

Maria Th. Anastasopoulou

## GENDER AND DIFFERENCE FRENCH THOUGHT IN AMERICAN FEMINIST CRITICISM

As is well known, American feminist criticism emerged out of the politically committed feminists who were active during the civil rights movement in the 1960s and the Women's Liberation Movement which grew out of it in the late 1960s. As a result, the impact of early feminist criticism in the United States focused on an attempt to extend the political activism of the decade onto the cultural domain and pursue the desired sociopolitical changes through literary criticism by effecting a disruption in the established, patriarchal modes of thinking which have customarily associated women with stereotypes of inferiority and has relegated them to the realm of the threatening Other that has to be subjugated and controlled.

The first critical works published within the perspective of this new feminist literary activism were studies which concentrated on exploring and exposing sexism in literature;<sup>1</sup> probed into that tendency in Western culture to comprehend, judge and classify experience in terms of our sexual differences, a tendency which Mary Ellman defined as "thought by sexual analogy;"<sup>2</sup> exposed the "phallic criticism" traditionally practised by men;<sup>3</sup> brought to the reader's awareness the major stereotypical images of women projected in literature by patriarchal ideology to the purpose of conditioning and controlling women's conduct;<sup>4</sup> explored the nature of power relations between the sexes as enacted in works by male authors;<sup>5</sup> and pointed out the exclusion of women from literary history.<sup>6</sup> This early phase of American feminist criticism is ideological and male-centered: "It is concerned with the feminist as reader, and offers feminist readings of texts which consider images and stereotypes of women in literature, the omissions and misconceptions about women in criticism, and woman-as-sign in semiotic

---

1. Katharine M. Rogers, *The Troublesome Helpmate: A History of Misogyny in Literature*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1966).

2. *Thinking About Women*, (New York: Harcourt, 1968).

3. Mary Ellman in *Thinking About Women*.

4. Mary Ellman's book, in which she first dealt with women's images in literature, triggered a series of 'images of women' studies best known among which is *Images of Women in Fiction: Feminist Perspectives*, edited by Susan Koppelman Cornillon, and printed by Bowling Green University Popular Press in Ohio, U.S.A. in 1972.

5. Kate Millet, *Sexual Politics*, (London: Virago, 1969).

6. See Nina Bayam, "Melodramas of Beset Manhood: How Theories of American Fiction Exclude Women Authors," *American Quarterly*, 33, 2 (Summer 1981): 123-39.

systems," as Elaine Showalter has pointed out in her article "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness."<sup>7</sup>

In the early 1970s, however, the focus of interest in American feminist criticism gradually shifted to an interest in re-interpreting well-known women writers and re-discovering "lost" women's texts. Feminist criticism, in other words, became woman centered. And while in its earlier phase it emphasized "woman as reader," in this second phase, the emphasis fell on "woman as writer," that is, on woman as the producer of textual meaning; on the themes that preoccupy women writers; the genres they chose to write in; and the structures they produce. It is particularly interested in the psychodynamics of female creativity; the issue of a distinctive, gender-conditioned female language; the histories of both individual and collective female literary careers; as well as an attempt to create a continuous female literary history alongside with the male literary canon. Elaine Showalter is responsible for labelling these two modes of feminist literary criticism "the feminist critique" and "gynocritics" respectively. "The 'feminist critique,'" she says in "Towards a Feminist Poetics," "is essentially political and polemical, with theoretical affiliations to Marxist sociology and aesthetics; 'gynocritics' is more self-contained and experimental, with connections to other modes of new feminist research."<sup>8</sup> The former position has been compared to the Old Testament, "looking for the sins and errors of the past," while the latter to the New Testament, seeking "the grace of imagination."<sup>9</sup>

In spite of the fact that this second phase has incorporated methodologies from Marxist and structuralist criticism and utilized material from psychology, linguistics, anthropology, social history and art history, "On the whole feminist literary criticism and scholarship have been stubbornly empirical; they have generated little theory and abstraction," Elaine Showalter observed in her 1975 review essay "Literary Criticism,"<sup>10</sup> and pointed out the need for feminist criticism to "clarify [its] assumptions and preceedures." Although "the theoretical eclecticism, empiricism and individualism" that

---

7. Elaine Showalter, "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women Literature and Theory*, ed. Elaine Showalter, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), p. 245. This article was first published in *Critical Inquiry*, 8, 2 (Winter 1981): 179-205; and was reprinted in *Writing and Sexual Difference*, ed. Elizabeth Abel, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982), p. 9-35.

8. Elaine Showalter, "Towards a Feminist Poetics" in *Women Writing and Writing About Women*, ed. Mary Jacobus (London: Croom Helm in association with Oxford University Women's Studies Committee; New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1979); rpt in *The New Feminist Criticism*, pp. 125-43.

9. Carolyn Heilbrun, the writer, in a 1975 dialogue with Catharine Stimpson, editor of the journal *Signs: Women in Culture and Society*, as quoted by E. Showalter in "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness," op. cit., p. 243.

10. *Signs*, I, (Winter 1975): 435-60.

characterize American feminist criticism may present advantages "in terms of flexibility, creativity, and openness to new ideas and sources," they have, Elaine Showalter continues, proved damaging in two respects: firstly by delaying and/or obstructing the formulation of "a solid system of critical theory," they have rendered feminist criticism invisible in the eyes of the academic world, which has not so far taken seriously the work produced by women critics either on individual women's texts or on reinterpreting classic texts; and secondly, by emphasizing the personal experience over theoretical assumptions, they have made some feminist criticism appear "more personal and expressive than standard scholarly writing," and the false impression has been formed that feminist criticism is a facile enterprise.

Four years later in her essay "Towards a Feminist Poetics," Elaine Showalter picks up the issue of the theoretical base of feminist literary criticism once more under the pressure of male attacks on feminist criticism as lacking in "intellectual candor" and "precision." "The absence of clearly articulated theory," she points out, "makes feminist criticism perpetually vulnerable to such attacks, and not even feminist critics seem to agree what it is they profess and defend." She admitted, however, that to the radical feminist any demand for theoretical positioning raises suspicions. Any methodology is considered as an instrument of patriarchy that limits and constricts. "From this perspective," Showalter understandably remarks, "the academic demand for theory can only be heard as a threat to the feminist need for authenticity."<sup>11</sup>

In the same year, Annette Kolodny made a similar statement. Reviewing and assessing the variety and diversity of the work produced by feminist literary critics, she pointed out the unwillingness of academia to recognize the importance of this work and admitted: "Instead of being welcomed onto the train, however, we have been forced to negotiate a minefield. The very energy and diversity of our enterprise have rendered us vulnerable to attack on the grounds that we lack both definition and coherence."<sup>12</sup> Then she goes on to formulate the three propositions which, she thinks, constitute the core of current American feminist literary criticism and concludes that a viable agenda for feminist literary criticism would be exactly "the variety and

11. In *The New Feminist Criticism*, p. 127.

12. Annette Kolodny, "Dancing through the Minefield" in *The New Literary Criticism*, pp. 144-167. Her theoretical position is also expounded in "Some Notes on Defining a 'Feminist Literary Criticism'," *Critical Inquiry*, 2, (Autumn 1975): 75-92; in "A Map of Misreading; or, Gender and the Interpretation of Literary Texts," in *The Feminist Criticism*, pp. 46-62; and in "The Theory of Feminist Criticism" (paper delivered at the National Centre for the Humanities Conference on Feminist Criticism, Research Triangle Park, N.C., March 1981).

13. A chapter from Julia Kristeva's *Des Chinoises* appeared in *Signs* I, (Fall 1975): 57-82 and the whole book was translated by Anita Barros as *About Chinese Women* and published by Boyars in London in 1977; Helen Cixous's "The Laugh of Medusa," which is considered a

variability of women's literary expression" (p. 159), a practice which places feminist criticism securely "with the other pluralities and pluralisms" (p. 159). She gives up the idea of formulating "any single reading method" and proposes, instead, "a playful pluralism, responsive to the possibilities of multiple critical schools and methods, but captive to none" (p. 161), as an agenda for feminist literary criticism.

At this stage, when American feminist criticism was groping for the formulation of a theoretical framework that would valorize its practice in the eyes of the academy, the French theories of *écriture féminine*, that is, theories of a specifically female language that allows the eruption of the "semiotic" — the pre-oedipal aspects of language associated with Mother and the body rhythms — into the symbolic language of the Law of the Father, that is, a socially imposed language, were gradually translated and published into English. In spite of the scarcity of translations of French texts, however, French thought began being echoed in the texts of a handful of American critics who were immersed in it, like Shoshana Felman, for instance, who as early as 1975, in her article "Women and Madness: The Critical Fallacy," urges women to do nothing less than to "reinvent language... to speak not only against, but outside of the specular phallogocentric structure, to establish a discourse, the status of which would no longer be defined by the phallacy of masculine meaning."<sup>14</sup> Felman's position is clearly reminiscent of Luce Irigaray's notion of a specific woman's language, whose style, she says, "resists and explodes all firmly established forms, figures, ideas, concepts" and which she names "le parler femme" or "woman-speak." And although in a seminar, she declared that "le parler femme" cannot be metaspoken, that is, explained or defined, Irigaray still gives a description of woman's discourse as one born by direct expression of women's libidinal rhythms and characterized by simultaneity and fluidity that allow no fixity or identification of any kind.<sup>15</sup>

In 1979 Mary Jacobus in "The Difference of View" included in *Women Writing And Writing About Women*, makes extensive reference to "recent French writing about Women and Literature" which operates on the Lacanian model that conceives femininity as the heterogeneous Other and relegates it to the space of the Imaginary (Lacan's term for the pre-Oedipal

---

feminist manifesto, appeared in *Signs* 1, 4 (Summer 1976): 875-93; an excerpt from *La Jeune née* appeared in *Diacritics*, 7 (Summer 1977). Christine Makward's interview with Hélène Cixous and Josette Feral's interview with Julia Kristeva appeared in *Sub-Stance: A Review of Theory and Literature*, 13 (1976): 9-18, 19-37. A selection of Kristeva's *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* appeared in English in 1980 by the Columbia Press.

14. *Diacritics* 5 (Winter 1975): 10.

15. All quotations from Irigaray are taken from Toril Moi's discussion of "Woman Speak" in her *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*, (London/New York: Methuen 1985), pp. 143-49.



stage of development), that is, the space of absence and silence and incoherence. She also refers to Kristeva's conception of the pre-Oedipal, or semiotic, as she calls it, phase, in which the body rhythms of language, as inscribed in avant guard literary practice, are challenging and subverting the Symbolic language from within. Kristeva proposes a women's writing that works within male discourse but works "ceaselessly to deconstruct it: to write what cannot be written."<sup>16</sup>

Yet, the work that seemed to be an attempt to bridge what Domna C. Stanton has called "The Franco-American Disconnection"<sup>17</sup> was the edition by Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron of *New French Feminisms* in 1980,<sup>18</sup> which presented a substantial introduction to French feminist thought as well as Hester Eisenstein and Alice Jardine's collection of essays in *The Future of Difference*, that appeared in the same year and included essays that offered a good discussion of current French trends in feminist thought.<sup>19</sup> The two books generated an avalanche of publications of special journal issues on French feminist thought in the next two or three years: the *Feminist Issues* (1,2) and the *Yale French Studies* (62) preceded these publications early in 1981; the *Feminist Studies* (7,2) followed in the Summer of 1981; *Signs* (7,1) in the Autumn of 1981; *Critical Inquiry* and *Diacritics* in 1982; *Feminist Issues* came back with another issue (2,2) in the Fall of 1982 and yet another one (3,2) in the Spring of 1983. Carolyn Allen is quoted by the editors of the *Yale French Studies* (62, 1981) as saying: "The American critical tradition, until very recently, or until it has been influenced by the French, has been a discourse entirely different from what it is beginning to be" (Intr. p. 7).

In view of this publishing enthusiasm shown to the possibilities of the developing connection between French and American feminists, one would expect a warm opening up of American feminist critics to a line of thought that had been kept from them because of the scarcity of translations. However, the reception of French feminist thought was far from enthusiastic. In their first contact with French thought, American feminist critics responded with suspicion. In a conversation for the *Yale French Studies*

16. Mary Jacobus ed., (1979), pp. 10-21.

17. "Language and Revolution: The Franco-American Disconnection" in *The Future of Difference*, Hester Eisenstein and Alice Jardine, eds., (Boston, Mass.: G. K. Hall & Co., 1980), pp. 73-87.

18. Brighton, England: Harvester Press, 1980; Boston, Mass.: G. K. Hall & Co., 1980.

19. The essays in this volume were drawn from "The Scholar and the Feminist VI: The Future of Difference," a conference sponsored by the Barnard College Women's Center held in New York City on April 29, 1979. The essays that particularly offer an introduction to French Feminist Thought are those included in "Part II: Contemporary Feminist Thought in France: Translating Difference," pp. 71-122.

issue on "Feminist Readings" (62, 1981), American suspicions were based on different grounds.

Sandra Gilbert admitted how "troubled" and "excluded" she feels by the "otherness" of French thought and, in spite of being aware that what the French feminists are doing is "fascinating" and "certainly essential," her sense of otherness "has something to do with a way in which their theory is detached from what we have to struggle with." Irigaray and Cixous seem particularly "anti-empirical" to her (p. 10). Susan Gubar wondered whether the nervousness she senses in the French attempts to validate the "feminine" is not a "conservative move" that would eventually lead to "an entrapment in a stereotype" or whether this is really "some genuinely new step" (p. 8). At another point she made her suspicion about the French theorizing more explicit: "I really do wonder," she said, "whether buying into theoretical discourse doesn't mean buying into just the kind of abstract language that so much of feminism has been opposed to" (p. 10). Elizabeth Abel expressed a strong distrust towards the "word play" that characterizes so much of French women's writing because she considers it a "male privilege." As a feminist, she said, she is more concerned, naively perhaps, "about female identity" and all she wants to do with texts is "to figure out what the forms of female experience are" (p. 10). Carolyn Allen felt that American feminist critics have to really re-educate themselves if they are to follow the French models. "You don't find the playfulness of French criticism," she said, "in the American tradition. It is a whole other notion of how you deal with texts or how you write about texts," and admitted that she prefers the American way "because it feels less parasitic" (p. 10).

Mary Jacobus, one of the earliest exponents of French thought in the United States, considers the French feminists' reconsideration of psychoanalysis a very important contribution to feminist literary criticism (p. 7). Equally important she considers the contribution of French feminist thought towards making "critical the relationship between gender and writing" (p. 8). She also points out the common denominator in both American and French criticism which is that of close reading. Deconstruction, one of the critical tools used in France, she reminds American critics, "is exactly close reading" (p. 11), a technique deeply entrenched in American feminist criticism. Yet, in spite of her belief that an integration of the French feminist theoretical criticism with the American tradition is possible, she also has reservations regarding the emphasis Cixous and Irigaray place on the female body, as a source for female writing, and on the "Dark Continent." She suspects that this stance brings us very close to a kind of essentialism and wonders whether "such essentialism does have a conservative implication" (p. 8). What emerges from this exchange reveals both a genuine interest but also a great distrust in French theoretical writing on the part of American feminist critics.

These two initial responses have marked the American feminist stance since the early 1980s when, under the impact of French linguistic philosophical and psychoanalytic inquiry, a shift in literary critical history became obvious. Soon after the discussion for the *Yale French Studies*, Ann Rosalind Jones, in her essay "Writing the Body: Towards an Understanding of *l'écriture féminine*," writes that the French feminists' "assertion of a bedrock female nature" which is used to challenge male centered thinking "has stired up curiosity and set off resonances among American feminists who are increasingly open to theory, to philosophical, psychoanalytic and Marxist critiques of masculinist ways of seeing the world."<sup>20</sup> This rather optimistic view, however, is only part of the story. It is true that, in the early 1980s, only some American feminist critics, already uncomfortable with traditional American critical methodologies, turned to the new sources of feminist inquiry which the newly imported French Thought was promising. Among the first to seek these new sources was Jane Gallop who, in 1982, published a book with the telling title *The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis*<sup>21</sup> which was a follow up to her earlier essay "Psychoanalysis and Feminism in France," co-authored with Carolyn G. Burke, a contribution to Eisenstein and Jardine's collection of essays *The Future of Difference*.

The relationship between psychoanalysis and American feminism has not been a happy one. As early as 1974 Juliet Mitchell published her *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*<sup>22</sup> in which, focussing on Freudean psychoanalysis, she pointed out that American feminists had received their Freud though the distorted and reductionist interpretations of Wilhelm Reich, R. D. Laing and Karen Horney, and were unwilling to accept Freudean psychoanalysis as a critical tool in their inquiry. Mitchell, speaking from within the anti-Freudean English-speaking feminism, made a plea for "a serious reading of Freud," for a reconsideration of his original contribution to human psychology and warned against the very serious consequences that such a neglect might have upon "the feminist analysis of woman's psychology and woman's situation: in short, [the] grave consequences for feminism's effectiveness" (p. 2).

Freud, however, was gradually recovered for American feminists through the Lacanian re-reading. Whereas Mitchell focused her discussion on Freud, Jane Gallop focused hers on Lacan. Her intention in *The Daughter's Seduction* (1982) is clearly to study "the relation between contemporary feminist theory and the psychoanalysis of Jacques Lacan" (xi). "A

20. *Feminist Studies*, 7, 2, (Summer 1981): 247-63; rpt. in *The New Feminist Criticism*, p. 361-377.

21. London: Macmillan/Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1982.

22. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1974.



re-reading of Freud and Lacan, together with the commentaries of Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva, seemed a proper step," Janet Todd remarks in *Feminist Literary History*, "towards the goal of dismantling the theoretical structures in which the feminine was created as a negative term."<sup>23</sup>

The introduction of Lacanian psychoanalysis, which is closely wed with post-structural linguistics, as well as the introduction of theories of *écriture féminine* which were developed as a response to current French intellectual debates by the main women theorists in France, Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva, into the American literary scene generated an interest in the issue of sexual difference as represented in language. As early as 1978, Stephen Heath, in his essay "Sexual Difference and Representation," defines a masculine discourse as one "which fails to take into account the problem of sexual difference in its enunciation and address."<sup>24</sup> The stance of early American feminists regarding sexual tion. Although they attacked male misrepresentations of women, the biological difference was not considered as constituting an opposition but rather a polarization.<sup>25</sup> Men and women, they claimed, were of equal intellectual value and thus they aimed at an equal status in social relations. A good example of this kind of criticism, which aimed at invalidating essentialist notions of femininity resulting in social and literary stereotypes, is the collection of essays *Women in a Sexist Society*,<sup>26</sup> in which Orick calls the notion of a gendered language "The Testicular Theory of Literature" and claims she would rather master male language that would allow her share men's power than create a new language for women.

However, since the mid-1970s, when feminist inquiry shifted its focus on woman centered texts, when it moved away from the "feminist critique" to "gynocritics," to use Elaine Showalter's terms, American feminist critics developed an interest in the essentially "feminine" which presupposes a unitary subject, the female. Patricia Spacks, in *The Female Imagination* (1975), Ellen Moers, in *Literary Women: The Great Writers* (1976), and Nina Auerbach, in *Community of Women* (1978), all are seeking to point out the essentially feminine. The first American to enunciate "difference" and promote a woman's language was the poetess Adrienne Rich. In *Of Woman Born* (1977) Rich, like Kristeva, rethinks the maternal and creates a new language for feminist criticism. In *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence* (1980)<sup>27</sup>,

23. New York: Routledge, 1988, p. 63.

24. *Screen*, V 19, n 3 (1978).

25. See Grace Stewart, *A New Mythos* (Vermont: Eden Press, 1979).

26. V. G. Gornick and B. K. Moran, eds., (New York: Basic Books, 1971).

27. Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, (New York: Norton 1976); *On Lies, Secrets and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978*, (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979).



she argues that women's rituals are a kind of linguistic response to a patriarchal social and cultural world. The most successful rejection of male discourse, however, has been effected by Mary Daly whose prose has often been likened to Helene Cixous's. Her publications, *Gyn/Ecology* and *Pure Lust*,<sup>28</sup> are the earliest examples of *écriture féminine* within an American context. Like Cixous, Daly claims that we should re-connect our language and our bodies in order "to re-member the dis-membered body of our heritage" (1978, p. 23).

An interesting side-effect of this tendency is, that, after the initial downgrading of sexual difference during the early stages of American feminist thought, when "feminist theorists bolstered claims for equality with claims of similarity,"<sup>29</sup> the work of some American feminist critics seemed to give rise to a re-emergence of a rather essentialist view of sexual difference which, paradoxically enough, echoed very closely the patriarchal notion of womanhood and femininity. Susan Griffin, for instance, emphasized the Victorian notion of motherhood, female virtue and the traditional association of women with nature; Betty Friedman reasserted the special female qualities and the role of woman in the family; Jean Betty Elshtain revalorized the given patriarchal order and woman's sphere in the home; and Carol McMillan celebrated woman's relation to nature and life processes through her reproductive role.<sup>30</sup>

After the impact of French theories of the *écriture féminine* in the late 1970s, the native American feminist critical tradition to locate the essentially "feminine" features in female texts and thus establish a continuous and autonomous female tradition shifted its focus, as Elizabeth Abel put it, in *Writing and Sexual Difference*, "from recovering a lost tradition to discovering the terms of confrontation with the dominant tradition. Aware that women writers inevitably engage in a literary history and system of conventions shaped primarily by men, feminist critics now often strive to elucidate the acts of revision, appropriation and subversion that constitute the female text. The analysis of female talent grappling with a male tradition translates sexual difference into literary differences of genre, structure, voice and plot" (p. 2). The earliest, perhaps publication towards that direction is

28. Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978); *Pure Lust*, (London: The Women's Press, 1984).

29. Elizabeth Abel, *Writing and Sexual Difference*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 1.

30. Susan Griffin, *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1978); Betty Friedman, *The Second Stage*, (1981); revised edition: (New York: Summit Books, 1968); Betty Jean Elshtain, *Public Man, Private Woman: Women in Social and Political Thought*, (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1981); Carol McMillan, *Women, Reason, Nature: Some Philosophical Problems with Feminism*, (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1982).

the already mentioned collection of essays, *Women Writing and Writing About Women* in 1979 edited by Mary Jacobus,<sup>31</sup> an attempt, as Maggie Humm observes "to assess syntactical patterns of slippage or dislocation as representative of women's shared refusal of aspects of language itself."<sup>32</sup>

As a result, the 1980s has witnessed a proliferation of publications exploring the ways in which gender is inscribed in literary texts and has initiated a new direction in feminist literary criticism known as "gender studies," a field of research which includes gender as a category of analysis. This development is a shift which Elaine Showalter in *Speaking of Gender*, which she edited in 1989, considers as "one of the most striking changes in the humanities in the 1980s."<sup>33</sup> Gender, as she explains, has been used, within Anglo-American feminist discourse, to denote "social, cultural and psychological meaning imposed upon biological sexual identity" (pp. 1-2). Gender theories, she points out, is not a phenomenon unique to literary studies. Homologous theories have developed in contiguous human disciplines such as philosophy, psychology, anthropology and history. Although gender denotes the socially constructed identity and "sex" the biological identity as male or female, the terms "gender" and "sexual difference" are often used interchangeably in feminist criticism. However, Elaine Showalter insists that "The term 'sexual difference' comes out of discourses of poststructuralism and psychoanalysis, and originates with the question of difference in language, subjectivity, and identity" (p. 3), while the term "gender" is used by materialist critics who emphasize history and social process in the construction of human identity as male or female.

*Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism*,<sup>34</sup> edited by Gayle Green and Coppelia Kahn in 1985 deals with the issues of the social construction of woman (G. Green and C. Kahn essay); the gender principle and the politics of language (Nelly Futchman essay); as well as the inscription of femininity in literary discourse (Ann Rosalind Jones essay). A year later, in 1986, Nancy K. Miller edited *The Poetics of Gender*,<sup>35</sup> whose individual essays brought into full awareness the fact that sexual difference is socially constructed, and attempted to show the constitutive role of this constructed difference in the production and reception of literature as well as in the canon formation. *Reading Woman: Essays in Feminist Criticism*,<sup>36</sup> edited by Mary

---

31. see above note 8.

32. "Feminist Literary Criticism in America and England," in *Women's Writing: A Challenge to Theory*, Moira Monteith, ed., (G. Britain: The Harvester Press Ltd., 1986), p. 105.

33. New York/London: Routledge, 1989, p. 1.

34. London/New York: Methuen, 1985.

35. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.

36. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.

Jacobus in the same year, addresses "both 'reading' and 'woman' — whether as reader, as writer, or as read; and especially as represented in and by Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis... both the question of feminist reading and the related (for me inseparable) question of reading 'woman' as a figure for sexual difference" (ix). *Gender and Theory*, edited by Linda Kaufman in 1989, further explores the issue of gender.<sup>37</sup>

The fact that Elaine Showalter, who has been accused of a rather stubborn insistence on the socio-cultural method and content in both her essays and books,<sup>38</sup> has been opening up to the subtler and more delicate connections of literature and consciousness, gender and language, is an example of the impact French feminist thought has had on American feminist criticism in the past decade.

Gender studies and the emphasis they place on the exploration of sexual difference in literary discourse has led to taking issue with other differences that may influence the use of language in writing, differences such as race and sexual preference. As a result, since the early 1980s there have been attempts to formulate a Black as well as a Lesbian feminist criticism. Adrienne Rich's crucial essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence"<sup>39</sup> enlarged the categories of lesbianism and black culture and provided American feminist criticism with a new dimension.<sup>40</sup> Lacanian and Derridean concepts, on the other hand, have also helped cultural feminists like Gayatri Spivak and Judith Kegan Gardiner to develop their own concepts of feminist culture.<sup>41</sup>

Yet, in spite of the impact that French Feminist Thought seems to have had on American literary discourse, as outlined above, and in spite of the appearance of books like Alice Jardine's *Gynesis: Configurations of Woman and Modernity*<sup>42</sup> which demonstrates the valorization of the feminine principle in French philosophical, psychological and literary discourse, the majority of American feminist critics are still skeptical about the theorization of feminist critical discourse. An instance of this stance is evinced in Janet Todd's *Feminist Literary Theory*, which, as late as 1988, comes as "a defense of the early socio-historical enterprise."<sup>43</sup> "My concern," says Todd

37. Linda Kaufman, ed., (Oxford/New York: Basil Blackwell, 1989).

38. Janet Todd, *Feminist Literary History*, (New York: Routledge, 1988), pp. 39-44.

39. in *On Lies, Secrets and Silence*; see note 27.

40. A. Snitow's essay in *Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, A. Snitow et al., eds (London: Virago, 1984) is a good introduction to the major shifts in American feminist criticism that occurred in the early 1980s as a result of debates about sexuality and culture.

41. see G. Spinak's "Unmaking and Making in *To the Lighthouse*" in *Women and Language in Literature and Society*, S. McConnell-Ginet et al., eds., (New York: Praeger, 1980); and J. K. Gardiner's "On Female Identity and Writing by Women" in *Writing and Sexual Difference*, pp. 177-191.

42. Ithaca, N. Y. and London: Cornell University Press, 1985.

43. see above note 38.



in her Introduction, "remains primarily with the socio-historical criticism which with all its limitations, has held resolutely to its rooted conviction that the subject is women, not the human or the humanist condition in general, not "woman," not a part of women like the vagina or the uterus, not an expression of women like sexuality or 'feminine writing'" (p. 4). Yet, she realizes that the confrontation of the two modes of feminist thinking, the socio-historical American and the psychoanalytical French, is inevitable but believes that "we should remain in contest and not rush towards some limiting and limited synthesis" (p. 6).

In spite of stances, beliefs and hopes, however, the process of intellectual history is irreversible. French thought has permeated American feminist criticism and the inevitable compromises have already been taking place, specially among the younger generation of scholars, to successfully render the "Franco-American disconnection" into a Franco-American alliance.

#### ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Μαρία Θ. Αναστασοπούλου, *Γένος και διαφορά: Γαλλική σκέψη και Αμερικανική Φεμινιστική Κριτική*

Το άρθρο αυτό εξετάζει την ιστορική εξέλιξη της Αμερικανικής φεμινιστικής κριτικής, όπως αναπτύχθηκε και εξελίχθηκε μετά τους αγώνες για τα πολιτικά δικαιώματα και την αναζωπύρωση του φεμινιστικού κινήματος κατά τη δεκαετία του 1960.

Παρουσιάζει τους λόγους που έκαναν αναγκαία την γέννηση και την ανάπτυξη της φεμινιστικής λογοτεχνικής κριτικής στη συγκεκριμένη αυτή στιγμή, τις πρώτες μαχητικές θέσεις που πήραν οι φεμινίστριες κριτικοί με σκοπό να εκθέσουν τον λανθασμένο, "κατά σεξουαλική αναλογία", τρόπο σκέψης του Δυτικού Ευρωπαϊκού Πολιτισμού, την "φαλλική λογοτεχνική κριτική", που κατά παράδοση εξασκούν οι άνδρες κριτικοί, τα στερεοτυπικά πρότυπα γυναικείων ρόλων, που άνδρες συγγραφείς έχουν προωθήσει μέσω της λογοτεχνίας, με σκοπό να διαωδύνουν την πατριαρχική ιδεολογία, την φύση και την δυναμική των σχέσεων μεταξύ των φύλων, όπως προβλήθηκε από άνδρες συγγραφείς, και τέλος τον αποκλεισμό των γυναικών συγγραφέων από τις ιστορίες της λογοτεχνίας και τη διδακτέα ύλη στα σχολεία και τα πανεπιστήμια.

Στη συνέχεια το άρθρο κάνει σαφή την αλλαγή που παρουσιάστηκε από τις αρχές της δεκαετίας του 1970, οπότε η φεμινιστική κριτική

άρχισε να ασχολείται περισσότερο με κείμενα γυναικών συγγραφέων, να ξαναφέρνει στην επικαιρότητα κείμενα γυναικών, τα οποία είχαν “χαθεί” ή “ξεχαστεί”, να επανερμηνεύει κείμενα γυναικών συγγραφέων, να εξερευνά τα θέματα που τις απασχολούν, το είδος που διαλέγουν να εκφράσουν τον προβληματισμό τους, τις δομές που παράγουν καθώς και την ψυχοδυναμική της γυναικειάς δημιουργικότητας. Σ’ αυτή τη φάση, που η φημισμένη κριτικός και καθηγήτρια στο πανεπιστήμιο του Πρίνστον χαρακτήρισε σαν «γυναικοκριτική» (“*gynocritics*”), έμφαση δόθηκε στο θέμα μιας λογοτεχνικής γλώσσας και έκφρασης που να καθορίζεται από το φύλο της δημιουργού.

Σ’ αυτό το σημείο της εξέλιξης της Αμερικανικής φεμινιστικής λογοτεχνικής κριτικής, που πάντα υπήρξε εμπειρική και πρακτική, δηλ. πάντα σε στενή σχέση με το ίδιο το λογοτεχνικό κείμενο, οι Γαλλικές θεωρίες για μια “γυναικεία γραφή” (“*écriture féminine*”), όπως αναπτύχθηκαν από τις Γαλλίδες θεωρητικούς Helen, Cixous, Luce Irigaray και την Βουλγαρογαλλίδα Julia Kristeva, άρχισαν να μεταφράζονται στα αγγικά. Το άρθρο αυτό εξετάζει την υποδοχή των θεωριών αυτών από τις Αμερικανίδες κριτικούς και την επίδρασή τους πάνω στην εξέλιξη της Αμερικανικής κριτικής σκέψης. Παρά την επιφύλαξη και τον σκεπτικισμό που εκδηλώθηκε στην αρχή, ο διάλογος που ακολούθησε την επαφή των δύο διαφορετικών απόψεων και προσεγγίσεων έδωσε την ώθηση για τη γέννηση, στη δεκαετία του 1980, μελετών που εξερευνούν τον τρόπο με τον οποίο το φύλο του/της συγγραφέα καταγράφεται στο λογοτεχνικό κείμενο, που παράγει. Η νέα αυτή τάση στη λογοτεχνική φεμινιστική κριτική έχει ονομαστεί “Γενετικές Σπουδές” (“*Gender Studies*”) και είναι ένα πεδίο έρευνας, στο οποίο το γένος/φύλο του συγγραφέα συνυπολογίζεται ως παράγων ανάλυσης των λογοτεχνικών κειμένων. Σε αντίθεση με τις αρχικές θέσεις των φεμινιστριών κριτικών, θέσεις οι οποίες αντανakλούσαν το φόβο των γυναικών ότι η διαφοροποίησή τους από το άλλο φύλο παρουσίαζε τον κίνδυνο να “γκετοποιηθούν” οι γυναίκες συγγραφείς, σε όλη τη διάρκεια της δεκαετίας του 1980, υποστηρίζεται, ότι η διαφορά όχι μόνο είναι θεμιτή, αλλά αποτελεί και το στοιχείο που διαφοροποιεί τα κείμενα ανδρών και γυναικών συγγραφέων. Οι “γενετικές σπουδές” έδωσαν ώθηση, ώστε πέρα από το γένος/φύλο ως παράγοντας ανάλυσης να συνυπολογίζεται ο φυλετικός παράγοντας καθώς και ο παράγοντας της σεξουαλικής προτίμησης. Έτσι έχουμε δει τα τελευταία χρόνια την ανάπτυξη της αфро-αμερικανικής θεωρίας λογοτεχνικής κριτικής καθώς και της λεσβίας ή ομοφυλοφυλικής λογοτεχνικής κριτικής.