mainstream. What we want to do is open up new reading areas and new ways of reading. None of us are doing it so that we can be ghettoized; the fact that we are rendered marginal is horrendous to us; it isn't pleasant to us. It's the fact that academe is closing the doors on us. We can't open the door by ourselves.

I think it is possible, though, that you are making a point to include certain feminist voices, whereas some feminist critics aren't particularly interested in being that heterodox, though for you it's a dialogue.

Well, as a political movement it is a generous movement. What attracts me to feminism is that it is a political movement that has not simply concerned itself with women; it has concerned itself with the nature of oppression in society; it has concerned itself with those who are oppressed by virtue of class or by virtue of race or by virtue of national origin, and I like feminism for saying that "if the bottom line is gender, it's always worse for women." But feminism has genuinely understood that; it is not a concern for merely individualistic self-improvement, and that's why I like it.

Can you say that about any other view?

I think certain aspects of socialism do genuinely try; what they never understand is the interface between class and gender. Gender always gets left out. What makes the feminist movement different? The difference is that race and class never get left out, but neither does gender. In the movements that deal with race and class, gender always gets left out. So then politically feminism is a far more inclusive social critique than are any other political movements, and it's a vast umbrella under which there are people who believe that corporate capitalism is a viable economy and what is really needed is reform. Then there are people much further to left like myself who think that you need quite radical steps to reform, and that democracy and capitalism are not compatible.

How do your politics affect your feminism? You are not

a Marxist.

No, but I've learned from them, and certainly a lot of my analysis is Marxist analysis.

Where do you see your position in feminist theory?

I see myself as just one voice among many; the one thing that distinguishes me is that most of the feminist critics work on European texts, either French or British, and I work on American texts . . . and early American texts as well as twentieth-century. I trained as an Americanist so I suppose that makes sense. That means I address two audiences at once: one is of my sister feminist critics, who are interested in feminist criticism whatever the texts are, and my other audience must be my fellow Americanists. I say that meaning my fellow Americanists and my sister Americanists, and I guess I'm trying to do two things at once. One is engage in feminist discourse, that is, talk about the ways in which we read, the ways in which we do literary history, the ways in which we assign value to texts. And in American literature, I think I serve another function, and that is to open up the canon by pointing to valuable texts by American women that have gotten lost, by arguing that there is no sufficient American literary history unless we take into account American women writers, and to re-read American texts that everybody thought they already knew and offer new ways of understanding what's going on in those texts because I bring interests to them that other readers simply haven't brought to them.

That incorporates all of the approaches of every feminist I have read.

But you see, you asked where's my place, and I said I was part of a very large chorus, and I have had the privilege of singing several different parts in the chorus.

Concerning being feminist and being Americanist, do you find yourself divided between two choices of style?

If you look at my vita, you'll see that I don't publish exclusively in nor did I even begin publishing in feminist journals until later. I published, in 1975, "Notes on Defining Feminist Literary Criticism" in *Critical Inquiry*; I did not publish it in a feminist journal. The reason I published it in *Critical Inquiry* was that it, like *New Literary History* and a few other good journals,

present themselves as forums for the open-ended discussion of critical discourse. It is a fact, however, that until 1975 in *Critical Inquiry*, and until later in *New Literary History*, there had not been any representation of feminism, and yet those were the major critical journals. That's why I chose to publish in those journals because it seemed to me that it was high time that those who identified themselves as critical theorists came to grips in a formal way with what feminist criticism might be saying. And it has always been my sense that you don't need to preach to the converted; we need to talk to one another because we get new ideas from one another, and we sustain one another, emotionally as well as intellectually. As such, some of the things that I write are really for an audience of those who are already engaged in the enterprise, but it would be foolhardy not to write to those who are not engaged in the enterprise because if we don't get more people interested in feminist criticism, practicing it, and respectful of it, we will be marginalized, we will be ghettoized, and finally we won't exist anymore.

Do you still write for feminist journals?

I've already written for *Signs*, and I have published in *Feminist Studies* and in *Women's Studies*, but in some ways, the readership of those journals is going to find articles by sister feminist critics whoever they are. The trouble is that the readers of *New Literary History* and *Critical Inquiry*, by and large, won't find articles by feminist critics unless they happen to appear in those journals, and that's a serious problem. The only instance in which I would object to dogmatism is to those that are so prescriptive to declare that there is only one way to do feminist criticism; that would offend me. Even so, those who make those statements often produce interesting criticism, and I read it; I don't agree that it's the only way, but I learn a lot from it. I think that in the long run there may be some interesting facets to biologically-based criticism. In other words, whatever the differences between male and female as we experience them, they are obviously culturally influenced, and since human beings are always going to be creatures of culture—human beings don't exist except within their own developed cultural forms—we will never know, it seems to me, what the innate biological differences really are. Understanding that, it is nevertheless intriguing to contemplate what the

meanings are that may be found in biological differences, even though the differences themselves may not be natural or inherited. In other words, hormonal levels, which are different in males and females, are also different from culture to culture in males and females. So clearly you're never dealing just with biology; what you're dealing with is the way in which culture gets expressed through biology.

One avenue that strikes me as curious in its behavior—actually it's not its behavior that's so odd, but its assumption—is Lacanian feminism or any feminist who espouses a Lacanian epistemology, that sense in which because of the way they view the acquisition of language by women, all women's writings will inevitably show alienation.

Sure, the notion that it's men's language, and women don't have the capacity to develop a useful language on their own, and therefore all women's writing is a translation, is an alienated translation.

As a form of feminism, that strikes me as a very curious stance.

At first I thought it was an interesting bit of intellectual game playing, and it was that, but I must say though over the years I have begun to think that there is substance to the argument that in certain ways, yes, women use a language that was developed for purposes other than the worlds that women inhabit, and that in some ways, some aspects of language may, in fact, be alien for women; you never control the making of language. When I was doing the research for years into American pioneer women's letters and diaries, examining the first and second generation's responses to the frontier, I realized that women almost self-consciously refused to use the metaphorical patterns that the men were using to describe the same identical landscape. I found in some of the overland trail materials, for example, diaries written by husband and wife in which the place names and dates are identical, the reference to the illness of the son is identical, and all else is so different that you would not know that these two people were on the same landscape at the same time.

What terrific texts for stylistic arguments.

Yes, so that's in the next phase; I will be examining that sort of thing in the third volume

of the land trilogy. This suggests to me that which I have been studying all along: the metaphorical structures for the males and the females are different; their expectations, their anticipations are very different, and when I examined nineteenth-century women's writings, that is, writings for publication, about the west, it seemed to me that I found women novelists like Emma Southworth and Maria Susanna Cummins who were self-consciously taking the dominant male forms—the myth of the American Adam, the myth of the American Daniel Boone—and trying to alter and refine that male figure as a figure and also the language associated with him so that he could be brought out of the wilderness and back into the town and have a viable relationship with their attempted invention of an American Eve. And in order to have the American Eve they had to re-write the American Adam. If you look at the presentation of this male figure in the sentimental novels which take families to the west, which were written for the most part between 1850 and 1860, you could make the argument, persuasively I think, that the male language for the west and the male myth of the west was a profoundly alienating one for women; in fact it had no place for women in it since the landscape was the female. In order to make a place for themselves on the frontier, women had to do battle with male language, so seeing that so vividly in American texts makes the French theorists less exotic. I think they have some valid points and some interesting points.

They do not then emasculate or de-feminize their language; they feminize the masculine language?

I guess I have some trouble with those terms "feminize" and "masculinize." What they do is re-write the figure; they can't deny him his associations with the hunt, let's say, so they leave those intact, but the hunt is now performed to sustain a family instead of to sustain the individual male in the wilderness. And in addition to his hunting skills, they make him a farmer which, of course, makes him a part of the human community, or they make him a politician or they make him a lawyer, and they sometimes dress him up with a degree from Harvard so that he has bourgeois class associations . . . so that you take this figure and you leave certain metaphorical structures intact, certain kinds of features of this particular literary character intact, but you put him in a different context so that the hunting no longer has the same association as it

does for an original Daniel Boone, and the fact that he is wearing the same kind of leather hunting outfit identifies him with the figure from which he is derived. Then later we see him in a suit, and we discover that instead of a log cabin, he has established a lovely home with a view. So what they have done is to take the figure and put him in another story which means that you give him different trappings and you give him different metaphorical associations.

What you're saying though reminds me of the "panther captivity narrative." Of all the essays in practical criticism, I found that one absolutely the most convincing in terms of proving that feminism widens the lens. In relation to that, do you think that if a French feminist were to analyse that captivity narrative, she would come up with something very different?

Yes, I think a French feminist critic would spend a great deal more time concerned with the authorship of that text. I let it stand as an anonymous text, which it is. By and large, I think it is male-authored because I think finally the male fantasy structure predominates in that particular text because the woman is taken out of the garden, out of the wilderness garden and back into civilization, and the garden is left intact for the hunters who are the males. I think a French feminist critic would spend a great deal more time than I did looking at the encodings of an author and looking for the encodings of gender. I think that any critic would finally come up with the notion that it's a male writer, but a French feminist critic might spend more time analyzing the ways in which this male author was really feminine, and that is why the text is so fervent about representing a female fantasy. I didn't do that, but it can be done. It wasn't of great interest to me since I have other interests; my interest is the continuing mythology of the frontier, and so I was looking at the text as part of—and it's clearer in the book than it is in the article—a historical development of a certain type of fantasy structure. I think it is an interesting question; it just didn't interest me, and it was not germane to my purposes in writing *The Land Before Her*.

They demonstrate how we are all captives of language by playfully showing one's self-conscious relation to language, not that we ever get out of it, but we know that we're part of it, and I wondered what that attitude might produce in looking at the captivity narrative because you don't deal ironically at any point, as I read

you, with the text, with the structure of the tale—the way she cuts up the giant; the fact that she goes back after some hesitation; I was intrigued with that aspect.

Well, I was interested with the structural elements between generic sources; that is, it was clear that there were several generic sources, so that you have an Indian resurrection narrative, that is, an Indian fertility story. You also have the pieces of a sentimental novel, so I was interested in structure; I was interested in the way elements from those various and really quite disparate sources got put together to make a narrative that worked in its own right. There are elements of structural analysis in my analysis, but I don't think it would be called a structuralist analysis because that was not what interested me; I was interested in the fantasy structure. I was interested in the ways in which you could see in conflict two different myths of the west: one identifying with the female, which is agrarian, and one identified with the male, which is hunting. How then do these relate to the frontier area? That's what interested me. So those were the kinds of things upon which I concentrated, and at the same time I was also concentrating on correcting or enlarging the views that have been previously available to us through critics like Slotkin and Fiedler, whose views I found far too narrow, particularly Slotkin's because he writes about the narrative ignoring the fact that the central figure is a female. That seems to me gender-blindness which is unfortunately not Slotkin's alone but is endemic in literary criticism which cannot continue, so I address that as part of the article though I hoped at the same time to make clear my high regard for both Fiedler's and Slotkin's works because they make my work possible. Can we go back to the question on men? How was it you asked it, "Do I think men can become feminist literary critics?"

Yes, you were saying that nothing else binds feminism except a concern for women, and you didn't say concern for how women read texts. Then you arrived at the final question of whether men can be feminists because some obviously believe they are: they believe they can generate a feminist reading.

Can men be feminists? Yes. Indeed, one of the most important aspects of this new phase of the women's movement is a concern for freeing everyone from constricting gender roles, and that is as much to the advantage of men as it is to the advantage of women. Can men be feminists? Of

course, if they are willing to understand that there will be, as a result of the success of the women's movement, a redistribution in the way in which power manifests itself in society. Men who find that liberating, who understand that all that does is empower more people in better ways, can be feminists. Men who are afraid, men who are threatened will never be feminists. The other question is whether they can be feminist literary critics. Again my answer is yes, but with a proviso; it is very difficult for most men to be genuinely feminist, politically and ideologically, because so many men feel threatened by the notion that power would be distributed equivalently, just as racist, white-right advocates are threatened by the notion that power might be distributed equivalently among people of different skin colors, just as people of one class are fearful of power being invested in people of another class. So it isn't easy. But if you have—when there is a man who is genuinely open to and supportive of that kind of power shift in the society—that kind of freedom from constricting, conventionalized gender roles, he is available, then, to become a feminist literary critic. It seems to me that a man who was afraid of feminism and its political implications would be a fraud as a feminist literary critic, and my sense is, unfortunately, that among the men who have set themselves up and identified themselves with feminist literary criticism now, there are more frauds than genuine characters, and I'll tell you why. If you read their articles, you'll see that many of these male critics emerge as born-again feminists. By that I mean that they just read a book and found themselves converted. They just read Elaine Showalter, or they just discovered the feminist issue of *Critical Inquiry*; they read it cover to cover; they are converted, and they are now doing feminist literary criticism. They never read any other feminist literary criticism; they don't think they need to. They assume that having read one issue of a journal or one or two books they know what it's all about, and it is embarrassing to read them and to read the paltry references they make to feminist criticism, and then to read the articles in which they ask questions or deal with topics that we have already put aside five years ago, which they have just discovered. So could a man be a feminist critic? Yes, if he can deal with the politics of feminism, and if he will do his damned homework, and most men don't do their homework; they assume that what we have to say is so simple that they can do a quick study, and then they are one of us. Well, in fact, feminist

criticism now has a history; it's fifteen years old; it has an enormous bibliography at this point. It is impossible for me to keep up, and I have been in the trenches since the beginning. If it's impossible for me to keep up, some arriviste who has just read one book should not assume that he knows everything. What he needs to do is to go to school and let us be his teachers. And he needs to invest an equivalent amount of time that we invested in developing it these last fifteen years; he needs to read, and if he will do that. . . . But of course the man who is not threatened, I think, by the political implications of feminism, will not be threatened by coming to terms with the variety and the numbers of extraordinarily good feminist critics and feminist articles and books. Yes, I would like to see men become quite genuine feminist critics because then the issue will shift from concern for women per se to concern with gender, and that's really where feminist criticism is moving now. And the concern with gender then becomes not simply the way in which women are encoded in texts, but the way gender is encoded in texts and encoded in society will become a question as to how women read differently from men; the question will become why do the sexes read differently. It's a gender question, and I think that's the direction that feminist criticism is moving in, and it can only be aided by men who are genuinely committed to that kind of enterprise, but they cannot do a shabby job. They cannot discredit us by refusing to do their homework which finally only discredits them.

Nobody says that; no male says that.

It is still the case that when you go to major conferences, there are two conferences going on; at the MLA, the most energetic and exciting sessions are often the ones sponsored by the Commission on the Status of Women and the Women's Caucus, and you get American texts and British texts and French texts discussed. Critical theory is the center for a lot of exciting exchange. Then you go to the other sessions largely attended by men, and they're lugubrious and boring, and they're repeating things that have been said for fifty years.

At several recent conferences, there has been some generational conflict expressed within feminism. How do you respond to criticism from younger feminist critics?

The statement by younger women that the older generation is less professional is, in fact, a euphemism for saying that I don't want to know why you were or continue to be angry. I don't want to be held responsible for the fact that I am coming in on the carpet that you made possible even though most of you are hanging at the fringes of the profession, untenured, teaching in lectureships in revolving door situations, here and there, moving around in a nomadic existence that is not satisfying; it's a way of not wanting to pay dues and acknowledge the politics and the pains of the past. Let me give you a specific example. When I was involved in that suit at the University of New Hampshire, I was suing them for sex discrimination and anti-semitism. The department advertized for someone who would be able to fill my slot in the department, which meant someone who was an Americanist, who was working on American women writers and did feminist criticism. And while many people, knowing of the suit, would not even consider going to New Hampshire under those conditions, perceiving the position as a way of getting rid of me and replacing me, there were, in fact, other women who did, and I encouraged people to take advantage of the opening because I figured I would win, and I would just stay there, and all it would do would be that I had the added pleasure of seeing yet another person added to the department who was interested in these things. But among the women who were interviewed were those that said they knew nothing about the suit when they were asked about it, and their response was, "I'm no bra-burner! I don't know what they're so angry about." And yet they worked on American women writers without understanding that none of us was a bra-burner. That was made up by *Time* magazine. But we had legitimate grievances, and there were legitimate reasons why we were angry, why we were pushed to the point where we had to sue universities and are still doing it simply to stay in. It was a generation of women who put their careers on the line to establish women writers courses, feminist criticism courses, women's studies programs, who had made it possible for the university to even be looking for someone who could teach in those areas.

This brings up another question. What is your sense of the history of feminism?

Whereas for a lot of people it starts in the seventies and the eighties, my sense of the

history of feminism goes back to the sixties and comes out of having first been involved in civil rights and the anti-war movements, and working for Caesar Chavez and the unionization of migrant workers in California. Was there sexism in the early days in these movements? Yes. And I think that is what radicalized many women to become feminists, because we were working in movements on behalf of others, having to be increasingly aware of the fact that our positions were oppressed, and also becoming increasingly aware that, for all our talent and education, society would not make room for us. Indeed, the men with whom we were going to school, the men who were getting B's when we were getting A's, would make sure there was no room for us if we were a threat to them, and when you realize that we were threats to them even in movements where we were supposedly sharing rather idealistical visions for social change, we were like the idealistic vision pertaining to the poor, pertaining to blacks, pertaining to migrant farmworkers, pertaining to everyone but not to women, never to women, even when they themselves were the migrant workers, black, working class, etc. I think that generated the women's movement. So my sense of the women's movement comes out of a disaffection for what the new left was doing in the sixties—not that I regret any of the work I did in the anti-war and civil rights movements; they were absolutely essential, as was the ecology movement, but my gender got left out of everybody's concerns. Coming out of that kind of political activist background, it never occurred to me that feminism was anything but political and activist, and to have it translated now by a second and third generation who lacks that history, to have it translated now into some kind of arid theoretical discourse that has no association with changing the world, that has no association with active commitment to alter social institutions, is a betrayal of the history that generated feminist discourse in the first place. It will kill its future. If feminist criticism sees its existence only in a classroom and only between the pages of books and doesn't understand that it has to work in a public sphere, then it will never become effective, and it will never fulfill its own potential promises.

By making themselves safe, they have given themselves no reason for existence?

That's true, but you see, safety is an illusion.

Women are not safe. Any woman who is perceived as a feminist, whether she is or she isn't, isn't safe. To hang on to neutral coloration on the assumption that you are going to be safe is foolish; no woman is safe in this profession yet. The essay "Dancing through the Minefield" argues that academe, right now for women in general, is a battlefield, and it is particularly dangerous for those who are activist feminists; we are not wanted at most institutions; at best we're tokens; we are often marginalized. More often, we don't have jobs at all. And the essay was about what it is like to be performing the criticism that we care about at risk. And at the same time, the essay was meant as a sort of ten-year retrospective, because it coincided with a ten-year celebration here at the MLA, a celebration about just how much had been done, despite the risk, and an attempt at celebrating, moreover, the enormous diversity, to see if amid all that diversity there were questions or attitudes or approaches that recurred in such a way that you might make a statement that they were in some sense characteristic of feminist criticism. It is from that that I generated the three propositions, but the essay ended with what I thought was, and hope to be understood as, a passionate statement about the necessity of a continuing political vision. What I was arguing was that it was a gifted wonderful future when you were no longer negotiating the minefield. But for those who were able to negotiate it, we 1) had a responsibility to make sure that others after us could keep negotiating it, 2) we had a responsibility to keep working actively for changes for women's status in society as a whole, and 3) we had a further responsibility to keep our discourse open and pluralistic and diverse. When I wrote this essay we were preparing for trial; I couldn't get a job to save myself. The suit was settled in October 1980; the trial was scheduled since 1979, and the essay was written in 1977. "Notes Toward Defining a Feminist Literary Theory" was written in 1975, and "Dancing through the Minefields" appeared in 1980, in terms of publication date, and the essay was written probably when I was at my lowest; I was locked in a battle with the University of New Hampshire; I was fearful that I would never get another job in academe; no one wanted to hire someone who was in the process of litigation, and I developed a reputation for being an activist feminist. My work made it difficult for some schools—or individuals in departments, to bring in a feminist; I wrote that essay about what it was like to be a feminist in academe and still be

trying to do serious literary criticism.

How do you respond to charges of pluralism. At one point Spivak writes, "To espouse pluralism as Kolodny recommends is to espouse the politics of the masculinist establishment; it's a method employed by the central authorities to neutralize our position as seeming to accept it; the gesture of pluralism on the part of the marginal can only mean capitulation to the center."

But she is right in that the way pluralism has been exercised in academia by and large, and how it is exercised in our society by and large, is that we will be pluralist until the dissenters or those that have been previously marginal actually begin to pose some kind of genuine threat to the center, and then we close down, and we're not pluralistic at all. So she's right. The way pluralism has been used by and large has been hypocritical, but my argument is that feminists are not hypocritical; we

act in good faith towards one another, and within feminism we have got to be pluralistic. The reason we have got to be pluralistic is that if we allow one group to determine the way for all of us, we won't learn very much; we won't go very far, and they will shut the door on too many of us. The advantage of pluralism is that you keep the door open, and you keep a multiple dialogue going, which means you can keep learning and keep refining what the problems are. Had we not been pluralist, feminist criticism would still be looking at images of women in literature which is where we started fifteen years ago. Well, not that that is not an interesting thing to do, but look how much else we do now, and it's because we stayed pluralist, and now feminist criticism is moving towards much larger questions about the encoding of gender, both male and female. Again that's because we kept the doors open. Had we stopped five years ago even, we would not be doing that.□

AN INTERVIEW WITH CATHARINE STIMPSON

The first question I wanted to ask you is whether it is possible to define feminist poetics, and if it is, is it needed or would such a definition be useful? The second question would be what do you see as your current position within the feminist discourse? The third question is whether feminism should contain a male discourse, and what do you see as the advantage in such an inclusion of this discourse? The fourth question would be how your politics affect your feminism and/or vice versa? The fifth question grows out of your presentation on race, gender, and colonization. Is feminism in danger through institutionalization of becoming a force of colonization for what one might call the phallogocentric power structure? The sixth question, or actually area of inquiry, would be about your work on Gertrude Stein; in listening to your paper, I wondered if it did not qualify as gynocriticism? The final question is about the methodology informing your work, and I would like to hear you comment on Reader-Response & Reception theories as well as Marxists approaches to texts. With that said, is there a feminist poetics?

The real difference is among looking for a feminist poetics, looking for a female poetics, or looking for a poetics of the woman writer. Let me try to separate them out. A poetics of the woman writer would be a theoretical description of writing by women that could incorporate a number of reasons as to why women write as women. Do they write as women because of their historical situation, because of complicated biological reasons, a combination of them? A poetics of women's writing would also see the common stylistic features of an entire sex without necessarily tying us to a specific reason for why women write as women. However, a female poetics, through the very use of the word "female," implies that women write as women out of biological causes, out of the body, out of the fact that they are born female, born into a biological class. The corollary of that would be a male poetics, a way in which men write as men because they are born into that biological class. The search for a "female" poetics now emphasizes bodily rhythms, bodily metaphors, which often seem multidimensional for women, linear for men. An old article in *Critical Inquiry*, studying a male poetics, especially in

Hemingway, suggests that a male style is like a male orgasm which ends in death and silence. Finally, a feminist poetics would be poetics of politics, a style that self-consciously incorporated a feminist ideology that begins in protest and revolt and seeks to effect equality and gender transformation. More a thematic than a stylistic venture, feminist poetics would have to involve a political and ideological reading of the world that was then taken into the literary text.

If a male poetics is defined by a linear progression towards orgasm, then is it also connected to what Gallop calls in her book "the chain of metonymy"? She discusses metonymy as a male-erected trope. Are the two terminologies compatible at this point?

It could certainly work that way, but if you are looking for a male and a female poetics, you must ask if your underlying reading of the world is a psychoanalytic one in which you see all tropes as substitutes for a sexual dilemma, all tropes as a displacement for a terrible dilemma between the infant self and its parents before you are six years old. I'm not sure that a female or a male poetics has to work that way. A female and a male poetics can simply mean a sense of language and the text springing out of the body. Obviously, the text is a series of displacements of the bodily experience, but you need not use psychoanalysis to define it. What distinguishes women as women and distinguishes men as men? A bodily state. What distinguishes you from me right now? Lots of cultural things distinguish us, but what is the one difference that we could not will? The body. A female and a male poetics would have to look for a writing that springs from bodily, erotic, reproductive differences.

In summary, it depends on the lens through which one wishes to examine the text; if one selects the psychoanalytic model, it inevitably leads to a reading of the text as displacement.

If you are going to talk about maleness and femaleness and how they might be inscribing themselves in the text, you are going to have to talk about a series of tropes for the body and for eroticized experience.

One cannot help noting a strong element of eroticism in your own writing; certainly the presentation last night on Stein was tied to the body, and also what I have read both in Signs and in Women and Sexuality. Perhaps I should define what is meant by "eroticism" in your writing. You seem to understand and take as given that we must address the body, and that alone would probably make men uncomfortable.

What class was to the nineteenth century, the body is to twentieth-century literature. This is an eroticized century that is taking, at least in the West, a founding text from Freud and founding ideas from D. H. Lawrence. This is the century that has used sex and sexual differentiation as a form of social organization and as a way of reading the world. I am a creature of the twentieth century; I mean we are taught to read the world erotically, in fact, I think we are consumed by sexuality. In a couple of places, like my essay on the lesbian novel, I ask how historians will judge us and our obsession with seeing the world erotically. What does it mean about us that we look at childhood and see these poor libidinal creatures, seething, these cauldrons of desire and frustration. If you are a feminist, you have to look at the body for several other reasons. One is because women have been taught to live in the body and to serve as metaphors for body. In social structures, women are treated as body, either the beautiful or the erotic or the maternal object. Feminist criticism has to analyze these practices. Feminism, too, teaches us to look at the importance of sexual differentiation in the building of social structures, and says that sexual differentiation is not the right foundation for these structures.

So one goes through the body to exhaust it as the primary critical lens through which to see the world.

Yes, it is a deconstruction of the importance of the body, which at the same time recognizes that it has a place in the world. We are creatures of the flesh as well as creatures of the mind. This is ironic for me because I'm basically a "blue-stocking," a proud and wonderful title.

In your essay on the lesbian novel, you mention a novel in that article, entitled Labyrinth, in which the main characters are two sisters, one who marries an ambitious egocentric man and the other who lives with an ambitious generous woman. I found it most interesting in light of what another feminist stated last night, in Kolodny's session on re-reading the canon,

about Brockden Brown's Ormond and what happens at the conclusion of that novel which she read as a very strong statement by Brown about the nature of the forms that govern our lives and as Brown calling for a radical reshaping of those forms because without such there is no re-formation. In regard to re-shaping the structures by which we live our lives, at the past several MLA's, the best criticism and without doubt the most powerful voices are those from the feminist "camp," and by camp, I mean that as we sit within the structure of MLA, the good old boy system that still exists, they must perceive you still as a hostile camp, a source of hostility and conflict.

We are to some of them.

This goes back to the women's caucus held in Houston at its MLA (1980). I wonder if you still perceive a sense of that hostility?

Oh, yes, but we women in the MLA really are very mild, polite, decorous. If this is a revolutionary movement, it is a revolutionary movement with teacups.

Well, you know what the attitude would be if a male said that.

But the consequences of feminist criticism are far-reaching. What actually is being called for is a way of re-reading the world that asks us to look at the fact that gender matters in the construction of the world and of culture. It asks for a reading of new texts; it asks for equality in the administration of knowledge. It doesn't ask for triviality or for silence. It asks for equality and heterogeneity in the distribution of knowledge.

So where's the fear in that is what I hear you saying?

What's scary? The call for change. But are women going to be vengeful? I don't think so. If they achieve power, are they going to be exclusionary? Are men never going to be allowed to read papers? I don't think so, except power does tend to be exclusionary. Fortunately, a feminist critique carries with it a self-consciousness about the abuses of power. Whether and when feminists achieve more power they will remain true to their principles is another question.

What is apparent from everything heard by feminists at this convention is that there is an invitation to the men that was not there a few years back.

It depended on whom you talked to. However, I

do think men are more receptive now; there have always been sympathetic men, but you are right to pick up a sense of feminist criticism feeling less besieged. It is not what it was fifteen years ago. Feminist critics are still being denied tenure, but there are also feminist critics who have tenure. There are some feminist books that are not published, but for the most part, feminist criticism is well-published, particularly in the United States.

This brings the discussion back to why feminists are bringing out the best theory at the moment.

In terms of a form for approaching various texts, there are three things to look at: the representation of women, which also means looking at "male prosy"; at the women's tradition, the gynocritical tradition; and, three, the cause and consequences of sexual difference. Given those questions, there is no area of culture that feminist criticism can't help; there is no area of culture that feminist criticism shouldn't move in. Moreover, not just academics are drawn to feminist criticism. Some of the most important work comes from outside, from non-academic writers. Who is our saint? What is our *locus classicus*: "A Room of One's Own." It is still the text where one can find the promise and perils of feminist criticism. Alice Walker's *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens* was first in *Ms.* magazine (May 1974). Having this group both inside and outside the academy helped to give feminist criticism some of its volatility and energy. It still has some of that founding wildness, which I hope it never loses. It's poised between its founding days and becoming a boring, standard subject.

This is precisely why we included our question on institutionalization and the women's movement. This is in fact what the argument has been for.

The institutionalization of feminism? I want it to have happened. No-one wants to stay crazy forever. Anybody who says that they love existence on the margins, and that they want to spend their lives on the margins, is kidding him or herself and you. Who, unless you're a saint, wants to eat catfood when you can have a decent meal. Nobody wants to live on the periphery. The real question becomes how do we avoid becoming self-enclosed. How do you make connections? One is with students, through students. A second way is through a connection with other analytical systems, between feminism

and Marxism, or post-structuralism, or black studies. A third way is to keep links with the women's movement. Am I saying that all academic movements should be primarily political movements? No, because I think one of the tasks of academic life is constantly to deconstruct ideology. Ideology, by definition, is a set of blinders, and if we made the academy a place that had to be political and ideological, it would destroy some of its virtues.

This returns to a previous statement. Who are our saints? Certainly those that would figure prominently would have to be politicians like Shirley Chisholm, Barbara Jordan, Bella Abzug and others. Yet these memories are in fact new and just were not there twenty years ago. Feminist theory was just not there.

Nor could it be. It just did not exist twenty years ago.

So to maintain the connection with the movement is to maintain the connection with your primary energy source?

Yes, and with a passion for social justice. A fourth way is to keep in touch with actual living writers. We sound so dull, don't we. It is very useful to talk to other writers other than oneself. The writers are looking at theory. Do you know a poet named Kathleen Fraser? She's working with a wonderful little poetry magazine called *However*. They're trying to bring together modernist and feminist principles.

To return to something discussed previously, it would seem to hold that we can deal with each other not through the body but beyond the body. You said earlier that one reason for focusing attention on the body was to get beyond it as a way of dealing with each other. What steps might be taken to assure this?

What you have touched on is one of the principles of feminist (or all) criticism: a need for critical self-consciousness. The feminist critic, in theory, asks herself, "How did I come to think what I think; how can I show my reader how I came to think what I think?" Feminist critics have an initial assumption that we think badly, so that feminist criticism begins in suspicion. The process of the feminist critic, male or female, is one of demystifying one's own presumptions about literature and culture, and then to try and make public the process of unraveling so that the next stage of reconstruction can begin. But the second

and third generation of feminist critics will be different. Why? Because if you go to a college classroom now, you can read DeBeauvoir to begin with. You don't discover her on your own. You see some of the insights of feminist criticism as a part of the world as it is.

As a given in that environment?

Right. The younger feminist critics have to become suspicious of us, and that's good. I see this happening. I was having lunch with a couple of people while I was evaluating women's studies programs at universities, and there were a couple of next-generation young assistant professors, saying, "Look, we don't have to say these things anymore."

Part of what I heard at our first meeting at the Houston MLA was a young assistant professor asking, "Why is there this tone of hostility, because I don't think it's needed any longer? I can understand it in the mid-sixties, but we are at the dawn of the eighties, and it is counter-productive." The question did evoke a sense of generational conflict within the feminist movement. What is your sense of this development?

Are things different? Yes. So, are certain oppositional stances still totally necessary? No, they are not totally necessary. But can we deceive ourselves about how much change has happened? Can that young assistant professor be kidding herself? Has she come up for tenure yet? Has she really hit it yet? The important point is that change is not symmetrical; change is asymmetrical, sloppy, certainly in those gender relations that concern both our public and private lives. We have to reconstruct the structures of intimacy as well as the structures of governments. Because change is so sloppy, you are going to see some places that are utopian visions right next to places that are perfectly awful. The techniques that are obsolete in one place may still be necessary in another. One must think of the situation as a patchwork. This is one reason why I resist the metaphor of margin and center. This spatial metaphor of margin and center means that there is one place of centralized power, with the rest of us dispersed around the edges.

And fighting to get in.

But is that really the way things work in the United States today? What's a more appropriate

way of looking at it? I think another appropriate way of looking at it is that we are circuit boards. Our life, in terms of cultural and political power, is like a circuit board; power is flowing every place. At one point in the circuit board, we have power, but at another point we may not. There are some people at the edges of the circuit board who have nothing whatsoever, but most of us above the poverty line have power in some places, where we are little centers, but we lack power in other places. As we charge around this vast circuit board that is America, at some places we are blinking with power, but in other places we're dim and dark. There is a scene in Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* where Oedipa is looking down a hill at a California town; she's gazing at the lights of the town and the patterns lights make when they interlock with each other, and she believes it looks like the back of a transistor radio, all these lines and squiggles going in all directions. That's the way power and force work in our lives—in analyzing the complexities of the lines of psychological, political and cultural forces. There is some good work coming out of women studying popular culture, or the media, but I think too many of us are only looking at the literary text, insufficiently at the electronic text.

We agree here; while it is popular to assert that we live in a visually saturated environment, what most people don't realize is that our culture remains a basically visually-illiterate society since to read any medium requires training in a process of reading that ultimately gets transferred to reading the world around us. Didn't you, in your presentation on colonization, mention something about being in a group of feminist filmmakers?

What I said was that I was reading an essay by English feminist filmmakers, and I thought they were misusing the metaphor of colonization. They talked about how invasive capitalism was, and how it was always looking for new areas to take over. The example they used was the way that Virginia Slims cigarettes had taken over the women's movement with the slogan "You've come a long way baby!" Now what does that slogan mean? It's saying to women, "Your life is better than it was." The ads have pictures of the old oppressed woman and the true, new, wonderful liberated woman. What the ads have taken over from the women's movement is the principle of the value of women's autonomy and the principle that men have dominated women

in the past; that has not been good for men or for women. But to what end? Why have they taken this over? Virginia Slims has taken this over to make money for Virginia Slims and also to teach women to smoke. I hate smoking. It is a killer habit. If all this is true, then why did I object to the feminist filmmakers using the term "colonization"? Because colonization, as we understand it in the modern world, is an economic, cultural, and political process that began in the fifteenth or sixteenth century, that later saw England running India and now sees America helping to dictate the policies of Central America. That process is a specific, historical one that hurts people, and if we use the word colonization as a metaphor to describe any dominating process, we lose sight of what colonization itself actually is. It blurs our vision. As much as I hate the Virginia Slims ad, I can't compare my experience of reading a Virginia Slims ad to what my experience would have been if I were not a tenured college professor in the *United States but rather an illiterate woman, working on a coffee plantation in Central America or a textile worker in Guatemala or an electronics worker in Taiwan.*

You mentioned earlier that you did not want to get into a discussion of feminism outside of the western democracies, but it would seem that that issue would be the most burning issue for feminists and feminism.

Absolutely, and let me tell you why I'm reticent. I don't want to get into it because I don't want to look like I know everything about everybody. Do we have to understand colonization? Do we have to know about it? Yes, but am I the person to teach about it? No. I don't want to be in the position of a first world woman saying, "This is the reality *there*." I've seen too many errors and mistakes coming out of intellectual imperialism. What we have to do is read, and listen, to the voices that are coming out of their own experience. I have been reading an article by Gayatri Spivak in an issue of *Yale French Studies*. She begins with a wonderful anecdote of being a well-born, Indian woman, educated in the West—an intellectual. She hears two old illiterate women as they wash clothes in a river that is flowing through her family's land. Then she goes into this powerful analysis of what French feminist theory is saying about women, how it cannot work for the Third World. Then she returns to the washer women to say, "What can we say to each other?" Another text I've been

reading is a collection of writings by Native American women edited by Rayna Green. One hears the voices from a place itself. They have always been there, but now they are rising in power and beauty. My task as a first world feminist critic is to try to frame the voices in a way that is respectful, tactful. Our job is to open up the walls of ignorance, and not to rebuild the walls of ignorance, even while claiming that this is a transparent mirror to the new reality. In the future, I think more and more of women's studies work will be done outside of the United States. It may take different forms, which I cannot predict. What I see happening within the United States is the increasing institutionalization of feminist criticism and women's studies on all levels without just becoming just another subject that students feel they have to learn.

What one might call another industry?

Yes, another industry.

So that is, as you see it, the future direction?

It's a big job.

It is also fraught with problems. With those walls of ignorance you're talking about, institutionalization may be merely a device of generation under the guise of protection.

We have covered a lot of ground. Speaking more personally, I was surprised that the Tolkien book was your first book.

It was a monograph, not really a book, and I did make a couple of mistakes. I asked, "Why are people reading this; why is it so popular—this empty pastiche?" Well, despite my strictures, Tolkien keeps on selling.

Speaking of power, that is one manifestation of power. Why do you think it continues to sell?

Because it is a wonderful story.

We're very plot-oriented aren't we?

As well we should be. I am now working on my second novel, and the hardest thing to do is plotting. To tell a story is a real gift. I respect Eudora Welty so much because she tells a story, because she gives us a sense of a beginning, a middle and an end. To get from the beginning to

the middle and then to the end is the hardest of work. It's much easier to be a critic.

The same might be said for poetry as well since it is not as time-consuming and does not require the organization.

Human beings need plot; we need stories, and Tolkien's is an intricate story. It appeals to the same part of us as "Dungeons & Dragons." Tolkien is also moral. There's good and bad; it's easy to tell who's who. Good and bad are always in arduous combat, and bad may win. So it's the intricate story that scares us.

Indeed, bad seemed to be winning constantly until the

end, and then he pulled it out.

He pulled it out; we're going to be safe after all. Tolkien is pretty banal and narrow on women, though. I say that even as I insist that we cannot think of the world only in terms of men and women. Now feminism does because that's its project: to look at relations between men and women, and see where they work and don't work. But it also may lead us to think of the world only in terms of men and women. What's going on in this convention? There is talk about literary theory, about Asian-American literature, about Spenser and the Renaissance. There are a great many things that these men and women share. We cannot reduce the world to men and women, even as we try to reconstruct their relations. I hate binary thinking. □

HEILBRUN: AN INTERVIEW

This is in certain ways not an original question, but do you feel it is necessary to assert a cohesive feminist theory? This question rises out of a reading of Showalter's new book and the theorists that have been included.

Maybe we need to, but we're not about to. The theoretical aspect of feminism, I think, is very important. As one of the people who writes in a plain English that dogs and cats can read, I'm really sort of unhappy about a certain intellectual group of feminists who are anti-theoretical, because I think we need them both very much. The dialogue between them is very important, but the idea that there will ever be one theory, I don't think true of anything, and where it exists, I think it holds things up. I mean they're very (caught) in both Freudian and Marxist theory and to some extent I think this is regrettable because they are both such stunning theories; it's like shooting a tank with a peashooter to try and get at them. So all I, for one, try and do is to be clear. Hopefully, some genius will come along with a theory that will relate to Freud and Marx, but as to having one coherent theory, I don't think you will, and I don't think I'd want it.

Is it sufficient to have earned respectability for the consequences of gender in writing?

If you mean as a Subject, it's more than sufficient, and I just wish we could do it more. We're still waiting for the generation of "old boys" to die out who don't think it's respectable, who don't think there's such a thing as gender. There's the universal writing, you know, neutral.

And in relation to them, you really have to keep putting a name "feminist" to what we're doing, but when I looked at the series of essays in Showalter, the question occurred to me: should there be any single feminist theory any more than there is single masculinist theory?

No, but naturally they have to debate the point of view, and Showalter herself has been very much a leading figure in this questioning, but even she changes her mind, as every intelligent person does. Many of us, those of us on what is

called the "cutting edge," are very concerned about the relation of men to feminism. And now that has become a very important topic.

Whether men can even practice feminist theory at all is another of our questions along with the question of reading texts and the effects of gender difference on both sides of this reading activity.

Speaking to some students in graduate school, we've come across an interesting version of this. I now have a number of male students in my feminist classes, and they pick up a lot of feminism. Then they give a report in another class using it entirely, but they never call it feminist, and they never mention the feminist critic they got it from. That is one of the big points in male critics. Even if they become feminists—and there are rare exceptions to this: Jonathan Culler is one—for the most part they are now learning the techniques which are very exciting and very good, but they don't credit anybody. It's like they just saw the light and were converted, and there was no one between them and Jesus. There is someone between them and this view. I'm probably the oldest feminist around, and I tend to be a little tempered to the winds, being very much a shorn lamb, and so I'm glad if this happens at all. If a young man can get up and say, "The interesting thing about Isabel in *Wuthering Heights* is that she has no story; there is no script. She's living by a romantic script. How is she going to live?"—if he just picked this out of the air—I'm not quite as upset as some of the younger feminists, but maybe I should be.

After all, they are just appropriating an insight as their own and crediting no one.

I guess in the end you have to ask yourself what is more important: the credit or the insight. And the male ego in our society is such that it can't credit women for something. But that's one of the problems; it's not how men read women's texts, which intelligent men—in particular younger ones—are getting very good at. It's the whole position of really taking seriously women, feminism, and the like. The biggest problem I've had all my life and have yet is to get the very

brilliant, serious younger critics to recognize that Woolf is as important as Joyce. Now bit by bit they begin to see that the fact that they don't know how to talk about her, and they can talk so easily about Joyce, perhaps indicates that she is a little more revolutionary than Joyce who appears, I think, considerably more revolutionary than he is.

We're continually struck by men informed by but who never cite women and women who laboriously and concentratedly respond to those men. The women are having arguments with the men in their texts, and the men continue to ignore those women, most particularly at a theoretical level.

That's very true. I know of male scholars who have a whole book about plots or a whole book about melodrama and never mention women writers, novels or even characters. But this just takes time.

You're optimistic. Catharine Stimpson was also optimistic and encouraged us to be also.

It is because some of these same scholars are very supportive of women scholars and scholarship behind the scenes. The men whom I have the most trouble with are the older men who don't admit there is such a thing as women's studies, who don't understand why you might want to be out on that fringe when you could be studying the center. We can only wait for them to die off.

Are they more frustrating to you than your allusion to Edward Said, in your essay from the Showalter book, where his Orientalism made you see your own situation in a different light; then you said of him that perhaps he wouldn't want to study feminism as a discourse or want it in the profession.

Here again I'm talking about a colleague. He and I in the last few years have been serving together on committees, so I've seen how he works. And it's true he doesn't mention women very much in what he writes although what he's doing is very allied to what feminism is doing. And yet here again I've found he will support good women. Believe me, what I have seen at the university over my life—there is such a change, at least in the English department at Columbia and other places, that I can't despair. Also Edward Said does so much we can use; we can learn so much from him, and it would be nice if he could learn something from us. As it happens

in this case, what's happened is really parallel.

How long have you been at Columbia? There's that part of the sentence in your essay in Showalter that's so wonderfully expressed. You say, "I, thirty years a girl and woman, in the feminist discourse. . . ."

And now it's been even longer. I took my degree here.

And they never let you go. That's a wonderful compliment.

The days when I came here it was very easy to get tenure. Well, not for a woman, but it was much easier. I first taught here in 1960, so that's twenty-five years I've been teaching here.

They have certainly been twenty-five crucial years for this whole subject.

Lionel Trilling, I hear, used to object to me in the early sixties in faculty meetings because I was a feminist so I'm interested in how I was perceived as being too interested in women's writing.

Returning for the moment to your work, what do you feel will last from your work—your best work, the one work you found most useful?

Oh, I don't think any of it will last. One of the fascinating things about feminism is that it moves so fast that already everything I have written has been written by somebody else. I would never write it the same way. Now what I have found is that *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny* or *Reinventing Womanhood* are still important to women who are, in relation to feminism, where I was when I wrote them. I mention, and am always asked about, *Androgyny*, and in Montana I mentioned before an audience that I would not do the book the same way. Incidentally, androgyny is coming back, and a lot of the ideas in the book are coming back. The fact is that in the world where I am, they're already out-of-date. Yet even there it is appalling to me to discover how I've changed. A young man who wrote a long essay on me said, "She has grown so much more liberal and broad-minded over the years. For example, she no longer makes fun of homosexuals." Well, I called him up and asked, "Where and when did I do this?" And he was right; I was not making fun of them, but I was using the kind of language which we used in those days. I referred to a group—I said to

someone—as a bunch of queers. Now you know I changed the entire thing when it was re-issued, and I took this out at considerable expense, but I have to admit to you I have never been homophobic, but nonetheless that was how we talked. And there are other things; in the very first book I know that I mention the fact that Freud found out that all the women who said that they had been sexually assaulted by their fathers later admitted that it was all fantasy. Of course, we know now that it probably wasn't; we now know in fact how many women were sexually abused by fathers. And this is also what I mean; even there one changes.

And we also know now that Freud, at the end of his life work, was changing his entire view of the economics of the female libido and feminine sexuality. So even Freud was changing.

If you are dealing with very current issues you are going to date yourself, and I have no illusions about this. I'm just trying to do what I can to keep this movement going. There are people who are encouraged, to whom you give courage, who find themselves in difficult situations, and that's what it comes down to.

Are there some you remember, dare I say, that were more fun to have written or enjoyable to have written?

Well, yes. In *Reinventing Womanhood*, for the first time I spoke personally, and I felt we had to get away from the high-up-on-Olympia mode; that was an enormous thing for me to do, an enormous hurdle to get over, an enormous risk to take. I no longer find it difficult but then, of course, you're called confessional. Women are "we," and I find I no longer can stomach a book, for instance, like Diana Trilling's book on Jean Harris, that absents the author; she takes these moral stands about Jean Harris without ever saying anything about herself. This is a male stance that I find—I don't know exactly why I call it male other than that they set the standard—troubling. Susan Sontag has such a style. Showalter refers to it as the Olympian stance of Susan Sontag and Elizabeth Hardwick. So there are certainly women that do it, and most of the women who write for *The New York Review of Books* or *The New Yorker* have it.

This would seem a shift of voice to form.

You have to say, "I am a woman; I have suffered;

I was there."

What about other people's work? Are there books that you feel were particularly helpful or useful to you?

I can't tell you what the excitement was like; I have lived in an all-male world; all my friends were men. One did not have women friends. It's hard to think of now, but one didn't if one were a professional woman in the sixties and fifties. And women were all playing this back to the suburbs role—no men all day except for diapering one, and you don't even have him now. Women were dull at dinner parties; they didn't talk about anything but their children. Anyway, these same women are now fascinating so it's not the women. Everything that came out was so exciting that I almost couldn't bear it. I was talking recently with the woman who owns Woman's Books on 82nd street (in New York), one of the biggest women's bookstores that sells only women's books. She said that when they started all their customers had the same books they did, and I was one of them. Now it's quite out of hand; they can't carry it all, and I certainly can't buy it all, but everyone who wrote in those earlier years I found extremely exciting. And you know Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique*; you can never repeat what that work meant. That book is one, and I read the *Second Sex* in 1953, and I remember that my whole generation of men became analysts, and all the women went to analysts, and all the men used to say, "She's suffering from penis envy." One had to be a closet feminist. There are certain texts that defined and fueled the movement like Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics*. It now looks naive to us. I just read two reviews of feminist criticism: one by a Norwegian woman who studied in France, and one by an Australian man. It's very easy for them to say that she [Kate Millett] only looked at men, and she was so obvious in what she said, but that book had a lot of power, and it still does. I like the way she confronted things and the way she spoke politically. She understood that she was talking about something political. People like Elaine Showalter have done wonderful things, and Mary Jacobus' book collection, *Women Writing, Writing about Women*, is excellent. Gilbert and Gubar's *Madwoman in the Attic* is an incredible book.

In fact, last year it was hard to keep up with what one press was publishing; the press that comes to mind was Cornell in 1984. This raises a question from another

interview where the interviewee was worn out with this whole conceptual model of marginality, being on the margin. She felt it does not work because feminism itself is pushing out on all fronts, so it's not like being on the margin any longer but being at a center. Do you get a sense of that shift as well, a sense of the replacement of one metaphorical description by another?

It depends where you are. If you are at Columbia or Yale or Princeton or University of Wisconsin (Madison), sure you can think of yourself as a center. But women, mainly, are still marginalized. If you study marginalization, as one of my young colleagues is doing, then you constantly re-discover that women are marginalized. We in the East tend to think that we're the world, but I've done two NEH summer seminars which taught me a great deal. College teachers from small colleges out there come here; the NEH pays them: it's one of the best programs they've ever had. I would say something, and they would say, "Well, maybe in New York!" If you go out to the midwest—Indiana, Ohio, the big smokestack towns—it's different. In one of those towns I said something about how I would like it to come to a point where no teacher would make a joke about a woman anymore than anyone would now make a joke about a black in the classroom. Well, several people came up to me afterward and said, "I have news for you. . . ." Women are still marginalized here, not to mention the whole rest of the world. No matter what the society is, there's always one more oppressed within the oppressed group so I don't agree, but I understand what she meant. So much is going on, and it's becoming discussed in such a central way that we cannot go on telling ourselves that we're marginalized because what we're trying to be is not marginal. We're all trying to mainstream, and obviously the way to mainstream is to discontinue saying we're marginalized. So I think politically that was probably a good statement.

What is your sense of how your own voice fits in with this avalanche of interest in feminist critical theory, women's studies and feminism?

Because of the privileged life I lead, and it is privileged in the East at a prestigious university and so forth, I get to talk to a lot of the very smartest people; I'm also at the same time immensely aware that the real problem of feminism is taking place somewhere in a classroom with a group of students who either

couldn't care less about this or who are going to say, "Men have a hard time too," or whatever. And you have to keep these two groups in touch with one another. It's more important than that because the young women, or the older women who are teaching feminism for the first time, on the one hand want to talk about the intricacies of the text while at the same time the students are back where feminism was before Betty Friedan wrote her book. They need to be encouraged and supported all along the line, and I tend to talk to groups of people and to somehow convey to them the excitement of feminism. I try to write in a way that's understandable while at the same I try not to sound or be foolish in the knowledge of all that I hear. It's not an easy position because you're not quite theoretical enough for the theoreticians and a little too heavy for the others, but it's what I aim at. Well, I don't so much aim at it; it's what I discovered to be my destiny.

That is a very difficult position to maintain. Does that mean that you look back and reflect upon the places in which you have chosen to publish or now you see that there are certain places in which you want to publish if, indeed, you are turning from one group to another?

It's not that conscious; like I said, this is more a discovery than an intention. First of all, when speaking there are always a large number of women who have never really heard of feminism before, who are afraid of feminism, but they come from an academic world. I mean that I don't go out and talk to the gardening club; I'm usually talking at a university. And I have learned that I get up on the podium with my pearls and my grey hair and my wedding ring and being a full professor and so forth, and I say very radical things, and I don't frighten them that much. They think, "My God, if she can say these things then there's no danger." Now I do notice that sometimes it frightens the men and some women, particularly fundamentalists, Mormons and so on, but for the most part you get radical ideas over, and it's reassuring, and because I am where I am, there's nothing they can do to me. So I don't worry anymore. I used to worry frightfully. I was the world's most sensitive creature; if anyone said "boo," I went away and cried, but not about reviews. I feel that once you've written something, you've laid it on the line. I have had to learn if men—and it mostly is men—and certain kinds of women don't like what I do, okay. I can't be everything to everybody. That was very, very hard to learn. I

should also say that I'm asked again and again, "Where did you get this self-confidence to talk?" It wasn't easy, and it took many years. I had to keep myself literally from crying if a man said something negative to me.

How long ago was this sensitivity present?

Certainly fifteen years ago, and it didn't come overnight. I remember the first time I really had the nerve to say something; it was when I heard a group of faculty men—and I was the only woman present and we were discussing something—say, "Okay, we'll give it to the girls to type." I had been working myself up to this for the last four years, and I said, "You know, they're women, and they have names." Believe me, I didn't feel that a braver act had ever been done. And I've since noticed that men would come into the English office—we have a rather large English office as you can imagine and we also now have a rather large number of male secretaries—and look around at the secretaries and say, "Nobody's here."

Your's is a difficult world, but it strikes me as a happy one.

It isn't, because I spend half my time feeling that I ought to be more involved with theory and the other half thinking I'm really making this too complicated.

I know that the NEH summer institutes for college professors that you mentioned before are clearly geared to walk that middle path that you're attempting to describe. Not only for that reason but for others, as well, it's a wonderful program. It's comforting to know that no matter how theoretical you get, you still give thought to what might be called the trenches.

Except that what you say sounds a little like still talking from on high. It's a matter of discourse. That's what I'm really talking about, and I really have discovered that I obtain a sort of median discourse. You have to understand that I'm in the position of whenever I'm with a group of feminists, I'm always by at least ten years the oldest person in the room. And this means that you are, through no choice of your own, in a certain role. Now a lot of my younger colleagues who think that I think too much about this keep telling me that nobody notices; it doesn't make that much difference, but, of course, it does, and they do. That role, in a sense, has affected the

way I talk, but it has also given me a way out of one of the more difficult problems women have within the women's movement, that women as figures of authority are relatively new; they used to be the odd one. Concerning the female role, growing out of Freud's family romance, the mother is not "naturally" invested with authority on the one hand, and on the other hand, she is supposed to be a nurturing figure. So you get a great deal of displacement from students and younger colleagues on both grounds; they're not being nurtured enough or whatever. You have to be aware of this and deal with it, and it is a lot easier to deal with it at my age. My age invests me with a kind of authority that ends the question. What sort of mother am I? I don't know. Now in dealing with younger colleagues, I'm very careful not to take any sort of authority position because what I want are friends, and since I am in a position where I've got to be older than my friends, that does not matter. With students, it helps. Younger women teachers often have a problem, and in fact a book was just published on the subject entitled *Gendered Subjects*, and the entire book is about the problems women have when teaching feminism.

That's interesting. Your description of your situation evoked thoughts of the work of Nancy Chodorow as well, but in an entirely academic context.

Oh yes. That's another book that we all learned enormous amounts from. I'm very pleased to say that I was asked to read that book for the California Press and was able to say, "I think you ought to publish this." By the way, those summer enrichment programs are wonderful. You make twelve friends for whom you will be writing letters of recommendation for the rest of your life as well as being friends. I would do another one next summer if they called up and said, "Do it." I'm not going to apply for anything anymore.

If Showalter's book represents many of or most of the important speakers within the feminist discourse in the last twenty years, what do you see on the horizon, what will happen within feminism in the next ten years, and in relation to that role you spoke of, is one of the things you see happening in the future that more American women scholars will respond to the strong generation of French feminists?

Yes, American feminists have been responding to them and to their masters for about six years, so that dialogue is, at this point, fairly well

established, and there's been a great deal of discussion about the book *New French Feminisms*. That dialogue is there and will continue. The first question, about where feminism is going, is much harder to answer, and everyone at the moment is being rather retrospective. Feminism sees itself as being at something of a crossroads, I would say, for two reasons. First, at its cutting edge, it has developed so many techniques, and there is so much it can do that the question becomes much more how to mainstream it: how to get men into it, how to convince the men and how to get it into universities. After all, back on the ranch, you still have to be at the first stages which is one of the mistakes I find some feminists making. Where they are or where we are, it looks like we're somewhere, but they're forgetting the people in small towns across the country. And that, I think, is a mistake. I think we are doing a great many things; I think we are retrospective, and I think we are in great danger. Every wave of feminism has been destroyed, has stopped. Not that there were that many waves because all of this began in the nineteenth century.

Could you expound on your sense of the destruction of various waves of feminism?

For example, there was a wave to get women the vote. Before that, there was the wave to get women into the professions, to start into colleges. There was the Married Woman's Property Act in England. Elaine Showalter's book, when it comes out, on madness as a female thing, shows that women who didn't work or fit into these things were just considered mad. They were put in madhouses; they were operated on.

Both our mothers and almost every other woman we know of from the age of the ascendancy of psychoanalysis in this century, especially in the fifties, have undergone shock therapy for such an inability to cope with such a radical male model.

This is my generation of women.

So these are the historical moments where the movement was stopped, but do you see a present way to stop this movement?

Each time, you get an undergraduate generation who calls it strident and shrill and who are embarrassed by the whole thing. They don't see what the problem is. Kate Stimpson is the one who is best on this subject, and Gloria Steinham

said, "They'll never be more equal again than they are now in Princeton." And she goes on to say that they have not done the four things that make them feminists: marriage, parenthood, jobs, and aging. That's one danger: the younger generation's inability to see this. Being scared of the feminist is another danger. This one group has gotten a great deal of backlash from the fundamentalists and the right wing of this country. It is very interesting to me that women are at the heart of it; people fail to notice this. It is no accident that abortion is the major issue, and these people couldn't care less about the life of a fetus or of a cornfield. They want to control women's bodies because that's how you control the next generation of women. Obviously, if someone is against abortion, then they shouldn't have them. We are now facing a tremendously rich enemy and a lot of very scared women. Remember that there are over forty-five million women in this country who have totally internalized the male "plot," who are Mormons, born-again Christians, fundamentalists of all sorts, and we haven't touched them.

They run for the cover of the Word.

That's right; that race can be a question, or whether or not evolution is taught, is a result of the women's movement. On the other hand, we are never going back to the nuclear family; that is fact. Women are going to be out of the homes; they're going to be working. In short, whatever aspect of feminism you talk about, I think it is always in very great danger, and one gets tired of the fight; one gets tired of being abused because of it. I could see where a lot of women would say, "To hell with it. If they don't care, why should I care."

Especially if one characterizes feminism as having two major and very different fronts at the moment, one of which is in small towns across America—the one we've just been speaking of—and the other in major universities. Concerning this second one, are you concerned that they might turn their back on the movement?

Reagan has done everything possible to make that so. Affirmative action is now virtually toothless and so on, but fortunately the major Eastern universities—Harvard always excepted—have continued this commitment. You had asked in your letter about the economic situation for the next ten years. Well, that's on our

side, "our" in this case being people who think as I think. I have now served on enough committees to know. The universities awakened to the fact that they're going to lose a quarter of their faculties in the next ten years by retirement. They now want a certain number of women; they want bright young people; they're going out after them; they're not going to wait to replace positions. We're going out now, I work on this all the time, and I think that's good for our side. We are getting marvelous men and women in their mid-thirties and early forties; they are the new intellectual world, not all of them, but the times seem to be working in our favor very well. The whole scene has turned around; these dreadful academic scenes where no one could get a job is changing. Demographically, by the nineties the baby boomers will all have children in college and people of my generation, tenured in the sixties and seventies, will all retire in the nineties. Many people retire early now. Those people have to be replaced, and we're all competing for the best, for instance, young women. I'm not saying it's perfect, but it's still a more encouraging picture than ten years ago.

I wanted to ask you about the twenty-five percent retirement figure you mentioned. I would have thought that some of those retiring positions, perhaps as many as half, would not be filled at all. If we then only need ten or twelve percent of those positions filled, then is it going to be a competition where the people who are in charge of hiring have a choice between a very bright young woman and a very bright young man who looks like a more compatible fit? That's something we worry about.

You've brought in another problem that I didn't mention because I am back in my little privileged world. Universities that teach on demand are a problem. My husband teaches at Fordham; he's an economist, and they have tenured their first woman in economics, and that is the area that has the fewest women. Now believe me, I'm not saying it's great, but it is moving. Now if I wanted to paint a pessimistic picture I could, but compared to how things looked ten years ago, it's looking very much better. I am very much worried about the situation you've described. At the MLA, when I was there, this was something that concerned us all the time: what was happening to the humanities. Now Bennett (then of the NEH), in his marvelous way, blames the victim, but nonetheless it's a problem. The use of part-time people is also a problem, and I know

there is tokenism and co-opting and other questions, but if you believe that the revolution must take place within institutions, which is what I believe, then you have to be a little encouraged when those institutions change.

Catharine Stimpson talked about the endowed chair of feminism & women's studies, and how they acquired the money. It will be a wonderful possibility for fine women scholars, so there is reason for optimism. Yet it's localized. Do you know the name of the woman who wrote a book for MLA entitled Stepping Off the Pedestal: Women and Academics in the South?

I know the book; it's a good book, and the South I think is where the most trouble still is. I mean the South and the Midwest—the Bible belt—is still a problem for women. I'm told that it's tough to get any male faculty member in the South to take sexual harassment seriously.

You mean, other than as a privilege. To its credit, that issue is taken very seriously at Loyola, whereas at state universities we have been affiliated with it was a problem for women.

Particularly young, attractive undergraduates where these men are in positions of power; it's an unbelievable position to be in. My feeling is that this is the other argument about the women's movement being an upper middle-class, white elitist, classist, racist movement. Sure it is, but those are the people who have the time to do this; all movements start there; they don't start with women with eight children, a husband who drinks and with no income. How is she supposed to do it? And I feel very much that if we can demonstrate that it works at Yale, then that is going to help everywhere. Other places should take very seriously what's being done at Yale.

There's Columbia and Yale, then there's our university, but what's left unconsidered is the black woman in a third world situation, and neither of our situations speak to that.

Yes, that's exactly right, and another problem to be addressed in the near future. Still Alice Walker says, that when she was studying at Howard, she studied black men because it was a black university, but she didn't study black women or any women.

We ask you about young American women responding to French women, and you said that it is a discourse

that's been going on for six years, but it wasn't covered in Showalter's book.

Isn't the whole third section on theory?

Yes, but none of the young women in America who are responding to French women is represented; there is only one essay almost at the end of the book that gives an overview of Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva, among others.

These French women are not so much feminists, and I understand from the French faculty members who go there that the whole feminist movement in France has been a nightmare.

The French themselves say that it died in 1960.

I think on this question of the ideal sisterhood and so forth that I follow Teresa de Laurentes, a feminist film critic who wrote *Alice Doesn't*. At the very end of it she says that she thinks we should get back to a certain quality we had in the seventies of seeing our groups and women working together and helping each other to talk through things, and I tend to agree with this, so I'm not sure I know what sisterhood means, but I think we need much more to talk to each other. I think that's the essence of feminism—to be able to talk things out in groups—but there are problems. Women don't know how to deal with competition; they've never competed. We, including me, are all out there as though someone handed us a violin and said, "There's the audience." It's not easy; there is nothing easy about it, and these women who buy the romance structure, the marriage structure, "I'll support you and so on . . .," know what they're doing; they get lots of rewards. What do we offer in exchange: risk, anxiety, excitement? I was recently in Idaho with Sonja Johnson, who had a bodyguard. She was a Mormon woman who had begun to speak out in favor of feminism, and the Mormons were very upset. They drummed her out of the church and so forth; it's a very powerful organization. Do you know that in Mormon families, little girls iron the little boy's shirts? I have had a number of students in seminars who were Mormons, but this is frightening; you were supposed to take pride in being the servants of men. I don't think it's good for men either.

That harkens back to your notion of the fierce protectivism by women who have so much invested in their position as down-trodden slave. It strikes me that there's some troubled moments for feminism, for the

future of feminism theory and writings. I was struck by the last sentence of Showalter's dedication to her new book to the daughters for whom all of this is history.

My children grew up in the fifties—a boy and two girls—and, a while ago, they watched "The Women's Room" on television. I know that Marilyn French was writing about my generation, although it wasn't my life, and they couldn't believe it. They ask, "How did you escape this?" It was as if they were watching something that was taking place in Salem in the 1750s. This is one of our real problems; there is no sense of history, and now women have everything; what more could they want? Now they're caught up in being in law firms. I think women should do exactly what they want, but they now see themselves very much torn between the job, the children or this and that. It's just as though new problems come up all the time; it's the hardest question in the world. What we need is each other to talk to for support, and I think where we get through our troubles is when we can just talk it out. Every woman I know thought she was personally a monster because she didn't enjoy staying home all day with her children, and when they began to understand that they all felt the same way, you can imagine how that felt. That was what Betty Friedan did.

It certainly wouldn't be the first movement to have undone itself, or seriously damaged itself, to let the second generation become divided.

Every movement does. It's a danger for every movement, but feminism has, in addition to all the dangers other movements have, an additional one—no, two additional ones. One is the obvious one; as Robin Morgan put it, we sleep with the oppressor which means that you have to make the private public. The other more dangerous one, because I think it is so difficult and anxiety-producing for women, is that they tend to slip off, even if they remain radical, into other courses: race, nuclear arms, South Africa, South America. And these are all wonderful causes, and they all need help. The fact is that women have been indoctrinated with the idea that it's better to do things for others, and never for themselves, and the women's movement suffered and will continue to suffer.

Let me backtrack for a moment. I wondered about the view from the top of a structure like the MLA versus a view even from a very powerful eastern university, and whether a man's reading of the profession at large would

differ from your own.

We're up against that all the time. Kate Stimpson could talk to you about this because she was on the Executive Council of the MLA around the time that the Women's Caucus came into being. Within the MLA, the change has been enormous because women now have a huge voice and are elected. It's been an extraordinary change; it's been one of the best things that's happened. Women are a third of the membership, and they now have an effect comparable to their numbers. To many of the old-fashioned men, this is a nightmare. I mean they can't believe there's a session on menstruation at the MLA. The organization I can now say is non-sexist as it's run: it was the only organization that testified against the new appointee to the NEH, and he was withdrawn. They went down and testified, the only one out of, I think, a hundred organizations, most of which felt that there would be retributions. The committee ended up divided, and the White House withdrew the nomination. Now, obviously, this isn't just women. The new Executive Director is a woman. However, the profession as a whole, as opposed to the MLA, is a little less gungho. There are too many women working part-time; in fact, I'm not so gungho about it for both sexes, but it is going to have to transform itself. I can say that it's definitely improving, but we lost a generation; that's another thing we have to recognize. All kinds of people did not go to graduate school during those tough years. They went to Law School or Medical School. Some of the brightest people went into other professions. We're now hoping that they'll come back. I'm talking about the years my children went to graduate school; neither they nor any of their friends went to graduate school in the humanities. The profession's greatest trouble is coming exactly from the downgrading of the humanities: all these people who want to go where the money is, the loss of a generation, the loss of liberal education, part-time people—all of that is very bad. As President of MLA, I gave the first Presidential Address in a hundred years. Now there had been two women Presidents up until about 1970, and since then there have been about seven or eight, mostly from the foreign languages (they alternate). All of them spoke in this great neutral voice, and for the first time I spoke as a woman. I said, "I'm speaking as a woman, and I'm speaking about women in the profession," and there was a lot of very negative reaction; there was also a lot of very positive

reaction. It was extremely brave of me. I had total support for this.

You are General Editor of a new series of books with Nancy Miller that is coming out of Columbia University Press.

Three books are out, and three more great books are on the way out, one by Elaine Showalter. It's called *Gender and Culture*, and the books we've published are called *Between Men*, a study of when two men love the same woman and what's really happening is that they are relating to each other. We have a book on Dora, *Freud's Dora*, and everyone who's written on Dora is in the book. There's also a book called *Breaking the Chain*, which is on the nineteenth-century novel. There again it's a totally French deconstruction of the nineteenth century, but it's absolutely in the French master tradition of structuralism and post-structuralism. The next to come out is Nina Auerbach's, which is a collection of essays, then Mary Jacobus', which is a collection of essays, and then Elaine Showalter's, which is a group of essays.

What are you working on? You said you couldn't take any more speaking engagements because you have a book on autobiography.

Biography. It began as a book on the theory of biography which I decided was indistinguishable from fiction, and here is Roland Barthes' notion that biography is another way to a novel. He said it a little more elegantly than that, but of course having done a list and discovered that a lot of other people are doing the same thing, this is really where the discourse is now. And I became interested in the second question to do with women, which is precisely that they have no script to their lives. The only obvious script is the one where you get married and have children, and so we're all making it up. What are other scripts that might exist for various parts of their lives? I mean Rachel du Plessis has just published a book called *Writing Beyond the Ending*, and it discusses the ending of what might be called romantic throw-over. I'm very interested in age and women, and friendship in men's and women's lives. Many successful women, over the years—achieving women—have had very nurturing husbands. Now their numbers are not legion, but it's an interesting phenomena that's totally not talked about. If you look back you can see it: George Eliot, Virginia Woolf and so forth. This interests me.□

AN INTERVIEW WITH JANE GALLOP

How would you characterize your writing style?

I think my writing style has changed. When I wrote *The Daughter's Seduction*, I think the style was relatively consistent in that book even though I wrote it over five years. I was given to shocking effects, and the shocks ranged from bad jokes—which are always shocking in a serious context—to really insistent sexual imagery. I think those are basically the two most shocking things, a certain kind of play on language but a low level one. Both of those have in common a non-seriousness, outrageousness, I guess. My style changed, but I did not set out to change it; it changed. And I think what happened is my imaginary or fantasy relationship with my audience changed. When I started writing *The Daughter's Seduction*, I was in graduate school; I wrote the chapter on Juliet Mitchell before I wrote my thesis, and by the time I finished it I was in my third year as an assistant professor at Miami University. What felt consistent throughout the book was the sense of being at the beginning of a profession and in a position that felt daughterly in all kinds of institutional senses. It was sort of like professional adolescence. I don't mean this as a put-down since I have my own attractions to adolescence, and it's a style I'm very attracted to, a new wave style. And I do associate a certain kind of outrageousness with adolescence. It's an attempt to make your place in relation to a world that's already constituted by being shocking. My style in the Lacan book is very different; there's still some of the same kind of jokes because that's also the way my mind works; it works by making all kinds of associations that are not, most of them, conceptual—or at least barely conceptual. There's not the same kind of outrageousness; there's playfulness but not outrageousness, and somehow I wrote that book as someone who had tenure. I'm not sure I know what that means, not just as someone with tenure at an institution but someone who at that point felt like I had a place with a certain amount of authority in the profession; there were people listening to me. I didn't have to make a place for myself; there was already a place. I felt this responsibility; that's

what happened; I changed. I felt a responsibility to really explain things to people so that I began to write more as a teacher rather than writing as a student. My thesis is in yet another style which is a combination of being outrageous and being careful; it's really written as a student. Something happened, and I began to feel that I was writing not so much to shock people. It was as if my main goal was to shake people up and make them unthink what they had thought, whereas somehow things changed; I thought my main goal was more to help people figure things out, and help them understand things I felt I had figured out. I think it had to do with envisioning my audience not as people who had more power than me but as people who needed my help.

One might characterize the style of The Daughter's Seduction as elliptical. In sections where you drew attention to the quality of your work, your work in relation to other scholars in the history of a discourse is actually less clear than it is now because since you were less sure of what you were saying, you said it less clearly.

I think that's right, and I feel it functioned as a defense mechanism, which any style does. It was functioning to cover my ass in some way. It's very complicated; for me, I'm trying to imagine some other mode of defense mechanism, one where you expose your ass to cover your ass.

Well, you have that figure of de Sade there as the jester between the two serious people, and it would be possible to interpret your voice in that mode.

There's something about the style that worked for me. I've gotten the impression from the graduate students I've met that it liberates them, in some sense, from a lot of the things that prove so burdensome while serving an apprenticeship. I think what's difficult for most people in graduate school is that it is an adolescence, a terribly anxious adolescence, in which one is trying so hard to be an adult, and in most cases not using a lot of good defenses that real adolescents have against not quite being an adult, which is being

something other. I feel that I've gotten positive responses—I've also gotten negative responses—from people who are my peers or who are older members of the profession, really intense responses where someone has read the book, and it's made a difference, basically from people who are graduate students, and that's very gratifying.

Do many people draw attention to the change in your style? It's pretty clear if you look from the beginning to the end, that you switch styles.

Your sense of the change is the extent to which I have stopped being elliptical and become clear.

Yes, when you explained it as being more concerned with explaining yourself as a teacher instead of the daughter, the direction of the change became clear.

That's interesting. The October piece ("Phallus/ Penis: Same Difference" [1981]: 243-51) is certainly playful in the sense that it has a certain amount of play at the beginning when I'm talking about the cover, but I think you're right that it's not elliptical, and I think that those may be two different facets of the style.

In the introduction to The Daughter's Seduction, you characterize your style as a kind of dialectical, that you took things that were in direct opposition and tried to make contact between them, and you close with an encouragement not to forget the other woman, not to efface her, to resist the tempting seduction of the sensualizing other. One way to describe the change in your writing was that in one case you were trying to bring two opposites at least closer together; you felt that was the important task. And in the other case, you examine women's writing—feminist criticism and its history, which reminds the reader to notice the difference between herself and the other. It's as if you've taken one subject and tried to create a difference in a group that otherwise might homogenize itself.

Yes, definitely as you say, it sounds different, and it certainly evolves from the strategy of always using at least two terms, but the idea of the two terms was to bring out the difference in each because I wasn't trying to meld them into one. That was for me a technique of defamiliarization; if one imagines feminism and psychoanalysis—the two largest terms—both of them ended up making the other defamiliarized so that neither could congeal. It wasn't that I imagined that I could put them all in one happy whole, but that it would sort of shake them up, whereas the

technique in Leclerc is simply taking one term and trying to make one aware of what I'd call the difference within, which is a term I get from Barbara Johnson and which I used for my response to the *Critical Inquiry* issue on feminism that appeared several issues following it. Elizabeth Abel asked me to write a response to the volume (editor's note: *Critical Inquiry*, "Writing and Sexual Difference," 8.2); there were several responses; Heilbrun also published a response to the volume. There is something about the Leclerc piece that, to me, is very close to *The Daughter's Seduction*. It seems to me that my interest in the figure of the maid servant is a continuation of my interest in the figure of the governess which ends *The Daughter's Seduction*; I felt like I was picking up a kind of theme that I hadn't talked about in the ensuing four years. When I got to the end of *The Daughter's Seduction*, the chapter on Dora, it was my attempt to try and think beyond simply familial models and to think about other kinds of difference besides sexual difference and generational difference, which is all you ever get in a familial model. The figure of the governess sort of stood out, and I realized that, already within psychoanalysis and in a way that people weren't talking about, there was an alternate figure. I don't want my feminism to collapse within the psychoanalytic model because I find that oppressive.

You work your way to an optimism that's cautious.

It's interesting to talk about the composition of the book. That wasn't the last chapter that I wrote. The last chapter I wrote was the one on Kristeva.

Why did you switch them?

I wanted the chapter on Dora to be the last chapter of the book, and I wanted the book to open up that way. I had spent a lot of time working on Lacan and Irigaray, and then I had in mind a chapter on Cixous and a chapter on Kristeva because, obviously, they were both psychoanalytically influenced. I'm not sure whether either of them qualifies as a feminist, but they were doing what I call feminist theory. When I plotted out the book, I knew that I was going to end up writing a chapter on each of them and those were the last two things I was going to do, and so I, for whatever reasons, ended up doing Cixous first and Kristeva last, but when I had finished both chapters I realized that I

wanted the Cixous chapter, the Governess chapter, to be at the end because it provided a place where I wanted the book to end.

What does the October essay do to continue that idea?

I decided to write about Annie Leclerc because she's someone whose writing I found interesting and hadn't really been involved with since she's not psychoanalytic; she was not part of the project for *The Daughter's Seduction*, but of all the other relatively well-known figures within French feminism, she was the one whom I hadn't talked about whose writing attracted me so I set myself a project to write about her. I read over *Parole des Femmes*, which is her book, and then I read *La Venue à l'Écriture*, not just her article but all three of them, and decided that I wanted to write about those two books together in some way. I never know what I'm going to say until I write. Literally, it's always a surprise to me, and when it isn't I find writing boring. Right now I have to write an MLA paper, and my assigned topic—I assigned it to myself because that's how I work—is this anthology called *The (M)other Tongue*. There's a shorter version of "The Father's Seduction" (from *The Daughter's Seduction*) in that book. I read whatever book I'm going to examine twice before writing. I think I have a basically narrative relationship to scholarship which is that I want surprise; I want things to happen. I always feel like I basically have to have a new idea.

Do you realize how much you sound like that old Mark Schorr essay "Technique as Discovery"?

No, I didn't realize it because I don't know it. It's probably good or I'd feel terrible. I know that when people talk about writing, and it's usually people talking about literature, I do respond, recognizing certain things. In fact, I was teaching *Theory of Criticism* by Murray Krieger, who is not one of my favorite theorists, but I found that it was very interesting when he was describing the process of writing as a process in which something has to happen that really surprises the writer. Some encounter with otherness must take place, but, of course, he would never recommend writing criticism that way, and that's probably where he and I differ. I recognized what he was saying as the way I think about my own writing. I've never been tempted to write fiction or poetry. I have never written any fiction or poetry, but I realize that there are certain standards I have through which I judge everything I read,

whatever it is, and it has to do with the fact that . . . it's like when you go to a movie, and the first fifteen minutes are interesting, but the subsequent frames have the same idea. I feel most critical articles and books are like that. There's always a solid idea and plenty of research to back it up, but once you've got the idea, why keep reading. I mean I want something to keep happening. For me, writing is discovering what I think, as it were.

I kept thinking that you needed to find difference in your writing; you had to see it while you were working, and even when you wrote on feminism—the Leclerc article. The position that each person takes in a feminist discourse, as it creates its history, interests me as a subject, as the four interviews we're doing would indicate. What is your own sense of where you fit into such a discourse, especially in terms of your writing style?

That's interesting. I think that part of it, the most obvious difference between me and everyone else, is that I'm the youngest. I don't just mean chronologically but academically, and I think it means a lot of things, in my relation to what it means to be a feminist academic. I took a women's studies course as an undergraduate, so there was a battle for legitimacy that I never had to fight. I think that makes an enormous amount of difference, and I think that's another reason why a lot of people are very responsive to my work, graduate students who are admitted feminists but who also find themselves, because of their position, in rebellion against the feminist orthodoxy.

That brings to mind the preface that Showalter has included in her book along the lines of the book being to our daughters for whom this is history.

I think for me, the position I took—if I were the only feminist in the world, I don't think I'd take this position—is that there are plenty of other people fighting the battle for legitimacy of feminism as a discourse, who are constantly fighting against feminism's enemies, against the patriarchy. I also fight against it, particularly in a more institutional context, and I also take a different position, for example, as an undergraduate teacher, where I teach Women's Studies here [Rice University]. I'm trying to teach them to think critically, but I'm also more critical of their patriarchal assumptions. For whatever

reasons, because I am to some extent a daughter of feminist scholarship, I find that the place that seemed right for me to speak was not somehow to constantly assert the legitimacy of feminism but to question a certain repressive orthodoxy that always threatened feminism. I don't think it's more present in feminism; I think it's less present in feminism. Feminism is a place where I'm very comfortable; somehow, whenever I feel anything congealing, I mix it up. I gave a talk at Princeton, and Elaine Showalter was in the audience, and she was upset by something I said. It was a talk that went two ways; it was called "Feminist Criticism and the Pleasant Text," and it was on the one hand a feminist reading of Barthes' *The Pleasures of the Text* and on the other hand a reading of feminist criticism through the issue of pleasure, which I find very complicated, and the whole notion of political pleasure. In that talk I gave a mythological, in Barthes' sense, characterization of feminist criticism and talked about how one has the impression that you're not supposed to enjoy reading real authors, and that it's okay to get pleasure from reading women writers. I said something more complicated but that's the essence. And I said in my talk that what I was saying was very crude. I know this is not the position of real feminists, but I think it's an impression one has, and I was trying to talk about a voice of a certain kind of moralism. And Showalter, after my talk, asked a question; her question was "I'm very upset at your having said that; I wish you hadn't said that." And I understood that, for her, my saying that was confirming people's worst stereotypes about feminist critics. I was talking about people's worst stereotypes about feminist critics, but I think that those were stereotypes that exist not only in our enemies but in us. I realized a kind of difference; Elaine's someone I think very highly of, and I enjoy her work for lots of reasons, one of which is style—I think she has a wonderful sense of style—and because she really is very interested in what has been going on in feminism, like the new history, and she's reflecting on that history. But I saw the real difference between me and her in that moment: it was her sense of the real vulnerability of feminist criticism and the fact that one wouldn't want to expose it or confirm people's bad opinion of it. I think that part of its vulnerability is involved in the crude ideas that get attached to it by those who believe in them and are against it. For me, the way to fight against those vulnerabilities would be not to cover those things up but to expose them.

That's a very interesting story because at the MLA in Houston (1980), at the Woman's Caucus, there was a panel with Jane Tompkins, Mary Jacobus, Barbara Johnson, and Kate Stimpson. Johnson's paper, which was toward the end of the session, discussed her discomfort in relation to a number of older feminists, and that prompted every feminist in the audience who was older to start telling stories of her own experiences which she had erected into women's mythological history.

I believe I was there, and the discussion got into stories about the tampon machines at Yale University. What's funny about that is that I have now moved my students to write letters because they don't fill the tampon machines at Rice University. I have just created this into an issue here. Rice is, of course, in terms of anything feminist, probably ten or fifteen years behind every place I have ever been, but I'm in some sense teaching the first Women's Studies course this semester. That doesn't mean that there haven't been courses on feminist writers, but it's the first course called Women's Studies. This is the first attempt to try and organize Women's Studies; there have been people in various departments that have taught feminist courses. In some sense, my position here is very odd because on the one hand I have been hired to teach Women's Studies and there's no opposition to it, but there is no Woman's Studies program. But I didn't take the job because it was a challenge; I took the job because I would rather teach Women's Studies than French. My degree is in French, and it's very hard to get out of a discipline, and here I'm not in a department. The challenge of trying to, single-handedly, set up a Women's Studies program was not what brought me here. I wasn't hired in any administrative capacity; I was just hired to teach Women's Studies, and it seems absurd to teach Women's Studies outside of a Women's Studies program. I'm just trying to create something more coherent than just whatever courses I have to offer and trying to figure out what faculty there is to draw upon who are feminists and may be doing feminist research. I'm really not in any kind of community here. It's odd because everyone is nice to me; I can do what I want, but it's just not being part of something larger. The only thing I feel part of is my students. It's exciting to me.

Stimpson is very optimistic about Women's Studies and talks about the new chair of Women's Studies that they've gotten endowed. And Heilbrun says that she's

realized that she's enjoyed this privileged life to do what she's wanted to do at Columbia University.

I'm optimistic in a larger sense because I think that the feminist literary scholarship that has been produced in the last five years is so incredible. I taught a graduate seminar this semester on Feminist Literary Criticism, and they said, first of all, having read the criticism chronologically beginning with the early seventies, that they all particularly like the later material, and what they said that was most striking was that they had thought that, basically, criticism was boring. Obviously, they had gotten this from their other English classes, and none of them had ever taken a course on criticism. And I started to talk about how there was some interesting non-feminist work that had been created out of structuralism and other approaches. There was an enormous amount of energy and high level thinking generated. I do like the feminist criticism of the eighties much more than the feminist criticism of the seventies; I find it more complicated, more sophisticated, and yet still having the kind of energy which the stuff of the seventies had. I think that energy, in the best cases, is both sophisticated and yet touches grounds of personal experience. So first, I'm very optimistic about feminist criticism because there is so much good work, and I see the people coming out of graduate school, smart young women doing great work. I find that exciting. Second, I found even teaching my undergraduates here very difficult at the beginning. They seemed somewhat out of it or conservative; by the end of the semester, they were really responding. I got them in there reading and talking, and by the end of the semester, they were all into it at various levels. Finally, I'm very optimistic about Women's Studies.

When you say feminist critics in the eighties, whom do you have in mind?

One person in the seminar liked Jane Marcus' work; another liked an essay Gayatri Spivak had done. I like Elaine Showalter's work in the eighties much more than her work in the seventies. I don't think I'm trying to talk about just another generation but about a certain way in which feminist criticism has progressed. I think that that's the difference. I mean Mary Poovey, Shari Benstock and others whom we read in the seminar. When I'm talking about the eighties, I'm not talking about people that are necessarily

young, things being published in the eighties as it were. What we ended the semester with was the double issue of *Tulsa Women's Studies* which I think is just marvelous. Elaine has a piece in it called "Woman's Space, Woman's Time" which is really good, and what's interesting is that there is a lot of reflection on what is happening in feminist criticism and on the influx of theory.

Shari had mentioned, when she was coming down to see you, that you two felt that you had a connection in liking to respond to other peoples' texts, found the margins a strong place. I know that Shari is another American who is interested in French feminist theory.

I think the influence of the French has been really good for the American literary scene in feminism, although what really interests me is not so much the French feminist material, which is also really interesting in the seventies but is not interesting in the eighties, but the effect it has produced on American texts and institutions. I've moved out of a French department, and I'm moving farther away from French.

So what happened to French feminism in the eighties?

There was a moment in which, out of this whole post-structuralist movement in France, there were women who started speaking at a certain moment as women, and for those of us in this country who were reading the men in that movement, it was very exciting to hear the women articulate what might be a kind of feminine voice in relation to those men, but then they went on in diffuse ways. They were never actually together in a movement, but there was a way they seemed together, especially from here. Kristeva became more and more a psychoanalyst and is now writing quite clinical stuff, and Irigaray has gotten kind of mystical. There was a way in which she was really poetic, but there was a kind of tension in the mid-seventies, a certain kind of real poetic, lyrical, mystical strain and a lot of hard, interrogative thinking; it's as if the tension slipped, which I think happens a lot of times. You can't maintain the same balance so you go in one direction. Cixous is still writing, but she's not really writing theoretical texts; she continues to write fiction and plays whereas what I think really energized people about Cixous was not her fiction but the couple of essays she wrote about women's writing rather than her exemplification. To talk about those three figures who have been so

influential is important. Their influence, not just their influence but the influence of post-structuralism on American feminist critics, I think, has been very salutary not because I think what was going on there was better; in some sense I find the American version of it more attractive. At its best there's not the same sort of worship of theory and language, the same tendency towards abstraction. What's interesting is that for me post-structuralism, and I suppose specifically deconstruction, which have had such an enormous influence in this country, have had their best influence on feminism.

That's true. Once you get the model of deconstruction you have to see that feminism would be its happiest home.

I don't know about that, but I think that deconstruction really, in some sense, needs some sort of grounded political commitment or it sounds too much like pure formalism, pure relativism—the sort of notion that gets embodied in all sorts of figures, certainly male deconstructionists I read all over this country, and which has rightly been seen as the latest mode of criticism, which is not grounded in any kind of basically passionate subjective stance of the writer. Basically, I've gotten very turned-off by deconstruction, and Derrida was here this September, and he spoke. I mean turned-off by what I see as a certain kind of power of deconstruction in this country. It's not just feminist orthodoxy that I don't like. Deconstructive orthodoxy I find even more offensive; I'm not sure why I find it more offensive.

Perhaps because its point of view is that there shouldn't be an orthodoxy.

I suppose it's even more contradictory, but again, in hearing Derrida, I heard very much a subjective voice when he speaks as opposed to when he writes, and he has very much a sense of wanting to take political positions.

Is taking political stands for him a sign of the particularity of his voice that he doesn't imply in his writings all the time?

One of the things I noticed is that when he speaks as opposed to when he writes he takes clearer positions. I think too it's because he is a good teacher although he doesn't so much write as a

teacher. When he speaks, he speaks as a teacher, and there is a kind of lucidity to his spoken word. I find that I really prefer, as unfashionable or as ironic as I may be, his word to his writing. But obviously his writing has been very influential. I think it is very hard, if not impossible, to maintain a level of constant critical complexity and also to take really clear positions and try and inscribe yourself; those are two different things again. Generally, anybody is going to fail at that; I think one of the things that's been most helpful is that people who have been influenced by deconstruction but who continue for whatever reasons to remain feminists maintain a double necessity. In my response to *Writing and Sexual Difference* (previously cited *Critical Inquiry* issue edited by Elizabeth Abel), I refer to this double obligation: on the one hand, the obligation to explore a wide range of things and, on the other hand, to take positions, to remember the world, to remember really serious kinds of political problems. The works I like the best are by people who have been obviously influenced by theory, who think in that complex way and yet are really committed to feminism. And there are more and more of those people round.

Is being committed to feminism a sufficient political position or do you have to do something more about that besides think about it? Do you have to do more than theorize about it and actually help create its intellectual history in order to be taking political positions?

What I was thinking about when I said that was the necessity of really understanding and being aware of the politics, the stakes, the power structures involved in what you say and what you read. When I said something about considering politics in the abstract, abstracted from any kind of context in which I am thinking about, I get overwhelmed because when I dwell on that abstract, it ends up being something in the world in which I feel absolutely powerless. So, of course, I prefer not to think about it in that way. When I think of politics in terms of my own practice, it has to do with teaching and trying to get people to think about the power structures operative in their lives, it means making graduate students aware of suffering under the necessity of pretending that you know everything by the time you get a Ph.D., it means making the women students at Rice aware of the fact that, for God knows how many years, the tampon machines have gone unstocked which is not just an inconvenience but a sign that the university

doesn't fully recognize its women students. It's at that level that I begin to feel that politics is not just a place where I feel powerless but where I can do something because, in those specific microcontexts, I become aware of what I can do and how I can do it. It's something I can feel good about.

What about somewhere in between those two. Are there politics to feminism in America, feminist criticism, in feminist critics' relations to one another? And does your writing reflect your thinking about that subject as well?

I don't think about that much, which is different from how I first thought of myself as a daughter, yet so much of it was the relationship of father to daughter that it wasn't within feminism too much but was within a literary academy. It was only somewhat later that I became much more aware of a certain relationship to the mothers, as it were, which I'm still thinking about a lot and will probably write about because I felt very strongly in reading this anthology that Shari is putting together as a special issue of *Tulsa Women's Studies*. One thing that kept coming up was the presence of two generations of feminists. The second generation is theoretical, and the first generation is pioneering. It comes from Showalter talking about two generations and from Nina Baym complaining about the current interest in theory, the way it's a betrayal of feminism, and from Jane Marcus basically criticizing Peggy Kamuf for a lack of filial-piety to Virginia Woolf, who is our foremother. It's my way of reading, which is to put together things, some of which I thematize and some of which are more imaginary but through which I began to realize that one of the things that began to take shape is that feminist criticism as an institution is not old enough, so that if there are two generations, there are mothers and daughters. It's a very complicated relation which is not the ideal symbiosis that Chodorovians would like it to be but is much more like the adolescent mother/daughter relationship that Chodorow also describes (see Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering* [Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1978] 61-62, 102-3). Such a relationship contains questions of filial-piety but also questions whether the daughters continue to be too seduced by the fathers and not enough by the mothers, which is probably true. I do see my seduction by the fathers and also see that there is something, again within a psychoanalytic model, to Jane Marcus' analysis of the reasons for

sticking with the fathers to protect against the power of the mothers, which is psychoanalytically right. My reading of that is very much the way I tend to read, which is to disagree with it to see if there's some truth in it. I have a plan to write about that.

I was very interested in that text too simply because I was really surprised that you weren't in it (The New Feminist Criticism, ed. Elaine Showalter [New York: Pantheon Books, 1985]). It gave me pause; the volume does not direct attention to the influence of French feminism.

The whole French influence side is inadequately represented in that volume, and that's the major critique of that volume I've seen, and I think that's true. It was something I really didn't care about because I know that stuff, but she's really ambivalent about it. In "Women's Space, Women's Time," in which she writes the recent history of feminist criticism, she talks about the two generations and the influence of French criticism. The level of her ambivalence is very clear there. I think I rightly call it ambivalence because I think she's also attracted to it and is, in some sense, sympathetic.

It occurred to me that there were two other women in the ending of that "other woman" essay (cited previously) when you asked to remember the other woman. I guess in some ways you've been the other woman to some of these American feminists—to remember not to efface—just as they don't quite pay enough attention to French feminism as they might or to American feminists who are responding to French theory, and then there's the "other" other woman—the black, the hispanic, feminists from third world situations—which is an entirely different kind of other. I thought you treated the class of the maidservant in a relatively non-political way.

What do you mean by political?

I feel that some people feel compelled toward an attitude of guilt in regard to another economic situation that's below yours. You do deal with that attraction to the dark servant.

I was dealing with guilt too, but I think that is a political issue. I think the attraction is political; I think the guilt is political; I think the effacement is political; and I think the way we deal with it is political. Our own relation as middle-class, writing women to the women who work for us is

both political and very uncomfortable. I thought the article was political, and I thought it was really . . . for me, the whole *topos* of "the other woman" which is a response to Spivak's article on the Third World . . . a response of feeling really confused and nonplussed. I responded to that through another mode of thinking about things, although the other woman had been a category for me for mainly psychoanalytic reasons, and it became a category of other sorts of difference, very strictly psychoanalytically defined. It was my way of deconstructing *écriture féminine* because I began to realize that the real problem was not its essentializing the difference between men and women but its covering over the difference between women.

The difference among women or between women?

I like the word "between" rather than "among" because the latter seems to me pluralistic, and the former means class difference, race difference, difference of position. It was my way of doing a critique of *écriture féminine*, but the specific critique I felt to be very political; it really ran the danger of effacing class difference in view of some universalized notion of woman. Since this has been an issue within feminism for the past hundred years, in some sense I was saying something very old, which was simply that we as middle-class women can't forget that we speak as middle-class women. What I was trying to talk about was the guilt and to say that I didn't think that guilt was an adequate way of dealing with the issue at all because guilt says, "I cannot tolerate this difference; this difference makes me very unhappy, and the difference is my fault." One of the things that I noticed in discussions of class difference and race difference is that middle-class white women are reminded that while they are women, they are also middle-class and white. They respond so guiltily that it's as if you can't speak if you're not oppressed; therefore, there's no real attempt to articulate what it means to speak as a middle-class woman. They either speak out of guilt as middle-class women or they speak as if there was no class difference at all. I am a middle-class woman, and that won't go away whether I feel guilty about it or not. It also doesn't make any sense to feel guilty; my guilt wouldn't do anyone any good. What is important to me is to understand what that means and to not efface it. I don't mean to say that I'm beyond the guilt, and I'm interested in analyzing that guilt, both to try to get in touch with the set of

feelings one has in response to these problems and then to analyze them, to try and make some sort of progress on them. I suppose that's what is psychoanalytic about my work; it involves both trying to get in touch with a set of feelings, but not in order to feel them, and to get at what's behind them. The ultimate reality is not the feelings, but the feelings are really a way at structures. I think what's happened is that some of the people working in theory have not really dealt much with those issues. I think that's why Spivak's work is so important; she's someone who is doing theory and thinking about these issues. It seems to me that feminists have done some sophisticated theoretical thinking on sexual difference, but there are other issues that have been feminist issues for a while that tend to be worked on by people not necessarily interested in theory so that a lot of the response comes through feeling and that doesn't get anywhere in working through the feelings. At a conference last Spring, the director of the Women's Research Center at Memphis State University, where they work on southern, black and working-class women writers, was talking on, really insisting on, remembering difference, not effacing it. Somebody stood up who was very upset and said, "What am I supposed to do?" And Lillian Robertson stood up and said something very smart: "The problem is your guilt, and your guilt is of no use." I think that's the problem. And sexual attraction is another side of the guilt; I don't see it as the solution to the guilt; I see it as a necessary part of what we have to understand, another side of the guilt which is a kind of an idealization; there's the guilt of both. . . . The Leclerc piece is one of the things that I've written recently that I liked the most. It surprised me in two ways. First, it's actually the most orthodoxly deconstructive piece that I've written. I was really, in my methodology, deconstructing the idea of presence and being in *écriture féminine*, and strangely it was at a time when I was feeling suspicious of anything Derridean. Second, I also felt that I was able to make a statement about a political issue that is complicated and difficult for feminism and within feminism. And the fact that those two things came together at the same time was really gratifying to me because they have associations that are at opposite ends of the spectrum. The feminists who are doing deconstruction are usually understood as the least political of the feminists, and the feminists that are saying, "Wait a minute, what about the issue of class," are usually the most political. I felt

that I was doing both. It seemed to me that that was what deconstruction should be used for, not to be used to pull feminists away from political issues.

The way you characterize the relationship of writing and sexual difference is the same as the relationship between poetics and gender; the relationship is that in both pairs, referentiality is not simply present, and it's not completely absent. It is problematical and that is the case in both of the two subjects of both pairs, and I wondered if this was a linguistic explanation of the situation or is it a political explanation or does it make any difference because the two at that point are so closely linked.

I don't know which it is, probably both. It seems to me that people who opt for the position that there is no referent are defending against something much more threatening; there is a relationship to the referent, and it's always difficult. It's really simple to claim there's not one; you don't have to worry about it. That's what concerns me with a sort of fashionable post-structuralism: there's no subject; there's no referent; we're beyond that; we solved that; we deconstructed that. What that says of all the problems that are so difficult in the world—of understanding reality, of understanding how you can effect reality, of how you can interpret reality—is that we don't have to worry about reality. There is no reality.

If you take what you've just said about the referent and writing and apply it to the referent and gender, then all of that applies even more clearly.

I wasn't even thinking about the referent in writing; I was thinking of the referent as some sort of weird concept of whatever is ultimately real.

But don't they come together again in Irigaray's—your sense that there's something salutary—poesis of the body, because she continues to make an allusion in her text to an extratextual reality.

I thought I was able to figure Irigaray's work out and make certain things clear about the referent. That's where I was talking about the referent, and that's where I explicitly talk about the problematic nature of the referent. I was talking about the body, specifically the body as a metaphor of the referent in some odd way. I understood that politically too. This is related to an issue that a lot

of people, a lot of men working with literary theory have been talking about for the last seventy years, are beginning to see that the politics of New Criticism, for example, grew out of a situation where people really felt powerless. They were unhappy with the world they lived in and felt powerless to change it, so they developed the notion of the autonomy of the imagination, which to me is the same thing as saying there is no referent, not literally, but it's the same psychological gesture of saying, "I have no power in this world, so I'm going to deny the reality of this world or at least I'm going to operate in a realm in which the world doesn't matter." I think what's valuable about feminism's input into literary criticism, which has a long history of that attitude, is that feminists really believe in the possibility of changing this world, and despite the fact that feminism is, in some sense, about how women are powerless, it is also about somehow feeling empowered to do something about that. This semester I taught Gerda Lerner's *The Majority Finds Its Path*, and one of the positions she takes over and over again—although she changes it a little at the end—is the position she started from, which is early in her career, and she was writing against all the feminist historians who were writing the history of how women were always oppressed. She was interested in writing about the power women had, what they had accomplished, what they had done, and how active they had been, how they weren't just victims. I've always been horrified at the thought of myself as a victim; I cannot conceive of myself as a victim, and I run in the opposite direction. I will reinterpret any situation in order not to see myself as a victim, and I think that that's really the stance of *The Daughter's Seduction*; I also knew that it was ambiguous. I mean who's seducing whom; who's the victim? I think it is what upset a lot of people who said, "What about men abusing their daughters? Those people are pure victims." I can't deny that it's a horrible thing, but the thing I'm suspicious of is why people identify with victims and what it does to them and how it renders them powerless. I find that very threatening; I find it personally threatening, and I find it a threatening trend within feminism. Whereas what is really attractive to me are all the places in feminism where women are really asserting their power. Somehow I find this odd association between women who, whether they were abused by their elders as children or not, in their discourse identify with abused children. You hear that in the discourse of anti-abortion: a

kind of identification with the rights of these unborn, the lawyer who would speak for the fetus. I think there are two things, two positions, that are horrifying to me, and when other people articulate them, I feel I must fight against them: one is the position of victim, and the other is the position of guilt, both of which seem paralyzing. And although they seem like the opposite—when you feel guilty you are not the victim—I think that it's guilt that makes one identify with victims because the one person supposedly not guilty is the pure victim.

Of course, when you feel guilty, you victimize yourself.

Those are the sort of knee-jerk reactions I have that produce a lot of the stances I take. I realize that in my response to feminists that I read, not just feminist critics, it's not their stance on various issues that makes me sympathize or not; it's whether they seem to want to emphasize women as oppressed or whether they want to emphasize women as powerful.

Is this why you find interest in American feminism right now, in terms of—well, you've always been an American feminist—as you've pointed out, the writing from France is not that interesting now, and the writing taking place in America is more interesting.

I think there is a certain kind, an enormous amount, of energy in feminist criticism, and I see feminist critics writing with the expectation that they have something to say and that people will find that interesting, perhaps because a lot of feminist critics now realize that there's enough audience and enough establishment that they are no longer waiting for an audience of men who think it's terrible to write feminist criticism, so there's not that sense of having to legitimize yourself. I guess I'm very into empowering, trying to empower other people and trying to empower myself. Virginia Woolf, in *A Room of One's Own*, talks about fact and fiction and how if you read literature you'd think women were very powerful and if you read history you think women had no power at all, and what she's really suggesting is that we read both. I think that there's been, on the one hand, here and there a tendency in a certain first level of feminist criticism of literature to say, "Literature was lying to us because it showed women as powerful, and women weren't. Let us not be taken in by these idealized images of women because they're really oppressive of women." Of course there's an old

tradition that goes back to at least Plato that says that literature itself is lying to us. On the other hand there's a tradition that says that since history, facts, are so depressing because women are so powerless, let's just read literature; let's escape, which is probably one of the reasons so many women have gone into literature. Woolf seems to be recommending that we try to read them both at the same time even though they contradict each other, that we really try to read and keep fact and fiction together, literature and history together. How can you imagine women as ever being powerful if they've never had any power whatsoever? Of course, people are re-writing history, and it turns out that women were not quite so absent as it looked in the history books Virginia Woolf was reading. There is still a history of women's oppression around, and the reality is that we live in a patriarchal society, and we've lived in it as far back as time itself. If you only concentrate on that, you will be paralyzed because how do you get out of a patriarchy, out of something that's always been there. And on the other side, if you ignore all that, because it's so depressing, and live in the sort of fantasy of one's own power, you are also paralyzed. You're paralyzed because you are not dealing with the world and not dealing with the real obstructions that are there, and that's what I was trying to say. For me the horror is being paralyzed; you've got to keep moving; you have to hold on to both of those because either of them alone will paralyze you. One paralyzes by making you totally ineffectual, unconnected to the world, whether you talk about that as formalism or escapism. If you're not effective in the world, then you're paralyzed. I obviously, temperamentally, am more attracted to the mode of empowerment. I also do try to write about the fact that there is a patriarchy, and in fact some of my work on Lacan and on phallocentrism is very pessimistic, and it has, for a lot of people, a jarring relation to the fact that I'm making these very pessimistic statements about how our language is really phallogentric; people who don't like Lacan don't like that fact. On the other hand, along with that pessimism is the obvious optimism of my tone, and my writing as if I thought I could do anything I wanted; I could make it say anything that I wanted. That's a contradiction that someone pointed out to me at a lecture, which is really true. On the one hand, I take this really cynical, sophisticated view of language as patriarchal—not patriarchal but outside of the subject's control—and on the other hand, I write as if I

could play with it and control it.

I want to shift gears for a couple of moments. You've obviously had success with your academic career, and keeping in mind the political reality that feminism has to deal with, have you thought about what the next five or ten years will mean to women academics who are entering the profession, perhaps in light of projected economic cutbacks?

What I'm suspicious of, and it's one of the things I'm trying to think through about feminism and theory, and deconstruction and feminism which I want to write about, concerns the question of what institutional and ideological forces are going on in anybody's career, and I think that there's a way in which a certain theoretical, poststructuralist feminism became legitimate in a way that feminist criticism never became legitimate, and I'm very suspicious of that although I feel that my own career has benefited enormously from that. That's why I've stopped being an advocate for French feminism; I really have done a kind of reversal. In fact, I'm reacting from the other side against those who feel French feminism is better, who think deconstruction is better, and I have increasingly identified myself more and more with the label feminist and less and less as anything connected with French. I have a theory about the rise of deconstruction in English departments in this country which I saw—it's this odd thing that I saw from French departments—and all of a sudden it caught on. Part of it has to do with my own success, which is why I pay a lot of attention to this. I think the reason it caught on was it was seen as a way of containing feminist criticism, which was growing

so much that it couldn't be simply ignored because it was a way of going beyond feminist criticism without ever having to pass through it. I meet a lot of male deconstructionists who are already putting down feminism from a place that they think is more radical because it essentializes identity and gender identity, and they're beyond that because their identity is *differance* with an "a." What was necessary to pull this off was the privileging of a few poststructuralist feminists who then could be used to put down all the feminist scholars working all over the country by saying, "Oh, come on; what you're doing is not radical at all. We're not threatened by it because it's really conservative; we're really much more radical." I certainly didn't wittingly contribute to that, but it's not a position I like playing because I think that it's really going on quite strongly, and therefore, I'm more and more associating myself with Women's Studies, with feminism, with American feminist theory. I see that as perhaps the most clever way—not that anybody thought this up—of responding to the enormous growth of feminist criticism, which is that you could no longer ignore it. You no longer could put it down from the Right because it was becoming untenable to continue to assert that position. So there was this move to transcend or jump beyond it, and to put it down from the Left. To the extent that my work helps fuel people that do that, I feel personally involved in a crusade which is my sense of urgency or desperation about that, to really unmask that, to write about it. I think that's why deconstruction is so successful. It spread like wildfire at the same time that feminist criticism got very strong. It was a position that didn't deny feminism but attempted to move beyond it. □