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Reading the Mother Tongue: Psychoanalytic Feminist Criticism

Jane Gallop

In the early seventies, American feminist literary criticism had little patience for psychoanalytic interpretation, dismissing it along with other forms of what Mary Ellmann called “phallic criticism.”¹ Not that psychoanalytic literary criticism was a specific target of feminist critics, but Freud and his science were viewed by feminism in general as prime perpetrators of patriarchy. If we take Kate Millett’s *Sexual Politics*² as the first book of modern feminist criticism, let us remark that she devotes ample space and energy to attacking Freud, not of course as the forerunner of any school of literary criticism, but as a master discourse of our, which is to say masculinist, culture. But, although Freud may generally have been a target for feminism, feminist literary critics of the early seventies expended more of their energy in the attack on New Criticism. The era was, after all, hardly a heyday for American psychoanalytic criticism; formalist modes of reading enjoyed a hegemony in the literary academy in contrast with which psychoanalytic interpretation was a rather weak arm of patriarchy.

Since then, there have been two changes in this picture. In the last decade, psychoanalytic criticism has grown in prestige and influence, and a phenomenon we can call psychoanalytic feminist criticism has arisen.³

1. See Mary Ellmann, *Thinking About Women* (New York, 1968), pp. 27–54.

2. See Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (Garden City, N.Y., 1970).

3. This paper was originally written to be read at a 1985 MLA Convention Forum entitled “Psychoanalytic Criticism: Its Place and Potential.” The forum was sponsored by the Division for Psychological Approaches to Literature and included four ancillary workshops exploring the meaning, impact, and future of this recent growth in psychoanalytic criti-

I would venture that two major factors have contributed to this boom in American psychoanalytic criticism. First, the rise of feminist criticism, in its revolt against formalism, has rehabilitated thematic and psychological criticism, the traditional mainstays of psychoanalytic interpretation. Because feminism has assured the link between psychosexuality and the socio-historical realm, psychoanalysis is now linked to major political and cultural questions. Glistening on the horizon of sociopolitical connection, feminism promises to save psychoanalysis from its ahistorical and apolitical doldrums.

The second factor that makes psychoanalytic reading a growth industry in the United States is certainly more widely recognized: it is the impact of French post-structuralist thought on the American literary academy. There is, of course, the direct influence of Lacanian psychoanalysis which promotes language to a principal role in the psychoanalytic drama and so naturally offers fertile ground for crossing psychoanalytic and literary concerns. Yet I think, in fact, the wider effect in this country has come from Derridean deconstruction. Although deconstruction is not strictly psychoanalytic, Freud's prominent place in Derridean associative networks promises a criticism that is, finally, respectably textual and still, in some recognizable way, Freudian. Although this second, foreign factor in the growth of American psychoanalytic criticism seems far away from the realm of homespun feminist criticism, I would contend that there is a powerful if indirect connection between the two. I would speculate that the phenomenal spread of deconstruction in American departments of English is in actuality a response to the growth of feminist criticism. At a moment when it was no longer possible to ignore feminist criticism's challenge to the critical establishment, deconstruction appeared offering a perspective that was not in opposition to but rather beyond feminism, offering to sublate feminism into something supposedly "more radical."

Thus, feminist criticism has, both directly and indirectly, given new viability to psychoanalytic criticism. Central to this viability has been the

cism. I would like to thank Claire Kahane and David Willbern for their invitation which led me to write the present paper. The central panel, chaired by Willbern, included Peter Brooks, Murray Schwartz, Cary Nelson, and myself. The workshop on psychoanalysis and feminism, chaired by Kahane, included Marianne Hirsch, Judith Kegan Gardiner, and Jerry Aline Flieger and provided excellent examples of psychoanalytic feminist criticism. I would particularly draw attention to Hirsch's paper—"Why Didn't I Recognize My Mother (or, Why Didn't My Mother Recognize Me?): Psychoanalytic Theories and Maternal Silence"—where the focus and concerns intersect with those of the present paper.

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burgeoning new field of psychoanalytic feminist criticism. Again, I see two major factors accounting for this growth. One is actually another effect of French post-structuralism—likewise stemming from Lacan and Derrida but, significantly, passing through those women thinkers we Americans have come to call the “French feminists.”⁴ Through writers like Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, and Julia Kristeva, we have seen a way of thinking that appears to be at once feminist and psychoanalytic, and also highly literary. The second factor has been the enormous impact made by Nancy Chodorow’s study of mothering.⁵ Chodorow has taken an object-relations view centered on the pre-Oedipal relation to the early mother and set in a feminist framework cognizant of the sociohistorical determinants of the institution of mothering. This particular mix of mother-centered psychoanalysis and American social scientific feminism has proven especially suggestive for feminist literary critics.

Psychoanalytic feminist criticism thus provides the vehicle which allows two heretofore unlikely couples to meet. In this vehicle, we not only find feminism joining hands with psychoanalysis but, behind that more obvious couple in what constitutes a theoretical double date, we might possibly glimpse the coming together of post-structuralism and American feminist social science, a pair that has rarely been known to speak.

A historic year for American psychoanalytic criticism, 1985 saw the appearance of a major monument in the field: the first anthology of psychoanalytic feminist criticism, *The (M)other Tongue*, edited by Shirley Nelson Garner, Claire Kahane, and Madelon Sprengnether.⁶ The coupling of psychoanalysis and feminism is clearly conducive to good reading, writing, and thinking. The anthology is excellent: a collection of first-rate pieces of feminist interpretation. As an attempt to survey this field, I would like to do a reading of this monument, at the very least of the inscription on its face.

The heroine in this book is surely the mother. The story progresses from “father-based” Oedipal structures to “mother-based” pre-Oedipal models and finally to an insistence that even in pre-Oedipal theories we attend not only to the child but to the mother.⁷ At the beginning of the

4. For an introduction to the French feminists, see *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (Amherst, Mass., 1980).

5. See Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1978); all further references to this work, abbreviated *RM*, will be included in the text.

6. See *The (M)other Tongue: Essays in Feminist Psychoanalytic Interpretation*, ed. Shirley Nelson Garner, Claire Kahane, and Madelon Sprengnether (Ithaca, N.Y., 1985); all further references to this work will be included in the text.

7. The phrases “father-based” and “mother-based” come from the preface to *The (M)other Tongue*, pp. 9–10.

book, in a critical survey of Freud's Oedipal scripts for girls, the mother is silent, ignored, invisible; by the end, in Susan Suleiman's strong statement, the mother is coming into her own, coming to writing. Our heroine would seem to be the ideal figure to bless the marriage of psychoanalysis and feminism. A powerful figure in familiosexual configurations of subjectivity, the mother is, of course, also a woman.

When I read this paper aloud, I said that the title of the anthology was "The Mother Tongue," but that in fact was *telling* not *reading* the title, for the title is, above all, a piece of writing not easily transcribed into oral language. Since the second word is actually written "(M)other," the title is both "The Mother Tongue" and "The Other Tongue," or perhaps not quite both but neither. Not quite the mother tongue nor quite the other tongue. The title itself is no longer quite in *our* mother tongue (plain English), although it is not in any other. It brings out the other in the mother.

The play on mother and other reminds us that in psychoanalytic theory the mother is the subject's first other, the other in opposition to which the self constitutes itself. Or rather, as becomes clear in object-relations theory and particularly in Chodorow, the mother is the site of something which is both other and not quite other, of the other as self and the self as other.⁸ Thus the monstrous word—"Mother-other"—in its fluid, double identity could be said to body forth the borderline status of the powerful, early mother, so central to psychoanalytic feminist theory.

Yet the title of the book is not "The (M)other" but "The (M)other Tongue." The book would appear to be not just about Mother but about language. The title phrase is nowhere glossed, or even used in the book, at least not with the *M* in parentheses. But we do find the simpler phrase, "The Mother Tongue" (without parentheses). In fact, the editors' introduction concludes on that more familiar phrase: "Feminists working from a number of critical approaches are concluding that it is time to learn, to begin to speak our mother tongue" (p. 29).

Although not marked or marred in any way by unseemly, unpronounceable punctuation, the phrase "mother tongue" in this sentence clearly does not mean what it usually means in *our* mother tongue, in the idiomatic English we know so well. If it is only now time "to learn, to *begin* to speak" this language, then this is not what we usually refer to as our native language. It may look familiar on the page, but this is not the same old mother tongue, but precisely an other mother tongue.

However "other" we can imagine his tongue to be, in this unmarked version it still looks like the idiomatic phrase. No mark forces the reader to see the otherness in this "mother tongue." This lack of marking may be part of a larger tendency, in this concluding sentence, to cover over an alterity that is, elsewhere, carefully noted. In this last sentence of the

8. I owe the phrases "other as self" and "self as other" to a related use by Naomi Schor, "Eugénie Grandet: Mirrors and Melancholia," in *The (M)other Tongue*, p. 218 n. 2.

introduction, “feminists working from a number of critical approaches are” jointly, in a plural, inclusive verb, “concluding.” In the “mother tongue,” we are not divided. Yet the triumphant conclusion forgets a difference articulated earlier in the introduction between two “critical approaches,” between the Chodorovians and the post-structuralists.

In the vicinity of the “mother” there is perhaps a tendency to cover over difference. Something about the figure of the mother seems to bless marriage and frown upon separation. From object-relations theory we learn that, for the infant, differentiation *is* differentiation *from the mother*. Imagining that the mother demands symbiosis, the infant experiences the drive toward separation as a guilty betrayal of the mother. Guilty to see the mother as other, to see the other in the mother; guilty thus to differentiate within the oceanic symbiosis. According to Chodorow, this atmosphere particularly characterizes the daughter’s relation to the mother, long past infancy, and finally carries over into adult relations between women. This special feminine lack of rigid separation has been celebrated by feminists, but let us not forget the corollary uneasiness that attends the drive toward differentiation, never wholly absent from this complex. I would speculate that the tendency within feminist criticism to glorify the figure of the mother might often occur along with a concomitant pressure to cover over differences between feminists.⁹ “Feminists working from a number of critical approaches are concluding that it is time . . . to speak our mother tongue.” In “the mother” we are not divided.

The conclusion of the editors’ introduction quoted above, with its lack of marked alterity, might be read as a happy ending. Given generic conventions, comedy concludes with the resolution of previous differences in a festive joining of all parties. But earlier in the narrative when the pressure of triumphant conclusion does not yet weigh so heavily, the differences between critical approaches can be delineated. In rehearsing the history of psychoanalytic feminism, the introduction finds that the French feminists have, like their American sisters, “turned to the preoedipal relation.” The editors then carefully add: “Although this shift to the mother has brought some degree of rapprochement between this line of French feminist concern and Anglo-American theory, the French detour though Lacan results in a difference. The insertion of the question of language introduces the notion of a form of expressivity outside the dominant discourse” (pp. 22–23).

“The mother” brings us some rapprochement, a lessening of difference; but “the question of language,” “the mother *tongue*” comprises difference. The question of the mother tongue inserts itself in the very reading of this passage. The word “rapprochement” can be found in an

9. For a similar discussion of the relation of pre-Oedipal psychology to feminism, see Jane Flax, “The Conflict between Nurturance and Autonomy in Mother-Daughter Relationships and within Feminism,” *Feminist Studies* 4 (June 1978): 171–91.

English dictionary, yet it is still pronounced in such a manner as not to let us forget that it is a French import. Not quite the mother nor quite the other tongue, it brings out the other in the mother. The French and English versions of the word remain close, so that "rapprochement" itself may be said to function as a point of rapprochement between the two languages. The appearance of this word in the text wishfully enacts a closing of the difference between the French and the Anglo-Americans.¹⁰ The book itself represents a wish to close up that gap, to be able to speak the mother tongue and the other tongue simultaneously, hence the title. But however ardent that wish, it is also true that the relation between the mother tongue and the other tongue involves us with real material difference so that the book's title cannot simply be pronounced.

Chodorow is everywhere in this book, appearing in three-quarters of the essays and providing its theoretical framework and coherence. But Chodorow's theory, however useful for feminism and psychoanalysis, remains, as the editors point out (p. 20), solidly within the traditional American paradigm for social science and has nothing to say about "the question of language," a question that remains crucial for literary critics, for us feminists reading texts.

Yet this book also partakes of the "difference" of the "French detour":¹¹ "the insertion of the question of language [which] introduces the notion of a form of expressivity outside the dominant discourse." The title of the book is an attempt to write beyond dominant discourse. The play of its parenthesis, using the material of the language to reflect on the language, resembles the stylistic devices of post-structuralist writers such as Derrida and Irigaray as well as American feminists such as Mary Daly. The feminists and the post-structuralists are trying to find a mode of expressivity which is not already shackled by the ideological weight of standard language, the dominant discourse. Standard language might be called the mother tongue, so the attempt to write outside the dominant discourse could be construed as a try for the other rather than the mother tongue. But as the title of our anthology makes us see, "the other" is already inscribed in "the mother tongue." These feminist and post-structuralist attempts at new expressivity do not really go outside the dominant discourse but

10. In this context let us remark the phrase "Anglo-American." It is not at all obvious that English and American feminists share a theory. For example, British psychoanalytic feminists tend to be Lacanian. Of course one could say that object-relations theory is an English movement. But then Chodorow has not been very influential in Britain. Perhaps the phrase stems rather from the fact that the English and Americans more or less share a "mother tongue." The contrast between the French and the Anglo-Americans is thus a difference between two language groups.

11. For a similar appearance of the concept of the "French detour," see Jane Gallop, *The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1982), pp. 139–40. In her essay "Enforcing Oedipus: Freud and Dora" in *The (M)other Tongue*, Sprenghether makes reference to this passage from *The Daughter's Seduction* (p. 61 n. 15).

rather bring out what deconstructionists such as Barbara Johnson have called “the difference within.”¹² We are not looking for a new language, a radical outside, but for “the other within,” the alterity that has always lain silent, unmarked and invisible within the mother tongue.

Another name—a more specifically feminist name—for dominant discourse is “patriarchal discourse,” and that phrase appears at the beginning of the book’s preface where the editors write: “Oedipally organized narrative . . . that is based on the determining role of the father and of patriarchal discourse tells a different story from preoedipal narrative, which locates the source of movement and conflict in the figure of the mother” (p. 10).

The Oedipal is associated with the father; the pre-Oedipal with the mother. Psychoanalytic feminists valorize the pre-Oedipal because the mother is a woman and she is suppressed in Oedipally organized narrative. But there is a fifth term that intrudes upon the two couples. Whereas the pre-Oedipal finds its source uniquely in “the figure of the mother,” the Oedipal is based not just on the father but also on “patriarchal discourse.” The use of that phrase here bespeaks “the French detour through Lacan” where the Oedipal father, the third term that intrudes upon the dyad, is the symbolic father, representing the order of language and law. As the editors will later say, “the French detour through Lacan results in a difference.” From the very beginning of the book, “the insertion of the question of language introduces” a disruption into psychoanalytic feminism’s tendency to polarize into mother vs. father, pre-Oedipal vs. Oedipal. Words like “narrative” and “story” in the sentence from the preface remind us that we are still very much in the realm of literary criticism. And no “story,” however primal, however familial, psychoanalytic, or basic to our culture can forgo the question of discourse. If, like the Oedipal, the pre-Oedipal is “narrative,” then it must be transmitted in some sort of discourse. Patriarchal discourse determines Oedipal narrative, but what sort of language would be associated with the pre-Oedipal?

One answer provided in this book is what Naomi Schor calls “the myth of a sort of prelapsarian preoedipus”: the pre-Oedipal is an Edenic world of immediacy before the advent of language (p. 223).¹³ Such an answer retains the purity of the polar opposition between the golden pre-Oedipal and the fallen Oedipal, but in that case—rather than the new fertile topos for literary criticism announced by the book—the pre-Oedipal would be beyond narrative, beyond the reach of the literary critic.

12. See, for example, Barbara Johnson, *The Critical Difference: Essays in the Contemporary Rhetoric of Reading* (Baltimore, 1981), p. 4.

13. For examples in *The (M)other Tongue* of this myth at work, see Dianne Hunter, “Hysteria, Psychoanalysis, and Feminism: The Case of Anna O.,” pp. 98–99, and Jim Swan, “Difference and Silence: John Milton and the Question of Gender,” p. 168.

Another answer, certainly the most prominent in the anthology, is of course "the mother tongue" itself, which sounds like it would be the language spoken by the figure who dominates the pre-Oedipal. In the introduction, the editors write: "At this juncture . . . the tendency of Anglo-American psychoanalytic feminism to focus on the drama of the preoedipal relationship between mother and daughter intersects with French feminist dreams of another mode of discourse, another side of language whose authority is the mother" (p. 24). A mode of language where mother not father is authority—matriarchal discourse—is not an object of focus but a dream, that is to say, in psychoanalytic terms, the fulfillment of a wish. *Another* mode, *another* side: the mother tongue as other tongue, a dream devoutly to be wished.

Anglo-Americans focus; French dream. On one side, "the drama of the preoedipal relationship"; across, "another mode of discourse." The only term repeated on both sides: "mother." Hitching the "expressivity outside the dominant discourse" to the mother seems to promise a lessening of difference, a rapprochement on various fronts. This "juncture," this "intersection": paths that seemed to run parallel on either side of a gap are crossing. In "mother," we are not divided.

If "French feminist dreams" come down to the mother tongue, then perhaps we can ignore the differences between "focus" and "dream," "drama" and "language." For those terms represent other differences between Anglo-American and French "critical approaches." To focus (telescope or microscope) is the classic mode of empiricist scientific investigation. The drama of the pre-Oedipal is treated as a classic object of positivist study. That it is then, figuratively, a "drama" renders the pre-Oedipal relationship (figuratively) literary and preps it for use in analogical operations on literary works.

On the other side, to dream is to become, oneself, the classic object of psychoanalytic study, the dreamer's psyche. If Freud invented psychoanalysis through interpreting his own dreams, then psychoanalysis may be the locus of an uncanny self-knowledge where subject and object are neither identical nor different, where the subject and object of knowledge are aspects of "the same person" separated by the opaque materiality of the dream. Such study no longer partakes of the positivist objectivity of the focusing lens, but rather inevitably implicates the subject's desires and defenses in the investigation.¹⁴

In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud provides us with a method of interpretation that involves attention to marginal specificity, to details we overlook when we reduce a story to its central drama. That aspect of Freud's work has influenced a different sort of literary criticism, one indebted to psychoanalysis for its interpretive methods rather than its

14. For exemplary instances of critical self-implication in *The (M)other Tongue*, see Schor, "Eugénie Grandet," pp. 236–37 and Kahane, "The Gothic Mirror," p. 340.

dramatic analogies. This sort of dream-reading is more typical of psychoanalytic criticism deriving from French post-structuralism.

Focus on narrative structure ("drama" and "relationship") in the anthology has led us to the "figure of the mother," central to the book. But this other sort of psychoanalytic reading might be applied to our dream of the mother tongue. For example, the word "patriarchal" is actually spelled five different ways in this book: aside from its standard spelling, we can read "partriarchial" (p. 16), "patriarchial" (p. 22), "par-tiarchal" (p. 105), and "partriarchal" (p. 264 n. 11). Presumably these are typographical errors, yet no other word in the book is so frequently misspelled, as if some unconscious (editors'? typist's? typesetter's?) was insistently trying to alter patriarchal discourse in one way or another, trying to speak something other than patriarchal.¹⁵ This is not a language "whose authority is the mother," not matriarchal, but other than patriarchal. This is clearly no one's mother tongue, but it may be the other tongue, perhaps what Lacan calls the discourse of the Other, that speaks in and through the mother tongue.¹⁶

The mother tongue, the language we learn at our mother's breast, is patriarchal language. That is where we learned the language which feminism has taught us to see as full of masculinist bias. In trying to move beyond the father, the mother looks like an alternative, but if we are trying to move beyond patriarchy, the mother is not outside. As Chodorow—among others¹⁷—has shown us, the institution of motherhood is a cornerstone of patriarchy. Although the father may be absent from the pre-Oedipal, patriarchy constitutes the very structure of the mother-child dyad.¹⁸ The early mother may appear to be outside patriarchy, but that very idea of the mother (and the woman) as outside of culture, society, and politics is an essential ideological component of patriarchy.

There is a drive in this book to speak outside of patriarchal discourse. But to the extent that drive fixes on "the figure of the mother" and/or glorifies the pre-Oedipal, the book risks losing its title to diacritical marks

15. In *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, Freud opens the possibility of treating mistakes by copyists and compositors as psychologically motivated, that is, interpretable; see Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey, 24 vols. (London, 1953–74), 6:129.

16. According to Jacques Lacan, "the unconscious is the discourse of the Other." See Lacan, *Écrits* (Paris, 1966), pp. 265, 379, 469, 549, 628, 632–34, 654, 814–15, 830, and 839.

17. See, principally, Dorothy Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise* (New York, 1976), and Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York, 1976).

18. Schor makes the same point in *The (M)other Tongue*: "What Eugénie begins to understand is that even as she enjoyed the shelter of the symbiotic mother-daughter relationship, even then she lived under the sway of the Symbolic, the order in which she was inscribed before her birth" ("*Eugénie Grandet*," p. 227).

and settling for a mother tongue which is not recognizably an other tongue.

In their preface, the editors of the anthology write: "It is clear that fascination by the preoedipal period and a corresponding focus on the figure of the mother in theories of human development have had a profound impact on the discipline of psychoanalysis and on the feminist interpretation of literature" (p. 10). "The discipline of psychoanalysis" and "the feminist interpretation of literature" are two widely separated realms, with apparently little in common. The opposition here is not only between Freudian and feminist ways of thinking but also between a quasi-medical practice of healing and a mode of literary interpretation. And yet these widely divergent domains are simply conjoined under the aegis of the pre-Oedipal period and the figure of the mother. Perhaps, since the pre-Oedipal is the realm of fusion and indifferentiation, its "impact" might include a preference for merger over distinction.

Or rather I should say, not the impact of the pre-Oedipal, but the impact of the "fascination by the preoedipal." Coppélia Kahn, in her contribution to the anthology, speaks of the "charmed preoedipal dyad" (p. 74). From the preface, we might infer that the pre-Oedipal period is not only a magical moment for infant and early mother but exercises a charm over those who contemplate it, who study and theorize. "Fascinate": "1. To be an object of intense interest to; attract irresistibly. 2. To hold motionless; to spellbind or mesmerize. 3. *Obsolete*. To bewitch; cast under a spell. [Latin *fascināre*, to enchant, bewitch, from *fascinus*, a bewitching, amulet in the shape of a phallus.]"¹⁹ The pre-Oedipal fascinates, attracts us irresistibly and holds us motionless, and in place of the phallic amulet, we are bewitched by the figure of the mother. The maternal having replaced the phallic, the early seventies' opposition between psychoanalysis and feminism can give way to a charmed union.

But, in fact, all charms, dreams, and wishes aside, what is the status of this marriage blessed by the mother? How mutual is the fascination?

The editors' introduction to *The (M)other Tongue* is comprised of two sections: its last four pages briefly summarize the articles to be found in the book; but the bulk of the introduction is a history of the encounters between psychoanalysis and feminism. The last paragraph of that history begins: "So far we have traced the ways in which feminism has reacted to psychoanalysis. . . . But there may be another story here, that of the response of psychoanalysis to feminism" (p. 25). For ten pages they have traced feminism's response to psychoanalysis, and now with but one paragraph left, they are just beginning to imagine the other side ("there may be another story"). This relationship seems far too one-sided; psychoanalytic feminism is simply the influence of psychoanalysis on feminism.

19. *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, new college ed., s.v. "fascinate."

One party has done all the talking; the other all the listening. Not a very good model for a marriage.

In the psychoanalytic context, however, we know of another relationship in which the one who does all the listening is not necessarily in the subordinate position, in which knowledge and authority in certain ways derive from the one who does all the listening. Perhaps, after all, psychoanalysis has been doing all its talking in relation to the knowledge it presumes feminism (or women) to have. That may be why feminism has been so willing to listen. But that other story, the influence of feminism on psychoanalysis, remains to be told.

That story would have to begin with what the other story has left out, what psychoanalysis for all its talking could not say. For if feminism, in its listening posture, is in the place of the analyst, then when we speak we will intervene in response to some marked gap in the story of the one who does all the talking. In the last paragraph of the historical introduction, the editors start to imagine that story: "Psychoanalysis, whether it posits in the beginning maternal presence or absence, has yet to develop a story of the mother as other than the object of the infant's desire or the matrix from which he or she develops an infant subjectivity" (p. 25). "Whether it posits in the beginning maternal presence or absence": that is, whether we are dealing with object-relations theory or Lacanian theory. Finally, even these two opposing schools of psychoanalysis are united in their common lack. In Lacanian models she is the prohibited object of desire; in object-relations she is the mirror where the infant can find his or her subjectivity. In either case her only role is to complement the infant's subjectivity; in neither story is she ever a subject. It is not mother that is lacking from psychoanalytic accounts, but precisely mother as other ("Psychoanalysis . . . has yet to develop a story of the mother as other").

In *The Reproduction of Mothering*, Chodorow begins to notice this blind spot in psychoanalysis, but she too quickly attributes it to the gender of the theorists: "male theorists . . . ignore the mother's involvements outside her relationship to her infant and her possible interest in mitigating its intensity. Instead, they contrast the infant's moves toward differentiation and separation to the mother's attempts to retain symbiosis" (*RM*, p. 87). Since the subject of both sentences is "male theorists," we might infer that now that women are theorizing they will not make the same mistake. Such a supposition about female theorists is equivalent to the assumption that the mother is outside patriarchy.

Susan Suleiman's essay in *The (M)other Tongue* begins with an account of the same syndrome in psychoanalytic theory ("It is as if, for psychoanalysis, the only self worth worrying about in the mother-child relationship were that of the child" [p. 356]). Although explicitly following Chodorow's lead, Suleiman's examples (from Helene Deutsch, Melanie Klein, Alice Balint, and Karen Horney) expose this bias not (merely) in the fathers

but in the mothers of psychoanalytic theory. Toward the end of her exposé of the mother's position in psychoanalysis—entitled “The Psychoanalytic Projection”—Suleiman remarks in a footnote: “It will certainly be noticed that almost all of the analysts I have been quoting are women” (p. 356 n. 8).

Only remarking this in a footnote, Suleiman makes no serious or prolonged attempt to understand why these women might perpetrate such patriarchal bias. It might be argued that, although women, these theorists are not, strictly speaking, feminists, or at least are not in a position to benefit from the work done in the contemporary field of psychoanalytic feminism. It might also be argued that they are all practicing analysts and therefore have an investment in the discipline of psychoanalysis that a literary critic, for example, need not share. Yet I think the problem might be more pervasive, that the maternal figure may move many of us to wish for an embrace that obliterates otherness. And those of us who are attracted to psychoanalytic theory may be particularly susceptible to the mother's charming figure, the dream of the mother without otherness.

I want to cite just one example of the bias against maternal alterity in contemporary psychoanalytic feminist criticism. My example comes not from this anthology but from an article by Ronnie Scharfman published in the 1981 issue of *Yale French Studies* entitled *Feminist Readings*. That volume shares many traits with *The (M)other Tongue*: in particular, a lot of psychoanalytic feminist theory and an attempt to bring together American and French feminisms.²⁰ Scharfman's text is an example of a feminist literary application of object-relations theory as it has come down through Chodorow. Scharfman writes: “Winnicott . . . asks what a baby sees upon looking at the mother's face. . . . ‘Ordinarily, what the baby sees is himself or herself.’” Again drawing on Winnicott, Scharfman describes an “unsuccessful mirroring bond”: “When a mother reflects her own mood or the ‘rigidity of her own defenses,’ rather than her child's, what the baby sees is the mother's face, and the ‘mother's face is not then a mirror.’ The consequences are tragic.”²¹ Scharfman does not critique Winnicott's position but simply produces a very agile literary application of it. Tragedy here remains the consequence of seeing the mother's subjectivity, seeing the mother as other.

20. I have done a reading of this volume which explores many of the same themes as the present paper, “The Monster in the Mirror: The Feminist Critic's Psychoanalysis,” which will be published in an anthology on psychoanalysis and feminism, edited by Richard Feldstein and Judith Roof.

21. Ronnie Scharfman, “Mirroring and Mothering in Simone Schwartz-Bart's *Pluie et vent sur Têlémée Miracle* and Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*,” *Yale French Studies* 62 (1981): 91, 99. Scharfman is quoting from D. W. Winnicott, “Mirror-role of Mother and Family in Child Development,” *Playing and Reality* (New York, 1971), pp. 111–18.

By focusing on the women theorists, Suleiman goes beyond Chodorow to show us a problem that stems not from the theorists' gender but from a bias in psychoanalytic theory itself: "Psychoanalysis is nothing if not a theory of childhood. We should not be surprised if it locates . . . every . . . aspect of adult personality in the child the adult once was, and often continues to be" (p. 358). Psychoanalysis is "a theory of childhood," that is, not merely about childhood, but a childhood theory, theorized from the child's point of view. That is its great strength: it has given us access to what is denied by any psychology that assumes that the child simply becomes an adult, rational, civilized. But the child's particular blind spot is an inability to have any realistic notion of the mother as an other subjectivity.²²

Chodorow, drawing on Alice Balint's work, focuses on this aspect of the relation to the mother, pointing to its continuation in adults and its determining role in ideology. In *The Reproduction of Mothering* she writes that "people continue not to recognize their mother's interests while developing capacities for 'altruistic love' in the process of growing up. They support their egoism, moreover, by idealizing mothers and by the creation of social ideology" (*RM*, p. 81). The child the adult continues to be cannot tolerate the mother's otherness. And that child is the source of psychoanalytic theory. If one of the major goals of feminism has been to put a stop to women's self-sacrifice, their exploitation through the ideology of maternal altruism, then it must counter every adult child's wish for the mother to be the perfect selfless mirror. That is where psychoanalysis and feminism may find themselves on opposite sides, one taking the child's wishes into account, the other defending the mother's side of the story.

Pointing us toward this opposition between psychoanalysis and feminism, Suleiman's essay stands out from the rest of the texts in the anthology, representing so to speak the internal alterity, the other within *The (M)other Tongue*. She goes beyond "the figure of the mother"—object for the infant's psyche—in search of the mother's subjectivity. In fact, Suleiman's text is not an example of psychoanalytic feminism but rather a feminist reading of psychoanalysis, which ultimately rejects psychoanalysis. Her essay is the last one in the anthology. Thus by the time we reach the end of the first anthology of psychoanalytic feminist criticism, we have in some way gone beyond the boundaries of the new field into a critique of its very possibility. That such an essay should be included and positioned last suggests that perhaps such a move is finally inevitable. If this collection is the first to celebrate the alliance of feminism and psychoanalysis, then

22. According to Chodorow, "Alice Balint argues that the essence of 'love for the mother' is that it is not under the sway of the reality principle" (*RM*, p. 79). Chodorow's source here is Alice Balint, "Love for the Mother and Mother Love," in *Primary Love and Psycho-Analytic Technique*, ed. Michael Balint (New York, 1965), pp. 91–108.

it also bears within it a sense of the limitations of such an alliance. *The (M)other Tongue* would be very different if it did not end with Suleiman's text. Since it does, we are, in some ways, forced to rethink what has come before.

Earlier, in looking at the editors' introduction, I said that *The (M)other Tongue* seemed to follow the generic code for comedy, culminating in a procession of couples marching hand in hand (psychoanalysis with feminism, Anglo-American theory with French feminism, the discipline of psychoanalysis with the feminist interpretation of literature). But an editors' introduction is always a secondary revision (in the psychoanalytic sense of the term²³) of the unruly material of an anthology. Ending with Suleiman's text, *The (M)other Tongue* actually concludes not with marriage but divorce.

And the accusations we hear typify the contemporary subgenre of the feminist divorce tale. Psychoanalysis does not allow mother her selfhood, makes her an object of service, and expects her to sacrifice herself to her partner's fantasies about her.²⁴ If "the figure of the mother" blesses the marriage of psychoanalysis and feminism, the mother as other presides over their divorce.

The anthology thus indeed leads us from the mother (fantasy figure and ideological construction) to the (m)other . . . But what of the (m)other tongue? In this book, it seems that the question of language is always tied to that other tongue, French, and to those "French feminists." As we have also seen, the other tongue, the "expressivity outside the dominant discourse," is usually construed as a mother tongue. On this question, Suleiman's essay is no exception. She discusses a less well-known French woman writer, Chantal Chawaf, who "has tied the practice of feminine writing to the biological fact of motherhood" (p. 370). Like other women of the French school, Chawaf is trying to practice *écriture féminine* (feminine writing), but more explicitly than with the other practitioners, her "expressivity outside" would be a mother tongue. ("Chawaf has stated in interviews and in commentaries on her work that for her motherhood is the only access to literary creation" [p. 370].)

Yet even here in this exemplary instance of a mother tongue, we can find the intrusion of an other tongue. Suleiman is discussing in particular a novel by Chawaf entitled *Maternité* (French cognate for "maternity"). When she quotes from the novel (p. 370), the footnote reads: "42. Chantal Chawaf, *Manternité* (Paris, 1979), 20." In the text, the title

23. "Secondary revision" is the "rearrangement of a dream so as to present it in the form of a relatively consistent and comprehensible scenario." This definition is taken from J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-analysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (London, 1973), p. 412.

24. The phrase "object of service" is taken from the editors' introduction to *The (M)other Tongue*, p. 19.

reads correctly, *Maternité*, but there at the bottom of the page we find an alien within the mother tongue. Perhaps the monstrous word “manternité” includes the English word “man” in the French word, producing a composite that is in no one’s mother tongue, that can only be read in two languages at once, that cannot simply be pronounced.²⁵ Not quite the mother tongue nor quite the other tongue; that errant *n* brings out the other in the mother.

In the classic psychoanalytic story, the “man” comes to disrupt the charmed pre-Oedipal dyad. As Janet Adelman puts it in another footnote in the anthology, this Oedipal intrusion of the man is but a late form, a repetition of an otherness already there in the early mother: “For the infant, the mother’s separateness constitutes the first betrayal; insofar as she is not merely his, she is promiscuously other. I suspect that this sense of otherness itself as promiscuous betrayal antedates the more specific oedipal jealousies and is retrospectively sexualized by them” (p. 134 n. 17). Those of us under the fascination of the pre-Oedipal often see the man’s entry as the fall from Eden. In a Lacanian version of that story, the man’s intrusion saves us from symbiotic fusion, from the mother’s engulfment. Adelman (and Chodorow and Suleiman) remind us however that both the positive and the negative valuations of the pre-Oedipal equally ignore the fact that the pre-Oedipal mother is already other.

The disruptive appearance of the word “man” within maternity may also remind us that maternity may not be simply a form of feminine writing. The masculine is inscribed in motherhood; patriarchal discourse structures the institution and the experience of motherhood as we know it. In any case, whether suppressed wish for separation or unauthorized critique, the *n* in Suleiman’s footnote continues the legacy of the title’s parentheses, interrupting the mother tongue by an other tongue.

Although there may be a wish to link French feminine writing with the pre-Oedipal, at the specific point in the editors’ introduction where they remark that the question of language results in a difference, they make it clear that the other tongue is not pre-Oedipal. “The insertion of the question of language introduces a notion of a form of expressivity outside the dominant discourse . . . an *écriture féminine*. . . . Such French feminists as Cixous and Irigaray seek to formulate a female poetics that would allow mother and daughter, once locked in a symbiotic fusion and plenitude, to become women and subjects, in and through language” (p. 23). Symbiotic fusion and plenitude lock women in, pre-Oedipal fascination holds them motionless.²⁶ The question of language must be inserted as the wedge to break the hold of the figure of the mother. *Ecriture féminine*

25. In the month following my writing of the present essay, I find myself regularly making a certain typo: “materity” for “maternity.” It is as if I felt there was an *n* that did not belong in “maternity.”

26. Kahane uses the same image of being “locked into a symbiotic relation” in her essay in *The (M)other Tongue*, pp. 336, 337.

must not be arrested by the plenitude of the mother tongue, but must try to be always and also an other tongue.

The other tongue is hard to pronounce, but those of us who have learned critical interpretation from psychoanalysis and from feminism are learning how to read it. At its best, psychoanalytic feminist criticism is teaching us not how to speak the mother tongue, not *only* how to see the mother as other and not mirror, but how to read the other within the mother tongue.