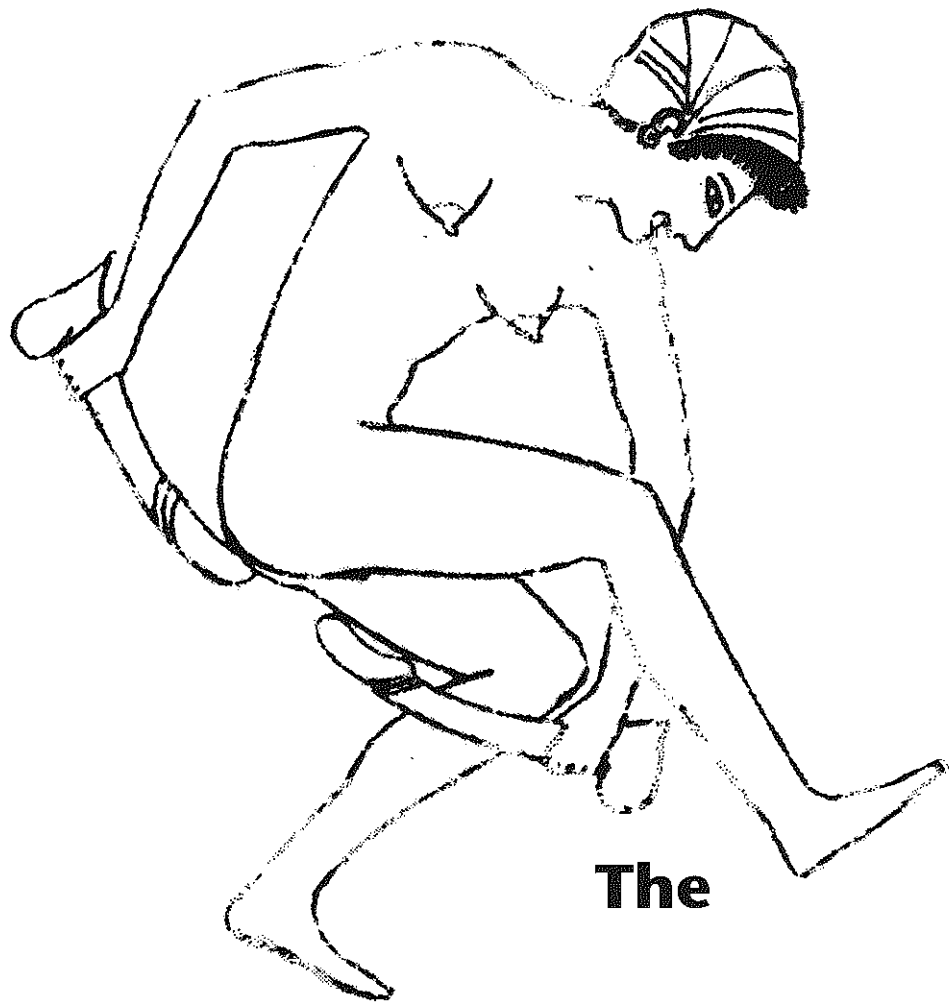


Subverting the Symbolic Order: The Ethics of Literary Discourse



Robert Majzels

Traditional male-dominated literary discourse either denies having any moral framework for its aesthetic judgements or claims some universal ethical ground. Feminism and marxism have exposed the self-serving hypocrisy of such assumptions. Because it takes place in a material world of gendered human beings, historically divided into classes and races, literary discourse is necessarily the site of a struggle for power — the power to control/create meaning. The writer's practice takes place on the ideological terrain, a terrain dominated by phallogocentric, bourgeois and ethnocentric discourse. From this critical perspective, no literary discourse can avoid taking some moral stance; the most common practice, because it is the way of least resistance, is to reproduce, in some form or other, the dominant ideology. The question arises: is it possible to engage in literary or any discourse without reproducing the dominant ideology? Can a text adopt a different ethics, resisting phallogocentric assumptions without using an entirely new language? And if such a language must be created, how will it make itself understood? Is there such a thing as a subversive text?

Even as I am writing (as you read), Adelina is working in the cane field on Hacienda Paz. She is stacking the sugar cane on the back of a *carabao*, a Philippines ox. Adelina has been up since four o'clock in the morning. First she helped her mother make breakfast; they have exhausted their rice rations, so they boiled some banana flower. Her father always eats first, because he needs his strength in the fields. Then come her younger brothers and sisters: they are too young to go without food. If there is something left, Adelina and her mother can eat; if not, they will wait until supper. During the harvesting, the women work in the field to increase their family's production. But they are not paid for their labour; it is calculated as her father's share.¹

Feminism has produced a literature based on-feminist ethics, that is, a genuinely inclusive human ethics. Ethics as we know it is really male ethics, limited to a male perspective of justice which excludes women's experience. Feminist ethics rectifies this distortion, and this allows Debra Shogan to conclude that "ethics" is, in fact, a sub-category of feminist ethics, rather than the contrary.²

MALE STRATEGIES. Somebody should compile an exhaustive list of male strategies for resisting feminist struggle: a study in the "military history" of the patriarchy's shifting lines of defense.

1. Based on notes taken by the author during a visit to the Philippines in 1984.

2. See Debra Shogan, "Categories of Feminist Ethics," *Canadian Journal of Feminist Ethics* 1 (Fall 1986), pp. 4-16.

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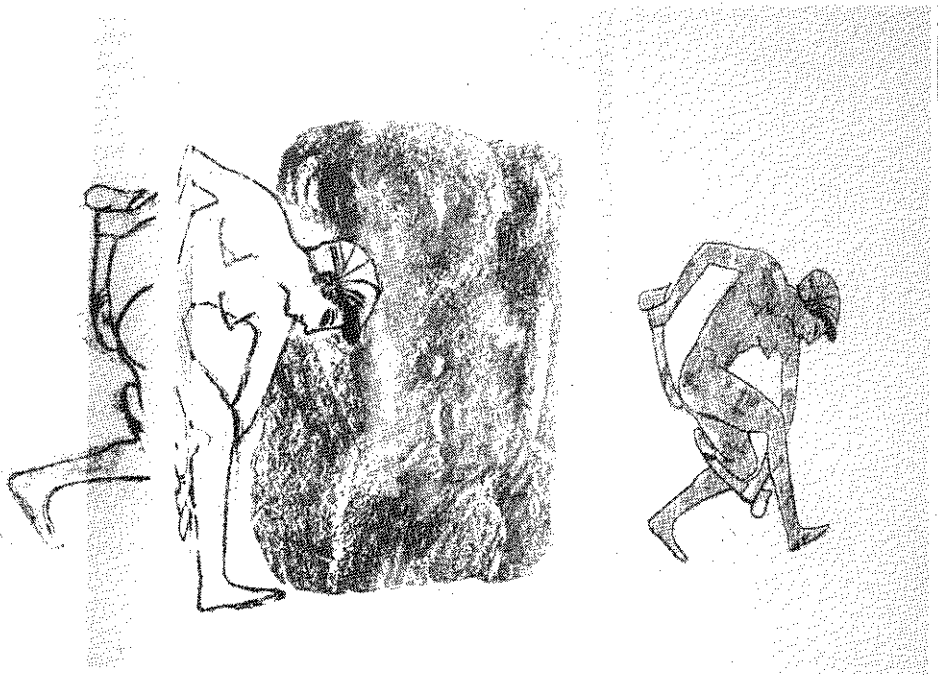
Beverly Harrison has identified five basic principles of feminist ethics: taking women's experience as the starting point; taking women's well-being as a fundamental concern; recognizing the moral agency of women; celebrating embodiment, as opposed to the Christian tradition of shunning sexuality; treating mutuality and caring as fundamental norms. There is a sense in which literary discourse based on such ethics is necessarily subversive: it demands change. This view of ethics contrasts sharply with the mainstream view of ethics as abstract, moral judgments. "Rather, starting with a notion of human personhood grounded in the material conditions of existence, and a notion of ethics as caring and responsibility in relationship might lead to a different type of quest for ethical foundations, locating it in the concrete circumstances of human life."³ The struggle for justice begins with the concrete experience of those who have historically been denied power.

The first time I got big Pa took me out of school.... He never look up from cleaning his gun. Pretty soon a bunch of white mens come walking across the yard. They have guns too.

Pa git up and follow 'em. The rest of the week I vomit and dress wild game.⁴

Everything except the wings around my face is red: the colour of blood, which defines us. The skirt is ankle-length, full, gathered to a flat yoke that extends over the breasts, the sleeves are full. The white wings too are prescribed issue; they are to keep us from seeing, but also from being seen.⁵

There is no more work on the Hacienda. The landlord says the price of sugar is so low it is not worth growing the cane. The cutters have asked him if he will let them grow vegetables and rice, but he says this is sugar cane land. Adelina's father cannot find work. He has gone into Bacolod City to try his luck. He has been gone for several weeks now. They have heard nothing. Adelina will have to go. She will have to try and get to Manila. Or Bataan. In Bataan, there is a free trade zone, they call it the Export Processing Zone. The American textile and electronic factories in the Zone hire women. They say the women are patient, and good with their hands. And they don't make trouble. Adelina will go to Bataan. If she finds work there she will send money home.



Because patriarchy denies women's moral and sexual agency – in male discourse, 'woman' means man's object, his Other – any literature which exposes this denial might be assumed to be subversive.

My self is a thing I must now compose, as one composes a speech. What I must present is a made thing, not something born.

(*Handmaid's*, 62)

Pa call me. Celie, he say. Like it wasn't nothing. Mr. ___ want another look at you. I go stand in the door. The sun shine in my eyes. He's still up on his horse. He look me up and down.

(*Color*, 11)

Feminist ethics demands the recognition of women's sexual agency. A text which affirms female desire subverts phallogocentric ideology, speaking the unspeakable, shattering the taboo.



3. Martha Saunders-Oppenheim, "Reason and Foundations of Ethics," p. 8.

4. Alice Walker, *The Color Purple* (New York: Pocket Books, 1985), p. 11. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text.

5. Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (Toronto: Seal Books, 1985), p. 8. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text.

It was the first kiss of her life to which her nature had really responded. It was a flaming torch that kindled desire.⁶

Without ever a pat of the hair, a rush to change clothes or a quick application of paint, with no gesture whatsoever, she rippled with sex...⁷

It mine I say. Where the button? Right up near the top, she say. The part that stick out a little. I look at her and touch it with my finger.
(*Color*, 82)

Feminist ethics also posit mutuality and caring as fundamental norms.

Shug say, Us each other's people now, and kiss me.
(*Color*, 189)

We was girls together, she said, as though explaining something.
(*Sula*, 194)

Does this mean we might establish an ethical grid by which to judge all literary discourse? Cheri Register's "prescriptive criticism": "To earn feminist approval, literature must perform one or more of the following functions..."⁸ In spite of its univocal and essentialist character, this call for feminist realist fiction was grounded in women's experience. Julia Kristeva has situated the imperative, authoritative discourse of radical feminism in the historic evolution of feminism as a second stage. This does not imply that it is outdated; the imperative, positive voice remains a critical facet of the struggle. "If patriarchy oppresses women *as* women, defining us all as "feminine" regardless of individual differences, the feminist struggle must try to undo the patriarchal strategy that makes 'femininity' intrinsic to biological femaleness, and at the same time insist on defending women precisely *as* women."⁹ Affirmation, reappropriation of the "feminine" raises women's consciousness, unsettles patriarchal assumptions. That, surely, is subversive in itself. It certainly provokes the wrath-disguised-as-scorn of the literary establishment. "If it is any good, feminist criticism, all feminist writing, and from my view all criticism, is guaranteed to offend the mighty."¹⁰



6. Kate Chopin, *The Awakening* (Toronto: Penguin, 1984), p.139. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text.

7. Toni Morrison, *Sula* (New York: Plume, 1973), p.42. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text.

8. Cheri Register, "American Feminist Literary Criticism," quoted in Elizabeth Meese, *Crossing the Double-Cross* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1986), p. 140.

9. Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* (New York: Methuen & Co., 1985), p. 82.

10. Meese, p. 17.



11. Colette Guillaumin, "The Question of Difference," *Feminist Issues* (Spring 1982), p. 39.

12. Michel Wallace, "What's Wrong with this Picture?" *Ms. Magazine*, December 1985.

13. Terry Eagleton, *The Rape of Clarissa* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1982), p. 42.

SOFTENING THEM UP. The outright rejection of any feminist criticism is, of course, not a realistic alternative; not in the long run: some adjustments, some accommodations, are inevitable. However, this in no way implies that an initial outright rejection cannot serve as a first line of defense. Such a strategy slows down the encroachment of women into areas traditionally reserved to men; it gives men time to readjust and fabricate a more flexible, more subtle, second line of defense. It also discourages the faint-hearted, those women not willing to face the tough battles ahead. And it induces those who stick it out to adopt less radical methods, thereby softening the ensuing blows.

But the univocal affirmation of "femininity" is not as subversive as it initially appears. It can be diverted into a call for acceptance, a strategy of integration. The claim to difference, if it is not also a rejection of the very concept of a centre, is reduced to a demand for recognition. It stops short of questioning the fundamental systemic sources of oppression. It can be co-opted into reformism. Much effort is engaged into reassuring that the margin is not a threat: we only want a piece of the pie.

She laugh. Let's us put a few advertisements in the paper, she say. And let's us raise your prices a hefty notch. And let's us just go ahead and give you this diningroom for your factory and git you some more women in here to cut and sew, while you sit back and design. You making your living, Celie, she say. Girl, you on your way.
(*Color*, 220-1)

If it is true that "what the dominant group fears above all is the concrete autonomy of the dominated, and even just its possible eventuality,"¹¹ how threatening is a utopia of black feminist capitalism? By autonomy don't we mean a complete break with the system? (Will Celie's business expand — "git you some more women in here to cut and sew?" Will she set up subsidiaries in Taiwan, South Korea? Why not use her missionary sister's contacts in Africa and set up a textile plant there?) "For the American public, surrounded by so many alarming fluctuations in the reign of the patriarchy, *The Color Purple* must have been reassuring to read. Given the chance, it implies, women won't lead so much as nurture."¹²

Prescriptive writing also perpetuates the myth of a single source of meaning. It reproduces the patriarchal idea of writing as "transparent communication of morally useful meaning,"¹³ and the author as transcendental signifier. By insisting on essentialist gender definitions, such discourse can do no more than tinker with the symbolic order. It remains entrapped in the logic of binary oppositions.



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ROLL OVER. Include one workshop on "The Women's Question," include one section in the manifesto; let them chair the workshop or write the section — that way we keep them busy, happy, and we don't have to worry about it.

Most women are moody and whimsical. This is some passing whim of your wife, due to some cause or causes which you and I needn't try to fathom. But it will pass happily over, especially if you let her alone.

(*Awakening*, 119)

Just insert the footnote: "Except where clearly intended otherwise, the use of the masculine in this document is meant to include the feminine."

In fact, instead of the traditional relegation of women to the margin, from which they have increasingly been encroaching on the text, we might attempt a new strategy:

LET THEM HAVE THE FOOTNOTE.¹⁴



14. Forcing women into the footnote is consistent with phallogocentric logic; it forces them to take a position within the system. When feminist writers like Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, or Rachel Blau DuPlessis reject forms of the uncentred text, they are not doing so for purely aesthetic reasons. They are, in a sense, breaking through the barriers which separate aesthetics and ethics.

"For Cixous, feminine texts are texts that... strive in the direction of difference, struggle to undermine the dominant phallogocentric logic, split open the closure of binary opposition and revel in the pleasures of open-ended textuality" (Moi, 108).

The deconstruction of gender roles, the denial of essentialist definitions, is, increasingly, a basic element of feminist ethics. A consistent ethical position would necessarily seek to subvert essentialist discourse, denying absolute authority to any one voice, denying the claim to the "natural" superiority of any single race, sexual orientation or fixed gender definitions. In adopting this position, feminist theorists have integrated aspects of recent semiotic criticism. Deconstruction denies the possibility of any transparent, uncentred signification. Discourse is always already de-centred. Any text's interpretation is determined by a complex of conflicting factors, including the social context, the author's personal experience and intentions, the reader's experience, and the ideology already encoded in the language.

According to this view, a writer who acknowledges this absence of absolute meaning, who recognizes the textuality of discourse, can choose to participate in the deconstruction of the patriarchal myth of the centre. But, to do so, she must first abandon the desire to occupy a uncentred position: "The search for a unified individual self, or gender identity or indeed 'textual identity' in the literary work must be seen as drastically reductive" (Moi, 10). A literary discourse, therefore, which presents a model of mutual caring, women as moral agents, celebrates embodiment and the well-being of women, and bases itself on women's concrete experience may correspond to a positive ethical position, but if it simply substitutes one absolute for another, it fails to subvert the symbolic order in a profound way. In not adopting a subversive refusal of authority, a text weakens its attack on phallogocentrism and remains entrapped in the logic of binary opposition. Finally, the text is flawed on an ethical level because it is not consistently revolutionary. Any literary discourse which fails or partially fails to subvert the existing order also fails or partially fails in the ethical realm.

This strategy seems to offer important advantages. Clearly, a phallogocentric position cannot be dislodged by a discourse which is equally univocal. Any attempt to "rally behind a uncentered feminist discourse against which we pit the more powerful voices of the critical establishment struggling to repress it" (Meese, 140) is bound to fail.

Of course, Elizabeth Meese's reasoning is not based solely on her evaluation of the unequal *rappport de force*; it is also an ethical concern. Univocal discourse is itself reductive and authoritarian, excluding, marginalizing different experiences among the non- or partially non-hegemonic groups. When white, petit-bourgeois or bourgeois, heterosexual women, for example, claim to speak for all women, working class and/or lesbian and/or women of colour are treated as Other.

Because each had discovered years before that they were neither white nor male, and that all freedom and triumph was forbidden to them, they had set about creating something else to be.

(*Sula*, 52)

That's the problem, she say. Have you ever seen a white person and a colored sitting side by side in a car, when one of 'em wasn't showing the other one how to drive or clean it?

I got out the car, opened the back door and clammed in. She sat down in front. Off us traveled down the road, Miz Millie hair blowing all out the window.

(*Color*, 109)

She didn't step aside to let me in, she just stood there in the doorway, blocking the entrance. She wanted me to feel that I could not come into the house unless she said so.

(*Handmaid's*, 13)

It is in their search for strategies to subvert the patriarchal order that a number of feminist writers have taken up the not necessarily feminist preoccupation with experiments in form. A number of traditional concepts have been rejected: the "universal," the "masterpiece," the "canon." Feminists and postmodernists travel together some way along the road of technical explorations. They resist linear narrative, violate the established rules of grammar and punctuation, reject the traditional insistence on character, plot and theme. Prose and poetic forms are fused, theory and fiction entwined, literary genres are shuffled together. Meanings are multiple, all closure is denied; intertextuality supplants the myth of originality. The visual dimensions of the text are exploited. Repetition, word play, musical patterns all serve to make the language itself the subject of the text. "Employing the epistolary form of classical texts, the author challenges phallogocentrism with black language, style, and consciousness, Walker wrests language from white domination" (Meese, 126).

These postmodern techniques are attractive to feminist writing in so far as they stress heterogeneity, provisionality, and subvert uncentred discourse. "If it's really the forms, the language, which dominate us, then disrupting them as radically as possible can give us hope and possibilities" (Rachel Blau DuPlessis, "For the Etruscans," in *The New Feminist Criticism*, 287). This has sometimes led to accusations of incomprehensibility and inaccessibility.

All clear statements are trapped in the same economy of values, in which clarity (oculocentrism) and univocity (the One) reign. Precision must be avoided, if the economy of the One is to be unsettled.... [The object is to] defer the moment of assimilation back into a familiar mode.

(Jane Gallop, quoted in Meese, 144)

We're going to create something they can't steal because they can't play it.

(Thelonius Monk to Mary Lou Williams, in Rob Backus, *Fire Music*, 37)

** The demand to reduce discourse to the comprehensible can be a trap. If ideology is encoded in language, then any message which is immediately understandable is already familiar. Common sense is a mask for the dominant ideology. The demand for more clarity can often be nothing more than a resistance to change.

Accompanied by a plague of robins, Sula came back to Medallion.... So they laid broom-

sticks across their doors and sprinkled salt on porch steps.

(Sula, 89-113)

The revolutionary writer is still using language to subvert the symbolic order of language; she is still a prisoner of language. "Language, the first and last way out of the literary myth, finally restores what it had hoped to avoid, that there is no writing which can be lastingly revolutionary" (Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, 63). Total rejection of the symbolic order would appear to be impossible, short of madness. The revolutionary is already part of the order which she or he seeks to subvert, even though she or he may be in the margin. This contradictory inside/outside position is at the root of the duality of revolutionary strategy: on the one hand, the demand for recognition and reform; on the other, rejection of the system and refusal to integrate.

No text can escape contextuality, historicity: no text is subversive in an absolute sense. It remains a site of struggle between the contending forces of interpretation. The struggle never ceases; there is no transcendental Subversive, no word which, if pronounced, would bring the entire patriarchal edifice crumbling down.

The multi-national textile and electronic companies are hiring only young rural women who are not married and who can be proven to be virgins; the companies do not want to pay maternity benefits. Adelina will go through the virginity test. And of course, how can you prove a woman is no longer a virgin unless you abuse her. The policy is "lay down or lay off." The union does not want to deal with this reality. In the collective bargaining process, they are concentrating on issues like minimum wages and some basic job security. They say the women's specific problems are not the kind of issues which will mobilize all the workers. They say these problems will be taken up later.

Ideology is not a monolithic structure. The realization that there is no absolutely subversive text does not imply there is no possibility of creating meaning or subverting the symbolic order. "Though it is true to say that the dominant power group at any given time will dominate the intertextual production of meaning, this is not to suggest that the opposition has been reduced to total silence. The power struggle intersects in the sign" (Moi, 158). Literature is not condemned to reflect the socio-economic relations which dominate society. Ideas and discourse may be the products of a material world but they have a dialectical relationship with that world — a counter-action takes place.

There is therefore in every present mode of writing a double postulation: there is the impetus of a break and the impetus of a coming to power, there is the very shape of every revolutionary situation, the fundamental ambiguity of which is that Revolution must of necessity borrow from what it wants to destroy, the very image of what it wants to possess.
(Barthes, 92)

The other, more optimistic side of this is that the old society contains within itself the germ of not only its own destruction, but also that of the

new world which will supplant it. If the new were forever trapped in the language of the old, there could be no change; we would be back to an essentialist determinism (something towards which Structuralism tipped dangerously back).

Adelina has to queue up every day at five o'clock in the morning to find out if she is on the list to work today. If she is not on the list, she will come back tomorrow. She has not been paid for three months because the plant manager has cash problems; the Central Bank has set controls on dollar supplies on account of the foreign debt. Adelina is not sure what this means, but she knows she must keep working if she wants to stay on the list. She will have to find a source of money until she starts to get paid at the plant.

SHARING POWER. "Their qualifications being judged equal, the committee will favour women candidates over men." I'm all for women's rights, but feminism goes too far. You'll never get anywhere by antagonizing people. What they do in the privacy of their own home is their business, but do they have to flaunt it in public? Your strategy is divisive of the family — the Union — the working-class — the Party. We should not hesitate to recognize that there are elements of feminist criticism which we can and should incorporate into literary criticism.

However,
the question is:
how much space
can we afford to
give up
to
this
Other
discourse?

By attempting to take over the entire text, aren't you claiming to represent, not just women, or yourself, but everyone? If so, you had better have a very thorough and all-inclusive theory to back up your claims.

NURTURE ME. All right, we're listening. Just tell us what you want us to do. It is, after all, your responsibility to re-educate us.

We can't do it alone.
In the long run,
sexism hurts men as much as women.
You said so yourself;
you said
men had as much to gain from feminism as women do,
in the long run.

(Come to think of it,
we might even argue that men have been even more victimized by this sexism than women.)

You said we weren't listening.
Well, now we're listening.
So tell us what to do. Help us. Nurture us.
What do you mean you don't have the time?
You said women were half the sky; well, that means we're still the other half. Isn't that what
You said?

If there is no absolutely subversive text, those forces relegated to the margin must locate a position from which to attack the centre. But the straight ahead charge up out of the footnote cannot succeed for long. Aren't we still attempting to "rally behind a uncentred feminist discourse against which we pit the more powerful voices of the critical establishment struggling to repress it?" Now I am imagining a kind of guerilla warfare of language.

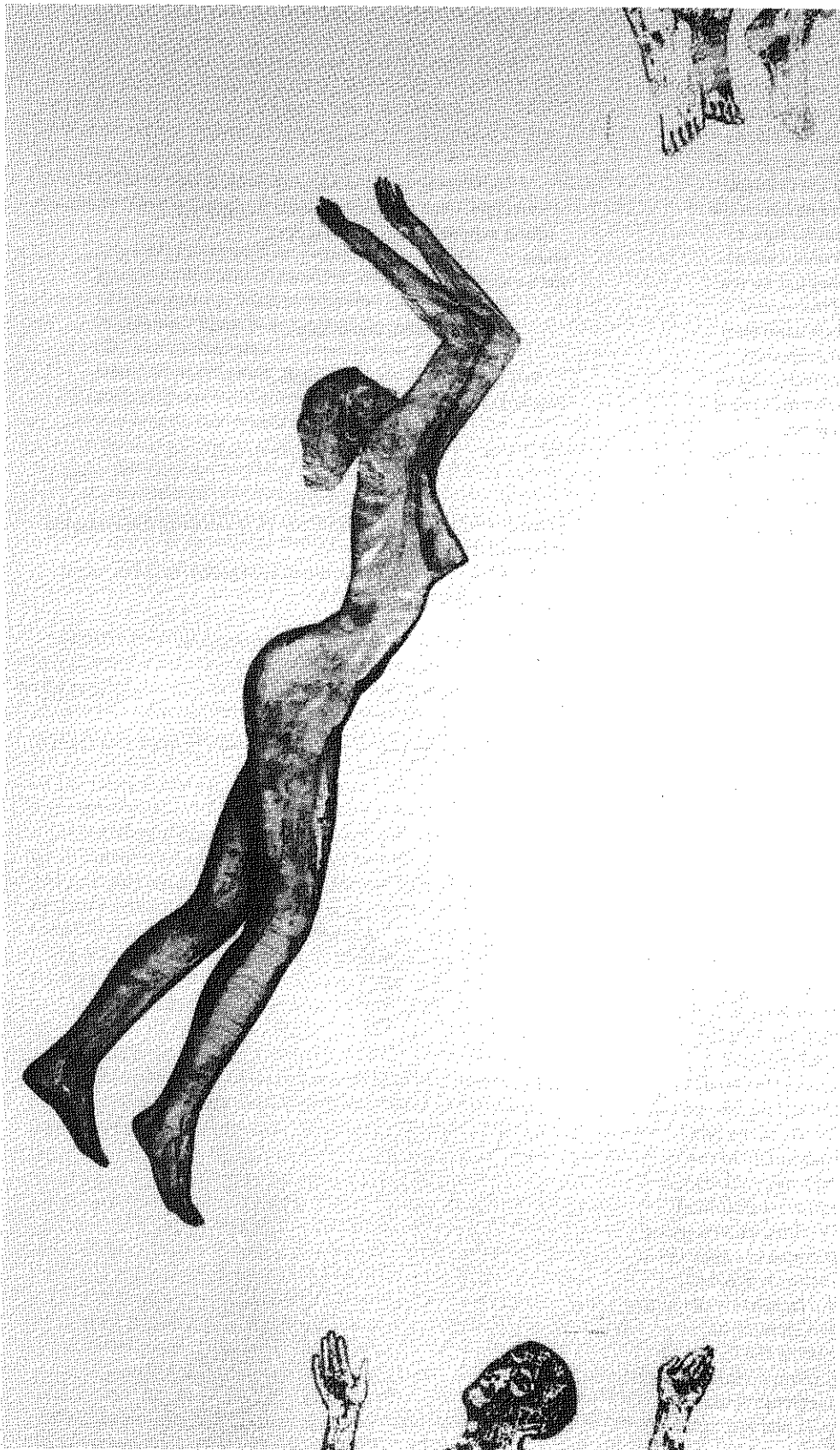
attacking in forays out of the margin¹⁵

mobility

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maintain. constant

mobility ,



15. When they storm the footnotes, we are already long gone.

avoid:
frontal
assaults

"And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of man."

(Genesis 2: 23)

strike quickly in the gaps vanish from sight

"the female is as it were a deformed male; and the menstrual discharge is semen though in an impure condition: i.e., it lacks one constituent, and one only, the principle of the soul."

(Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, 737a, 26-30)

surround

the margins

the

from

centre

Moira was out there somewhere. She was at large, or dead. What would she do? The thought of what she would do expanded till it filled the room. At any moment there might be a shattering explosion, the glass of the windows would fall inwards, the doors would swing open.... Moira had power now, she'd been set loose, she'd set herself loose. She was now a loose woman.

(*Handmaid's*, 125)

This strategy avoids the contradictions of coming to power. It refuses to liberate even a small red zone, thereby hoping to escape the dangers of new authority, new hierarchy. Writing is a series of breaks, ruptures and gaps in the symbolic order.

The guerrilla refuses to come down from the mountains. The new Absolute is disruption; no alternative community, no unity is possible. Where does this lead in ethical terms? Where does it lead in strategic terms?

The manager of the plant might have taken her in as his mistress, but he chose someone else. She can go to Olongapo and sell herself to the American sailors stationed at Subic Base. If she gets a job in a bar, as a hospitality girl, she can make up to US \$5 a customer. She will have to negotiate with the bar owner about her share. He will provide her with a cot with the other women behind the bar. First she will need papers from the City Council Health Center. That means she must pay for the STD tests, twice a month. The US Navy takes her picture. If she gets sick, they will post her picture on the base, to warn off the sailors. If she gets AIDS from a sailor, they won't pay for her treatments; they pay for the tests, not for the treatments. Most of the women don't think they will get sick: they take antibiotics before sex to ward off infections and pregnancy. After sex, they wash out their vaginas with Colgate, or Sprite, or carbonic acid. This destroys the vaginal linings so that they can no longer lubricate naturally. Some women get cancer of the uterus, but the US Navy does not worry about that — cancer is not contagious. If she makes some money, she could send it back home to her mother in Negros, for the young ones. But she will have to lie about what she is doing, she will have to find a way to keep it from them.

"The stress on negativity and disruption rather than on questions of organization and solidarity leads Kristeva to an anarchist and subjectivist political position" (Moi, 170). Kristeva pursues anti-authoritarianism to the exclusion of mutuality and caring.

The strength of an ideological order lies in its flexibility, its ability to reintegrate discordant voices. In the struggle against authority, is there not another danger? Plunging into the fast flow of the shifting signifier, thrashing loose from all possible co-option, resisting integration, breaking away from all groupings, all structures, to float free, we suddenly discover ourselves back in the calm waters of petit-bourgeois individualism. There is a market for this kind of writing, sooner or later. Kristeva no longer wishes to be pinned down as a feminist: "I am not interested in groups. I am interested in individuals" (in Moi, 169). So we are back to Hobbes and Mill: liberalism. The patriarchal, capitalist system can handle such individualists; at worst they can be declared geniuses.

We need an ethics of subversive discourse. "Exploration not in the service of reconciling self to world, but creating a new world for a new self" (DuPlessis, 288). What the dominant power fears most is not simply the autonomy of the individual, but, more than that, the autonomy of the dominated regrouped in a collective movement. A revolutionary aesthetics would need to assert a feminist ethics while refusing uncentered discourse; it would reject authoritarian hierarchies while promoting collective action. "The artwork produced with this poetics distinguishes itself by the fact that it claims a social function and puts moral change and emotional vulnerability at the center of the experience of the reader...mutuality, porousness, intimacy, recontacting a both/and, using both sides of the brain, nonhierarchic, anti- or multi-climactic, wholistic, lacking distance...perhaps didactic" (DuPlessis, 280).

IS THIS TEXT JUST ANOTHER MALE STRATEGY?

Appropriating feminism: White jazz.

The Tootsie tactic: allow me, ladies, to speak in your name. After all, we men can do it so much better. The Walter Raleigh ruse: let me spread my cape over this muddy hole of theory, so you can sail across un/touched.

But I hope this is not merely one more male strategy.

I hope this is a self-critical text.

This is what I, a man, have learned so far.

I hope this is a text in support of feminist struggle. Not presuming more; but not just moral support: a fighting support.

I hope this is a listening text.

How

do I listen without appropriation?

hear many voices: poly/vocalism inter/textuality: gaps.

Str a i n to hear the voices fade in and

out of

my range

extending my range widening the page undoing undermining centre/margin...

How? A collage, a composition, arrangement of voices, sometimes in harmony sometimes

CONTRA / DICTION

out of step

if feminist ethics are indeed human ethics, my task as a man: to study, support, struggle, to keep my "EARS HUGE"¹⁶



16. Barbara Godard, Daphne Marlatt, Kathy Mezei and Gail Scott, editorial collective of *Tessera*. *Canadian Fiction Magazine* 57 (1987).



If litera perhaps it This text is not been c integrate t substitute

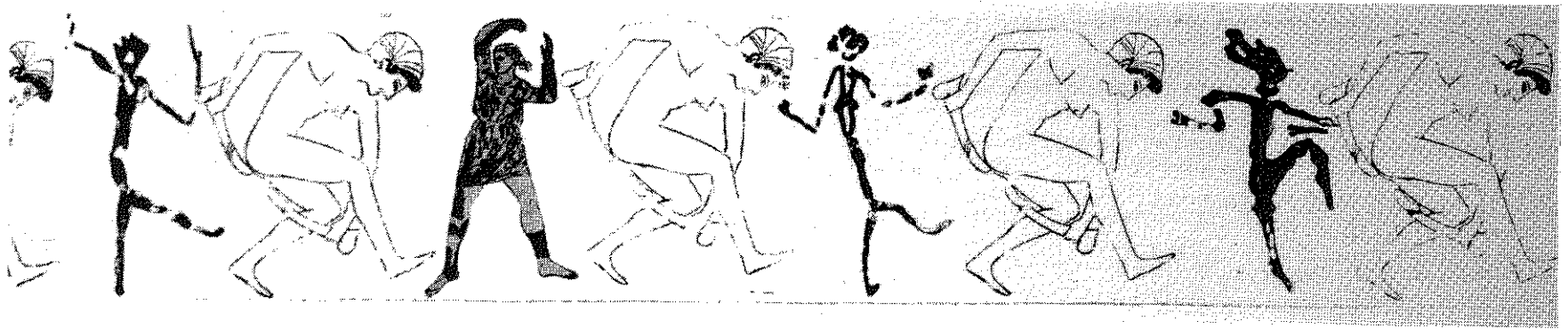
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Feminis and practic and aesthe art and life agers; whe uncles; aft all the whi have raped to their gra when Lind makes it w the cats an to mount t "It is be possible." "And n

Robert Majze Philippines. F Filipino poet

17. Roland B *Essays*, trans Northwester



If literary discourse is going to require us to act collectively, perhaps it must begin by abandoning the concept of "author." This text is only a specific locus in a process. The words have not been composed, so much as collected. This text will disintegrate thirty seconds after.... This text cannot/must not substitute for action.

When she joined the New People's Army, Adelina joined a collectivity. Even in the mountains she is living as part of a larger community. Everything is not perfect. "Some of us women who joined the NPA thought that once we were carrying M-16s we would be emancipated. Sure, you're less likely to get raped if you're walking around with a machine-gun, but, even so, our struggle isn't over."

If it's a story I'm telling, then I have control over the ending. Then there will be an ending, to the story, and real life will come after it.... You don't tell a story only to yourself. There's always someone else."

(*Handmaid's*, 37)

Feminism is making breakthroughs in revolutionary theory and practice which require redefinitions of terms like ethics and aesthetics, and a re-examination of the borders between art and life. "After all the old women have lain with the teenagers; when all the young girls have slept with their drunken uncles; after all the black men fuck all the white ones; when all the white women kiss all the black ones; when the guards have raped all the jailbirds and after all the whores make love to their grannies; after all the faggots got their mother's trim; when Lindbergh sleeps with Bessie Smith and Norma Shearer makes it with Stepin Fetchit; after all the dogs have fucked all the cats and every weathervane on every barn flies off the roof to mount the hogs..." (*Sula*, 145-6).

"It is because the world is not finished that literature is possible."¹⁷

"And not enough..."¹⁸

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17. Roland Barthes, "Kafka's Answer," *Critical Essays*, trans. Richard Howard (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University, 1972), p. 137.

18. Kathleen Martindale, marginal commentary.



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