CREATING FEMALE COMMUNITY: REPETITION AND RENEWAL IN THE

NOVELS OF NICOLE BROSSARD, MICHELLE CLIFF, MARYSE CONDÉ, AND

GISÈLE PINEAU

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Title: Creating Female Community: Repetition and Renewal in the Novels of Nicole Brossard, Michelle Cliff, Maryse Condé, and Gisèle Pineau

In this project I explore the creation of female community in the novels of four contemporary feminist writers: Nicole Brossard, Michelle Cliff, Maryse Condé, and Gisèle Pineau. I contend that in their diverse representations of female community, these women writers provide collaborative feminist models of resistance, creative transformation, and renewal. Building on Judith Butler's articulation of agency as variation on repetition, I argue that these writers transform the space of the novel in order to tell these stories of community, revitalizing this form as a potential site of collaborative performance of identity. They offer an alternative vision that is not only feminist and collective, but also transnational, translinguistic, historical, and epistemological – challenging and reconfiguring the way in which we understand our world.

I develop the project thematically in terms of coming-of-age through and into female community (what the communities in these novels look like and the relationship between individuals and communities, seen through the process of individual maturity). I then consider the formal construction of female community through the collective

narrative voice (both within the novels and outside them, in the form of each writer's collective body of engaged feminist dialogue in interviews and theory). Finally, I explore female community through alternative genealogies and quests for origin (demonstrating the implications of these novels' vision for transforming a more traditional worldview, with transnational communities and the transmission of historical knowledge across generations of women).

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I dedicate this dissertation to my mother, Deborah Sue Ellis, in loving memory

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: FEMALE COMMUNITY IN THE NOVELS OF BROSSARD,

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> In a sense, all signification takes place within the
> orbit of the compulsion to repeat; 'agency,' then,
> is to be located within the possibility of a
> variation on that repetition…it is only *within* the
> practices of repetitive signifying that a
> subversion of identity becomes possible.
>
> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble,* 198-199

In Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble,* which posits that gender and identity are constructed through repetition of a series of performances throughout people's lives, the category of woman is challenged, as is any collective political action based on an ideal of shared "womanhood." For Butler, the idea of two essential and distinct genders is a myth, part of a "regulatory fiction" maintained and reinforced through a repetition of performances carried out by and inscribed upon the body, such as reproductive heterosexuality. In her conclusion – "From Parody to Politics" – she challenges the work of traditional feminism, which works for the rights of women, and insists that political action should instead be directed towards exposing and subverting this regulatory fiction, and questioning and remaking our existing categories of gender and identity. Our ability

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to do so – the possibility of agency – arises when we begin to vary that repetition of performance.[1]

In this project, I take Butler's arguments – and in particular her definition of agency as a variation on repetition – as a starting point for literary analysis in a new direction. My own purpose is not so much to expose and subvert the "regulatory fiction" that is gender and identity, as it is to explore something new: namely, what the idea of gender as a performance allows us to *create*, or the reimagining and reconfiguration – the *transformation* rather than the subversion – of gender. In this project, I pursue and analyze one such reconfiguration – the creation of female community in the writing of Nicole Brossard, Michelle Cliff, Maryse Condé, and Gisèle Pineau.

I contend that in their diverse representations of female community – their writing, imagining, performing, and structuring the stories of mothers, daughters, friends and lovers developing over generations and across boundaries of language and nationality – these women writers provide collaborative feminist models of resistance, creative transformation, and renewal. Insomuch as narrative has the power to shape our understanding of our reality,[2] these novels offer powerful alternative visions of what women's lives are and could be, in creating women's voices that resist the confines of

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1. In particular, Butler analyzes the subversive potential of gender parody such as drag as an example of variation on performance of gendered identity: "In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency… The notion of gender parody defended here does not assume that there is an original which such parodic identities imitate. Indeed, the parody is of the very notion of an original" (187-188).

2. Contemporary theory has taught us that we can access reality only through language – an important tenant of structuralism for example is that we can access the referent only through symbol, neither the signifier nor the signified having a one-to-one correspondence with reality. As the way we position, understand and represent ourselves individually and collectively through language, narrative representation is one of the principle ways we construct social reality and imagined community. Thus, study of the symbols we use to define ourselves, and the way we narrate our own stories, tells us at least as much about "reality" as a supposedly objective empirical summation of facts.

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patriarchal culture in building female community, revitalizing the novel as a potential site of collaborative and transformative performance of identity.

I focus my exploration of female community on nine works in particular: Nicole Brossard's *Le désert mauve* (1987) and *La capture du sombre (*2007); Michelle Cliff's *Abeng* (1984), *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987), and *Into the Interior* (2010); Maryse Condé's *Moi, Tituba sorcière…noire de Salem* (1986) and *Victoire, les saveurs et les mots* (2006); and Gisèle Pineau's *L'exil selon Julia* (1996) and *Mes quatre femmes* (2007). Each work has been chosen for the complexity of its imagined female communities and its commitment to the representation of generations of women's lives. Moreover, these works represent a reconceptualization of female community that is diverse and transnational on the part of each of the four authors, who themselves come from a variety of national backgrounds, including Quebec (Brossard); Jamaica and the United States (Cliff); and Guadeloupe and France (Condé and Pineau).

On the one hand, I explore the complex ways these female communities are performed and problematized within these narratives, through negotiation among individuals, communities, and patriarchal reality. In my analysis, rather than eschewing the category of woman or the concept of feminism, I look at the potential of these female communities as collaborative models of feminist resistance and creativity, based as they are not on uncomplicated solidarity or homogeneity but rather on collective resistance to patriarchal culture; engagement with women's lived experience over generations and across national and linguistic borders; and commitment to creative expression through the creation of multiple voices and perspectives.

On the other hand, I also look at how these communities are created through the way they are structured in narrative patterns of repetition and renewal, which include multiple narrators or levels of narration; non-linear chronology and manipulation of time and space; historical figures such as Tituba and Nanny being re-imagined and re-claimed; and alternative genealogies in which daughters transform their mothers' and grandmothers' stories. I argue that these authors' transformative and feminist visions of female community are created and performed not only *within* their texts, but also that the texts themselves, through the collaborative models of readers, writers, and interpreters they enact, perform an important variation on more traditional novelistic representations of women, which tend to represent individual journeys, whatever their explicit or implicit confrontation with patriarchal reality. The nine novels of this project, in their complex performances of gender, identity, and community, create a distinctive feminist agency that deserves recognition and further study as such.

While collaborative models of political resistance are not new to feminism, and while narrative techniques such as multiple narrators are not new to the novel – the postcolonial novel in particular, for example, often makes use of multiple narrators in its resistance to colonial or neocolonial univocal cultural authority – what is at stake in my project is the particular combination of these elements and the translation of these collaborative models to the feminist novel. The nine novels I explore here demand attention to the layers of their narrative construction of female community, as well as to their thematic portrayal of the same within their texts, and these multiple levels of female community both necessitate and revitalize in turn the potential of a methodological approach based in feminist theories of narrative. Central to my project is the idea that

such an approach, while currently underutilized, is essential for demonstrating the potential of the novel of female community as a site for feminist agency, resistance, and creativity; I hope to demonstrate with this contribution to feminist narrative theory the continued dynamism of the field itself.

The Realist Novel and Its Particular Construction of Reality

In employing feminist theories of narrative, I build upon extensive previous scholarship, including narrative studies in general and the theory of the novel in particular. Much of this scholarship has focused on the history of the novel and its historical rise in popularity in the form of the realist novel during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Europe. In concentrating on the novel of female community as a variation on previous patterns of repetition, I argue that this type of novel represents an important departure from the traditional realist novel, the latter being associated with a historically stable form and related worldview – a particular national, political, and gendered reality to which the feminist novel of female community poses imagined alternatives.

The worldview represented by the historical realist novel coincided with the development of capitalist modernity, which led to such social changes as the rise of the middle class and a resulting increase of the reading public; an impetus towards imperialism; new grand narratives of history and historical progression; expanded concepts of nationalism and the nation-state; an emphasis on individuality and interiority; and a belief in separate spheres for men and women in the form of the cult of

domesticity.[3] With the increase of leisure time that modernity engendered, for the middle class in particular, more and more people began to read the novel, which became one of the dominant cultural forms of the nineteenth century. Within these novels, conventional characters and plots (such as the marriage plot or the *Bildungsroman*) began to enact individual performances of capitalism, patriarchy, and national identity, causing these values to solidify in the collective popular imagination.

The imagined stable reality of these novels was further developed through the *form* of the novel itself, as events within the novel unfolded within a specific national space and according to a progressive, linear chronology. As Ian Watt explains in his book *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (1957), the realist novel was characterized not only by formulaic plots and genres, but also by particular narrative elements designed to create verisimilitude, characterized by "the particularization of time, place and person; a natural and lifelike sequence of action; and the creation of a literary style which gives the most exact verbal and rhythmical equivalent possible of the object desired" (291). Watt understands the realist novel in relation to previous narratives such as the epic, in which different conceptions of time echoed a different worldview. The new progressive view of time coincided with notions of chronological development, giving underlying justification and support to economic, industrial development and national, imperialist domination.

Yet the themes and structure of the novel did more than merely mimetically represent the ideology of the age. Twentieth-century theorists of the novel such as Fredric

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3. In referring to the "cult of domesticity," I am following the way this concept has been described by Gubert and Gilbert, as a code of behaviors and idealized virtues for women such as "modesty, gracefulness, purity, delicacy, civility, complacency, reticence, chastity, affability, [and] politeness" (23); this is elaborated upon later in this chapter.

Jameson, Ian Watt, Nancy Armstrong, Franco Moretti, and Benedict Anderson all describe, to a greater or lesser extent, the role of the realist novel in *spreading* political ideology and in helping to establish an ideal social order with codified relationships between individuals and communities. For example, Benedict Anderson argues in *Imagined Communities*, his influential study of the culture of nationalism, that it is in part through the realist novel – its narrative conventions of time, space, plot, and interiority, as well as its themes – that national communities became such a powerful part of the European cultural and political imagination. Like Ian Watt, he identifies the novel's conception of time as a contrast to pre-modernity's sense of religious, circular time; he explains that modernity's concept of time is realized in the novel as "a complex gloss upon the meanwhile," establishing the idea of nation as a collective of individual members simultaneously experiencing the same shared political reality. This imagined sense of connectedness is so pervasive that it masks more problematic aspects of capitalist society: "it [the nation] is imagined as a *community,* because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is also conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (7).

Such a harmonious ideal of shared identity did not remain uncontested in the realist novel, however. Although it acted as a platform upon which such simultaneity could be enacted, thus legitimizing capitalist modernity, the realist novel also served as site for the exploration – and ultimate suppression – of new social conflicts between individuals and communities. The instability of the age and resulting anxieties, over the changes to society caused by capitalist culture and the rise of industrialism, were given expression and then reassuringly contained in the form of the novel. According to Georg

Lukács, whose work *Theory of the Novel* (1920) was one of the first attempts to systematically describe the structure of the novel, the novel differed from earlier forms such as the epic in dealing not with an essential and integrative view of the world but rather with a troubling dissonance between reality and individual subjectivity. This is reflected in the inner form of the novel, or the "process of the problematic individual's journeying towards himself" (80), sometimes at the risk of interiority overshadowing exterior reality. However, Lukács described the outer form of the novel as "essentially biographical" (77), which serves to reduce the problematic "infinity" or "unlimited nature" of the novel in relating all events and details, no matter how disconnected, fragmented, or trivial, back to the central character and his life (81). According to Lukács, this biographical form and the element of time are what unify and ultimately structure the potential chaos of the novel: "The unrestricted, uninterrupted flow of time is the unifying principle of the homogeneity that rubs the sharp edges off each heterogeneous fragment…Time brings order into the chaos of men's lives" (125).

Franco Moretti elaborates on this idea of individuals at odds with historical and community reality in his work *The Way of the World: The* Bildungsroman *in European Culture* (1980), in arguing that the "most exemplary" form of the novel to reflect and contain the dynamic changes of the times was the *Bildungsroman,* or the novel of individual formation.[4] According to Moretti, in the classic European *Bildungsroman,* the figure of youth, confronted by social instability and the possibility of class mobility, represents the turbulence of society, while the ephemeral nature of youth itself – its logical end in maturity, old age, or death – contains this turbulence and represents the ultimate stability of society and social class. Moretti explores the way the youthful male

4. See chapter II for a fuller discussion of Moretti's work.

individuals of these novels grapple with the demands of society as a whole, finishing in either compromise and maturity – seamless integration into the community – or resistance and death.[5] He emphasizes the importance of studying the form of the novel to understanding how narrative constructs political reality, an argument I draw upon in my own project:

> formal patterns are what literature uses in order to master historical reality, and to reshape its materials in the chosen ideological key: if form is disregarded, not only do we lose the complexity (and therefore the interest) of the whole process – we miss its strictly *political* significance too. (xiii)

Moretti goes on to argue, however, that the *Bildungsroman* was a particularized genre related only to white male individuals. According to his introduction, there was a certain limited tradition of the female *Bildungsroman* in England, but it lacked political significance, since it did not represent a similar struggle between individual and society.[6] My own work contests the idea that the study of the form of the novel should remain limited to the exploration of certain individuals and communities. Instead, I argue that the social construction of gender is an important part of historical modernity, the legacy of

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5. Moretti also relates these novels to specific historical circumstances and national changes, comparing for example the relative stability of the English novel to more problematic French examples, connecting these to the "Bloodless Revolution" and to the French Revolution, respectively.

6. "And the *Bildungsroman* of the others – women, workers, African-Americans…? [The deepest] reason for those exclusions [in my work] lies in the very elements that characterize the *Bildungsroman* as a form: wide cultural formation, professional mobility, full social freedom – for a long time, the west European middle-class man held a virtual monopoly on these" (Moretti ix-x). While I acknowledge that social mobility is not necessarily a central concern in the feminist novel of female community, I argue that the definition of the *Bildungsroman* as a site of struggle between the individual and society is far from irrelevant in this new context.

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which continues to be part of our everyday reality as well as of our cultural imagination. If literature truly attempts to "master historical reality," then we must carefully consider the role of the gendered component of the realist novel in shaping gendered and political reality, and we must read the contemporary feminist novel of community through the way it attempts to rewrite that particular configuration of reality.

The Political Implications of Femininity in the Nineteenth-Century Domestic Novel and the Female *Bildungsroman*

While several theorists of the novel have explored gender specifically in the realist novel, most are concerned with the way gender construction in these novels connects to – and often masks – political ideologies other than gender, indicating the political stakes involved in posing alternatives to the realist novel and its worldview. Ian Watt, for example, argues that the marriage plot, which appears in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novel, and which exists not only as a theme but also as that which determines the broad outline of the plot (for example, divisions between lovers which need to be resolved, ending in marriage), should be regarded as a figure for multiple social concerns, rather than an ideal model of feminine conduct. For example, in looking at Richardson's novel *Pamela* (1740), which depicts the relationship and ultimate marriage between an aristocratic man and a serving girl, Watt explains, "[i]n *Pamela* the relationship of the lovers has all the absolute quality of romantic love; and yet it can realistically be made to involve many of the basic problems of everyday life – conflicts between social classes and their different outlooks, for example, and conflicts between

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the sexual instinct and the moral code" (137-138). For Watt, *Pamela* is a middle-class fantasy about the mobility of social class, one that draws in both the female and male middle-class reader alike.

Nancy Armstrong offers a similar perspective in her analysis of the construction of gendered ideals and spheres in the realist novel, in her work *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (1987). She too argues that the portrayal of gender in these works masks other ideological concerns, describing the way that what we think of as the natural separation between the private and the political – and between female and male spheres – is itself historically constituted and politically motivated. Specifically, she reads the domestic novel as empowering a stable middle class through emphasis on individuality over community. She argues that in the domestic novel, political conflict is displaced onto sexual relations, thereby shaping the political unconscious and what she refers to as "the gendering of human identity" (14), a process whereby the realist novel works to embrace inner truth based on qualities of mind tied to gender difference. She asks that we consider the possibility that the new middle class is represented specifically by a *female* individual, a move which empowers middle-class political and ideological stability over possibilities of communal political action, as the social contract is displaced onto the figure of the sexual contract and the marriage plot.

While Armstrong describes a particular power afforded to the middle-class woman in this process, and acknowledges contemporary concerns about this power, as "the ideal of domesticity has grown only more powerful as it has become less a matter of fact and more a matter of fiction" (251), she ultimately considers gendered ideology as a diversion within the novel, or as the visible means by which other ideology gains

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unconscious cultural ground. She argues that the construction of ideals of femininity and female conduct cannot be considered apart from their role in the construction of capitalist modernity, which for her takes precedence. For Armstrong, this implies that feminist attempts to explore representations of women and women's writing serve only to reinforce the "dyadic" hold of gendered spheres in our political unconscious – like Butler, she seems to suggest that an awareness of the historical construction of gender and sexuality should encourage us to move past an adherence to gender and to focus our efforts on the political ideology being thereby repressed.

For theorist Anne McClintock, the power of the nineteenth-century middle-class woman is subject to even more complex intersections of ideological forces. In her work *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (1995), she argues that gender is inextricably intertwined with both race and class in the process of European colonial expansion and control. McClintock describes the way all three interrelated and interdependent concepts are furthered in the novel, as well as other cultural texts.[7] This cultural configuration was used both to justify a patriarchal, imperial, and capitalist worldview and to limit the potential power of women, European racial "others," and lower-class citizens. Her work relativizes the power of the middle class woman identified by Armstrong, as she illustrates the way such power, while being limited by patriarchal hierarchy, is nevertheless made complicit in racial and social hierarchies:

7. While Anderson focused on the novel and the newspaper as indicative of "the gloss upon the meanwhile," McClintock also takes into account photographs, advertisements, diaries, and various examples of pseudoscientific discourse (phrenology, diagrams of the "family of man"), exploring different racialized and gendered stereotypes through these diverse media. For example, advertisements for soap emphasized a desire to "clean up" Africa, while Orientalist art attempted to "unveil" and uncover the exoticized woman of the Middle East.

the rationed privileges of race all too often put white women in positions

of decided – if borrowed – power, not only over colonized women but

also over colonized men. As such, white women were not the hapless

onlookers of empire but were ambiguously complicit both as colonizers

and colonized, privileged and restricted, acted upon and acting. (6)

McClintock explains that the relationship between the cult of domesticity and

imperialism was reciprocal, as both involved hierarchal framing of power and resistance.

While the cult of domesticity legitimized imperialism through offering it a hierarchical

system of rhetoric and practice, such as active male conquest of passive female bodies,

imperialism reinforced the cult of domesticity by reenacting it in colonial spaces:

the colonies – in particular Africa – became a theater for exhibiting,

amongst other things, the cult of domesticity and the reinvention of

patriarchy [through] some of the stalwart themes of colonial discourse: the

feminizing of the land, the myth of the empty lands, the crisis of origins,

domestic colonialism, the soap saga and the emergence of commodity

fetishism, the reordering of land and labor, the invention of the idea of

racial idleness – as well as complex and myriad forms of resistance to these

processes. (16-17)

Rather than focusing on the limited power of middle-class women over the domestic

sphere, McClintock sees the cult of domesticity itself as an important symbolic system

within which imperial power was both established and contested.

I argue, however, that all of these approaches, while offering valuable and

necessary insight into the interrelated nature of these processes of societal construction,

tend to overshadow the complex negotiation between the way women are imagined in the novel, the conditions of their social reality, and the power and extent of their resistance to that reality, something valuable in its own right. While I acknowledge these scholars' contributions to the study of women's writing – particularly in regards to their illustration of the stakes and implications of such writing, and of the complexity of the role of gender in establishing and maintaining an imagined stable overall worldview – I believe their work ignores something very important.

Again, I would argue instead for the study of feminist writing as the study not of what is being politically created or suppressed, but rather of what is being posed as imagined alternative, by means of the very form that does so much to create the restrictive reality described by Armstrong and McClintock. For Armstrong, such gendered spheres enforce individuality upon the Western world, substituting collective political action with an individual domesticated middle-class moral code. Yet if the enforcing of individuality on the Western world has such critical and vast political implications, and if this is done in large part through imagining an idealized female domestic sphere, then surely it is worth considering those novels which write community instead, and which implicate, compel, and interpellate the reader into such an imagined community. To ignore the workings of gender in the novel in such a way is to ignore what these novels *do* as well as what they *obscure* – and to ignore what they are capable of creating.

> To read women's literature is to see and hear repeatedly a chafing against the 'unsatisfactory reality' contained in the maxim.
> Nancy K. Miller, *Subject to Change: Reading Feminist Writing,* 357

Preceding McClintock and Armstrong's works is a vast scholarship on nineteenth- and twentieth-century women's writing, which illustrates the extent to which the novel can be – and has been – a site for the creation of feminist resistance to patriarchal culture and its traditionally corresponding worldview; this next section is dedicated to exploring that scholarship. The nine novels I explore throughout this project are indebted to both this tradition of resistant women's writing and to various feminist critical approaches to understanding that resistance. As I trace a history of this scholarship, however, and how it shapes my own methodological approach, as well as how it has influenced what I am designating the feminist novel of female community, I argue that this type of novel goes one step further than its predecessors in combating the "unsatisfactory reality" of patriarchal culture, in its particular narrative construction of female community.

This scholarship, consisting of a variety of feminist approaches to literary texts, became especially prominent during the 1970s and 1980s in France, England, and the United States, coinciding with the women's liberation movement and collective political action during this time. Feminist literary criticism was inspired by earlier feminist texts

such Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and Simone de Beauvoir's *Le deuxième sexe* (1948), which posited the idea of the social construction of gender, challenging the idea of gender as it had come to be represented in Western culture: as an essential, natural and static state of being. Feminist theorists recognized women's writing as an important site for the production of gendered identity, and focused their efforts on texts which resisted traditional configurations of that identity. If, as Jacques Lacan suggested, women were forced to remain outside of language, and the Symbolic, patriarchal order created by language,[8] the question for feminist scholars of women's writing became how these writers could work from within this system to tell their own stories. How did women create their own textual authority?

Major approaches to the question of narrative and authority in women's writing involved on the one hand a commitment to recovering a history and tradition of women's literature; and on the other hand a search for a feminist poetics, or a feminist theory of narrative which would build on more conventional narratology and theory of the novel to offer insight into – and even a universal definition of – feminist texts. The first approach concentrated in particular on nineteenth-century novels, and examined the female *Bildungsroman*, a form found to be so limited by Moretti, as a site of potential resistance to patriarchal culture. This genre was of particular interest due to its engagement with the formation of the gendered individual through education and other social processes, whereby girls, in coming of age and becoming women, were encouraged to emulate ideal patterns of feminine behavior and development. In their attempts to chart women's

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8. See for example Anne McClintock's section on "Lacan and the Disavowal of Women's Agency": "women are doomed to inhabit the tongueless zone of the imaginary. We are forbidden citizenship in the Symbolic…If women speak at all, it is with male tongues, as ventriloquists of phallic desire. If we look, it is with a male gaze" (*Imperial Leather* 192). Chapters III and IV offer further discussion on this issue.

writing – Ellen Moers' *Literary Women* (1976) being one of the most well-known and cited examples – scholars of these nineteenth-century novels gave critical consideration to both the form and content of these texts, connecting literary representations of individual women and female community to material, historical and cultural situations of women.[9]

For example, Pauline Nestor takes a historical approach to women's writing in her work *Female Friendships and Communities: Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell* (1985), describing nineteenth-century women's community as being realized in England during a critical historical moment, when a "surplus" of women in the population (around half a million women, according to Nestor) led to a significant number of unmarried women. As these women were navigating what they could offer in their own right to their community – as nurses or as nuns for example – public debates sprang up about the usefulness and dangers of women living together without men. Nestor makes intriguing parallels between these societal concerns and the writing of female friendships and communities in the works of three important nineteenth-century British women writers: Mrs. Gaskell, Charlotte Brontë, and George Eliot. She also emphasizes their relation to each other, as contemporaneous women writers, seen for example in their correspondence in which they commented on each other's works. Like Armstrong, Nestor sees a particular power for women and for the woman writer during this time, although she argues that ultimately, these prototypes of female community fell short of true resistance:

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9. See also Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) as another attempt at historically reclaiming a tradition of women writers; Guber and Gilbert acknowledge, in both their original and updated preface, the way their work builds on that of Moers and Showalter (see for example Guber and Gilbert xxvvii).

Despite the polarization of opinion [on the "female capacities for friendship and communality"], certain preoccupations and perspectives remained constant…These included the conception of women's friendships within a conventional framework of heterosexual roles, the related notion of female friends compensating for the lack of a male and recognition of a need for male authority. Underlying all was a continuing definition of women and women's friendships in relation to men. (5)

These novels, then, showed conceptions of resistant community, representative of a new historical strength of female community in the public sphere, yet this community was circumscribed by the patriarchal culture in which it struggled to take shape. I would further argue that this resistance was also limited by taking place within the confines of the narrative conventions of the traditional realist novel.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, on the other hand, argue in their work *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979) that a clear and resistant female poetics can be located in this same tradition of the British nineteenth-century novel by women, in the way that such novels contend with male constructions of femininity, and male dominated literary tropes of ideal and problematic female behavior. For these feminist critics, whose work is ironically itself an important example of the power of collaborative writing, the process of self-awareness and construction of authority which led earlier women writers to "escape" from "male texts" (13) is above all individual in its resistance. That the woman writer's confrontation of patriarchal culture is an individual process can be seen in the way Gilbert and Gubar develop the central metaphor of their project:

the woman writer's self-contemplation may be said to have begun with a

searching glance into the mirror of the male-inscribed literary text. There

she would see at first only those eternal lineaments fixed on her like a mask

to conceal her dreadful and bloody link to nature. But looking long enough,

hard enough, she would see…an enraged prisoner: herself…[This process

of vision] is central to the feminist poetics we are trying to construct. (15)

More specifically, the individual woman writer had to "come to terms" with the way

male writers had previously represented women in their texts, in particular in terms of

"extreme images of 'angel' and 'monster' which male authors have generated for her"

(17).

Gilbert and Gubar convincingly demonstrate, as do Armstrong and McClintock,

the extent to which these stereotypes were both ingrained and naturalized in fiction and in

culture. They describe the domestic angel of the house as constructed and idealized not

only through literature but also, beginning in the eighteenth century, through conduct

books which prescribed models of qualities and behavior for women, or "the creation of

those 'eternal feminine' virtues of modesty, gracefulness, purity, delicacy, civility,

complacency, reticence, chastity, affability, politeness" (23). Such an idealized woman

was to control the domestic sphere into which her husband could retreat from his active

life in the public, political sphere: "enshrined within her home, a Victorian angel-woman

should become her husband's holy refuge from the blood and sweat that inevitably

accompanies a 'life of significant action'" (24). Such images were so pervasive and

powerful that they urged Virginia Woolf to demand that "the angel be killed" in *A Room

of One's Own* (quoted in Gilbert and Gubar 17).

In this context, the image of the "monster" became prominent in literature as the foil to the domestic angel, representative of woman's potential for aggressive independent action, rather than submissive domesticity: "the monster-woman, threatening to replace her angelic sister, embodies intransigent female autonomy" (28). Male authors used this trope to vilify – to make monstrous – the concept of female resistance and independence. Gilbert and Gubar argue that women must of necessity contend with this male authored dichotomy in their own writing, and that few have so far been successful at dispelling these images (at the time of their writing at least, in 1979): "the images of 'angel' and 'monster' have been so ubiquitous throughout literature by men that they have also pervaded women's writing to such an extent that few women have definitively 'killed' either figure" (17). On the other hand, they argue that what women writers have achieved in beginning to resist and play with these images is not insignificant; since the eighteenth century, these writers have been "creating fictional worlds in which patriarchal images and conventions were severely, radically revised" (44), and these revisions constitute a female poetics.[10]

While I do not disagree with the power of these diametrically opposing images in the cultural imagination, and with the need to radically revise them, in my own project I argue that the resistant potential of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century domestic novel by women is undermined by the authority of patriarchal reality, inscribed in the formal and restrictive narrative conventions of the realist novel. It is my contention that the nine

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10. It is worth noting that so pervasive have these images been, that women's writing has continued to engage and revise them well into the twentieth century. One contemporary example that comes to mind is Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon* (1983), in which Arthurian legend is re-imagined in part through the character foils of Morgaine and Gwenyfar, written not as "monster" and "angel," respectively, but rather as a powerful woman operating from within an alternative pagan culture, and as a woman falling under the sway of patriarchal Christianity's message of sexuality as sin.

examples of feminist novels of female community I explore go beyond these earlier examples of resistance in the creation of their own alternative worldview and in the way that this worldview is narratively constructed. In contrasting these earlier resistant gestures and those created by more developed images and performances of female community, I argue that while these previous novels remain inscribed into the logical worldview from which they are written, the latter novels transform the ground from which they write.

In exploring this transformation of narrative ground, I build in particular upon a theoretical movement during the 1980s to explicitly link feminism with theory of the novel, in an attempt to analyze what is subversive in the nineteenth-century novel and what twentieth- and twenty-first century writing does to go beyond this in creating alternative narration, particularly in literary movements such as *écriture féminine* and modernist experimental fiction, which I see as important precursors to the feminist novel of female community. While theorists such as Nestor and Gilbert and Gubar focus on changing historical circumstances and resulting shifts in narrative themes, my own work is more indebted to the narrative scholarship of theorists such as Nancy K. Miller and Susan Lanser, who explore what it means to transform narrative structure and technique in the creation of female textual authority, demonstrating that the importance of studying form cannot be overestimated when looking at political and ideological formation of gender within the novel, or at the novel as a site of formation and performance of gender identity. Their attention to narratology illustrates just how subversive it is to attempt to transform the novel – to challenge from within the very form so instrumental in stabilizing gender ideology. They offer critical insight into the way women rewrite the

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novel: not only through critiquing the novel's traditional aims and themes, but also in subverting narrative conventions and challenging patriarchal language on the field of language itself.

Both Miller and Lanser draw on traditional narratology to make their points about the transformation of narrative in women's writing. While many theorists have provided a variety of narrative terminology in order to categorize the way narrative signifies logic and structures events, Gerard Genette's description of the different levels of narration at work in the novel continues to serve as a particularly valuable conceptual framework for the analysis of imaginative narrative play on the part of particular literary movements and authors. In his work *Narrative Discourse Revisited,* Genette proposes a threefold distinction between "*story* (the totality of narrated events), *narrative* (the discourse, oral or written, that narrates them), and *narrating* (the real or fictive act that produces the discourse – in other words, the very act of recounting)" (13).[11] Attention to these narrative distinctions can demonstrate the extent to which writers are challenging realist narrative conventions and by extension, the worldview supported by this kind of narrative. For example, in the realist novel, these different levels of narrative were logically balanced to create a reality effect, with events being put together in a linear, chronological fashion, and recounted by a clearly designated and often privileged narrator (often referred to as "omniscient third-person point of view").

In the 1980s, feminist scholars were debating the usefulness of such traditional narrative categories to the study of women's writing and its fluid, dynamic approach to the representation of women's lives. Miller, for example, describes new feminist ways of

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11. In Genette's original French text: "entre *histoire* (l'ensemble d'événements racontés, *récit* (le discours, oral ou écrit, qui les raconte) et *narration* (l'acte reel our fictive qui produit ce discours, c'est-à-dire le fait même de raconter)" (10).

conceiving of narrative as she explores the theory and practice of *écriture féminine*,

which she defines in her chapter "Plots and Plausabilities in Women's Fiction," written

during the heyday of this literary movement, as "a process or a practice by which the

female *body,* with its peculiar drives and rhythms, inscribes itself as text" (341). Miller

explains that in playing with language and narrative convention, these French women

writers challenged the logic and versimilitude of traditional male texts. Miller points to

Luce Irigaray's description of this process as an unmasking of the feminine:

> To play with mimesis is…for a woman to try to recover the place of her
>
> exploitation by language, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to
>
> it. It is to resubmit herself….to ideas – notably about her – elaborate in and
>
> through a masculine logic, but to "bring out" by an effect of playful
>
> repetition what was to remain hidden: the recovery of a possible operation
>
> of the feminine in language. (Luce Irigaray, quoted and translated by
>
> Miller, 343).

For the proponents of *écriture féminine,* the goal was to find a way, through repetition

and transformation of language, to express the reality of women's lives, and in particular

their sexuality, in narrative. Miller's own description of a feminist text – marked by what

she calls a "female signature" (17) – has much in common with this philosophy of

écriture féminine in that Miller too emphasizes a strategy of narrative disruption of the

logic underlying traditional texts. Miller explains that feminist writing is that which,

among other characteristics, "contests the available plots of female development of

Bildung and embodies dissent from the dominant tradition in a certain number of

recurrent narrative gestures, especially in the modalities of closure that Rachel DuPlessis has called 'writing beyond the ending'" (8).

For Miller, however, playing with mimesis through "playful repetition" of narrative technique is less powerful than transformation of plots and the female subjects who drive them: "the particular shape of a heroine's destiny in novels by women, the improbable twists of plot so common in these novels, is a form of insistence about the [difficult] relation of women to writing" (39). In other words, Miller insists not on the successful representation of the reality of women's lives in fiction – which for her is both impossible to achieve and something which runs the risk of substituting one essential femininity for another – but rather on conscious and committed efforts to make clear the difficulty of operating from within a patriarchal narrative system, and to challenge that system from within the structure of the novel.

Following this logic, she argues that the importance of narrative experiments in feminist texts lies not in whether they can be considered to truly embody a feminine style, but rather in the way they leave the text open for reinterpretation:

> to look for *uniquely* "feminine" textual indexes that can be deciphered in "blind" readings is pointless…There are no infallible signs, no fail-safe technique by which to determine the gender of an author. But that is not the point of the *post*-compensatory gesture that follows what I call the new literary history. At stake instead is a reading that *consciously* re-creates the object it describes, attentive always to a difference. (342)

In other words, for Miller, feminist narratology allows the feminist critic to transform a text through re-reading it, locating a "feminist signature" not in an essentially feminine

narrative style but rather in "a difference" – unique to each woman writer and feminist text – in which can be found a "mark of a resistance to dominant ideologies" (17).

Miller goes on to suggest that the feminist potential of a text is demonstrated in the way that such a text engages its female readers, creating a dynamic relationship between writer, readers, interpreters and text.[12] This idea of female community being created through the text resonates with the work of Brossard, Cliff, Condé, and Pineau, who engage readers and interpreters in creating and emphasizing collaborative models of dialogue and interpretation in their novels' enactment of female community. Miller's view of engaged female readers insists on the importance of what she calls the "intratext" of women writers: "The historical truth of a woman writer's life lies in the reader's grasp of her intratext: the body of her writing and not the writing of her body" (61). For Miller, it is the self-reference of these writers, in particular their acknowledgement of the struggle they face to represent the material conditions of women's lives from within patriarchal language, which should engage readers and interpreters, rather than the way they try to capture the rhythms of the female body. While my own work gives considerable attention to the intratext of each of the four women writers whose novels I explore, including various interviews and theoretical essays, I would argue that the writing of the body, as *part* of the writing of lived experience of women, should not be excluded from critical consideration, merely the writing of the "essential" or universal female body, which I believe Miller is right to caution against.

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12. This idea draws upon reader-response theory, defined in 1969 by Louise Rosenblatt in terms of her theory of transaction, or the idea of textual meaning being determined by the relationship between reader and text: "The transactional view of the reading process not only frees us from notions of the impact of distinct and fixed entities, but also underlines the essential importance of both elements, reader and text, in the dynamic reading transaction" (41).

Susan Lanser, in her book *Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice* (1992), further contributes to a feminist understanding of the contestatory potential of the novel, as a site for women writers to undermine dominant patriarchal constructions and narratives in telling their own stories. Like Miller, Lanser locates feminist narrative poetics not in strictly defined narrative patterns or categories but rather in particular configurations of dynamic communities of readers, writers, and text: "I maintain that both narrative structures and women's writing are determined not by essential properties or isolated aesthetic imperatives but by complex and changing conventions that are themselves produced in and by the relations of power that implicate writer, reader, and text" (5). This approach insists on an ever-shifting relationship between these texts and the historical material conditions of women's lives, engendering a dynamic and constantly evolving reader response.

Yet in differentiating her own feminist narratology from the terms of *écriture féminine,* Lanser demonstrates a more nuanced approach than Miller's. One of the issues at stake for Lanser in bringing together women's writing and narrative theory is the necessity of challenging traditional narratology and theory of the novel, which has remained primarily if unconsciously concerned with male-centered authorship and texts: "The explorations of narrative structures in women's writing may, in turn, challenge the categories and postulates of narratology, since the canon on which narrative theory is grounded has been relentlessly if not intentionally man-made" (6). For Lanser, literary movements like *écriture féminine* present one such challenge to conventional narratology because they reveal the extent to which such narratology is "naively empiricist" (5) in terms of its focus on an empiricist grammar, or a systematicity that is not concerned with

the lived experience of women. On the other hand, she argues that because of its insistence on the female body and a particular style of writing (challenging though that style may be in relation to narrative conventions of the realist novel), *écriture féminine* also represents a "naively subjectivist" (5) project in its essentializing and thus limited articulation of the work of women writers.

Lanser is therefore careful to avoid essentializing or universalizing her own concept of female narrative voice, explaining that "these concerns lead me less to a new narrative poetics than to a poetics attentive to issues that conventional narratology has devalued or ignored" (8). She looks at the different forms of textual authority created by these different voices, keeping in mind that traditional textual authority has rested in the hands of hegemonic, white male discourse, during the period in which the novel rose to prominence as a cultural form, or the mid-eighteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries. For Lanser, the mere presence of the female narrative voice troubles that hegemonic authority: "I take as a point of departure the hypothesis that the female voice – a term used here simply to designate the narrator's grammatical gender – is a site of ideological tension made visible in textual practices" (6). It follows then that feminist writing, for Lanser, is less about instances of individual characters performing feminist resistance – or even about plot structures that allow for the development of such themes (one focus of Miller's work) – and more about those textual practices which present the most challenge to dominant ideology, or the text itself as resistant.

In her exploration of voice, authority, and resistance, Lanser proposes a distinction between three narrative modes: authorial, personal, and communal narrative voice. Each of these modes provides a different kind of authority for the woman writer,

or a different textual platform from which to speak (15). In authorial, public narrative voice, "the narrator is not a fictional participant in the fictional world" (16), while in personal narrative voice, "the 'I' who tells the story is also the story's protagonist (or an older version of the protagonist)" (19). While the two modes are linked to different types of authority – authorial voice is given a "superior reliability," (20) due to its claims of omniscient public authority – both of these forms are invested "in the presupposition that narration is individual" (21) and are thus distinct from communal narration.

For Lanser, communal voice is only possible in terms of a cohesive community: "By communal voice I mean …a practice in which narrative authority is invested in a definable community and textually inscribed either through multiple, mutually authorizing voices or through the voice of a single individual who is manifestly authorized by a community" (21). She argues that the communal voice requires more than the presence of multiple narrators (as in Faulkner) and does not involve "the presentation of divergent and antithetical perspectives on the same events" (21), which she associates with epistolary novels such as *Les Liaisons dangereuses*. Lanser concludes that communal voice creates the least resistant narrative, going so far as to suggest that this mode works to uphold hegemonic ideology: "communal voice might be the most insidious fiction of authority, for in Western cultures it is nearly always the creation of a single author appropriating the power of a plurality" (22). Yet this is only the case if that plurality has a unitary and uncomplicated message.

While my own work benefits greatly from Lanser's careful attention to the category of narrative voice and what this can reveal about the creation of textual authority, my project diverges from hers in terms of my perspective on communal

narrative voice. I argue that Lanser's definition fails to recognize the complexity and particularity that must always accompany the communal voice. I privilege these novels of collectivity in spite of their complexity and ambivalence, but also because of it – the "divergent perspectives" which complicate these writers' articulations of community and resistance makes their interpellation of feminist readers all the more powerful and compelling for being more challenging. If the lived experience of women – a central concern for all four of the women writers I explore in my project – is not to be represented in universal or essentialist terms, then ambivalence and complexity are a necessary part of that representation. In employing feminist theories of narrative, and concentrating these theories on the collective voice, I intend to demonstrate that it is this form of narration which offers the most resistant and creative feminist potential for revisioning the novel.

My work also benefits from feminist scholarship from the decades following the 1980s, during which time feminist narrative theory has been primarily focused on the study of autobiography, and contemporary feminist configurations of semi-autobiography. This scholarship examines the way feminist examples of the genre create confusion between fiction and reality and trouble the idea of a "truth pact" between the author and the reader,[13] linking these destabilizing effects to the resistance of patriarchal discourse. In blurring the lines between fact and fiction, these novels grant power to the imagination which challenges the stability of the traditional autobiography and the worldview it represents and contributes to.

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13. This pact is described in Philippe LeJeune's *Le pacte autobiographique* as an implicit promise, from the author to the reader, to portray reality; in this case the author's authority is tied to this promise of truth. LeJeune himself later argued, however, that no such definition could account for the diversity of autobiographical texts.

Laura Marcus explains in her book *Auto/biographical Discourses* (1994) that the destabilizing effects of conscious fiction in autobiographical narratives has important creative implications for literary transformation of identity: "The 'fictional' can become the space for more general identifications, or for the trying-out of potentialities and possibilities – what might have been, what could have been, what might yet be – or it can be a way of suggesting how much fiction is involved in all self-representations" (280). She explains that feminist concerns include "a focus on issues of identity, now seen less as something to be disinterred or captured and more as something to be made, cultural and gender hybridity, embodiment, and the transgression of generic and other boundaries" (281). These varied feminist concerns are taken up in the works of Brossard, Cliff, Condé, and Pineau, particularly in terms of a correlation between the rewriting of gender identity and the transformation of cultural, linguistic, and narrative performance through a hybrid imagination.

Studies of this genre, however, have tended to locate this imaginative power in the hands of the feminist individual, not in community structures. In their introduction to *Revising the Word and the World: Essays in Feminist Literary Criticism* (compiled in 1993), an anthology of interviews with and essays by women writers and theorists, Vèvè A. Clark, Ruth-Ellen B. Joeres, and Madelon Sprengnether argue that this type of narrative has been particularly important to feminist critics because of the very individualism that such a genre promotes. They discuss the potential antithetical nature of the individual personal narrative and the disruptive postmodern narrative of the fractured self, the latter of which constitutes another primary focus of contemporary narrative theory:

Interest in these forms [semi-autobiography] reflects the concern with self-

identity that feminism tends to stress…Ironically, feminist critical interest

in personal narratives has emerged at a time when postmodernism, with its

challenge to the idea of a unified self…, has been in sway. Yet the study of

personal narratives, with its focus on the recovery of women's

marginalized experiences and our wish to define our own lives, is central to

feminist scholarship. (2)

There is a conflation here – which I seek to problematize – between feminist authority

and personal narrative: the idea that women's lived experience can only be found in the

stable unitary self and thus can only be represented in an individualist form. Such an

approach seems to understand postmodern theory in a somewhat nihilistic manner, as that

which disrupts and denies the traditional idea of self. I believe that on the one hand, these

authors are correct to point out that "postmodern philosophy does not highlight gender

specifically as a concern. Nor does it focus on the material conditions of women's lives"

(Clark et al. 5).

On the other hand, I would argue that postmodern narrative theories can provide

important tools for feminist analysis of women's writing, freeing such analysis for

example from a reliance on the concept of individual autonomy and authority. I would

argue that what postmodern theory leaves in the place of this traditional self is not

something fractured – or rather, not *only* something fractured. Rather, it is a new sense of

self, as studies of intersectionality would indicate, which encompasses multiple points of

individual and collective identity, and which seeks a dynamic representation in the novel,

as dynamic as identity itself, and as dynamic as performance of that identity. I argue that

novels of female community and their narrative imagination do not pose a threat to the

authority of personal narratives and do not limit the expression of women's lived

experience. Rather, they offer a possibility for the expression and free imagination of

such experience, and create a collective authority more powerful – at once more creative

and more resistant – to the restrictive individual authority of the realist novel and its

biographically structured successors.

My project and my methodological approach are derived from this complex and

varied feminist scholarship, much as the novels and authors I explore take inspiration

from a long tradition of novels by women in their conceptions of female community. The

four authors I study were not the first to resist the patriarchal authority of the realist novel

and create alternative narratives, and in my next chapter, "The Classic European

Bildungsroman and its Discontents: Predecessors of the Feminist Novel of Female

Community," I draw once more on previous feminist scholarship in my own close

reading of certain precursors to the contemporary novel of female community, as I

contextualize the nine novels which constitute the focus of my project by situating their

distinct visions of female community in relation to previous historical examples of both

nineteenth- and twentieth-century resistant women's writing.

Acknowledging the importance of these works – both previous women writers

who wrote female community into their works and the feminist criticism that explores

these texts – my second chapter explores the way previous women writers experimented

thematically and structurally with the novel to challenge the authority of the realist novel.

In this chapter I look first at women writers writing within the realist tradition, critically

examining Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and her briefly expressed desire to travel

and explore the world as men are entitled to do, as well as George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) and the female friendships present in both novels.

I then look at later novels of formal modernist experimentation – authors who recognized that destabilization of traditional narrative convention and form meant destabilization of gender identity. I explore these later engagements with the social construction of gender through Virginia Woolf's *Orlando: A Biography* (1928); Simone de Beauvoir's *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée* (1958); and three novels of Marguerite Duras in which she explores the same story of sexuality and coming-of-age in an attempt to re-inscribe agency through repetition: *Un barrage contre le Pacifique* (1950), *L'amant* (1984), and *L'amant de la Chine du Nord* (1991). I look at the way all three of these authors use formal experimentation to portray the limits of representation, through narrative techniques such as stream-of-consciousness and play with temporality. While I read these repositioning and deconstructive narrative gestures as powerful examples of agency, I will at the same time distinguish these authors' use of narrative techniques from that of my primary authors, who take up these same techniques to imagine reality anew in constructing female community.

The Feminist Novel of Female Community: Collective Journeys and Collaborative Authority

> si le patriarcat est parvenu à ne pas faire exister
> ce qui existe, il nous sera sans doute possible de
> faire exister ce qui existe. Encore pour cela faut-

il la vouloir en nos mots très réelle cette femme

intégrale que nous sommes, cette idée de nous

qui comme une certitude vitale serait notre

penchant naturel à donner un sens à ce que nous

sommes.

Nicole Brossard, *La lettre aérienne,* 87

The question remains: what is it that the writers and texts I have chosen to study do differently? What patterns of resistance and creativity are revealed through a methodological approach of feminist theories of narrative? To put it simply, I argue in this project that this difference is constituted by a unique combination of narrative experimentation and a commitment to female community, and that various female communities showing possibilities for collective feminist agency are performed both within and through these nine narratives. In the remaining three chapters of my work, I explore this combination through what I see as transformative repetitions of the realist novel, or the use of the form of the novel to create new and powerful feminist reconfigurations which allow for the modeling of female community.

As Ramon A. Fonkoué demonstrates in his 2010 article "Voix de femmes et figures du mâl(e) en littérature francophone: Nicole Brossard et Maryse Condé," in which he compares the writing of Nicole Brossard and Maryse Condé, the work of these contemporary women writers is consistently still read in terms of their subversion of patriarchal textual reality through emphasis on the female subject, rather than in terms of their enactment of female community. For Fonkoué, for example, it is this resistance to

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patriarchal language which allows for comparison between these two geographically disparate feminist writers:

> D'emblée, l'on peut affirmer que Nicole Brossard et Maryse Condé s'attaquent à l'ordre symbolique en tant qu'il est un ordre discursif au service du patriarcat. Aussi, se distinguent-elles par une pratique de l'écriture qui dénote une conscience pointue des enjeux qui se grèffent à la prise de parole… le désir d'inscrire la femme au cœur de leur texte est une préoccupation que partagent l'une et l'autre. En effet, ce qui rapproche les deux auteures, c'est une écriture qui marque l'émergence et la primauté du sujet féminin. Le désir de subvertir l'ordre patriarcal est ici evident. (76)

The connection made here between Brossard and Condé stresses their mutual desire to challenge the field of patriarchal writing and language, describing the potential of their writing as something akin to the goals of *écriture féminine*: "la primauté du sujet féminin" and "le désir d'inscrire la femme au coeur de leur texte." Yet resistance through the figure of the independent female subject is only part of what these novels have to offer, and such interpretations miss the sense of the collective emphasized by Brossard as early as 1987 in her theoretical work *La lettre aérienne:* "faut-il la vouloir *en nos mots* très réelle *cette femme intégrale que nous sommes*, cette idée de nous qui comme une certitude vitale serait notre penchant naturel à donner un sens à ce que nous sommes" (87, emphasis mine). For Brossard, the female subject does not exist apart from the female "nous," and it is a commitment to the "nous" and to "nos mots" that drives her narratives.

This focus on female community itself – the desire to transform the literary object from the journey of one individual to the workings of a community, and the emphasis on the way individuals act within such a network – is shared by all four authors. With this transformation of object comes a transformation of worldview, with an insistence on cultural hybridity, transnational community, multiple perspectives, diverse and dynamic roles for women, and challenges to or subversions of traditional plot structures such as the marriage plot. To better illustrate the complexity of these transformations in the feminist novel of female community – and their realization through narrative form as well as content – I have chosen to include an earlier and later novel for each author (and in the case of Cliff, two earlier novels and one later one).

With novels written at the same time as the majority of feminist narratology, as well as novels from the past decade, my selection represents both the initial creative energy of the 1980s and early 1990s, and a continued commitment in the present to feminist novels of community and to manipulation, dynamism, and creativity of form. The specifics of this resistant creativity over time in the work of Brossard, Cliff, Condé, and Pineau – and of the narrative practices through which these writers simultaneously refute realism and offer imagined alternatives – are explored in chapters III, IV, and V of this project.

In all three of these chapters, I draw on the theoretical works, interviews and personal narratives of each author in order to articulate the way they construct female community outside their fictional texts as well, and how their novels fictionalize and put into practice their theory. I argue that the female communities they imagine – and the narrative collaboration they construct through collective narrative voice and figures of

translation – act as models for collectivity which draw in and implicate a female reader. I argue that their larger body of writing, read in conjunction with their novels, establishes their feminist agency and interpellates female readers into their projects, in creating new collaborative patterns of reading, writing, theorizing, and imagining.

Within this intertext, I privilege interviews in the creation of extended female community. As Clark et. al. suggest, interviews in particular have the potential to interpellate readers in the process of textual construction and collaborative interpretation:

> More effectively than any other text, perhaps, the interview draws the public into the field of its construction. The effect, first on the interviewer or compiler, then on the audience, is that of a dialogue or multilogue in which all are participants, all are involved. Furthermore, in its presentation of dialogue and the implied inclusion of others as readers, the interview as text can help to generate a desire for social change. (3)

This "desire for social change" has important implications for the feminist project at the heart of these novels of female community. Drawing readers and interpreters into a sense of participation in the process of textual construction leads readers to not only consider the extent to which gendered reality is also constructed and imagined, but also to develop their own sense of agency, as participants in re-constructing and renewing that reality in alternative texts and interpretations.

For example, in Brossard's "Oeuvre de chair et metonymies" (1996), which seems to be a combination of essay, personal narrative, and fiction, she describes the way her daughter came of age into a community of women writers:

La jeune femme avait grandi entourée de femmes savantes et créatrices. Tous les jeudis après-midi, le salon de sa mère s'emplissait de voix de femmes…Bientôt la fillette passa ses journées à lire et à écrire comme elle avait souvent vu sa mère le faire….Commes certains rêvent de retourner au pays des ancêtres, la fille cherchait ses racines dans les livres de la mère. (103-104)

Here Brossard's daughter, "la jeune femme," learns to read and write in a "salon" of women, taking these women's voices and writings as models for her own creativity. This coming of age through and into female community is echoed in many of the nine primary works of this project, and is explored in my second and third chapters. "La jeune femme" further sees in these books of her mother's the path to tracing her own creative origins and genealogy, a type of quest which forms the subject of my fifth and final chapter. This type of work – a mixture of creative, personal, and theoretical writing – demonstrates an investment in models of female community both real and imagined, as well as realized through the imagination. Such writing not only offers readers a chance to imagine themselves as part of the creative process of building female community, but also serves to inspire them with a greater sense of the stakes involved in such a project.

In my third chapter, "Re-Writing Maturity: Diverse Conceptions of Coming-of-Age and Resisting Patriarchy in the Feminist Novel of Female Community," I pay particular attention to the development of female community through the transformation of the *Bildungsroman* – no longer an individual journeying towards him- or even herself, but rather an individual's coming-of-age through and into the female community that surrounds her. In this chapter, I explore the question of maturity, particularly as it is

constituted in each writer's earlier work. I examine what characterizes maturity, focusing in particular on education, mentorship, travel, and sexuality; how it develops through and in relation to female community, or diverse networks of female relationships including not only mothers and daughters, but also female friends, teachers, and lovers; and to what extent it seems possible, exploring how in many of the novels an awakening to the power of patriarchal violence and discourse seems to lead to a final confrontation with this threat, from which characters often fail to emerge victorious.

I argue that this element of coming-of-age establishes these novels as particularly productive sites for analyzing the formation of the gendered individual through education and other social processes, and for locating moments and patterns of resistance to this process of formation. In approaching these texts through the critical framework of feminist theories of narrative, I argue that performances of gender and coming-of-age within these novels both exemplify and resist the processes of social construction of gender as described by feminist theorists such as Simone de Beauvoir and Judith Butler, whereby girls are caught up in a systematic production and perpetuation of hegemonic ideals of femininity and womanhood. My focus on the formal construction of maturity and coming-of-age, however – the representation of the processes and performances which shape it, as well as specific moments of realization and awakening – constitutes a different angle from the more common feminist focus on gendered identity and its construction. This formal approach allows me for example to locate agency in narrators and narration as well as characters, allowing multiple readings of novels which seem to end in tragedy.

For example, in Michelle Cliff's *Abeng* and its sequel *No Telephone to Heaven,*

Clare Savage receives a formal education in Jamaica, the United States and England; in

each place this education leads her to a sense of alienation, and an awareness of the

extent to which patriarchal and hierarchical racial systems control official discourse.

Clare considers several literary and historical models of identification, such as Anne

Frank in *Abeng* and Jane Eyre and Bertha Mason in *No Telephone to Heaven.* However,

even in choosing Bertha over Jane, she continues to feel alone: "No, she could not be

Jane…Bertha was closer to the mark. Captive. Ragôut. Mixture. Confused. Jamaican.

Caliban. Carib. Cannibal. Cimarron. All Bertha. All Clare… she became terrified and

knew she must end her solitude. Her aloneness was catching up to her; that was all"

(116).

      It is her friend Harry/Harriet who eventually draws her back to Jamaica and

encourages her participation in a revolutionary community, whose final act is an attempt

to sabotage a reductive Hollywood film production of the life of Nanny and Cudjoe.

Harry/Harriet acts as a mentor and model as well as a friend in showing Clare how

gender itself, in addition to Jamaican community, can be about performance – and that

gender and community are no less authentic for being explicitly created. For example,

during Clare's vacation to Jamaica, Harry/Harriet shows Clare an isolated beach where

they create their own discovery narrative of paradise, female friendship, and belonging:

          Harry/Harriet trespassing determinedly, telling her this was the most

          secluded beach on the island…They could swim as girlfriends…They lay

          side by side under a sky thrilling in its brightness. Touching gently, kissing,

tongues entwined, coming to, laughing…[Clare thought,] At the same time

I feel drawn to you. At home with you. (130-131)

Just as with Bertha, Clare identifies with Harry/Harriet as a transgressive, hybrid figure,

but while thoughts of Bertha brought confusion and terror, her relationship with

Harry/Harriet makes Clare feel "at home."

While my third chapter explores female community primarily in terms of thematic

construction – transformative patterns of coming-of-age, education, and maturity – my

next chapter turns to what I argue is the most important element of narrative structure

working to create female community in these novels. In this fourth chapter, "Collective

Narrative Voice and Transformation of Authority in the Feminist Novel of Female

Community," I further explore the creation and modeling of female community in these

novels through each author's use of collective narrative voice. Here I draw once more on

the work of Miller and Lanser – their various categories of narrative voice and their

analysis of the implications of such categories for feminist narratology. The inclusion of

more than one narrator creates a nuanced and necessary depth to these representations of

women's lived experience, and ensures that these texts' visions of female community are

performed *through* as well as *in* the text, as these narratives *about* collectivity are being

told collectively, through various – at times even divergent – perspectives. In addition,

the creative space of the novel and its possibilities of narrative voice allow for the

construction of multiple levels of narration and structures of *mise-en-abîme*, which are

perhaps mostly strongly at work in Nicole Brossard's novels.

In Brossard's *Le désert mauve,* for example, a collective narrative voice is

established through two fictional writers; the first of the part of the book, a story about

the coming-of-age of a character called Mélanie entitled *Le désert mauve*, is presented as the work of Laure Angstelle; while the second part, *Un livre à traduire*, describes Maude Laures' efforts to translate this story; and the third part, *Mauve, l'horizon*, is presented as the finished translation by Maude (also in French). This undermines the idea of authority and authenticity being drawn from one stable and definitive narrative; even Maude's last name suggests a variation on – a pluralization of – that of Laure. Furthermore, in their simultaneous roles of writer, narrator, and character, Laure and Maude complicate any attempt to strictly delineate between form and content in this novel's production of female community.[14] Through their dialogue with each other, Laure and Maude are actively structuring the form of the book while at the same time contributing to its thematizing of female collectivity, thus ensuring the infusion of female community throughout multiple levels of narration and emphasizing female collaborative interpretation as a process that goes beyond identifying the content of one easily contained inner story.

In my fifth chapter, "Mothers, Daughters, Grandmothers: The Female Search for Origin and Alternative Genealogy," I examine the way stories of searching for origin are complicated by the diverse alternative genealogies presented in each work – for example, cultural transmission across generations of women rather than patriarchal lineage; lesbian families; substitute mothers and daughters and the limits of biological genealogy; and the re-inscription of women into narratives of historical community. I relate these alternative genealogies to more traditional genealogical quest narratives common to the male *Bildungsroman*, as in narratives driven by conflict between fathers and sons as described by Peter Brooks in *Reading For the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (1984), and

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14. See chapters III and IV for more detailed analysis of these multiple narrative roles.

to colonial, imperial fears of miscegenation and resulting metaphors of the family of man, as articulated by Anne McClintock in *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (1995).

Additionally, I examine not only the way alternative genealogy is thematized in the novels, but also the way in which it is shaped and figured through language; temporality which disrupts progressive chronology and patterns of linear development from origin to ending; and transformative repetitions such as the daughter repeating and transforming the mother's or grandmother's journey. I argue that these four authors, in their rejection of logical and progressive narrative structure and coherent, national spaces, present a significant challenge to the stable worldview of the traditional realist novel, which, as Edward Said suggests in *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (1975), was largely dependent upon a genealogical narrative structure, even when the narrative content was not determined by an explicit genealogical quest: "the unity or integrity of the text is maintained by a series of genealogical connections: author – text, beginning-middle-end, text – meaning, reader – interpretation, and so on. Underneath all these is the imagery of succession, of paternity, or hierarchy" (162). Disrupting such narrative patterns challenges for example the idea that gender roles are "natural" or that colonial history is a logical and productive progression of events with a clear beginning and end, and thus destabilizes some of the political significance – unconscious or otherwise – behind the realist novel.

One such alternative genealogy can be seen in Maryse Condé's recent book *Victoire, les saveurs et les mots* (2006)*,* a semiautobiographical text telling the story of her grandmother. Condé promises the reader a story which is both partial and subjective,

and which is about her imaginative journey to trace her grandmother's history as much as it is about that history itself: "Tel qu'il est, je livre le portrait que je suis parvenue à tracer, dont je ne garantis certainement pas l'impartialité, ni même l'exactitude" (17).

For Condé's narrator, the imagination must of necessity be privileged over official discourse, because her grandmother has no place in official history, and even within her family her grandmother's legacy is limited by her mother's loyalty to assimilationist principles and silence about the past. Yet despite the lack of empirical evidence which would make available to her a chronological progression of events, the narrator is able to piece together much of her grandmother's history and to connect to her across time. In tracing a creative connection between her grandmother's talent for cooking and her own creative agency as a writer, Condé offers an imaginative framework for engaging the past: "Loin de se contenter d'exécuter avec brio des plats créoles, elle inventa…Ce que je veux, c'est revendiquer l'héritage de cette femme qui apparemment n'en laissa pas. Établir le lien qui unit sa créativité à la mienne. Passer des saveurs, des couleurs, des odeurs des chairs ou des légumes à celles des mots" (85). This desire to "revendiquer l'héritage" is common to several genealogical quests in the work of the four women writers at the center of this project.

In closing this introductory chapter, I want to emphasize the two-fold argument I make in this project as to the possibilities of the feminist novel of female community: the resistance to patriarchal culture and the creation of something new in the form of alternative female community. These female communities and genealogies are by no means utopist, and acknowledge for example problematics such as intergenerational gaps; pressures of assimilation and integration; difficulties of language; and continued

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patriarchal violence. Yet the complexity of these imagined communities – and in particular their privileging of the imagination over reality and its official discourses – powerfully transforms the feminist novel in recreating the novel as a viable alternative space, a dynamic platform from which to resist the traditional patriarchal and colonial spaces of the realist novel.

To destabilize something so traditionally stable as the realist novel, is to offer a powerful resistance to an entire worldview, whose linear, progressive, individualist, nationalist, and patriarchal values went alongside such ideology as gendered spheres of influence, historical progress, and the justification of colonialism. At the same time, the paradoxical creative possibilities offered by the space of the novel allow for important imagined alternatives of maturity, education, language, performance, voice, time, and space, offering a community-based worldview.

Furthermore, the works of these four women writers demonstrate how the novel can further feminist projects of female community by extending such projects on several narrative levels, thus modeling resistant and creative feminist collaboration. In their attention to and use of nontraditional narrative structure and transformative repetition, these writers indicate the novel's particular capacity to reformulate representations of women's lives, and require a similar attention on the part of the reader and the literary critic who approaches their texts. In my own project, I hope to illustrate the benefits and necessity of a methodology of feminist theories of narrative, as a model for readership and critical engagement with feminist texts. In my interpretations I hope to engage in a feminist conversation that has already begun, and I encourage readers of this text to do the same.

CHAPTER II

THE CLASSIC EUROPEAN *BILDUNGSROMAN* AND ITS DISCONTENTS:

PREDECESSORS OF THE FEMINIST NOVEL OF FEMALE COMMUNITY

> 'No sight so sad as that of a naughty child,'
> he began, 'especially a naughty little girl.
> Do you know where the wicked go after
> death?'" [Mr. Brocklehurst]
> 'They go to hell,' was my ready and
> orthodox answer. [Jane Eyre]
> 'And what is hell? Can you tell me that?'
> 'A pit full of fire.'
> … 'And what must you do to avoid it?'
> … 'I must keep in good health, and not die.'
> Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre,* 19

Few texts from nineteenth century women's writing have so inspired generations

of female readers and feminist thinkers as *Jane Eyre: Autobiography* (1847). In the

excerpt above, a young Jane defies the minister who comes to take her away to school, a

man whose position and power over Jane represent the patriarchal, religious, and middle-

class confines to which Jane is subject. These confines, as embodied by the minister and

the educational institution of Lowood, are literally lethal – Jane's only friend as a girl, a

schoolmate, will die at Lowood as a result of abuse and neglect. Defying patriarchal

authority from the first, as a self-reliant child, Jane resists the system that seeks to limit

and define her in relation to the concept of sin. "I must keep in good health, and not die,"

she says to the infuriated Mr. Brocklehurst, and her defiant, decidedly unorthodox logic

strikes a powerful resistant chord. Jane continues to assert agency through moments of

self-definition as she matures, positing her individuality as something coherent and apart, and integral to her process of coming-of-age.

At the end of the novel, however, Jane's individual will is subsumed into her marriage with Mr. Rochester. This relatively peaceful integration into patriarchal society seems to be simultaneous with her process of female maturity, the institution of marriage being nearly the only societal institution open to female characters of the nineteenth-century realist novel. In this sense, the novel *Jane Eyre* follows the pattern of a traditional *Bildungsroman*, as Franco Moretti and others have described it – an individual journey towards maturity and integration with society. Yet this summation of the novel's imagined relationship of the female individual to society seems reductive, suggesting a complete negation of Jane's resistant power, rather than a limitation. The novel itself offers a more complex construction of the interplay between individual, society, and community, as well as an imagined relationship between reader, narrator, and writer, one that repeatedly insists on the reader's participation in the interpretation of narrative events.

This complexity encourages a variety of questions for the engaged feminist reader, with regard to interpretation of the feminist potential of the text. What is the social reality constructed by the traditional *Bildungsroman*, and how does the novel resist this construction? To what extent is the novel constrained by it? What defines the individual in the *Bildungsroman*, and by what parameters and processes is individual maturity established? By contrast, what moments and processes of female formation or maturity does the novel offer us? What relationships does it imagine – not just between women and men but between different female characters? What limits or constrains these

relationships? What kind of ideal reader does the novel address, and how does the novel engage that reader?

In this chapter, I navigate these questions not only for *Jane Eyre* but also for George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), Virginia Woolf's *Orlando: A Biography* (1928), Simone de Beauvoir's *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée* (1958), and Marguerite Duras' *Un barrage contre le Pacifique* (1950), *L'amant* (1984), and *L'amant de la Chine du Nord* (1991). I consider these texts – which range from the nineteenth-century realist tradition to modernist fiction to the *nouveau roman* – as evoking a powerful, if partial, resistance to the traditional male *Bildungsroman*, and its focus on autonomous individuals in conflict with society. In positioning these works as important precursors to the feminist novel of female community – to the nine novels that constitute the focus of this overall project – I argue that their feminist resistance is ultimately limited by an inability to imagine integration into a sustainable female community.

The focus of this chapter, however, is not so much the limitations of these novels as it is their resistant potential. I have chosen these selective examples not to insist on their lack of feminist, female community, but rather to celebrate them for their own patriarchal resistance, as important novels in their own right. It is my intention in this chapter to examine that resistance in tracing its development in these works alongside the journeys of coming-of-age and maturity of the protagonists. I begin in considering various critical definitions of the *Bildungsroman* – its thematic and narrative features – and of the female *Bildungsroman* in particular, before analyzing the way these specific novels construct female maturity and imagine relationships between women and the role of women in society.

The Traditional *Bildungsroman* and Its Construction of Gender and Maturity

> If I am struggling for autonomy, do I not
> need to be struggling for something else as
> well, a conception of myself invariably in
> community, impressed upon by others,
> impinging upon them as well, and in ways
> that are not fully in my control or clearly
> predictable?... Is this not another way of
> imagining community?
> Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The
> Powers of Mourning and Violence,*
> 27

The view of community outlined above by Judith Butler demonstrates the

difficulty in imagining society as a collection of cohesive and separate individuals – the

"I" is always dependent upon the relation between the "I" and others. In her view,

individual development towards autonomy is also a development of community; her

work draws on the process of mourning, often described as a private individual matter, as

a lens for developing community and public consciousness. This question about the limits

of autonomy, and about the degree to which autonomy is complicated by community,

finds an echo in the European *Bildungsroman,* and in various theoretical conceptions of

the genre. Butler's phasing here has particular relevance for the female *Bildungsroman;*

in these works, a desire for female autonomy and individual "control" is made more

difficult by the way patriarchal society is "impressed upon" women, and by the way

women in turn may "impinge upon" others, particularly other women, in struggling to

free themselves from such ideological constraints.

Franco Moretti's articulation of the *Bildungsroman* in his work *The Way of the*

World: The Bildungsroman *in European Culture* has been extremely influential for

theorists of the genre, perhaps because of the way he constructs the genre's privileged

role within the ideological construction of modernity. He is more interested, however, in

the figurative implications of individual formation than in the process of individual

formation as such, which influences his conception of the genre. According to Moretti,

the *Bildungsroman* allowed for the representation of the turbulence and instability of the

modern age, which Moretti attributes to new possibilities for mobility of social class in

particular, and the containment of that turbulence in new social structures and

institutions, literature itself being one such institution.[15] Moretti argues that the

Bildungsroman formally and symbolically represents this tension between turbulence and

containment through the figure of youth: before reaching maturity, this figure of youth

serves "to *accentuate* modernity's dynamism and instability" (5), yet because youth is a

transitory life stage, this same figure puts a reassuring temporal limit on the very

instability it represents: "Youth is brief, or at any rate circumscribed, and this enables, or

rather *forces* the *a priori* establishment of a formal constraint on the portrayal of

modernity" (6).

In representing modernity then, the youthful individual in the traditional male

Bildungsroman finds himself at odds with society for a time, before maturing and being

integrated into society. For Moretti, in the classic *Bildungsroman,* of which *Wilhelm*

Meister and Jane Austen's novels are examples, the youthful individual finds full

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15. See also D.A. Miller's work *The Novel and the Police,* which examines the way the realist
novel, and detective fiction in particular, worked to encourage readers to police their own
morality and social transgression. His work draws on Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish,*
engaging Foucault's work in a specifically literary context. For another example of literature
conceived of as an institution, see Louis Althusser's essay "Ideology and Ideological State
Apparatuses," which describes literature as one state apparatus used to interpellate the subject.

integration into society as he develops and matures.[16] Moretti describes the signs and

process of maturity in the classic *Bildungsroman* in the following way:

> Self-development and integration are complementary and convergent
>
> trajectories, and at their point of encounter and equilibrium lies that full
>
> and double epiphany of meaning that is 'maturity"…To reach the
>
> conclusive synthesis of maturity, therefore, it is not enough to achieve
>
> 'objective' results, whatever they may be – learning a trade, establishing a
>
> family. One must learn first and foremost, like Wilhelm, to direct 'the plot
>
> of [one's own] life' so that each moment strengthens one's *sense of*
>
> *belonging* to a wider community. (19)

In this configuration, maturity is defined by the "encounter" and "equilibrium" of "self-

development and integration," a definition which places maturity in opposition to social

resistance – one matures by growing out of resistance, and by directing one's individual

path towards a "wider community," or one dies. The examples of the nineteenth-century

female *Bildungsroman* taken up in this chapter seem in this sense to coincide with this

definition – Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Eliot's *Mill on the Floss* end, respectively, in

maturity (as marked by marriage) and death (following an inability to integrate).

Perhaps more interesting here is Moretti's argument that in order to achieve full

maturity, one needs more than visible markers or "'objective' results." For Moretti, full

integration into society requires *internalizing* the values of the "wider," i.e. national,

community, which can only happen when one "direct[s] the plot" towards "a sense of

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16. When the figure of youth is resistant to social mores, and remains resistant at the end of the
novel – the case of Julian Sorel in *Le rouge et le noir* for example – the ending (in this case,
Julian's execution) becomes a societal act of containment and suppression, rather than a seamless
integration.

belonging." In other words, it is not only what happens to individuals or what they do that indicates their maturity (their tangible rewards such as a career or a marriage) but also it is what happens to them internally – the way they come to understand themselves in relation to others, and as masters of their own destinies. Following the lines of Moretti's argument, "directing the plot" *away* from dominant societal values is futile – such resistance can only be temporary, and means seeing oneself in opposition to others; an individual involved in this kind of plotting is isolated and denied the condition of maturity.

Yet in evaluating the implications of Moretti's figure of youth for female maturity, there is a way in which the very act of directing one's own plot is a more powerful and subversive act than Moretti's definition would suggest, especially for female characters and narrators. Moretti goes so far as to argue that only "the west European middle-class man" is capable of directing his own plot, because of his "virtual monopoly" on "wide cultural formation, professional mobility, [and] full social freedom" (ix); Moretti adds that without this monopoly, "the *Bildungsroman* was difficult to write, because it was difficult to imagine" (x). Such a statement ignores the impact of anything less than "full social freedom," ironic for a study that attempts to demonstrate that there is no such thing as "full" freedom, or freedom without compromise. It seems that even the attempt to have a female protagonist direct her own plot, limited though her direction and freedom might be, is an audacious move – a challenge to the "monopoly" of the traditional *Bildungsroman.*

Moreover, although Moretti does not recognize this possibility, when a female protagonist can direct her own development and change its direction away from the

traditional path to integration, this may represent a different kind of maturity – the maturity to see and question the way women are positioned in society, even if that questioning is ultimately contained. Maturity becomes in this context a *recognition* that one is denied the possibility of "full social freedom," or of full participation in a national or economic community. Instead of rejecting out of hand the possibility that women's writing might include novels of individual formation, due to the impossibility of women entering society on equal terms or with "full freedom," this chapter considers the relevance of Moretti's formal definition of the *Bildungsroman* – enactment and containment of resistance located in the figure of youth – to the particular resistance and containment of female youth in nineteenth- and twentieth-century European women's writing.

The need for a definition of female maturity as recognition of restraints placed on the female subject is made even clearer by the central role of marriage in the *Bildungsroman.* Full freedom for women was indeed "difficult to imagine" in the nineteenth-century novel, not only because of societal restrictions, but also because of narrative restrictions on representations of women's lives, such as the predominance of the marriage plot. Such a plot relates of course to male characters as well as female, and Moretti tells us that marriage is a necessary component of the classic male *Bildungsroman*, as the means by which the male youth performs maturity and integrates into society:

> how is it possible to convince the modern – 'free' – individual to willingly
> limit his freedom? Precisely, first of all, through marriage – *in* marriage:
> when two people ascribe to one another such value as to accept being

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'bound' by it. It has been observed that from the late eighteenth century on, marriage becomes the model for a new type of *social contract*… the classical *Bildungsroman* 'must' always conclude with marriages. It is not only the foundation of the family that is at stake, but that 'pact' between the individual and the world. (22)

Although Moretti mentions two people being "bound," he emphasizes that marriage is about a male character being convinced to limit "*his* freedom." Moreover, here he is considering the symbolic significance of marriage, its use as metaphor for the social contract between male individual and public society, to the exclusion of its particular significance for women.[17] The "pact between the [male] individual and the world" takes precedence here over a pact between the female individual and the male, or between the female individual and the world that wants to confine her.

The Female *Bildungsroman*: Marriage, Female Maturity, and Narrative Structure

Despite Moretti and others' interpretation of the figure of marriage – the way it limits individual freedom for men as well as for women, and its metaphorical role in terms of class relations – the marriage plot had particularly limiting implications for women, and for the development of female maturity. This concern can be seen for example in Nancy K. Miller's articulation of female plot in her work *Subject to Change: Reading Feminist Writing*:

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17. Moretti is not alone in so doing; Ian Watt and Nancy Armstrong also describe the role of marriage in the domestic novel as a metaphor for the social contract. See the previous chapter for further consideration of their treatment of marriage as symbol and displacement.

By female plot I mean quite simply that organization of narrative event

which delineates a heroine's psychological, moral, and social development

within a [hetero-]sexual fate…Female plot thus is both what the culture has

always already inscribed for woman and its reinscription in the linear time

of fiction. It is generally mapped by the heroine's engagement with the

codes of the dominant ideology, her obligatory insertion within the

institutions which in society and in novels name her – marriage, for

example. (208)

Here we have a consideration of how female development and maturity seem always

bound to a trajectory towards "a sexual fate." A female protagonist's identity, despite any

resistance she offers in her "engagement with the codes of the dominant ideology,"

becomes narrowed to the way "institutions" define her. This institutional naming and

claiming of the female subject becomes all the more powerful when it is "delineat[ed]"

by "the linear time of fiction," or by the linear structuring of narrative events

characteristic of the traditional realist novel. As Miller puts it, a sexual fate is already

"culturally inscribed," and placing it in the narrative structure of the realist novel is thus a

"reinscription," making both "society" and "novels" complicit in the reproduction and

naturalization of this fate. Female maturity in this context is inseparable from this journey

into heterosexuality, as the only accepted path for women to social integration; this

conception limits not only individual female autonomy, but any possibility of sustainable

female community as well, with female characters finding maturity only in relation to

male characters and patriarchal ideology.[18]

18. This idea is also articulated in Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*: "almost without
exception they [women] are shown in their relation to men" (82).

Esther Labovitz, in her work *The Myth of the Heroine: The Female Bildungsroman in the Twentieth Century* (1986), echoes this idea of the limitations of marriage in her definition of the female *Bildungsroman*. She goes so far as to argue that nineteenth-century narrative representations of women offered so little possibility for female power and maturity, that these works must be excluded from consideration as part of a definition of the genre; such an approach resonates with Moretti's reductive intention to ignore any type of novel he finds incapable of representing "full freedom." Labovitz explains that

> even those works which started out as potential *Bildungsromane,* traced the heroine's growth up to her physical maturity to the neglect of her potential for future development…Heroines who did attempt an identity of self were generally halted before they could complete the journey to selfhood, thus militating against their designation as *Bildungsroman* heroines. (5)

In particular, Labovitz refers to marriage as the primary narrative device that "halted" the heroine's possibilities for "selfhood" and development, possibilities that, for Labovitz, only the twentieth-century heroine had the potential to realize.

In addition to recurrent plots that limit pathways to maturity for female protagonists, feminist literary theorists have also been concerned with recurrent images associated with these characters, images commonly put forth by male characters, narrators, and writers. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in their work *Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination,* describe these recurrent images as opposing female stereotypes, "the extreme images of 'angel'

and 'monster' which male authors have generated" (17). The nineteenth-century woman

writer, they explain, must contend with these images in her writing because they are

already so entrenched in both the cultural and the literary imagination in patriarchal

society. More specifically, Gibert and Gubar argue that these dual images necessitate a

kind of doubling and duplicity in the literary representation of women, often involving a

suppression of the more "monstrous" aspects of these characters in order to achieve

societal integration.

This problematizes both the representation of individual female creativity and the

possibility of female characters interacting with each other in community; in Gilbert and

Gubar's view, "female bonding is extraordinarily difficult in patriarchy: women almost

inevitably turn against women" (38). If women are indeed confined to embody one pole

or the other, learning to internalize "monstrous" dissent for example in order to mature

into the angel of the house, then other women exist mainly as foils in that process of

becoming, rather than as other maturing subjects with whom to develop friendship and

community. In Gilbert and Gubar's reading of *Jane Eyre*, for example, Bertha Mason

represents Jane Eyre's encounter with Jane's own monstrous impulses, rather than a

woman with whom Jane might be able to engage in female intersubjectivity.[19]

These ideas of Gilbert and Gubar – about the predominance of these opposing

stereotypes of women and the duplicity they engender – also appear in attempts to

theorize the female *Bildungsroman* as a particular genre. Lorna Ellis for example, in her

work *Appearing to Diminish: Female Development and the British* Bildungsroman*,*

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19. For example, on Bertha's visitation to Jane's chamber: "Literally, of course, the nighttime
specter is none other than Bertha Mason Rochester. But on a figurative and psychological level it
seems suspiciously clear that the specter of Bertha is still another – indeed the most threatening –
avatar of Jane" (*Madwoman* 359). This conception of Bertha as a "specter" and an "avatar," while
compelling in terms of Jane's self-development, serves to further dehumanize Bertha.

1750-1850 (1999), finds that "*Bildungsroman* heroines construct themselves as subjects by manipulating the signs of their objectification. By learning how the male gaze functions in their society, heroines learn to manipulate their appearance and behavior in order to gain some control over the self they project for others" (10). She draws on Moretti's definition of the *Bildungsroman* closely in order to suggest that this female "manipulation" can be seen as a positive development into maturity, part of a necessary "search for a compromise between the desires of the self and the expectations of society" (167). She argues for an interpretation of female manipulation as agency, rather than (merely) as a detrimental condition of living in patriarchal society: "The female *Bildungsroman* does not portray a tragic view of women's development…Instead, by showing how fictional heroines can work within 'the system,' female *Bildungsromane* offer a limited possibility for female autonomy while simultaneously critiquing the societal expectations that constrict women" (29).

Despite the acknowledgement here of a "simultaneous critique," Ellis places this kind of female *Bildungsroman* on a troubling timeline, or a trajectory from successful manipulation and integration, to excessive subversion and tragedy: "In contrast…later heroines such as Maggie Tulliver and Edna Pontellier, who publicly maintain the right to create their own worldview, lose their ability to compromise and thus to survive within a hostile environment. Therefore, these later novels abandon the dialectic of reintegration and subversion that sustained the female *Bildungsroman*" (10). Ellis' answer here to the discontents of the genre – a need for more compromise and an emphasis on the necessity of integration into a society driven by a certain worldview – puts her definition in conflict with that of Labovitz. Although both theorists identify women's compromise with society

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as in some way determining the nineteenth-century female coming-of-age novel, Labovitz reads this compromise in negative terms, arguing that too much compromise prevents maturity and thus that these works cannot be considered *Bildungsromane*, while Ellis attempts to associate compromise with partial agency, to the extent that for her, a lack of compromise means exclusion from the genre of the *Bildungsroman.*

Yet representation of female experience in the nineteenth-century novel was more complex than either of these definitions might suggest, particularly in terms of the way other female characters influenced the development of the female protagonist. Sharon Marcus, in her book *Between Women: Friendship, Desire and Marriage in Victorian England* (2007), introduces the concept of the "plot of female amity" to the question of dominant female plots and images. According to Marcus, female friendship in the nineteenth-century Victorian novel existed alongside the marriage plot, indicating that for Victorians, equality was a feature to strive for in both friendship and marriage:

> Victorians accepted friendship between women because they believed it cultivated the feminine virtues of sympathy and altruism that made women into good helpmates. But the embrace of friendships…was not simply, as one might darkly conjecture, an attempt to press women's bonds into patriarchal service. It also indicated a shift in the spiritual and emotional definition of marriage from a hierarchical bond dictating that inferior wives obey their superior husbands to a more egalitarian conception modeled on friendship. (26)

In other words, not only did female friendship model femininity within marriage – helping with the construction of "good helpmates" for husbands – but to a certain extent

the opposite was also true; marriage became "modeled on friendship" and held more allegiance to the concept of equality than hierarchy, albeit as an ideological value rather than a material condition of marriage, or "the persisting economic, legal, and political dependence of wives on husbands" (26).

Marcus ascribes a critical if not transformative power to these friendships, and connects this power to narrative structure. She explains that "[i]n the plot of female amity, marriage and friendship are inseparable, and the woman who promotes a friend's marriage to a man is a forceful agent of the closure achieved once…the future husband and wife have attained the harmony that already prevailed between the female friends" (82). She argues that in narrative terms, female amity is a representation of stability as well as an agent of plot development. In reinforcing traditional femininity and the idea of equality in marriage, female friendships are strongly at work in directing the plot, through what Marcus calls "a narrative matrix": "The relative stability of a narrative matrix endows it with power and endurance…A narrative matrix is not dispensable… nor is [it] passive, since it has the generative power and dynamism to launch, direct, and resolve a plot" (79). As we have seen, the ability to "direct a plot" is not insignificant; Marcus insists here on the enduring "power" of female friendship, a very different position from Gilbert and Gubar's rejection of its very possibility. This position also contradicts any conception of female plot as *merely* about marriage or "a sexual fate."

Similarly, Laura Green argues for the complexity of identification in what she terms the novel of formation. In her work *Literary Identification from Charlotte Brontë to Tsitsi Dangarembga* (2012), Green contends with the literary representation of the formation of the female subject with a shift in focus. Rather than emphasizing male

dominated plots and images of women, Green explores the complex networks of readers, characters and authors involved in subject formation. Like Labovitz, Green argues that female development in the novel is often restricted; she suggests, however, that in considering formation instead, we are able to see the process of gender construction: "while the protagonists of these novels are always depicted at *formative* – self-constructing or self-defining – moments, their continued psychological *development* is sometimes withheld, incomplete, or cast into question" (2). Her work pays particular attention to moments of reading in the novel of formation, as opportunities given to the protagonist for identification and "self-defining" – the definition of the self that comes from consideration of, and identification with, another. She suggests that these reading moments offer opportunities not only for the formation of characters, but of readers as well – the characters model identification for readers of the text.

Yet as this focus on "self-defining" might indicate, Green sees this formative process as primarily about the self, or about the construction of individual female subjectivity. She considers this focus on the individual to be the basis of both nineteenth- and twentieth-century iterations of the genre, despite the complexity of identification in these texts:

> The novels I discuss themselves exhibit doubled or divided ends: the representation of shared features of women's formation as subjects, on the one hand, and a conception of subjectivity as fundamentally individual, on the other. While they represent the individual's formation, and obstacles to it, as specifically gendered, they also implicitly and explicitly insist that

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their female protagonists' experience and emotions have a claim on the

human universal. (7)

Interestingly, the individual is opposed here not to community or to society, but to "the human universal." The only possibility for community here would be the extent to which "shared features" of women's formation are emphasized in the text, and the extent to which one woman's journey into adulthood might be representative of other women's journeys.

Green also argues that identification is not inherently resistant: "the chain of narrative identifications into which [novels of formation] introduce their readers - in which authors become characters, characters become readers, and readers in turn become authors - may be productive as well as recursive and may serve to inaugurate new narrative directions as well as reproduce old narrative patterns" (21). Green establishes a dichotomy here between "productive" texts and "new narrative directions" on the one hand, and "recursive" texts and "old narrative patterns" on the other. This suggests that no matter how complicated identification may be, and now matter how central it is to the process of female formation, feminist resistance in the novel still comes down to changing the plot, and to a temporal trajectory not unlike that of Labovitz or Ellis – in this case, from old narrative structures to new.

It seems to me that identification – particularly in terms of narrative representations of reading and writing – is more powerful than this description suggests. I contend that the attention given to moments of reading, writing, and textual interpretation serves to inscribe feminist and collaborative potential in both nineteenth- and twentieth-century examples of the female *Bildungsroman.* In my view, these moments interpellate

the reader into a network not just of identification, but also of *relationships*. Reading and writing in these works, even when they seem to be solitary pursuits, encourage the realization that formation takes place through language, representation, and dialogue – these are moments of critical and creative response to pre-existing words and ideas.

Nancy K. Miller seems to take this dialogical approach to resistance as well, in suggesting that women writers' resistance be evaluated in terms of a dialogue with the dominant plot structures from within their fictional texts:

> female-authored literature generally questions the costs of overdetermination of this particular narrative economy with an insistence such that the fictions engendered provide an internal, dissenting commentary on female plot itself. They thereby solicit a reading that takes into account the ideology at work in this map of female experience. (208)

Here, resistance to female plot and its construction of female development is associated not only with "the ideology at work," but also with "the costs" of such ideology and its narrative reinforcement. The "internal, dissenting commentary" critiques this narrative system from within, and does so in "solicit[ing] a reading." The feminist reader thus interpellated, far from being invited to identify with a traditional female subject – a possibility suggested by both Marcus and Green – will develop an awareness of the

ideological construction and "narrative economy" at play in representing "female experience."[20]

For Miller, a dissenting commentary is particularly powerful in autobiographical texts, a form that she relates to both performance and selectivity. The act of representing one's own life – and the choices involved in that representation – accentuates the writer's creative control over the narrative. In a question put to her reader, itself an instance of interpellation into a dialogue, Miller compares autobiography to a stage: "what conventions govern the production of a female self as *theater*? How does a woman writer perform on the stage of her text?" (49). Part of the answer to these questions on performativity seems to be "the problem of selectivity" – the decision of what formative moments to include and privilege, such as a focus on childhood reading. Miller's conception of life writing differs from traditional autobiography in that she looks not for empirical truth but for performances that showcase the difficulty of writing women's lives under patriarchy. She calls for a reading "which would privilege neither the autobiography nor the fiction, but take the two writings together in their status as text" (60). I follow this approach in choosing the texts I have – all of which are concerned to some degree with biography – and in my consideration of how this element contributes to greater resistance and "dissent."

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20. See also Rachel DuPlessis, *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers*; DuPlessis argues that what she calls "the romance plot" suppresses female maturity to the point that it invalidates the *Bildungsroman*: "As a narrative pattern, the romance plot muffles the main female character, represses quest [*Bildung*], valorizes heterosexual as opposed to homosexual ties, incorporates individuals within couples as a sign of their personal and narrative success" (5). This text is more thoroughly explored in the following chapter in consideration of its link between feminist resistance and community, such as the need for "woman-to-woman bonds" and "the communal protagonist" (5).

What all of these feminist scholars seem to have in common, despite varying definitions of and approaches to the female *Bildungsroman* – as novel of development, novel of formation, female life writing – is the idea that any evaluation of feminist resistance within the genre (even contemporary iterations) must take into account the predominance of patriarchal female images and plots in nineteenth-century texts, whether it is about insisting on their restrictive limitation, or about discovering their complexity and finding a resistant thread within them. My own reading of the feminist potential of the novels of this chapter takes into account both approaches – seeing feminist resistance in terms of resistance to dominant plots, but also in consideration of the (perhaps surprising) element of sustainable female community that already exists within these plots.

Accordingly, the close readings that follow focus on the way in which maturity is defined in these novels, and in particular, in the processes (education, both formal and through reading, work, marriage, sexuality) and the relationships (those between women in particular) that seem to define the transition from girlhood to womanhood. I will attempt to demonstrate that we can see these works' discontent with the traditional *Bildungsroman* in both the form and content of their plots – in the way these novels break with traditional progressive temporal form and conventional plots such as marriage in order to tell the stories of individual women, and to envision possibilities (albeit fledgling or fleeting) for female solidarity and community. I will place particular emphasis, as do the texts themselves, on addresses to the reader and on moments of reading and writing within the narrative.

Jane Eyre: "As Free as in Solitude"

According to Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *Jane Eyre* is emblematic of the genre of the female *Bildungsroman.* In their assessment of the novel's feminist potential, the character Jane's individual journey to maturity is also a collective journey, but only in the sense that her story is representative of every woman's role in patriarchal culture:

> her story, providing a pattern for countless others, is…a story of enclosure and escape, a distinctly female *Bildungsroman* in which the problems encountered by the protagonist as she struggles from the imprisonment of her childhood towards an almost unthinkable goal of mature freedom are symptomatic of the difficulties Everywoman in a patriarchal society must overcome. (339)

In this conception of the novel, Jane is representative of "Everywoman," tasked with finding "mature freedom" by escaping society's structures of "imprisonment." It is not clear what exactly is meant by this freedom – freedom from patriarchal culture? From its more overtly oppressive institutions? Individual freedom *within* patriarchal culture? I suggest that Jane's maturity can be read not so much in terms of an oscillation between "enclosure and escape," but rather between individual and collective development: between self-reliance and friendship, and between self-education and learning and teaching in community. Moreover, I argue that her story's resistant feminist potential can and must be read in its specific appeals to an imagined reader – not *every* woman but a specific middle-class Victorian one.

Jane begins the novel in isolation, and in comparing herself negatively to her cousins: "humbled by the consciousness of my physical inferiority to Eliza, John, and Georgiana Reed" (1). Her mental superiority, and her power of imagination, on the other hand, is made immediately clear to the reader, if not to the character. Unlike her cousins, Jane prefers to read, and to take her reading as a point of imaginative departure: "Each picture told a story; mysterious often to my undeveloped understanding and imperfect feelings, yet ever profoundly interesting…With Beswick on my knee, I was then happy: happy at least in my way. I feared nothing but interruption" (2-3). These descriptions of Jane's mental life – her "underdeveloped understanding" and her "imperfect feelings" – seem almost placed to create a contradictory response from the reader, who, far from accepting these scenes as examples of underdevelopment and imperfection, are encouraged to see the depth of Jane's imagination and developed moral understanding and outrage.

Interruption occurs in the form of her cousin John, who tells her the books belong to him: "all the house belongs to me, or will do in a few years" (3). To make his patriarchal claim on property and authority clear, he then uses the book as a weapon, hitting Jane and causing enough damage to make her bleed. In a passionate accusatory cry, Jane demonstrates her understanding by making comparisons to books she has read, arguing that his authority is hardly natural or just: "'Wicked and cruel boy!' I said. 'You are like a murderer – you are like a slave-driver – you are like the Roman emperors!'" (3). In this scenario, Jane feels herself to be "like any other rebel slave" (3). From childhood then, Jane both recognizes her lack of power and attributes to it a sense of injustice, promising attributes for a reader wishing to imagine her a proto-feminist.

Strikingly, in her three comparisons to John, each one critiques a hierarchal system of power open to abuses, positing the relationship of John and herself as similar to the power a murderer has over a victim, a slave-owner over a slave, and a Roman emperor over his subjects. It seems that John is "wicked and cruel" because of his participation in such a system: his entitlement due to the position of power granted to him by society; Jane is his dependent, both as a poor relation and as a female, occupying his space and using his things. With his lack of imagination, books are only objects to be possessed, and ownership is to be unquestioned, justifying violence towards dependents and inferiors. Jane's power and authority, on the other hand, come from her ability to read and learn, which gives her the knowledge with which to make such comparisons. As Cheryl A. Wilson argues in her article "Female Reading Communities in *Jane Eyre*" (2005), reading can be a force for transformation that threatens the status quo: "[a]n ignorant and deprived Jane, forced to inhabit an inferior social position, is unthreatening. However, the act of reading represents an attempt to increase knowledge, which could transform Jane into a socially mobile individual" (134).

Jane's power of imagination is further demonstrated during her time as a prisoner in the red-room, her punishment for attempting to fight her abuse. It is the room in which her uncle died, and it has been frighteningly preserved. Jane senses the space begin to come alive around her:

> to my right hand was the high, dark wardrobe, with subdued, broken
> reflections varying the gloss of its panels; to my left were the muffled
> windows; a great looking-glass between them repeated the vacant majesty
> of the bed and room… All looked colder and darker in that visionary

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hollow than in reality: and the strange little figure there gazing at me, with

a white face and arms specking the gloom, and glittering eyes of fear

moving where all else was still, had the effect of a real spirit: I thought it

like one of the tiny phantoms, half fairy, half imp… (6)

Jane's surroundings begin to reflect her mental state as well as the dangers of her social location as the Reeds' young female dependent: like the shadows and reflections of the room, she is "subdued, broken, muffled" in relation to the "vacant majesty" of those in power over her, a power they are shown to be unworthy of possessing. Jane is so trapped in this space that she hardly recognizes her own reflection; instead of a human girl she sees "a strange little figure" with "the effect of a real spirit…one of the tiny phantoms, half fairy, half imp." It is significant here that Jane is haunted by a vision of herself that is "strange," ghostly or not fully alive, and a half-breed, and that it is her prison, and her helplessness in response to confinement, that are responsible for creating this vision, despite the fact that she later tells the doctor it was Mr. Reed's ghost who frightened her (13). Jane loses her grip on reality during her imprisonment, but comes out of the situation emboldened enough to critique Mrs. Reed directly. This newfound maturity is seen as unnatural and out of sync with Jane's predetermined position in society; Mrs. Reed sends her away soon after, and specifically asks Mr. Brocklehurst that Jane be "trained in conformity to her position and prospects" (21).

Yet Lowood, the school to which Jane is sent, is more than a new imprisonment, or a forced lesson in conformity. It also serves as an important new stage for her educational development, in terms of both her ability to recognize the injustice of society, and the progression of her reading knowledge and female friendships. To oppose Mr.

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Brocklehurst's unjust treatment of his female students, Helen Burns and Miss Maria

Temple give Jane support and community. Sarah Maier explains in "Portraits of the Girl-

Child: Female *Bildungsroman* in Victorian Fiction" (2007) that both Helen and Miss

Temple model maturity for Jane: "This education includes a type of surrogate communal

family of women to which she looks for exemplary behaviour…At the same time as they

give Jane support against Brocklehurst's intimidation tactics, Helen and Miss Temple

represent the customary ways of dealing with the burden of being female in a strictly

patriarchal system" (323). The maturity they exemplify, then, is more complicated than

Gilbert and Gubar's idea of "mature freedom" – Helen and Miss Temple indicate that

Jane's education system is not "strictly" patriarchal, and they support Jane over Mr.

Brocklehurst, but they also represent conformity, or the "customary ways" for women to

behave in patriarchal society. Helen embraces religion for example, albeit not the way

Mr. Brocklehurst teaches it, and Miss Temple seems to embrace the idea of marriage

superseding female community, leaving the school and her pupils and companions to

marry a clergyman.

All of this is not to argue that Helen and Miss Temple have no effect on Jane's

development into a woman still capable of questioning the dominant social order. They

have an enormous impact on helping her to see the value of female friendship, teaching

her that female community can mitigate if not transform the patriarchal world with which

women must contend. Reading and knowledge play a strong role in establishing this

community; just as Jane found authority in books to challenge John Reed and his mother,

she finds the strength to approach Helen in recognizing their mutual affinity for books: "I

saw a girl sitting on a stone bench near. She was bent over a book, on the perusal of

which she seemed intent…I hardly know where I found the hardihood thus to open a conversation with a stranger. The step was contrary to my nature and habits; but I think her occupation touched a chord of sympathy, for I, too, liked reading" (51). This "chord of sympathy" is enough to draw Jane out of her habitual isolation. Not only does Helen model reading as a worthy female occupation, but together with Miss Temple, she models for Jane the potential for education within female community: "they spoke of books: how many they had read! What stores of knowledge they possessed!" (75).

Jane's faith in community survives the loss of both of these female friendships. Jane spends Helen's last hours in previously unrealized intimacy with her: "She kissed me, and I kissed her, and we both slumbered" (55). Jane tells the reader that no other relationship will ever be as strong, including, presumably, her later relationship with Mr. Rochester: "I never tired of Helen Burns; nor ever ceased to cherish for her a sentiment of attachment, as strong, tender, and respectful as any that ever animated my heart" (52). While not as intimately connected to Miss Temple, their relationship seems to embody a number of functions for Jane: "her friendship and society had been my continual solace; she had stood me in the stead of mother, governess, and, latterly, companion. At this period she married, removed with her husband (a clergyman, an excellent man, almost worthy of such a wife) to a distant county, and consequently was lost to me" (57). Here, Jane's maturity after growing up at Lowood is described through her relationship with Miss Temple, who acted as a mother first, when Jane was at her youngest and most impressionable, then as a teacher, and finally, when Jane had matured enough to be her equal, as a companion. Despite all of these roles, and despite what they have been through together, Miss Temple chooses to marry and become "lost" to Jane, whose slight

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resentment can be read in this choice of phrase, as well as in the declaration that the clergyman is "almost worthy," but not completely.

Jane cannot imagine remaining at Lowood after Miss Temple's departure, despite new management, and suddenly realizes the extent to which the institution limits her access to society as a whole: "now I remembered that the real world was wide, and that a varied field of hopes and fears, of sensations and excitements, awaited those who had courage to go forth into its expanse, to seek real knowledge of life amidst its perils" (58). The open-ended quest narrative of the novel has begun, and the "courage" it requires seems profoundly individual. As if to emphasize this new isolation, once Jane reaches Thornfield and becomes a teacher herself, she rejects the viability of new potential female companions. It seems that Mrs. Fairfax, the housekeeper, is kind but unimaginative: "There are people who seem to have no notion of sketching a character, or observing and describing salient points, either in persons or things" (72).

Adèle, Jane's pupil, is treated by Jane with a mixture of sympathy, due to Jane's partial identification with her, and judgment, due to what Jane deems to be her overly French character. This ambivalence can be found in one of Jane's first descriptions of Adèle: "I found my pupil sufficiently docile, though disinclined to apply: she had not been used to regular occupation of any kind. I felt it would be injudicious to confine her too much at first" (70). Unlike Helen Burns, whose reading occupation draws Jane to her, Adèle has "no regular occupation." Nevertheless, Jane refuses to treat Adèle with "confinement," befriending her instead. Although Adèle seems to have no occupation or imagination, Jane identifies with her in her isolation and lack of a role model, telling Mr. Rochester: "I have a regard for her; and now that I know she is, in a sense, parentless –

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forsaken by her mother and disowned by you, sir – I shall cling closer to her than before.

How could I possibly prefer the spoilt pet of a wealthy family, who would hate her

governess as a nuisance, to a lonely little orphan, who leans towards her as a friend?"

(99) Jane is attempting to form a new female community, recognizing that isolation can

mean loneliness, and that shared circumstances of family and class (Adèle, like Jane as a

child, is a dependent) can bring people together. A class difference would mean Adèle, as

"a spoilt pet," would "hate" Jane in failing to identify with her.

This is corroborated within the narrative world by the arrival of Blanche Ingram,

who Jane believes is a rival for Mr. Rochester's affections. In a disturbing episode of

self-rejection, Jane decides to deliberately draw two contrasting portraits in order to

convince herself that Blanche is her superior, an attitude which seems a regression back

to the novel's opening, when she considered herself physically inferior to her cousins.

Jane orders herself to "delineate carefully the loveliest face you can imagine; paint it in

your softest shades and sweetest lines…call it 'Blanche, an accomplished lady of rank,'"

and for her self-portrait, to "Omit no harsh line, smooth away no displeasing irregularity;

write under it, 'Portrait of a Governess, disconnected, poor, and plain'" (110).

Fortunately for Jane's diminishing self-esteem, Blanche is so ostentatious about her own

superiority, and her disdain for governesses, that Jane finds herself able to criticize her:

"She was not good; she was not original: she used to repeat sounding phrases from

books: she never offered, nor had, an opinion of her own" (85). Blanche is condemned

here by her way of reading, as a replacement for independent thought and true maturity.

Jane's initial belief that women of different classes cannot be equals seems to hold true,

although it turns out that her middle-class values place her above and not below Blanche.

Jane's recovery of her self-esteem is accompanied by a gendered societal critique, in the passage in the novel that is most often cited as a description of female resistance to the laws of patriarchy:

> Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts, as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering. (74-75)

This passage is radical in a variety of ways; in particular, the insistence that there is something wrong the systematic denial of women's emotional and mental capacities. In articulating a need for "a field for their efforts," and in suggesting that real suffering comes from its lack, Jane's statement anticipates feminist activism towards a more equal educational system. The "too rigid a restraint" she describes seems to be symbolically represented by Mr. Brocklehurst and her cousin St.-John Rivers, figures who are both "narrow-minded" and "privileged" in their position in society. This "exercise for their facilities" seems to be found instead with Mr. Rochester, but also with various female communities: with Helen and Miss Temple at Lowood, and with her cousins Diana and Mary later on.

There are other parts of the novel however that seem to be in contradiction with this plea against "too rigid a restraint," most notably, the example of Bertha Mason, who has been literally restrained and isolated in the attic for years. When Jane encounters

Bertha, she sees nothing but a "savage beast" (249), rather than a woman who has been imprisoned, as she was in childhood. If the confinement to the red-room for the span of a few hours resulted in hysteria and illness, surely Jane's character ought to be capable of finding a "sympathetic chord" with someone so much more completely and perpetually confined. Jane has rejected the idea that "women are supposed to be very calm generally," but she also refuses to entertain the idea that Bertha's very confinement may have caused her madness and lack of calm. Instead, she follows Mr. Rochester's lead of attributing the madness to Bertha's Creole blood.[21]

Bertha may represent an extreme case, at least in the way the novel accounts for her madness, but Jane also contradicts her stated belief about women's equality when it comes to her attitude towards Adèle. We have seen Jane's expression of friendship for Adèle, and her intention not to overly confine her, yet as a teacher, Jane encourages Adèle to conform to English patriarchal society at every turn. Adèle's own maturity is troublingly marked by an acceptance of her role in society, the very fate which the clearly antagonistic Mrs. Reed desired for Jane: "As she grew up, a sound English education corrected in a great measure her French defects; and when she left school, I found in her a pleasing and obliging companion: docile, good-tempered, and well-principled" (320). Like a good slave, the concept of which made a younger Jane so enraged, Adèle is "obliging" and "docile," and "well-principled." She matures into a companion who obeys, not an equal for Jane to befriend. We can easily imagine this mature and "corrected" Adèle confined to "making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering" (75).

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21. For more analysis of Bertha Mason and the terms of Jane's rejection, see chapter V.

Hope for female community is not entirely lost however, as Jane befriends her cousins Diana and Mary. Even before discovering their genetic kinship, Jane is drawn to them because of the way they read: "I liked to read what they liked to read… I devoured the books they lent me: then it was full satisfaction to discuss with them in the evening what I had perused during the day. Thought fitted thought: opinion met opinion: we coincided, in short, perfectly" (346-347). Jane rejects their brother St. John and his marriage proposal for several reasons, but one of these seems to be his interruption of Jane's newfound female reading community: "'I hope you will begin to look beyond Moor House and Morton, and sisterly society'" (386). At the end of the novel, Jane refuses to let her marriage separate her from this sisterly society, deliberately telling her reader that Diana and Mary will continue to spend time in community with Jane: "My Edward and I, then, are happy: and the more so, because those we most love are happy likewise. Diana and Mary Rivers are both married: alternately, once every year, they come to see us, and we go to see them" (321).

Diana and Mary also teach Jane how to be in a relationship with Mr. Rochester, echoing Sharon Marcus' argument about the function of the female amity plot in Victorian literature. The end of the novel seems dominated by her marriage, and her attempt to convey its salutatory attributes to the reader, starting with a direction of the reader's focus: "Reader, I married him" (318). Jane describes her marriage as a state of continued freedom:

> To be together is for us to be at once as free as in solitude, as gay as in company. We talk, I believe, all day long: to talk to each other is but a more animated and an audible thinking. All my confidence is bestowed on

him, all his confidence is devoted to me; we are precisely suited in
character – perfect concord is the result. (320)

This passage holds striking similarities to the shorter passage describing her friendship with Mary and Diana. While "it was full satisfaction" to discuss books with her cousins, she and Mr. Rochester "talk…all day long." Jane thinks the same way as Mary and Diana, making their friendship a convergence: "Thought fitted thought: opinion met opinion: we coincided, in short, perfectly," and she converges with Mr. Rochester in much the same way: "to talk to each other is but a more animated and an audible thinking…we are precisely suited in character – perfect concord is the result." "Perfect coincidence" has been replaced with "perfect concord." Maturity with Mr. Rochester seems only possible because of the maturity she previously achieves with her cousins. This maturity is defined as a communal freedom – "to be at once as free as in solitude, as gay as in company." Marriage then, or this particular marriage at least, represents a perfect compromise between individual freedom and society; only a perfect convergence of minds can allow for a woman to be "as free as in solitude," and to navigate "company" with gaiety.

Yet Susan Lanser, in her chapter "*Jane Eyre*'s Legacy: The Powers and Dangers of Singularity," encourages us to be cautious regarding this perfect balance, arguing that Jane's authority and voice come only at the expense of other women, particularly Bertha: "Jane the character must silence all voices" (190). Certainly by the end of the novel, most of the female characters apart from Jane have been silenced in narrative terms, through death (Helen, Bertha, Mrs. Reed) or separation (Miss Temple, Adèle, and to a certain extent, even Mary and Diana). I would argue, however, that the relationship between

character and reader remains consistent and powerful throughout the novel, making even Jane's most individual moments of development dialogical. Because the text is a fictional autobiography, the novel's authority rests on a certain kind of textual promise to the reader – the promise that the novel will bring the reader into intimate conversation with Jane, and see her individual journey first-hand. The novel acknowledges that this autobiography, fictional or not, will contain some selective subjectivity, such as when Jane tries to explain her decision not to recount her remaining years at Lowood with Miss Temple: "But this is not to be a regular autobiography. I am only bound to invoke Memory where I know her responses will possess some degree of interest" (57).

This "degree of interest" is what constitutes Jane's ideal reader: someone interested in a narrative that finds her relationship with Mr. Rochester more interesting than that with Miss Temple, for example, but also someone interested enough in women's role in society to be receptive to her claim that "women feel just as men feel." Despite the reader being ostensibly male (having to do with the novel being published under a male pseudonym), this appeal to the reader's interest in female development seems to constitute the ideal reader as a woman, someone capable of finding an identification and "sympathetic chord" with Jane. Consistent dialogue with this presumed sympathetic reader pushes the idea of female community beyond relationships between characters, and towards a feminist novel of female community.

The Mill on the Floss: "This Struggling Earthly Life"

George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* makes a different narrative choice, focalizing the coming-of-age story of protagonist Maggie Tulliver through an omniscient narrative observer. The authority of this first-person narrator seems to lie in their closeness to Maggie: "Now I can turn my eyes towards the mill again, and watch the unresting wheel sending out its diamond jets of water. That little girl is watching it too" (2). In this sense, her novel acts as a biography rather than a fictional autobiography, although many twentieth-century scholars have understood the text as semi-autobiographical, a depiction of Mary Anne Evans' relationship with her own brother – their idyllic childhood and his disapproval of her choice as an adult to live out of wedlock with the married George Henry Lewes.[22]

My interest here is not in the extent to which the text is autobiographical, but rather in the choice to tell Maggie's story as a biography, with "selectivity," to borrow Nancy K. Miller's term, focused on childhood as well as womanhood, and the process of coming-of-age itself. My interest is also in the text's appeals to a sympathetic reader, interpellated into Eliot's case against rigid patriarchal culture by her construction of Maggie's social reality and the narrative commentary developed alongside. As Eliot tells the reader towards the end of the novel, "All people of broad, strong sense have an instinctive repugnance to the men of maxims; because such people early discern that the mysterious complexity of our life is not to be embraced by maxims" (325). I take this comment against reliance on maxims to be at least partially directed against patriarchy,

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22. Literary scholars have also studied *Jane Eyre* in terms of semi-autobiography, in particular Lowood and the death of Helen Burns, as inspired by the Brontë sisters' time at school, after which two of the sisters died.

and I explore "the mysterious complexity of our life" in terms of the text's resistant feminist potential, as it is illustrated through Maggie's coming-of-age.

Like *Jane Eyre, The Mill on the Floss* devotes considerable textual space to its female protagonist's childhood and education. The critique of the inequality of education under patriarchy for girls and boys is made much more explicit in *The Mill on the Floss* however, as Maggie's access to education and her imaginative power is juxtaposed with that of her brother Tom. The Tullivers, who themselves have limited education, are shown to be much more concerned with Tom's education and prospects than they are with Maggie's, despite Maggie's intelligence exceeding her brother's. Maggie's father recognizes his daughter's intelligence, but believes no good can come of it: "'She's twice as 'cute as Tom. Too 'cute for a woman, I'm afraid…It's no mischief much while she's a little un; but an over-'cute woman's no better nor a long-tailed sheep, – she'll fetch none the bigger price for that'" (4). Here childhood is distinguished from maturity with the troubling idea that an "acute" intelligent woman is an oddity of nature, and that this intelligence will fetch no "price" for herself or for her father.

It later becomes clear that for Maggie's father, and for society at large, maturity, female worth, and marriage are one and the same: "her father was bitterly preoccupied with the thought that the girl was growing up, was shooting up into a woman; and how was she to do well in life? She had a poor chance for marrying, down in the world as they were" (180). In her father's estimation, Maggie, as a grown woman and not a girl, can only "do well in life" through marriage, and her excessive intelligence combined with the family's economic trouble signal a "poor chance" for marriage and maturity. Tom's own estimation of his sister is not so different. When Maggie insists on working as a

governess rather than be his dependent, not unlike Jane's insistence on working after

being taken in by the Rivers, he cannot understand why. While St-John Rivers chooses to

interpret Jane's work ethic as proof of her potential to be a diligent missionary wife, Tom

finds Maggie's work ethic inconsistent with his goals and situation in life – his work as a

businessman and his attempt to gain back the mill and the family's respectability, after it

is lost under their father's mismanagement.

He finds Maggie's independence unseemly, something that reflects her willful

nature, to the detriment of his public performance of masculinity as the patriarchal head

of the family, whose role it is to financially support and claim authority over his female

dependents. Without any awareness or acknowledgement of the inequality behind their

different situations in life, he insists that as a man who has integrated into the world, he

has worldly knowledge that Maggie will never share: "'you might have sense enough to

see that a brother, who goes out into the world and mixes with men, necessarily knows

better what is right and respectable for his sister than she can know herself'" (255). His

claim is that his life experience, as someone "who mixes with men," gives him superior

knowledge and thus the right to command Maggie's behavior. As Maggie resists this

claim, the reader (although not Tom himself) becomes aware of the contingency of

Tom's insistence that he "necessarily knows better what is right." That is, Tom's

justification of his "natural" authority is contingent upon his opportunities as a man – the

spaces he has access to, such as his uncle's firm, and his ability to act in those spaces. He

sees no injustice in Maggie's inability to "go out into the world" as a woman, and he

refuses to validate her attempts to try. For Tom, there is no need for Maggie to "do well"

as an individual, and it is her desire to find a kind of maturity outside of marriage or a male-controlled household that makes her unnatural, even threatening.

Tom's rejection of Maggie's adulthood independence – her need to work and her decision to pursue her relationship with Philip Wakefield, a friend and potential suitor, against Tom's will – relates to Tom's beliefs shaped in childhood about the role of girls and women in society. As a boy, he is encouraged by his parents and other adults to reject the value of Maggie's intelligence. At the beginning of the novel, Tom and Maggie's attitudes towards their future are telling. Maggie understands her own superior intelligence, but plans to subordinate it into service to Tom: "'When he grows up I shall keep his house, and we shall always live together. I can tell him everything he doesn't know'" (16). Maggie expects that as a mature woman, she will continue to know more than Tom, but she will use that knowledge to "keep his house" and resolve his ignorance. Tom, meanwhile, plans to assert masculine authority over her: "Still, he was very fond of his sister, and meant always to take care of her, make her his housekeeper, and punish her when she did wrong" (23). "Fondness" transitions quickly here to a need to "punish" and correct Maggie's "wrongs" – a desire shared by more overtly oppressive characters in *Jane Eyre,* such as Mr. Brocklehurst or John Reed, who attempt to make the young Jane conform to a conventional role.

When Maggie pays Tom a visit at school, it is the beginning of her journey towards recognition of their unequal opportunities in life, and the beginning of her sense of injustice at the realization that her own mental prowess will be allowed no scope to develop. Maggie takes her visit as an opportunity, "with the sense that she was taking a great journey, and beginning to see the world" (91-92). This language calls to mind the

structure of the classic *Bildungsroman* quest narrative, and illustrates the link between education and integration into the world. Once at the school, Maggie attempts to impress both Tom and his tutor Mr. Stelling with her ability to learn new concepts quickly. Tom, meanwhile, is feeling insecure as a result of his inability to process Latin grammar and a classical education: "under this vigorous treatment Tom became more like a girl than he had ever been in his life before" (90). Although the narrator is implicated in this problematic linking of femininity and failure, the text goes on to critique Tom for this attitude, suggesting that Tom's aggressive rejection of Maggie's abilities is due in part to his perception of a threat to his masculinity: "'But I shall be a clever woman,' said Maggie, with a toss. 'Oh, I dare say, and a nasty conceited thing. Everybody'll hate you'" (93). In Tom's eyes, Maggie's intelligence makes her forget her place, becoming "nasty" and "conceited," a "thing" rather than a woman. As it turns out, his prediction that everyone will hate her for failing to be a proper woman is accurate.

Mr. Stelling soon confirms and legitimizes Tom's rejection, telling him that Maggie's intelligence must be dismissed, along with the intelligence of all women: "'They've a great deal of superficial cleverness; but they couldn't go far into anything. They're quick and shallow'" (96). In this reductive reasoning, Maggie is a girl and therefore her intelligence must be an illusion. This reasoning seems particularly damning for Maggie's case to establish her own worth on the strength of her mental capacity, because as a representative and dispenser of official knowledge, Mr. Stelling's opinion seems to indicate that of the educated classes in general, and thus carries some authoritative weight. Yet the novel encourages its sympathetic reader to side with Maggie, albeit indirectly, through previous critique of Mr. Stelling's powers of

discernment and teaching – he is motivated by the prospect of earning fees, and fails to give Tom the sort of practical education his father has asked for (a knowledge of legal and business affairs). The attentive reader is predisposed to reject Mr. Stelling's views, and by extension to question the idea that women's intelligence is "quick and shallow." Maggie is injured here by a lack of female community in her life – Jane Eyre had Helen and especially Miss Temple, and their authority, to oppose the authority and influence of Mr. Brocklehurst, while every adult Maggie encounters seems to deny the reality of women's intelligence, or its utility for society, or both.

Despite this lack of female community to guide her, Maggie matures into an awareness of the limits placed on women in society. She comes to recognize the contingency of patriarchal authority, its dependence on educational and vocational opportunities and freedom of movement in society. When Tom attempts to control her relationship with Phillip, and tells her his own conduct and family loyalty is superior to hers, she insists in their ensuing conversation that his having proper conduct is easier because of his gender: "'Because you are a man, Tom, and have power, and can do something in the world.' 'Then, if you can do nothing, submit to those that can.' 'So I *will* submit to what I acknowledge and feel to be right. I will submit even to what is unreasonable from my father, but I will not submit to it from you'" (225). Tom not only fails to grasp Maggie's point about his relatively privileged role in society – that it is this privilege and not an innate superiority that shapes Tom's conduct – but also insists that Maggie both accept that she "can do nothing" and "submit" to male authority. Maggie then makes an interesting concession to patriarchal culture, proclaiming unquestioning

obedience to her father if not her brother; what lingers here for the sympathetic reader is Maggie's independent will, and her identification of the "unreasonable."

Maggie's individual resistance is also tied up with her imaginative life, as both a girl and a woman. As a child, faced with Tom's rejection, she finds solace only in imaginative escapism: "Maggie could think of no comfort but to sit down by the hollow, or wander by the hedgerow, and fancy it was all different, refashioning her little world into just what she should like it to be" (28). Like Jane, she retreats into her mind, but while Jane's inner world comes predominantly from books, Maggie's imagination is given more scope – her "refashioning her little world" gestures towards the necessity of refashioning a greater world, the gendered society that restricts her. As an adult, Maggie uses similar language to demonstrate her dissatisfaction with the dominant life narrative for women, a romantic fate: "'But I begin to think there can never come much happiness to me from loving; I have always had so much pain mingled with it. I wish I could make myself a world outside it, as men do'" (269). Here we have Maggie's desire to have a "world outside" of the "sexual fate" as Miller would say; strikingly, this "world outside" is of her own creation, one she "could make [her]self."

This desire for "a world outside" is not limited to a search for female community. Maggie's earliest efforts to find a like-minded community to respect her intelligence and creative power take her to the local gypsy community. Maggie recognizes herself as an Other, someone not belonging to the community in which she is raised and educated: "she had been so often told she was like a gypsy, and 'half wild,' that when she was miserable it seemed to her the only way of escaping opprobrium, and being entirely in harmony with circumstances" (66). Maggie unconsciously takes Victorian racial and

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cultural ideology into her new community however, believing herself the gypsies'

superior and determining that she will be their Queen. Much like Jane's rejection of

Bertha and easy acceptance of Bertha's Creole blood as an explanation for her madness,

Maggie finds she is unable to connect with any one she has racially othered. She soon

finds herself back with her family, left to come of age with the people responsible for the

message that Maggie is "like a gypsy" in her nonconformity.

Maggie's nonconformist behavior is also made clear in her childhood through

comparison with her cousin Lucy; their friendship is Maggie's most significant female

relationship in the novel, and offers the most potential in terms of sustainable female

community. At first, it seems as though the narrative will construct Lucy only as

Maggie's foil, which is how Maggie's mother perceives her: "'an' there's her cousin

Lucy's got a row o' curls round her head, an' not a hair out o' place. It seems hard as my

sister Deane should have that pretty child; I'm sure Lucy takes more after me nor my own

child does'" (5). The omniscient narrator soon intervenes however, interpellating a more

careful reader (of the text and of the characters of Maggie and Lucy):

> And Maggie always looked twice as dark as usual when she was by the
>
> side of Lucy... Certainly the contrast between the cousins was
>
> conspicuous, and to superficial eyes was very much to the disadvantage
>
> of Maggie though a connoisseur might have seen "points" in her which
>
> had a higher promise for maturity than Lucy's natty completeness. (37)

There is potential here for the development of the monstrous dark woman and the lighter

angel of the house, as Gilbert and Gubar might put it; Lucy brings out Maggie's darkness,

serving in that sense as a point of identification, rather than a person with whom to

develop a relationship.[23] Yet the narrator tells us that this is only "to superficial eyes," encouraging the reader to act instead as a hypothetical "connoisseur" capable of seeing "a higher promise for maturity" in Maggie. While the definition of maturity here is somewhat unclear, there is a definite indication that maturity goes beyond appearance, and a suggestion that it is instead linked to the life of the mind.

Ironically, Lucy herself is Maggie's most appreciative audience during childhood. She is the only character to benefit from the power of Maggie's creative storytelling: "Lucy had a delighted semibelief in Maggie's stories" while "Tom had a profound contempt for this nonsense of Maggie's" (63). Like Maggie, Lucy experiences joy as well as escape in the imagination, and finds value in Maggie's ability to enter and share an alternative world. Because Tom has no capacity for understanding or appreciating ambiguity, he dismisses these stories as "nonsense," while Lucy is able to play with reality and experience "semibelief." This creative ambiguity seems to be a sign in the novel not only of authentic childhood experience but also of maturity itself.

Maggie, meanwhile, rejects Lucy in their youth, seeing her as a rival for Tom's affections, and taking to heart the way the adults in their lives contrast the two of them. On the one hand, they take joy in each other's company; Lucy looks at Maggie with a "shy pleasure," and Maggie "always looked at Lucy with delight." On the other hand,

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23. Gilbert and Guber argue in *The Madwoman in the Attic* that what Maggie and Lucy share is only the extent to which they might become one another, or their shared circumstances under patriarchy: "Eliot always, in fact, associates such an act of sympathetic identification between women… with a perspective on life that widens as the heroine escapes what the novelist depicts as the ultimate imprisonment, imprisonment within the cell of the self… what these women share is their potential for becoming each other, and it their recognition of this potential that defines the heroism of sisterhood within patriarchy" (517). I would argue that the way their friendship sustains each other is more complicated than this; Lucy teaches Maggie not about "imprisonment" but about the power of love and forgiveness, while Maggie teaches Lucy about the joy of the imagination – a sisterhood not defined merely by patriarchy.

Lucy's genuine admiration for Maggie is unreciprocated at this point in their development, and Maggie looks at Lucy in order to fantasize a version of idealized femininity that she herself could possess: "She was fond of fancying a world where the people never got any larger than children of their own age, and she made the queen of it just like Lucy, with a little crown on her head, and a little sceptre in her hand–only the queen was Maggie herself" (37). Like Jane, Maggie attempts to reconstruct identity through portraiture, yet Jane drew herself in comparison with Blanche Ingram as a gesture of self-effacement, while Maggie gestures in her alternative world towards a better self, "a queen" with power, who would appropriate Lucy's best attributes. Maggie's self-esteem in comparison to Jane's is refreshing, yet both characters' creative efforts and comparison between themselves and others seems to be about identification and idealized femininity rather than a desire for community.

I suggest that part of Maggie's maturity into womanhood can be read in the way she comes to appreciate and seek friendship with Lucy, overcoming the impulse to use Lucy only as model for identification. In a conversation with Philip Wakem over female protagonists in literature, often interpreted as a foreshadowing of Maggie's betrayal of Lucy, Maggie makes a powerful move from identification to community:

> 'As soon as I came to the blond-haired young lady reading in the park, I
> shut it up… I'm determined to read no more books where the blond-haired
> women carry away all the happiness…If you could give me some story,
> now, where the dark woman triumphs, it would restore the balance.'
> 'Well, perhaps you will avenge the dark women in your own person, and
> carry away all the love from your cousin Lucy.'

'Philip, that is not pretty of you, to apply my nonsense to anything real,'

said Maggie, looking hurt. 'As if I, with my old gowns and want of all

accomplishments, could be a rival of dear little Lucy… even if I were

odious and base enough to wish to be her rival… Lucy is good, and loves

me.' (214)

Maggie insists here on the distinction between fiction and reality, suggesting that the

relationship between herself and Lucy cannot and should not be reduced to the dominant

literary archetypes of the "blond-haired" and the "dark woman." In her last comment, it is

significant that she rejects not only the feasibility of being Lucy's rival, but also the

desirability, describing such a wish as "odious and base." The attentive reader can

extrapolate from the statement "Lucy is good, and loves me," that Lucy is good *because*

she loves Maggie, and that Maggie's adult maturity is defined in part by the

acknowledgment of the value of Lucy's love.

Lucy's fiancé Stephen Guest, who will soon develop an illicit though reciprocated

passion for Maggie, also recognizes the value of Lucy's love for Maggie, yet assimilates

this value into a patriarchal context. When Lucy tells Stephen that "'[t]here is no girl in

the world I love so well as my cousin Maggie'" (236), he recognizes Lucy as "a woman

who was loving and thoughtful for other women" (240) and adds this to his mental

catalogue of what makes Lucy virtuous, and a perfect marriage partner. Stephen's

assessment recalls Sharon Marcus' "female amity plot" and its role in providing

normative models of female development.

Maggie and Lucy's friendship, however, provides a bond that goes far beyond

merely preparing each of them for heterosexual marriage. As we have seen, from

childhood onward Lucy is the only person in Maggie's life to love her unconditionally and consistently, and to admire her. Lucy can also be seen as a representation of the ideal reader, through her support of Maggie, particularly as a listener. When Maggie confesses her difficulty with her brother over her relationship with Philip, which Lucy reads not as a betrayal of the Tulliver family but as a perfectly valid romantic friendship, Lucy listens as sympathetically as she had to Maggie's childhood stories: "The narrative lasted long, for Maggie had never before known the relief of such an outpouring; she had never before told Lucy anything of her inmost life; and the sweet face bent towards her with sympathetic interest, and the little hand pressing hers, encouraged her to speak on" (252). This passage suggests the text overall as well as this particular struggle of Maggie's, with the idea of an "outpouring" of Maggie's "inmost life," and with "the sympathetic interest" provided by Lucy, and elicited by extension from the reader. The passage also indicates the tactile nature of their relationship, with Lucy's "little hand pressing hers" as a means of physical support. There is a semi-erotic intimacy to their connection, particularly on Lucy's part: "Lucy…could not resist the impulse to steal up to her and kiss her" (271).

Lucy's importance to Maggie, and to the text, is furthered when it comes to her forgiveness of Maggie's transgression, her briefly sought escape with Lucy's fiancé. When Maggie decides she cannot go through with the act of marriage to Stephen, the way this would affect Lucy and Philip is foremost in her mind, rather than how society in general would judge her actions. Yet when Maggie returns, it is society who ostracizes her, and in particular, the women of society: "Public opinion, in these cases, is always of the feminine gender, – not the world, but the world's wife" (320). "The world" has

special significance in the novel, as a set of possibilities open only to those free to move about in spaces and roles under patriarchal control (education, travel, business, the law), and as something to be juxtaposed with the imagination, the world Maggie would refashion if she could.

Here patriarchal reality is shown to have another consequence for women – not just a limit on individual female freedom but also a suppression of female solidarity. "The world's wife," who is limited from access to the world proper, must judge from within her prescribed sphere any woman who attempts to act out, to reach "a world outside," lest the world's wife be implicated herself in such transgression: "still, since they [words about Maggie's transgression] *had* been said about her, they had cast an odor round her which must cause her to be shrunk from by every woman who had to take care of her own reputation–and of Society" (329). Society with a capitol S is under indictment in the novel, responsible for curtailing the development of someone like Maggie – imaginative, strong willed, intelligent – from childhood on, as both a girl and a woman.

Lucy's forgiveness provides a marked contrast from Society or "the world," gesturing towards a potential female solidarity and community that Society cannot completely prevent. Moreover, Lucy's act of forgiveness provides another moment of intimacy between the two women: "She pressed the little hand that she held between hers, and looked up into the face that was bent over hers. Lucy never forgot that look. 'Maggie,' she said, in a low voice, that had the solemnity of confession in it, 'you are better than I am. I can't–' She broke off there, and said no more. But they clasped each other again in a last embrace" (333). In the first such scene of "confession," it is Maggie who confesses to Lucy, and Lucy whose "little hand [was] pressing hers" (252), while

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here, Maggie reciprocates, pressing Lucy's hand as Lucy speaks to her with "the solemnity of confession." What Lucy might have to confess is unclear, but in its ambiguity a reader with "sympathetic interest" (particularly a contemporary feminist reader) might see the depth of her love for Maggie as itself a confession. What does seem clear is the strength of this "last embrace" between them, soon to be contrasted with Maggie's last embrace with Tom, just before they both meet their deaths.

Maggie's death, explained in the narrative world by her attempt to rescue to her brother Tom from a flood, is often debated in terms of its greater significance. Is her death, described by the narrator as "that far, far-off rest from which there would be no more waking for her into this struggling earthly life" (334), a potential liberation from society's demands, or does it illustrate the power of society to suppress and contain her resistance? There is a wistful quality to the contrast between death as a distant "rest" and life as more immediate "struggling," but there is tragedy as well in the idea that "there would be no more waking for her." Maggie's death is also marked by another embrace, suggesting reconciliation between Maggie and Tom: "brother and sister had gone down in an embrace never to be parted, living through again in one supreme moment the days when they had clasped their little hands in love" (340). This embrace has a privileged role in the novel by being placed at the end, yet I read it as an echo of the embrace previously shared with Lucy, whose forgiveness is more immediate and clear than Tom's. Moreover, Lucy's embrace is a commitment to life, a friendship that has helped Maggie to navigate "this struggling earthly life," while Tom's embrace, despite the narrator's insistence that now they are "never to be parted," is possible only in death. The "clasp[ing] of their little hands" represents a distantly remembered idyllic past, while Maggie and Lucy's

handholding is, like their relationship, recent and tangible. Tom's lack of "sympathetic interest" for Maggie in life means that it is only Maggie who is remembered; it is her grave that Lucy, Stephen, and Philip visit at the end of the novel, and in this way, her relationship with those still living is privileged alongside her relationship with Tom.

This reading of the end of the novel, and of the importance of Lucy and Maggie's relationship, is in line with Susan Fraiman's reading of the novel, in her article "*The Mill on the Floss*, the Critics, and the *Bildungsroman*" (1993), as a sort of "anti-*Bildungsroman*," because of its critique of the development of alienated individuals at the expense of social relations, what she describes as the novel's "portion of radical discontent" (137). Fraiman assesses the success of the *Bildungsroman* in terms of community rather than individual progress, and suggests that *The Mill on the Floss* can be read in terms of Maggie's constitution through social relations: "I offer an alternative way of reading for formation, insisting less on the progress of an alienated individual than on a figure's constitution by manifold social relationships" (138).

Maggie has little access to the traditional modalities of the *Bildungsroman*, and for Fraiman, she also *chooses* to reject this cult of individuality: "her stubbornly relational mode…suggests not a lone figure pushing past a painted backdrop but a girl hedged in, defined at every point, by a certain cultural discourse" (146). Fraiman adds that in showing Tom's story to be "deficient" – his lack of sympathetic feeling, and integration through marriage – the novel offers a critique of social mobility as development, "a repudiation of precisely this story of self-advancement" (140). I would like to extend this idea of the novel as anti-*Bildungsroman,* characterized for me not only by a rejection of the traditional narrative of individual development, and by a recognition

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of the power of "cultural discourse" and social relations to define individuals, but also by a reclaiming of that power of the "relational mode," through the creation of a powerful female relationship that presents an alternative to the definitions of Society, and "the world's wife."

Orlando: "The Spirit of the Age"

Virginia Woolf's *Orlando: A Biography,* published in 1928, may initially seem out of place in a grouping of novels with a commitment to female community. Its coming-of-age narrative is after all exclusively focused on one protagonist, Orlando, who begins the novel as a sixteen-year-old boy during the Elizabethan era. The novel almost immediately demonstrates its deviance from the classic *Bildungsroman* however, establishing the presence and authority of an unnamed narrator, or "biographer," who comments on their own process of narration. As the novel progresses, further ties to the narrative tradition of the realist novel dissolve; not only does Orlando transition from a man to woman, rather than (merely) from boy to man, but s/he does so in a way not beholden to verisimilitude. Moreover, Orlando's journey takes him/her through various centuries and cultural norms, ending in the present moment from which Woolf writes, suggesting the ongoing, open-ended nature of identity formation.

In her article "The Temporality of Modernist Life Writing in the Era of Transexualism: Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* and Einar Wegener's *Man into Woman*," Pamela L. Caughie describes the novel as an example of "transnarrative." For Caughie, Orlando's transition from man to woman both demands and enables a narrative structure

so transformative as to need a new genre classification: "transsexual life writing…disrupts conventions of narrative logic by denying pronominal stability, temporal continuity, and natural progression. It thereby demands a new genre, a transnarrative" (503). Due to this privileging of the creative imagination in the form and content of the narrative, the character Orlando is free from Maggie's "struggling earthly life" – unbound by the restrictions of any one culture and its social reality, and, if not free from "a sexual fate," free at least from the "linear reinscription" of that fate through realist narrative convention and "natural progression." This creative freedom is linked to what I see as the novel's most important feminist contribution, its illustration of the constructed nature of gender – its contingency upon cultural and historical ideology, or what the novel refers to as "the spirit of the age" – in place of a mimetic representation of gender, as empirical, even material fact.

In addition, Woolf demonstrates her commitment to female community in her theoretical essay *A Room of One's Own.* In this essay, Woolf constructs an imaginative argument about the representation of relationships between women that go beyond rivalry as a necessary and important part of the woman writer's task. Woolf contrasts the work of an imagined feminist writer, Mary Carmichael, with that of Shakespeare:

> Chloe liked Olivia perhaps for the first time in literature. Cleopatra did not like Octavia. And how completely *Antony and Cleopatra* would have been altered had she done so!... Cleopatra's only feeling about Octavia is one of jealousy. Is she taller than I am? How does she do her hair?... All these relationships between women, I thought, rapidly recalling the splendid

gallery of fictitious women, are too simple. So much has been left out,

unattempted. (82)

This accounting of "the splendid gallery of fictitious women" as "too simple" seems reductive if we consider the strength of the female relationships in *Jane Eyre* (Jane and Helen, Jane and her cousins) and *The Mill on the Floss* (Maggie and Lucy); Eliot in particular takes pains to assure the reader that as an adult, Maggie's feelings for Lucy have evolved beyond jealousy. Yet even if this imagined fictitious relationship between Chloe and Olivia is not "the first […] in literature," such relationships continue to present a powerful challenge to the idea that relationships between men and women should hold primacy, in literature and in reality. If Chloe and Olivia, two of Mary Carmichael's characters, are given as much importance in Woolf's text as Mary Carmichael herself, then the feminist resistance Woolf encourages is collective; the room of her title starts to signify not so much the cult of individuality and solitude – writing as individual artistic vision, and texts which, like the room in question, belong only to the writer – but rather an alternative space in which to (re)create and (re)imagine the world, and women's place in it.

Yet if Woolf's theoretical commitment to female community is more explicit than any represented by Brontë's and Eliot's bodies of work, her novel *Orlando* seems complicit in the suppression of relationships between women. The character Orlando's transformation of gender, itself a powerful subversion of the classical narrative of maturity and development through institutional structures like education and marriage, seems to come at the expense of a sense of community. As a modernist text, *Orlando* transforms narrative ground in the search to undo the reality of the realist novel, but this

work remains fundamentally individualist, which ends up reinforcing the *Bildungsroman* pattern of individual against society, rather than attempting to portray societal transformation. My analysis of the novel keeps the imagined Chloe and Olivia in mind as a point of comparison with the *Bildung* of Orlando as a writer and as a gendered individual finding his and her place in society, as I explore the text's potential alongside its limitations.[24]

The novel opens with an insistence that Orlando embodies typical masculinity: "He – for there could be no doubt of his sex, though the fashion of the time did something to disguise it – was in the act of slicing at the head of a Moor which swung from the rafters" (13). The stability of Orlando's masculinity is linked here with the performance of violence, "the act of slicing." Yet the certainty of the "no doubt" as to his gender is already challenged by bringing up the possibility of doubt, and by the way that "the fashion of the time" points to the relative nature of that masculinity; the "disguise" this fashion provides, or the doubt it casts, is for a reader of Woolf's time, not a contemporary of Orlando. Less clear is the extent to which the narrator wants to encourage a critique of the link between masculinity and racial Othering; the violence is directed at "a Moor" who seems to serve the same purpose as Bertha Mason, of reproducing the definition of self through contrast with the Other.

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24. Like Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* and Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, *Orlando* is often read as an autobiographical statement of some kind. In this case, many scholars have focused on the relationship between Vita Sackville-West and Virginia Woolf, and the correspondence between the two women that took place while Woolf wrote the novel. As with the other two novels, my interest here is not in the extent to which the novel reproduces actual events, or even how it might attempt to transform these events. Instead, my interest is in the terrain of the text itself – the narrative and relationships imagined on the pages, and the elements of female coming-of-age, resistance to patriarchal culture, and community potential.

This opening part of the text also gives the reader the first indications of the subversive nature of the narration and biographical construction. Like Brontë's *Jane Eyre,* Woolf's novel makes use of a fictional biography to emphasize the closeness of the text, and the reader, to the protagonist. If the authenticity of a biography or autobiography rests in its claim to truth, its correlation to real life events, both texts must work through the construction of a fictional truth. While *Jane Eyre* works to achieve verisimilitude, making Jane's story a plausible life narrative, *Orlando*'s unnamed biographer works to comment on the process of her own narration, her own "selectivity" to borrow Nancy K. Miller's term once again. When compared with the narrator of *The Mill on the Floss,* who mixed closeness to Maggie with omniscient distance from the reader, the biographer of *Orlando* provides a much stronger interpellation of her reader's participation with the text. The tongue-in-cheek narrative aside – "for there could be no doubt of his sex, though the fashion of the time did something to disguise it" – undermines both the strength of Orlando's unquestioned masculinity and the authoritative nature of biography itself, asking the reader to join in the humor but also in the interpretation of the character and his masculinity.

We can thus interpret for ourselves the idea that the young Orlando seeks solitude naturally, which the biographer tells us humorously is the result of his clumsiness:

> and the biographer should here call attention to the fact that this clumsiness is often mated with a love of solitude. Having stumbled over a chest, Orlando naturally loved solitary places, vast views, and to feel himself for ever and ever and ever alone. So, after a long silence, 'I am

alone', he breathed at last, opening his lips for the first time in this record.

(17-18)

The idea that "the biographer *should* call attention" (emphasis mine) suggests once again

that the reader is being asked to judge the validity of the narrator's choice. The reader is

left to debate what lies behind Orlando's desire for solitude; perhaps it is the archetype of

the solitary artist, since Orlando is a playwright: "Orlando had written no more perhaps

than twenty tragedies and a dozen histories and a score of sonnets" (24). The

exaggeration of the phrase "to feel himself for ever and ever and ever alone" casts some

doubt on the naturalness of this desire for solitude. The last sentence offers some

metatextual humor, contradicting Orlando's words "I am alone" with the reminder that

the biographer, too, is present, as is the reader, "in this record." The reader is reminded of

this "record" throughout the novel, and the process of "selectivity" that determines the

record continues to be made opaque, engaging and affording power to the reader.

After this period of youthful solitude, which seems to offer writing and individual

creativity as *Bildung*, Orlando's entry into sexuality constitutes a more intersubjective

social maturity. His first relationship is with the Queen, and as if to insist that Orlando's

world is greater than Orlando himself, the biographer gives us not his point of view of the

Queen, but rather the Queen's subjective appraisal of Orlando:

Eyes, mouth, nose, breast, hips, hands – she ran them over; her lips

twitched visibly as she looked; but when she saw his legs she laughed out

loud. He was the very image of a noble gentleman. But inwardly? She

flashed her yellow hawk's eyes upon him as if she would pierce his soul.

The young man withstood her gaze blushing only a damask rose as

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became him. Strength, grace, romance, folly, poetry, youth – she read him

like a page. (24-25)

Orlando is the object of the Queen's penetrating gaze here, and her attempt to "pierce his

soul," as well as her reduction of Orlando to his physical parts, results in his "blushing

only a damask rose," suggesting a role reversal from patriarchal culture in which women

are traditionally the object of the male gaze. Moreover, in speculating on what he is like

"inwardly," the Queen contrasts attributes of idealized masculinity such as "noble" and

"strength" with attributes that seem to signal a lack of development, such as "folly" and

"youth." In the Queen's view, Orlando's penchant for poetry is part of his youthful,

romantic folly, hardly indicative of a mature *Bildung.* In saying in definitive terms that

the Queen "read him like a page," the biographer not only endorses the Queen's opinions,

but also provides a model for the reader's own appraisal of Orlando, encouraging a

recognition of Orlando's incomplete maturity and less than ideal masculinity, despite the

"image" he projects.

Their relationship ends when Orlando has sex with a girl his own age, and is

discovered by the Queen, who reacts with jealousy and anger, recalling Cleopatra and her

jealousy towards Octavia. The biographer describes Orlando's betrayal as an act

motivated by both nature and the culture of the age: "if Orlando followed the leading of

the climate, of the poets, of the age itself [...] we can scarcely bring ourselves to blame

him. He was young; he was boyish; he did but as nature bade him do" (27-28). Although

power is attributed to nature here, on closer examination it seems that Orlando's desire for

the girl is not in fact "natural" or at least not exclusively so, but is (also) conditional,

dependent upon youthful immaturity and cultural ideals "of the age itself" – particularly

the poetic trope that girls should be "plucked" while still in "season" (27). In a sense,
Orlando is acting on what *society* "bade him do." This distinction between nature and
society – which in this instance are in harmony – will become even more delineated as
Orlando matures.

Orlando's desire for this particular girl, for example, is not nearly as strong as his
love for Sasha, an unconventional and somewhat androgynous Russian woman, which
suggests that real desire does not always follow culturally determined norms. Sasha's
clothing disguises her sex just as Orlando's clothing disguised his in the beginning of the
novel (37), and because of her appearance and athletic skill Orlando is sure she must be
male: "alas, a boy it must be – no woman could skate with such speed and vigour [...]
Orlando was ready to tear his hair with vexation that the person was of his own sex, and
thus all embraces were out of the question" (38). If same-sex desire is "out of the
question" here, this phrasing recalls once again the opening of the novel, in which "there
could be no doubt" as to Orlando's masculinity – such phrasing actively encourages doubt
and questioning for the attentive reader.

The biographer declares that this relationship with Sasha has resulted in mature
masculinity: "In one night he had thrown off his boyish clumsiness; he was changed from
a sulky stripling [...] to a nobleman, full of grace and manly courtesy" (41). We have the
same words from the Queen's description here – "nobleman," "grace," and "courtesy,"
the last of which has now become "manly" – as well as the assertion that Orlando is done
with "clumsiness," related not only to immature boyishness, but also to solitude, as seen
earlier. Yet this maturity is put into question even before Sasha betrays Orlando, as
Orlando watches a play being performed and imagines acting towards Sasha with a

distinct lack of courtesy: "The frenzy of the Moor seemed to him his own frenzy, and when the Moor suffocated the woman in her bed it was Sasha he killed with his own hands" (56-57). The image of the nobleman is once again in danger of being exposed as a fiction, or as merely an image, distorted by uncontrollable violence and by identification with the racial Other. Here "the Moor" of the play serves a role not unlike that of Bertha in *Jane Eyre,* representing the monstrous within, and allowing for displacement and containment of that monstrosity through projection onto the racialized Other.

The greatest challenge to Orlando's masculinity is of course his transition into a woman, following Sasha's betrayal. At first, his response to the overnight change (after an inexplicable visitation by trumpeters and allegorical figures) indicates that the transition is not so fundamental to his sense of self: "Orlando looked himself up and down in a long looking-glass, without showing any signs of discomposure, and went, presumably, to his bath" (138). Discomposure or no, however, Orlando's first act upon becoming a woman is to flee her own society and join a group of gypsies.[25] Just as Maggie did before her, Orlando sees the gypsy community as a disparate space free of the gendered conventions in her own society. While Maggie believed the gypsies would accept her "darkness" and failure to embody idealized femininity, Orlando wants to find acceptance in a society in which gender does not matter: "the gipsy women, except in one or two important particulars, differ very little from the gipsy men" (153). Also like Maggie however, Orlando fails to become a part of this alternative community. The gypsies refuse to acknowledge her education and ancestry, and her gift as a writer – a career Orlando is learning cannot exist in isolation, without a community of readers.

25. The biographer tells us soon after Orlando looks in the mirror that pronoun usage must now change – again because of "convention" rather than nature: "in future we must, for convention's sake, say 'her' for 'his,' and 'she' for 'he'" (138).

It takes a return to England for Orlando to realize "the penalties and the privileges of her position" (153), and to achieve a greater understanding of the way gender is socially constructed:

> She remembered how, as a young man, she had insisted that women must be obedient, chaste, scented, and exquisitely appareled. 'Now I shall have to pay in my own person for those desires,' she reflected; 'for women are not [...] obedient, chaste, scented and exquisitely appareled by nature. They can only attain these graces, without which they may enjoy none of the delights of life, by the most tedious discipline.' (155)

For the first time, Orlando (rather than the biographer) directly suggests that gendered virtues occur not "by nature" but rather must be "attain[ed]." She also suggests that in a patriarchal society, it is women who must "pay" for these values being represented as natural and desirable. A new kind of image and pattern of behavior are now demanded by society, and Orlando can satisfy these demands only "by the most tedious discipline," or, as Judith Butler might say, by repetition of gendered performance. Orlando recognizes that even sexuality itself has to do with repeated performance: "As all Orlando's loves had been women, now, through the culpable laggardry of the human frame to adapt itself to convention, though she herself was a woman, it was still a woman she loved" (161). Although same-sex desire seems reduced to habit here, it is nevertheless a change from Orlando's earlier attitude that such desire is "out of the question." In addition, the idea that desire for the opposite sex is a "convention," rather than something resulting from nature, is a powerful one. Even if Orlando is later able to "adapt" in the sense that she

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feels love for a man, her love for Sasha continues throughout the novel, providing a dynamic and fluid representation of sexuality.

Orlando's struggle with society's demands is even more difficult, if less complicated, when it comes to legal matters and the reclaiming of her estate: "The chief charges against her were (1) that she was dead, and therefore could not hold any property whatsoever; (2) that she was a woman, which amounted to the same thing" (166). With these legal and cultural losses of power, Orlando must now contend with the spirit of the age in a more resistant mode than when she was male. As she enters the Victorian era, she attempts to subvert gendered convention through a marriage with Shel (full name Marmaduke Bonthrop Shelmerdine), an unconventional man whose gender identification is uncertain, as was Sasha's before him: "'Are you positive you aren't a man?' he would ask anxiously, and she would echo, 'Can it be possible that you are not a woman?' and then they must put it to the proof without more ado" (257-258). Humorous though this exaggerated interaction is, this representation of sexuality points critically to the performative nature of gender. Orlando and Shel's need to "put it to the proof" anticipates Butler's concept in *Gender Trouble* of "the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence" (185), according to which heterosexuality is an ideal "that disguises itself as a developmental law regulating the sexual field that it purports to describe" (185). In other words, heterosexuality is a fiction disguising itself as natural "developmental law," requiring performances like Orlando's and Shel's (and motivating these performances though creating "anxiety") in order to maintain its coherence and superiority. While Orlando and Shel may be part of the regulatory system, accepting its ideals and

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performing the way it demands, the text itself effects a strong critique in showing the reader how the system constructs and maintains itself.

To a certain extent, Orlando is given feminist agency within her marriage. The biographer offers an implied comparison to *Jane Eyre* that makes it clear that Orlando's marriage, compromise though it may be with Victorian society, goes a step further than Jane's in providing the protagonist with individual freedom. The suggestion here is that unlike Jane, Orlando marries for the deliberate purpose of manipulating her place in society:

> She had just managed, by some dexterous deference to the spirit of the age, by putting on a ring and finding a man on a moor…to pass its examination successfully…Orlando had so ordered it that she was in an extremely happy position; she need neither fight her age, nor submit to it; she was of it, yet remained herself. Now, therefore, she could write, and write she did. (266)

Just as Jane first encountered Mr. Rochester on the moor near Thornfield, Orlando is able to marry after "finding a man on the moor." Jane's encounter occurs soon after she expresses the desire to "travel the world as men do," suggesting that her relationship with Mr. Rochester will now suffice instead, while Orlando's encounter enables the renewal of her writing, a career independent from (if enabled by) her husband. The "dexterity" required here to arrange that independence recalls Lorna Ellis' argument that female maturity is about manipulation and "work[ing] within 'the system'" (29), rather than a direct confrontation with society. Orlando chooses to "pass" for example, rather than "fight" or "submit" to society's demands for her integration. The "happy position" she

achieves as a result is an individual one; she "ordered it" so she could "remain herself" and develop as a writer, without much concern for other women whose creativity or freedom might be stifled under the system. We are taken to an image of a room of one's own, but not the room from which imagining collectivity is possible or a desired outcome; the emphasis is very much on individual authorship.

Orlando's narrative does not leave her in this isolation however, thus complicating the idea that isolation and individual freedom equates to maturity and "success." The next phase of her development comes from childbirth, which is creatively revealed in the text only after a seemingly unrelated stream-of-consciousness, in which Orlando ponders life, society, and the nature of desire, as in the following excerpt: "[hail]... all fulfillment of natural desire, whether it is what the male novelist says it is; or prayer; or denial; hail! in whatever form it comes, and may there be more forms, and stranger" (294). All of these thoughts are then related to Orlando giving birth: "In other words Orlando was safely delivered of a son on Thursday, March the 20th, at three o'clock in the morning" (295-296). If giving birth is equated with these open-ended desires, through the phrase "in other words," then it becomes a meaningful and powerful experience, itself a part of "natural desire...in whatever form it comes," contradicting the idea that child-bearing is the only role to which women should aspire.

The end of the novel comes soon after this experience. Orlando has matured from boy to man, from man to woman, through marriage and childbirth, and from immature poet and playwright to published writer. The biographer tells us that as Orlando enters the present moment, all of her multiple selves converge: "The whole of her darkened and settled…and all is contained as water is contained by the sides of a well. So now she was

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darkened, stilled, and become…what is called, rightly or wrongly, a single self, a real self" (314). The very end of the narrative is marked by a temporal convergence as well: "And the twelfth stroke of midnight sounded… Thursday, the eleventh of October, Nineteen Hundred and Twenty-eight./ The End" (329). This return to linearity and "a single self" is concerning in light of the idea that textual experimentation resists the progressive development essential to the patriarchal ideals of the traditional *Bildungsroman.*

I also see in this privileging of the present moment, however, a subtle possibility for resistance to the limitations of "the male novelist" (294); as much as the ending seems to be a return to realist narrative convention, it is also an open ending, an insistence that Orlando must now contend with *contemporary* society. To the careful feminist reader of Woolf's time and today, there is an encouragement to apply what Orlando's development has revealed – about the historical construction of gendered ideals – to our own society. The very abruptness of the ending suggests that it is now the reader's task to imagine and critique what society demands from individuals. As for Orlando herself, despite the textual avowal that she is now "contained" and "stilled," I offer an alternative interpretation: that her complex identity is not so much suppressed as it is accommodated by her mature self. In this reading, maturity is associated at the end of the novel with a validation of complexity and multiplicity. Becoming more "settled" does not necessarily mean that her development is at an end, just as finally publishing her work does not necessarily mean that she will no longer write. Perhaps Orlando's next step, now that she has achieved such a complex individual freedom, will be to find the kind of community

exemplified by Chloe and Olivia from *A Room of One's Own,* or to write that community into being.

Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée: "J'ai payé ma liberté avec sa mort"

In feminist theory, Simone de Beauvoir is perhaps most famous for her theories about gender construction – demonstrated by her now infamous statement in her theoretical work *Le deuxième sexe* that "On ne naît pas femme, on le devient" (tome II 13). Like *Orlando, Mémoires d'une jeune fille* represents through the coming-of-age of its protagonist, in this case the author's representation of her younger self, the extent to which femininity is a social construct, rather than part of a natural order. Beauvoir's text, however, eschews any kind of narrative experimentation, temporal or otherwise, indicating a return, perhaps even a regression, to the narrative realism employed by Brontë and Eliot. In comparing Beauvoir's work to the three previous works examined in this chapter, I argue that her autobiographical account of her coming-of-age into a feminist philosopher builds upon Brontë's and Eliot's critique of the restrictions of patriarchal society, offering a stronger and more direct critique of the effects of such restrictions on women's lives. There is also a deeper consideration of how patriarchy affects female relationships, particularly relationships between mothers and daughters. At the same time, in placing the young Simone's narrative on a linear trajectory, Beauvoir's work lacks the radical textual resistance of Woolf's.

This linearity is reinforced by the fact that unlike any of the three novels previously explored, *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée* is explicitly presented to the

reader as autobiographical. Although events in the narrative are interpreted through a double lens – that of the young Simone and that of the presumably mature adult Simone who narrates retrospectively – interpretation in both of these cases is tied to events represented as empirical reality, events to which the narrator (and not the reader) has privileged access. What draws the reader into the text then is not the possibility of participating in interpretation or the creation of meaning, but rather a promise that they will receive the "truth."[26] The opening line of the work for example is as temporally exact as the ending of *Orlando*: "Je suis née à quatre heures du matin, le 9 janvier…" This kind of empiricism, which serves in *Orlando* to emphasize the present moment, works here to establish a stable chronology from beginning to middle to end. It also acts as a promise to readers that they will be allowed privileged access to this empirical reality, if they accept the narrator's authority.

For Esther Labovitz, such linearity places Simone's narrative along a problematically progressive timeline, suppressing the difficulties of her coming-of-age within patriarchy while promoting her individual success as a writer and a philosopher. Labovitz suggests that the reader is encouraged to conflate the literary representation of Simone with the historical Beauvoir, and is thus predisposed to see in Simone's coming-of-age story the seeds of adult maturity and success. She warns:

> Because Beauvoir's life may be viewed as a success story for women, on
> many levels, the reading of this *Bildungsroman* as a straightforward linear
> account of positive development might become a temptation…to avoid

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26. Again, see Philipe LeJeune's *Le pacte autobiographique* for further discussion of the truth pact.

this pitfall, the reader must be alert to signals within the narrative which relate to…failures and despairs. (76)

This alert reader is not one who is interpellated by the text itself, unlike the sympathetic reader elicited by *Jane Eyre* and *The Mill on the Floss,* or the critical reader invited by *Orlando* through that text's commentary on its own construction. Instead, the text itself invites a "straightforward" and progressive reading of Simone's journey from resistant youth to mature adulthood, complete with building a career (writing and teaching), finding the right romantic partner (Jean-Paul Sartre), and integrating into society (albeit in the form of a resistant academic community rather than the bourgeois society into which she is born). The "alert" feminist reader will need to read the novel somewhat against the grain in order to find the textual "signals" of the "failures and despairs" of Simone's journey that Labovitz describes, many of which are shaped by patriarchal culture.

In my view, the text's emphasis on individual success is dangerous not only because of its misleadingly "straightforward" portrayal, but also because it leads to an inability to imagine sustainable female community as an indicator of successful maturity. Labovitz argues, for example, that "[w]hat emerges as the focus of Simone's *Bildung* is the heroic struggle to maintain her individuality in the face of hostile forces ranged against her" (74). Heroism is defined here as the individual against society – the "hostile forces" of family, bourgeois culture, and religion – rather than collective resistance. Labovitz does go on, however, to acknowledge the limits of Simone's "heroic" individuality in identifying one of the text's "failures and despairs" as Simone's lack of a female role model:

the young Simone insists upon her uncanny intuition that she will have to

fashion her own idea of sex role and become her own role model. In her

case, she has seen that society has not yet invented one for her. One can

view such an attitude as a sign of a new freedom and an indication of

choice. Upon closer examination, however, one finds that the heroine is

often forced to build an image of her female role from the abyss of

nothingness. (76-77)

This argument points to the contradiction throughout the entire autobiography between,

on the one hand, Simone's celebration of her own abilities as a writer and thinker, finding

"freedom" and "choice" in forging new ground and stepping outside of existing societal

roles for women (marriage in particular), and on the other hand, the contradictory sense

that Simone is to some extent being "forced" into isolation and self-definition. I disagree

with Labovitz, however, in her belief that Simone has only "the abyss of nothingness"

from which to draw on in her own self-development. My reading of *Mémoires d'une*

jeune fille will challenge this "abyss" in exploring the strength of Simone's relationships

with other female characters, her best friend Zaza (Élisabeth Mabille) in particular. While

these relationships are often strained, and while none of them seems to inspire Simone

with a lasting desire to seek female community, these characters exist at least partly as

other subjects who play a major role in Simone attaining intersubjective maturity.

In *Le deuxième sexe,* the same theoretical work in which she argues so

persuasively that gender is a matter of social construction, Beauvoir argues that

relationships between mothers and daughters are not intersubjective, but rather about

problematic self-identification: "Dans une fille, la mère ne salue pas un membre de la

caste élue : elle y cherche son double. Elle projette en elle toute l'ambigüité de son

rapport à soi : et quand s'affirme l'altérité de cet *alter ego,* elle se sent trahie" (tome I

375). In this conception "altérité" is a threat and a betrayal, not the beginning of female

community. In *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée,* both Simone and her mother seem

implicated in this process of identification and betrayal. At first, in her early childhood,

Simone idealizes her mother from a distance: "Ma mère, plus lointaine et capricieuse,

m'inspirait des sentiments amoureux : je m'installais sur ses genoux, dans la douceur

parfumée de ses bras, je couvrais de baisers sa peau de jeune femme ; elle apparaissait

parfois la nuit, près de mon lit, belle comme une image" (12). Their relationship is

intimate physically, but their closeness is only an illusion; her mother is only "une

image."

> As Simone grows up, she starts to unconsciously imitate her mother:

>> Aussi vivions-nous, elle et moi, dans une sorte de symbiose, et sans
>>
>> m'appliquer à l'imiter, je fus modelée par elle…j'appris de maman à
>>
>> m'effacer, à contrôler mon langage, à censurer mes désirs, à dire et à
>>
>> faire exactement ce qui devait être dit et fait. Je ne revendiquais rien et
>>
>> j'osais peu de chose. (56-57)

Her mother then is her first role model, and she learns from her how to suppress herself,

how to "ranger" her identity. Taken in combination, the verbs "effacer," "contrôler," and

"censurer" present a severe indictment of her mother and their "symbiose." When

Simone starts to differentiate herself from her mother – particularly in her rejection of

religion – her mother is not the only one who feels betrayed: "Ma véritable rivale, c'était

ma mère" (138). Simone has not only received a lesson in how to be contained, which she

is able to reject, but also a more lasting lesson, in how to relate to other women; this lesson is not so easily rejected.

Simone's relationship with her younger sister is a little more nuanced: "il me faillait une associée ; rivalisant, collaborant, l'œuvre de chacune trouvait en l'autre sa destination, elle échappait à la gratuité" (59). If her sister is sometimes a rival, she also participates in collaborative, creative play. She is not, however, seen by Simone as an entirely separate person: "Elle était mon homme lige, mon second, mon double : nous ne pouvions pas nous passer l'une de l'autre" (59). Like her mother, her sister exists at this stage of her life only as her double; in this case, a masculine and subservient double. Yet the narrator claims that Simone never imagined herself as a man: "Dans mes jeux, mes ruminations, mes projets, je ne me suis jamais changée en homme ; toute mon imagination s'employait à anticiper mon destin de femme" (75). Simone and her sister imagine and prepare for this "destin" together, which they associate with physical suffering:

> La plupart des héroïnes réelles ou légendaires… n'atteignent, en ce monde ou dans l'autre, la gloire et le bonheur qu'à travers de douloureuse épreuves infligées par les mâles. Je jouais volontiers à la victime […] C'est ainsi que nous faisions, ma sœur et moi, des concours d'endurance : nous nous pincions avec la pince à sucre, nous nous écorchions avec la hampe de nos petits drapeaux. (77)

The young Simone equates victimhood with success for women, or "la gloire et le bonheur," and the text makes it clear that this conclusion arises from the way women, both "réelles et légendaires," are constructed by society, with their historically restricted

social roles in reality and their problematic representation in literature and legend. While Jane wanted to explore the greater world "as men do," and Maggie dreamed of an alternative world, one she could "fashion herself" and thus control her own destiny, at this point in her life Simone sees no possibility for escaping, let alone transforming, patriarchal society and its "douleureuse épreuves." While patriarchal society is blamed more directly here than in *Jane Eyre* or *The Mill on the Floss* for placing limits on female maturity, Simone chooses to develop "endurance" rather than resistance, taking away from the resistant potential of this particular representation of her childhood.

Simone is equally uninterested in imaginative escape, especially if it means a transformation of the self: "Moi-même, je ne m'imaginais pas avec un autre visage ; ni dans une autre peau ; je me plaisais dans la mienne" (64). Maggie fashioned an alternative world in which she reigned as Queen, but was only able to do so using Lucy's more conventionally beautiful face and not her own; Simone's vision of the future, while not as imaginative, refuses this kind of conformity. Her vision becomes more transformative than Maggie's when she imagines being in control of her destiny and that of others through a career as a teacher:

> Mère parfaite d'une petite fille modèle, lui dispensant une éducation idéale dont elle tirait le maximum de profit, je récupérais mon existence quotidienne sous la figure de la nécessité. J'acceptais la discrète collaboration de ma sœur que j'aidais impérieusement à élever ses propres enfants. Mais je refusais qu'un homme me frustrât de mes responsabilités : nos maris voyageaient. Dans la vie, je savais, il en va tout autrement : une mère de famille est toujours flanquée d'un époux ; milles tâches

fastidieuses l'accablent. Quand j'évoqua mon avenir, ces servitudes me

parurent si pesantes que je renonçai à avoir des enfants à moi ; ce qui

m'importait, c'était de former des esprits et des âmes : 'je me ferai

professeur', décidai-je. (76)

Here, Simone's ambition is a professional one, recalling Jane's development into a

teacher and governess, a role she used to leave Lowood and seek her own way in the

world, as well as Maggie's determination to make a living as a governess independently

of her brother's financial support. Unlike both Jane and Maggie however, Simone moves

from a belief that teaching will be motivated by "nécessité" to an embrace of what

teaching has the potential to achieve: "ce qui m'importait, c'était de former des esprits et

des ames."

Moreover, Simone demonstrates a greater understanding than Jane or Maggie that

patriarchal society will interfere with her plans of self development: "Dans la vie, je

savais, il en va tout autrement." Jane finds happiness in giving up both teaching and

traveling – her dream of exploring the world as men do – for marriage and raising a child,

sending her charge Adèle away, while Maggie finds no sympathetic connection to any of

her students, and attributes her lack of happiness primarily to herself rather than to

society's demands that she repress her intelligence. In contrast to both of these attitudes,

Simone explicitly decides that teaching is even more important than having children of

her own and being a "mère parfaite," as the latter would involve marriage and untenable

"servitudes." She does not yet see a path which would allow her to avoid marriage

altogether, but like Orlando, she envisions an unconventional marriage that would

compromise with the spirit of the age; she and her sister would have husbands who, like

Orlando's, "voyageraient" and would leave them space to develop their teaching and writing, respectively.

As she matures, Simone decides to become a writer as well as a teacher, the first female protagonist explored in this chapter to pursue this double *Bildung*. Her childhood embrace of reading inspires her desire to write and defines her engagement with the world:

> Malgré leur conformisme, les livres élargissaient mon horizon ; en outre, je m'enchantais en néophyte de la sorcellerie qui transmute les signes imprimés en récit ; le désir me vint d'inverser ce magie […] Comme je ne cherchai pas dans la littérature un reflet de la réalité, je n'eus jamais non plus l'idée de transcrire mon expérience ou mes rêves ; ce qui m'amusait, c'était d'agencer un objet avec des mots, comme j'en construisais autrefois avec des cubes ; des livres seuls, et non le monde dans sa crudité, pouvaient me fournir des modèles. (70-71)

For the young Simone, literature is "sorcellerie" and "magie" that she wishes to create herself. The careful contrast here between magic and "un reflet de la réalité" suggests that a desire to "agencer" and create is, for the narrator, a condition of immaturity; the mature writer should instead wish to pursue a more realistic or engaged type of writing, one that explores real experiences and "le monde dans sa crudité," rather than the world "des livres," which here are the repository of "idées reçus" and "conformisme" rather than imaginative creativity.

Simone will later find more engaging books that offer her literary models of identification, including coming-of-age novels such as Louisa May Alcott's *Little*

Women: "Je m'identifiai passionnément à Joe, l'intellectuelle [...]elle était bien plus garçonnière et plus hardie que moi; mais je partageais son horreur de la couture et du ménage, son amour des livres. Elle écrivait" (118). Identifying with Jo March helps Simone to connect a love of reading with writing, and with a rejection of traditional roles for women, "la couture et [le] ménage." Her encounter with *The Mill on the Floss* proves even more important to her development as a writer, drawing her to autobiography in particular: "Je pleurai sur sa mort [Maggie's death] pendant des heures [...] À travers son héroïne, je m'identifiai à l'auteur: un jour une adolescente, une autre moi-même, tremperait de ses larmes un roman où j'aurais raconté ma propre histoire" (185). Simone theorizes her own maturity here, connecting it with an ability to overcome emotional pain through the writing of the self, a self which in her mind will constitute a distinct person, "une autre moi-même."

Simone's friendship with Zaza is an important part of the formation of Simone's "autre moi-même." Even before the first appearance of Zaza's name, the narrator tell us that this friendship will cause Simone to question her self-sufficiency: "Désormais ma suffisance était tempérée par les sentiments qu'une autre m'inspirait. J'avais eu la chance de rencontrer l'amitié" (119). For the first time, Simone sees in someone else a person, rather than a double or an "image"; the individual solitude and freedom that she has been so eager to pursue will be "tempérée" by Zaza in the rest of the text. At first, their relationship follows the script of identification that marked Simone's way of relating to her mother, her sister, and the literary figures in whom she saw her own reflection: "Zaza aimait comme moi les livres et l'étude" (122). Occasionally Simone's admiration for Zaza even results in self-suppression, not because this is a behavior Zaza models (as does

Simone's mother) but because Simone wants to identify with Zaza so much that she rejects those qualities that differentiate the two of them: "J'aimais tant Zaza qu'elle me semblait plus réelle que moi-même : j'étais son négatif ; au lieu de revendiquer mes propres particularités, je les subis avec dépit" (158). It seems that if they are different, Simone *must* be Zaza's "négatif" and somehow less "réelle" in Zaza's shadow.

Yet with Zaza, Simone finds intimacy that with her mother was only an illusion: "elle acheva de me séduire [...] tout ce qu'elle disait était intéressant ou drôle" (120). This new intimacy is based not on image but on substance – the way Zaza manipulates language and ideas: "elle fit de l'ironie un système; elle tournait en ridicule non seulement la plupart des gens, mais aussi les coutumes établies et les idées reçues [...] Beaucoup de ses opinions étaient subversives" (148). At the same time, as if to preserve the seriousness of the way they relate to one another, Simone and Zaza keep a carefully guarded formal distance between them: "Nous ne nous permettions aucune familiarité. Nous nous disions 'vous' avec cérémonie, et sauf par correspondance, nous ne nous embrassions pas" (122).

The formality of their friendship does not prevent Simone from forming the deepest attachment of her life thus far. She becomes aware of the depth of her feelings in imagining how devastated she would be if she lost Zaza: "de nouveau une évidence me foudroya: 'Je ne peux plus vivre sans elle'" (124). The exaggeration of this thought can be attributed to Simone's youth, much as the extremes of Orlando's passion for Sasha were attributed by the biographer of that text to Orlando's then immaturity. As Judith Butler suggests, however, moments or fears of individual loss are important in the

formation of intersubjectivity and community, and Beauvoir's use of the word "évidence" implies the validity of Simone's feelings.

As Simone matures further *through* her friendship with Zaza, she starts to realize that she is not merely Zaza's "négatif" and that her feelings need not result in either over-dependence (that idea that she cannot exist apart from Zaza) or suppression of self: "L'admiration que je lui vouais ne me dépréciait pas à mes propres yeux. L'amour n'est pas l'envie. Je ne concevais rien de mieux au monde que d'être moi-même, et d'aimer Zaza" (124). Simone's declaration of love, and her recognition that she and Zaza do not need to be rivals – "[l]'amour n'est pas l'envie" – is a powerful gesture towards female community, one that challenges once again Gilbert and Gubar's argument that female solidarity is made impossible by patriarchy. In addition, this is the phrase that closes the first section of the novel, and is thus accorded a significant narrative space; the narrator has selectively privileged their friendship and the reader is obliged to pause and recognize its importance. From this point on their friendship becomes the focal point of the entire volume, the "female amity plot" that drives the narrative towards its conclusion.

While the immediacy of this bond lessens as the two of them grow older and advance in their studies, as Simone rejects the ideology of her family more and more, she sees Zaza as a continued source of strength: "Ma seule véritable amie demeurait Zaza" (313). In particular, both Simone and Zaza reject the bourgeois ideology of marriage. Zaza goes further than Simone in making explicit a connection between marriage and prostitution: "ces moeurs indignaient Zaza: elle déclara un jour qu'elle ne voyait pas de différence entre une femme qui se mariait par intérêt et une prostituée" (200).

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Simone herself comes to embrace the idea that in order to find maturity, she must

disassociate from her family and their values: "Pour comprendre le monde, pour me

trouver moi-même, il fallait me sauver d'eux" (254). Simone shares this desire to

"comprendre le monde" with Jane, Maggie, and Orlando, but is the first of them to decide

that she must escape her family in order to do so. In attending university, Simone furthers

simultaneously her escape and her *Bildung*, embracing philosophy and finding a like-

minded alternative community: "Moi aussi, je participais à l'effort que fait l'humanité

pour savoir, comprendre, s'exprimer: j'étais engagée dans une grande entreprise

collective et j'échappais à jamais à la solitude. Quelle victoire!" (374). This "entreprise

collective" does not seem to extend to female community, however, and most of

Simone's new friends are male scholars. It is during this time that Simone meets fellow

philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre: "il était le double en qui je retrouvais, portées à

l'incandescence, toutes mes manies" (482). This description returns Simone to an

intersubjectivity reliant on doubling, and troublingly recalls Jane's assertion that within

marriage, she and her husband have become indistinguishable.

Meanwhile, somewhat paradoxically, marriage becomes a strain on Simone's

friendship with Zaza; while Simone becomes less and less willing to be a "fille rangée"

for her parents, Zaza is tormented by her mother's continual demands that she marry.

Simone becomes disappointed in what she sees as Zaza's merely partial resistance: "À

distance, elle [Zaza] ne me parlait que de ses difficultés, ses révoltes, et je me sentais son

alliée; mais en vérité son attitude était équivoque: elle gardait à sa mère tout son respect,

tout son amour, elle restait solidaire de son milieu. Je ne pouvais plus accepter ce

partage" (378). I read this moment in the text as a failure of female community on several

levels, the first being that Simone makes it clear her loyalty to Zaza is contingent on

Zaza's behavior and "attitude" being exactly like her own, as Sartre's seems to be. On

another level, Simone fails to recognize the role of the patriarchal system at work,

blaming Zaza's mother individually rather than society for shaping her attitude, and

rejecting Zaza as an "alliée" for adhering to her love for her mother. A female friendship

that demands the dissolution of another bond between women is a problematic one.

Simone does continue to recognize Zaza's suffering however, even if she feels

Zaza herself is complicit in that suffering. As Zaza starts to drink and to entertain suicidal

thoughts (241), the fear of loss that was so sharp in childhood returns to haunt Simone,

during a visit to the home of the Mabille family:

> il y avait cette mère et toute cette famille entre nous, et peut-être un jour
>
> se renierait-elle, et je la perdrais [...] J'éprouvai une douleur si aiguë que
>
> je me levai, je quittai le salon, je me couchai, en larmes. La porte
>
> s'ouvrit; Zaza s'approcha de mon lit, se pencha sur moi, m'embrassa.
>
> Notre amitié avait toujours été si sévère que son geste me bouleversa de
>
> joie. (367)

This rare intimacy between Zaza and Simone recalls a similar scene in *The Mill on the*

Floss, in which Lucy listens to Maggie's confession about her feelings for Phillip while

comforting and kissing her. What later stood between Lucy and Maggie was their shared

desire for a man, and society's inability to forgive Maggie's temptation. While the

"world's wife" was more to blame than "the world" in that case, a similar attitude is

reflected here, with "cette mère" being singled out for particular blame among "toute

cette famille." Both scenes also anticipate the end of each friendship in death; Lucy

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stands over Maggie's grave at the end of *The Mill on the Floss,* and Simone will soon be devastated by Zaza's death, coming after years of stress and a sudden illness.

Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée ends with Simone attempting to process that loss which she so often anticipated, providing the reader with a new obligation, that of understanding Simone's pain: "Souvent la nuit elle [Zaza] m'est apparue toute jaune sous une capeline rose, et elle me regardait avec reproche. Ensemble nous avons lutté contre le destin fangeux qui nous guettait et j'ai pensé longtemps que j'ai payé ma liberté avec sa mort" (503). Here the phantom of Zaza haunts Simone, as the presence of Lucy haunted Maggie after Maggie's betrayal. And unlike Maggie and Lucy's reconciliation before Maggie's death, here Simone receives only "reproche" in the female gaze directed back at her. There was a possibility of a we, "ensemble nous avons lutté," but in the end Simone seems to believe that their relationship comes down to an exchange, her individual freedom at the cost of another individual's death. It is now Zaza who has become the "négatif," a shadow of Simone.

This response to Zaza's death can be read as a particularly painful moment of awakening on Simone's part as to the effects of patriarchy on women's lives, but it also seems to represent a kind of survivor's guilt – Simone survives the trauma while Zaza does not. The event of Zaza's death is a tragic indication of the problems of patriarchal society, yet the focus of the text is on individual loss, and there is no corresponding move towards a collective feminist response, or towards a new determination to change the system; the community consciousness Butler describes as emerging from personal loss is absent here. Nevertheless, Simone's coming-of-age inspires feminist readers in its demonstration of professional maturity for women, and its critique of patriarchal culture.

If *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée* has limitations in its portrayal of female community and feminist thought, it is only the first volume of Beauvoir's autobiographical work; the role of women in society will continue to be a focus of her autobiographical, fictional and philosophical writing throughout her career.[27]

Le cycle du barrage: "L'histoire que je fais ici est différent, et pareil"

Duras' *Cycle du barrage*, a term taken from Eva Ahlstedt's study *Le "cycle du barrage" dans l'oeuvre de Marguerite Duras* (2003), consists of three semi-autobiographical works telling the coming-of-age story of a young girl growing up in poverty in French Indochina. In each work, the young protagonist must traumatically confront the violent reality of patriarchal culture while navigating maturity through her entry into sexuality. The first of these works, *Le barrage contre le Pacifique* (1950), draws on realist narrative convention, and is the most explicitly fictional, telling the story of a girl named Suzanne; according to Ahlstedt, this constitutes a "pacte romanesque" (24) with the reader, or the promise that what they are reading is fiction. The two later works, *L'amant* (1984) and *L'amant de la Chine du Nord* (1991), repeat and transform this story in terms of more explicit autobiographical claims and more experimental narrative structure. This shift from fiction to autofiction moves away from the limiting linear realism of *Mémoires d'une jeune fille* and the verisimilitude of both *Jane Eyre* and

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27. Other autobiographical works include *La force de l'âge* (1960), *La force des choses* (1963), and *Tout compte fait* (1972).

The Mill on the Floss.[28] At the same time, Duras' work also differs from the humor and exaggeration of *Orlando*. Instead, she tells a painful story in an unconventional way, powerfully conveying trauma to the reader but asserting partial agency over that trauma in demonstrating creative control of narrative structure.

The structural pattern of repetition and transformation will receive particular attention here, as a structure that draws the engaged feminist reader into the writer's project of reinterpreting events. As Laurie Corbin explains in *The Mother Mirror: Self-Representation and the Mother-Daughter Relation in Colette, Simone De Beauvoir, and Marguerite Duras* (1996):

> Since each of these texts is a slightly different version of the same story, the reader is induced to abandon the problematic distinction between fiction and autobiography and to accept what could almost be called the superreality of this story: what is being recounted comes to acquire a truth which surpasses questions of verifiable history. (72)

The reader of the *Cycle du barrage* is far from Beauvoir's promise of evidentiary truth, and must not only "accept," but also join in the interpretation, of the texts' "superrreality." My exploration of this autofictional cycle considers one scene in particular from each of the three works, an episode of gendered violence committed by the protagonist's family against the protagonist. Each portrayal of sexuality and family conflict offers a powerful critique of female maturity under patriarchy, a "truth" made all the more powerful through the texts' combined "superreality" effect.

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28. Autofiction is often used in contemporary literary theory to describe works that mix autobiography and fiction.

Because the episode being repeated is a traumatic one, trauma theory also provides valuable insight into the force and effect of this narrative repetition. Cathy Caruth, in her influential work *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, describes trauma as "a wound of the mind" (3), and further explains that the combination of the initial wound – the traumatic event – and the repeated effects of that wound on the survivor, constitutes trauma as "a double wound" (3). Although time and repetition may produce more understanding of this wound, trauma can never fully be known, nor fully communicated to another. The representation of trauma is thus not about a tangible healing, or complete understanding (such as Simone's insistence about what Zaza's death means – the cost of her own freedom), but rather about finding a way to communicate trauma that "conveys the impact of its very incomprehensibility" (6). Texts that call attention to their own inability to fully represent trauma, which for Caruth necessitates a literary mode, engage their reader in a kind of open-ended witnessing, asking the reader to navigate rather than resolve the double wound alongside the narrator or writer of the text.

Beyond the act of engaging the reader in witnessing, in the case of trauma, repetition and transformation might be able to displace, if not the trauma itself, then its effects. Narrative repetition of gendered trauma also allows for a critique – and denaturalization – of the underlying patriarchal norms that inspired the gendered violence in the first place. The agency provided by variation on repetition then, to borrow Judith Butler's concept once more, is doubled, as it is both individual – a means of displacing effects of individual trauma – and collective, a means of emphasizing the elasticity of cultural meaning on the one hand and the creative power of the writer on the other. The

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sympathetic feminist reader is drawn into this creative power as well through the act of reinterpretation.

Yet for Duras, that agency has its limits. Each protagonist's story, for example, consists of a development towards a heterosexual fate, and in this series, is explicitly linked with prostitution, the logical conclusion of a patriarchal system that objectifies women and places economic and ideological worth on their sexuality. Moreover, none of the protagonists has a significant female relationship from which she can draw support. Instead, Duras' protagonists are perhaps the most isolated out of all of the protagonists considered in this chapter, limiting the feminist potential of this repeated *Bildungsroman.* The series' critique of patriarchy and the social construction of sexuality is made all the more brutal through the repetition of the protagonists' suffering, but the reader is left with no alternative system or possibilities for female maturity.

The first of the three works, *Un barrage contre le Pacifique,* was published in 1954 as a novel, with no explicit autobiographical claims; it was only in the second work that Duras explained that this novel was intended to recount the story of her mother. Like *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée,* this novel is in many ways a story about the necessity of escaping the family and the mother in particular. At one point, Suzanne is warned by her friend Carmen, a prostitute, to be careful around her mother:

> il fallait avant tout se libérer de la mère […] Elle avait eu tellement de malheurs que c'en était devenu un monstre au charme puissant et que ses enfants risquaient, pour la consoler de ses malheurs, de ne plus jamais la quitter, de se plier à ses volontés, de se laisser dévorer à leur tour par elle. (146)

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In Carmen's opinion, which Suzanne reluctantly concedes is the truth, Suzanne's mother

is a "monstre" waiting to "dévorer" both her and her brother Joseph. The novel considers

this monstrosity as it relates to the seventeen-year-old Suzanne's affair with an older man

called M. Jo, who pursues her and gives her money and gifts. Both Suzanne's mother and

brother are simultaneously complicit in encouraging her to prostitute herself for this new

source of income, and horrified by her perceived loss of virtue (and marketplace value).

In a scene that will be repeated in the two later works, Suzanne is violently beaten

by her mother after she brings home a large diamond given to her by M. Jo:

> – Une saleté de fille comme j'ai là […] Elle [la mère] s'était jetée sur elle
>
> [Suzanne] et elle l'avait frappée avec les poings de tout ce qui lui restait
>
> de force. De toute la force de son droit, de toute celle, égale, de son doute
>
> […] Joseph n'avait pas protesté et l'avait laissée battre Suzanne. Il y
>
> avait bien deux heures que ça durait […] Suzanne à ses pieds, à demi nue
>
> dans sa robe déchirée, pleurait. Lorsqu'elle tentait de se lever, la mère la
>
> renversait du pied […] Dès que Suzanne faisait un geste, elle frappait.
>
> Alors, la tête dans ses bras, Suzanne ne faisait plus que se protéger
>
> patiemment. (109-110)

Suzanne's mother suspects her of losing her virginity to M. Jo, of having exchanged her

body for the diamond, which she equates with becoming "une saleté de fille." Her

violence is not only motivated by, but also proportional to, her doubt about her daughter's

virtue: "de toute la force…égale, de son doute." Joseph is complicit in the violence, not

only doing nothing to stop it ("Joseph n'avait pas protesté") but also actively allowing

their mother to continue ("il l'avait laissée battre Suzanne"). The implication that he

could stop the violence if he wished, and that his mother acts because he allows it, critiques his role in perpetuating the violence. Ironically, both Joseph and their mother are also implicated in voyeuristic sadism, as the beating is accompanied by a stripping of Suzanne's clothes; her family punishes her for her supposedly deviant sexuality by exposing her, watching her, and continuing to beat her while she is "à demi nue dans sa robe déchirée."

Throughout this violent scene, Suzanne is predominantly portrayed as a helpless victim, who can only keep trying to stand up ("tentait de se lever") and who finally "ne faisait plus que se protéger patiemment." She submits not only to her mother's beating but also to her brother's control of her fate; she immediately accepts it when he tells her that although he believes in her "innocence," she must never again see M. Jo. It is clear to the reader that Joseph's eventual defense of Suzanne comes only because of his belief in that innocence, yet Suzanne herself seems to have internalized her family's conflicted values, completely accepting a correlation between chastity and worth. She has not in fact had sex with M. Jo, and she finds it natural that this provides her with her brother's protection: "La seule douceur de la vie c'était lui, Joseph" (114). She does not question that this protection comes only after several hours of Joseph watching her be beaten, nor does she question the double standard of patriarchal culture that creates the condition of her oppression: on the one hand, the idea that her only worth (and possibility of providing for her family and herself) is sexual, and on the other hand, the idea that engaging in sexuality makes her deviant, "une saleté de fille" who deserves to be beaten.

In *L'amant,* published in 1984, the story has been transformed into an explicitly autobiographical telling. The protagonist, no longer Suzanne, is referred to with a variety

of names and pronouns: "elle," "je," "la petite," "l'enfant." The narration has changed as well, no longer a stable third-person omniscient perspective but a voice that oscillates between first- and third-person, and between the protagonist's experience at the time and the narrator's perspective later on in life. Early in the text the narrator offers her own explanation for her creative narrative construction: "l'histoire de ma vie n'existe pas…Il n'y a jamais de centre. Pas de chemin, pas de ligne. Il y a de vastes endroits où l'on fait croire qu'il y avait quelqu'un, ce n'est pas vrai il n'y avait personne" (14). Yet even if there is no true "centre" to her story, there is nevertheless a desire to tell it. The narrator explains that this story is specifically a re-writing: "L'histoire d'une toute petite partie de ma jeunesse je l'ai plus ou moins écrite déjà […] Ce que je fais ici est différent, et pareil. Avant, j'ai parlé des périodes claires […] Ici je parle des périodes cachées de cette même jeunesse" (14). The promise to the reader is twofold here; at once a promise to reveal the truth of these "périodes cachées" and a promise to avoid the clarity of the first version of events.

The scene of violence has been transformed as well, presented in more painful and immediate terms, and with much more indictment of the brother's participation. As if to indicate the chaos that the protagonist experiences, the narrative voice itself has become more unstable, beginning with a third-person perspective focalized through the mother, then changing to a first-person account, then ending with a mixture of first-person narration and a reference to herself as "la petite":

> Sa fille court le plus danger, celui de ne jamais se marier, de ne jamais
>
> s'établir dans la société, d'être démunie devant celle-ci, perdue, solitaire.
>
> Dans des crises ma mère se jette sur moi, elle m'enferme dans la

chambre, elle me bat à coups de poing, elle me gifle, elle me déshabille, elle s'approche de moi, elle sent mon corps, mon linge, elle dit qu'elle trouve le parfum de l'homme chinois, elle va plus avant, elle regarde s'il y a des taches suspectes sur le linge et elle hurle, la ville à l'entendre, que sa fille est une prostituée […] Derrière les murs de la chambre fermée, le frère. Le frère répond à la mère, il lui dit qu'elle a raison de battre l'enfant, sa voix est feutrée, intime, caressante, il lui dit qu'il leur faut savoir la vérité, à n'importe quelle prix, il leur faut savoir pour empêcher que cette petite fille ne se perde […] Je sais que le frère aîné est rivé à la porte, il écoute, il sait ce que fait ma mère, il sait que la petite est nue, et frappée, il voudrait que ça dure encore et encore jusqu'au danger. Ma mère n'ignore pas ce dessein de mon frère aîné, obscur, terrifiant. (73-74)

Instead of being a "saleté de fille," the protagonist is accused more directly here of being "une prostituée," this time in connection with a Chinese lover, representing racial otherness as well as wealth, making the lover an uncertain prospect to help the protagonist "s'établir dans la société." She is also constantly referred to as "perdue," indicating that the same patriarchal values as those in *Un barrage* are underlying the violence – the association between female sexuality and deviance, or "loss" of virtue. The pain and extent of the violence are similar as well, as is the mother's and brother's need to voyeuristically expose as well as hurt her: "elle me déshabille…" The sense of traumatic violation seems even worse than in *Un barrage,* as the mother not only hits and undresses her but "m'enferme" and "sent mon corps." Meanwhile, although the brother is

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no longer in the room, the violence happens at his instigation, and his desire to know – "il faut savoir" – is accompanied by his voice taking on a sinister sexuality: "sa voix est feutrée, intime, caressante," a tone he uses to compel the mother's violence.

What has changed here in terms of agency seems to be the discourse of knowing. In *Un barrage,* Joseph knew the truth of Suzanne's sexual behavior, and this knowledge was associated with his control over her. In *L'amant,* the brother and mother are both desperate to know this "vérité," but the only thing the brother knows is what the mother is doing to his sister. Moreover, this knowledge is represented at one remove – it is the protagonist who knows that he knows this ("Je sais que le frère aîné… sait ce que fait ma mère"), giving the control over knowledge back to her, at least in narrative terms. The discourse of "danger" also gives the narrator control over this representation of trauma. Initially used as justification for violence – her mother's fear that she "court le plus grand danger" of sexual impurity – the word "danger" is later used to condemn her brother, as an outcome not of sexuality but of the violence: "il voudrait que ça dure encore et encore jusqu'au danger."

The repetition of this passage, then, does not provide complete transformation of the initial trauma, and to a certain extent it portrays Caruth's sense of "incomprehensibility," since her brother's violent desire remains "obscur" and "terrifiant," while the protagonist herself hesitates between a knowing "je" and a still vulnerable "la petite" (in this text, she is only fifteen and a half). Yet the narrator's knowledge of her brother's complicity provides a marked contrast to Suzanne's acceptance of Joseph, and gestures through this greater knowledge towards agency. Perhaps in connection with this gesture towards escaping the family and its values, the

novel itself ends on a more positive note than that of *Un barrage,* which ends with her

mother's death. In the ending of *L'amant,* although it takes place years after the

protagonist has been forced to separate from the lover, there is a renewed

acknowledgement of the love between them: "Il lui avait dit que c'était comme avant,

qu'il l'aimait encore, qu'il ne pourrait jamais cesser de l'aimer, qu'il l'aimerait jusqu'à la

mort" (142).

In the third work in the cycle, *L'amant de la Chine du Nord,* the intermittent "je"

of *L'amant* has disappeared entirely, replaced by a protagonist known only as "l'enfant."

The text, influenced in part by a desire to critique the film adaption of *L'amant,* has an

explicitly cinematic vision, and as in *L'amant,* the narrator points to her own process of

construction in the re-telling of the story. In the prologue to the novel, the narrator

explains: "J'ai écrit l'histoire de l'amant de la Chine du Nord et de l'enfant: elle [this

story] n'était pas encore là dans *L'amant,* le temps manquait autour d'eux" (11). Yet if

her intention is to bring to light a previously untold aspect of the story, one that "n'était

pas encore là," this is accompanied by a renewed dedication to fiction rather than to

empirical truth: "je suis redevenue un écrivain de romans" (12).

In this third work, the scene of violence is represented only indirectly, through a

discussion between the Chinese lover and the mother:

> Le Chinois dit : – Je voudrais que vous me disiez la vérité, Madame, sur
>
> votre petite fille… Est-ce que votre fils l'a frappée quelquefois… ? La
>
> mère gémit tout bas, effrayée. Mais le fils aîné n'a pas entendu […]Elle
>
> répond : – Non, c'est moi, Monsieur, parce que lui, j'avais peur qu'il la
>
> tue. Le Chinois sourit à la mère. – Sur ses ordres à lui, votre fils aîné ? -

…Si vous voulez… mais ce n'est pas si simple… pour l'amour de lui,

pour lui plaire… pour de temps en temps de pas lui donner tort… vous

voyez […] il demande à la mère quel mot employait le fils. Elle dit que

c'est le mot « dresser » comme dressage mais surtout le mot « perdue »,

que s'ils ne faisaient rien, elle et lui, la petite serait perdue… qu'il en était

sûr, qu'elle serait « allée » avec tous les hommes… (167-168)

If there was a distancing from trauma involved in *Un barrage,* with the violence

displaced onto a fictional protagonist of a different name, here there is a displacement of

a different kind, with the protagonist completely unaware of the mother's confession and

the lover's protective search for knowledge. The agency and power of this variation is

accorded not to the protagonist, who is conspicuously absent from this scene, but to the

narrator, who seems to be deliberately recreating the scene with less traumatic power.

Here for example "la vérité" is demanded not from the "petite fille" (who, incidentally, is

only fourteen in this latest version, and in this way even more vulnerable), but from the

perpetrator of the violence, the mother, who is put on trial of a sort by the lover. It is the

mother who is "effrayée" this time, not her daughter. Moreover, she indicates that her

motivation is not completely her belief in patriarchal culture, or her belief that without

this violence "la petite serait perdue," but rather because it is what her son desires: "pour

l'amour de lui, pour lui plaire."

Yet if the lover protects the protagonist here from having to experience the

conversation, by receiving an admission of guilt, the lover also gestures towards

acceptance: "Le Chinois prend la main de la mère, il l'embrasse. Il dit : – C'est possible

qu'il ait vu lui aussi qu'elle courait un danger…" (171). The word "danger" is invoked

once again, in its original sense of a patriarchally determined link between sexuality and deviancy, or dangerous loss of worth. It seems possible that this particular variation on the violent scene is Duras' attempt to both expose the mother's guilt and forgive her for it, and thus provide closure, but the difficulty of this attempt is illustrated in its indirectness, since both guilt and forgiveness are mediated not only by the text, itself a conscious re-creation, but also by the lover. And if that forgiveness depends on validation of female sexuality as "danger," it is a forgiveness that places itself in opposition to feminist agency. Any closure or healing provided by this variation is thus problematic, and speaks more to a personal response to trauma than to a lasting challenge to patriarchal society and the violence it engenders, just as Simone's personal loss of Zaza in *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée* did not lead to a collective feminist response to the societal conditions that in part produced the loss.

This lack of the protagonist's presence in the iteration of the violent scene in *L'amant de la Chine du Nord* is felt in the ending of the novel as well, in which the protagonist and the lover once again communicate by phone years later. At first their conversation is almost identical to that in *L'amant*: "Il [the lover] avait dit que pour lui […] leur histoire était restée comme elle était avant, qu'il aimait encore, qu'il ne pourrait jamais de toute sa vie cesser de l'aimer. Qu'il l'aimerait jusqu'à la mort" (242). After this point however, the lover listens to the protagonist crying, over the phone and then from a distance: "il avait essayé d'entendre encore. Elle n'était plus là. Elle était devenue invisible, inatteignable. Et il avait pleuré. Très fort. Du plus fort de ses forces" (242). The protagonist has troublingly disappeared, from both the room and as a participant in the narration, as she becomes "invisible." While the pain that the lover and the protagonist

feel is clearly shared, if the lover cries "[d]u plus fort de ses forces," it seems that the protagonist has no "forces" at all.

It is on this note of loss and pain of separation that the novel concludes. If, as Judith Butler suggests, loss is particularly powerful moment in which to engage in community, this occurs no more in the *Cycle du barrage* than in *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée.* The young girl that is Suzanne, "elle," "la petite," and the narrator herself matures into a kind of self-effacement, one shared by Jane (in her marriage to Mr. Rochester and the suppression of her separate identity), Maggie (with her death), Simone (in her belief that her individual freedom comes only at the cost of Zaza's death), and even Orlando (who, even if the text leaves room for interpretation, sees her multiple selves being "contained" into one). In the end, then, none of these resistant *Bildungsromane* achieves the kind of sustainable female community of the nine novels explored in the rest of this dissertation.

In the following chapter, I describe what constitutes maturity in the novel of female community, of which these nine novels are examples. I look in particular at the combination of form and content as yet unrealized by the works of the present chapter – the combination of resistant narrative structure and female relationships that advance individual maturity through and alongside collective consciousness. Yet while I argue that these works go beyond those explored in this chapter in their construction of female community, it is hard to imagine them being able to do so without building on the work of these important precursors – their critique of individual female development and maturity within patriarchy; their often nuanced representation of female friendship and love between women; their exposure of gender as a social construct; and in the case of

Woolf's *Orlando* and Duras' *Cycle du barrage,* their radical narrative transformations of the linear *Bildungsroman.* These works all participate in a powerful canon of women's writing, as they continue to intepellate feminist readers and interpreters.

CHAPTER III

RE-WRITING MATURITY: DIVERSE CONCEPTIONS OF COMING-OF-AGE IN

THE FEMINIST NOVEL OF FEMALE COMMUNITY

>When we recognize another, or when we ask for
>
>recognition for ourselves, we are not asking for
>
>an Other to see us as we are, as we already are,
>
>as we have always been, as we were constituted
>
>prior to the encounter itself…It is to solicit a
>
>becoming, to instigate a transformation, to
>
>petition the future always in relation to the
>
>Other.
>
>Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The*
>
>*Powers of Mourning and Violence,* 44

The Feminist Novel of Female Community

In *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence,* Judith Butler theorizes

community through loss, suggesting that because loss is an important part of human

experience, it can help us consider the Other in non-oppositional terms. This vision of

community is rooted in the idea that both individual and collective identities are not

fixed, but rather in a continuous process of "becoming" and "transformation." This

represents a significant departure from the model of Other as means of self-identification

through contrast, mirroring, or mimicry. Instead, the "encounter itself" is a performance, an enactment of community that transforms individuals in asking them to recognize their own becoming and their ever-changing relationship to the Other.

This chapter connects this conception of community with Butler's theory of gendered performativity, in order to explore individual and community formation in works by Nicole Brossard, Michelle Cliff, Maryse Condé, and Gisèle Pineau. These works portray both individual gendered maturity and female community as performative – as constructed rather than essential or natural identities. In doing so, they shed important light not only on processes by which patriarchal culture disseminates ideology and hegemonic control over identity, but also on the creative processes by which alternative collective identities can be created and maintained. In particular, this chapter will concentrate on the process of female maturity, and the re-writing of this process when it is imagined in the context of feminist community.

This focus represents a departure from the previous chapter, in which individual female maturity was considered mainly in the context of patriarchal society, and the restrictions such society poses to female communities as well as individual female development. In the works considered in that chapter – ranging from Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* to Marguerite Duras' *L'amant de la Chine du Nord* – female coming-of-age had important differences from maturity in the classic male *Bildungsroman* as defined by Franco Moretti and others. Particularly significant differences included: 1) female maturity defined not only by "successful" *Bildung* or individual careers, but also by awareness of social position as women, or recognition and critique of society's demands on female individuals; 2) tentative gestures towards female community, through the

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representation of female friendships as more than mere models for initiation into patriarchal society; and 3) on a structural level, interpellation of sympathetic and attentive readers, thus constituting community in terms of relationships between writer, reader, and text, if not always between female characters.

In the works examined in this chapter, the re-writing of female maturity builds upon all three of these differences from the male *Bildungsroman,* going further than the works of the previous chapter in their resistance to patriarchal culture and creation of alternative ideologies and communities. In what I am calling the feminist novel of female community, of which all four authors' work are examples, female maturity is no longer defined solely by successful individual *Bildung* or by recognition and critique of patriarchy. Instead, individual female maturity is redefined through female community. Relationships among women in these works are not merely the means by which individual female maturity is realized (through identification with, and sometimes rejection of, various models of femininity or womanhood). Rather, participation in a female community is both the vehicle for and the definition of female maturity.

The feminist novel of female community is also defined here as being formally constituted through plot and narrative structure. The alternative communities it envisions are not limited to the narrative confines of the traditional realist novel, in which linear chronology and verisimilitude coincided with a patriarchal, national, imperial worldview, embracing linear evolutionary progression as a model of individual and historical development. Instead, the feminist novel of female community uses more creative narrative strategies and privileges the imagination over reality in order to realize alternatives to what Nancy K. Miller refers to as "female plot." In *Subject to Change:*

Reading Feminist Writing, Miller describes the way linear structuring of events such as marriage makes heterosexual fates for women seem both natural and inevitable; when such events are placed at the end of a novel, they appear as both the sign and end goal of female maturity (208). Revision of linear temporality, then, becomes an important narrative strategy in moving from individual female plot to a plot of female community, although even radical departures from progressive linearity do not automatically guarantee a realization of female community (as may be seen in the work of Woolf or Duras).

Playing with temporality is also important in realizing visions of intersectional female community.[29] Caribbean writers often make use of alternative temporal structure to challenge linear fates for the colonized as well as for women. This alternative temporality is frequently tied to other narrative choices seeking to destabilize reality or versions of reality determined by patriarchal or imperial ideology. Magical realism for example, a style or genre in which magical or fantastic events occur alongside realistic conditions of time and place, serves to challenge or at least supplement narrow views of historical reality that consider only official recorded history.[30] These official representations of history often obscure aspects of historical oppression of the colonized, as well as the extent to which colonized subjects, especially women, are themselves

29. In invoking intersectionality, I am engaging with a critical discourse whose beginning is often associated with Kimberle Crenshaw's work on the intersecting nature of oppression. For example, in her 1993 article, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," she argues that "the experiences of women of color are frequently the product of intersecting patterns of racism and sexism, and [that] these experiences tend not to be represented within the discourses of either feminism or antiracism" (1243-1244).

30. I use the term "magical realism" in drawing on another Caribbean literary movement, which is also associated with Latin America. Alejo Carpentier's *El reino de este mundo* [*The Kingdom of This Earth*], first published in 1949, which he describes as an example of "lo real-maravilloso" or "the marvelous real," is often considered to be the first such novel.

historical agents. Moreover, such representations tend to present history itself as linear progression, lending authenticity to the idea that the colonized are less developed than the colonizers, who are presented as further along the line of progress (an idea I explore further in chapter V). This has particular implications for Guadeloupe and Martinique, which have been assimilated into the French nation as *Départements d'outre mer* (DOM) and which continue to be subject to French political and cultural authority.

In this chapter my focus is on how maturity into female community, as realized through anti-reality narrative effects, opens up new possibilities for the fate of individuals beyond a seemingly inevitable assimilation into (neo)colonial culture or development towards heteronormative sexuality. The female protagonists of these novels develop community consciousness and sometimes take on community roles such as teacher, political activist, spiritual guide, or guerrilla fighter. Many of them explore sexuality beyond the confines of heterosexual marriage. And even when these alternative fates are thwarted by the realities of patriarchal violence, the alternative temporality of these works – in particular, narrative patterns of repetition and transformation of events, rather than linear progression – allows for agency to be developed by narrators rather than just by characters, allowing multiple readings of novels which seem to end in tragedy.

In addition to narrative experimentation with temporality, the feminist novel of female community demonstrates a commitment to making its *process* of narrative construction transparent. This revelation of process models for the engaged feminist reader the construction of individual and community identity, and invites her to participate in the interpretation of meaning. In other words, these texts not only *include* performances of identity, both individual and collective, but also are themselves textually

performative of female community, when they engage readers in a textual, interpretive community. Female community is thus created on multiple levels — within and around the text — demonstrating that even when female individuals and communities meet with hostile forces in reality (be these patriarchal, historical, or (neo)colonial), a belief in the feminist potential of community can exist beyond these conditions. This is a message that relies on a narrative structure as well as thematic content.

The feminist novel of female community is defined then by its combination of alternative narrative form and thematic concerns — the realization of female community through the imagination. These texts simultaneously create relationships among women and offer structural resistance to linear time and patriarchal reality. Much as Pamela L. Caughie argues that transexual life writing both demands and enables a new genre, the "transnarrative," in her article "The Temporality of Modernist Life Writing in the Era of Transexualism: Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* and Einar Wegener's *Man into Woman*" (see previous chapter), I argue that the plot of female community similarly demands and enables a new genre, in this case the feminist novel of female community. This new genre is both a repetition and a transformation of the female *Bildungsroman,* just as the female *Bildungsroman* is a repetition and a transformation of the traditional male *Bildungsroman* (sometimes within the same text, as with Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*). In the following sections, I will draw on the work of various feminist scholars, including selected essays and interviews, to develop my definition of female community and this new genre.

Following this theoretical consideration, the close reading in this chapter of Brossard, Cliff, Condé, and Pineau attempts to show how each work might fit this

definition of the feminist novel of female community. On the one hand, female maturity in these works is examined through the characteristics which defined social integration in the classic *Bildungsroman*: education, sexuality, and *Bildung* (particularly writing as a vocation), although even these characteristics are diversified when they occur within the context of female community. On the other hand, female maturity is examined as being *defined by* community participation and construction. While the female coming-of-age story has long been a productive site from which to analyze and critique the social formation of the gendered individual, the feminist novel of female community goes a step further in providing a site of analysis for the formation of social *alternatives* to patriarchally determined gendered identity. Moving from individual to community development, these novels offer transformative visions of female maturity.

Theorizing Female Community

For the most part, feminist scholars have considered the development of the subjectivity of female protagonists in relation to society and its compromising demands, but not in relation to other female subjects; rarely has female coming-of-age been explored in terms of *community*. There are a few notable exceptions, and I build on these in my own definition of the feminist novel of female community. One such theoretical work, explored in more detail in the previous chapter, is Sharon Marcus's *Between Women: Friendship, Desire and Marriage in Victorian England*, in which she describes the nineteenth-century "plot of female amity." This plot gave female friendships an important if not transformative role in the construction of female maturity. Marcus argues

that in narrative terms, female amity was a representation of stability, or a continuous relationship in the life of the female protagonist, as well as an active agent of plot development, such as when a female friend endorsed or even enabled a particular marriage for the female protagonist.

Rachel DuPlessis, in her work *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers,* explores female community as one aspect of a greater project for feminist writers "to delegitimize romance plots and related narratives… inventing narratives that offer, in the multiple individual and the collective protagonist, an alternative to individual quests and couple formation" (xi). She explains that death in the nineteenth-century female *Bildungsroman* not only represents a punishment for transgression against social convention, but also results from a lack of community, a lack that is addressed in the twentieth century: "death occurs because a female hero has no alternative community… This is why, in the twentieth-century critiques, community and social connectedness are the end of the female quest, not death" (16). Although DuPlessis makes a distinction between the communal female quest and the individual male quest, she does not argue that the community itself, at the end of the quest, must be female.

Nina Auerbach, in *Female Communities: An Idea in Fiction*, is one of the only literary theorists to directly address female community in and of itself as a literary phenomenon. While Marcus and DuPlessis see aspects of female community (female friendship, a communal quest) operating in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, respectively, Auerbach considers it in light of a much longer history, as "an evolving literary myth that sweeps across official cultural images of female submission, subservience, and fulfillment in a bounded world" (6). Instead of these "official cultural

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images" of women, Auerbach argues that female community "feeds dreams of a world beyond the normal" (5). For Auerbach, female community is always resistant as it points to the possibility for maturity outside patriarchal control: "As a recurrent literary image, a community of women is a rebuke to the conventional ideal of a solitary woman living for and through men, attaining citizenship in the community of adulthood through masculine approval alone" (5).

In Auerbach's formulation, however, it seems that female community can only exist apart from the world, rather than as a transformative force within it. Auerbach describes the Amazons as a paradigmatic trope of female community: "The communities of women which have haunted our literary imagination from the beginning [the Amazons] are emblems of female self-sufficiency which create their own corporate reality" (5). This "corporate reality" is a powerful and collective alternative creation, but the term "self-sufficiency" places emphasis on isolation, and on a discourse of the self. On the one hand, Auerbach explains that this isolation is the result of exclusion; the Amazons are "outcasts" from society (4). On the other hand, Auerbach finds that it is their very isolation which grants them the power to choose their relation to patriarchal reality: "their isolation has had from the first the self-sustaining power to repel or incorporate the male-defined reality that excludes them" (6). It seems to me that "the power to repel or incorporate" is not yet the power to transform, or to create something new. While the Amazons themselves are powerful female warriors, for example, they find strength mainly through appropriation of masculinity (in some versions of the tale, the Amazons literally remove their outward femininity, cutting off their right breasts in order to better deploy bows and arrows).

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The literary texts Auerbach analyzes range from Amazonian legend in Greek myth to Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961), and Auerbach argues that Spark "seems to stand alone as an architect of communities of women today" (30). I argue that each of the four authors of this project is such an architect, demonstrating the need for further consideration of literary female communities. It is my hope that my own work contributes to the scholarly and feminist recognition of these communities and their continued evolution, particularly in the decades following the last period of Auerbach's focus, and in Francophone and Anglophone contexts outside France, England, and the United States. As Auerbach herself tells us, female community is no unchanging matter: "Since a community of women is a furtive, unofficial, often underground entity, it can be defined by the complex, shifting, often contradictory attitudes it evokes. Each community defines itself as a 'distinct existence,' flourishing outside familiar categories and calling for a plurality of perspectives and judgements" (11). I call for such a plurality in considering the female communities of Brossard, Cliff, Condé, and Pineau, which, while "complex" and "often contradictory," are perhaps significantly less "furtive" and "unofficial" than their predecessors.

Theories of Quebecois and Caribbean Community

One way of nuancing the communities of women Auerbach describes is to explore more intersectional representations of female community, ones in which gender is a part of a complex social positioning – racial, historical, colonial, and socioeconomic as well as gendered. In her work *The Sense of Community in French Caribbean Fiction*,

Celia Britton describes the way community takes on a specific urgency and resonance in the Francophone Caribbean. Because of the legacy of slavery and forced migration, the region has a particular linguistic, racial, and cultural hybridity, and the construction of community identity becomes a "problem" and source of anxiety, as well as a necessity (2). Britton describes how various political and literary movements of the Francophone Caribbean have emphasized "the issue of consciously creating a sense of community" (3). Just as female community defines itself against patriarchal representations of women, literary and political movements such as n*égritude*, *antillanité,* and *créolité* have all attempted to provide a comprehensive model of Caribbean history and collective identity that stands against neocolonial representations of Caribbean society, past and present.[31]

Edouard Glissant for example, in *Le discours antillais,* has proposed "le roman du Nous" as a model for the Francophone Caribbean novel: "L'histoire et la littérature, désencombrées de leurs majuscules et contées dans nos gestes, se rencontrent à nouveau pour proposer…le roman de l'implication du Je au Nous, de Je à l'Autre, du Nous au Nous" (267). In this configuration, the "Je" or the individual is always constituted in relation to community, and the Francophone Caribbean novel is less a reflection of individual destiny ("les devenirs particuliers") than of stories of collectivities told in "nos gestes" rather than through literary realism. Nor do these novels reflect "l'Histoire" or official historical reality; instead, they contest the supposed objectivity of official historical narrative through their disruption of literary realism: "Le rapport à plat du réalisme littéraire correspond point par point à la prétention pure de l'historien" (240).

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31. Specifically, Britton refers to Aimé Césaire's concept of *négritude* (see *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal,* 1939); Edouard Glissant's concept of *antillanité* (see *Le discours antillais*, 1997); and Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant's concept of *créolité* (see *Éloge de la créolité*, 1993).

Glissant's work makes it clear that anti-reality narrative techniques are equally important in a Caribbean context, and in feminist Caribbean writing this becomes a different overlapping project – the need to simultaneously contest both patriarchy and dominant historical representation.

Françoise Lionnet has taken up Glissant's theories, particularly his work in *Poétique de la relation,* in order to analyze postcolonial women's writing specifically. Lionnet, herself born in Mauritius, compares Afro-American, Caribbean, and Indian Ocean texts in her book *Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture* (1989), articulating her conception of *métissage* as "the site of undecidability and indeterminacy, where solidarity becomes the fundamental principle of political action against hegemonic languages" (6). She later adds that "above all, [*métissage*] is a reading practice" (8), an idea that gives critical agency to the reader. In *Postcolonial Representations: Women, Literature, Identity* (1995), Lionnet further describes *métissage* in women's writing as a "universal" yet dynamic and non-hierarchical model of relationality (4). Here the solidarity of Glissant's "roman du nous" is re-imagined as female collectivity and solidarity.

Florence Ramond Jurney similarly suggests in *Voix/es libres: maternité et identité féminine dans la littérature antillaise* that in the conscious creation of female Caribbean identity, an intersectional approach emphasizing women's role in history is needed:

> La relation entre femmes… permet de mettre à jour l'existence d'une
> histoire féminine… poussée jusque-là dans l'invisibilité... les personnages
> féminins ne peuvent raconter leur propre histoire que lorsqu'elles

parviennent à réétablir un lien à la mère et aux autres femmes de la

communauté, ces femmes qui les soutiennent. (84)

Female community – defined here as female relationships that sustain female

protagonists – is necessary for recovering women's role in history, which official records,

as well as nationalist postcolonial identity politics, have left "invisible." Official

representations of history rely on claims of reality and truth, while obscuring their own

selective process of construction, such as a denial of women as historical actors.

Women's writing, because it is not beholden to these official histories, is able to render

women's stories visible. In Jurney's view, a fictional representation of one woman's story

is made possible only through a representation of that character's role in a female

community, rendering such individual stories a part of a greater "histoire féminine."

These stories, which have the potential to reinvest women with historical agency, can

only unfold outside of the limits imposed by patriarchal, historical and (neo)colonial

discourse.

Maryse Condé, unlike Jurney, does not directly endorse the concept of female or

Caribbean community. She does, however, share an interest in bringing forgotten or

underrepresented women's history to light, as indicated by her desire to tell the story of

Tituba, and she accords women's writing in particular the power to voice these histories.

In her article "Order, Disorder, Freedom and the West Indian Writer," Condé calls for

feminist creativity and imaginative narrative strategies. She links disorder, instability, and

women's writing with the concept of freedom: "Above all, creativity is a complex

process which obeys no rules […] Creative imagination goes beyond the limits of reality

and soars to areas of its own choice" (160). For Condé, the literary imagination cannot be

held accountable to the vision of any one literary movement, or to a historical or political concept of collective identity. Yet Condé privileges women's stories in associating "creative imagination" with women's writing, giving women writers a collective identity and according them the power to undermine "reality," be it historical, patriarchal, nationalist, or regional.

More recently, in an anthology dedicated to the concept of Francophone global literature, *Pour une littérature-monde*, Condé insists on the independence of her voice as a writer: "J'aime à répéter que je n'écris ni en français ni en créole. Mais en Maryse Condé" (205). This position seems to privilege individual creativity over the construction of community, yet in arguing for a world literature that engages readers beyond the Caribbean, her choice to write "in Maryse Condé" represents a more specific refusal of cohesive, limiting concepts of community identity, rather than a rejection of community altogether. For Condé, solidarity and community cannot be uncomplicated or undemanding, but this does not preclude her from representing community in her own way, such that her readers are drawn in by its very complexity and "disorder." Her work models the *process* of constructing community, engaging readers in a vision of collectivity that includes not only relationships between characters but also between author, readers, interpreters, and text.

Reclaiming women's role in history through community narrative has been important for Quebecois women writers as well. During the "Quiet Revolution" of the 1960s and 70s women formed their own manifestos and collective projects, including the Clio Collective, a group concerned with representing women's active role in history, and collective theatrical performance; Brossard herself participated, for example, in the

writing and production of *La nef des sorcières* (1976). These feminist performers, activists, poets and novelists also pursued lesbian and queer identity, and tried to make community spaces for this exploration, in political practice and in literary and theatrical representation. Milena Santoro explains in *Mothers of Invention: Feminist Authors and Experimental Fiction in France and Quebec* that Quebecois feminist writing in the 1970s was part of a transnational feminism in the sense that the work of these authors corresponded with that of French women writers and theorists as well.[32] Not mentioned in her work is the extent to which there is a transnational writing community among Caribbean writers living in Quebec (such as Marie-Célie Agnant). Many of these writers share Condé's concerns about the complexity of political and historical collective identity.

Nicole Brossard, while not as invested in specific historical reconstruction as these writers or as Condé, shares Condé's desire to transform reality and to accentuate the process of this transformation, engaging readers critically and creatively. In her theoretical essay *La lettre aérienne* (1985), Brossard explicitly describes this project: "[Les mots] vont devenir des stratèges indispensables pour affronter la réalité sur ses deux versants: celui du fictif et celui du réel…Entamer la réalité pour qu'à partir du corps et de l'émotion de la pensée surgisse une vision aérienne de toutes les réalités. Réalités qui, se croisant, forment ainsi ma matière à écriture" (30-31). Just as Condé chooses to create "beyond the limits of reality," Brossard chooses, for her "matière à écriture," to privilege "toutes les réalités" over "la réalité" which, in the context of Brossard's work, we may read as patriarchal reality. To challenge and undermine this singular and constrictive reality, Brossard calls for "une vision aérienne." In her fiction, a collective

32. See Santoro's introductory chapter for a more thorough history of Quebecois women writers.

vision (comprised of multiple realities and versions of stories) is opposed to linear or even circular narratives, as it spirals into open-ended possibility.

Such a "vision aérienne" is realized in Condé's work as well, in that both writers deliberately privilege the imagination over any attempt to represent or adhere to empirical reality, particularly when it comes to temporality. Karen McPherson, in her work *Archaeologies of an Uncertain Future: Recent Generations of Canadian Women Writing* (2006), has described this alternative temporality in the work of Brossard as an "archaeology of the future": "the *return* (in and of the narrative) to the past in order – through a kind of literary *trompe-l'histoire* – to live it differently, or at least, through the creative workings of memory, to transfer it forward into a different present with the possibility of imagining and in that way generating a different future" (xvii). This project of transformative imagining of past, present, and future informs the work of all four authors of this project, as their work uses the element of *trompe-l'histoire* – its repetition and transformation of an individual story – to depict female maturity as an open-ended and ongoing journey, to be interpreted by both writer and reader.

Contesting Patriarchal and Psychoanalytic Limits on Female Community and Its Representation

Another way of expanding on Auerbach's ideas is to engage with the difficulty of writing female community in a patriarchal system. In *Subject to Change,* Nancy K. Miller defines feminist writing as having an identifiable "signature" or set of characteristics, including "a self-consciousness about woman's identity" and "a claim for the heroine's

singularity by staging the difficulty of her relation as a woman in fiction to Woman" (8).

Here, "Woman" stands for predominant patriarchal representations of women (or

womankind) as essential, even universal Other. In this project, the signature of feminist

community would be one that challenges the idea of "Woman" not only in order to

portray individual female experience – "the heroine's singularity" – but also in order to

represent relationships among women. To understand how the feminist novel of female

community creates its own "self-consciousness" about the constraints posed by

patriarchy, it is necessary to consider how it engages a tradition of both cultural and

psychoanalytic determinations of female identity.

In the previous chapter, I explored how predominant images and archetypes of

women, such as monster and angel, limited the possibilities for literary representation of

female community. Contending with these archetypes often translated to the female

protagonist seeing other women merely as models for identification, to be accepted,

rejected, or internalized. (In *Jane Eyre,* Bertha Mason acted as a monstrous double of

Jane Eyre, ostensibly rejected, and, in Gilbert and Gubar's view, symbolically

internalized as a representation of Jane's own monstrous impulses.) The mother daughter

relation in particular was subject to such doubling, even in twentieth-century texts.

(Simone de Beauvoir argued in *Le deuxième sexe* that mothers reject their daughters

when those daughters fail to become their double, a pattern represented in her

autobiography as well.) If there are more empowering archetypes, such as the femme

fatale of noir texts or the figure of the Amazon, these archetypes are also subject to

limitations; the femme fatale is another manifestation of the monstrous, taking temporary

power only in appropriating symbols of masculinity, while Auerbach reminds us that the

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Amazon, while collectively powerful, is also isolated, able to maintain power only in living apart from patriarchal society.

Psychoanalytic narratives of development limit relationships among women in a different way, in purporting to define what is natural and what is deviant about these relationships. Sigmund Freud's conception of gender development involves a trajectory no less linear than that of the marriage or romance plot in nineteenth-century novels depicting female coming-of-age. In Freud's view, both male and female children initially view the mother as "love-object," until the moment when they are forced to confront the mother's lack of a penis, an important step in their path to gendered maturity. Both genders must eventually accept the authority of the father rather than the "castrated" mother in order to mature, although this process is different for girls and boys.

In his essay "Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes" (1925), Freud posits a developmental narrative for little girls: "They are destined to… notice the penis of a brother or playmate, strikingly visible and of large proportions, at once recognize it as the superior counterpart of their own small and inconspicuous organ, and from that time forward fall a victim to envy for the penis" (673). This "penis-envy" changes the way the little girl relates to others, causing "the character-trait of jealousy" and "the loosening of [her] relation with her mother as a love-object" (675). It also changes the way she views herself; the little girl "develops, like a scar, a sense of inferiority" (674), and is then faced with the threat of the "masculinity complex," or the desire to have a penis and become a man herself – a desire that must eventually be curbed for successful maturity. According to Freud, one expression of this excessively "masculine" desire is sexuality involving the clitoris: "masturbation, at all

events of the clitoris, is a masculine activity and… the elimination of clitoridal sexuality is a necessary precondition for the development of femininity" (675). For Freud, female maturity is about suppression of unnatural masculinity and acceptance of inferior femininity; the little girl does not mature correctly if she fails to give up her attachment to either the mother or the clitoris, or if she fails to "[give] up her wish for a penis and [put] in place of it a wish for a child" (676).

Like Judith Butler's explanation of the "heterosexual coherence" as a "regulatory ideal… that disguises itself as a developmental law regulating the sexual field that it purports to describe" (*Gender Trouble* 185), Freud's narrative is a selective interpretation, a story rather than a natural law, despite his use of scientific discourse. The "superiority" of the penis, for example, is by no means an unarguable scientific fact, as Anne McClintock points out in *Imperial Leather*: "Freud does not explain why the fetish object must be read as a substitute for the woman's (absent) penis and not, say, as a substitute for the father's (absent) breasts" (190). The ending of Freud's story – a desire for heterosexual reproduction – is no more natural than a marriage at the end of a nineteenth-century *Bildungsroman.* Yet although Freud's story is just that, a narrative rather than a factual law, this does not mean that it has no consequences for women; we have seen that narrative shapes our perception of reality, particularly when it disguises itself *as* reality. Freud's theories have been heavily influential, and even today psychoanalysts, literary theorists, and feminist scholars return to his work to debate and build on it.

Jacques Lacan draws on Freud's work in order to argue that language itself is dominated by the Symbolic, associated with the paternal. Lacan adds to Freud's

developmental narrative in explaining that when children develop consciousness of themselves as individuals (as beings separate from the mother) and enter language, they must progress from the pre-Symbolic, associated with the pre-linguistic maternal, to the Symbolic, a process that necessitates a rejection of the maternal. This focus on language raises the stakes of the developmental narrative from scientific theory to the entire realm of *representation,* giving Lacan's work important literary implications. McClintock explains that Lacan's theory leaves women with little to no agency in such a male dominated system: "If women speak at all, it is with male tongues, as ventriloquists of phallic desire. If we look, it is with a male gaze" (192). To this might be added the idea that if women write, it is only in appropriating male language and authority (see for example *Madwoman in the Attic*).

Also at stake with Lacan's theory is the extent to which normal female development is juxtaposed with unnatural deviance from this pattern (associated with transgression or failure). Like Freud, Lacan argues that girls must reject the maternal in order to mature successfully, establishing rivalry as a model for all relationships among women. While Freud focuses on the failure of girls who overcompensate in adopting "masculine" tendencies like clitoral masturbation, Lacan focuses on lesbians as examples of failure to mature. McClintock points out that like Freud's choice to focus on the penis rather than the breasts as "absent," Lacan's description of lesbian sexuality is a selective interpretation:

> Lacan's denial of female fetishism, except as lesbian disappointment and
> loss, again disavows female difference (women as agents of different
> desires) by rewriting lesbians' active affirmation of women as a negative,

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disappointed rejection of men. Thus the lesbian becomes an aberrant

heterosexual who has not been able to accept her social role as the object

of male desire. (195)

This selective "rewriting" of lesbian activity as failure to "accept her social role" and

integrate into society requires some feminist rewriting in return, of female maturity and

of female community – relationships among women such as those between mothers and

daughters and between female lovers – in order to reclaim this "active affirmation."

For just this reason – the need to actively affirm that which was disavowed and

declared "aberrant," failure, unnatural, masculine, etc. – many feminist scholars,

particularly those in the 1970s and 80s, tried to reclaim Lacan's pre-Symbolic space, in

which daughters could identify with their mothers and girls could explore the full range

of their sexuality without patriarchal interference. This work coincided with the literary

movement of *écriture feminine* and its attempt to express the rhythms of the female body

in writing, discussed in the introductory chapter to this project. Julia Kristeva argues not

for a return to the pre-Symbolic but for the duality and coexistence of the paternal

Symbolic and what she calls the semiotic (le sémiotique), or rhythms and drives linked to

the "repressed, instinctual, maternal element" (*Desire in Language,* reproduced in *The*

Portable Kristeva 104). In Kristeva's view, the two are in constant tension, the semiotic

disrupting the Symbolic yet also being restricted by it.[33] Judith Butler argues in *Gender*

Trouble that while Kristeva seeks subversion in the semiotic, and does not confine it to a

pre-Symbolic realm, she does not go far enough in her resistance to the authority of the

Symbolic: "Although she [Kristeva] effectively exposes the limits of Lacan's efforts to

33. For more on the interaction of the semiotic and the Symbolic, see *Revolution in Poetic Language* and *Desire in Language* in particular, as well as Kelly Oliver's comprehensive introduction to *The Portable Kristeva.*

universalize the paternal law in language, she nevertheless concedes that the semiotic is invariably subordinate to the Symbolic" (108).

Butler also cautions against the feminist project in general of trying to find and express the pre- or extra-Symbolic, arguing that this project reifies essentialist beliefs about gender: "The postulation of the 'before' within feminist theory becomes politically problematic when it constrains the future to materialize an idealized notion of the past or when it supports, even inadvertently, the reification of a precultural sphere of the authentic feminine" (49). Like Butler, I am more concerned with female identity as a performative social construction than I am with any "authentic feminine" qualities that may exist and lack representation. I am particularly interested in the narrative performance of gendered identity – the extent to which these narrative performances reproduce patriarchal culture, subvert it, and pose alternatives.

The writers of this project resist the idea that the patriarchal Symbolic exclusively determines representation of women, and of relations among women. Their texts contest the Symbolic while making clear the difficulty of writing in patriarchal culture when language itself is in large part under patriarchal control. Their rejection of verisimilitude and linear chronology, privileging the imagination, works to undermine patriarchal reality, even as it demonstrates the need to operate by means of language. The focus of all four writers on coming-of-age, as a site for the formation of the gendered self, offers language to their protagonists not only in terms of formal education or careers as writers, but also in the form of intersubjective dialogue among women, demonstrating that language can be a means of expressing female community (and alternative epistemologies) as well as a patriarchal, sometimes neocolonial, Symbolic order.

The close readings that follow will attempt to trace this complex stance on language and representation as a part of a female community signature, which I will define in the following terms: 1) a privileging of creative imagination over official reality, colonial and patriarchal, often aligned with a recognition of the difficulty of writing under a patriarchal Symbolic, 2) sustained intersubjective relationships among women, and 3) a focus on the process of individual maturity into community, as a productive lens with which to view 1) and 2). While the transformation of individual maturity is not a prerequisite for the feminist novel of female community, it provides a powerful demonstration of what this genre can achieve in resistance and creativity. This chapter focuses accordingly on those novels which make coming-of-age a central element: Brossard's *Le désert mauve* (1987); Cliff's *Abeng* (1984) and *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987); Condé's *Moi, Tituba* (1986); and Pineau's *L'exil selon Julia* (1996).

The Feminist Novel of Female Community in Practice

I begin with Gisèle Pineau's *L'exil selon Julia: récit,* not because it is the most recent, but because it is, on one level, the least complex of the female communities among these novels. It offers an autobiographical coming-of-age story, that of the author herself as a child and young girl. This story is from the beginning a communal one, as the young Gisèle's coming-of-age in France is entwined with her grandmother Julia's perspective and experiences living in both Guadeloupe and France; Gisèle's path to maturity is enabled by what Julia teaches her. This revision of the traditional autobiography or *Bildungsroman* – individual maturity developing through this

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relationship – is profound. As the title indicates, intersubjective listening is central to the work and to Gisèle's path to maturity. Julia, herself illiterate, is given a voice not only by the young Gisèle, who listens to her grandmother's stories, but also by the maturing Gisèle the writer, who starts to write these stories down, and, on the level of the overall text, by the author, who privileges not only Julia's story but also her authority with her title.

Moreover, the author deliberately eschews verisimilitude as a guiding principle, another important revision to traditional representations of coming-of-age. The text opens with this epigraph: "Hasards de la mémoire, inventions? / Tout est vrai et faux, émotions./ Ici, l'essentiel voisine les souvenirs adventices./ Il n'y a ni héros ni figurants./ Ni bons ni méchants./ Seulement l'espérance en de meilleurs demains." It is Julia who will enable this "espérance en de meilleurs demains" for Gisèle, but not as a grand heroic or romantic figure, and not in teaching her to oppose truth and fiction, nor memory and invention. This blending of memory and invention makes it clear that the work is no simple autobiography, promising the factual truth to readers. It also eludes classification as autofiction, as it tells not the story of the self, but rather the story of the self and other, or even the story of the other related by the self.

Following the epigraph, the story opens with a xenophobic refrain, repeated throughout the text, that demonstrates the discrimination faced by Gisèle and her siblings in France: "Négro/ Négresse à plateau/ Blanche-Neige/ Bamboula/ Charbon/ et compagnie" (11). Gisèle's mother Daisy encourages her children to ignore the name-calling on their path to assimilation into French society, an assimilation equally embraced by Gisèle's father Maréchal and his colleagues in the French army: "L'armée est leur

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credo, la France et ses et caetera de colonies leur univers" (12). United though her parents are in their desire to assimilate, the young Gisèle is also keenly aware that they inhabit separate gendered spheres, and that her mother and the other army wives are somewhat "désilllusionnées" with their lives: "Par devoir conjugal, les dames s'obligent entre d'elles à la sympathie. Se découvrent des affinités, parlent marmaille, couture et tricot…J'aime les écouter. En essuyant les plats, elles essuient aussi leurs peines secrètes, et dénoncent à mots couverts… leur amertume de femmes" (14). This kind of community is forged by "devoir," not true "sympathie," and the commonalities between the women result not from shared interest but from the pursuits that society limits them to, as women. As a result, they teach the listening Gisèle mostly about "amertume de femmes."

This does not mean that Daisy wants Gisèle to share her "peines secrètes," and she protects Gisèle from racially motivated abuse by one of her teachers at school. Daisy is dismayed that Gisèle waits so long to tell her what is happening, and chides her daughter for what she sees as her inability to separate fantasy from reality: "Tu passes ton temps à inventer des histoires, à écrire des romans inutiles et tu caches la réalité au lieu de la mettre au grand jour… La vie, c'est pas des romans. Tu peux pas porter un secret lourd comme ça, alors que tu as une manman!" (157). In this crucial misunderstanding, Daisy believes Gisèle's creative writing has left her ill equipped for reality. Daisy seems to admonish Gisèle for not recognizing her as an ally in facing reality, itself an empowering message about female community, but this message relies on a dismissal of Gisèle's emergence as a writer and her creativity, contrasting reality with "romans inutiles." Her mother does not recognize the extent to which Gisèle's work is a revolt against and a revision of reality, not (solely) an escape from it. For Daisy, Gisèle's

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writing is an obstacle on the path to maturity; she believes Gisèle must learn to accept reality on its own terms, rather than transforming it in imagining other realities.

While Daisy helps Gisèle only in fighting direct abuse, it is Julia who offers her a systematic way to reimagine reality. Julia teaches her grandchildren about the history of slavery, omitted by their parents and their formal education: "Seule, Man Ya [the children's name for Julia] ose nous instruire… Quand elle dit le Mot, des rivages sans soleil s'ouvrent devant nos yeux. Frissons. L'esclavage!" (111). Julia employs a sort of magical realism, weaving history and legend in her description of the past, giving Gisèle not only more information, but a new way to imagine reality. This new understanding emerges in Gisèle's own self-education through reading, as she turns to *Contes et Légendes des Antilles* to supplement classic French novels: "Moi, je n'y trouve ni contes ni légendes, seulement des histoires véridiques qui authentifient les paroles de Man Ya" (117).

Gisèle develops her own sense of exile, particularly after Julia has returned to the Caribbean, and French children continue to taunt her and her siblings: "Retournez dans votre pays, Bamboulas! Retournez! chez vous en Afrique!" (139). While the French would like to have clearly delineated racial and national identity – all black people must belong in Africa – community identity is far more complicated. At times, Gisèle imagines the Caribbean as her country: "Je veux bien retourner dans mon pays. Mais quel pays?… Un moment, je me couche comme Man Ya, sur son lit. Je souffle fort, pour gonfler les voiles et m'en aller, traverser les mers, et pareille à l'Apolline des *Contes et Légendes,* voler, voler, voler, jusqu'aux Antilles" (139-140). In this moment of performative

identity, Gisèle places herself in the physical space once belonging to Julia, in order to embody her belief in magic and in the Caribbean.

Gisèle goes on, however, to recognize that the true power of the Caribbean lies not in its physical location but in its representation through language and writing: "Je veux quitter cette terre-là qui me repousse. Alors, je deviens écriveuse d'après-midi, gribouilleuse de minuit, scribe du petit matin. Écrire pour s'inventer des existences. Porte-plume voyageur, encre magique, lettres sorcières qui ramènent chaque jour dans un pays rêvé" (140-141). While before she imagined a physical journey to the Caribbean, albeit via "voiles," here Gisèle writes the Caribbean into being, creating "un pays rêvé" via "lettres sorcières." Her desire to "s'inventer des existences" is also explicitly linked here to her desire to give Julia a voice: "J'écris les contes et légendes de Julia" (141). Exile, when addressed through the imagination, leads Gisèle to a powerful expression of female community.

When Gisèle is thirteen, she moves with her family to Martinique, and her experience does not always correlate to the way she has imagined it. She learns from her experience at school that society has rigid divisions of race and gender in particular. Although she makes friends across racial lines – "négresses et chabines" – she feels her separation from these other girls due to her lack of practical knowledge of the Caribbean: "Elle se moquent de mon ignorance quant à des choses élémentaires essentielles à ma survie ici" (188). Meanwhile, as in France, the white students (although here a minority) refuse to befriend racial others:

> Dans la cour de l'école, des Blanches qu'on appelle Békées se retrouvent
>
> entre elles, minorité… Elles comptent parmi leurs ancêtres des anciens

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maîtres du temps de l'esclavage. À la récréation, elles parlent le même

créole que les négresses ou les Indiennes, les mulâtresses, les chaînes et

les métis d'ici… Elles déroulent mêmes gestes, même démarche, même

accent. Mais elles doivent porter l'héritage pesant de leurs aïeux. Alors,

elles gardent le rang et la distance… (187)

While Gisèle speaks undeniably differently from her new friends, her Creole infused with

a French accent, these "Békées" speak and act in the same way as everyone else at

school. Clinging to their "héritage" in the face of these commonalities of performance

keeps them from fully taking part in this microcosm of female Caribbean community.

In addition to her accent, Gisèle herself is separated from this community, it

seems, by her relative lack of sexual knowledge and experience: "Négresse-femmes

assises sur les bancs de l'école, ces belles-là m'émerveillent. Elles sont d'un autre monde

qui me dépasse, va loin devant tout ce que j'avais imaginé. Elles pratiquent l'amour avec

dérision et facilité, s'en glorifient. Mon innocence les démonte" (187). They perform a

different kind of gendered identity, one that Gisèle associates with female maturity:

"Elles sont déjà grandes femmes. Poudrées, fardées, défrisées, bouclées, haut perchées"

(186). Gisèle does not seem to question that this kind of maturity depends on specific

gendered performance, nor the idea that sexuality must be heterosexual. She does

however continue to see the other girls at school as role models helping her to access her

own sexuality, rather than as rivals to be judged or rejected: "Lorsqu'une beauté de

l'école des soeurs racontait ses nuits dans l'amour d'un homme, mon corps augurait

d'autres jeux à venir" (212).

At the end of the novel, while these challenges to community identity remain – racial divisions, limits on female sexuality – resolution and maturity are achieved through Gisèle's realization of the importance of Julia's wisdom. Julia has died, but her presence remains with Gisèle, who has finally realized along with her siblings that Julia's words have power despite her illiteracy:

> Selon nous, poser les dires sur du papier, tracer des lettres à l'encre définissait la connaissance dans son entier, marquait l'évolution. Et là, quelques années plus tard, au bas de cet arbre…Tout notre beau savoir déboulait derrière les prunes que Man Ya voltigeait. Et soudain, nous étions parés à tout entendre, à écouter et empiler pour l'avenir. (218)

Here, the "selon nous" has finally given way to the "selon Julia." All of the children's "beau savoir," their belief that only writing can lead to "connaissance" and "évolution," is undone in the sight of Julia's creations: her garden and her stories. When Gisele imagines her in the final passage of the text, it is with a mixture of memory and invention, fulfilling the promise of the epigraph: "Elle est là, dans le temps d'aujourd'hui, vivante… Elle écrit Julia sur une ardoise dans une facilité que tu ne peux comprendre… Elle est assise sur un nuage. Elle rit et mange des mangos roses" (219). This imagined Julia can now read and write "dans une facilité" but this does not diminish her connection to the natural world which she has in part created, her garden; nor does it diminish her capacity to creatively inspire Gisèle in her future listening, writing, and participation in community.

In Michelle Cliff's *Abeng* (1984) and *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987), protagonist Clare Savage comes of age in Jamaica, the United States, and England. Clare is the

daughter of Kitty, a "colored" woman, and Boy, the "white" grandson of a justice who came from England to Jamaica in the time of slavery. Both parents see Clare as representing Boy's legacy more than Kitty's, due to the lightness of Clare's skin, and Kitty remains silent for the most part while Boy tries to instill in Clare a sense of racial superiority. Clare eventually comes to reject this philosophy, and to join a nationalist revolutionary guerrilla group. Her story ends with her death, recounted at the end of *No Telephone,* after she and the other guerrilla fighters attempt to sabotage a film set of a film presenting a distorted version of the story of the historical figure Nanny of the Maroons.

Both *Abeng* and *No Telephone* circle around this moment, demonstrating Clare's trajectory from girlhood to this fate, yet neither novel is solely focused on Clare and her story. Instead, as for Pineau, Clare's coming-of-age is a point in a larger story about Caribbean and female community. Even Clare's fate – her somewhat extreme political act of sabotage and its repercussions – is the result of her maturity into historical and community consciousness, carefully developed in both novels. Other girls and women are particularly instrumental in developing that consciousness, and these relationships will be the focus here.

The complexity of Cliff's historical project is illustrated from the beginning of *Abeng* by her explanation of the title preceding the opening narration: an *abeng* is a conch shell used to call slaves to work but also by the Maroons to communicate, a symbol of appropriation that anticipates Clare's final battle over historical representation. In the first words of the novel itself, Cliff explains that the proceeding story will be that of the entire island: "The island rose and sank. Twice. During periods in which history

was recorded by indentations on rock and shell. This is a book about the time which followed on that time. As the island become a place where people lived. Indians. Africans. Europeans" (3). Already community is being privileged over the individual.

It does not in fact become clear that Clare will be a focus until several pages in, and when she is introduced, it is through a connection to a fossil, placing her narrative within the pre-established greater context of the island's past: "Clare, the elder Savage daughter, who was twelve years old, found a trilobite fossil embedded in the rocks under the water, and Mr. Savage explained in great detail how old the world was, and how insignificant was man" (8). Clare's father would like to have authority over humanity's history, as well as authority over the Savage family's history, and over Clare's fate. In his mind, as well as Kitty's, Clare is destined not just for heterosexual reproduction, but for a project of racial cleansing: "the whitest parent… would pass this light-skinned daughter on to a white husband, so she would have lighter and lighter babies…moving towards the preservation of whiteness and the obliteration of darkness" (129). Kitty believes this fate renders Clare's sense of island community impossible: "Better to have this daughter accept her destiny and not give her any false notion of alliance which she would not be able to honor" (129). The possibility of "alliance" with people different from herself, a different "destiny," is something Clare must build without either parent's help.

The Savages are not the only authorities on history and community within the novel. The stories of two female characters come in to bridge the historical gap between Nanny and Clare, for the reader: that of Inez, the mixed race mistress of the justice, Boy's great-grandfather, and Mma Alli, a slave on his plantation. Inez has magical power that

she supplements through her friendship with Mma Alli, herself a magical healer and a community leader:

> a strange woman with a right breast that had never grown. She said she was a one-breasted warrior woman and represented a tradition which was older than the one which had enslaved them... She gave of her time and secrets. She counseled how to escape – and when. She taught the children of the old ways – the knowledge she brought from Africa. (35)

Mma Alli acts similarly here to Julia in *L'exil*, teaching the aspects of the past that are otherwise obscured. Her knowledge is harder to access in the present, however; as Clare herself has been kept from this story, it can help only the reader develop historical community consciousness.

Mma Alli is nevertheless extremely important to the revisionary project of the novel. In drawing on legends of the Dahomy Amazons, Cliff uses Mma Alli here to revise the idea that "warrior women" are only part of Western legend. In addition to embodying this warrior tradition, Mma Alli is also a lesbian, represented not in terms of Lacan's "disappointed heterosexual," but as something which empowers her and all her lovers:

> Mma Alli had never lain with a man. The other slaves said she loved only women in that way, but that she was a true sister to the men — the Black men: her brothers. They said that by being with her in bed, women learned all manner of the magic of passion... She taught many of the women on the plantation about this passion and how to take strength from it. To keep their bodies as their own. (35)

This description is an important challenge to the idea that female community can exist only in isolation from society. Neither aspect of Mma Alli's identity – being a female warrior and a lesbian – prevents her from being "a true sister to the men" as well as the women. Mma Alli's sexuality, like her knowledge of tradition, enables her to provide agency to other women, helping them "to keep their bodies as their own" even in the most desperate circumstances of gendered violence.

Abeng also offers significant revisions of Freud, Lacan, and Kristeva's narratives of gendered development. Although Kitty keeps her distance, Clare, instead of rejecting her mother in turn, wishes for a closer relationship. She has a fantasy that seems to align with Lacan's notion of the pre-Symbolic: "At twelve Clare wanted to suck her mother's breasts again and again – to close her eyes in the sunlight and have Kitty close her eyes also and together they would enter some dream Clare imagined mothers and children shared" (54). This "dream" of togetherness is also one of escape, with both mother and daughter "closing their eyes" to reality. Later the fantasy shifts to an extra-symbolic space: "Those mornings and afternoons with her mother in the bush made Clare think – wish – that they were on an desert island together – away from her father and his theories and whiteness" (80). Like Gisèle's "pays rêvé," Clare's desert island is an imagined space used to undermine the oppression of reality – in this case, both patriarchal authority and racist philosophy. Unlike Gisèle, who can realize her imagined community in writing and in her relationship with Julia, at this point Clare's dream of female community is still unrealized. The re-writing that occurs here is that it is Clare's distance from her mother, not their excessive closeness, that is the true obstacle in her path to maturity. Clare's isolation causes her pain, and points to the necessity of an alternative fate.

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While staying with her maternal grandmother over the summer, Clare has several experiences leading to further rejections of the dominant developmental narrative. As with Freud's narrative, there is foundational moment in Clare's life when she sees two of her male cousins bathing: "She had hidden once behind a rock at the riverside and saw the two of them splashing each other's bodies — her eyes of course became fixed on their penises" (57). Freud might find this "of course" to be entirely in line with his own conclusions, but unlike the next step in his narrative, there is no resulting sense of inferiority for Clare, merely a sense of exclusion.

Later on when her cousins help slaughter a hog, and then prepare to cook and eat its privates, Clare is once again excluded: "she hated now that she couldn't control her tears – she was acting like a girl, in front of two boys who had just shut her out... She felt that keen pain that comes from exclusion" (58). Crying is "*acting* like a girl" (emphasis mine) rather than *being* a girl, a performative rather than essential gendered act. Once again, Clare's pain is not due to a perceived lack, but to the injustice of the limits placed on her as girl: "They had the power to hurt her because they were allowed to do so much she was not" (59). The boys have no natural or essential superiority, despite their belief in the magic of the penis; their power is only that which is "allowed" by society.

Clare's friendship with Zoe, the daughter of a woman who rents some of Clare's grandmother's land, provides the most disruption yet to the developmental narrative. Although Clare and Zoe play imaginatively, the narrator assures the reader that this is no escape from reality: "To the girls, for a time, this was their real world – their true plane of existence for two months of the year when all other things fell outside. The real world – that is, the world outside country – could be just as dreamlike as the world of make-

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believe – on this island which did not know its own history" (97). If reality – the official history the island does have access to – is itself "make-believe" and "dreamlike," then the world Clare and Zoe fashion for themselves is just as powerful and "real," perhaps even more so.

Their friendship also furthers Clare's developing sexuality. On the day that Clare takes her uncle's gun in order to kill a pig of her own, bringing Zoe with her, Zoe persuades her to give up the quest and bathe in the river with her instead. They swim naked together for the first and last time, in a scene of mutual erotic intensity:

> The two girls closed their eyes against the rise of the sun to noon overhead and touched hands. Brown and gold beside each other... Their fingers could slide through the hair and deep into the pink and purple flesh and touch a corridor through which their babies would emerge and into which men would put their thing. Right now it could belong to them. (120)

Like Clare's dreams of her mother, she and Zoe touch one another and "[close] their eyes," but this is no mere fantasy; she and Zoe physically enact this closeness. The scene is also a repetition and transformation of Clare's earlier discovery by the river, of her male cousins bathing naked; she reclaims the bodily freedom represented by that early nakedness for herself. While Clare does not yet realize that this kind of desire for another girl can be sustained beyond the "right now," that their bodies can still "belong to them" in the future, the attentive reader can connect this phrasing to the description of what Mma Alli does for the other women in on the plantation, helping them "to keep their

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bodies as their own." Clare is on the path to the kind of community Mma Alli symbolizes, one that allows women to control their own bodies and sexuality.

Any future development of the specific relationship between Clare and Zoe, however, is tragically prevented by society. A man appears by the river and judges them for their nakedness, startling Clare into shooting a pig after all. This transgression – her "violence" and her appropriation of the gun that is the preserve of male power – proves too much, and Clare's grandmother sends her away without allowing her to say goodbye to Zoe. Yet despite this forced parting, Clare has learned something important, about her own desires, about the limitations society wants to place on her as a women, and about the difficulty of bridging racial and class divisions in forming Jamaican community. Other realizations are yet to come, as suggested by the end of the novel, in which Clare wakes up from a dream about Zoe to find that she has her period for the first time: "Something had happened to her – was happening to her. And it didn't really matter that there wasn't another living soul to tell it to. She was not ready to understand her dream. She has no idea that everything we dream about we are" (166).

In *No Telephone to Heaven*, Clare's story and progress towards understanding the dream continues as she searches for her identity in the United States and England before returning to Jamaica, although there is much less of a focus on the process itself of coming-of-age.[34] One particularly important moment in Clare's journey towards Jamaican community, however, is a parallel to the scene by the river in *Abeng*. By the

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34. For example, Clare receives a formal education in Jamaica, the United States and England; in each place this education leads her to a sense of alienation, and an awareness of the extent to which patriarchal and hierarchical racial systems control official discourse. For more analysis of this aspect of the novel — formal education and official epistemology versus alternative education, historiography etc — see chapter V. For more on the novel's narrative dimensions, particularly the implications of multiple divergent stories within the text, see chapter IV. In this chapter I focus on Clare's story and how this story itself is made communal.

time of this later scene, briefly analyzed in the introductory chapter of this project, Clare

has reached adulthood, and is trying to reconstitute her sense of community in Jamaica

after time spent in the United States and England. This time, that community is enabled

by her friend Harry/Harriet, a transwoman who teaches Clare about rejecting neocolonial

philosophy in favor of nationalist political action. Harry/Harriet shows Clare an isolated

beach where they swim and lie together afterwards, echoing Clare's emerging desire for

Zoe: "Harry/Harriet trespassing determinedly, telling her this was the most secluded

beach on the island…They could swim as girlfriends…They lay side by side under a sky

thrilling in its brightness. Touching gently, kissing, tongues entwined, coming to,

laughing" (130-131). Like her experience with Zoe, this closeness with Harry/Harriet is a

realization of the dream of female community. This time, no man appears to disrupt what

she and Harry/Harriet create together. There is also none of the fragility that appeared

with Zoe — Clare's belief then that they could only have the "right now," before their

bodies were inevitably possessed by men and pregnancy. With Harry/Harriet, a

friendship that grows after Clare has experienced both sex with a man and a miscarriage,

Clare can reclaim her body, and find joy in it.

At the end of *No Telephone,* Clare's renewed participation in community is

complicated by the fact that it leads to her death, as well as that of Harriet (who at this

point has renounced her previous identity as Harry and Harry/Harriet). Because she and

Harriet are both engaged in an effort to sabotage a neocolonial film attempting to reduce

the story of Nanny of the Maroons to a gendered Hollywood romance in which a helpless

Nanny must be saved by her lover Cudjoe, it is clear that the relationship between Clare

and Harriet has led to a community grounded by, and committed to, both past and

present. The gap that existed in *Abeng* between historical figures like Nanny, the powerful women in the Savage family's past such as Mma Alli and Inez, and Clare herself, seems to be successfully bridged, a sign of Clare's maturity into female community. This community empowerment is however compromised by violence on both sides, the intention of sabotage on the part of Clare's community and the resulting gunfire after someone in their group betrays them to the security forces hired to protect the film set. Yet despite this problematizing of community at the end of the novel, the text's feminist and anti-colonial revisions to individual maturity still stand, inviting the reader into future reflection on both the potential and the limitations of community as a force for undermining reality.

In Maryse Condé's *Moi, Tituba*, as in both of Cliff's novels, the individual coming-of-age story of the protagonist, in this case the character Tituba, is complicated by the novel's historical project, here an explicit reimagining of the story of the historical figure Tituba. The novel uses some of the formal conventions of the realist novel, taking place in historical locations (Barbados and Salem, specifically) and moving forward chronologically through Tituba's life, told in the first person as a fictional autobiography. However, these historical settings and events are taken as a point of imaginative departure, with the deliberate intention of giving this historical figure a fuller narrative, one that goes beyond the linear recording of the events of the Salem Witch Trials and revolutionary activity in Barbados. In the epigraph to the novel, which echoes Pineau's in *L'exil*, Condé makes it clear that there will be no clear demarcation between reality and fiction: "Tituba et moi, nous avons vécu en étroite intimité pendant un an. C'est au cours de nos interminables conversations qu'elle m'a dit ces choses qu'elle n'avait confiées à

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personne." Here, the authority for the events recounted in the novel is paradoxically drawn from confessional conversations and "intimité" between character and author that are only possible in the imagination.

The blurred line between reality and the imagination continues to mark Tituba's development and her relationship with others, through a narrative strategy that evokes the concept of magical realism; Condé goes further than either Pineau or Cliff in giving her protagonist direct access to magic. Tituba's mother, Abena, for example, had died soon after Tituba was born, hanged for resisting a second rape by her white master (Tituba was the product of a first rape, by an English sailor). Yet Abena remains a supportive presence in Tituba's life, not in the sense that Julia does for Gisèle in *L'exil,* but rather in literally appearing to her daughter alongside Yao, Tituba's adoptive father, who had committed suicide after Abena's murder. Abena and Yao contribute to Tituba's education, as does Man Yaya, a woman who takes Tituba in after the death of her parents: "[e]lle m'apprit à me changer en oiseau sur la branche…Elle m'apprit surtout les sacrifices" (23). Here, magic not only facilitates the relationship between Tituba and other women, but is also the basis of Tituba's education and initiation into adulthood. The type of knowledge she receives stands in contrast to the epistemology of the white community of Salem, which imagines far more limited possibilities for life and death.

Indeed, Tituba feels empathy towards her white mistress Élizabeth, and laments the fact that Élizabeth will die without understanding what for Tituba is the real nature of death: "Mourir, ma pauvre douce Élizabeth ?...Mourir, mon agneau tourmenté, sans avoir appris que la mort n'est qu'une porte que les initiés savent tenir grande ouverte ?" (75). Tituba's empathy for Élizabeth, far from suggesting that female community is impossible

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across racial lines, indicates instead that patriarchal control cannot be resisted without recourse to the imagination. Élizabeth has no access to that imagination and is thus confined to the reality constructed by her husband, Samuel Parris, and by the narrow religious beliefs of the Salem community. It is this lack of imagination that ultimately comes between her and Tituba, causing her to reject and accuse Tituba publicly once the witch trials have begun, and to twist Tituba's stories of magic into evidence of demonic witchcraft.

If Élizabeth's incomprehension marks one challenge to Tituba's maturity into female community, Samuel Parris and the Salem Witch Trials constitute an even more direct and powerful threat to Tituba's participation in community, representing the violence inherent in both the institution of slavery and patriarchal epistemologies. After he tortures her into confessing to witchcraft, an episode of the novel drawn from official historical records, Tituba despises herself for giving in: "Après mon interrogatoire, Samuel Parris vint me trouver : – Bien parlé, Tituba ! Tu as compris ce que nous attendions de toi. Je me hais comme je le hais" (167). Using "tu," the more intimate form of "you," in order to emphasize the power he holds over her, he asserts that she has conformed to his expectations. The trials also seal the betrayal by Tituba's first lover, John Indien, for whom she left the safety of her life with Abena, Yao, and Man Yaya, having agreed to accompany him to Salem, which she could do only as a slave. In the face of these multiple betrayals, by women as well as men, the community participation that has sustained Tituba's development falters.

Yet Tituba's story continues beyond the Salem witch trials, an important *trompe-l'histoire* that opens up the possibility of individual healing through renewed community

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participation. Tituba is sold to a Jewish family whose members treat her more humanely

and eventually free her, and she is then able to become an active participant in the

revolutionary activity in Barbados. There are problems in this revolutionary community

as well: her lover Christopher, a rebel maroon, will not acknowledge the contributions of

women in the fight against slavery. He also fails to understand Tituba's magical powers,

interrupting her when she tries to describe what it means to be a "sorcière":

> – Chacun donne à ce mot [sorcière] une signification différente. Chacun
>
> croit pouvoir façonner la sorcière à sa manière afin qu'elle satisfasse ses
>
> ambitions, ses rêves, ses désirs…/ Il m'interrompit: - Écoute, je ne vais
>
> pas rester là à t'écouter philosopher! (225)

Yet although Tituba faces silencing by Christopher, her return to Barbados also enables

the renewal of the community that nurtured her in childhood: Man Yaya, Abena, and

Yao. This community, like Tituba's magical power, can only exist beyond "the limits of

reality." It is an elective, inclusive community, a family that refuses to be limited by

gender (the mentorship of Yao remains constant alongside that of Man Yaya and Abena,

a counter to the betrayals of Samuel Parris, John Indien, and Christopher), biology (Man

Yaya and Yao are equal to Abena, Tituba's only biological relation in the novel, in the

support they provide to Tituba), or even death.

The ending of the novel is particularly transformative, as it uses an imaginative

trompe-l'histoire to refuse to provide closure and thus offers a way out of the devastating

effects of patriarchal and colonial violence. In one sense, the novel ends with Tituba's

own execution by hanging, like her mother before her, condemned to death for her

resistance. However, Tituba interprets this death as a way to rejoin her community:

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"Bientôt j'atteindrai au royaume où la lumière de la vérité brille sans partage…Man Yaya, Abena ma mère et Yao m'attendaient pour me prendre par la main" (263). The "lumière de la vérité" that awaits her is not so much transcendent as it is tangential, linked as it is with those who will physically take her "par la main." Even more importantly, Tituba's death does not mark the end of her ability to physically interact with and teach future generations on earth. In the epilogue, Tituba's maturity is marked by her ability to reach out to a young girl, just as her mother and grandmother had done to her: "Cette enfant mienne a appris à reconnaitre ma présence dans le frémissement de la robe d'un animal…le jaillissement irisé de la rivière et le souffle du vent qui décoiffe les grands arbres des mornes" (273). The novel ends therefore not with the closure of death but with a refusal to be confined by a narrowly defined reality, and with an evocation of a predominantly female community (Yao's presence serves as a reminder that for Condé, female community does not mean isolation from all men), one that continues to be an empowering force for individual female maturity across generations and across history.

Examples of the narrative pattern of *trompe-l'histoire* abound as well in Brossard's *Le désert mauve*, published in 1987, one year after Condé's novel. Like *Tituba,* the novel ostensibly follows the coming-of-age story of one individual, the fifteen-year-old girl Mélanie, told in the first person "je" of fictional autobiography. However, this narration is complicated in the text by the coexistence of two fictional narrators. Mélanie's story is originally narrated in the first person in the first section of Brossard's three-part novel, in a self-contained narrative presented as having been written by fictional author Laure Angstelle and titled *Le désert mauve*. The story is then

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textually repeated and transformed in the novel's third part, narrated by a "translated" Mélanie in a self-contained narrative presented as having been penned by fictional translator Maude Laures and titled *Mauve, l'horizon*. The second section of the book, between these two narratives, is titled *Un livre à traduire* and traces the thinking and writing processes of the fictional translator Maude Laures, inspired by and compelled to rewrite Laure Angstelle's original. This creative narrative structure questions the very idea of an original text, or an authority residing in origins rather than in creative, collaborative process. It is a call to the engaged feminist reader to participate in the interpretation of Mélanie's story and community.

Le désert mauve also differs from *Moi, Tituba* by its use of space and time in a primarily figurative manner. From the outset of the story, the space of the Arizona desert accompanies Mélanie's coming-of-age, possibly representing the pre-Symbolic, prelinguistic space (or a Kristevan extra-symbolic, extralinguistic semiotic space) of creative feminist possibility.[35] In the first lines of the novel, the desert is established as a space to which Mélanie is drawn, a space capable of encompassing reality and existing apart from humanity: "Le désert est indescriptible. La réalité s'y engouffre, lumière rapide…Très jeune, je pleurais déjà sur l'humanité. À chaque nouvel an, je la voyais se

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35. Brossard's novel seems to play with these concepts in emphasizing Mélanie's difficulty in leaving the desert and entering the world of patriarchal reality. As Catherine Campbell's suggests in her essay "Our Last Chance for Silence," Brossard chooses language over silence, with all of its attendant difficulty: "The positive aspects of silence, represented by Mélanie's experiences in the desert, can be very tempting…[But] Mélanie must overcome the temptation. Words have the power to create *reality* and *reality* is what we all have to live with. Silence is not a viable option" (148). If reality has not escaped the Symbolic, we can nevertheless "create" and operate within it.

dissoudre dans l'espoir et la violence" (1/11).[36] The desert is represented here with a play

on words, as not only indescribable, but un-scriptable, or not beholden to written reality.

Mélanie is introduced as someone navigating the contradictory possibilities of the future

– the tendency of humanity towards both hope and violence. Although "la réalité s'y

engouffre," the desert is nevertheless a space apart, a site to which Mélanie returns over

and over again alternatively to navigate her coming-of-age and relationship to humanity,

and to temporarily escape this process or put it on hold.

Of course, this is just one version of the desert and of Mélanie, a version we find

transformed in Maude's translation: "Le désert est indescriptible. La lumière avale

tout…Très jeune, je désespérais déjà de l'humanité. À chaque jour de l'an, je la voyais se

dispersais dans l'espoir et la démesure" (1/181). Here, the light swallows "tout," rather

than merely incorporating reality, seemingly granting the desert more power and potential

for isolated refuge than it had in Angstelle's version. Mélanie's relationship with the

future is grimmer, in that she despairs rather than simply crying, yet "violence" has been

replaced with the more vague "démesure," the first evidence of Maude Laures's attempt

to attenuate the patriarchal violence depicted in Laure Angstelle's version of Mélanie's

coming-of-age.

The two fictional writers differ in their portrayal of female community as well. In

both versions of the story, Mélanie matures through and into relationships with other

women, the most prominent example being her alternative family structure, comprised of

her mother Kathy Kerouac and her mother's lover, Lorna. In Laure Angstelle's narrative,

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36. Citations from the text indicate its complexity and dual temporality. The two page numbers
given for each citation indicate 1) the page number within the self-contained section of the novel,
in this Laure's Angstelle's "original" version, *Le désert mauve* and 2) the page number within
Brossard's novel, encompassing all three sections.

the illiterate Lorna shapes Mélanie's education and maturity in powerful ways, with a storytelling power similar to the creative potential of the space of the desert: "Lorna…m'avait initiée à l'érosion…elle m'avait décrit des paysages…Lorna inventait" (2/12). In Maude Laures's version, however, Lorna's storytelling is a falsehood: "Elle passait de longs moments à me raconter des histoires…Lorna fabulait…Lorna mentait" (2/182). Maude is not comfortable here with creative ambiguity, moving from "raconter" to "fabuler" to "mentir," invoking less creative power with each successive choice. It seems that even in her desire to transform the story, Maude is less sure than Laure of the power of "invention," an indication that she may not be able to succeed in completely transforming Laure's version of the story.

Meanwhile, the relationship between Mélanie's mother and Lorna, while initially isolating Mélanie, later gives her the possibility of imagining her own lesbian desire, and resisting patriarchal reality. In Angstelle's narrative, Mélanie experiences their relationship as an intimacy she herself does not (yet) have: "Ma mère avait le pouvoir insoupçonné de susciter en moi une terrible solitude qui, lorsque je la voyais si rapprochée de Lorna, me ravageait" (8/18). Later in the story, in a complex yet significant transition, Mélanie moves from thinking about Angela Parkins, a woman for whom she has begun to feel desire, to thinking about the relationship between her mother and Lorna as something cherished, rather than as something from which she is excluded: "Le jour, ma mère serait une femme, le jour et la nuit, Lorna serait avec ma mère et je chérirais leur présence ailée" (30/40).

In Maude Laures' translation, this same sense of initial isolation does not occur, although there is still a disconnect between Mélanie and her mother: "Elle pouvait me

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dérouter. Son pouvoir était grand de morceler mon regard" (8/188). The same mental transition from Angela to her mother and Lorna panics Mélanie in this version: "Le jour, ma mère serait comme une femme. La nuit, Lorna serait avec ma mère et je m'affolerais de leur présence voilée" (30/210). Once again, Maude Laures gives female community less power over Mélanie's maturity than did Laure Angstelle; in this second version for example, Mélanie's mother is only "*comme* une femme" (emphasis mine), and her relationship with Lorna, rather than existing continuously day and night, as a sustained and comfortable presence, has been limited to only the night, and placed in opposition to the day, with the suggestion of "veiled" secrecy. Yet both fictional writers transition from this thought about the relationship to Mélanie's defiance of the possibility of future tragedy posed by reality, subtly suggesting that it is this relationship that gives Mélanie the strength for this defiance: "Je ne céderais en rien devant l'aura tragique" (30/40 and 30/210).

In juxtaposition to Lorna and Mélanie's mother, in both versions of the story, we find a man known only as "l'homme long" (Laure Angstelle) or "l'hom'oblong" (Maude Laures) who will be responsible for the story's "aura tragique." His narrative follows a more linear chronology; unlike Mélanie's, for example, each of his sections is introduced with a numerical chapter heading. As Mélanie's story of her own development unfolds, it is interrupted by short, terse chapters narrating the man's static and obsessively violent thoughts as he waits in a motel room: "La fumée de sa cigarette le suit comme une présence spectrale. L'homme long connaît la valeur magique des formules. Il pense à l'explosion" (7/17). The man, associated from the beginning with death through the image of the "présence spectrale," links "valeur magique" with scientific knowledge, and,

more troublingly, with an explosion, one that makes explicit reference to the atom bomb with the a number of descriptive details as well as the repeated phrase "*I/am/become/Death*" (7/17), common to both versions of the story.[37]

The man's development, or his journey to become death, exists in order to break up Mélanie's own becoming. Their stories intersect when the man's story culminates in an act of murder, in which he shoots and kills Angela while she is dancing with Mélanie in the motel bar. In this sense, Mélanie's entry into maturity is not the discovery of her own romantic and sexual identity – dancing in the arms of Angela – but rather the terrible awakening of her understanding of violent patriarchal control over the world in which she lives. In both versions of the story, as in Condé's *Tituba,* individual maturity into community is disturbingly entwined with the violent death of women.

In Laure Angstelle's version of the murder, patriarchal violence is described in terms of a brutal temporality, the logical result of the man's linear narrative development:

> Le temps est entré en nous avec minutie comme un scalpel, le temps nous
>
> oblige à la réalité…Puis le corps d'Angela Parkins remue lentement…
>
> Tout mon corps est devant le désastre. Plus un son…Au fond de la salle,
>
> il y a le regard impossible de l'homme long. Le désert est grand…Angela
>
> se dissipe dans le noir et le blanc de la réalité…La réalité, l'aube. La
>
> fureur dans l'aube et les galaxies…Puis ce fut le mauve de l'aube, le

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37. For more analysis of "l'homme long," see Alice Parker's essay "The Mauve Horizon of Nicole Brossard," in which she describes the novel's evocation of "the amoral formulas of Robert Oppenheimer" (108), or Catherine Perry's essay "L'imagination créatrice dans *Le désert mauve*: transfiguration de la réalité dans le projet féministe," in which she discusses the man's alienation from language, demonstrated in part by his recourse to prayer and repetitions of phrases from the *Bhagavad-Gita* (588-589).

> désert, et la route comme un profil sanglant…Je ne peux tutoyer
>
> personne. (40-41/50-51)

Time is described here as a weapon, "un scalpel" that forces Mélanie to confront "le noir

et le blanc de la réalité" and its ability to cause Angela to completely dissolve and

disappear. The dawn, which has been associated in the rest of the novel with a hopeful, as

yet unwritten future, becomes reduced to "la fureur" and "un profil sanglant." The final

phrase, which is common to both versions, "je ne peux tutoyer personne" (41/51 and

40/220), emphasizes the devastating effect Angela's murder has on Mélanie's

development into lesbian female community.

Mélanie's process of constructing that community for herself through a

relationship with another woman is abruptly halted by the murder, and replaced with an

avowed inability to speak intimately with another person. Mélanie, like Tituba, has been

betrayed by society, particularly by the deadly logic of patriarchal society and power; in

Tituba's case, the "tu" was deployed against her by Samuel Parris after he had tortured

her into confessing, a symbol of intimacy corrupted into a symbol of hierarchal power,

while in Mélanie's case, the "tu" with whom she was exploring intimacy on her own

terms has been cruelly taken from her. Such an ending seems to critique the devastating

effects of patriarchy without posing a sustainable feminist alternative, Mélanie's previous

declaration of "Je ne céderais en rien devant l'aura tragique" notwithstanding.

Yet just as Condé creates an ending beyond the ending, opening up the

interpretation, if not the fact, of Tituba's murder, Brossard's dual narration insists on the

continuing power of creative interpretation of events. In Maude Laures' version of the

ending, although it is not possible to change the event of the murder, the changing of the

words used to describe it seems to infuse more hope into Mélanie's perception of the future:

> Le temps travaille minutieusement…Puis le corps d'Angela Parkins bouge si peu…Plus d'écho, plus de musique…Le silence est cru….Le ravage est grand. L'hom'oblong regarde devant lui, complètement détaché de la scène… La réalité, l'aube. Néant. Tout mon corps va se soumettre….Puis ce fut le profil menaçant de toute chose. Puis l'aube, le désert, et mauve, l'horizon….Je ne peux tutoyer personne. (40/220)

Here the element of time has become less threatening, no longer represented as a weapon. Unlike Laure Angstelle's linking of "aube" with "fureur," "réalité" and a "profil sanglant," Maude Laures makes the profile only "menaçant," and links the "aube" with the "horizon," suggesting a future which spirals outward in the face of patriarchal closure. "L'horizon" is so powerful for Maude that she inscribes it into her alternative title as well: Mélanie's story has been transformed from *Le désert mauve* into *Mauve, l'horizon,* although the ultimate title of the entire work (Brossard's text, rather than that of either fictional writer or translator) seems to privilege Laure Angstelle's version. In my own reading of the end of the novel, it is not so much that one version is more effective than the other at resisting patriarchal violence, but rather that their dual creation of meaning collaboratively renders the hold of patriarchal violence less stable and concrete.

This particular pattern of repetition and transformation, enabled through narration and voice rather than through specific events or the ordering of those events, is the subject of the next chapter, in which *Le désert mauve* and *No Telephone* are revisited alongside an exploration of the other works at the center of this overall project:

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Brossard's *La capture du sombre*, Cliff's *Into the Interior*, Conde's *Victoire, les saveurs et les mots,* and Pineau's *Mes quatre femmes.* In this next chapter I consider how collective narrative voice furthers the feminist novel of female community in its project of addressing the threats posed by patriarchal and neocolonial reality. While these latter four novels, all of them written in the first decade of the twenty-first century, do not focus to the same extent as the works examined in this chapter on re-writing coming-of-age and maturity, I see them as a continuation of each author's commitment to writing female community.

I do not, however, propose a temporal trajectory in which the later novels of each author surpass or make less relevant the transformative power of their previous works. I hope to have shown that power here through my articulation of the feminist novel of female community and through selective analysis of Pineau's *L'exil*, Cliff's *Abeng* and *No Telephone*, Condé's *Moi, Tituba* and Brossard's *Le désert mauve*. The female communities explored in this chapter are complex, and not without their own obstacles and limits. Yet even if they are often unable to confront patriarchal reality on its own terms, they all make powerful use of the imagination to transform the novel of female community into a site from which to question and reconstruct reality. In these works, re-writing individual coming-of-age through and into female community not only disrupts predominant patriarchal narratives and images of female development, but also enables the creation of alternative narratives, ones that spiral out into multiple possibilities for female maturity, education, *Bildung,* sexuality, friendship, and family. With their revision of maturity and community, and their interpellation of the reader through modeling of

collaborative processes of construction and interpretation, all five works provide

challenging inspiration for collective feminist thought.

CHAPTER IV

COLLECTIVE NARRATIVE VOICE AND TRANSFORMATION OF AUTHORITY

IN THE FEMINIST NOVEL OF FEMALE COMMUNITY

> I cannot muster the 'we' except by finding the
> way in which I am tied to 'you,' by trying to
> translate but finding that my own language must
> break up and yield if I am to know you.
>
> Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The*
> *Powers of Mourning and Violence,* 49

> The strongest community we can conceive is
> one with many voices.
>
> Nina Auerbach, *Female Communities,*
> 12

Voice, Authority, Agency

The concept of voice has long been an important political category, particularly in relation to the voiceless - those whose political or historical agency has been reduced by hegemonic culture. Voice has been important to feminist activism as well, as feminists have struggled against the idea that female voices, whether it is a question of women writers or of the broader historical or political role of women, are silenced under

patriarchy. In neocolonial contexts women face a double silencing; Renée Larrier argues in her article "'Crier/Ecrire/Cahier': Anagrammatic Configurations of Voice in Francophone Caribbean Narratives" that finding voice is particularly urgent under these conditions: "It is especially imperative that women writers, who have been doubly marginalized – by colonialism as well as by patriarchy – move from silence to voice" (281). In light of this historical suppression, women speaking out – as both an embodied and textual, sometimes metaphorical, practice – constitutes feminist agency, and multiple voices speaking together or alongside each other are accorded an even greater agency, a collective political power.

That voice was and is a primary concern for feminist writers and literary theorists, as well as political activists, is evidenced by an extended body of theoretical writing on gender and narrative voice, some of which I draw from here. Voice has received attention in the field of narratology as both an overall stylistics or poetics, and as a specific narrative component or technique: that of narration. The study of narration – of who tells the story, and with what authority and knowledge – has held a privileged place for feminist theorists of narrative, for the same reasons that the act of speaking has been so important to feminist political activists: the act of speaking and writing, for women, allows for a powerful conjunction of agency, authority, and expression of lived experience and knowledge.

Yet if collective speaking and action have played a recognized part in the construction of feminist politics, collective narration of female community has been less studied. In this chapter I focus on what I call the collective narrative voice, as an important constitutive element of the feminist novel of female community. I take

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Auerbach's declaration in the above epigraph, that "[t]he strongest community we can conceive is one with many voices" (12), as a point of departure to explore some of the characteristics of the many voices of the feminist novel of female community: what structures these voices and enables them to speak; how different voices speak to one another; and how, as Butler suggests in the epigraph, individual voices "must break up and yield" (49) in the formation of the we. More specifically, I engage with a recent text of each of the four primary writers whose work is a focus of this project, in light of the particularly complex narration these works make use of in their creation of female community: Nicole Brossard's *La capture du sombre*, Maryse Condé's *Victoire, les saveurs et les mots*, Michelle Cliff's *Into the Interior*, and Gisèle Pineau's *Mes quatre femmes*. I also briefly return to Brossard's *Le désert mauve* and Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven*, this time with a more specific focus on narration.

In these works, the use of the collective narrative voice comprises a variety of narrative choices, such as multiple narrators, sometimes across multiple levels of narration; fictional authors and imagined dialogue between authors and characters; and acts and tropes of translation, particularly the translation of one woman's story by another woman. I argue here for the recognition of the contribution of these narrative choices to the overall creation of female community within these texts. Moreover, if we accept the idea that narrative shapes our social reality, rather than merely representing it (as I have argued elsewhere in this project), then this narrative aspect of female community has implications for feminist collective agency that go beyond the pages of these specific novels. In tracing the collective narrative voice of these four writers, I argue that their work constitutes not only a representation but also a *performance* of female community, a

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performance that is itself political. Narration, as a narrative *act* rather than (merely) a technique, is one of the most powerful constituents of the argument this overall project makes about the potential of literary text as feminist performance.

In the previous two chapters, I explored some of the historical difficulty of women writers as they negotiated patriarchal language to find their own voice. I argued that the voice of the feminist novel of female community, its style or poetics, operating both within and against patriarchal culture, can be found in its combination of thematic construction of female community – the transformation of individual stories through and into community – and its narrative resistance and creativity. While the previous chapter focused primarily on transformative temporal structure as a narrative constituent of the voice (in its signification of style or poetics) of the feminist novel of female community, this chapter engages the question of voice through a focus on narration.

The collective narrative voice furthers the feminist novel of female community by embedding female community more deeply into form as well as content; in making female community not only a matter of story (events and characters) or even of plot (the ordering and selecting of events), but also of narration (the telling of events). We have seen in the previous two chapters that there is a great deal of power accorded to directing one's own plot, and telling one's own story – the power to not only give voice to experience, but also to select events and to order them, and to disorder dominant narratives and representations of women. This chapter engages what happens when the telling itself becomes communal, through multiple narrators and multiple authorities, or rather, through multiplicity *as* authority (a community authority and agency). While multiple voices are often divergent and sometimes in conflict, this serves to create a

richer community, made more complex by its indication of ongoing problems. The central argument of this chapter is that in the feminist novel of female community, collective narrative voice extends feminist narrative agency, in opening it up to multiple narrators and speakers, and, through these narrators' demonstration of collaborative interpretation and storytelling, to the engaged feminist reader, who is encouraged to see herself as part of the interpretive process.

In order to make this case, I first give a brief historical and theoretical overview of the study of voice in conventional narratology (its traditional concerns and questions as they relate to voice and narration). I then discuss contributions from feminist scholars of narrative theory, and Susan Lanser's work in particular, drawing on this previous feminist work in order to elaborate my own articulation of the collective narrative voice, on which very little scholarship exists, particularly scholarship that not only accepts but embraces divergent perspectives within a text. Finally, I look closely at the work of Brossard, Cliff, Condé, and Pineau in terms of their search for new collective authority to resist patriarchal ideology and violence and give voice to their female communities.

Throughout the chapter, I also continue to draw on the theoretical works and interviews of each author, while giving this work new significance in suggesting that it too is a part of the collective narrative voice in that it extends their modeling of collectivity, particularly with interviews, which perform dialogue. I argue that this larger body of writing, read in conjunction with their novels, establishes their feminist agency, though not in a univocal, reductive way often associated with the concept of authorial intention. Rather, this voicing of ideas on the part of individual authors serves to further engage feminist readers of their work, and thus is a paradoxical demonstration that

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individual creativity, for feminist writers, achieves its most powerful form when it offers

agency to others – readers and interpreters of the text.

Narrative Theory and Categories of Voice

Twentieth century theories of the novel have emphasized the constructed nature

of the novel, or the formal elements and structure used to construct novelistic

representation, of which narration is only a part. These formal considerations, particularly

in structuralist influenced narrative theory, have sometimes been emphasized to the

exclusion of other, more interpretive questions, about the meaning or the politics of a

given text. As Susan Lanser argues in her article "Queering Narratology," the traditional

aims of narratology have to do with establishing and maintaining a strict separation

between formal consideration and interpretation, a separation that leaves no room for

narrative theories attentive to gender: "the sex and gender (let alone the sexuality) of

textual personae have not been graciously welcomed as elements of narratology; they

have been relegated to the sphere of 'interpretation,' which is often considered a

'temptation' into which narratology must be careful not to 'fall'" (250).

This formal categorization can however contribute to projects of feminist analysis

such as this one. One categorization I draw on extensively, for example, is Gérard

Genette's work in *Narrative Discourse* and *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, in which he

expands on the Russian formalist distinction between story and discourse as part of the

structuralist project of finding a grammar of language and literature. He proposes a

threefold distinction that is still helpful in separating out the category of narrative voice

and considering its particular implications for feminism: between "*story* (the totality of the narrated events), *narrative* (the discourse, oral or written, that narrates them), and *narrating* (the real or fictive act that produces that discourse – in other words, the very fact of recounting)" (*Narrative Discourse Revisited* 13). In this view, narrator and character belong to separate narrative levels of the text: characters to the level of the story, and narrators to the level of the narrative (at which level, they are accorded the power to narrate). We have already seen in the previous two chapters that the process of ordering events can present more of a challenge to patriarchal culture (and its predominant representations of women) than the content or specifics of the events themselves. Genette's definition of narrating as "an act that produces" suggests that more power still lies with the narrating aspect of the text; the power to produce, or construct, events is a power that belongs to the narrator(s).

Genette also offers categories that provide insight as to how a narrating voice constructs its authority, whether it is with a promise of truth, as in autobiography, or the promise of full knowledge, as with what has been traditionally known as the omniscient third-person point of view. Instead of first-person or third-person, Genette proposes a terminology of focalization and diagesis: homodiagesis for speakers of their own stories, and heterodiagesis for those who tell the story of another, with focalization through the perspective of particular characters. Genette would describe what is conventionally known as third-person omniscience as heterodiagetic narration with zero focalization – a narrative voice with "so panoramic a field… that it cannot coincide with any character" (*Narrative Discourse Revisited* 73). Such a voice would also be extradiagetic, "a phenomenon of level" (84), indicating that the voice speaks from outside the world of the

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story or diagesis, a term Genette borrows from cinema studies. This terminology has the advantage of more precision as to the position of that voice within the text. It can also tell us about more about how this kind of voice establishes its authority; because it operates from a textual level presumably closer to that of the author, or authorial persona, than anyone from inside the diagesis or world of the story, it gains its authority because of this textual positioning, which allows it a greater scope of perception, and locates it in implied closeness to the imagined ultimate authority, the author. This system of diagesis, and narration as defined through focalization instead of point of view, has been adopted by many narrative theorists, though not all.

In contrast, in her work *Narratology* (second edition), Mieke Bal maintains that there is an opposition between narration and focalization, or telling and perceiving: "between those who see and those who speak" (142). There is always a first person narrator she explains, even if they are imperceptible – there is always an implied "I narrate" preceding each sentence of a text. In this view, the character does not share in the telling, even in narrative situations Genette would describe as a narration focalized through the perception of a particular character. Instead, Bal offers a complex host of terminology, including a distinction between external and character-bound narrators, and her own three levels of narrative: the fabula, or the events (approximate to Genette's story); the story, or "the fabula presented in a certain manner"; and the narrative text, a "text in which an agent relates ('tells') a story" (5). Like Genette, Bal ascribes a particular power to this narrating agent because of its closeness to the author: "the writer withdraws and calls upon a fictitious spokesman, an agent technically known as the narrator" (8). In this system, the narrator acts – is a textual agent – from the level of

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narrative text, the outermost level of narrative, while the focalizer acts from the level of story, and actors act from within the fabula, or the events themselves. Genette's formulation, however, seems to give more power to narration than Bal's, because in his view the narrator *produces* the text, or at least the discourse, while in Bal's view the narrator merely relates.

When speaking about narrators and levels of narration in this chapter, my own terminology draws from both Genette's and Bal's work. This is because my central concern is not so much terminology as it is the broader, more interpretative question of feminist agency – how the narrative voice or voices establish their authority, and how that authority (and by extension, agency) becomes collective. In exploring this question, I too am interested in how texts are structured, but I have a specific focus on the structuring of the collective narrative voice, and only insofar as understanding this structure helps develop understanding of the feminist implications of these texts. In other words, I do not attempt to account for every technical structure of the text or even of the narration, but rather to be attentive to the feminist aspects of that structuring.

In order to do so, I focus on two levels of the text – the story, and the narrative (in both Genette's sense of the word, as the ordering of events or the product of narration, and in Bal's sense of it, as the narrative text). I follow Genette's choice of the term *narrating*; his description of it as an act with the power to produce, and his argument that narration comprises both narrating and focalization, although I use the possibly less precise terms first- and third-person. I also follow Bal's concept of textual agents that are present in multiple levels of the text – agents of the story who act out or perceive events (characters), and agents of the narrative who narrate those events (narrators). I am less

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concerned than Bal however with maintaining an absolute separation between perception and narration. As Bal herself explains, this distinction is not always clear; the narrator is the only one who has the power to narrate, but "it may also perceive, and it may also act" (29).

My decision to embrace conventional terminology for specific techniques of narration (first- and third-person, omniscience) is perhaps surprising for a project in which I insist on the importance of radical departures of form and content, and on the need for a new genre: the feminist novel of female community. I have chosen to stick to this conventional terminology for two reasons. First because, as Paul Dawson argues about narrative omniscience in his article "The Return of Omniscience in Contemporary Fiction" (2009), "[this term] is embedded in our critical lexicon" (145). Like Dawson, I am not convinced that analyzing unconventional narrative must be a matter of ever more specific and technical approaches to structure; I value having a "critical lexicon" in common in order to make this project more accessible to readers.

Secondly, it seems to me that the political implications of specific narrative choices, such as those which greater scope of perception make possible, are clearest through the lens of categories most widely recognized, despite what Dawson describes as these categories' "attendant narratological imprecisions" (145). Dawson argues for example that the term omniscience affords interpretation not possible with any other term: "none of the existing alternatives quite manages to encompass the narrative freedom (in terms of panoramic scope and narratorial judgment) which the trope of a 'god-like' narrator suggests" (145). In the case of narrative authority then, it may be easier to see when traditional kinds of narrative authority are rejected or challenged not in

looking at new categories that may themselves be imprecise, but in using established categories to measure transgression or departure (or proliferation). This approach constitutes, I freely admit, a privileging of interpretation over precision and systematicity.

Perhaps because of a desire to avoid interpretation, for all the thoroughness and precision offered by approaches to narrative theory like Genette's and Bal's, these approaches do not provide definitive answers to questions about how authority is established and maintained. For example, must authority come from implied closeness to the author? If the narrator is defined as an agent or stand-in for the writer (as Bal argues), does the narrator always have more authority than the character who perceives, or does this greater authority only occur when the narrator's status as stand-in for the writer is made explicit in the text? Can authority come instead from closeness to the events being narrated? In this case, more authority could be given to a character than to a narrator. And, most importantly for the collective narrative voice, how does authority shift throughout a text?

It seems to me as though the authority of a narrating voice is dependent not on textual structure per se, or textual structure alone, but on structure in relation to the reader – on the kind of implicit or explicit promise the text makes to the reader through its form; a promise about knowledge, truth, or experience of events, for example, or a promise to make visible the text's process of construction. Readers, like gender, have not always been addressed in narrative theory; Bal argues for example that "[i]t is only once we know how a text is structured that the reader's share – and responsibility – can be clearly assessed" (11). I would argue that this kind of division between text and reader is impossible; that the text is structured in relation to an imagined reader, rather than prior

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to this relation, just as a reader navigates a text through picturing an imagined author. A narrating voice, in my view, gains its authority through the way it speaks to an imagined or ideal reader, and studying the way it is positioned within a text is valuable only insofar as it tells us about that relationship.

Moreover, a strictly empirical approach to narration does not allow for a full appreciation of the subversive power of the shifting of voice and authority between character and narrator. In *Narrative Discourse,* Genette describes metaplesis as "any intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe (or by diegetic characters into a metadiegetic universe, etc.) or the inverse" (234–35), which causes the "shifting but sacred frontier between two worlds, the world in which one tells, the world of which one tells" (236). Genette is attempting here to provide a systematicity without judgment or considerations of the effects of this technique on the reader, but his words the "sacred frontier" suggest a kind of sacrilege inherent to a disruption of boundaries between voices and levels. Yet I argue that this shifting has potential not only as a disruptive force but also as a deliberate opening up of authority, making it more difficult for a reader or interpreter to clearly identify one voice or one textual location as the source of authority, and suggesting that authority can only be found in considering the character alongside the narrator – how they might both create meaning (sometimes together). The narratological reading I propose here is clearly dependent upon a connection to the reader, and is interpretative in nature.

Laura Buchholz, in her article "The Morphing Metaphor and the Question of Narrative Voice" (2009), gives us more open and possibly more accessible terminology with which to view the shifting relationship between character and narrator, providing an

example of more recent narratological approaches that offer wider frameworks (rather than systematic grammars) for considering narrative. This more recent work has been less about defining technical aspects of narrative, or at least, less about an insistence on the strictness of these definitions, and more about frameworks from within which to read and interpret textual meaning.[38] Buchholz draws on Marie-Laure Ryan's work in "Cyber Narratology" to take Ryan's "morphing metaphor" (taken from the term for the computerized technique of developing one image into another) and extend it to a discussion of shifting aspects of narrative voice. Buchholz argues that as a metaphor, morphing "introduces the possibility of identifying a transitional process of voice between narrator and character, while also illustrating, through visual terminology, the varying fluctuations between two speaking agents" (200). She explains that the metaphor is an open one, as it "allows the 'I' to be identified in a fluid sense: sometimes narrator, sometimes author (or creative persona of the story), and sometimes a mixture of the two" (201).

What this approach allows, beyond the recognition of both transition and fluctuation between characters and narrators, is a shifting of focus when analyzing authority; the central question becomes not about which voice is more successful in vying for control, but rather about which voice is more visible to the reader (208). Buchholz proposes "embracing the inevitable blurring between agents that many narratives force us to confront" (212), not just between narrator and character, but also between what she calls "narrator-as-author" or "fully constructed persona of the author" and character,

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38. Examples of recent frameworks include theories of narrative empathy, postmodern narratives, reader-response, and 'unnatural' narratives; see for example Andrew Gibson's *Towards a Postmodern Theory of Narrative* or Jan Alber et al.'s *Unnatural Narratives, Unnatural Narratology: Beyond Mimetic Models.*

"along a continuum of *visibility* throughout a single narrative" (212). This approach, she suggests, may allow us to distinguish not only between perceiving and telling, but also between telling and *creating* the story, or "between the voices of a narrator telling a story and a narrator-as-author who appears to create the story" (214).

This "continuum of visibility" and "blurring between agents" is important to this chapter's argument about narrative authority and agency, as it provides a way to speak about shared agency between teller and creator, or, in the case of fictional tropes of translation, between creator and translator, or between creator and interpreter/ re-creator. What Buchholz's theory does not offer, however, is an attentiveness to shifting of authority and voice between gendered agents of a text. In the next section, I explore Susan Lanser's work in detail in order to consider what feminist theories of narrative have to offer for the articulation and analysis of collective narrative voice in the feminist novel of female community.

Feminist Considerations of Voice and Narrative Authority

Feminist narratology is loosely defined here as a framework through which to interpret feminist texts and their narrative contributions to feminism. Susan Lanser's work in particular provides a valuable feminist framework for examining narration, as distinct from narrative events and temporality. In her work *Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice* (1992), explored more briefly and in more general terms in my introductory chapter, Lanser begins by emphasizing the seeming incongruity between narratology and feminist criticism:

> Formalist poetics may seem to feminists naively empiricist, masking
> ideology as objective truth, sacrificing significance for precision,
> incapable of producing distinctions that are politically meaningful.
> Feminist criticism may seem to narratologists naively subjectivist,
> sacrificing precision for ideology, incapable of producing distinctions that
> are textually meaningful. (4-5)

While Lanser is not the only the narrative theorist to bring together "formalist poetics" and "feminist criticism," I privilege her work here because it still offers the most substantial consideration of feminist implications of different configurations of narrative voice.[39]

In fact, Lanser goes on to argue that it is the study of narrative voice that can most productively bring together these two disciplines, producing analysis neither overly textual nor overly political: "As a narratological term, 'voice' attends to the specific forms of textual practice and avoids… essentializing tendencies…As a political term, 'voice' rescues textual study from a formalist isolation" (5). These essentialist tendencies in feminist theory, she explains, can lead "to the assumption of a pan historical 'women's language' or 'female form'" (5). An example of this is the theory and practice of *écriture féminine,* which, as we have seen in previous chapters, involves efforts to reclaim and create a female voice or stylistics – the writing of the female body and sexuality in order to resist patriarchal language and representations of women. Like Lanser, I question the assumption that there is an essential female poetics to be found, and turn to formalist narrative theory in order to analyze texts as feminist projects. As Lanser puts it, "[t]hese

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39. Nancy K. Miller's work in *Subject to Change,* explored in detail in the previous two chapters, is another example of feminist narratology. This work is however more focused on transformations of plot than on issues of narration.

concerns lead me less to a new narrative poetics than to a poetics attentive to issues that conventional narratology has devalued or ignored" (8).

The question of authority for women writers is one such issue. If women must author their texts from within a patriarchal system, how can they write, as women, from a position of authority? Must their authority rely, in the same way as male writers, particularly male writers of the realist novel, on concepts of credibility, verisimilitude, omniscience? All of these concepts offer the reader an implicit promise of knowledge of the world, or at least the world represented in the text; this "real world" has often been one to which women have had limited access, particularly in previous centuries. As Lanser argues in "Queering Narratology," "there was a time not far distant when all women narrators were suspect for presumed subjectivity" (256), a subjectivity attributed to their limited perspective.

Lanser suggests in *Fictions of Authority* that when we consider women writers and female narrators, we should look at what kind of authority they claim in considering the historical context behind each kind of claim. She divides textual authority into three categories – public, private, and communal – and contextualizes each, explaining for example that is she most interested in public voice because "within the historical period I am studying [the late eighteenth to mid-nineteenth century] it has not been voice in general so much as public voice that women have been denied" (8); during this time women writers were encouraged instead to limit themselves to "private" forms such as letters or diaries.

The issue of authority is however important for contemporary women writers as well; Lanser argues that while some of these contemporary writers want to critique the

value of authority itself, even these writers become caught up in its textual production: "even novelists who challenge this authority are constrained to adopt the authorizing conventions of narrative voice in order, paradoxically, to mount an authoritative critique of the authority that the text therefore also perpetuates" (7). Lanser indicates that for this reason, "[t]he emphasis of [her] book is on the project of self-authorization" (7), or the authorization of the writer's voice.

In order to understand Lanser's concept of communal voice – its potential and its limitations for my own articulation of collective voice in the feminist novel of female community – I will first take a step back and examine her definition of private and public voice more closely. Both of these voices are defined through narration: private voice is "narration directed towards a narratee who is a fictional character" while public voice is "narration directed towards a narratee 'outside' the fiction who is analogous to the historical reader" (15). Lanser also distinguishes between "authorial voice" and "personal voice," or between "narrative situations that are heterodiagetic, public, and potentially self-referential" (15) and "narrators who are self-consciously telling their own histories" (18). All of these distinctions help Lanser to argue that authorial voice is given a "superior reliability" and authority:

> The authority of personal voice is contingent in ways that the authority of
> the authorial voice is not: while the autodiagetic 'I' remains a structurally
> 'superior' voice mediating the voices of other characters, it does not carry
> the superhuman privileges that attach to authorial voice… an authorial
> narrator claims broad powers of knowledge and judgment, while a

personal narrator claims only the validity of one person's right to interpret her experience. (19)

Lanser also points out the similarities between these voices, such as "the degree to which both forms are invested in singularity – in the presupposition that narration is individual" (21). As such, they can tell us little about "intermediate forms… in which the narrator is reconstructing the life of another woman" (21); while Lanser gives the example of Christa Wolf's *Nachdenken über Christa T.,* this is also a recognizable structure of several of the primary works of this project, including Gisèle Pineau's *L'exil selon Julia* or Maryse Condé's *Moi, Tituba, sorcière,* both of which are analyzed in the previous chapter.

For Lanser, communal voice is only possible in terms of a cohesive community: "By communal voice I mean …a practice in which narrative authority is invested in a definable community and textually inscribed either through multiple, mutually authorizing voices or through the voice of a single individual who is manifestly authorized by a community" (21). This "definable community," Lanser implies, equates to a unitary textual meaning. She argues that the communal voice requires more than the presence of multiple narrators (as in Faulkner) and must not involve "the presentation of divergent and antithetical perspectives on the same events" (21).

In assessing the value of the communal voice, Lanser argues on the one hand that it has untold political potential, since it "shifts the text away from individual protagonists and personal plots, calling into question the heterosocial contract that has defined woman's place in Western fiction… suggest[ing] the political possibilities of a constituting a collective female voice through narrative" (22). On the other hand, for

Lanser the reality of this communal voice in practice is that it creates the least resistant

narrative, since it is dangerously disguised as more resistant and more collective than it

is: "communal voice might be the most insidious fiction of authority, for in Western

cultures it is nearly always the creation of a single author appropriating the power of a

plurality" (22).[40] Lanser is technically correct to point out that there is an ultimate

univocal authority – the writer of the text, no matter how many fictional voices that writer

produces. In that sense, the multiple authority I have been speaking of is always a textual

construction.

I diverge from Lanser's understanding of the collective voice, however, in denying

that such a structure must always be "insidious" or a pretense. Particularly when the

process of sharing authority becomes a focus of the text itself, in texts that make visible

their process of construction (including their process of narration), the writer of the text is

not hiding behind her multiple narrators, but offering something – not a pretense but a

performance of collectivity, and a commitment to it. Even more importantly, the

collective voice is a performance of collectivity that interpellates the reader, both as an

audience (a recipient of the textual performance), and as a participant (in the

interpretation of the text).

In other words, this performance of shared authority, fictional and provisional

though it might be, invites the reader into the text through its fictional demonstration of

collaborative interpretation, or collaborative control over meaning. The reader is

encouraged to share interpretative if not creative authority over the finished (published)

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40. An example of this can be found in D.A. Miller's analysis of *The Moonstone* in his work *The Novel and The Police* – multiple voices presenting a unified and cohesive textual authority (with such political implications as naturalizing the social order which is threatened and then contained within the text).

text alongside the author of that text. Beyond the texts themselves, interviews with the authors (textual performances in which two real people are required), which I argue are also a part of the collective narrative voice, further reinforce this commitment to have conversations with engaged recipients of the text.

Towards a Definition of Collective Narrative Voice in the Feminist Novel of Female Community

In my own approach to the collective narrative voice, I follow a similar approach to feminist narratology as Lanser, in refusing a female narratology based on the idea that women and men naturally or essentially possess different rhythms and styles of writing. Instead, like Lanser, I focus on narrative voice as an example of an attentive poetics, one that tells us something about how feminist writers *perform* authority and feminist writing. Unlike Lanser however, I see the collective narrative voice as the most transformative performance of feminist creative authority that feminist novels have to offer. I argue that with the collective narrative voice, the feminist novel of female community is able to perform community both within the text, in embedding community into form as well as content, and outside the text, in inviting feminist readers to participate in the interpretation of textual meaning.

In order to make this claim, I define the collective narrative voice not by a set of specific narrative rules – a set kind of focalization or number of narrators for example – but by a recognizable commitment to the narrative *process* of representing collectivity. This involves any element of the narration that brings attention to the constructed and

contingent nature of its own authority. Multiple narrators for example bring attention with their very presence to concepts of multiplicity and community. They also have a destabilizing effect on authority within the text, through their demonstration that there is no one authority of textual meaning. The presence of fictional authors and translators (as in Brossard's work in particular) has a similar destabilizing effect on concepts of unitary authority, creativity, and interpretation.

In the novels explored in this chapter, this destabilization gives way to a new kind of authority. The collective narrative voice, through its rejection of unitary knowledge and authority, creates a new authority based on a new promise to the engaged feminist reader. Rather than promising to represent pre-existing knowledge from a position of univocal superiority, the feminist novel of female community promises to demonstrate a collective *process* of interpretation and arriving at knowledge, from a de-centered and multi-vocal position, a process of meaning-making in which the feminist reader is invited to participate. As Lanser suggests, feminist novels have the potential to create "an entire 'story' that is the story of the narration itself" (20). In the feminist novel of female community, this story is the story of shared narration. It is the story of collective agency as well, of agency granted to multiple speakers within the text and to the reader as well as the writer.

In arguing that the collective narrative voice provides greater feminist agency, I do not however mean to imply that collectivity is seamlessly or easily achieved – voices in dialogue can and often do diverge and contradict one another. Yet the act of destabilizing meaning – rejecting the idea that there must be one unitary and unwavering voice of authority – provides powerful resistance to all that is associated with that unitary truth,

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just as alternative temporality destabilizes a linear path and its associated progressive

worldview. The collective narrative voice remains powerful even with its contradictions,

and sometimes because of them. As Butler suggests in the epigraph at the beginning of

this chapter, finding community is only possible in engaging with the sheer difficulty of

relating to the other. The desire to "translate" rather than speak with the other is tempting,

but sustained community can only come from failure to translate the other as merely a

version of oneself; instead, something as fundamental as "[one's] own language" must be

transformed.

What I offer here, rather than a systematic definition, is a new collective framework

for the consideration of authority and narrative voice. On a textual level the collective

narrative voice is a feature of the feminist novel of female community, both as a narrative

technique (a means of creating collective feminist authority) and a narrative effect

(always already constituting an example of such authority). On an analytical level, a

feminist narratological approach to the collective voice is also a critical interpretative

framework from which to view a text's openness to shared authority. In this following

section, a selective close reading of the work of Brossard, Cliff, Condé, and Pineau, I will

model this framework in asking a set of narrative questions of each text, feminist

variations on questions of who speaks, under what textual conditions: How do female

voices speak in the feminist novel of female community? What kind of visibility do they

offer the reader, and what kind of reader do they address, whether implicitly or

explicitly? What kind of visibility do they have in relation to the (other) female characters

of the text? With what kinds of knowledge (of the world, of characters), do they speak?

How do these individual women's narrating voices imagine, listen to, and speak with the

voices of other women? How do they tell their own stories, and those of the female

communities they are related to?

Instances of Collective Narrative Voice in Brossard, Cliff, Condé, and Pineau

I start my analysis with Nicole Brossard's *Le désert mauve* because of the

complexity of its narrative voice, and because I will argue that her later novel *La capture

du sombre* is in many ways a continuation of her themes and project of narration in *Le

désert mauve*. This analysis will also serve as a final demonstration of why an open

framework attentive to the collective narrative voice can be more productive than

elaborate categorization. In *Le désert mauve*, the reader and critical interpreter of the text

might be tempted at first to think that the narrator is the same as the character who

perceives. This speaker, the fifteen-year-old Mélanie, speaks in the first-person about her

own story.

This personal authority is established in the beginning of the novel, although the

mixture of present tense and *imparfait* seems to indicate the presence of a more mature

Mélanie reflecting back on her life: "Le désert est indescriptible…Très jeune, je pleurais

déjà sur l'humanité. À chaque nouvel an, je la voyais se dissoudre dans l'espoir et la

violence…j'étais alerte dans le questionnement" (1/11).[41] This type of narrator is what

Genette would term autodiagetic, and what Bal would term a character-bound narrator.

These first words, beyond establishing knowledge of the character and authority of the

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41. As with my citations of this novel in the previous chapter, page numbers will reflect the
complexity of the text; the first page number is the location in that section of the text, while the
second page number is the location in the overall novel. Both page numbers appear on the
material page of Brossard's novel, with the section page at the top and the overall page on the
bottom.

narrator, suggest an aspect of Mélanie's character that the reader is perhaps encouraged to emulate when it comes to the narration; the aspect of being "alerte dans le questionnement."

This narrative constitutes only the first section of the entire novel, although it shares the same title as the overall work, *Le désert mauve.* When the next section opens, the first section is revealed to be not a primary text but an embedded one – a mise-en-abîme or story within a story. It turns out that the primary teller of Mélanie's story is the fictional author Laure Angstelle. Despite her status as an author rather than a narrator, Laure is a narrative agent who is given the authority to act, narrate, and in this case, even create (albeit from within the fictional realm of the text). This section of the overall text – in which Laure encounters Maude Laures, another fictional author wishing to translate her story – can be described as the primary or outer story, making this outer story (like Scherazade's) a story *about* narration, or at least about writing and translating. Because she is herself fictional and interacts with other fictional agents such as Maude, Laure is also a character.

Attempting to sort out focalization here, or even the question of who is the author as opposed to who is the narrator and who is the character, becomes a frustrating and perhaps unnecessary task in the interpretation of the overall text and its three constituent parts. None of this seems to get us any closer to questions of who has authority here, and how that authority is shared and extended to the reader. I argue that these questions might be better answered in dispensing with this kind of categorization, and returning to a more basic idea of levels of narration: as readers we are encouraged to see Mélanie as the teller of her own story, but then we are confronted with the idea that a new character, a

fictional author, is the teller of that story. We might then move to an analysis of story and narrative; Mélanie and Laure never meet, and exist on different levels of the text.

Yet these separate levels do not equate to story and narrative (or to fabula and narrative text, in Bal's terms), making a central authority, or even a clearly defined hierarchy of authority, difficult to establish. Because Mélanie operates on the level of story, her narration (and the authority granted to her by this act of narration) seems to be textually inferior to Laure's voice and authority (which operates from the level of outer story). Yet Mélanie is both a character and a narrator, operating at both levels of her own text (section I of the overall novel), while Laure is technically a mere character, fictional author though she may be; to complicate this further, Laure is credited with writing and inventing Mélanie's story and narration both.

As if this were not confusion and destabilization enough, Maude renders formal analysis more difficult still. In the second section of the overall work, entitled *Un livre à traduire,* Maude is described by an unnamed third-person narrator (whose presence is almost invisible) as a translator. More specifically, Maude would like to translate Laure's "original" text: "Elle ne saura jamais pourquoi tout son être s'est enfoncé dans un livre, pourquoi pendant deux ans elle s'est brisée, s'est allongée dans les pages de ce livre écrit par une femme dont elle ne sait rien" (1/55). The combination of tenses here reveals multiple perspectives; it is the unnamed narrator who knows enough to say that Maude will *never* know why the "book" fascinates her so much. Maude, on the other hand, is the one who knows (in the present tense) nothing about Laure; of course, as readers, neither do we.

The narrator, as focalized through Maude, goes on to describe Maude's role as translator in somewhat denigrating terms: "Elle était une présence minimale… Un jalon peut-être entre ce livre [de Laure] et son devenir dans une autre langue. C'était précisément à voir" (1/55). Maude's translated text, part three of the overall novel, is not a conventional translation from French to another language, making this "autre langue" symbolic, a desire to have a dialogue and conversation with a text, its character, its narrator, and its writer. The narrator who tells the story of Maude's translation process explains that it is the desire to enter Mélanie's world that drives Maude: "Il était possible que tout cela ne puisse advenir que si, par le détail, elle entrait dans l'univers de la narratrice dont le nom, Mélanie, lui donnait à entrevoir un profil sur la nuit, découpé" (2/56). Here the narrator seems a bit less certain or omniscient, with the phrase "il était possible." This is a possibility left ultimately open to the reader, as is the scene in which Maude and Laure interact. This scene, found towards the end of *Un livre à traduire,* is introduced by an impersonal though quite visible narrator: "*On imagine la scène en écartant le rideau entre l'auteure et la traductrice. On abolit la distance en imaginant les deux femmes assises dans un café*" (86/140; italics original to the text). This "on" is unclear, suggesting perhaps an invitation to the reader.

In the final section of the overall text, entitled *Mauve, l'horizon,* Mélanie narrates her own story once again, although this story has been somewhat transformed through the now invisible narrative actions of Maude. In the opening lines for example, "j'étais alerte dans le questionnement" has been changed to "Habile, je l'étais au jeu du discernement" (1/181), suggesting that Maude grants more interpretive authority (the power of discerning rather than questioning) to Mélanie. Yet if we continue to read these

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lines as a signpost for the reader, they problematically change the reader's task as well as Mélanie's, from an attentive questioning to a more complacent and certain discernment.

This pattern continues throughout this section of the text, in the sense that while the events of the "original" story do not change, the significance of these events and their description change in important ways. At the end of the "translated" story, for example, Maude's invisible voice inscribes more hope in the future in changing a few words. As I have argued elsewhere, the overall text refuses to privilege either Maude or Laure's text at the expense of the other.[42] Collectively, both Laure and Maude create meaning, whether they are characters, narrators, authors, or some combination thereof, and it is only when their work is viewed together that their challenge to a central authority can be fully understood.

Even Mélanie, whose story is an embedded one, and who therefore holds less authority, is closer than either Laure or Maude to the events she narrates, giving her a different kind of knowledge and personal authority. If we draw on Laura Buchholz's "visibility continuum," we can also argue that because Maude and Laure have no overt presence in Mélanie's narrative(s), at these points Mélanie's voice is more visible and thus more authoritative to readers. If there is no clear hierarchy then between "original" and translation, or even between character and narrator, then authority is shared and collective. While Brossard still holds the most authority as individual writer of the text, her privileging of the *figure* of the interpreter and translator (if not the reality) invites the reader, particularly one engaged in attentive reading and interpretation, into her own interpretation of the text.

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42. See my discussion of this novel in the previous chapter, or my forthcoming essay in *Defining Stages in Women's Lives* (edited collection, expected publication 2015).

In *La capture du sombre,* a novel published in 2007, exactly twenty years after the publication of *Le désert mauve,* there is a continued interest in collective feminist authority. Like Maude in *Le désert mauve, La capture du sombre* includes a fictional author who wishes to write, metaphorically speaking, in another language: "Depuis hier, quelque chose s'est glissé dans mes pensées qui a modifié le cours du temps de manière à ce que j'aie, pour une raison qui m'est encore inconnue, envie d'écrire lentement un livre dans une langue qui ne serait pas la mienne" (5). Once again, Brossard offers us a mixture of tenses, although this first-person narration (unlike that of Mélanie) seems undivided between present and retrospective narration. The present tense of the fact that this unnamed author (and narrator) does not yet understand why she wants to write in this other language suggests the ongoing nature of this project, and invites the reader to join her in her quest. Brossard is also invoking her own intertexuality here, referring to her previous novel *Hier* (2001) and implicating her own project in that of this fictional author, constituting her as the kind of narrator Buchholz might call a "narrator-as-author."

From the beginning of the novel then, the textual location and authority of this initial voice is difficult to pinpoint. She is a narrator of her own story, a story that seems to be both her own and a story about the process of narration and writing. She is also a character, because she is a fictional author; within the story however, in relation to other characters, her status as an author grants her a superior authority. Beyond the desire to speak in another language, her quest is one of facing the darkness, unspecified but suggestive of patriarchally controlled reality: "Il y a du noir à l'horizon…Il me faut maintenant d'autres mots pour tout ce sombre de nature et de civilisation qui vient" (8).

Like *Le désert mauve, La capture du sombre* is divided into several sections, and this first narrative is only a few pages long, and is accorded no title. It is unclear whether this narrating voice is the same as the one who speaks in the second section of the overall text, entitled "Cahier de croquis" and beginning with the words: "Depuis quelques jours, j'habite au château et je dors dans un lit à baldaquin" (11). Like the opening narration, this is a first-person voice who speaks in the present tense. Moreover, as a character, this narrator is also a writer; the text soon reveals that she is staying in this chateau in Switzerland because she is being sponsored as a writer by the owner, a character named Tatiana Beaujeu Lehmann. The second narrating voice also wishes to write in another language, but the way she speaks about it seems to indicate a more literal interpretation: "je m'épuise rapidement en écrivant dans une autre langue" (24).

The overall section is structured such that passages narrated by this voice are interspersed with those of other characters, whose stories are narrated in a third-person voice: "Quand elle lui savonne le dos avec une éponge, Laure parle longuement et doucement à sa mère" (12). In addition to the story of Laure, a lawyer taking care of her elderly mother, the reader receives the story of Kim and June, a lesbian couple, and Charles, Kim's brother and an artist, and further details of the story of Tatiana and the character represented by the first-person narration, whose name is eventually revealed to be Anne (47). Within this section, it is relatively easy for the reader to locate more authority in Anne than in Tatiana, Kim, June, Charles, or Laure, because Anne speaks about the process of literary construction, and does so in her own voice.

More ambiguous is the relation between this section and the opening section of the overall novel. Is the first narrator the same as the second? If so, is she becoming a

character even as she narrates, entering her own fictional world? Or is the second section the first narrator's production, the results of her efforts to write in another language? In this case, are all the characters her invention, including the second narrator? Has she created this narrator to act as her own authorial persona, her narrative agent that speaks for her? In either interpretation, there is morphing and indeterminacy between narrator and character. Brossard's decision not to clarify the connection between these two parts of the text means that neither interpretation carries more authoritative weight than the other, which, along with its tantalizing un-resolvability, invites the reader to interpret this question for herself.

The third section of the novel, entitled "Les clôtures dans la respiration," is even more difficult to describe in any definitive way. It consists of several narrative voices, all using the first-person, who take turns speaking in run-on, seemingly unending sentences. It is impossible to pinpoint each shift in narration, and can only be identified in considering perspective. For example, in the opening to this section of the novel, it is possible to interpret the first speaker as Anne, because this speaker is musing on what this multiplicity of voices contributes to her project to write in another language:

> Une lumière au bout du corridor je m'en aperçois bien c'est **dans l'autre langue** une ampoule une chose au fond des yeux qui empiète sur les mots comme une symphonie dans un parc un bel après-midi de juillet avec des bruits de circulation au loin et des fragments de silence jetés ici et là… à force de piger des expressions nouvelles **dans une autre langue** celle-ci devient plus lisible et tout en beauté de sons nouveaux je vais donc de ce pas aller inventer l'horizon… (61, bold text mine)

The multiple voices of another language are represented here with positive imagery such as the "symphonie dans un parc un bel après-midi" and the "beauté de sons nouveaux" that will allow Anne to "inventer l'horizon" – the horizon being another intertexual concept of Brossard representing a hopeful future.[43]

Directly after the word "horizon," the sentence continues, and what it describes soon implicates, in my own interpretation at least, that it is now the voice of Kim, although Kim has never spoken in the first person before in the text:

> …**et faire attention** aux pieds nus de ma mère sur le carrelage de la salle de bains pendant que mon frère m'attend dans la cuisine… et il ouvrait une armoire pour y prendre un cahier de croquis ou un message dans une enveloppe blanche…" (61-62, bold text mine, to emphasize what I locate as the point of transition between Anne and Kim)

I read this part as Kim's voice because, like Anne's pre-established connection to "une autre langue," Kim has a pre-established relationship with her brother Charles, who is himself associated with "cahiers de croquis." In this interpretation, the words "faire attention" signal a possible point of transition, or a part of morphing between voices. Regardless of whether it signals a new voice or not, it could (also) indicate a direction to the reader, to remain engaged.

In the next section, entitled "Le niveau de l'eau," the first-person narrating voice of Anne returns, as she ponders "deux phrases avec de l'eau et de la lumière. Je les avais imaginées et maintenant je voulais les écrire" (89). Anne also continues to think of "l'autre langue," although it is not given the purely positive significance it has in the

43. See my analysis of *Le désert mauve* in the previous chapter, particularly regarding the ending of each version of Mélanie's story.

beginning of the previous section. Here, it can also be challenging, denying Anne any certainty of knowledge and access to the power of logical reason that the original (by implication, patriarchal) language might have to offer:

> Dans ma langue, j'arrive à bien raisonner, à penser le pour et le contre d'une hypothèse, à comprendre mes propres hésitations alors que dans l'autre langue, je fais de curieux raisonnements, la moindre ambigüité m'agite et je n'ai aucun contrôle sur la suite des mots. Les zones de savoir sont sans interdit. La réalité prend une allure floue. Les images que je m'étais habituée à considérer miennes deviennent incompréhensibles ou se figent ici et là dans l'espace comme des objets inquiétants. (92)

Anne is disquieted by the transformation of the images she once believed to be hers, and by her "curieux raisonnements" in the new language as opposed to her ability to "bien raisonner" in the old. Yet despite the fact that she has "aucun contrôle" over the flow of language, she now has access to unrestricted "zones de savoir" and a new reality.

In the final section, entitled "Apprendre à sortir," there are clear indications that it is Anne who speaks (references to the chateau and conversation with Tatiana). There is also, however, another deliberate morphing between narrator and character, or possibly between narrator and author: "Quelque part en plaçant un moi d'origine et de fiction dans une langue étrangère, j'ai pensée que j'arriverais peut-être à faire le tour de l'idée que le corps se renouvelle" (136-137). The identity of this voice could of course have several possible interpretations, but it seems to me that the "moi d'origine et de fiction" suggests at least the authority of the first narrator, who may be speaking of herself as the "moi d'origine" and Anne as the "moi de fiction." It may also be Brossard the writer

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referencing herself as the "moi d'origine," and either the first narrator or Anne (or them both as one and the same) as the "moi de fiction." We will never know, in the sense that Brossard does not provide an answer, but we can interpret freely.

We can also interpret freely the concluding lines of the novel: "Je n'ose pas écrire : je suis figée fossile dans la position du combat" (140). Like the images in the previous section that have become "incompréhensibles" to Anne, and that "se figent ici et là…comme des objets inquiétants," the speaker here seems to have lost momentum and become "figée." Whether this final voice is the first narrator, Anne, Brossard herself, or some combination, her words suggest that even writing in "l'autre langue" may not be enough to conquer or transform patriarchal reality completely. Yet this voice remains resistant, in the "position du combat." Furthermore, the destabilizations of narrative authority and certainty, coupled with the shared authority of "Les Clotures dans la respiration," establish the collective narrative voice of this text beyond a doubt, and suggest that no aspect of meaning or speaking agent is truly "figée."

Like both of Brossard's novels analyzed here, Maryse Condé's *Victoire, les saveurs et les mots* is just as much a story about narration as it is a story related by means of narration. On the level of story or events, the text offers the story of a woman named Victoire. On the level of the narrative, there is a single narrating voice who speaks in the first person and explains that Victoire is her grandmother, rooting her authority in a biographical promise to the reader, and suggesting her role as narrator-as-author. Yet in introducing the rest of the text, the narrating voice makes it clear that the story will be provisional, as she has no direct access to the events of her grandmother's life: "Tel qu'il

est, je livre le portrait que je suis parvenue à tracer, dont je ne garantis certainement pas l'impartialité, ni même l'exactitude" (17).

This provisionality, which might weaken the authority of the text, serves instead to reinforce it, by playing a part in fulfilling a different promise to the reader, one of making visible the process of reconstruction of the story. This reconstruction will of necessity require the imagination; the story of Victoire is incomplete due to both gaps left in the narrator's mother Jeanne's reconstruction of Victoire's life, and a lack of archival records documenting Victoire's existence at the margins of society, as an illiterate mixed-race cook. This incompleteness is only sometimes presented as an obstacle in the text; more frequently, it serves as motivation, making the project of narration a project of ending the silence and giving Victoire a voice.

This project is performed (in the sense of acted out within the level of the story) in the beginning section of the text, when the narrator imagines a conversation between herself and Victoire in which Victoire visits the narrators room and demands her attention: "Qu'attends-tu pour t'intéresser à moi ? Cela seul compte ! semblait-elle me dire" (16). Here it is Victoire who authorizes the story that will follow, and who establishes an imagined intimacy between herself and her granddaughter, constituting both of them as speakers (although Victoire only *seems* to speak to the narrator) and characters in the same story, the story of the narration itself.

In an interview with Bénédicte Boisseron given in 2010, Condé argues that the division between autobiography and intimacy (or between "fact" and imagination) is impossible to maintain, at least in her own writing process, and describes *Victoire* as a mixture of the two:

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Peut-être qu'un lecteur voit clairement la différence mais nous, quand

nous écrivons, il y a tellement d'éléments autobiographiques qui créent le

sentiment d'intimité que l'on n'arrive pas très bien à distinguer les deux…

Par exemple, dans *Victoire, les saveurs et les mots…* il y a toute une série

de faits vérifiés et authentiques, mais il y a aussi, et je l'avoue, toute une

série de faits inventés. Comment appeler le résultat: autobiographie our

intimité? C'est en effet l'histoire de ma mère et ma grand-mère mais revue

et corrigée par un regard qui imagine. (134-135)

In this account of her own work, we can see Condé's construction of the collective

narrative voice. First of all, as argued earlier in this chapter, the fact that this is an

interview places Condé in a conversation about interpretation; as a dialogue with one

reader of her work, Boisseron, this interview constitutes an interpellation of other

engaged readers as well. Within Condé's words themselves, there is another indication of

the reader: "Peut-être qu'un lecteur voit clairement…" This could indicate a certain

skepticism about whether the reader can in fact establish textual meaning more clearly

than the writer. I choose to interpret it, however, as another sign that the reader is

welcome to interpret, and that Condé has this reader in mind when writing. Next there is

a self-selective role in a community of writers indicated by the "nous écrivons"; Condé

does not consider her act of writing to be one of isolation.

　　　As Condé continues, her discussion of *Victoire* demonstrates how she constructs

authority within the text. She uses the word "authentiques" to refer to the factual,

empirical part of her reconstruction of Victoire, suggesting the authority traditionally

provided by claims of authenticity. She then however combines the words "faits

inventés" – the French word "faits" can be translated as both "facts" and "events," and while it seems "events" is more likely to be the meaning here, I again choose to interpret this differently, as the suggestion that invention does not mean a lack of truth or authenticity. At the end of this accounting, Condé refers to the narrator (and indicates once again that the narrator is her own agent, a narrator-as-author) in saying that the story is "revue et corrigée par un regard qui imagine." This discourse of looking is significant, implying that there is not so much a distinction between someone who sees and someone who tells (as in Bal's *Narratology*) but rather someone who re-sees and who herself perceives (as well as creates) events. In this way, the narrator, through the imagination, can enter Victoire's world, recalling Maude's desire to enter Mélanie's in *Le désert mauve.* As with Maude and Mélanie, there is a morphing or indeterminacy in *Victoire* between the narrator and Victoire.

Yet if Maude had to remain less visible during Mélanie's story, when Mélanie herself narrated her own story, the narrator of *Victoire* has a far more visible presence. The narrator continues to narrate in the first person beyond the opening section of the text, though often focalized through the perception of Victoire or other characters who play an important role in Victoire's life. In this sense, the collective narrative voice of *Victoire* is less a matter of shared narration and more a matter of shared perception and interpretation. The narrator maintains her authority not in being the only first-person voice to speak, but in reminding readers of her presence and her process of imaginative reconstruction, and in interpreting events in an open-ended manner.

An important example of this open-ended interpretation occurs in a passage with mixed discourses; the narrator speaks and also quotes from two letters, thus allowing the

two writers of these letters to speak as well: Anne-Marie and Boniface Walberg, the

married couple who Victoire works for as a cook while raising her daughter Jeanne

alongside the Walbergs' daughter Valérie-Anne. Victoire has been having an affair with

Boniface, with Anne-Marie's knowledge and consent; here the narrator considers, in her

reading of the letters, what drives Victoire's loyalty to both of them, and whether the

friendship between Victoire and Anne-Marie might include a sexual relationship as well:

> Une lettre qu'Anne-Marie écrivait…contient cette phrase qui ouvre toutes
>
> les interprétations: 'Je hais la vie que je mène, même si notre chère et fidèle
>
> Victoire me conforte en me soulageant de bien des obligations'…je retiens
>
> aussi une lettre [de] Boniface…: 'Ma vie serait entièrement malheureuse si
>
> elle n'était constamment illuminée par la dévotion de ma fidèle Victoire.'
>
> Notons : à chaque fois, revient le mot 'fidèle'. On peut néanmoins se
>
> demander à qui Victoire fut-elle fidèle. À Marie-Anne ? À Boniface ? Ou
>
> poursuivait-elle un projet, son projet personnel, dont le centre était Jeanne ?
>
> Seulement Jeanne ? (86–87)

Here the narrator performs her own close reading of the word "fidèle" – what it means in

this context and what it might obscure. She invites the reader to participate in this

performative close reading as well with the choice of "notons," which translates to "let us

note [together], rather than "je note." The interpretation itself she leaves as a series of

questions about who Victoire might be truly faithful to, causing this interpretive reading

to perform the same role as the sentence from Anne-Marie's letter, as a reading "qui

ouvre toutes les interprétations."

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As for the question of whether the relationship between Victorie and Anne-Marie is a sexual one, one of the interpretations suggested by Anne-Marie's letter, the narrator offers us her opinion on the next page while making it clear that it is only an opinion: "Je préfère croire qu'exista entre Anne-Marie et Victoire une amitié exceptionnelle, née comme un coup de foudre dès leur première rencontre, une complicité sans faille qui ne se démentit jamais" (88). The phrase "je préfère croire" is an example of the text's paradoxical construction of narrative authority; it is a clear denial of objectivity and interpretative rather than empirical, which suggests an undermining of public authority (to borrow Lanser's terminology), yet it is also a statement that insists on the narrator's visible presence for the reader. It also constitutes another instance in which the narrator fulfills the promise to render visible not only her presence, but also her process.

At the end of the novel, the tragedy of Victoire's own voice being unable to speak directly remains: "Victoire glissa sans doute dans l'au-delà sans mot dire, sans rien révéler d'elle-même, comme elle avait vécu sa vie" (254). This tragedy is not all the text has to offer however. On the level of events, the text indicates that life will continue after Victoire's death, since the final lines describe not Victoire's death but rather the birth of the narrator's older sister, two weeks later. On the level of narrative, the text offers Victoire a voice that is itself communal, authorized, and imagined through the voice of the narrator and even the author, if we consider the narrator to function as narrator-as-author, or if we consider Condé's interview with Boisseron a part of her story about creating and narrating the life of Victoire. Through the lens of narration, Victoire's story becomes an enactment of female community across generations and between writer, narrator, character, and reader.

In Gisèle Pineau's *Mes quatre femmes,* the collective narrative voice is constructed differently, made possible only through the setting of the novel, in an imagined place and time. This setting is established in the epigraph preceding the main text: "*La mémoire est une geôle./ Là, les temps sont abolits./ Là, les morts et les vivants sont ensemble./ Là, les existences se réinventent à l'infini*" (7, italics original to text). Like Condé's *Victoire, Mes quatre femmes* is the story of a multigenerational female community, with a narrator who acts as, in Buchholz's term, a narrator-as-author. In this case, it is the story of four women: Daisy, the narrator's mother, Julia, her paternal grandmother, Gisèle, her aunt, for whom she is named, and Angélique, an ancestor during the time of slavery. Julia is the same character who appeared in Pineau's earlier work *L'exil selon Julia,* explored in the previous chapter in its construction of coming-of-age. This marks *Mes quatres femmes* as a continuation of her earlier work, much more directly than Brossard's *La capture du sombre* constitutes a continuation of *Le désert mauve* (in the sense of feminist projects of translation). It also marks *Mes quatre femmes* as a (semi)biographical text and gives the narrator a similar authority to the narrator of *Victoire* – an authority based on biographical knowledge but also the imagination. In the space outside reality where the narrator's four women meet and speak to one another (the possessive pronoun of the title indicating the narrator's ownership of their stories), their lives will be reinvented more than recounted.

Like all three of the other texts explored so far in this chapter – *Le désert mauve, La capture du sombre,* and *Victoire – Mes quatre femmes* also offers the reader a story about narration. In *Mes quatre femmes,* however, this discourse on narration is difficult to locate in an outer as opposed to an inner story. The first section of the text, which does

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not exactly correspond to an outer story, describes the four women and the narrator herself with a confusion of narrative perspective and authority. The text begins with distance, or with a narrator who does not make herself particularly visible:

> Elles sont quatre. Elles sont pareilles aux quatre roches jetées sur un morceau de terre qui ne vous appartient pas…Quatre roches silencieuses que personne ne souciait de récurer mais qui étaient de la famille cependant… Quatre roches qu'on abandonnait sans regret derrière soi. (9)

Like Condé's Victoire, the four women of this text are introduced as being without voice, "quatre roches silencieuses," more dramatically voiceless than Victoire in being portrayed as inanimate, unmovable objects. Impersonal words like "personne," "on" and "soi" keep the reader from a clear sense of the speaker, yet the "on abandonnait sans regret" lends itself to the interpretation that the narrator feels she has abandoned these four women.

If the narrator is distant at first, the women being narrated are soon given power as speaking agents, with a description that contradicts the initial comparison to rocks: "Chacune parle à son tour et expose les voilures de sa vie qu'elle enguirlande et brode à sa manière…Toujours, les paroles les font voyager loin de la geôle obscure" (10-11). Words here have not only the power of exposure, but also of freedom – enabling the women to "voyager loin de la geôle obscure."

The narrator then transitions from an impersonal voice to second-person address: "C'est sûr, une parenté les lie… il est doux de croire en sa bonne fortune. Se figurer ces quatre femmes telles des cariatides qui, par-delà les temps, vous soutiennent sans faillir, vous assurant une solide assise sur cette terre" (11). This complex shift in narration

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provides another example of the utility of morphing as a lens for analysis: the impersonal, certain tone of the "c'est sûr"; followed by the more subjective "il est doux," suggesting the narrator's own perception; followed by a statement that "ces [not mes] quatre femmes…vous soutiennent," technically a second-person address but an implication of the narrator's presence (the narrator herself is mostly likely this "vous," although the use of the formal and/or plural you rather than the informal singular form invites the reader in as well).

The final part of this section suggests that the overall work is a tribute to these voices and their power to sustain the narrator, and by implication the author:

> Elles vous ont raconté tant d'histoires…Ces quatre femmes, on les devine
>
> le coeur ouvert, impatients de transmettre un savoir… il apparaît que
>
> chacune incarne la saison d'une histoire qui, s'accolant à celles des autres,
>
> rassemble et ordonne les morceaux de votre être. Celle-là a dessiné le
>
> pays. Celle-ci a légué le nom. La troisième a posé la langue. La quatrième
>
> a cédé le prénom. (12)

The description here of the four women being responsible for "les morceaux de votre être" comes worryingly close to the communal voice as Lanser understands it: a multiplicity of speakers that serve to reinforce a unitary authority (in this case, that of the narrator). Yet these women's role in the text goes beyond their responsibility for these different parts of the narrator's being. Moreover, in and of itself this description suggests not so much an authorizing of the individual but a reciprocity of creation; the narrator creates these four women textually and imaginatively, while they have created her historically and through their legacy.

The rest of the overall text continues the narration of the first section, and the lines between speakers and tellers are often blurred, destabilizing any notions of concrete unitary authority. I will consider a passage from the second section of the overall text, entitled "Gisèle," as an example of this indeterminate narration and authority. Gisèle is introduced to the reader here as the character most likely to need help in telling her story, or in "moving from silence to voice," to borrow Renée Larrier's words. In the beginning of this section of the text, *Gisèle's* section, silence surrounds Gisèle: "Le silence rôde à ses bords. Qui peut dire ce que lui chuchote le silence?" (13). This "qui peut dire" indicates that even if the narrator is creating and authorizing this entire section, and exercising complete control over it, that control does not come with omniscience. The narrator further tells us that while this place enables Gisèle to speak, the other three women are authorized to tell her story as well: "Comme des rivières, elle regardent s'écouler les vies des unes et des autres. Elles connaissent par coeur l'histoire de Gisèle. Chacune pourrait la raconter à sa place" (13).

While most of the narration of the section is focalized through the third-person perspective of Gisèle, with many passages beginning "Gisèle se souvient…," there are also textual moments in which Gisèle is allowed to speak more directly, such as her account of her wedding: "Gisèle se berce un instant, reprend son récit. Nous avons dansé tant et plus…Je me souviens, murmure Gisèle, quand la musique s'est éteinte" (23). This morphing from "Gisèle" to "nous" to "je," without the guidance of quotation marks, requires attentive reading and suggests fluidity between the perspective of Gisèle herself and the perspective of the narrator.

Gisèle's section also includes several passages focalized through another character, Daisy in particular, who knew Gisèle in life: "En un autre temps, elles ont été soeurs de sang" (20). Because of this former closeness to Gisèle, Daisy uses the space of the memory jail to work through her anger, as she blames Gisèle for falling into silence and abandoning the living after the death of her husband. Daisy's perspective is sometimes given with the same third-person structure of Gisèle's, passages opening with "Daisy se souvient…" Daisy is also allowed to speak directly (albeit in the form of a monologue), as in the following instance after she is chastised by Julia and Angélique for criticizing Daisy: "Ces femmes m' insupportent. Pourquoi serais-je privée du droit de demander des explications à Gisèle? J'ai accepté d'être enfermée ici pour cette seule raison… Au nom de tous ceux qu'elle a abandonnés, connaître enfin la vérité" (20-21). Daisy is hardly entering into the spirit of the memory jail here, in searching for verifiable "explications" and a singular "vérité." Nor does she seem interested in finding a sense of community with the other three women, feeling only anger for Gisèle and finding both Julia and Angélique "insupportables."

Daisy later comes to an understanding with and forgiveness of Gisèle: "Daisy et Gisèle mettent en branle leurs souvenirs. Elles chicanent sur des détails, ajustent leurs récits et finissent par s'accorder sur une version consensuelle de l'histoire qu'elles livrent d'une même voix à Julia et à Angélique" (25). Here the two come together to produce "une même voix" and "une version consensuelle" authorized by them both. It is the result however of negotiation, with plenty of initial discord to work through before finding an accord, suggesting that finding this "même voix" does not negate the multivocal strength of the conversation between the two of them and their dual construction of the story.

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A greater authority seems to come from the narrator, who reminds us of her presence and her act of narrative (re)construction at the end of the section: "Se fabriquer une histoire avec si peu de pistes. Se revêtir de ce prénom chagrin…Elle est toujours là, dans ma tête… Mystérieuse Gisèle que le chagrin emporta. Si grand chagrin. Tant lourd prénom" (58). The narrator finds her connection to Gisèle to be, if not completely "insupportable," difficult and "lourd." Yet this is nevertheless a significant moment for the narrator, who uses the first-person – "ma tête" – for the first time in the overall text in pointing to the presence of the other Gisèle. The relationship between the two Gisèles is hardly an easy one; it is however a reciprocal one in which both voices speak and authorize each other. And if the narrator is behind each speaker, then Daisy's act of forgiveness and shared narration with Gisèle is also the narrator's, providing another example of collective narrative voice allowing for various interpretations of a text.

If I finish with Michelle Cliff, it is not to suggest that her collective narration of female community is less important than that of Brossard, Condé, or Pineau. Instead, it is because I wish to privilege her voice in putting it in a place where readers are likely to pause and take stock of the chapter. Cliff's narration is demanding, particularly when trying to interpret it as something that enables community in her works. Unlike the other texts of this chapter, her work often insists on focalization through one particular character (Clare in *No Telephone to Heaven,* and the unnamed protagonist of *Into the Interior*). When there are multiple voices present, they are often not only divergent but in conflict with each other. Cliff's refusal however to privilege the traditional narrative authority usually associated with one voice is a powerful destabilization. Her communities become even more powerful in light of their refusal of automatic solidarity,

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and her collective narrative voice, limited though it may be, expresses these difficult and complex communities.

Moreover, Cliff is explicitly committed as a writer to an idea of voice enabled through literature. In her article "Caliban's Daughter: The Tempest and the Teapot" (1991), Cliff speaks of her own silence, particularly in childhood, as a colonized subject: "There are several version of the colonized child, several versions of silence, voicelessness. There is the child who is chose, as was I, to represent the colonizer's world, peddle the colonizer's values, ideas, notions of what is real, alien, other, normal, supreme" (40).

Cliff goes on to describe how overcoming this silence informs her writing: "my purpose as a writer of Afro-Caribbean – Indian (Arawak and Carib), African, European – experience and heritage, and western experience and education, has been to reject speechlessness, a process which has taken years, and to invent my own peculiar speech, with which to describe my own peculiar self" (40). The voice mentioned here seems to be an individualist one – "my own peculiar speech" – but it recalls Maryse Condé's statement "j'écris en Maryse Condé" (explored in the previous chapter) in that what is individualist on one level may also be, for a writer, a refusal for uncomplicated national or colonial solidarity, rather than a refusal of solidarity altogether. A writer's voice, after all, particularly writers as conscious of their readers as Cliff and Condé, is always speaking *to* someone (an imagined reader) in their writing. In the case of Caribbean women writers, these voices are always speaking in relation to (although not *for,* or as part of) Caribbean female community.

Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven,* explored more thoroughly in the previous chapter, as the coming-of-age story of Clare Savage (together with *Abeng,* a prequel), has a complex narrative voice as well, which complicates the extent to which Clare is the central authority of the text. The novel opens with a third-person narrative voice focalized through an entire group of travelers riding a truck painted with the words, "No Telephone to Heaven": "It was a hot afternoon after a day of solid rain. Rain which had drenched them" (3). The group's collective actions and perceptions are narrated in the present tense, although it eventually becomes clear that what is being described is unfolding towards the end of the story, if not the narrative (Genette's distinction between story (events) and narrative (the ordering of events) becomes extremely helpful here).

The first description of Clare (and indication of her presence) within the opening narration is then structured in such a way as to trouble her participation in the group:

> A light-skinned woman, daughter of landowners, native-born, slaves, émigrés, Carib, Ashanti, English, has taken her place on this truck, alongside people who could easily have hated her. The people around her had a deep bitterness to contend with…evoking the name of Nanny, in whose memory they were engaging in this, they might move closer. Their efforts were tender. They were making something new, approached not without difficulty, with the gravest opposition; the bitterness, the fury some held, could be strip-mined (5).

Clare is traveling with people "who could easily have hated her," and while this phrasing implies their acceptance of her, in the next sentence they are described as "the people around her," apart from her. Furthermore, they are all "evoking the name of Nanny," a

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Maroon fighter Clare knew nothing about in *Abeng* (1984), in which the first part of her story is represented. Nanny gives Clare and the group a new shared language, one that contests both patriarchal and neocolonial narratives of Jamaican history in which stories of Nanny have no part, but these "tender efforts" to "make something new" are complicated by the force of their "bitterness" and "fury" which they intend to "strip-mine," a hint of the violence to come later in the novel.

The first violence appears not in Clare's story but in that of Christopher, a person at the extreme periphery of Clare's life; the collective narrative voice of the novel is in part a succession of different and disparate individual voices, including Paul, Christopher (the man who violently murders Paul's entire family with a machete), Kitty (Claire's mother), Boy (Claire's father), and finally Clare herself, in her transition from her studies in England to a revolutionary project in Jamaica. This troubled collective voice is complicated by class inequality, racial tension, and physical and cultural violence, while Clare's own planned participation in the revolutionary group's violent sabotage of a neocolonial cinematic representation of Nanny's life – a representation which rewrites Nanny's political struggle as a romantic love story between her and Cudjoe (a man who betrayed Nanny historically) – links the actions of her and her group to the violence of Christopher.

At the end of the novel, as Clare's group is shot down by helicopters before they can commit their act of sabotage, their final moments are once again complicated by a third-person narration which is only sometimes focalized through Clare's perspective, with phrases such as "[t]hose hidden in the bush could do little but listen" (207) suggesting a return to the group focalized narration of the novel's opening. As they are

being shot and killed, Clare's individual voice emerges once again only to express that her new community and shared language cannot save her, underscored by a white space on the page with no ellipses marks: "She remembered language. Then   it was gone" (208). Clare's voice has been silenced forever, and her effort to reclaim narrative representation of Nanny has been brutally stifled with her death within the story.

This is however only one possible interpretation of Clare's death. Cliff herself offers an alternative interpretation in "Caliban's Daughter: The Tempest and the Teapot":

> While essentially tragic, I see it and planned it as an ending that completes the circle, actually triangle, of the character's life. In her death she has achieved completed identification with her homeland. Soon enough…her bones will turn to potash as did her ancestors' bones. Her grandmothers' relics will be unable to distinguish her from her darker-skinned sisters.
> (11)

In this interpretation, given the authoritative weight of the author herself, Clare's death is not a sign of failed community but of community fulfillment, a "complete identification with her homeland." Somewhat literally, Clare will be absorbed into the earth of that homeland and her individuality will be subsumed by the others who are buried there. I would like to suggest that there is a still greater authority on interpretation of the text — that of the reader, who is not limited to either a reading of either tragedy or community fulfillment in death.

Like the relation between Brossard's *Le désert mauve* and *La capture du sombre*, Cliff's later novel *Into the Interior* takes up similar themes to those of *No Telephone to Heaven*, in particular the difficulty of constructing community, especially from exile.

Both works contain elements that correspond to Cliff's own life; while I do not argue that this makes either text autobiographical, I do suggest that this connection adds personal authority (as Lanser would describe it) to the public authority constructed by the narration. Moreover, I view this work not only as a continuation of themes but also as a possible retrospective response to the events and nationalist community of *No Telephone.*

Into the Interior at first glance is even more individualist than *No Telephone*, with the majority of the text being narrated by a first-person narrator who tells her own story, without recourse to imagined spaces, dialogues, or figures from the past. Moreover, unlike Clare Savage, this unnamed narrator is difficult to emphasize with, as she distances herself from all notions of solidarity, whether national, international, or gendered, and from meaningful connections to other characters. As the narrator herself describes it, "I fancied myself a citizen of the world, belonging nowhere, with fealty to no one" (17). Within her story, she is a student of art history (who lacks a thesis topic) and a freelance journalist, both of which suggest a lack of commitment. The narrator also has no conscious sense of Jamaican identity, although she does not accept England as uncritically as Clare does at first.

The narrative first-person voice who narrates in the past tense is consistent throughout most of the novel, seeming to obey realist and individualist narrative convention in this way: "I was born in the middle of the twentieth century and was raised in the age of Victoria…" (3). These opening lines suggest a biographical empiricism similar to the beginning of Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (explored in chapter II). Also like Orlando, however, is the extent to which this voice undermines its own authority in suggesting that it is unreliable. The narrator tells us for example that her family "cleaved

to the past…Not a reliable narrator in the crew" (3). As she herself is a narrator as well as the novel's central character, the reader is encouraged to see her implicated in these words, and is asked to question her account from then on.

There are other narrative shifts in the opening pages that are difficult to establish in a definitive way: "Everything in need of restoration. Do not look too closely. Have you not been warned girl?" (3) The narrator is speaking of the disorder of her family home and land, but this morphs into another voice that is given no identity, and no quotation marks. It could easily be interpreted as a family member, speaking to the narrator herself as a child and warning her not to question her family's status and narrative. The feeling of indeterminacy remains however, adding to the reader's need to question and pay close attention to the text. A third morphing then occurs in connecting to the past: "A black maid kisses her teeth as her master tongues the gold hoop in her ear" (3). Once again it is impossible to give the identity of this voice with any certainty. What we can say is that because the present tense is employed here, the past is in a sense alive or ongoing for the narrator, even if she refuses to acknowledge this directly.

Other speakers besides the narrator are more clearly established within the text. An important example occurs when the narrator meets a woman from the American south named Bex on the journey by boat to England, and forms a friendship and sexual relationship with her. Their connection is strengthened by the narration, when the narrator cedes visibility, if not authority, to Bex as she tells the story behind the scar on her face, an incident in which she is attacked in a women's restroom for being queer:

> Inside, in front of the mirrors, were some sorority sisters she recognized
> from the university. 'Pardon me if this reeks of cliché… I knew well the

> danger of a gauntlet of girls…Then two of them held me down while my
>
> original accuser applied a razor blade to my face… In my memory the
>
> entire thing plays out in silence.' (26-27)

The morphing is visible here, from the narrator's voice speaking about Bex (she recognized) to Bex's own voice ('Pardon me…'). It is a brutal story urgently in need of voicing, indicated by the fact that for Bex, it usually "plays out in silence." Although it is an instance of shared narration, on the level of story these events challenge the notion of a universal solidarity between women, suggesting that queerness can place women as society's outsiders, even to other women. And if Bex and the narrator have found solace and solidarity in each other based on their shared queer identity, the narrator turns down an offer to accompany Bex at the end of the journey.

The most dramatic representation of the narrator's interaction with another woman coincides with the text's most radical narration in the final section of the novel. In this section, entitled "Confluence," there is a complex morphing between the narrator (whose story is now being told in both first- and third-person, distinguished by italicized text) and a woman from the past (who appears in both narrations). This shifting begins as follows:

> I was walking on the white glass sands, looking down. A piece of blue
>
> glass… lay at my feet. I picked it up… I put the piece of glass in my
>
> pocket.
>
> *She slipped a membrane and slid into the interior. She was on a street that*
>
> *stretched gray alongside the River Thames… This was something else. She*

> *thought not a dream because she could touch the cold iron of a balustrade*
>
> *in front of a townhouse.*
>
> In front of me a woman was walking… I thought I would follow the
>
> woman in front of me, who seemed not to know she was alone.
>
> *She herself was an opportunistic nomad… an omnivorous traveler,*
>
> *rootless…Haven't the past months proved this? The woman she was*
>
> *following seems to have direction…* (119-120)

For no logical reason, either from the level of the story or from the level of narration, the

unnamed protagonist is now narrated by two distinct voices, only one of which is her

own, although the other seems focalized through her perspective, as in "*She thought not a*

dream." Something outside reality is shaping this meeting between the two women.

Perhaps because this is an unreal, imagined space (although it is extremely unclear who is

doing the imagining), the protagonist (as I will now call her in order to avoid confusion

by calling her the narrator) is able to connect with this woman from the past, who, unlike

the protagonist, "*seems to have direction.*"

Without seeming to put an undue amount of thought into it, when the woman

speaks to her the protagonist immediately agrees to accompany her to the river, and when

the woman jumps in and sinks, the protagonists responds by jumping in as well:

> We were at Battersea next to the river…All of a sudden she turned
>
> around… 'Will you come with me…?' 'Of course,' I said…She began
>
> to cross the river, then mounted the a railing and jumped, feet first, into
>
> the black waters…the weight of her pulled her down, and she sank out

of sight. I stood up and pulling off my turtleneck and slipping out of my

jeans dove over the side of the boat…. (120-122)

The protagonist (though we can now safely refer to her as the narrator once again, since

the third-person voice has vanished) explains her motivation to follow this woman only

indirectly: "It gave me heart when I found that mirages could be photographed, that they

resulted from the bending of light and were imaginary only insofar as every real thing

was imaginary… I followed her under the water" (122). It seems that the narrator wants

to experience the reality of the imaginary for herself.

The combination of events and narrative voices in this section are so multi-layered

that existing criticism of the novel does not agree on even the nature of the events, or on

the interpretation of the final lines: "When I came to, I was washed ashore. Apocalypso"

(122). Lucía Stecher and Elsa Maxwell, for example, in their article "Michelle Cliff's

Into the Interior and the Trope of the Solitary Female Immigrant," interpret the ending as

the narrator's suicide (819), while Beata Potocki, in her article "'Apocalypso': Visions of

Cosmopolitanism in Michelle Cliff's Fiction," describes instead "the suicide of the

revolutionary woman and the narrator's own survival" (81). While both of these

interpretations consider narration in their interpretation of events, I suggest that

privileging narration can give us a new insight into what the novel achieves: the

realization of solidarity and transhistorical community through the imagination, on the

level of both story and narration. In my own interpretation of the ending, I too read the

narrator's survival; more than that, I see her survival as a response to Clare's death in *No

Telephone,* offering a creative realization of community more viable than Clare's violent

political struggle.

To offer a brief conclusion, all of these works perform variations on the collective narrative voice as I have outlined it in the first half of the chapter, demonstrating the need for an open interpretative framework attentive to any number of structural possibilities of feminist narration. What these instances of the collective narrative voice hold in common is their expression of the text's commitment to resistant and creative female community. These contemporary texts perform female community in diverse ways and offer complicated, sometimes deliberately difficult and indeterminate, voicing of these communities. I also hope to have shown that the collective narrative voice is at the heart of each novel's construction of female community, and at the heart of each text's extension of that community to its readers, enabled through proliferation of authenticity and openness to interpretation.

The feminist novel of female community, as a genre, has now been thoroughly defined through this and previous chapters. In the following chapter, I explore another permutation of this genre in terms of alternative, multigenerational quests, a subject we have seen here in my analysis of the contributing of collective voice to these quests (particularly in the work of Condé and Pineau). I will turn to a consideration of the implications of the genre as a whole, in its ability to provide alternative knowledge and epistemology. It is narration however that makes these feminist projects of transmitting cultural knowledge possible, and it will be important not to lose sight of the power and agency found in the act of narration.

CHAPTER V

MOTHERS, DAUGHTERS, GRANDMOTHERS: THE FEMALE SEARCH FOR

ORIGIN AND ALTERNATIVE GENEALOGY

> But it is not enough to stand on the opposite
>
> river bank, shouting questions, challenging
>
> patriarchal, white conventions. A counterstance
>
> locks one into a dual of oppressor and
>
> oppressed...it's a step towards liberation from
>
> cultural domination. But it is not a way of life.
>
> Gloria Anzaldua, "La Conciencia de la
>
> Mestiza: Towards a New
>
> Consciousness," 378

The Implications of Alternative Genealogy

In the epigraph above, taken from Gloria Anzaldúa's essay "La Conciencia de la

Mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness," included in one of her anthologies of women

writers and theorists, *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical

Perspectives by Feminists of Color* (1990), itself an important collaborative project,

Anzaldúa argues that while patriarchal critique is important, this alone cannot lead to

social transformation, or a new "way of life." Instead, she offers a theory of a new

consciousness, embodied in the figure of the *mestiza*, who by necessity must learn to deal

with multiple identities, expressed in her poetic opening in both Spanish and English:

"Because I, a *mestiza,*/ continually walk out of one culture/ and into another,/ because I

am in all cultures at the same time,/ *alma entre dos mundos, tres, cautro,/ me zumba la*

cabeza con lo contradictorio./ Estoy norteada por todas las voces que me hablan/

simultáneamente" (377). This transformation – the ability of the *mestiza* to be "in all

cultures at the same time" – happens through the creative work of the imagination,

represented here in the crossing between English and Spanish, and between poetry and

theory.[44]

This call to go beyond resistance and towards creativity – towards the

construction of something new – echoes the feminist project of repetition and renewal in

the work of each of the contemporary women writers who serve as the focus for this

project – Nicole Brossard, Michelle Cliff, Maryse Condé, and Gisèle Pineau. For

Anzaldúa, the *mestiza* is a figure who embodies a collective transformation of society,

and who demonstrates metaphorically the resistant and creative potential of boundary

crossing. Her description of the *mestiza* offers a different way of understanding and

navigating the world:

> The new *mestiza* copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a
>
> tolerance for ambiguity...She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural
>
> personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode...The work of *mestiza*
>
> consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality that keeps her a

---

44. It is worth noting here that the mestiza is represented not only as transformative but also as suffering, due to the cultural discord linked to her hybrid existence: "me zumba la cabeza" and "Estoy norteada" indicate that suffering. Uma Narayan details this conundrum in her article "The Project of Feminist Epistemology: Perspectives from a Nonwestern Feminist," arguing that any "epistemic advantages [gained] by inhabiting a larger number of contexts" should be considered alongside the "painful problems" that such social positions might bring (258).

prisoner and to show in the flesh and through the images in her work how
duality is transcended.... A massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the
individual and collective consciousness is the beginning of a long struggle,
but one that could, in our best hopes, bring us to the end of rape, of
violence, of war. (379)

Here, the consciousness of the *mestiza* is specifically described as "work." This work has
important political dimensions, as the "massive uprooting of dualistic thinking" could
lead to "the end of rape, of violence, of war."

In this chapter, I engage more directly than in previous chapters with the political
implications of the feminist novel of female community, focusing on the element of
alternative genealogy. In the novels of Brossard, Cliff, Condé, and Pineau, diverse
formulations of genealogy include alternate family structures such as adoptive and
lesbian families; transmission and recovery of history and family stories across
generations of women; and connections between women across linguistic and national
boundaries. All of these alternative genealogies stand in contrast to narratives of fathers
and sons; quests for patriarchal origin and lineage; and grand narratives of history.
Taking Anzaldúa's call for a "pluralistic mode" and shift in consciousness as a point of
departure, I argue that these writers' alternative genealogies and quests for origin add an
important dimension to the resistant creativity of their works by allowing for
epistemological shifts.

While in the last two chapters I focused on what constitutes female community in
these novels, and its transformative possibilities for present and future – coming-of-age
through and into female community, and the collaborative framework of collective

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narrative voice, in chapters III and IV respectively – in this chapter my focus shifts to the alternative past as a pathway to alternative presents and futures. I argue that in their imaginative alternative genealogy, these stories of generations of women indicate what is at stake in transforming the realist novel and its worldview, exposing and challenging links between genealogy, patriarchy, imperialism, nationalism, and narratives of historical progression. Through various ways of privileging the creative role of the imagination, such as narrative structure that plays with temporality, these works re-inscribe women as historical actors and transmitters of historical and cultural knowledge, and allow for the representation of female community as a transnational dynamic force for the complex negotiation of past legacy in the contemporary world. This creates alternative feminist epistemologies in terms of both alternative ways of understanding the world, and alternative processes of arriving at and narrating that understanding.

Moreover, I argue that this re-envisioning of genealogy, nation, historiography and epistemology constitutes these texts as radical political projects, in their use of what I will call the transimaginary. I define the transimaginary as the deliberate emphasis on both border crossing and the imagination, and as the choice of the imagination as the method to represent that crossing: writing creatively across borders of time, space, language, gender, stories, histories, communities, and any strict division between the imagination and reality. I contend that this practice extends these writers' commitment to feminism to a broader intersectional politics that at various points in their works is transnational, anticolonial, antiracist, and anticapitalist, as well as feminist.

Genealogy in the Traditional Realist Novel: Linking Patriarchy, Nation, and History

through Representations of Temporal Progression

To establish the extent to which the work of these four women writers transforms earlier narratives through alternative genealogies and the transimaginary, and to engage with the stakes involved in this transformation, I return briefly here to the nineteenth-century traditional realist novel. Narratives of fathers and sons, patriarchal genealogy, and male quests for origin have a long history in the novel. As we have seen, nineteenth-century novels brought together various ideological aspects of modernity, including not only patriarchal culture, but also capitalism, imperialism, and even racism. This ideology was naturalized and reinforced through linear, cohesive narrative temporality.

As we saw in the introductory chapter, this linear temporality was also connected to the creation of realism and verisimilitude in these texts. In *The Theory of the Novel*, Georg Lukacs links temporality with the "essentially biographic" nature of the novel – its path through the life stages of individuals – arguing that "[t]ime brings order into the chaos of men's lives" (123). Likewise, in Peter Brooks' *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative*, "plot is the internal logic of the discourse of mortality" (22). We have also seen the importance of this progressive temporality for Moretti's description of the *Bildungsroman*, since for him this chronology was what allowed the figure of youth to represent the *contained* turbulence of nineteenth-century society, through progression through time from resistant youth to resigned maturity or death. The realist construction of time, then, can be linked to political ideology – in this case, the containment of political instability.

Edward Said, in his work *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, suggests that hierarchy as well as containment is implicit in linear narrative temporality: "the unity or integrity of the text is maintained by a series of genealogical connections: author – text, beginning-middle-end, text – meaning, reader – interpretation, and so on. Underneath all these is the imagery of succession, of paternity, or hierarchy" (162). For Said, texts that follow this formal linear pattern are politically problematic, even if they do not reproduce this genealogical imagery through their content. In this chapter I follow Moretti and Said in reading this temporal structure as political, in its perpetuation of hierarchy and its ability to limit resistance.

Ironically, this temporal model of evolutionary progression was so widespread in nineteenth-century culture that it created its own teleology. The evolutionary model was used to certify and authorize particular knowledge claims or narratives, about history or science for example, which were seen as more credible if connected to a genesis through time. These claims, after being admitted into the canon of empirical knowledge, then served to themselves justify the continued use of the evolutionary model as a measure of progress, authorizing this model even as they used it to derive their own authority. Peter Brooks describes this reliance on the evolutionary model as part of an "extreme need" for plot and narrative in the nineteenth century, resulting in the consolidation of official, empirical knowledge into different disciplines:

> Not only history, but historiography, the philosophy of history, philology, mythography, diachronic linguistics, anthropology, archaeology, and evolutionary biology all establish their claim as fields of inquiry, and all respond to the need for an explanatory narrative that seeks its authority in

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a return to origins and the tracing of a coherent story forward from origin

to present. (6)[45]

According to Brooks, all of these disciplines depended on narrative for "coherency," and

on a particular kind of genealogical narrative as "explanatory," along a timeline "from

origin to present." All of these fields, in their reliance on this narrative pattern for

authority, helped to establish empiricism (quantifiable, measurable data as constitutive of

"reality") as the dominant means of understanding the world, including social relations.

Developing a tendency begun in the age of Enlightened reason, "reality" took on the

project of constructing and transmitting official knowledge, as well as evaluating cultures

and human beings. Any non-empirical or alternative ways of understanding social

relations, whether explicitly resistant or not, were thus in conflict with an entire

worldview, and needed to be suppressed.

In *The Novel and the Police,* D.A. Miller describes the role of the realist novel,

and the crime novel in particular, in carrying out suppression and containment. His work

explores the way Foucault's concepts of discipline and surveillance translate to the crime

novel, in which the ostensible representative of the police (the detective) is felt to intrude

upon the privacy and freedom of individuals, which obscures the way in which the real

surveillance work is carried out within domestic space, with characters surveilling and

policing one another as well as themselves. Miller argues that this surveillance is made

possible in the novel primarily through its temporal structure:

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45. Brooks speculates that this drive for overarching "explanatory narrative" may be explained by
the loss of "sacred narrative" or "masterplot" – described by Benedict Anderson as something
represented through "circular time" – as a means of understanding the world: "The enormous
narrative production of the nineteenth century may suggest an anxiety at the loss of providential
plots: the plotting of the individual or social or institutional life story takes on new urgency when
one no longer can look to a sacred masterplot that organizes and explains the world" (6).

[This] feat is possible because nineteenth-century narrative is generally

conceived as a *genesis*: a linear, cumulative time of evolution. Such a

genesis secures duration against the dispersive tendencies that are literally

'brought into line' by it. Once on this line, character or event may be

successively placed and coherently evaluated. (26)

Evolutionary genealogical time is here afforded a great deal of disciplinary power over

"dispersive tendencies" – or dispersive agents – attempting to resist the linear reality

constituted in and by these texts.

For the contemporary feminist novel then, a first step in transforming the novel

with alternative epistemologies is to recognize the extent to which the structure of the

novel reinforces the ways in which official reality and traditional epistemology present a

threat to those who do not "fit" along the dominant epistemological line. As Alice A.

Parker explains in her 1998 overview of Brossard's oeuvre, *Liminal Visions of Nicole*

Brossard,

Traditional novels reinscribe the social matrices that produced meaning

and 'reality'…More serious, the truth-claims of a certain literary tradition

suggest that the words on the page provide a direct translation of some

'reality out there' which can be empirically verified. Such a notion mirrors

the world view of bourgeois, capitalist culture, with its investment in the

myth of progress, its positivist philosophy and conservative values. (4)

Parker emphasizes the political work of Brossard's writing in terms of its contestation of

this "reality out there," and by extension, of the worldview "mirror[ed]" by this reality.

As can be seen in previous chapters as well as this one, Brossard's novels problematize

the very possibility of "a direct translation," and emphasize the necessity, even urgency, of using the imagination to undermine "empirically verified" and "positivist" reality, linked in her work with patriarchal culture and violence against women, both physical and epistemological. Her patterns of translation and transmission defy not only traditional reality, but also the *processes* by which that reality constructs itself. In this chapter, I explore the way Brossard's desire to undermine reality – "entamer la réalité par la peau et par la langue" (*La lettre aérienne*, 1987) – can also be seen in her play with temporality, a strategy and project shared with Cliff, Condé, and Pineau.

Genealogy in the Colonial Project: Gender, Race, and Reproduction

Narrative patterns of transgression and containment represented a particularly powerful threat to "disruptive agents" when those agents challenged multiple ideologies simultaneously. Anne McClintock, in her work *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest,* considers temporality and containment of resistance through analysis of a particular colonial trope, what she calls the pseudo-scientific figure of the "family of man," or a metaphor used to "signify hierarchy within unity" (45). This figure, she explains, contributed to a constant re-enactment of gendered, racial, and imperialist ideology, in connecting hierarchical family structure – the father at the head of the family unit – with the hierarchal structure of colonialism, with civilized colonizers at the head of "the family of man" and the colonized in an inferior position.

McClintock adds that due to the temporality associated with the "family of man," both women and the colonized were denied historical agency: "According to this trope, colonized people – like women and the working class in the metropolis – do not inhabit history proper but exist in a permanently anterior time within the geographic space of the modern empire as anachronistic humans, atavistic, irrational, bereft of human agency – the living embodiment of the archaic 'primitive'" (30). While D.A. Miller accords temporal structure the power to suppress "dispersive tendencies" by bringing them "into line," McClintock suggests that this power is particularly severe for women and the colonized, who are forced to remain in "a *permanently* anterior time" (emphasis mine).

Despite this lack of "human agency," however, women were designated as the greatest threat to the "family of man," what McClintock describes as "anachronistic regression" or "the possibility of racial decline from white fatherhood to a primordial black degeneracy incarnated in the black mother" (49). The women responsible for such a decline, in the European imaginary, were transgressive in terms of both gender and race, committing the crime of miscegenation. McClintock explains that "[t]he image of bad blood was drawn from biology but degeneration was less a biological fact than it was a social figure… Métissage (interracial unions) generally and concubinage in particular, represented the paramount danger to racial purity and cultural identity in all its forms" (47-48). This "degeneration" threatened to reverse the evolutionary timeline.

For Barbara Fields, a Marxist historian, race itself is an ideology, one that continues only in our repeated performances of it. Like McClintock, she links the construction of race to gender and to reproductive concerns, tracing the invention of race to laws governing interracial children. For example, she considers a law written in

Maryland in 1664 seeking to assign slave status to children resulting from male slaves and "divers freeborne English women forgettfull of their free Condicon [who] to the disgrace of our Nation doe intermarry with Negro slaues." Pointing to the use of the words "freeborne," "Nation" and "English," rather than "white," Fields argues that "*[r]ace* does not explain that law. Rather, the law shows society in the act of inventing race" (107). She further argues that the ideology of race, which first arose to deal with property claims such as the potential loss of one source of slave labor addressed in this law, does not become essentialized until later, when it is needed to resolve the contradiction between liberty and slavery: "It was not Afro-Americans…who needed a racial explanation. It was not they who invented themselves as a race. Euro-Americans resolved the contradiction between slavery and liberty by defining Afro-Americans as a race" (114). This "racial explanation" not only resolved this contradiction, but also naturalized it.

Fields also argues, however, that the *transmission* of this ideology, as well as the construction of the ideology itself, is not actually an essential, natural, or fixed quality that can be passed down through generations unchanged or without effort. Instead, echoing Butler's conception of gendered ideology, she points to the repetitive construction and transmission of racial ideology through repeated performance:

> The ritual repetition of appropriate social behaviour makes for the
> continuity of ideology, not the 'handing down' of the appropriate
> 'attitudes'... Human beings live in human societies by negotiating a certain
> social terrain, whose map they keep alive in their minds by collective, ritual

repetition of the activities they must carry out in order to negotiate the terrain. (113)

For Fields, this "appropriate social behaviour" must be ritually and collectively performed and negotiated. Bringing her work into conversation with McClintock's, we can see how this is connected to disciplinary examples of what might be called "inappropriate social behaviour," or transgressive performances of race, gender, and sexuality that threaten dominant ideology.

In briefly engaging two novels on the basis of genealogy – the nineteenth-century realist novel *Jane Eyre* and William Faulkner's more modernist *Absalom, Absalom!* – I hope to demonstrate the extent to which genealogy has been a driving force in the novel, contributing to an understanding of the world that denies the role of women as historical agents and transmitters of wisdom and historical knowledge, instead constituting them as potentially dangerous in terms of transgressive sexuality and race, and offering possibilities for their containment. This tendency of denial of women's agency on the one hand and criminalization of women's sexuality on the other is both implicitly and explicitly addressed in the feminist novels of my project.

In Charlotte Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre,* often described as a female *Bildungsroman,* Jane Eyre is juxtaposed to Bertha Mason, the madwoman in the attic.[46] Jane's intermittent questioning of gender roles and class rigidity exists alongside a refusal to acknowledge her implication in imperialism, and the extent to which she herself is defined and complicated by imperial "others" like Bertha. When Jane first sees Bertha, she is horror-stricken: "'[her features] were fearful and ghastly to me – oh sir, I never saw

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46. To borrow the language of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their influential work *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination.* See chapter I for a detailed exploration of this work.

a face like it! It was a discoloured face – it was a savage face. I wish I could forget the role of the red eyes and the fearful blackened inflation of the lineaments'" (242). Bertha appears here as non-human: "savage," with "red eyes" and "blackened inflation," and worst still, "ghastly," suggesting that she is like a ghost – no longer entirely alive, as well as no longer entirely human. Bertha, the text implies, has regressed due to her mixed blood.

Mr. Rochester describes Bertha with a more explicit discourse of race and contamination. He explains that the initial premise of the marriage was an alliance between his racial purity and her beauty and wealth: "her family wished to secure me, because I was of a good race; and so did she" (260). Later he learns of her mother's madness, a madness to which Bertha too soon succumbs, proving herself to be a part of a disruptive, impure female genealogy: "the true daughter of an infamous mother" (261). Mr. Rochester has been contaminated by her: "I was rich enough now – yet poor to hideous indigence: a nature the most gross, impure, depraved, I ever saw, was associated with mine, and called by the law and by society a part of me" (261). This "impure" and "depraved" creature is declared "a part of me," subsumed by the institution of marriage into his very being. After hearing this story, Jane feels continued horror towards Bertha and sympathy towards Mr. Rochester, although she refuses to entertain the idea of becoming his mistress instead of his wife.

Towards the end of the novel, Jane returns to Mr. Rochester, blinded in the aftermath of a fire set by Bertha, as an independently wealthy woman who is physically unimpaired, and thus in a potential position of power over Mr. Rochester. However, she generously describes their marriage in terms of equality: "I know what it is to live

entirely for and with what I love best on earth. I hold myself supremely blest – blest beyond what language can express; because I am my husband's life as fully as he is mine" (384). She will now "live entirely for" Mr. Rochester, as their union goes "beyond what language can express," suggesting that this union will be far more powerful than the one in which Mr. Rochester was contaminated by Bertha.

Their happiness becomes even more complete at the end of the novel when Mr. Rochester regains his sight with the birth of his son: "When his firstborn was put into his arms, he could see that the boy had inherited his own eyes, as they once were – large, brilliant, and black" (384). Here, with her contribution to the generational progression from Mr. Rochester to his son, Jane is given the power to restore the genealogical and racial timeline that Bertha threatened with her contamination. The figure of "anachronistic regression" has been safely contained. Jane herself, however, has been denied independent agency, as her son has "inherited" the legacy of his father rather than her own; although Jane continues to narrate in the first-person here, there is an emphasis on the vision (and by implication, the perspective) of Mr. Rochester and his son.

This narrative of racial degeneration can also be seen in William Faulkner's more modernist work *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936). While this text is not restricted to the formal realism of *Jane Eyre,* and includes destabilizing narrative elements such as multiple narrators and non-linear chronology, miscegenation is represented as equally dangerous and threatening to the legacy of the male characters. At the origin of this family is Thomas Sutpen, whose first wife had Creole blood. Although he abandons this wife before to coming to the United States and building a new family, his son Charles, a result of that first marriage, returns to haunt him.

Without disclosing his identity, Charles tries to integrate himself into the family by befriending Thomas' son Henry and marrying Thomas' daughter Judith (his own half-brother and half-sister). His efforts fail, sparing the Sutpen legacy the threat of incest, but the threat of racial contamination continues through the character of Clytie, Thomas' daughter by one of his slaves. At one point, for example, Clytie is described by Rosa, Judith's white aunt, as "that inscrutable coffee-colored face, that cold implacable mindless (no, not mindless: anything but mindless: his [Sutpen's] own clairvoyant will tempered to amoral evil's undeviating absolute by the black willing blood with which he has crossed it) replica" (143). Similar to both Jane and Mr. Rochester's descriptions of Bertha and her contaminating potential, this description of Clytie represents her as a contaminated "replica" of her father, who has "crossed [his] own clairvoyant will" with "black willing blood," and created a monster: someone "inscrutable," a figure of "amoral evil" which is "absolute."

Judith, the half-sister of both Clytie and Charles, is also presented as racially corrupt throughout the novel. She is a threat not because of her genetic origins, but because she fails to maintain enough distance from Clytie, her half-sister, Charles, her half-brother and brief fiancé, and even Henry, her brother. For example, Mr. Compson, one of the narrators, stresses the fact that Judith obeys her brother Henry's request not to let Charles write to her not because she accepts his male authority as her brother, but because she identifies with him to the extent that they are one person, a united front: "[Judith] did obey Henry in this matter – not the male relative, the brother, but because of that relationship between them – that single personality with two bodies both of which had been seduced almost simultaneously" (93). This frightening loss of boundaries

between Judith and Henry – the "single personality with two bodies" – is a threat in terms of sexuality as well as gender, race, and incest, since both are "seduced" by their male half-brother.

In fact, Mr. Compson later suggests that Judith becomes merely a backdrop for the relationship between Henry and Charles: "She was just the blank shape, the empty vessel in which each of them strove to preserve…what each conceived the other to believe him to be – the man and the youth, seducer and seduced, who had known one another…before Judith came into their joint lives even by so much as girlname" (123). Here, any agency Judith might have is negated, as she becomes a "blank shape" and an "empty vessel," echoing McClintock's claim that women are "[s]ymbolically reduced, in male eyes, to the space on which male contests are waged" and that they therefore "experience particular difficulties laying claim to alternative genealogies and alternative narratives of origin and naming" (31). The emphasis in this part of the novel is on the "origins" of Henry's and Charles' relationship, and in their eyes Judith is denied "even… so much as girlname."

While the men are away during the Civil War, Judith lives on the Sutpen estate with both Clytie and Rosa, and again loses boundaries between herself and others, as narrated by Rosa: "*We led the busy eventless lives of three nuns in a barren and poverty-stricken convent…and amicably, not as two white women and a negress, not as three negroes or three whites, not even as three women, but merely as three creatures*" (160). Here the idea of woman as empty vessel returns, as the three women become one: "*It was as though we were one being, interchangeable and indiscriminate*" (161). The fact that they are behaving "amicably" is terrifying to Rosa, as is the idea that they are no longer

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separated by race. Furthermore, in the absence of men, they also can no longer exist as women, "but merely as three creatures" who live as "nuns," devoid of gender and sexuality as well as race. In becoming one they have lost even their humanity.

This particular blurring of boundaries ends after the war, and by the time Clytie burns down the estate with herself and Henry still inside, Clytie is once again a racial other, reduced to a terrifying image, as narrated by Quentin:

> and then for a moment maybe Clytie appeared in that window….the tragic gnome's face beneath the clean headrag, against a red background of fire…looking down at them, perhaps not even now with triumph and no more of despair than it had ever worn, possibly even serene above the melting clapboards before the smoke swirled across it again. (392)

Here Clytie's face, that of a "tragic gnome" against "a red background of fire," is as "inscrutable" as ever. Her face is contrasted with Rosa's response to the fire: "the light thin furious creature making no sound at all now, struggling with silent and bitter fury, clawing and scratching and biting at the two men who held her" (392). Rosa is driven mad by Clytie's destructive power, silenced and rendered animalistic as a "creature" who can only express her "silent and bitter fury" through "clawing and scratching and biting."

This degradation of a character whose origins are "pure" – Rosa is white with no history of mixed blood, unlike Charles and Clytie – emphasizes the danger of contamination that mere association with racial "inferiors" can bring. While Jane was able to heal the danger posed by Bertha to Mr. Rochester, none of the characters of *Absalom, Absalom!* are able to heal Thomas Sutpen or secure the future of the family. When the Sutpen plantation burns, there is no rebirth through a new and pure generation.

In this sense, despite all of its narrative experiments and questioning of its own authority, *Absalom, Absalom!* furthers an ideology just as racist, if not more so, as that of *Jane Eyre,* indicating that alternative genealogies can not depend on alternative temporality alone; rather, a conscious – and, I argue, political – intention is required.

The Search for "Inheritable Wisdom": Official Knowledge and Alternative Epistemologies via the Transimaginary

In examining the alternative genealogies of the contemporary feminist novel of female community, I argue that these narratives constitute intentional political projects with their creation of alternative worldviews and epistemologies. In *Reading for the Plot,* Peter Brooks describes genealogical plots of the nineteenth-century novel as quests not only for genetic origins (or for racial purity, as in *Jane Eyre* and *Absalom, Absalom!*) but also for knowledge and "wisdom":

> The nineteenth-century novel in particular will play out repeatedly and at
> length the problem of transmission, staging over and over again the
> relations of fathers to sons (and also daughters to mothers, aunts,
> madwomen, and others), asking where an inheritable wisdom is to be
> found and how its transmission is to be acted towards. (27-28)

In the contemporary feminist novel of female community, particularly those texts that engage with Caribbean collective identity and representations of history, this "problem of transmission" continues to take precedence. These texts, however, posit alternative knowledge and ways of knowing, rather than tracing or perpetuating the transmission of

official wisdom. I argue that this alternative wisdom – inheritable, accessible, and transformable – is made possible through the transimaginary, which I will further develop here in engaging with a variety of critical thought on border crossing and transnationalism.

In addition to building on the work of Gloria Anzaldúa, explored in the beginning of this chapter, my conception of the transimaginary is also linked to more recent feminist thought on solidarity, community, and global transnational feminism. In particular, I see my own work and that of the four authors I study here as evocative of Chandra T. Mohanty's alternative vision for the future, as articulated in her recent work *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*, which emphasizes an intersectional collective framework for feminist resistance. She argues that the practice of feminist solidarity must take into account the continued intersecting forms of oppression faced by women today:

> The interwoven processes of sexism, racism, misogyny, and heterosexism
> are an integral part of our social fabric, wherever in the world we happen
> to be. We need to be aware that these ideologies, in conjunction with the
> regressive politics of ethnic nationalism and capitalist consumerism, are
> differently constitutive of all our lives in the twenty-first century.

Her vision of solidarity insists on the extent to which oppression is "interwoven" and performative, consisting of "processes" rather than stable practices or ideologies; we have seen that this recognition of the performative aspect of oppression and knowledge is equally essential to Barbara Field's understanding of the construction of race. Ironically,

these processes are here described as "regressive politics," suggesting a reverse timeline of progress measured by solidarity rather than nationalism or capitalism.

Furthermore, Mohanty's articulation of feminist border crossing requires us to be aware of the complexity and difficulty of border crossing: "Feminism without borders is not the same as 'border-less' feminism. It acknowledges the fault lines, conflicts, differences, fears, and containment that borders represent." This vision is careful with its deconstruction of official epistemology, in that it recognizes the continued instances in which traditional borders continue to impact people's lives. Keeping this in mind, I explore the genealogical projects in these novels as not only resistant and creative, but also still troubled by the epistemological and physical violence of the contemporary world, by which frameworks of normality such as patriarchy, whiteness, or heteronormativity continue to construct and deploy their power. Nevertheless, for Mohanty feminism is still "the most principled way to cross borders – to decolonize knowledge and practice anticapitalist critique" (111); this border crossing, then, emphasizes performative resistant practice as well as a transformation of knowledge.

In M. Jaqui Alexander's work *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory and the Sacred* (2005), she argues in part that feminist border crossing takes on an important role in the formation of alternative knowledge. Her project, which focuses on the Caribbean, connects alternative knowledge with collectivity:

> *Pedagogies* summons subordinated knowledges that are produced in the
> context of the practices of marginalization in order that we might
> destabilize existing practices of knowing and thus cross the fictive

boundaries of exclusion and marginalization [as part of a project of]

configuring new ways of being and knowing [and] mov[ing] away from

living alterity premised in difference to living intersubjectivity premised in

relationality and solidarity. (7-8)

Like Mohanty, Alexander's vision of feminist border crossing emphasizes "solidarity"

and the need to "destabilize existing practices of knowing." She goes further however in

suggesting the need for "configuring new ways of being and knowing," a process which

involves both "fictive boundaries" and "relationality," echoing Edouard Glissant's

Poetique de la relation.

Several theorists have engaged with these "fictive boundaries" in discussing the

potential of the novel for alternative history and historiography.[47] As Timothy Spaulding

argues in his book *Re-Forming the Past: History, the Fantastic, and the Postmodern*

Slave Narrative, "Many African American writers, particularly in the last decades of the

twentieth century, sought not only to recover these stories [of slavery], but also to

redefine the way we narrate the slave experience" (2). This redefinition of the way we

narrate can take several forms, including "characters that defy the conventions of time

and space" (7), and a focus on the imagination in the form of magical realism or the

fantastic:

By employing elements of the fantastic or metafiction in their texts, these

writers force us to question the ideologies embedded within the 'realistic'

representation of slavery in traditional history and historical fiction. In its

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47. See also Stuart Hall's article "Thinking the Diaspora: Home-Thoughts from Abroad" (1999),
in which he conceives of identity as a production and a process rather than as a return to an
imagined origin: "culture is not just a voyage of rediscovery, a return journey. It is not
'archeology.' Culture is a production" (16).

place, [these writers] reconstruct an overly oppositional, highly

fictionalized form of history – one that allows them to claim authority over

the narrative construction of past. (2)

In this description of resistance and creativity, writers of the slave experience "claim

authority" *through* the most fictional or imaginative elements of their work. In so doing,

these texts "force us to question" the "reality" of traditional historical accounts of slavery.

Spaulding goes on to argue that narrative authority is also created in these

alternative works through "a sense of communal identity" which results in "a more

complete view of the past from a present perspective – a view that the official history

effaces and postmodernism abstracts" (19). For Spaulding, alternative slave narratives

make use of certain narrative postmodern techniques in unconventional ways, to

deconstruct traditional kinds of knowledge while simultaneously claiming concrete, if

alternative, collective identities. These postmodern slave narratives therefore go beyond

what is offered by either "official history" or by the traditional deconstructive framework

of postmodernism.

Jenny Sharpe, who studies historical figures such as Nanny, a revolutionary

Maroon leader in eighteenth-century Jamaica, in her book *The Ghosts of Slavery: A

Literary Anthology of Black Women's Lives* (2003), describes the necessary role of the

imagination in narrating the story of Nanny. For Sharpe, the telling of this story is always

a political struggle: "[t]he story of Nanny is the story of contending forms of knowledge:

written versus oral histories, colonial versus national cultures, institutional versus popular

ways of knowing" (2). In 1991, Michelle Cliff herself made an impassioned argument for

the importance of this alternative knowledge – or "popular ways of knowing" – in her

essay "Caliban's Daughter: the Tempest and the Teapot": "The extent to which you can believe in the powers of Nanny, that they are literal examples of her Africanness and strength, represents the extent to which you have decolonized your mind" (47). This version of "decolonization" of knowledge, unlike Mohanty's or Sharpe's, goes so far as to say that alternative knowledge must *replace,* as "literal," official historical knowledge, rather than contend or negotiate with it.

In the selective close readings that follow, I challenge Michelle Cliff's need for a "literal" narrative to replace official history, examining instead the strength of her texts and the other novels of my project based on their use of the transimaginary – their privileging of the imagination in feminist visions of collective border crossing. The genealogical narratives I explore in this chapter offer neither individual quests for pure origin nor stories about differences between fathers and sons, but rather portray vibrant intergenerational, transnational, and translinguistic female communities. I argue that these stories of daughters, mothers, and granddaughters interpellate feminist readers and interpreters into their collaborative performances of alternative knowledge and epistemology, and I focus on these texts' destabilizing play with language and form; their alternative spaces and temporalities; and their privileging of the imagination over traditional hegemonic constructions of patriarchal, nationalist official reality.

Navigating the Collective Transimaginary: Alternative Genealogies in Brossard, Cliff, Condé, and Pineau

In Nicole Brossard's work, alternative genealogies occur in her emphasis on the relationship between mothers and daughters; wisdom is gained in navigating these relationships, rather than received from patriarchal representatives. Her efforts to undermine the traditional wisdom of patriarchal reality through the imagination can be seen primarily in her use of alternative temporality, and in her juxtaposition of various temporalities within her work. As we have seen in chapter III, Karen McPherson describes this alternative temporality in the work of Brossard (and in that of several other Quebecois women writers) as a transformative present which touches both the past and the future:

> I focus not so much on women writers' *revisions* of the past…but on the
> *return* (in and of the narrative) to the past in order – through a kind of
> literary *trompe-l'histoire* – to live it differently, or at least, through the
> creative workings of memory, to transfer it forward into a different present
> with the possibility of imagining and in that way generating a different
> future. (xvii)

This project of "*trompe-l'histoire*" takes place in opposition to the patriarchal temporality attempting to impose violent order on the women in Brossard's texts.

In *Le désert mauve,* for example, the protagonist Mélanie receives different forms of wisdom from her mother, Kathy Kerouac, and her mother's lover, Lorna. Kathy encourages Mélanie to enter patriarchal language: "La voix de Kathy Kerouac était à elle

seule une présence…Kathy Kerouac connaissait le pouvoir de sa voix " (41/95).[48] Lorna, meanwhile, is illiterate, and her knowledge must therefore exist outside officially recognized epistemology: "Lorna…m'avait initiée à l'érosion…elle m'avait décrit des paysages…Lorna inventait" (2/12). In Maude's version of this original story, the words have changed in seemingly minor yet significant ways: "Lorna…m'avait appris à donner un sens aux images…Elle passait de longs moments à me raconter des histoires…Lorna fabulait" (2/182). Maude, unlike Laure, the "original" author, is not comfortable with ambiguity, as Gloria Anzaldúa might say; Maude insists that Lorna is trying to "donner un sens aux images," as if the imaginative act of "invention" – changed here to "fabulation" which invokes less creative power – is not enough on its own.

Juxtaposed with the wisdom of both of these women is the patriarchal narrative of a man known only as "l'homme long," told with a more linear chronology. As Mélanie's story unfolds, it is interrupted with short, terse chapters narrating the man's obsessively violent thoughts as he waits in a motel room, in the motel owned by Mélanie's mother Kathy: "L'homme long connaît la valeur magique des formules. Il pense à l'explosion" (7/17). The man associates wisdom and "valeur magique" with scientific knowledge, and, more troublingly, with an explosion.

The man's timeline collides with Mélanie's at the end of the story, when he emerges from his room and shoots and kills Mélanie's friend, a woman named Angela Parkins, while she dances with Mélanie:

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48. Citing from the text, as in previous chapters, indicates its complexity and dual temporality; the novel has three parts: the "original" story of Mélanie, written by fictional author Laure Angstelle; the narrative of the fictional translator Maude Laures, who feels compelled to rewrite the original; and Maude Laure's "translated" version of the original, still in French. The two pages numbers indicate 1) the page number of that part of the novel, in this case the translator's narrative, "Un livre à traduire" and 2) the page number of the overall novel.

Tout est fluide et lent dans les bras d'Angela Parkins. Le temps me

manque pour comprendre. Il n'y a plus de temps. Le temps est entré en

nous avec minutie comme un scalpel, le temps nous oblige à la

réalité…Puis le corps d'Angela Parkins remue lentement. Tout mon corps

est devant le désastre. Plus un son…Au fond de la salle, il y a le regard

impossible de l'homme long. Le désert est grand…Angela se dissipe dans

le noir et le blanc de la réalité…La réalité, l'aube. La fureur dans l'aube et

les galaxies…Je ne peux tutoyer personne. (40-41/50-51)

As the two women dance, "tout est fluide et lent," time slows down in order to interrupt

for a moment the progression of the narrative of the "homme long," who represents an

unspoken patriarchal authority which relies on progressive narrative to punish

transgression, in this case the lesbian desire between Angela and Mélanie. Yet the

narrative can only be delayed, not prevented; while the women dance the man enters the

suspended moment like the "scalpel" of time which subjects Angela to "le noir et le blanc

de la réalité." The chronology of the man's story is smoothly aligned with his narrative,

or with the discourse which shapes his story, since previous appearances of the man have

been restricted to clearly defined chapters which progress linearly. Mélanie, reeling from

the devastating consequences of his story, is now unable to get close to anyone: "Je ne

peux tutoyer personne."

All hope is not lost, however, as we have seen in chapter III, in which I

considered both versions of the end of Mélanie's story in terms of their representation of

coming-of-age and maturity. Alice A. Parker explains this hope in terms of the fact that

meaning in *Le désert mauve* is not fixed:

Mélanie is inserted into a history that logically concludes with the death of

her first lover and of passion itself. Welcome to 'reality.' But writing,

which has the potential to renegotiate the place of women in discourse,

pries open meanings and emotions, as the narrator and the translator

discover…What 'happens' is only a fragment of the 'story.' (136)

While Mélanie's attempt to disrupt linearity may be ultimately unsuccessful, her story as

it told through Laure Angstelle's voice is not the only version, despite being "the

original." As we saw in chapter IV, the authority of the text is shared among fictional

writer, fictional translator, Mélanie, Brossard herself, and the reader invited to join in the

interpretation of the text.

Although Maude's attempt at rewriting through metaphorical translation cannot

avert the murder of Angela, she does manipulate the "original" enough to offer a greater

sense of hope at the end of her translated text:

Elle dit qu'en réalité il suffit de quelques mots concis pour changer le cours

de la mort…Le temps travaille minutieusement…Puis le corps d'Angela

Parkins bouge si peu…Plus d'écho, plus de musique…Le silence est

cru….Le ravage est grand. L'hom'oblong regarde devant lui, complètement

détaché de la scène… La réalité, l'aube. Néant. Tout mon corps va se

soumettre….Puis ce fut le profil menaçant de toute chose. Puis l'aube, le

désert, et mauve, l'horizon….Je ne peux tutoyer personne. (40/220)

In Maude's translation, a critical engagement with time is for the most part elided, since

her account removes the contrast between the fluid time of Angela and Mélanie's dance

and the precise, calculating time of patriarchal reality; Maude replaces this contrast with

the brief phrase "Le temps travaille minutieusement." Her failure to recognize linear time

as the instrument of the murder, along with her belief that "quelques mots concis" are

what can "changer le cours de la mort," ensures that she will fail to avert Angela's

murder. However, while she is unable to undo patriarchal violence, the fact that the

reader can see her efforts to do so undermines the power of linear time on the level of her

narration. Furthermore, the element of hope brought by Maude's translation, echoed in

her linking of the "aube" and the "horizon" – unlike Laure's linking of "aube" with

"fureur" and "réalité" – seems to lie in the idea of an temporal "infinity" which spirals

outward in the face of patriarchal closure.

 While Brossard's alternative epistemology is clearly rich in its imagined

temporality and temporal conflicts, its evocation of space – devoid of historical context –

is less transformative. On the one hand, this removal from history indicates the urgency

of the imagination for Brossard's project, and places additional emphasis on her focus on

language, or alternative ways to enter patriarchal language, reality, and thus

epistemology. On the other hand, when compared to Spaulding's articulation of what

slave narratives do and do not do with postmodernist narrative strategies, Brossard's text

might be seen as particularly (and problematically) postmodern in a way that Cliff's,

Conde's, and Pineau's are not. Brossard's separation of gender from specific national or

historical context, as well as from related frameworks of oppression such as social class

or race, limits the text's overall transformation of reality.

 In comparison, an important part of Michelle Cliff's project is the representation

of women as actors in history, developed in particular through her novels *Abeng* and *No

Telephone to Heaven,* which trace the story of Clare Savage's coming-of-age and search

for identity. In these works the problematic of transmission is enacted through Clare's

parents – her mother's silence and her father's limiting racial ideology – as well as

through competing representations of history; as we have seen in the previous two

chapters, Clare's journey and quest for historical understanding ends with her death in *No*

Telephone, after an attempt to sabotage a Hollywood film set and its reductive depiction

of the lives of Nanny and Cudjoe, historical Maroon fighters.

Clare, like Bertha, Charles, and Clytie before her, is mixed-race, the daughter of a

"colored" woman, Kitty, and a "white" man, Boy, whose sense of racial identity comes

from being the grandson of a British colonizer – a justice and a slave-owner. While Kitty

is distant from Clare, Boy is closer to her because she is lighter skinned than her mother

and little sister, and he sees his lineage continuing through her: "'you're white because

you're a Savage'" (73). Even Clare's name represents something different to each of her

parents:

> Kitty told Boy he could name their eldest daughter after the college his
>
> grandfather attended at Cambridge University – when in fact she was
>
> naming her first-born after Clary, the simple-minded dark girl who fought
>
> for her and refused to leave her side [when she was ill in the hospital]…But
>
> Kitty never told this to Clare – that her namesake was a living woman, a
>
> part of her mother's life, rather than a group of buildings erected sometime
>
> during the Middle Ages for the education of white gentlemen. (141)

This competition in naming resonates with Anne McClintock's argument that patriarchal

naming represents an attempt to take away the mother's power of creative generation, to

"publicly disavow the creative agency of others and arrogate to themselves the power of

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origins" (29). The power of Kitty's act of naming is limited here, however, because the alternative wisdom being offered in naming Clare after a "simple-minded dark girl… a living woman" who had a real effect on Kitty's life is never transmitted to Clare. Instead, Clare is left to believe that the power of her name lies in its evocation of official wisdom, represented by "a group of buildings… for the education of white gentleman."

The silences of Clare's mother and father and her teachers – the silences of the history of slavery and oppression in Jamaica – make themselves felt throughout the novel, and in particular during Clare's visit to the abandoned Savage plantation. Clare finds the house disappointing, because she cannot read its traces: "The house was not at all what she had expected. It was as though she wanted it be a time machine rather than a relic. A novel rather than an obituary. She wanted to know the people who had lived there" (37). Here Cliff is making the claim that the novel is a privileged and relatively uncompromised cultural document, unlike official narratives of history such as the one Clare learns in school, and unlike the house itself, which is soon to be converted into a tourist attraction, devoid of its tangible and authentic historical markers.

As if to prove her point, Cliff continues by inserting the story of the judge, Clare's great-grandfather, who burned all his slaves to death in a fire after emancipation:

> The justice worried what would happen to the island when it swarmed with
> free Africans, some only a few years out of the bush. Who would have
> conceived that the empire would see fit to unleash these people…he was
> concerned about the survival of his race. He was fearful of the mixing
> which was sure to follow freedom – in which the white seed would be
> diluted and the race impoverished. (38)

Like his grandson Boy, the judge is obsessed with the Family of Man and the purity –

here the "survival" – of his race, and their obsessions are both heightened and made

ironic by their sexual relationships with women of mixed race, like Thomas Sutpen and

Mr. Rochester before them. Neither Boy nor Clare now knows of the fire set by the

judge, another gap left by official history, but the reader is allowed to see the way it

insidiously touches Clare: "the judge's action…became the pattern of foundation stones

and thin dirt gullies Clare saw that afternoon behind the house, rectangles remembering

an event she would never know of …" (40). The reader is interpellated here into the

construction of the imagined past, since Clare is once again separated from this

knowledge; at this point it is *only* the reader who can engage with this transimaginary

crossing between past, present, and future, which creates an urgent sense of reader

responsibility.

Among those to perish in the fire is Mma Alli, a mentor to the slaves and "their

strict teacher and true sister" (40) who uses her magic and knowledge of herbs to help

Inez – the Indian slave raped by the judge – abort her child and escape. These women's

stories, along with that of Nanny the Maroon leader, are interspersed with Clare's own

story, offering an alternative genealogy that has yet to be recognized by Clare and that

has passed her mother by: "Kitty should have been the daughter of Inez and Mma Alli,

and Nanny too – and had she known of the existence of these women, she might have

shared her knowledge, her extraordinary passion, using its strength, rather than protecting

what she felt was its fragility" (128). Kitty is criticized here not only for a failure of

knowledge and understanding, but also for a failure of transmission: "she might have

shared her knowledge."

Instead, Clare is left to search for this collective genealogy of women on her own. In *No Telephone to Heaven*, Clare's story continues as she searches for her identity in the United States and England before returning to Jamaica. A turning point for Clare is her re-imagining of herself in relation to the women of *Jane Eyre*:

> The fiction had tricked her. Drawn her in so that she became Jane. Yes. The parallels were there. Was she not heroic Jane? Betrayed. Left to wander. Solitary. Motherless….Comforted for a time, [Clare] came to. Then, with a sharpness, she reprimanded herself. No, she told herself. No, she could not be Jane…Bertha was closer to the mark. Captive. Ragôut. Mixture. Confused. Jamaican. Caliban. Carib. Cannibal. Cimarron. All Bertha. All Clare. (116)

While Jane conceived of herself as being different from both Blanche Ingram and Bertha Mason, stigmatizing their deceptive sexuality, Clare comes to understand that she cannot be like Jane but must instead be like Bertha, a "captive" and hybrid figure. Unlike Jane, however, she does not reject this link of captivity between herself and Bertha. Like Anzaldúa's *mestiza,* she suffers in part from the "confusion" and "captivity" of her hybrid identity, but she also learns to see Bertha's transformative potential in linking her to historical agents such as Nanny.

Eventually, after her mother's death, Clare is called back to Jamaica by her growing dissatisfaction with European culture, and by her best friend Harry/Harriet, who helps her understand the performative nature of gender as well as national identity. When she returns, Clare takes up the challenge of alternative cultural transmission in the form of education, becoming a teacher of history, and in the process discovering a powerful

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alternative history: "I have listened to the stories about Nanny and taken them to heart…I have walked the cane…poked through the ruins…I have swum underwater off the cays…some history is only underwater" (193). Clare then goes a step further in her reconstruction of the past, joining a group of guerilla fighters and offering them her grandmother's land, trying to connect to both her mother and grandmother: "If anything, I owe my allegiance to the place my grandmother made… My grandmother believed in using the land to feed people. My mother as well" (189).

The novel ends, as we have seen, with Clare and her fellow revolutionaries fighting not only for alternative spaces but also for alternative knowledge and representation of history, as they target a film set in which the story of Nanny is being co-opted and trivialized. This approach is problematized, however, by violence – in the end of this battle over language and appropriation, as gunfire begins, Clare herself loses language, powerfully represented by an unexpected gap on the page itself: "She remembered language. Then   it was gone" (208). Clare, like the other members of her chosen community, have been killed and silenced, and it seems that the "official" representation of Nanny, a condescending distortion driven by a capitalist film industry, will be the one to succeed.

Joanne Chassot points out, however, in her article "Black Women Re-visioning American History: The Ghost as Alternative Epistemology in the Works of Toni Morrison, Gloria Naylor, and Michelle Cliff," that even invoking the figure of Nanny has powerful epistemological implications: "For Cliff, Nanny's haunting presence is thus both the symbol of a suppressed history and the key to its recovery" (187). This "haunting presence," as a "symbol," requires the imagination. In her own reading of the

ending of the novel, Chassot emphasizes Clare's embodiment of Nanny's story:

> Clare and Nanny's spirits are finally united… ghosts appear when documents fail; they bring in other facts and perspectives, those that did not make it into the official record. But the function of these ghosts is not limited to re-inscribing the suppressed perspectives of the slaves into the master narrative: they also point to the ways those perspectives were suppressed in the first place. (188)

Clare, like Nanny, continues to be part of that contestation of "documents" or "official record," beyond her death. In so doing, she brings critical attention to historiography – "the way those perspectives were suppressed" – opening the door to a new historiography and epistemology.

In Maryse Condé's work, the project of historiography and alternative feminist epistemology is equally central and achieved through the transimaginary. I would argue, however, that in *Moi, Tituba sorcière* her work goes even further in demonstrating the transformative potential of alternative genealogy, in its construction of a hopeful vision for the future. *Moi, Tituba sorcière,* in addition to being a compelling variation on coming-of-age, as seen in chapter III, is the only novel of those explored in this project that is an explicit example of historical fiction. In the novel, the project of reclaiming and transforming history is developed through the imaginative retelling of the story of the historical figure of Tituba. In addition to playing with facts from Tituba's historical record – in particular, her participation in the seventeenth-century Salem witch trials – Condé gives Tituba a stake and an active role in the contemporaneous slave revolts of Barbados.

Yet Tituba's reimagining is also achieved outside of this biographical narrative. In the epigraph to the novel, Condé makes it clear that for her, Tituba still lives: "Tituba et moi, avons vécu en étroite intimité pendant un an. C'est au cours de nos interminables conversations qu'elle m'a dit ces choses qu'elle n'avait confiées à personne." Not only is Tituba alive, but she is also in intimate conversation with Condé, and the novel's truth claims – never before heard confessions – are thus paradoxically invoked through encounters that are clearly imagined. In offering us a novel with equal generic claim on magical realism and historical fiction, Condé does more than merely reinscribe Tituba as a historical agent; she also presents an alternative epistemology which contests the authority and knowledge of the colonizers and European perspectives in the present.

This alternative epistemology is developed through Tituba's family community, who teach her their magical wisdom from beyond the grave. Tituba's mother, Abena, for example, dies soon after she is born, hanged for refusing to have sex with her white master. Abena nevertheless teaches Tituba about magical transformation: "[e]lle m'apprit à me changer en oiseau sur la branche…Elle m'apprit surtout les sacrifices" (23). This type of wisdom, which requires great sacrifice, stands in contrast to the epistemology of the white community of Salem, which includes only a limited understanding of life and death.

For example, as we saw in chapter III, Tituba feels empathy towards her white mistress Élizabeth, and laments the fact that she will die without understanding what for Tituba is the real nature of death: "Mourir, ma pauvre douce Élizabeth ?...Mourir, mon agneau tourmenté, sans avoir appris que la mort n'est qu'une porte que les initiés savent tenir grande ouverte ?" (75). Elizabeth, compared here to an "agneau tourmenté," is not

an initiate and has no access to this open door of the afterlife, an afterlife which Élizabeth's people believe consists only of the torments of Hell or the joys of Heaven for a select few, both of which realms are entirely divorced from real interaction with the living world.

In contrast, when Tituba herself faces imminent death, she is not afraid. Although she will be hanged for her transgressions against the colonizers, like her mother before her, and much like Clare Savage and Nanny, she knows that her death will reunite her with her mother, her grandmother, and her father: "Bientôt j'atteindrai au royaume où la lumière de la vérité brille sans partage…Man Yaya, Abena ma mère et Yao m'attendaient pour me prendre par la main" (263). The "lumière de la vérité" that awaits her is not so much transcendent as it is tangential, linked as it is with those who will physically take her "par la main."

Even more importantly, her death, unlike Clare's, does not mark the end of her ability to physically interact with and give aid to future generations on earth. In the epilogue, Tituba continues to help others with her magic, just as she did in life, and just as her mother and grandmother did for her: "Cette enfant mienne a appris à reconnaître ma présence dans le frémissement de la robe d'un animal…le jaillissement irisé de la rivière et le souffle du vent qui décoiffe les grands arbres des mornes" (273). In this passage, Tituba helps a young girl, who she thinks of as her own child, to recognize Tituba's presence in the form of an animal, and in the movement and the sounds of the river, the wind, and the trees. Here Tituba is granted agency by the transimaginary, allowing her to actively share wisdom with future female generations.

Condé's later work *Victoire, les saveurs et les mots,* explored in the introduction as well as in the previous chapter in terms of its collective narrative voice and shared authority, also works through the transimaginary: "Tel qu'il est, je livre le portrait que je suis parvenue à tracer, dont je ne garantis certainement pas l'impartialité, ni même l'exactitude" (17). As in Cliff's work, there is a rejection here of history based on a principle of truth and the premise of objectivity. The narrator of the text, in her quest to learn her grandmother's history, cannot guarantee either "impartialité" or "exactitude." Instead, the *process* of her discovery of the past, indicated by her act of tracing, is what will authenticate the novel.

This process of historical recovery relies on the transimaginary out of necessity, yet it becomes more than a necessary instrument in the novel: "Loin de se contenter d'exécuter avec brio des plats créoles, elle [Victoire] inventa…Ce que je veux, c'est revendiquer l'héritage de cette femme qui apparemment n'en laissa pas. Établir le lien qui unit sa créativité à la mienne. Passer des saveurs, des couleurs, des odeurs des chairs ou des légumes à celles des mots" (85). Because Victoire was illiterate, and because her daughter Jeanne is focused on assimilation rather than sharing her mother's wisdom with her daughter (the narrator), it appears that Victoire has left no legacy. Invention then becomes necessary in order to "établir le lien" between the narrator and Victoire. Invention is also, however, the *nature* of the link between the two – the narrator seeks an inheritance not merely of knowledge but also of the power to create and to imagine.

The urgency of the need for alternative epistemology is made clear through the part of Victoire's legacy that is injustice. In addition to be denied an education, Victoire is condemned for her affair with Dider Argilius, an official revolutionary figure, which

leads to the birth of the narrator's mother Jeanne. While Victoire herself has left no words

behind, no trace in official histories, this man is celebrated as a postcolonial hero, despite

his abandonment of Victoire. Condé questions this system of cultural transmission, which

would ignore the nonofficial parts of his history, the parts with real consequences for

women's lives:

> Dernier Argilius est passé à la postérité…comme un ardent défenseur des
>
> nègres opprimés, illettrés…des thèses, des monographies, des mémoires
>
> ont été rédigés à propos de ce modèle, ce martyr. Ma question donc :
>
> Qu'est-ce qu'un homme exemplaire ? Ne comptent que les écrits, les
>
> discours et les gesticulations en public ? Quels poids la vie personnelle, le
>
> comportement intime ? Dernier Argilius a profité dont on ne sait combien
>
> de femmes, gâché la vie d'au moins une d'entre elles, planté je ne sais
>
> combien de bâtards poussés sans père. Cela n'importe pas ? (50)

At stake here is not simply the idea that Dernier Argilius is remembered and Victoire is

not, but also the process of that remembering. Dernier is ironically being recognized for

helping the illiterate in official documents: "des thèses, des monographies, des mémoires

ont été rédigés." His behavior towards Victoire and others – his "comportement intime"

and his lack of paternal responsibility – falls away in comparison to his role in the

genealogical narrative of the developing postcolonial nation.

Yet it is not the injustice and the pain of Victoire's life that are emphasized at the

end of the novel, but rather her alternative wisdom and the narrator's embrace of this

wisdom: "Il me plaît, quant à moi, que ma grand-mère demeure secrète, énigmatique,

architecte inconvenante d'une libération dont sa descendance a su, quant à elle,

pleinement jouir" (255). Condé suggests here that there is pleasure to be found in turning to the imagination to trace a journey of "libération." Discovering and reconstituting origin – creating it anew through the transimaginary – is here portrayed not as a necessary response to erasures of official history, but as a vibrant intergenerational process or performance, one that is an end – even a joy – in and of itself.

Gisèle Pineau, in her semiautobiographical work *L'exil selon Julia,* and her continuation of this story in *Mes quatre femmes,* is also concerned with transmission of knowledge and wisdom, and with women's participation in history. According to Dominique Licops, in her article "Origi/nation and Narration: Identity as Épanouissement in Gisèle Pineau's *Exil selon Julia*," this novel can be taken as a "genealogical *récit,* a narrative which is a process of self-creation rather than self-representation" (80). This process of self-creation, for Licops, is explicitly performative: "Gisèle [the semiautobiographical narrator], who has 'remembered' Guadeloupe according to the narratives and visions of her grandmother rather than to the unfruitful nostalgia of her mother, in fact reinvents an original home…she thereby performs her genealogy" (83). The narrator "reinvents" her origins here through selective use of the transimaginary, rather than simply receiving them in a chronological line from grandmother to mother to daughter.

The epigraph to the novel locates its own narrative authority not in faithfulness to reality but in the power of emotions, self-propagating memories, and hope in a transformed future: "Hasards de la mémoire, inventions? / Tout est vrai et faux, émotions./ Ici, l'essentiel voisine les souvenirs adventices./ Il n'y a ni héro ni figurants./ Ni bons ni méchants./ Seulement l'espérance en de meilleurs demains." This epigraph,

considered in chapter III in light of its challenge to verisimilitude, also stands in contrast to official representations of history, which, like traditional autobiography, are premised on a presentation of the "truth." In this novel as well as in *Mes quatre femmes*, in which "tout est vrai et faux," Pineau's narrator must work through the transimaginary rather than official historical record in her quest to understand her legacy through her female ancestors and their role in history.

The narrator of *L'exil selon Julia,* a young Gisèle, must face assimilationist ambivalence from her mother towards her grandmother's cultural and historical knowledge, just as Clare had to contend with her mother's silence and her father's adherence to official narratives and wisdom in *Abeng.* While Clare had to turn to other freindships and communities for knowledge – Harry/Harriet and the revolutionary group – Gisèle has her grandmother Julia, who contributes to Gisèle's alternative education.

After starting school in Paris, Gisèle finds herself caught between two competing systems of knowledge, and two ways of telling stories. As she learns to read, the narrator immerses herself on the one hand in classics of French literature, expanding her imagination: "Les livres et tous les personnages qui les habitent me parlent, me laisse entrer dans leurs conversations" (62). While these characters speak to her and seem to allow her entry into their world, she sometimes experiences anxiety while reading: "Parfois, je lis dans l'inquiétude… Je vole les mots. Je dépouille les livres. Combien d'yeux avant moi ont pillé ces mêmes pages ? Je dérobe les histoires. Je soutire les confidences" (63). Her anxiety, highlighted by her seeking to "uncover," "steal," "plunder" and "extract" these stories, suggests the difficulty of full integration into French culture; this cultural transmission can happen only through violent seizure.

Furthermore, something is lacking for the narrator in terms of both imaginative possibilities and historical knowledge, and it is Julia who provides those possibilities. Julia, or Man Ya as she is affectionately referred to by her grandchildren, fills an important gap left by their official education and by their mother, for whom "le passé est mort et enterré" (115), in telling the narrator and her siblings about the history of Guadeloupe and the legacy of slavery: "Seule, Man Ya ose nous instruire. Elle excelle en ce domaine. Quand elle dit le Mot, des rivages sans soleil s'ouvrent devant nos yeux. Frissons. L'esclavage!..." (111) While Man Ya is illiterate, this capitalizing of "le Mot" suggests that she nevertheless has command of language as well as historical transmission. Rather than having to "steal" or "plunder" these stories in the isolated space of the attic, and then jealously wonder "how many eyes" have seen them, the narrator receives these stories together with her siblings, as the reality of slavery "s'ouvrent devant nos yeux."

Later, as the narrator reads *Contes et légendes des Antilles,* she finds her grandmother's imaginative wisdom confirmed: "Moi, je n'y trouve ni contes ni légendes, seulement des histoires véridiques qui authentifient les paroles de Man Ya sur la maudition du Nègre et la vie des esprits…j'ai beau lire et relire, piller les pages, les Antilles n'en finissent jamais d'emplir les sacs vides de ma quête" (117). Through stories which merge historical memory with imaginative storytelling, the narrator comes to a better understanding of her grandmother's alienation from French culture, questioning in particular the principle of progress through time, which neglects and even "tramples" important dimensions of history: "Alors, je comprends mieux la mélancolie de Man

Ya, sa peur de mourir ici là, sur une terre muette … où le temps marche en conquérant, sans jamais regarder derrière lui, piétinant toutes choses" (118).

In *Mes quatre femmes,* Pineau continues her semiautobiographical quest for origins in continuing to engage with the story of her mother and grandmother, adding in this novel the stories of Angélique, her great-grandmother, and Gisèle, her aunt. This later novel, however, is both a repetition and a transformation of *L'exil selon Julia* because of its more powerful use of the transimaginary in representing genealogy, indicated by her epigraph, which again takes the form of poetry: "La mémoire est une geôle./ Là, les temps sont abolis./ Là, les morts et les vivants sont ensemble./ Là, les existences se réinventent à l'infini." In this novel, Pineau imagines four of her female ancestors interacting with one another in a prison of memory. In this imagined space, "les temps sont abolis" and "les morts et les vivants sont ensemble;" while Clare could only reunite with Nanny in becoming dead herself, in Pineau's work it is the dead who come alive.

The historical stakes however are similar; Pineau opens her novel in comparing the four women of her novel to rocks, which have been silenced and forgotten, like Nanny: "Elles sont quatre. Elles sont pareilles aux quatre roches jetées sur un morceau de terre qui ne vous appartient pas et sur lesquelles, autrefois, on déposait sa case de bois et tôle, là-bas, aux Antilles…quatre roches silencieuses que personne ne souciait de récurer mais qui étaient de la famille cependant" (9). In the previous chapter, I examined this passage in terms of its portrayal of voice; in this chapter we can see the further historical and cultural implications. Here the four women are symbolizing a forgotten region – the Caribbean, which has been abandoned through exile to France – as well as forgotten

individual histories. Also, the use of "vous" and "on," rather than the first person "je,"

draws the reader from the outset into the text's genealogical quest for history and

community. This quest is marked by painful memories, with descriptives such as

"plaies," "mares d'eau saumâtre qui noient leurs yeux," "blessures anciennes," and

"cicatrices," yet also by an intergenerational healing through language and storytelling:

"Elles se consolent l'une l'autre… Toujours, les paroles les font voyager loin de la geôle

obscure" (10-11). It is their relationship to one another, their mutual empathy, and the act

of telling each other their stories that allow them to travel from the jail of "obscurity."

The beginning of the book also emphasizes the fact that this staging of imagined

genealogical encounter is meant to create alternative wisdom: "Ces quatre

femmes…impatientes de transmettre un savoir, d'offrir un lot de connaissances où il

faudra puiser, trier le futile du nécessaire, désemmêler les fils empoussiérés" (12). The

four women are "impatientes" for a chance to transmit and offer a plurality of

knowledges, "un lot de connaissances." This transmission will require work on the part of

the recipient, who must "désemmêler les fils empoussiérés" of history, modeling for the

reader an engagement with the past through the transimaginary.

While it was Julia who made the history of slavery come alive in *L'exil selon*

Julia, in *Mes quatre femmes* it is Angélique, the narrator's great-grandmother, who has

come alive in the jail cell in order to contribute her wisdom. In the beginning of her

narrative, which is the last in the novel, she emphasizes the extent to which the pain of

slavery dominated her life, repeating the phrase, "toute ma vie, j'ai dû me battre" (143).

Each of the four women has one object that she has taken into the jail, and instead of a

hat, a tree, or a book, Angélique's object is the official document certifying her freedom

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from slavery, a page from the 1831 issue of the *Gazette officielle de la Guadeloupe.* She reminds the others, and the reader, that the reality of this official document is fragile: "parfois, me réveillant, je me pinçais à trois fois pour vérifier que j'étais bien dans la réalité du monde, dans la réalité des choses…Et dans ma tête, y avait une petite voix qui répétait que j'étais pas à ma place, que j'allais tout perdre, que mes enfants payeraient si j'obstinais" (177). Her fear is that in forgetting her "place," her children would suffer. The irony is that the current generation is in danger of forgetting her experience, and will suffer if they refuse to confront that historical trauma and its legacy in the present.

At the end of the novel, the narrator returns to emphasize this historical project. She tells us that while "il ne faut pas croire toutes les histoires," at the same time, forgotten stories, especially ones that are not beholden to official reality, have the power to challenge our belief in ideologies of the present:

> Ici et là, il se trouve des histoires inspirées par de mauvais esprits qui corrompent votre plume, attisant votre ego…Ceux d'antan, ceux d'aujourd'hui, qu'on peut entendre clairement si l'on prête l'oreille… [Ces histoires] sont traversées des siècles de mots, des ères de silence, des nuits d'infamie. Elles ne craignent pas la nudité des écrits couchés sur le papier. Elles tracent leur chemin à l'encre de la vie, réelle ou rêvée. (185)

The use of "vous" compels the participation of the reader once more, suggesting that these histories that refuse to be forgotten exist for a broader audience than merely the narrator. In this articulation, these stories are capable of surviving centuries of discourse, silence and infamy – "siècles de mots, des ères de silence" – as well as the threat of the official written word: "des écrits couchés sur le papier." Instead, Pineau argues that for a

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full reality of lived experience, we must turn to the imagination: "l'encre de la vie, réelle ou rêvée." The reader is invited here to see in female community not only collective agency and shared authority, but also alternative understandings of past, present, and future. The act of tracing the past, for Brossard, Cliff, and Condé as well as Pineau, is a transformative act, with far-ranging implications for resisting patriarchal reality and offering creative alternative ways of knowing and transmitting wisdom.

In conclusion, then, the female communities and alternative genealogies of these four women writers are by no means utopian, and acknowledge for example problematics such as intergenerational gaps; pressures of assimilation and integration; difficulties of language; and violence. Yet the complexity of these imagined communities – and in particular their privileging of the imagination over reality and its official discourses – powerfully transforms the feminist novel, recreating the novel as a viable alternative space, a dynamic platform from which to resist the traditional patriarchal and colonial spaces of the realist novel and to invoke alternative feminist visions and epistemologies.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION: THE FUTURE OF FEMALE COMMUNITY

I conclude this project with a few remarks on the future of the feminist novel of female community. In looking to the future of this genre, I am also looking to further contextualize my work – the concept of female community in contemporary women's writing – in relating it to present and future debates and skepticism surrounding the concept of community itself. To this end, I bring together here three disparate contemporary engagements with female community – a recent admissions policy decision by Mount Holyoke College, Judith Butler's *Undoing Gender* (2004), and Gisèle Pineau's novel *Morne Câpresse* (2008). In so doing, the common thread I wish to follow is an emphasis on both the difficulty and the continued necessity of creating female community.

We have seen throughout the project that my argument for the importance of female community is linked to the collective agency such communities have the potential provide. I have argued that the feminist novel of female community is a particularly dynamic platform for the exploration of such agency, which can be seen in the work of the four primary writers addressed in this project: Nicole Brossard, Michelle Cliff, Maryse Condé, and Gisèle Pineau. It is my contention that their novels create collective agency within and beyond the text itself, through narrative patterns of repetition and renewal and through textual interpellation of feminist readers and interpreters.

This argument about greater agency depends in large part on an understanding of the feminist novel of female community as *performance*, rather than merely

representation, of female community. This understanding is drawn from Judith Butler's articulation of agency in her work *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990). For Butler, gender is enacted through a stylized repetition of performance, and agency comes from varying that repetition: "The task is not whether to repeat, but how to repeat or, indeed, to repeat and, through a radical proliferation of gender, to *displace* the very gendered norms that enable the repetition itself" (202-203). At stake with my own argument is how such gendered agency can become collective, and become even more transformative through that collectivity.

I read the nine texts at the center of my analysis as performative through the way the texts themselves displace gendered and individualist norms. To see these texts as performance of collective, gendered identity – as variations on and reconfigurations of gendered identity – is to see them as transformative. It is to recognize these texts as resistant to partriarchal culture and creative in their creation of feminist community as alternatives. In arguing that these alternative communities become especially powerful in the way they narratively engage their readers, I have relied on a methodology of feminist theories of narrative. I have tried to demonstrate that this approach offers critical understanding of what these texts achieve in performing collective agency that is not otherwise apparent. The seeming incompatibility between feminism and narrative theory, as described in Susan Lanser's work, continues to influence feminist literary theory today, and the aims of this project have been to demonstrate, on the contrary, the continued viability and potential of the field of feminist narratology, with open categories and definitions.

Although I connect the collective agency I see at work in these novels to narrative performativity in drawing on Butler's theories, Butler herself has defined feminist community as being intrinsically exclusionary, rather than transformative: "The feminist 'we' is always and only a phantasmatic construction, one that has its purposes, but which denies the internal complexity and indeterminacy of the term and constitutes itself only through the exclusion of some part of the constituency that it simultaneously seeks to represent" (194). The female communities in the novels of Brosard, Cliff, Condé, and Pineau, which I posit as examples of the genre of feminist novel of female community, are indeed "phantasmatic," in the sense that they are created through the literary imagination. I accord agency to that deliberate privileging of the imagination, however, which has influenced my definition of the genre as a combination of anti-reality narrative techniques and thematic commitment to community (as outlined in my introduction and developed in the following chapters). In my view, the constructed nature of such communities does not limit them, nor does it lead to exclusion.

Butler is not the only theorist, however, to hold the "we" in a critical regard. In the French language, the word "communauté" itself is suspect, suggesting homogeneity and exclusionary practice rather than solidarity. As we have seen, the concept of community is fraught across the Caribbean, in both Francophone and Anglophone contexts, as debates continue about the value of national, transnational, regional, and postcolonial identity in relation to cultural hybridity, while community in Quebec has been linked with regional, linguistic, and separatist identity (from Anglophone Canada).

In the United States, facile definitions of multiculturalism are coming unraveled in the face of divisions in society this concept has no language to address (continuing

racism, gender discrimination, and economic inequality at the forefront). The future of female community, at least in its limited definition as a group of female individuals who share a common identity as women, is becoming less certain as well. Mount Holyoke College, my own alma matter and one of the few remaining women's colleges in the country, has just announced that it will begin to admit "any qualified student who is female or identifies as a woman" ("Admission of Transgender Students"). The college's further explanation is even broader, meaning that in practice, both male and female transgender students can start to attend the college, as well as gender queer students and those who reject gender labeling all together.

This change in policy, what Judith Butler might refer to as a salutary example of "a proliferation of gender," was encouraged by contemporary feminist thought, which seeks to define itself against exclusionary ideals and practices. While some members of the Mount Holyoke community (including alumna, current students, and current faculty) see the change as destabilizing female community, perhaps even obliterating it as an institutional imperative, I see this new policy as both enabling and demanding a new definition of female – and feminist – community, much the same way that the feminist novel of female community both enables and demands the articulation of a new genre. I believe that Mount Holyoke is embracing a more open kind of feminist community, one that performs collective solidarity in a way that has more potential to transform society than institutions which continue to define "female" and "woman" in binary and restrictive ways – definitions which do not account for gender as a social construction and performance.

In her more recent work *Undoing Gender*, Judith Butler concedes that this destabilization of traditional categories of gender can be difficult, even frightening: "What I call my 'own' gender appears perhaps at times as something that I author or, indeed, own. But the terms that make up one's own gender are…beyond oneself in a sociality that has no single author (and that radically contests the notion of authorship itself" (1). This unauthorized or collectively authorized sociality does not necessarily diminish individual agency, but it does complicate it: "If I have any agency, it is opened up by the fact that I am constituted by a social world I never chose… As a result, the 'I' that I am finds itself at once constituted by norms and dependent on them but also endeavors to live in ways that maintain a critical and transformative relation to them. This is not easy" (3). This acknowledgement that resistance and transformation is "not easy" marks a change from Butler's earlier work, as does the connection here between the "I" and the "social world"; it seems that if individual agency is still is a matter of variation on repetition of performance, the individual attempting to act transformatively must always negotiate with social norms.

This more complex, yet to me, more worthwhile, understanding of community shapes Gisèle Pineau's novel *Morne Câpresse,* published in 2008. The novel follows a central protagonist, Line, as she infiltrates a quasi-religious and isolated female community in Guadeloupe, run by the self-titled "Sainte Mère" Pâcome, Pâcome's sister Lucia, and her adopted daughter Neel. Line is in search of her own sister, Mylène, establishing a doubling of sisters in the text, but her quest is unsuccessful. At Morne Caprêsse, instead of finding Mylène, Line witnesses the collapse of the community.

Underneath the illusion of a harmonious, self-sustained female collective, whose mission is to save "toutes les filles perdues," before saving the rest of Guadeloupe and then the world, lies a history of murder. Pacôme, revealed to the reader (although not to Line) as mentally ill and tormented by voices only she can hear, has gradually retreated into isolation within the community, letting go of her commitment to her disciples while maintaining a hierarchy of power. She awaits the birth of a male child, an event that will announce that it is time to descend from Morne Câpresse: "Le jour où un garçon naîtrait dans la Congrégation, cela signifierait que le monde en bas était prêt à recevoir le message du Seigneur" (213).

Lucia, who does not wish to reintegrate into a world in which she has little power, takes matters into her own hands, killing all of the male children born to members of the community: "Dès 1991, elle avait pris sa décision. Aucun enfant de sexe masculin ne sortirait vivant de l'infirmerie de la Congrégation. Officieusement, il y en eut vingt-trois en dix-huit ans. Étouffés. Noyés. Étranglés. Tous diagnostiqués mort-nés par Lucia et jetés dans un trou derrière l'infirmerie. Et pendant toutes ses années, Pacôme n'y avait que du feu" (214). During the course of Line's visit, Lucia is struck by a fit of conscience and commits suicide, and soon after that Pacôme sets fire to the commune in obedience to the voices she hears. The community falls apart.

This portrayal of female community as illusory at best, horrifyingly violent at worst, seems to contradict not only Gisèle Pineau's earlier works, but also my own efforts to define the feminist novel of female community as a positive representation – even more powerfully, as a textual performance – of social change. It is my contention, however, that this novel of failed utopia is less a failure of female community than it is a

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failure of certain kinds of community – those that exclude, homogenize (in this case to the extent of murdering those who do not conform), and those whose members follow political or religious rhetoric without question. In other words, I believe the novel presents feminist readers, particularly those coming to the text with a preconceived notion about women writers, feminism, or Caribbean or postcolonial identity, with a kind of warning, about the dangers of accepting any of these categories as fixed and unproblematic. Instead, the text forces us to confront the problems of constructing overly simplistic alternatives to current social reality, such as replacing one gendered hierarchy with another.

Moreover, the community of the novel is not merely a failure. To many of the women who made it possible with their participation, Morne Câpresse was a haven from the very real violence they faced in the patriarchal world around them. Even for Line, the outsider who approaches it with skepticism from the beginning, the community proves beneficial to a certain extent. She recognizes Neel as her long-estranged cousin and the two leave Morne Câpresse with the intention of living together (although Line does not recognize that Neel's motivation is escaping discovery by the police as an accomplice to murder, as Neel was aware of Lucia's actions).

Line also comes away with renewed hope of finding her sister, and with the strength she needs to let go of a destructive relationship: "Elle allait retrouver Mylène. Elle redescendrait dans le monde d'en bas et elle dirait adieu à Térence. Elle commencerait une nouvelle vie. Ces trois jours de folie l'avaient en quelque sorte revigorée" (289). Line is also inspired to reconnect with history: "Assurément, elle aurait besoin de connaître son histoire, l'histoire de ceux qui l'avaient précédée, l'histoire de

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son peuple" (313). This is especially significant in the novel because her intial separation from her sister was caused by a difference in ideology, with Mylène seeking more knowledge about the past and Line trying to achieve socioeconomic assimilation.

A possible reading of the novel, then, is that female community does indeed have a future, not in isolation but as a force *within* society, indicated by Line's renewed sense of purpose as she descends into the greater social world. In this reading, the text does not propose that feminist society is necessarily linked to a violent hatred of men, or that feminism can always be reduced to empty rhetoric, but rather, insists that gendered reality cannot be transformed in exclusionary isolation. Like Mélanie in *Le désert mauve*, and like the narrator of *Into the Interior*, two other novels in which a surface reading might suggest failure of female community, the women of *Morne Câpresse* find that society must be confronted "with all its attendant difficulties," as Catherine Campbell suggests in her essay on *Le désert mauve,* "Our Last Chance for Silence."

In our ever-changing social reality, we cannot choose silence, but nor can we choose to follow inflexible identities and articulations of community, gendered or otherwise. Instead, as feminists we must "spiral outwards" (to borrow Nicole Brossard's language from her theoretical essay *La lettre aérienne*) into ever greater and changing configurations of female identity and community. I do not wish to suggest that Pineau's novels be a blueprint for addressing feminist concerns the world over, or even that her work can shed insight on changing attitudes toward feminism and female community in the United States, a claim that would entail appropriation and a worryingly universalist concept of feminism.

Nevertheless, speaking as a feminist working from within the American academy, it is up to us as feminist scholars (particularly those of in comparative literature and those who work on concepts of transnationalism) to bring into conversation diverse texts and textual performances of female community, and to create more possibilities for academic and literary collaboration. It is my hope that this dissertation not only brings into conversation some of the novels of Brossard, Cliff, Condé, and Pineau, and demonstrates the continued need for feminist narratology as a critical methodology, but also that it opens up conversations among feminist readers of this work about the nature and radical potential of feminist performances of female community.

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