Toward a Theory of Gendered Reading

Larry Edward Schoenholtz

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TOWARD A THEORY OF GENDERED READING

by

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An endeavor of this sort begins long before its official work. For me, it began in the 60s with Dennis Kocienda. I think of the thousands of hours we spent together as amateur scientists—always trying to get to the bottom of things. Dissecting a mouse like we were pint-sized extras from Chicago Hope. Dodging flying test tubes until our house fan became a workable centrifuge. How dedicated we were! I think of Elizabeth Hardin in the 70s—who always said that I stimulated her mind because I “had a way with words”—eventually showing me that my feminism and manliness were rooted in the selfsame spirit. Nor can I forget all those other co-conspirators in the imagination’s greater voyages: Ed, Dale, Dan, Guido, Sam, Ronda, Claudia, Linda, Denise and Denise and Mike and Mike Wiz. Guido was the Great Encourager. God bless my Bodhisattva.

But all good apprenticeships come to an end. By the time I got to Western, my mind was teeming with ideas and the search for personal style. Bill Olsen and Arnie Johnston cured me of the delusion that I knew how to write poetry and fiction, then proceeded to make a success of me in spite of it!

We didn’t know it at the time, but Dr. Egan probably became my thesis director in our first class together. He noted two traits from my papers which were to hold me in good stead over the next five years: a passion for the details of research and a sense of authority in my convictions. He made me feel that I wrote “not as the scribes.” Dr. Gianakaris would eventually come along to undo the excesses of the latter in my final
class at Western, but the two of them together made me a balanced writer—able at last to fuse my personal vision to the rigors of scholarship. I can hardly thank Dr. Jorgens enough. To get the best grade in the hardest class from the smartest professor was a tremendous encouragement. To all my committee members, then—thanks!

1995 began with disasters and ended with victories. I would be remiss not to include those who were crucial to the progress. I’m grateful to Julie Scrivener, Herb Davis, and Sharon Keller for the invaluable assistance in the production of the manuscript. Greg Ross must be cited for leading me from the mine fields of my own demons. I thank Amy, Bill, Brenda, David, Liz and Robin for having superior understanding and loyalty throughout. And God bless Doc for keeping me from taking myself too seriously. I mean—just because I’m gossipy, hyperdefensive, self-indulgent, helpless and nosy doesn’t mean that I’m not a good person! And let me cite Elizabeth again... my thesis was really finished in an outdoor jacuzzi in November. The final ingredient needed was peace of mind!

I thank Christa for being my inspiration, and Anna for being the mom who is raising her to have a conscience. Last but not least, please note that my own mom has been there through it all. Not enough can be said of a person who is there for you on your first and last days of school—especially over 42 years! Thanks, Mom.

Larry Edward Schoenholtz
TOWARD A THEORY OF GENDERED READING

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Western Michigan University, 1995

Sociolinguistic studies have long acknowledged that men and women sometimes read, write, speak, and view differently. This is often recognized as a cultural phenomenon, but there are increasing reasons to suppose that biology may play a larger role in these differences than was suspected two or three decades ago. Over the last fifteen to twenty years, in particular, evidence has continued to mount in that direction from studies in neurophysiology, endocrinology, and infant behavior. In addition, sociobiological perspectives first proposed in the 1970s seem to have met with large success in being confirmed by cross-cultural studies done in the 1980s.

This thesis proposes that many gender issues may be divergent because males and females have innately different resources and needs. It offers paradigms by which literature may be viewed simultaneously from mutually exclusive angles. Works discussed include *Sister Carrie* by Theodore Dreiser, *McTeague* by Frank Norris, *The Awakening* and "The Storm" by Kate Chopin, and *Herzog* by Saul Bellow. Some discussion is also devoted to pulp romances and pornography.
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INTRODUCTION

When readers bring themselves to texts, necessarily complex entanglements occur. We can examine a text as a disembodied sequence of words and images, for instance, and derive certain values thereby accruing within such notions as structure or style. We can examine a text in terms of the author's intentions or the historical context in which it is produced. We may even approach a text as an object of psychoanalytic inquiry—using any number of popular theories from the field of psychology. But however we approach a text initially or ultimately, few critics would disagree with the notion that a text does not actually become vitalized as a "work" until it is realized by the mind of the reader. In this regard, some reader-response critics assert:

The work is more than the text, for the text only takes on life when it is realized, and furthermore the realization is by no means independent of the individual disposition of the reader . . . (Iser 1219)

The fact that completely different readers can be differently affected by the "reality" of a particular text is ample evidence of the degree to which literary texts transform reading into a creative process that is far above mere perception of what is written. The literary text activates our own faculties, enabling us to recreate the world it presents. (Iser 1222)

To analyze the text in formal isolation as so many "words-on-a-page" (in the old formula of the New Criticism) is a highly artificial procedure. A literary text, after all, in an objective sense consists only of a certain configuration of specks of carbon black on dried wood pulp. When these marks become words, when those words become images or metaphors or characters or events, they do so because the reader plays the part of a prince to the sleeping beauty. He gives them life out of his own desires.
When he does so, he brings his lifestyle to bear on the work. He mingles his unconscious loves and fears and adaptions with the words and images he synthesizes at a conscious level. (Holland 1239)

This, then is my thesis: that the form of the reader's experience, formal units, and structure of intention are one, that they come into view simultaneously, and that therefore the questions of priority and independence do not arise. (Fish 1248)

Critic David Bleich even goes so far as to say "... it is the reader who determines whether a piece of writing is literature" (1254). Of special importance from the quotations above are the words "disposition" and "unconscious." For if prevailing sociobiological perspectives are correct, ancient imperatives are more likely to find themselves expressed indirectly—"between the lines," as it were. Norman N. Holland cites the unconscious component of language as critical to reading and writing both.

Although these unconscious and infantile sources are by no means the only ones, if so conscious an act as writing ... has strong buried components, I find it hard to believe that responding to a play, a movie, or a poem does not. (1236)

In a much more pointed context, we will return to the role of the unconscious when examining the philosophy of such French feminists as Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray.

The notion that men and women think differently because of their "basic natures" is so ingrained in our lay culture that people are often surprised anyone would bother to question it. On the other hand, I have heard feminists speak as if male/female differences are so trivially based—so amenable to the effects of conditioning and culture—that the lay culture is assumed to be little better than ignorant and uninformed. As a person who
moves as frequently as I do between these two extremes in our society, I have grown to appreciate the magnitude of the gulf. For at the extremes, the average person sees the feminist as an idealistic aggressor against common sense; the latter sees the former as an anti-scientific conspirator in the long, unfair tradition of male domination. Fortunately, this gap is closing by the sheer force of common sense and science both. The last thirty years of research has brought us to the point where we can make some good tentative judgments in favor of both sides.

This debate is usually known as the biology-versus-culture issue (sometimes heredity-versus-environment), and is relatively new. A hundred years ago, to say that the sexes were fundamentally different was to state something yawningly obvious (Moir 9). Then, with the continued rise of feminism as a political movement, many of the centuries-old stereotypes began to be called into question. For the benefit of the Social Contract—that is, for the benefit of all of us—it is good that this happened. Not only did women achieve the right to vote throughout the democracies, they were no longer regarded as automatically incapable of entering "male" professions, or relegated to the status of inferior beings—at least among educated people. Nor is this situation likely to be reversed. Though my thesis will demonstrate that many differences do exist between men and women—including those of the highly-resistant biological variety—most scientists who now believe in these differences see them as trade-offs: men and women have different strengths and weaknesses on average; females are hardly to be viewed as sub-standard versions of males.
But the debate continues.

... we reject biologically based theories as ignoring the large and complex contributions of culture and psychology to speech differences. (Henley 387)

If the world is a sexist world, it is because the men and women before us behaved in what we would call a sexist way. To reconstruct the world on non-sexist lines takes a positive effort, because it is an unnatural act; it is a social and political precept, but political and social precepts do not organize brains. Only hormones do that. (Moir 66)

... we do not want to suggest that gendered identities and relations have any common core "fixed" by their (initial classificatory) link to reproductive biology. (Eckert 433)

Culture and consciousness were presumed to free us from evolutionary forces. (Buss 3)

The importance of determining where culture leaves off and biology begins cannot be minimalized for one straightforward reason: biology is far more resistant to change. It is less amenable to educational influences and social conventions, as well as more "forgivable." If it is true, for example, that men have an innate tendency to dominate... asking them to relinquish it might not be any more effective than asking them to grow shorter or become physically weaker. Genes are very powerful determinants.

Which does not mean that culture cannot have the ultimate say, however. If sexism continues to be demoted as socially repugnant, men and women who happen to be less inclined toward it (especially by biochemical disposition) would presumably be more attractive, more likely to be chosen as partners, and would consequently produce more offspring. Over a period of many generations, it would therefore not be difficult to imagine natural selection opting for a more androgynous version of our species. In my
opinion, social forces are already at work toward this end. But to suppose such changes as being "merely" matters of educational level or cultural sophistication is likely to breed as much resistance as cooperation. If feminists simply see themselves as "smarter" or "more informed" than non-feminists, the issue becomes framed in terms of dominance—thereby fostering precisely the kinds of forces targeted for extinction. For to have an innate will to dominate means exactly that: such an inclination cannot and will not allow itself to be bested in a showdown. It is true that having an innate will to dominate does not mean having a blank check to wreak havoc on equal rights. As civilized human beings, we must insist that the Social Contract ultimately prevails. But such an innate will does imply a right to be understood as perfectly natural in the broad evolutionary spectrum.

This thesis may be conveniently divided into four major thrusts. Chapter I establishes the fact that males and females use language in markedly different ways—with a male tendency to dominate as one of the predominant features. Chapter II seeks to demonstrate that—while culture undoubtedly plays an enhancing role—significant, innate differences between males and females (including male tendencies to dominate) have now been established in neurophysiology, endocrinology, and infant behavior. Most of this chapter uses Brain Sex: The Real Difference Between Men and Women as the source of its claims. And although this work by Anne Moir and David Jessell is supported by many scientists as a fine compendium of studies made in the hard sciences up to 1991, the discussions therein are seen by some others as simplistic or over-stated. The reader
should keep in mind that these fields are virtually still in their infancy; in relationship to my thesis, a "what-if" position would perhaps be prudent. Chapter III seeks to further demonstrate that many of these physiological distinctions have prehistorical foundations in ancient mating strategies. If the reader is distracted by the notion that we no longer live in the ancient world, we cannot, unfortunately, say the same for our bodies. A great number of our unconscious physiological mechanisms were established long before the modern, conscious, neo-cortex evolved. The problem is one of lag, and is worth mentioning here because it underlies much of Chapters II and III. As David Buss writes:

To illustrate, look at the foods consumed in massive quantities at fast food chains. We have not evolved any genes for McDonald's, but the foods we eat there reveal the ancestral strategies for survival we carry with us today. . . . They reveal the food preferences that evolved in a past environment of scarcity. Today, however, we overconsume these elements because of their evolutionarily unprecedented abundance, and the old survival strategies now hurt our health. We are stuck with these taste preferences . . . because evolution works on a time scale too slow to keep up with the radical changes of the past several hundred years. . . . We carry with us equipment that was designed for an ancient world. (Buss 14).

Chapter IV explores contemporary notions of the "feminine écriture" discussed by such French feminists as Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray, then posits a scheme by which one version of a "masculine écriture" may be used to describe several examples of characters in American fiction. Chapter IV also seeks to demonstrate that only an unengendered (non-existent) reviewer could establish one way of viewing as necessarily more "correct" than another . . . resulting in a permanent divergence of interpretation between the sexes.
CHAPTER I

EVIDENCE FOR GENDER DIFFERENCES IN SOCIOLINGUISTICS
AND READER-RESPONSE CRITICISM

Is there evidence for the notion that men and women use and interpret language differently? If so, are there consistent patterns in the differences of that usage?

The sociolinguistic investigation of gender influences upon language is relatively new. Most contemporary research began in the mid-1970s, and Robin Lakoff's *Language and Woman's Place* is often cited as the landmark exploration. Although sympathetic to women, she describes women's speech as weaker than or inferior to men's in several basic ways. She notes, for instance, that little girls are instructed to "speak like ladies" and that this, among other things, means expressing themselves less forcefully (i.e., speaking softly, using "polite" tag questions, avoiding vulgarities for emphasis, etc.). But this style of conversation also means that they will be taken less seriously. It puts females into an automatic double bind.

So a girl is damned if she does, damned if she doesn't. If she refuses to talk like a lady, she is ridiculed and subjected to criticism as unfeminine; if she does learn, she is ridiculed as unable to think clearly, unable to take part in a serious conversation: in some sense, as less than fully human. These two choices which a woman has—to be less than a woman or less than a person—are highly painful. (Lakoff 282)

This double bind is one way that men assert their domination in our culture through language. In order for women to succeed in the "man's world," they must learn
to speak "like a man" (i.e., more forcefully) \ldots in effect, becoming bilingual. As further examples of this dual-language role, Lakoff claims that certain words are consigned to women—more or less as a consolation prize for their loss of real power. Words like mauve, sweet, charming, lovely, adorable and divine would be considered unusual when used by a man (Lakoff 286).

In their examination of cross-sex miscommunication, Nancy M. Henley and Cheris Kramarae examine several prevailing theories. Included is Lakoff's "Female Deficit" theory. They reject much of her theory as biased, but do claim that "the point made by Lakoff that society differentially evaluates women's and men's speech is largely true and must be taken into account in any theory of difference and miscommunication" (Henley 387).

More interesting from my point of view is their analysis of the Two Cultures theory. This theory states that men and women grow up in different sociolinguistic subcultures. Each subculture has "different conceptions of friendly conversation, different rules for engaging in it, and different rules for interpreting it" (Henley 387). But in analyzing one popular 1982 study. Henley and Kramarae re-interpret the results to show that the six areas discussed by Maltz and Borker can be shown as firmly based in male domination. It might be helpful if we look at these six points (Henley 388-391):

1. MINIMAL RESPONSE. Maltz and Borker claim that a woman using "uh-huh" or "mm-hmm" means "continue, I'm listening." When a man uses it, it means "I agree, I follow you." They are two equal but different forms. Henley and Kramarae
see this as naive. They cite studies showing male usage of minimal response as displaying lack of interest, and go on to claim that "This seemingly innocent cultural difference, then, has the effect of supporting male dominance of conversation."

2. THE MEANING OF QUESTIONS. Maltz and Borker cite studies which show that women use questions for conversational maintenance; men tend to use them as requests for information. Henley and Kramarae see this difference as men taking to themselves as the voice of authority.

3. THE LINKING OF ONE'S UTTERANCE TO THE PREVIOUS UTTERANCE. Women do this more than men. Henley and Kramarae see the refusal of males to observe it as exercising a prerogative of power over conversational flow.

4. VERBAL AGGRESSIVENESS. This would include the well-documented fact that men interrupt women more than vice versa. Male dominance here is self-evident.

5. TOPIC FLOW AND SHIFT. Men make more and faster shifts in the topic of conversation. Henley and Kramarae see this as exercising the power to define and control a situation.

6. PROBLEM SHARING AND ADVICE GIVING. Women tend to share problems and listen mutually. Men interpret the introduction of a problem as a request for a solution. They tend to act as experts and offer advice rather than sympathize or share their own problems.

Henley and Kramarae conclude by saying "... there is a clear pattern for language style associated with men to be that of power and dominance" (Henley 392).
Other theorists concur with the role of power and dominance in the differences between men's and women's use of language. Susan Gal even refers to this presence in language as "symbolic domination," and states

Recent conceptualizations of gender . . . argue that gender is better seen as a system of culturally constructed relations of power, produced and reproduced in interaction between and among men and women. I draw on sociolinguistic studies of everyday talk to provide evidence that it is in part through verbal practices in social interaction that the structural relations of gender and dominance are perpetuated . . . (Gal 408).

Gal also notes that these power issues become well-defined in childhood:

For instance, boys and men organize into relatively large hierarchal groups, using direct commands and vying with one another for leadership positions by holding forth in competitive verbal display. . . . Girls, by contrast, play in smaller groups, forming exclusive coalitions. There is plenty of conflict in all-girl groups, but their verbal interactions implicitly deny conflict and hierarchy, phrasing commands as proposals for future activity . . . (Gal 414)

Penelope Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet also cite the role of power in gender relations. "Not only are difference and dominance both involved in gender, but they are also jointly constructed and prove ultimately inseparable" (Eckert 433).

Moving more specifically to how men and women read or view, we also encounter differences along these lines.

Other studies claim to have shown that men watch the men in movies more than women do; that boys prefer adventure stories, while girls prefer stories about love, private life, and glamour; that children who are already pretty aggressive identify with different characters in a Western according to the degree of their pre-existing aggression, their sex, and the ending of the film. (Holland 1237)
In one study conducted with college students, Elizabeth Flynn found significant differences between the interpretive abilities of her male and female students.

The study does suggest... that male students sometimes react to disturbing stories by rejecting them or by dominating them, a strategy, it seems, that women do not often employ. The study also suggests that women more often arrive at meaningful interpretations of stories because they more frequently break free of the submissive entanglement in a text and evaluate characters and events with critical detachment. (Flynn 1282)

In fact, Flynn sees the very strategies we have been discussing as drawbacks to women's speech as potential enhancements in reading.

Reading is a silent, private activity and so perhaps affords women a degree of protection not present when they speak. Quite possibly the hedging and tentativeness of women's speech are transformed into useful interpretive strategies—receptivity and yet critical assessment of the text—in the act of reading. A willingness to listen, a sensitivity to emotional nuance, an ability to empathize with and yet judge, may be disadvantages in speech but advantages in reading. We may come to discover that women have interpretive powers that have not been sufficiently appreciated. (1283)

With all of the preceding in tow, we now must ask ourselves: are there reasons to suppose that these differences between men and women come about for biological reasons? In particular, does male dominance feature in our language so prominently because there are physiological and/or prehistorical imperatives for it to do so?
EVIDENCE FOR INNATE SEX DIFFERENCES IN ENDOCRINOLOGY, NEUROPHYSIOLOGY, AND INFANT BEHAVIOR

The first evidence for major differences between the brains of males and females was discovered nearly thirty years ago by psychologist Herbert Landsell. Men who suffered serious right-hemisphere brain damage lost most or all of their capacities related to spatial skills; similarly-damaged women did not. In addition, men who suffered serious left-hemisphere brain damage were three times more likely to suffer from a language problem than women damaged in the same areas.

This led Landsell to the conclusion, now accepted, that in women language and spatial skills are controlled by centres in both sides of the brain; but in men such skills are much more specifically located—the right side for spatial skills, the left for verbal ones. Numerous studies have confirmed the early findings. (Moir 42)

With the development of Positron Emission Tomography (PET scans), it has been possible to both verify as well as elaborate upon these early discoveries. We know now, for instance, that men not only process language almost exclusively in the left hemisphere, they require both the front (anterior) and back (posterior) regions of the left hemisphere to coordinate such efforts. Women do not require two such areas and are therefore able to accomplish the effort of communication with less expenditure in biochemical energy. It has also been discovered that women have (on average) a corpus callosum which is
thicker and richer in neural pathways—providing greater communication between the hemispheres.

One of the implications of these findings is that men's brains tend to be more specialized and less redundant in neurological resources; women's brains tend to be more diffuse and interactional. This explains, among other things, why men find it easier to read a map and talk at the same time. These activities are processed by males almost exclusively by the right and left hemispheres, respectively, and that means fewer chances for neural interference patterns to arise.

It also explains the old stereotype of men being generally less able to express their emotions. In light of what has been said in the previous three paragraphs, consider the difference between males and females in a strictly physical manner. Though emotions are largely processed by the right hemisphere in both males and females, males have no less than three neurological handicaps in completing the process. His emotions are concentrated more exclusively in the right hemisphere, transference of these emotions to the left hemisphere is more constricted, and the expression itself requires coordination between the posterior and anterior regions before the expression can be fully actualized.

If we knew nothing whatever of the abundant sociological evidence for it, we would expect—for biological reasons alone—that girls would learn to speak before boys, that they would have richer and larger vocabularies, be quicker to acquire grammar, as well as be more adept at putting their thoughts and feelings into words (Moir 58). At three years old, 99% of girls' speech is understandable; boys take about a year longer (58). It
is also well-documented that boys outnumber girls in remedial reading classes four to one. Cognitive disorders like dyslexia and stuttering are largely male (17).

Corresponding to the early boost females obtain for verbal fluency, males apparently have a similarly innate facility for almost anything involving spatial orientations. In visual tests, boys are faster at identifying words containing a particular letter of the alphabet. But if this test is conducted by dictation, girls prevail easily (Moir 63). Males also maintain a lifelong advantage at reading maps, as well as the ability to visualize the rotation of three-dimensional objects.

Though research is still too new to include in my review here, there may be evidence for the notion that certain parts of speech get processed in different parts of the brain (i.e. nouns in one place, verbs in another, etc.) If this is true, there may be—given the structural descriptions already noted—more gender differences yet to be discovered concerning the human brain.

Observations of infant behavior have proven useful in assessing innate sex differences because infants have not yet had the time to become conditioned by a given society's gender expectations.

At two to four days old, baby girls will maintain eye contact with adults twice as long as boys. At one-week old baby girls empathize with other crying babies; boy babies don't. Baby girls prefer human beings to inanimate objects; baby boys are equally absorbed by anything that moves. At four months, baby girls can distinguish the photographs of familiar people from strangers; boys usually can't (Moir 56). And though
we experience the effects of our culture rather significantly by the toddler stage, studies of children at that age show that many of the infants' early gender biases hold up. When given a pair of "binoculars" in which people are presented to one eye and inanimate objects to the other, boys report seeing more things than people; girls report the opposite (57). Also around this age, boys show clear preferences for exploring areas, spaces and things (which is in keeping with sociobiological theory; see next chapter); girls mostly enjoy talking and listening (58).

Endocrinology has provided the third strong case for innate sex differences in the "hard" sciences. We began to learn about the effects of male and female hormones in the 1950s. Pregnant women with diabetes were sometimes treated with artificial female hormones (mostly diethylstilbestrol). Pregnant women with toxaemia were often treated with artificial male hormones. The children which resulted from these pregnancies demonstrated behavior in accord with our common stereotypes of masculine and feminine behavior—sometimes in exaggerated ways. They did this regardless of the sex that they actually were (Moir 32). June Reinisch found, for example, that boys washed in additional male hormones in the womb had aggression scores twice as high as their unexposed siblings (Moir 78). Both boys and girls whose mothers had taken extra male hormones during pregnancy "were found to be more self-sufficient, self-assured, independent and individualistic on a standard personality questionnaire. Those whose mothers had taken female hormones preferred group activity and were more reliant on others" (Moir 79).
Another clue came from children born with genetic abnormalities. Boys with XXY sex cells, for instance, exhibited more traditionally feminine behaviors, while girls with Turner's Syndrome (XO in the place of a normal XX) became "tomboys" (Moir 31).

Since these early discoveries, we have learned a lot about the effects of hormones on behavior. Testosterone has been particularly well-studied. Levels of this primary male androgen correlate strongly with aggression, athleticism, and criminal behavior. It also seems to be responsible for causing male I.Q. scores to soar between the ages of 14 and 16—while girls' scores tend to level off, and sometimes even fall (Moir 89). Women's hormones also seem to exert powerful effects. It is known that high estrogen levels suppress women's capacity for concentration and application in spatial skills while simultaneously boosting their capacity for verbal fluency and articulation (Moir 96).

One of my professors asked me what any of this meant to him specifically as a teacher. I might half-facetiously reply that he time his tests to coincide with ovulation cycles. One study suggests that the results for women might be as wide as 14% (Moir 183).

As a serious matter of fact, there may even be some argument for the notion that denying innate sex differences makes the world harder for women rather than easier.

The American anthropologist Professor Lionel Tiger argues that the almost universally accepted notion that males and females are equal has led, in practical terms, to greater inequality. If you reject the evidence about sexual differences, you don't change the institutions or structures in a way that would accommodate those differences. So, 'at the moment, it is women who must accommodate themselves, and they are being asked to compete with men in male-oriented institutions. The net result of this
is their continued deprivation and a recently increased resentment and anxiety.' (Moir 183)

What is most impressive about the figures presented in this chapter is the sheer magnitude of divergence. Scientists are often delighted to find significance as "large" as 6% more or 14% less. In some of the statistics here, we find such striking divergences as three times (300%) more language impairment in males with left hemisphere damage, four times (400%) more likelihood of finding boys than girls in remedial reading classes, five times (500%) more likelihood for males to commit murder, etc.

With numbers like these, it would be surprising if there were not long-term evolutionary pressures involved in the creation of such differences. Let us now see if there is any evidence for that.
CHAPTER III

EVIDENCE FOR INNATE SEX DIFFERENCES IN
SOCIOBIOLOGICAL THEORY

The most obvious difference between the sexes resides, of course, in our separate contributions to the reproductive function. It has been known for some time that males and females of all species develop mating strategies based upon the needs and resources peculiar to their genders and roles as parents. That human males and females were exempt from this investigative process for so long is partly due to traditional prudery regarding human sexuality and partly due to our modern emphasis upon culture over biology.

Two matters have brought sociobiology from the fringe to the center of respectable discussion over the last two decades: (1) the evidence that I presented in the previous chapter is largely in accord with sociobiological principles and (2) cross-cultural studies confirm a consistent, identifiable pattern of divergent mating strategies between human males and females. That is: cultural variations are relatively small compared to the overall trends in choices and commitments.

In brief, sociobiology states that men and women have different strategies in mating because their parental investments are strikingly divergent. This begins at the level of the gamete itself. A human female begins life with all the sex cells she will ever
have—about 400 ova. A human male, on the other hand, produces his sex cells over the course of his lifetime, and does so at approximately the rate of twelve million new ones every hour. In other words, it takes a human male about an eighth of a second (!) to create the same number of sex cells that a woman will ever possess. In still other words: eggs are expensive; sperm is cheap. A single encounter between a male and female might entail a total time investment of a few minutes to a few hours on the part of the male. But should a conception result, the female’s investment continues throughout the nine months of her pregnancy to childbirth, extends to the choice of keeping or abandoning the infant, and usually continues through lactation, nurturing, etc. "Among all 4000 species of mammals and 200 primates, females bear the burden of internal fertilization, gestation, and lactation" (Buss 20). The meaning of this difference between males and females is obvious: because the sexual encounter has such potentially far-reaching consequences for the female, she is much more likely to be selective in the choice of a mate.

The male has essentially two options to insure progeny: promiscuity and protection. He can, that is, insure the survival of his genes in offspring by either producing such a large number of them that some are bound to survive through chance alone, or he can choose to enter into protecting the ones most likely to be his. In the latter choice, natural pressures for the male and female to specialize in different aspects of the nurturing process are great. Since females would be relatively immobilized by pregnancy and lactation, males would be the sex more often likely to be free to hunt for resources and fight to protect. Those who could do so better than other males would be
favored by natural selection. Over tens of thousands of generations, the male would become larger and stronger than the female. Hormones which select in favor of activity and aggression would prevail. Skills related to hunting and spatial orientations would come forward. We know, for instance, that boys are innately better at identifying animal noises (Moir 62), and boys at all ages from six to nineteen are much better at hitting targets than girls (63).

The largest cross-cultural study of mating choices performed to date was conducted by David M. Buss and his colleagues from the University of Michigan. The study was done over a period of five years (1984-1989), and involved thirty-seven cultures located on six continents and five islands. All major racial groups, religious groups and ethnic groups were represented—10,047 persons worldwide were surveyed (Buss 4).

The stereotype that women are viewed as "sex objects" by men was confirmed in all 37 cultures. Youth and appearance were rated by men to be the most desirable traits in a potential mate among eighteen choices. The stereotype that men are viewed as "success objects" by women was also found to be universal. Financial prospects were chosen first by women among the eighteen traits.

It has sometimes been argued that women seek men with financial resources simply because they are themselves deprived of this by cultural norms (Buss 45). Dr. Buss found that this was almost certainly not true, and there were several types of counter-indications. In the few societies where women held greater personal and
economic power than men, the women still preferred mates with resources (45). Economically successful women in the United States also preferred men with resources. In fact, "these women express an even stronger preference for high-earning men than do women who are less financially successful" (46). Also, psychologists Michael Wiederman and Elizabeth Allgeier found that "college women who expect to earn the most after college place more importance on the financial prospects of a potential husband than do women who expect to earn less" (Buss 45). In reverse confirmation, low income men do not place any greater value on the economic resources of women than financially successful men do. Also, men seek to exclude other men from power at least as much as they do women. So while it remains true that men in most cultures do control the resources and exclude women from power, why should such a seemingly perverse, inverse relationship of desire exist among women? Why should women who need more not want more than the women who already have relatively abundant resources? It is as if a relative freedom from need increases the freedom to choose along more natural inclinations, in general. At any rate, Dr. Buss summarizes by stating:

Men strive to control resources and to exclude other men from resources to fulfill women's mating preferences. In human evolutionary history, men who failed to accumulate resources failed to attract mates. Men's larger bodies and more powerful status drives are due, at least in part, to the preferences that women have expressed over the past few million years. (47)

An old saw says that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. But Dr. Buss discovered that the eye—the eye of the human male, at least—has more universal inclinations than we once thought. For though there are many different kinds of physical standards for
feminine beauty throughout the world, he did find some traits that all men tend to prefer (on average) regardless of culture.

As a woman gets older, her reproductive value declines. Youth and health, therefore (and anything which can serve as cues to youth and health) are more likely to be attractive to the human male. Worldwide, men choose women who are younger than they are when they have a choice. The average difference is two-and-half years younger. Women worldwide prefer men who are three-and-a-half years older. What's more, men prefer even younger women as they get older. By their 30s, they prefer women five years younger on average. By the 50s, this increases to ten or more years (Buss 52). Actual marriage statistics support this. The average difference at first marriage is three years (by "coincidence," this is the mean of what men and women want). This difference increases to five years at the second marriage and eight years at the third (52).

Men of all cultures prefer women who exude powerful indicators of youth and health.

Our ancestors had access to two types of observable evidence of a woman's health and youth: features of physical appearance, such as full lips, clear skin, smooth skin, clear eyes, lustrous hair, and good muscle tone, and features of behavior, such as a bouncy, youthful gait, an animated facial expression, and a high energy level. These physical cues to youth and health, and hence to reproductive capacity, constitute the ingredients of male standards of female beauty. (53)

Standards of facial beauty seem to be universal to the extent that human males seem to desire symmetry. Symmetrical faces provide additional cues to youth because asymmetry can often be associated with the effects of parasites and injuries. What's more,
there is evidence for the notion that this type of perception of attractiveness is innate. Infants of both sexes look longer at attractive faces than they do at unattractive ones (54).

One long-range study supports the fact that men value looks more than women do. In America from 1939 to 1989, men have consistently rated good looks as more important than women do. During this time, the exposure of the general population to the mass media presentation of fashion models (i.e. through magazines, billboards, television, etc.) has caused both sex's standards to rise dramatically. But the difference between the sexes has remained the same.

In addition to reproductive capacity, indirect effects of beauty have been observed. As one example, beautiful wives increase a man's social status. Strangers looking at photographs consistently ranked men higher in social status if the photographs included attractive wives (59).

Because beauty standards inclining toward slimness or plumpness vary so widely across cultures, it may seem unlikely that any universals exist related to body shape. But this is not so. Reproductive capacity is at its maximum when a woman's ratio of waist to hip size is between .69 and .8. Devendra Singh found through studies conducted with photographs that—regardless of whether the culture preferred slimness or plumpness—a waist-to-hip ratio of .7 was universally considered more desirable than .8, and .8 was more desirable than .9 (Buss 57). .7 has also been found to be the ideal in studies made of centerfolds and beauty contest winners. Besides reproductive capacity, Buss also notes that higher ratios are probably less desirable because they mimic pregnancy.
Sociobiology claims that our ancestral mothers specialized in nurturing and communication while our ancestral fathers specialized in hunting and protecting. To the degree that this is true, it would explain why a woman's approach to language might be relatively more polite and indirect than a man's. When we think of nurturing, after all, we think of a process which includes affirmation of another's being as an important part of teaching and promoting trust. We would expect a woman's language to be lesscommanding and more accommodating, in the main. There is nothing terribly mysterious about this dynamic. It does, unfortunately, breed the kinds of misunderstandings in the modern world that lead to conflict—even extending into the realm of the non-verbal message. Henley and Kramarae report that women tend to look at others longer and more directly than men do. Since men would be more likely to do this with women only in a sexual context, men can sometimes confuse a more generalized intimacy with sexual invitation (Henley 396).

Sometimes a woman's indirectness can be disastrous. Does a woman ever mean "yes" when she says "no," for instance? Yes. In one study of 600 college women, two out of five admitted to having used token resistance at least once (Henley 389). When it is actually intended, "coyness" is complex in the sense that it is both inviting and withholding. This would surely be among those activities least likely to be read correctly by a being evolved to appraise a situation as straightforwardly as possible. Hunting and fighting are simply more direct in their concerns than that. So as uncomfortable as it may be for us to acknowledge it, at least some date rapes likely begin with the mistaken notion
that men can automatically differentiate an intensely played token resistance from an absolute refusal. At some point in the engagement, in fact, this is like asking a man to read a woman's "real" mind. As I have shown in these last two chapters, that is probably quite impossible. Communication is difficult enough when both sexes are as straightforward as they can be.

In summary, here is the situation that sociobiology provides for us: Among our ancestors, the specialization of parental resources and investments selected men as freer to hunt and fight. The more dominant men were naturally selected over those who were less dominant. The dominant men were chosen more often by women because they were better providers and protectors, and natural selection began to support these choices through genes, hormones, and neural structures. Because evolution takes place over millions of years, the relatively recent emergence of the neo-cortex and its constructs—including such things as language, the Social Contract, and feminism—lags behind these biological inclinations. The most likely effect of this lag would be expected to be in the realm of male dominance.

We already know that this male dominance exists in syntactical forms like "mankind" and the generic use of the word "he." Now, we seek to see if it can be found in some other sense—at once both broader in scope and more defined in context—if there is any meaning that can be given to the notion of a "masculine écriteur."
CHAPTER IV

PARADIGMS FOR THE MASculINE UNCONSCIOUS

There is some precedence for the scheme that I am about to unfold. French feminists like Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray have called for a "feminine écriteur" to come forth. They see language as one more item which has been appropriated by men for the purposes of power and subjugation. In fact—particularly in the case of Cixous, I feel—language and body are co-mingled to such a degree that one cannot fully be repossessed without the other.

By writing her self, woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her . . . Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time. Write your self. Your body must be heard. Only then will the immense resources of the unconscious spring forth. (Cixous 81)

We should especially note this reference to the "immense resources of the unconscious," recalling that it is only in our unconscious reservoirs that ancient forces still lurk to exert their influences over the modern context. Genes, hormones, and neural structures are all a part of these immense resources.

But what, specifically, would woman's writing—a feminine écriteur—consist of? Being a man, I have no idea. In the words of Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous . . .

She is indefinitely other in herself. This is doubtless why she is said to be whimsical, incomprehensible, agitated, capricious . . . not to mention her language, in which 'she' sets off in all directions leaving 'him' unable to discern the coherence of any meaning. Hers are contradictory words,
somewhat mad from the standpoint of reason, inaudible for whoever listens to them with ready-made grids, with a fully elaborated code in hand. (Irigaray 97).

It is impossible to define a feminine practice of writing, and this is an impossibility that will remain, for this practice can never be theorized, enclosed, coded—which doesn't mean that it doesn't exist. But it will always surpass the discourse that regulates the phallocentric system; it does and will take place in areas other than those subordinated to philosophico-theoretical domination. (Cixous 84)

I now posit the notion that a purely masculine écriture is equally possible. I suggest that our language contains (and has always contained) elements of our prehistoric heritage—be it male or female—but that what now exists is probably a half-clumsy, thoroughly-noble attempt to be neutral. In accord with our fair-minded but fledgling neo-cortex. In accord with our Social Contract's implorations toward equal rights.

In short, we have acknowledged the ancient male role of dominance in our language without, however, reducing this dominance down to its purified forms of perception. In a tacit agreement with Irigaray and Cixous, I believe that a masculine écriture would be the opposite of a feminine one. It would be possible to pin it down to a grid, enclose it, and code it. Perhaps these French feminists see our present state of language and criticism as the "masculine écriture" to which they seek to provide the counterweight. But it is not. The present state has always supposed the neutrality of the Social Contract to be in full force. But it, too, is not. What we have and have had, rather, is probably a confused mixture of the masculine and the (attempt to be) neutral. So while I leave the French feminists—all feminists and women, perhaps—to evolve a language that I can only approach in understanding through my estrogen at the furthest
reaches of its imagination, I now present them with a scheme that I understand only through the deepest immersion in my own ancient blood. To what I possess as a man beneath the censoring, civilized layers of the modern brain. To the subterranean world of what I will be designating as a “porneme.”

For centuries, classical physics thrived upon a very fundamental premise: every action and condition in the universe had a specific, describable cause. This cause-and-effect principle was conceived of as both immutable and universal, and everything from optics and hydraulics to acoustics and celestial mechanics was brought under its wing. If the cause happened to be unknown, patience was the only requirement. It would be found eventually. This view of the cosmos is sometimes known as "mechanistic determinism"—a kind of billiard-ball paradigm of how the whole of creation could be seen as one enormous, inter-locking machine—as beautiful as it was rational.

And then it all ended forever. With the rise of inexplicable physical phenomena toward the end of the last century, the seeds of quantum physics were born. Things were happening at the sub-atomic level which simply did not make sense. By the time figures like Bohr, Einstein, Heisenberg and Schrodinger had worked out the first implications and equations of the new sub-atomic view in the first three decades of the twentieth century, quantum physics had evolved into a curious creature indeed. Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, for example, established the lower limits of observation by claiming that it was impossible to determine both the position and the momentum of an electron at any given moment. Knowledge of the one condition could be obtained at the expense of knowledge
of the other condition (and vice versa), but both could not be known simultaneously. What's more, this limitation was not due to a lack of sophistication on the part of the observer or tools used. The limitation was an eternally fixed restriction within nature itself.

This was only the beginning of the great unraveling of common sense. The vacuum of space was not a vacuum at all—"virtual" particles sprang from the nothingness and were reabsorbed by it. It was even discovered that the "intention" of the observer somehow seemed to play a part in the results obtained from various experiments. The wave/particle duality of light was a particular problem. If the observer sought to identify the fundamental unit of light as a particle, there were experiments which could confirm that. But if he sought to identify light as a wave-form of energy, there were experiments which could do that as well! Never mind that common sense suffered as a result. It has been many decades now since the human imagination has been capable of picturing the kinds of reality so neatly described in the mathematical equations of quantum mechanics. As to whether light consists of matter or energy, the final "answer" is an indisputable "both or not-both" ... depending upon nothing more than the tools and intentions of the experimenter.

Let us now suppose that Cixous and Irigaray are right—that a feminine writing exists beyond the grasp of men and grounded somehow in the unconscious realms of the female body. And let us further suppose that this so-called “pomeme” scheme I am about to propose is similarly grounded in the unconscious realms of prehistoric
maleness—perhaps equally incomprehensible to women (or maybe just too seemingly offensive to be considered seriously). Would this not mean that a new kind of indeterminacy has come about? I believe it would. For unless we can imagine a fully androgynous being as the reviewer, what is each sex to make of the other one's privileged resources in discourse? Not much, I would imagine. The complexity alone is staggering. Each of the differences discussed in the last two chapters would require its own "roadmap" just for starters. Does testosterone see a leader where estrogen sees a bully? Does a "female" brain tend to diagnose empathy where a "male" brain finds resignation? Do women predominate the readerships of pulp romances because of the same prehistoric heritage that causes men to predominate those of pornography? Which of these questions has meaning, which ones don't, and how does that whole mess finally become incorporated with cultural variations and psychological differences among individuals? Gender-divergences could easily become the quantum mechanics of literary discourse.

Most of us who live in the world of literature already have plenty of difficulties of interpretation without these considerations. It is worth our while to take a look at some of the problems that we have now with such matters as feminism, sexism, genre, and context. Then we can attempt to impose a "masculine écriture" which might stand out from the more usual approaches. For as we can readily observe, lots of "normal" kinds of indeterminacies already exist which may or may not be due to gender differences.

Let us start with the big picture first—the "overall context" or "final conclusion." In Kate Chopin's The Awakening, the character of Edna Pontellier commits suicide at the
end of the novel. Before her long swim toward exhaustion and drowning, Chopin only states that "She felt like some new-born creature, opening its eyes in a familiar world that it had never known" (113). By one view (and Chopin's apparently—she was shocked by the critical condemnation of her novel), Edna's death can be seen as "see what happens when a woman tries to be too independent, sexual, etc." She ultimately paid for it with her death; she "got what was coming to her." On the other hand, we could equally say "correctly perceiving the irreconcilability of her individuality with the oppressive forces surrounding her, she accepted her death with the same autonomy and courage with which she accepted her sensuality and life." Which is more closely allied to how we see it today. And which is correct? We cannot say with certainty. We know that she was sad at losing her lover, but we do not know if this "new-born creature" can be classified as resolved or defeated.

Consider the character of Ramona in Herzog. She is intelligent, imaginative, and self-reliant—in many respects, a fine example of the quintessentially modern woman. But what are we to make of some of her "traditional" uses of erotic enticement?

It was odd that Ramona should sometimes carry on like one of those broads in a girlie magazine. For which she advanced the most high-minded reasons. An educated woman, she quoted him Catullus and the great love poets of all times. And the classics of psychology. And finally the Mystical Body. And so she was in the next room, joyously preparing, stripping, perfuming. (202)

At this moment Ramona appeared. She thrust the door open and stood, letting him see her in the lighted frame of bathroom tile. She was perfumed and, to the hips, she was naked. On her hips she wore the black lace underthing, that single garment low on her belly. She stood on
spike-heeled shoes, three inches high. Only those, and the perfume and lipstick. Her black hair. (203)

No wonder clothes were so important to Ramona, they were the setting of that luxurious jewel, her nakedness. His laughter as it became silent, internal, was all the deeper. Her black lace pants might be utter foolishness, but they had the desired result. Her methods might be crude, but her calculations were correct. He was laughing, but it got him. His wit was tickled but his body burned. (203)

The question is: in itself, does Ramona's behavior here undermine her status as a modern woman? Does it make her less "feminist"? As per our discussion in the last section, does she become belittled by it, conceptually unacceptable, marginally or directly pornographic? Several contexts are appropriate and internally consistent with their opposing world-views, and there is nothing to which we can turn to on some "higher" level for a resolution. For that matter, we might as well go to the perfect extreme. What should we make of The Happy Hooker by Xavier Hollander? By some criteria, it could be seen as a feminist work. It is bright, confident, independent, joyous, and life-affirming. But how can we call it feminist if its whole raison d'etre is predicated upon the world's oldest profession? Does its money-for-sex basis disqualify it? Again, the overall context is completely indeterminate. A strong, internally consistent case can be made for both sides of the issue. We no longer live in a literary universe where Edna's suicide or Ms. Hollander's optimism can automatically be qualified as feminist or sexist.

What about individual sentences? Consider the following sentences extracted from pornographic novels, pulp romances, and American literary classics. I have
purposely removed the citation sources, and the reader might wish to try to guess which sentences are from which of the three genres:

1. Like all women, she was there to object and be convinced.

2. ... why did she feel the desire, the necessity of being conquered by a superior strength?

3. For a moment she struggled with him, stupidly, all capacity for reason sucked away into the black tunnel of pain.

4. "I don't want to hurt you!" [he said, entering her] "I don't care! Oh don't tease me."

5. She could not believe this was happening to her. Despite her indignation, she felt fortunate to be so chosen. At this moment she was the happiest woman in the world.

6. Everything seemed to reel and shimmer as fireworks and mind-blasting explosions of ecstasy seared through every fiber of her body.

Does anyone doubt that any of these sentences could have come from any one of the three genres? #1 is not terribly unlike "baby, you know you want it"—a recognized trope of male sexism. As a matter of fact, it is from *Sister Carrie* (Dreiser 56). #2 is similarly suggestive of pornography's emphasis upon sexual dimorphism, but it is the words of Trina thinking to herself in *McTeague* (Norris 143). #3 is certainly sadomasochistic in tone, but it is not from pornography. It is from a pulp romance entitled *Gilded Heart* (Flanders 105). #4 is also sadomasochistic in tone, but it, too, is not
from pornography. It is from a pulp romance entitled *Through the Looking Glass* (McGill 222). #5 would not seem particularly indicative of pornography. The word "happiest" would be generally viewed as counter-indicative. In fact, it is from *Horny Holy Roller Family* (Aldrich 86). And compare #6 with "When he touched her breasts they gave themselves up in quivering ecstasy, inviting his lips. Her mouth was a fountain of delight." They seem to be very similar in descriptive language, as well as generally characteristic of the kinds of euphemistic tropes found in pulp romances. But neither of the two is, in fact. #6 is from a pornographic novel entitled *Her Black Professor* (N.A. 33), and the other is from "The Storm" by Kate Chopin (247). A similar example actually from a pulp romance is "A volcano growled, rumbled and erupted, spewing its glowing liquid into the deepest recesses of her" (McGill 177).

We will examine sentences like these in greater detail in my section on Critical Applications. For now, let it be generally recognized that—at the level of the sentence—many interpersonal encounters cannot be distinguished by genre. When we do not see very obvious indicators—like the "dirty words" of pornography or, perhaps, classical allusions to high art in high art—we are lost. These sentences mean virtually nothing "out of context." And, once again, what kind of a context are we looking for, anyway? What if the "obvious indicators" never appeared? Do we adopt a kind of "majority rules" position in which word-by-word, sentence-by-sentence hints, suggestions, and contradictions are resolved in the direction of their preponderance? Or to their "usual" meanings within some grand literary consensus? No. We are lost. And how
much more difficult matters become at the level of the word. Your "love," for instance, could mean "great fondness" while mine means "adoration," and perhaps the distinction would not be problematic between us. But a deconstruction of "love" on both psychological and neurological levels removes the possibility of a norm "between" us—as well as potentially measurable deviations from that norm. If our "wiring" is different, we could mean very different things. You could say "love," and I may not have the faintest idea of what you're talking about. Scientifically, not the faintest idea.

Now, let us begin to look at the concept of dominance in a way that will allow it to be discussed in practical ways. We need to keep in mind—per our discussion in Chapter I—that dominance has been cited by many sociolinguists as a prominent feature in how males use or interpret language. Chapters II and III showed several ways in which this dominance may be seen as biologically grounded. As we discuss paradigms for speaking about it in a practical manner, the reader ought to keep in mind that we are only looking at averages and innate inclinations. Dominance is not always an exclusively male phenomenon, nor is every male predisposed to it equally.

The mainstream "feminist" position supposes what I call a Horizontal Gender Correlation. Think of it as a literal horizontal line in which the opposite genders stand looking at each other. Neither is higher than the other one is, and differences are expressed by the distance between them. Depending upon the level of love, trust, and understanding between them, they stand close to one another or far apart. Analogs to this horizontal relationship are found in our Christian heritage (at least in the "pure" equality
expressed in the Sermon on the Mount), as well as in such words and constructs as universality, equality, democracy, mysticism, socialism, the Welfare State ("give to those who ask"), being, and the Social Contracts.

Now, imagine a line at right angles to this first one. This is the mainstream "sexist" position, and is what I call Vertical Gender Differential. On this line, one gender always stands higher than the other one, and the entire significance is embodied in concepts related to dominance. The one "on top" (higher up the line) dominates the one below. Analogs to this vertical relationship are found in our Greek heritage, and in such words and constructs (respective to the above terms) as specialness, hierarchy, aristocracy, romanticism, fascism, the Capitalist State, becoming, and jungle dynamics. We might better view the relationship between these two if the terms are viewed as in the following table. Please note that they are generalizations. Like all generalizations, they will be open to dispute, shades of gray, and a certain amount of reasonable distortions and internal exceptions. It is also important to note that sexism and feminism are not to be thought of as automatically pejorative or beneficent terms (see Table 1).

Horizontal Gender Correlation does not present a new problem for literary criticism because this orientation essentially represents the official status of literary criticism today. All texts are approached (in the main) as if every human being, (a) speaks essentially the same language (in the neurological sense), (b) makes most significant choices based upon a conscious perception of intentions ("free will"), and (c) has a fundamentally equal chance to prevail at all thinking endeavors, regardless of gender. Our
problem is how to evaluate texts in terms of Vertical Gender Differential . . . where these three conditions do not or might not apply. Note also that probably no human beings would be represented as a purely vertical or horizontal line. Most would represent some angle of slope between the two extremes.

Table 1

The Vertical/Horizontal Analogues of "Engendered" Literary Criticism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vertical Differential (Dominance)</th>
<th>Horizontal Correlation (No Dominance)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sexism</td>
<td>Feminism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hierarchy</td>
<td>Equality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialness</td>
<td>Universality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aristocracy</td>
<td>Democracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jungle Dynamics</td>
<td>Social Contracts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greek Heritage</td>
<td>Christian Heritage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capitalist State</td>
<td>Welfare State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fascism</td>
<td>Socialism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romanticism</td>
<td>Mysticism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becoming</td>
<td>Being</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I have found it convenient to divide the different conditions of Vertical Differential into a four-paned window of possibilities (see Table 2). There are probably other ways
to do it, but this one was immediately suggestive. Depending upon whether the female
leads or follows, controls or submits, four contingencies present themselves. Each one
of the four windows is a "porneme." A porneme may be defined as: the smallest possible
unit by which Vertical Gender Differential can be identified. And I certainly hope the
reader will forgive my use of the vernacular here. The amount of verbiage spared is
nothing short of miraculous. It might help to think of the units as essentially pornographic
(hence the name "porneme"). Or at least: they are pornographic at their worst. As we
will shall see in the next section, their effectiveness does not diminish much in intensity
as we move upward through increasingly sophisticated literary discourses. The pornemes
are also quite useful in discussing serious literature.

I include within each window three pertinent pieces of information about the
porneme. Immediately beneath the title of each are the corresponding verbs associated
with the "role," followed by the modern male strategy (M.S.) used to "dominate,"
followed finally by the probable Sociobiological Antecedent (S.A.) or ancient male
strategy used to dominate. The reader will note that these "pornemes" can also be seen
as common stereotypes used in lay culture. That should not distract from their usefulness
to us as practical literary tools.
Table 2
The Four Pornemes of Vertical Gender Differential

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Controls</th>
<th>Submits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leads</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BITCH:</td>
<td>SLUT:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I reign;</td>
<td>I lust;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I'm superior.</td>
<td>I'm driven.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS: I will fight.</td>
<td>MS: I will use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(SA: rape)</td>
<td>(SA: genetic proliferation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follows</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHORE:</td>
<td>BIMBO:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I cost;</td>
<td>I wonder;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I'm expensive.</td>
<td>I'm bewildered.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS: I will pay.</td>
<td>MS: I will lead.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(SA: trade)</td>
<td>(SA: know-how)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

And now we are suddenly faced with the most important question in this thesis: how does a reviewer know if the approach should be Horizontal or Vertical? And the answer is: this is an unanswerable question. Like the "true" nature of light, it is both/not-both a wave and a particle. The Uncertainty Principle becomes: if only a genderless person can determine the true slope of a Horizontal/Vertical proposition, narrative bias is indeterminate. Let us now look at the applications.
CHAPTER V

CRITICAL APPLICATIONS

Exploring the Basic Paradigms Through Pulp Discourse

We should be truly surprised if ancient strategies of male dominance did not find specific correlates in the narratives we have come to read and write. For unless we can imagine a creative writing that is completely immune to the influences discussed in this paper, sub-cortical forces should manage to exert gender bias upon most narratives. It should not matter whether the narratives are out-dated or modern, and it should not matter if they come from literary classics or "pulp" fiction.

In fact, the very lack of subtlety normally meant when we distinguish pulp fiction from "serious" literature makes it particularly amenable to pomeme-analysis. Mass-market narratives do, after all, have wide appeal on the level of a "common denominator" and rarely attempt to moralize or make subtle explorations of human behavior. What's more, the two largest pulp markets happen to be gender-divergent. A vast majority of pornography is purchased by males; a vast majority of "romance" novels are purchased by females.

What is pornography? We might define it as a genre of literary discourse which exhibits the least amount of neo-cortical censoring combined with the most amount of gender differentiation. As such, its value as a genre is straightforward: an
opportunity to look directly into a deeper level of unconscious inclinations in the human male. Which is the same as looking backward in time.

The females presented in mainstream pornographic novels can hardly be said to be "real women" in any meaningful sense. They are better understood as "caricatures of surrealistic vulnerability." In contrast with more soft-core forms of erotica (of which romance novels are often a part), little attempt is made to give the female characters any real emotional depth. Plots are extremely thin as a rule, and encounters are described with vulgarities instead of euphemisms or clinical phrases. Forcible rape is nearly as rare in pornography as it is in other literary forms, but great emphasis is placed instead upon versions of female vulnerability—especially those derived from the Slut and Bimbo pornemes. Thus, an uncontrollable (female) lust or generalized confusion tends to provide the main trigger for the sexual encounters therein. In surveying 250 titles in a catalog, only 17 titles were suggestive of the Whore porneme. And the Bitch porneme exists only in a rare female-dominant sub-genre, although there was some touch of it in all six novels reviewed for this study. When the Bitch porneme exists in mainstream pornography, it does so only because it provides a more dramatic target for the subsequent male domination—a kind of "the bigger they are, the harder they fall" dynamic. Regardless of type—by the end of a pornographic narrative, all females end up below the males on the Vertical Gender Differential. This is no surprise, of course.

When we move from hardcore pornography to soft-core erotica—to the modern romance novel, specifically—we might expect these dynamics to undergo major
transformations. We have, after all, moved from an almost exclusively male market to an almost exclusively female one. In fact, however, the essential dynamics of interpersonal encounters show quite remarkable similarities. So much so that it will profit us more if we first look at the differences.

Pulp romances regularly use euphemisms in the place of vulgarisms. Pornography's standard terms for the penis, for instance (i.e., cock, dick, prick, shaft, prong, boner, etc.) get replaced in pulp romances by such euphemisms as "his embarrassing rigidity" (McGill 99), "firm evidence of his desire" (108), "agonizing center of his need" (131), "throbbing length of him" (132), "rigid evidence of his wanting" (173), "instrument of desire" (177), and "his magnificent exclamation point" (225). This same divergence of lexicon applies to the female genitalia, as well as to descriptions of sexual intercourse and orgasm. Female orgasms are slightly less divergent, however. In pornography, a woman might "juice"—while a pulp romance might have her "hurdling down mindless corridors." But in both, there is a frequent use of tropes involving heat: melting, burning, flaming, exploding, sparking, igniting, etc.

The plots of pulp romances tend to be more generally layered with non-sexual complications. It is also fairly safe to say that the sheer number of sexual encounters is greater in a typical pornographic narrative. But beyond these rudimentary distinctions, we are on shakier ground. It is not true, for instance, that pornography views women less emotionally than romances do. In most of the examples I've seen, the mother-son incest bond is frequently portrayed like a love affair (curiously, the father-daughter theme seems
less so). Nor is it true that pulp romances lack the surrealistic touches which often pervade pornography—especially when emotions are expressed by a woman in wildly euphemistic terms. It is true that the women characters of pulp romances tend to direct their desires toward men more or less in tune with our cultural norms.

These differences notwithstanding, pulp romances display the four pornemes without much disguise. Consider one typical formula of the genre: a female protagonist meets a male "antagonist" who arouses attractive/repulsive reactions overwhelming to her usual good sense and composure (Slut); she spends a great deal of time totally confused by these reactions (Bimbo); she combats him mightily and sometimes haughtily (Bitch), but eventually trades her independence for him (Whore). Please remember that these correspondences remain indeterminate. Depending upon both the subjectivity of the reviewer and the details of the specific narrative, all of the above might very well deconstruct into their respective versions on the Horizontal Gender Correlation. But, in general, the women of pulp romances really only reach fulfillment and self-discovery through the intervention of men.

Let us look specifically at the Slut porneme. We might remember from our Four-Porneme Grid that the Slut says "I lust; I'm driven." The focus is upon an internal helplessness before interpersonal forces and pressures, and is well represented in pornography and romances:

Maxine was helpless to stop him... (Aldrich 32)

She tried to prevent her response, but her body had a mind of its own. (Jackson 15)
And it annoyed her that she was so fascinated with him. Yet she couldn't help herself. (11)

. . . it felt only as if something insanely divine had gotten hold of her . . . a delicious sensation that started to break down a barrier deep inside . . . (Vandanmere 68)

She felt a joy she could not control. She was happy and, in spite of herself, deeply in love. (69)

And it annoyed her that she was so fascinated with him. Yet she couldn't help herself. (Sherman 11)

She felt vulnerable and at his mercy . . . (McGill 82)

But she had no control over her feelings for him, no control over anything. (123)

But when he returned . . . her resistance had magically melted away. (Flanders 10)

Firm resolve melted like half-filled gelatin in a pan of warm water. (34)

This man could be dangerous, a dim voice warned from far back in her mind. . . . but he smiled at her, and the power of her early-warning system . . . began to fade. (52)

. . . she let it happen, this hazy wanting . . . not resisting, not thinking; just being . . . with him . . . And she gave herself to it, for it was impossible to do otherwise . . . (78)

Notice the tropes "in spite of herself" and "couldn't help herself." These are used at every level of discourse to identify the potential Slut.

The two genres are virtually indistinguishable at this level of discernment. As a matter of fact, the first six quotes above are from pornographic novels; the second six are from romance novels. We will shortly examine the Slut porneme in American literary classics—where it is also plentifully represented. Suffice it for now to say that at the level
of the sentence (linguistic) and interpersonal surrender (psychology), these two genres are impossible to separate. We must, still again, appeal to some magical "overall context" to try to do so.

Feminist Sara Diamond writes:

Love magazines and mass-market romances are the equivalent of women's pornography. They often contain explicit details of love-making, but always in the framework of passion, 'true love' and tenderness . . . But these 'feelings' and descriptions are not necessarily benign or even positive frameworks for sexual experience. Indeed they are often vehicles that convey strong messages . . . of behavior proscribed by . . . patriarchal morality. (50)

And related to this concern, Myrna Kostash writes:

. . . who are we trying to fool when we say we can draw the line . . . between the erotic and the pornographic? . . . By trying to draw lines among these phenomena—by saying that scenes of sexual torture are what we're worried about, not soft-focus 'pussy,' or that the explicitly sexual, not the soft-core suggestive, is problematic—we are being naive. (33)

Before we examine the specific tropes used by the pornemes in all narratives, one crucial point ought to be mentioned regarding the pulp discourses of pornography and romances. Though they might have much more in common than a cursory glance will allow—both psychologically and politically—pulp romances may be more subversive to feminist causes than pornography. First of all, the plots and dialogues of pulp romances are more realistic (porn is more surreal). Secondly, they reinforce codes of conduct usually endorsed by society as a whole (porn is more taboo). Thirdly, they are the more common literary form actually purchased by large numbers of the gender most involved with self-awareness and growth at this point in history (porn is more male). Finally, one
does not have to be a legal adult and travel to the seedier parts of town to purchase it (porn is more shielded). So what difference does it make to say that pornography is qualitatively more subversive to the strength and egalitarianism of feminist causes if it is fundamentally outside the mainstream of society? It is certainly beyond adolescent observation, at least (as a rule). And what improvement can we claim by saying that pulp romances are a little "nicer," perhaps . . . if any harm in them at all is nevertheless firmly enmeshed in the racks of most local supermarkets? Paul Bové writes:

Discourses and their related disciplines and institutions are functions of power: they distribute the effects of power. They are power's relays throughout the modern social system. (58)

In other words: maybe we ought or ought not to be concerned about the man in the raincoat in the porn shop in the slums. But let us realize that the 14-year-olds giggling at the Harlequin rack will probably have more to say, in the long run, with how human relationships are formed and celebrated. Paul Bové is right; the business of literature is the business of life.

Indeterminacy of Bias in Serious Narratives

In the most sophisticated literature of our culture, we might suppose that anything as rudimentary as the four pornos would surely be dwarfed by complexity of narrative or subtlety of handling. But as we are about to see, a trope-by-trope analysis of male-female interactions is less than decisive. What we find rather, is that the complexities of high literary discourse tend to blur the distinction between horizontal and
vertical presentations—making the existence of the pornemes, once again, essentially indeterminate.

Many of the critics who originally condemned *Sister Carrie* upon moral grounds undoubtedly did so because of the Whore porneme: Carrie was simply viewed as trading sex for an improved social status. Indeed, of the following quotes from *Sister Carrie* suggest the Whore porneme:

He made her take [the money]. She felt bound to him by a strange tie of affection now. (Dreiser 50)

The voice of want made answer for her. (75)

She still took . . . pride in him, which was augmented by her desire to have her social integrity maintained. (90)

Something else in her spoke. . . . he loved her, and she was alone. If she did not turn to him—accept of his love—where else might she go? Her resistance half dissolved in the flood of his strong feeling. (222)

She could hardly tell why the one-time keen interest in him was no longer with her. Unquestionably, it was because at that time he had represented something which she did not have. (383)

Their influence upon her life is explicable alone by the nature of her longings. . . . It is but natural that when the world which they represented no longer allured her, its ambassadors should be discredited. (399)

Critical opposition to *Sister Carrie* in 1900 was frequently moralistic. We would certainly be more kind in that regard today. The possibilities for female economic independence at the turn of the last century were extremely limited. Combined with the impersonal, brute forces of a big city, the two conditions of oppression together cause us to sympathize with Carrie's need to survive. Her desperation "lead her by the nose," and
the modem view is therefore not nearly so inclined to see the Whore porneme in operation here.

But who is to say? The real culprit of *Sister Carrie* may indeed be the relative economic slavery of women in turn-of-the-century Chicago. But that fact does not obliterate the quotes above. She is still "trading-off" her value as a sex/love object. We can imagine a more idealistic approach claiming that she "should have been more dignified" or "should have born any consequences rather than surrender." But she didn't. She traded the only real commodity that she had at her immediate disposal whether justified by the hindsight of modern consensus, or not. In fact, a more demanding feminism might not excuse her relinquishment of individuality, despite the intense social pressures, in effect of siding with the sexism of the Whore porneme without meaning to.

If we are propositioned by a prostitute on the street, we "know" that this is harlotry. But as we ascend the scale of "barter," everything becomes increasingly fuzzy. The Whore porneme eventually becomes deconstructed by the following question: at what point does a self-assessed value of sexuality become immune to all considerations of its trade potential? The answer is, of course—no one knows. Would attractive women who date only wealthy men qualify for this immunity? Are they excused because sex is only a part of the trade-off? This indeterminacy is additionally confounded by modern confirmations of the sociobiological perspective.

Female "helplessness" before internal forces is common in many different kinds of narratives, and is indicative of the Slut porneme at its extreme. The usual presentation
is given as a duel between inconsistent aspects of the self, and has many supporting
tropes. Such phrases as "in spite of herself, couldn't help herself" and "with mixed
feelings" are common. Sometimes, hypnosis is overtly suggested or strongly implied
(Dreiser 65; Chopin, Storm 246; Aldrich 84). It is not uncommon to see the unexpected
urge or emotion presented as having a weakening effect on the woman's knees, hands,
feet, or other body parts (Flanders 31,33,80,85,111; Vandanmere 25,80; Chopin,
Awakening 58). Sometimes, she is speechless or will "babble" (Flanders 111;
Vandanmere 25,172). Oxymorons are effective at depicting self-contradiction, of course,
and are particularly plentiful in pulp romances. We find such uses as "sweet torture"
(McGill 130), "silent roar" (173), "exquisite torture" (177), "gentle devouring" (220),
"dangerously content" (Flanders 88), "contentment and resignation" (65), "dread and
anticipation" (81), "horror and relief" (103), and "shivering and melting" (128). American
literary classics juxtapose opposites, as well: "strange and awful . . . delicious" (Chopin,
Awakening 113), "self-protection and coquetry" (Dreiser 3), and "shame and joy" (Norris
72). Sometimes the body's reaction against the mind's better sense is characterized as a
"betrayal" (Chopin, Storm 246; Jackson 15).

The helplessness and surrender so basic to the porousme is well-represented in
serious narratives:

Nothing could have been more sudden, more unexpected than that
surrender of herself. (Norris 72)

But he had only to take her in his arms, to crush down her struggle with
his enormous strength, to subdue her, conquer her by sheer brute force,
and she gave up in an instant. (73)
As she glanced up at him the fear in her liquid blue eyes had given place to a drowsy gleam that . . . betrayed a sensuous desire. (Chopin, Storm, 246)

. . . followed in obedience to one of the two contradictory impulses which impelled her. (Chopin, Awakening (14)

A single current of desire passed through her body . . . weakening her hold upon the brushes and making her eyes burn. (58)

There came over her the acute longing . . . overpowering her at once with a sense of the unattainable. (88)

He did not say goodnight until she had become supple to his gentle, seductive entreaties. (92)

Like the Whore porneme, the Slut porneme deconstructs at an indeterminate level of expression. "Surrender" is not inherently weak, of course, nor is a struggle with "mixed feelings." These matters are not even gender specific. In fact, we would view a complete inability to surrender as pathologically rigid, and would tend to see people who never had mixed feelings as dogmatic. But how much surrender and self-contradiction is too much? The Slut porneme deconstructs with the following question: at what point does the surrender to internal urges and contradictions surpass an "average" expectation of civilized self-control? Kate Chopin apparently only sought to portray the awakening of Edna Pontellier to her independent, sometimes sexual nature. The moralistic criticism of her day saw only the Slut porneme. One critic likened Edna's awakening to a "moth before a flame" (St. Louis Daily Globe-Democrat, 5/13/1899), and another lectured on the need for "many restrictive clauses" in the exercise of individuality within a "civilized society" (New Orleans Times-Democrat, 6/18/1899).
We tend to see these criticisms as extremely excessive from today's point of view, but the underlying indeterminacy is certainly fresh. There is simply no reference point—no "center" a la Derrida—from which we can make an unambiguous determination. As we saw when discussing the conclusion of The Awakening, even appeals to an "overall context" or "final outcome" are less than satisfactory.

The Bimbo porneme is easiest of all to deconstruct since wonder and bewilderment are frequently a part of "normal" life. Once again, we "know it when we see it" in pornography, but we become increasingly unable to identify it as we move upward through more and more complex narratives. In pornography, we find such lines as:

Something was happening to her, something she didn't understand or want to understand. (Jackson 54)

She found her responses toward him puzzling. She didn't understand her excitement. (13)

She really wished she could come up with an answer. (Aldrich 122)

Similar examples abound in pulp romances:

Furthermore her intuition told her that he understood things about her that she had yet to understand. (McGill 82)

. . . she cast about in her mind for something to say while she wondered how she had gotten herself into this. (Flanders 30)

Then why did one . . . little kiss turn her into some sort of mindless center? (33)

What did she want? It hardly seemed to matter anymore. (65)
About the best thing we can say of high literary discourse is that the levels of unknowing span a wider spectrum. In *McTeague*, we find Trina "refusing without knowing why" (Norris 30). And concerning her marriage to McTeague: "What, indeed, was Trina afraid of? She could not tell" (143). Sister Carrie finds an "indefinable fascination" with Hurstwood (Dreiser 100) and has instincts "mingling confusedly in her brain" (3). Dreiser even manages a hybrid Slut/Bimbo porneme with "Her little brain had been surging with contradictory feelings . . . " (177).

In *The Awakening*, we find many examples of unknowing, and many of them are combined with internal warring:

A thousand emotions have swept through me tonight. I don't comprehend half of them. (30)

There were days when she was happy without knowing why. There were days when she was unhappy, she did not know why . . . (58)

She wanted something to happen . . . she did not know what. (75)

Perhaps the most pointed example of unknowing occurs when Edna says to Mademoiselle Reisz "do you suppose a woman knows why she loves?" (81). Could we imagine this line being said by a gun moll in an old gangster movie? Of course we could. The Bimbo porneme therefore deconstructs with the following question: at what point does an "average" expectation of self-protective intelligence surpass an "average" susceptibility to manipulation?

We believe we "know" what smart women and dumb women think and act like. We don't. They simply stand in relative contrast to each other, and in complete contrast
to the source of confusion. Suppose this source is a "conning" agent. If the con is sufficiently executed, perhaps the smartest woman in the world could be duped. There is, once more, simply no center from which we can make such determinations—however "obvious" they may appear to our intuitions.

In the narratives used for this study, there were no outstanding examples of the Bitch porneme in the pulp discourses or turn-of-the-century classics. But we find an excellent example when we move forward six decades—to Saul Bellow's Herzog, published in 1961. The character of Madeleine is specifically referred to as a bitch by her husband, Moses Herzog (21,55,159,254,263,321), by her lover, Valentine Gersbach (60,61,194), as well as by Ramona (16), Simken (209), and Himmelstein (80). In reference to my Four-Porneme Grid, we note that the Bitch both leads and controls, and self-describes as "I reign; I'm superior." We might expect that there could be many ways in which this exaggerated sense of self-importance is conveyed, and that is indeed the case. In Herzog, all of the following characterizations of Madeleine may be interpreted within the Bitch porneme: (1) direct expressions of vanity, (2) expression stating or implying above-average powers, (3) satisfaction from the misfortunes of others, (4) double standards, (5) uncompromising demands and manipulations, and (6) violent emotions. Frequently, these traits are hybridized.

Madeleine's beauty is mentioned many times, and by almost every character in the novel who knew her (though Ramona calls her a "packaged" beauty). Bellow has us watch Madeleine's primping through Herzog's eyes on a few occasions, and the vanity is
obvious. "The satisfaction she took in herself was positively plural—imperial" (21). Madeleine herself says to Herzog "Still young, beautiful, full of life. Why should I waste it all on you?" (21). It is clear, also, that Madeleine is well aware of the power that can come with such beauty. Herzog even believes that he sees it in a photograph of Madeleine taken when she was twelve years old:

She . . . had the hauteur of the female child who knows it won't be long before she is nubile and has the power to hurt. This is mental politics. The strength to do evil is sovereignty. She knew more at twelve than I did at forty. (126)

We must be wary, of course, of Bellow's choice of point of view. Free indirect style—shifting back and forth between first and third person narration (with a liberal use of indirect interior monologues)—makes Herzog's reports potentially unreliable. At least some deconstruction of the Bitch porneme is unavoidable for this reason. But we note Madeleine's "I reign" from her own perspective, too. Herzog worries, for instance, what she would do if stopped by a state trooper while driving. Even though she has no driver's license, she is quite confident that she could "sweet-talk him" (122).

Self-confidence and vanity are, by themselves, simply fringe aspects of the Bitch porneme. The true Bitch must also cause others to suffer and/or must delight when others do. When Herzog is in the police station being booked, "he knew what this moment was to her—happiness!" (300). And when Madeleine tells Moses that she was "crushed" by their failed marriage, Herzog thinks "Crushed? She had never looked more glorious" (9). Herzog also says:
What she had been looking for, high and low, was precisely an ambitious Herzog. In order to trip him, bring him low, knock him sprawling and kick out his brains with a murderous bitch foot. (93)

It is typical for the Bitch to get men to fight over her. Though this is not the usual sexual rivalry, we read "She wanted Moses and the Monsignor to struggle over her. It heightened her sexual excitement" (115).

Double standards are endemic to the Bitch porneme. The notion of superiority often includes the duplicitous bite. Nothing could enrage Madeleine so quickly as a lie (37) yet she lies with ease to Herzog about her secret affair with Gersbach (193). It is Herzog's house in Chicago, yet she insists that he should leave when the marriage is over (10). Madeleine's double standards apply even to her own, often contradictory nature. Herzog tells Ramona that Madeleine "could turn against her own pretensions" (193). She complained of her sinfulness "but wanted it, too" (110). Madeleine would insistently place Herzog's hand on her breast while they slept, but equally wished for him to disappear in the morning (112).

These self-contradictions are explored by Herzog. In one of his more memorable reflections, he says "It would not be practical for her to hate herself. Luckily, God sends a substitute, a husband" (174). This self-hate is not a usual notion associated with the Bitch porneme and tends to deconstruct it somewhat. Bellow follows the above quote ten pages later with "...she had treated him with contempt and cruelty as if to punish him for lowering and cheapening himself, for lying himself into love with her and betraying the promise of his soul" (184). An astonishing sentence from a great writer.
It seems to imply that Madeleine's version of the Bitch porneme functions like a zen koan. She is, in effect, saying "how could I possibly love a man who would love a bitch like me." This dynamic would also explain Herzog's otherwise enigmatic suggestion earlier in the narrative that "Maybe it's just as well that I didn't hit her. I might have won back her love" (57). That is: he might have won it back because the abuse would be in accord with her self-hate. Or maybe: the dynamic between these two specific individuals may be similar to that found in the feline world. The female of the species does not act like a "bitch" because she does not wish to copulate with the male. She acts thus because she does wish to, and seeks confirmation that the male is powerful enough to take her against her best resistance.

Madeleine is undoubtedly one the most intriguing Bitches of modern literature. She is not nearly as evil as Miranda in Second Skin or as psychotic as Nadine in them, but she presents a more complex problem to the reader than they do. For what are we to make of her if self-hate is at the root of the dynamic? If the "terrible menstrual ice of her rages" is simply a misdirection in self-loathing, are we still grounded in superiority? Or inferiority? And does the distinction really even make any difference if the existential effect upon others' lives remains the same?

This is only the beginning of the deconstruction found in Herzog. It is not simply the possibility of self-hate which unravels an unambiguous portrait of Madeleine. We are also told that Herzog "bullied" her (39). Herzog himself does not deny this, and even claims to have been a bad husband in both of his marriages (4). Most importantly for the
issue of deconstruction, there are plenty of suggestions throughout the novel that Herzog
is (or was) a masochist in search of a sadist. The sense seems to be both emotional and
sexual. All of the following citations are indicative:

There was a flavor of subjugation in his love for Madeleine. (8)

But he had asked to be beaten, too, and had lent his attackers strength. (4)

But they were bitch eyes, that was certain. They expressed a sort of
female arrogance which had an immediate sexual power over him. (34)

[Ramona to Herzog] If only I were a bitch! Then you'd hang on every
word. (152)

What I seem to do, thought Herzog, is to inflame myself with my drama,
with ridicule, failure, denunciation, distortion, to inflame myself
voluptuously, esthetically, until I reach a sexual climax. (208)

The problem here, of course, is that the Bitch has now moved in conception from
being an obstacle to being a complement of desire—vastly complicating the porneme.
Herzog says at one point that Madeleine's actions were "sad, comical, or cruel, depending
on one's point of view" (7). That simple declarative is at the heart of much of the
indeterminacy in Herzog.

There is no question that the Bitch porneme is the most complex of the four.
Consider its difficult history in the feminist movement. Many feminists have correctly
pointed out that a man may be viewed as a "decisive leader" for the same actions which
might cause a woman to be classified as a "pushy bitch." And unfortunately, the paradox
is quite unresolvable. It may be just as valid to see the man as pushy or the woman as
decisive as it is the reverse, and—I repeat—no genderless entity exists to make a final
pronouncement of certainty. The best we can do as a "working substitute for truth" is to attempt to arrive at a consensus acceptable to most, and with as few gender disagreements as possible. The Bitch porneme ultimately deconstructs with the following question: where does self-worth leave off and self-righteousness begin? The line between ruthlessness and decisiveness is particularly difficult to ascertain.

We do not yet know for sure if the physiological differences between the sexes contribute to significant average differences of perception and cognition in literature. But we ought to be prepared for a serious possibility along those lines. The first consequence will surely be a principle of indeterminacy not unlike the one in this paper—even if the paradigms offered here turn out to be clumsy attempts at narrowing its range.

To the degree that the natural sciences advance our understanding of gender differences, it benefits us to listen and explore. This is not always done or applauded, and several researchers have commented upon prejudices and hostilities in the field (McGlone 256; Moir 182; Peterson A3; Strossen 132). In particular, the "culturists" fear that gender-divergences will divide us upon the issue of human rights; we note that historical abuses grounded in male domination have not been unkind to their fear. But this fear must not be allowed to become either policy or prophecy. The real oppression of women is quite intolerable to any acceptable definition of humanity. That must be remembered as the common bond between us.

We do not testify against the fledgling cortex—with all of its beautiful and profound culture. For one thing, it is hard to quarrel with an organ without which we
couldn't even be discussing these matters! And so we celebrate it. But if the cortex only seems to eke out a gradual implementation of fairness against enormous historical forces to the contrary, that should neither surprise us nor discourage us. We will make the "old ways" go the way of the tailbone if they do not serve our ethical imperatives. In the meantime, it is probably in our best interest not to pretend that the tailbone isn't there.
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