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POPULAR / POST-FEMINISM AND POPULAR LITERATURE

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SUMMARY

This thesis is concerned with the ambivalence expressed towards feminism by many women in the last decade and identifies post-feminism as a problematic through which to explore this in contemporary women's writing. It focuses on selected fictional and non-fictional texts of the 1980s and 1990s and examines the ways in which they engage with feminist concerns.

Until now, post-feminism has not been studied through its articulations in popular literature. To do justice to the wide range of views held by women and avoid a defensive and pessimistic reading of commercialised mainstream culture, I have made use of intertextual readings. The methodology is derived from feminist critical theory and cultural studies in order to address the relation between feminist and non-feminist literary texts and the dynamic interchange between what have been labelled as feminist politics and mainstream or consumer women's interests. The significance of the research lies in the identification of ways in which such works of fiction and non-fiction provide an outlet for women's voices which could serve as a basis for developing feminist criticism and politics.

The thesis is divided into three chapters, the different themes of which illustrate post-feminist concerns. In the first, I address the literature of popular therapy by women. The second chapter focuses on contemporary fictional and non-fictional writings by women on sex. The final chapter examines women's relationship to transgression through genres of crime writing. I have found that popular literary forms used by women may offer a progressive and complex reading of post-feminism. I conclude that post-feminism has drawn on popular elements of feminism and that, at the beginning of the 1990s, one may identify a reincorporation of feminism into post-feminism.

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KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS

PFW Post-feminist woman

WLM Women's Liberation Movement

TTCMW Twentieth Century Crime and Mystery Writers

INTRODUCTION

Why is it that feminism seems to attract that imperative to deny more than any other politics that you could think of? Nobody would say 'I'm not a Tory but...' or 'I'm not a socialist but...'. What produces that need to displace yourself from something you are partly attracted to, partly repelled by; that you feel partly speaks for you and partly doesn't? What is it that people feel is demanded of them when they think of feminism?

Beatrix Campbell [1]

This thesis originated from a concern with the status of feminism in the 1980s in contemporary popular culture. There appeared to be a disjunction between the rapid development of feminist theory and criticism inside the academy and the continued growth of feminism in Britain as a wider social and political movement. Many women who seemed to approve of feminist aims were increasingly reluctant to identify themselves as feminists. Some were satisfied that they were sufficiently independent to determine their own lives in the ways they wanted, others were suspicious of a feminist agenda that seemed to demand an allegiance which they were not prepared to make. There was clearly a need to understand the various meanings feminism accumulated for women in this period, and how these meanings had been and continued to be created. This led directly to the cultural media where definitions are processed, contested and broadcast to a wide audience. Recognising that identification of those cultural forms which might be deemed 'popular' is not straightforward, this enquiry is focused upon literary texts of the decade which were written by, addressed to and consumed by women to see to what extent they engaged with feminist practice and the discourses of women's liberation.

By selecting some of the outstanding fictional and non-fictional texts of the 1980s for critical examination, I hoped to raise questions about the relation of contemporary culture to the changing position of women in British society in this period. My research is concerned with feminist and non-feminist writing and topics were chosen which would illustrate the dynamic interchange between what has been labelled as feminist politics and what are accepted as mainstream women's interests. I wanted to demonstrate that the rich and diverse body of popular literature under study conducts

within itself a debate on feminism pertinent to women's concerns in a rapidly changing cultural climate. The project was to identify ways in which such writing provided an outlet for women's voices which might then serve as a basis from which to develop feminist politics amidst shifting definitions.

'Popular Post-feminism'?

The popular press was alert to changes in feminism in the 1980s and added its own influential perspectives to the debate. A stereotype emerged in 1988 which seemed to focus many of the problems women were experiencing with regard to feminism. This was the 'post-feminist woman' whose glossy and glamorous image, with 'short skirts, sleek stockinged legs, tousled hair, pillar-box red lips and high heels' was an enticing alternative to the tired stereotype of the ugly feminist, with dungarees, hairy legs, cropped hair and no make-up.[2] She was intelligent, economically independent, not butch or strident and had made it for herself 'feminine-style' (Neustatter, 1990, p.151). Denoting a new-found freedom from the supposed shackles of feminism, the term 'post-feminism' slipped into the popular parlance of the last decade. It provided a welcome concept for my research, representing, as Neustatter writes, 'the values of the Eighties, deifying wealth, glitz and the go-for-it mentality' (p.232). It was packaged as an accompaniment to postmodernism, and used the rhetoric of women's liberation to address women not as sisters but as consumers, thus providing a clear example of the incorporation of feminism into a project which could not be identified as feminist. To the extent that it was presented as on a continuum with feminism as well as an opposition -- post-feminists 'no longer needed any of that nasty bra burning' (p.151) -- it also hinted at one of the problems feminists seemed to have difficulty facing, which was that of a generation gap twenty years on from 1968.

As stereotypes, any congruence between the feminist and the post-feminist woman, such as the mutual aim for female empowerment, is repressed. However, I argue that there are grounds for understanding post-feminism as a phenomenon rather than a

category for identity and aim to uncover the ambiguities that are simplified and made too easily digestible through stereotyping. Post-feminism may result from a sense of the inadequacy or untenability of feminist views on gender difference. It is in this sense that 'post-feminist' was used as an adjective as early as 1919, when a Greenwich Village female literary group declared: 'We're interested in people now -- not men and women'.^[3] Part of the project of this thesis therefore is to discover what assumptions or presumptions, arguments, and conceptual models consistently underlie the post-feminist outlook when adopted by women in the last decade and much of the second chapter is devoted to this. I examine in which directions these elements tend, as manifested in contemporary literature, whether there seems to be a project in common with feminism, and what the results might be for feminist theory.

Through attention paid to post-feminism as a dissatisfaction with and implied criticism of feminism, a focal point is provided from which to examine different facets of British feminism. The question of alignment with socialism and Marxist theory is thrown into relief by a post-feminist emphasis, for example, and this is useful when I consider the application of critical positions in cultural studies to female popular literature of the 1980s. Post-feminism also takes part in the crucial 'equality' versus 'difference' debate which has been seen to divide reformist or liberal from radical or libertarian feminism, and this is helpful in my consideration of the imaginative freedoms afforded by some contemporary women's fiction. The post-feminist position on men, in terms of male-identification as well as its apparent heterosexism, may be used to question the status of identity politics and debates on separatism, as well as to address the specificity of lesbian feminism. This is relevant to contemporary culture in terms of genre and gender roles. The question of post-feminism's alignment with institutionalised power raises the question of the marginalisation of women within feminism and feminism's class affiliations, which may also be applied to what is deemed to be women's popular culture and the public language used to address women.

I chose to address post-feminism in my research because it provided a tool from popular culture with which to explore the ambivalence many women felt towards feminism. While from the point of view of many self-identified feminists there would be too much to lose in the espousal of post-feminism, it might prove attractive to those who were alienated or had become embarrassed by the terminology and stereotypes associated with the Women's Liberation Movement. It was clear that, when talking to the uninitiated, although not unaware, in the late 1980s, one had to tread very carefully when using the word 'feminist'.^[4] Yet the discrepancy with regard to the term often emerged solely on the level of articulation; women would eschew the term even when they were agreed on the root of a certain problem's being sex discrimination at work, for example. Because, by this time, so many feminist aims could also be validated on non-gender-specific terms, such as common-sense or rationality, the power of feminism as a conscious political position and dissenting voice had been modified. Through mainstream appropriation of parts of the equal rights side of the feminist project the goalposts had been changed, seeming to leave feminism with a smaller space to shoot in. Post-feminism was thus a response to a new consensus which was not purely illusory (e.g. while women's earnings or representation in politics show that women have not yet gained equality, fewer people dared to say that women were not, or should not be, equal) and appeared to make feminist politics dated or even redundant.

The use of the prefix 'post' has often been derogatory, as in the examples of Post-Impressionism and post-Marxism. When it is not used neutrally its connotations may be complex. It could mean 'after', although not in the sense of a complete change (in which case another term altogether would presumably be invented), nor in the sense of a reaction from or against the original (where anti-Marxism, for example, might be appropriate), nor even the sense of 'later', in that it is a repetition of the original in form or another after its classic period (when 'neo' can be used). Rather it suggests a betrayal, particularly when applied to politics, an infiltration and appropriation, a parasite riding on the back of the original movement which benefits from the ground it has won but uses this for its own means. 'Post' also implies a

dissatisfaction or impatience with the original movement. It may suggest that it has taken the wrong turn or lost its dynamism; the aims may remain the same, but the means have to change with the times. The forms must alter to guarantee the content, but then perhaps new forms will also revolutionise the content.

While Angela Neustatter sees post-feminism as negative ('The propagation of the idea that a post-feminism is a good thing is the most cleverly marketed idea yet for attempting to put a full stop at the end of women's liberation'), later she states optimistically that 'there are a number of young women adopting a vigorous feminist line in their daily lives, but not necessarily in a formalised sense' (1990, p.232, 238). This division of content and form, which takes place when a loose agreement in analysis falls short of political articulation, is the gap in which popular post-feminism has flourished. Rather than relegate it to the hands of anti-feminists, I saw it as strategically important for feminists to go on the offensive and re-appropriate elements of post-feminism that belonged to the Women's Liberation Movement. Rather than accept narrow definitions, feminism should stand by its own historical diversity and pluralism. Beatrix Campbell has reminded us that in Britain, women's politics are strongly aligned to the traditions of the right and of the left but there has been a lack of dialogue between socialist and conservative feminism. In The Iron Ladies, she suggests that the Women's Liberation Movement did not know how to take the Tory woman seriously, and was hesitant to find that there might have been any common ground. [5] I suggest that post-feminism in the 1980s brings a comparable challenge to contemporary feminism.

I will now look at the emergence of post-feminism in the 1980s with regard to feminism, mass market culture and feminist theory. Since then, as is to be expected with research into contemporary material, the debates have consolidated and expanded with the publication of new works of feminist criticism in the early 1990s. Just as I have seen the late 1980s to be characterised by post-feminism, American critics have made similar arguments for a 'backlash' against feminism. While post-feminism and backlash are close companions, as effects of an inevitable anti-feminist counteraction

and generation gap within the feminist movement, I look at the distinctions that may be made in the hope of providing a more specific definition of post-feminism.

Post-feminism in the 1980s

I like to think that feminism's a broad church. For instance there are Christians who burn crosses on Negro lawns in the southern states of the U.S.A. and there are Christians who follow Karl Marx in Latin America. The only thing they have in common is that they are Christians. Feminism is like that now ... the reason for the emergence of a free-market feminism in the Eighties is the fact that to be ruthless, competitive and individualistic is the most rebellious thing a girl can do.

Julie Burchill [6]

The belief that 'one is a woman' is almost as absurd and obscurantist as the belief that 'one is a man'. I say almost because there are still many goals women can achieve: freedom of abortion and contraception, day care centres for children, equality on the job, etc. Therefore, we must use 'we are women' as an advertisement or slogan for our demands. On a deeper level, however, a woman cannot 'be'; it is something which does not even belong to the order of being. It follows that a feminist practice can only be negative, at odds with what already exists so that we may say 'that's not it' and 'that's still not it'.

Julia Kristeva [7]

Post-feminism is a divisive concept which has caused and courted controversy. In its common usage the term is a product of the last decade and was first broadcast in the British popular press to suggest that women had now achieved *sufficient independence* no longer to need feminism. Since then, from being a 'media invention' and an example of 'sleight of hand journalism', it has accrued diverse meanings, many of them still negative for feminists.[8] In academic circles post-feminism has come to denote postmodern or poststructuralist feminism.[9] I will argue that this is a secondary effect of the absorption of the term into theoretical debates which tends to repress its important place in the public debate on feminism and the modern woman. Consequently, this thesis foregrounds the popular deployment of the term and addresses its ramifications in popular literature. Rather than allow these to be subsumed in contemporary problematics of feminist theory I ask whether an

examination of the modes of argument and interpretative strategies of popular post-feminism may be used to question the application of theoretical models.

The two quotations above exemplify two faces of post-feminism, that which borrows from neo-liberal ideologies of individualism prevalent in the 1980s and that which is characterised by the anti-essentialism debate which has come to dominate feminist critical theory and continues today. This thesis explores the tensions and similarities between the two and I will refer to Julie Burchill's post-feminist novel, Ambition (1990), and French feminist writings to exemplify this. The former, while a fictional text, bears the hallmarks of Burchill's journalism which, throughout the Eighties has been astute in encapsulating the national trends and features of various political and cultural movements from the point of view of a young woman of evident post-feminist persuasions.[10] Ambition is very self-conscious regarding its position at the intersection of two decades and, by placing the stereotype of the post-feminist woman in a fictional narrative context, allows an elaboration of the themes and concerns which I will address as constitutive of post-feminism. The experimental and philosophical writings of some French feminists offer a conceptual framework and theoretical models which I will use to measure post-feminist strategies later in the thesis.

In Ambition Burchill's post-feminist protagonist Susan Street voices an unsisterly impatience with feminists as 'moustachioed milch cows who sit in the mud around airbases insisting that women are peaceful and loving and nurturing and that all the trouble in the world is caused by men', hence the free-market feminism which scorns essential definitions of womanhood (p.142). While this sounds like anti-feminist misogyny, this is post-feminist rather than pre-feminist because the character claims that she is taking up the torch for women's empowerment. The context is her objection to the fixed idea of what feminism entails, as expressed by a man, for the 'New Manifesto's' smug assurance that materialism is incompatible with feminism works to prevent feminists from moving into the Nineties. Free-market feminism appears to be no longer perturbed by the dualistic constraints which construct and

maintain social understanding of womanhood and femininity. In Hélène Cixous' famous mapping of patriarchal value systems -- Activity / Passivity, Culture / Nature, Head / Heart, Intelligibility / Sensitivity, etc. [11] -- it would simply refuse to recognise modern women in the subordinated side of the hierarchised pair. It is how it avoids this that is of crucial importance for this thesis' elaboration of post-feminist strategy. Either it finds ways to declare the boundaries no longer relevant and throws the whole lot into the melting pot of the market as up for grabs, or it is more sinister and dispenses with the second and lower side of the equation altogether. For the latter would seem to fulfil the purpose of the structure in the first place: 'there's no place for women in the operation ... either the woman is passive or she does not exist ... She does not exist' (1987, p.63).

In Ambition, the New Man accuses the post-feminist woman of reversing the equation; he says, 'women today' are 'making all the mistakes men used to: treating the opposite sex like shit, ... completely losing sight of the eternal values' (p.214). Yet she has had enough of this circular trail of oppositions. Her feminism is not to be tied to one set of values, destined to spend its energies then fighting its counterpart. Impatience and pragmatism seem to be the hallmark of Burchill's brand of post-feminism; she scorns any 'jam tomorrow' philosophy and is wary of both essentialism and its necessary metaphysical other: 'What will I get, pray, if I am nurturing and passive, my reward in heaven?' (p.142). The only transcendence allowed in the 'broad church' of this new feminism is reached at the end of the novel when, tongue in cheek, Burchill has Street stare 'up, up and away' towards wealth and power (p.382). The construction of women as 'other', necessitated by masculinity's differentiation from 'the feminine', is seen by French feminist thought to exclude women from the realm of the human. [12] The irony of assertive women being denounced as male-identified when masculinity has been constructed as the cultural norm is reflected in Street's comment: 'Isn't it funny that when a woman acts like a human being, when she shows anger, pain and ambition, they call her a female dog?' (p.189). Role-reversal and male-identification emerge as post-feminist concerns.

The exposure of the humanist fallacy as masculinist by French feminist theorists and Burchill's post-feminism has been problematic for feminist politics. While post-feminism dissociates itself from socialism, Street having woken up to 'the fact that socialism has become a male weapon to divert women's energies from feminism' (p.142), feminism shares with socialism a concern with other people (women in the same or similar conditions) which invests it with a humanistic and moral imperative. The recognition of a common oppression was necessary for feminism to have emerged as a movement and the ethically motivated cry for justice was crucial not only in attracting non-politicised women to its project, but also in its recognition by the establishment and hence its ability to make a notable impact on society. While the Women's Movement still has much to achieve there is a danger in relinquishing an easily identifiable as well as practical moral imperative. As Sue Margolis stated in a Mail on Sunday supplement devoted to the post-feminist woman, 'I'm still trying to be a feminist, forget the post', adding, 'I would like nothing more than to take whoever invented the phrase post-feminist woman and send him -- I'd rather believe it was a man -- eight and a half months pregnant, tired and frightened with another child tugging at his skirts, to an ante-natal clinic'.^[13] The powerful emotions surrounding motherhood are probably the main crux of feminism's moral appeal historically, instrumental, for example, in women's gaining the suffrage. It is therefore not surprising to note that it is absent from Ambition, as from most magazine articles on the post-feminist woman. This adds resonance to the question of role models and generational conflict in female popular culture in the post-feminist decade.

As well as a fear of losing an ethical dynamic, related is the legitimate fear of a strategic loss of solidarity. The individualistic free-market feminist is not just mean and amoral, she is alone. In Ambition, 'left-wing ideas about the bond between women left Susan Street early ... She was relieved of all illusions before she reached the age of consent, when she ... emerged as a creature without scruples or conscience' (p.16). Similarly, the Mail on Sunday's post-feminist woman, according to

Neustatter, is 'the woman who has made it by being successful and highly paid in her career, who looks good, loves men and sex and who sees feminism as old hat, a bore, and above all, something she does not need. Siding with women, helping or supporting them is not on the menu' (1990, p.232). Typical of post-feminism is the refusal to acknowledge the legacy which made such 'success' possible in the first place, under the name of feminism. No one reason will suffice to account for the impact created by the Women's Liberation Movement, and one can argue that economic reasons (the need for cheaper, unprofessional, non-unionised and part-time labour) played as important a role as the social and political ferment of the later 1960s. Yet it is certain that the rationality of feminist argument would not have won the case for equality without the sheer number of people involved. For women a generation later to claim that they need neither feminism nor the support of other women is not only to bite the hands that fed them, but also to appear to cut off such a network of support in the future. For if post-feminism is to emerge in greater coherence than mere opposition to feminism, one should look out for the move away from sisterhood, which recognises unity in oppression, towards new forms of address and group recognition amongst women.

Developments in the Early 1990s

By the end of the last decade post-feminism had performatively broken into areas which feminism had long been debating and theorising: right / left politics, individualism, pluralism, work, as well as sexual difference, pornography, subjectivity and resistance. The motivation lay in major shifts in the historical and political contexts as well as in a new generation gap between the women who were active in the Women's Liberation Movement from the late 1960s and young women twenty years later. Most feminist journals in Britain recognised a crisis, or the more optimistic ones at least a change, in feminism in this period and 'Thatcherism' is inevitably discussed as highly significant in this. In an introduction to 'Twenty Years

of Feminism', the editors of Feminist Review acknowledge that 'Thatcherism, very broadly, has adopted a dual strategy in regard to feminism. While incorporating its individualist elements, it has mounted devastating onslaughts on the collective socio-economic and political projects of women's liberation'. [14] Joan Scanlon's Surviving the Blues looks at the WLM in terms of the reality of Thatcher's Britain, wary of the impulse to nostalgia for the post '68 decade which results in 'the exclusion of younger women's experience in the name of a model which has had its day and cannot be repeated'. [15] The Spare Rib Collective remark that 'the term "feminism" has come to denote an elitist and exclusionary movement'. They praise as dynamic the fact that, 'in trying to understand what the modern day Women's Movement is, there is no specific theoretical work to turn to, and no central organising committee to contact for a definitive blueprint', for this has the effect of 'de-emphasising theory and dogma and rules, textbook politics ... and has led to an emphasis on "process" and "practice"' (p.187).

In the above-mentioned issue of Feminist Review a discussion between younger feminists suggests some of the leanings that might emerge from the lack of direction younger women have felt in the post-feminist period. They suggest that 'the awe with which we hold our predecessors is not always constructive' and point out that it is important to bear in mind that 'The Women's Liberation Movement was historically specific and only possible in conjunction with other major social movements'. [16] They acknowledge that there was not the same potential for radicalism in the 1980s, when feminists recognised that they had to form alliances with other movements to resist attacks, and find that the tasks of younger feminists have largely been defensive. In line with the postmodern politics of style, their summary of sexual politics seems to hinge upon their appearance. They are unhappy about what they see as earlier feminists' sense of shame about appearances and equation of vanity with subordination, concluding that it is a strength that 'superficially we may seem to follow the dictates of gender roles, yet we are fundamentally confident about expressing our identities as individuals'. They recognise a need for new articulations

because women might feel 'trapped' as well as 'liberated' by their feminism. For them, the post-feminist woman is a useful tool to measure themselves against, helping them to define their feminism, a crucial task for younger feminists who have not been involved in creating a definition but have rather been inhabiting one. Their choice, as they see it, is either to 'reaffirm our status under the old classification', or to 'pinpoint a newer feminism' (p.137).

The following year saw the publication in Britain of Naomi Wolf's American best-seller, *The Beauty Myth*, which appeared to do both. Wolf begins by adopting the radical rhetoric of the early WLM and asks: 'a generation on, do women feel free?' [17] By explicitly addressing a younger generation of women she lays the ground for a reformulation of feminist analysis. Her method is to rename the enemy of women's liberation, for her argument is that the 'Beauty Myth' of the 1980s has taken over from the 'Feminine Mystique' to carry on the former's work of social control (1990, p.16). While she notes that every generation since 1830 has had to fight its own version of this myth, she combines it with the idea of a contemporary 'backlash' against feminism, or 'counterforce', to claim the novelty of her argument: 'The contemporary backlash is so violent because the ideology of beauty is the last one remaining of the old feminine ideologies that still has the power to control those women whom second wave feminism would have otherwise made relatively uncontrollable' (p.10).

By marking a distinction in the political climate for women and addressing contemporary phenomena, from the latest methods of cosmetic surgery (p.239), to new statistics on eating disorders, adverts for facial creams (p.116), new diet regimes as a cult (p.122), Hollywood films (p.136), and date rape (p.166), Wolf tailors a classic feminist analysis to the lives and experiences of young women. Her writing combines radical rhetoric with a youthful tone of naive optimism. Although she does not shy away from the terms 'feminism' and 'struggle', she writes that 'it is not ballots or lobbyists or placards that women will need first; it is a new way to see' (p.19). However, in conflating the contemporary ills which beset women under one

theme, for 'beauty' is soon seen to encompass all aspects of the 1980s reaction against feminism, Wolf leaves little manoeuvre for resistance. By presenting it as responsible for women's failing to achieve liberation when it was at their fingertips, she makes women appear very malleable and susceptible to the media. She writes of women's having been 'controlled' by ideas of perfection for 160 years (p.271).

In an article written for publication in Britain, Wolf portrays 'Potential Third Wavers' as similarly inhibited by the notion of the 'Post-Feminist Era'.^[18] Unlike the editors of Spare Rib, she sees the absence of a pre-given theoretical interpretation as disabling and she urges compassion for the post-feminist generation who are floundering owing to a lack of guidance. She acknowledges that 'the process of representing feminism to young women as obsolete was also hastened by those real changes in the times which mean that the second wave agenda *does* in fact need updating if it is to seduce new recruits', yet sees post-feminism not as symptomatic of and a potential part of that updating, but rather as the cause of an epistemological dilemma and paralysis. Leaving post-feminism behind as 'that scary word', Wolf focuses on sociological studies which indicate the low confidence of teenage girls and the increase in attempted suicides among female adolescents. She looks for a rejuvenation of feminism from the universities, after travelling to campuses in the U.S. and Canada. Finding from an opinion poll that there are more teenage activists now than there were in the 1960s, she writes, 'if the past is a guide, we can hope for the classic political overflow back into feminist channels'. This is also the context of The Beauty Myth which Wolf clearly hopes paves the way to 'a Third Wave framework' into which young women can 'connect their energies'.

In the United States, The Beauty Myth reached the top of the best-seller lists and was reprinted five times, with Wolf heralded by the press as 'Feminism's Pretty New Face: making women's liberation more attractive in the 90s'.^[19] In Britain it was marketed as the new feminist classic with 'the power to change lives' and, welcoming Wolf as 'early heroine of Woman's World, Nineties style', Fay Weldon recommended the book as 'course enhancement for the feminist'.^[20] However, not all British

feminists relished course enhancement from a Yale-educated middle-class American woman still in her twenties, and reviews denounced the author for allowing a beautiful photograph of herself to be printed on the back cover of the Chatto & Windus hardback (it was removed in the Vintage paperback), complaining that she had no new message and was merely reiterating what feminists had been saying for years.

Yet the book does have something new to say, namely that after the 1980s, not only was there a market for an updated feminist analysis but also that by this time, feminism with a facelift was welcome in the popular media. While Wolf addresses some of the features of post-feminism critically, such as the appeal for women of individualistic meritocracy and 'the aspirational promise of women's magazines that they can do it on their own', she seems also to embody it in her public persona (p.29). She hastens to add in her conclusion that her book does not mean 'we can't wear lipstick without feeling guilty' and that she is 'not attacking anything that makes women feel good' (p.271). Even though she warns against the hope of making images of fashion and advertising include us, she finds that 'women who work in the mainstream media are a crucial inside vanguard' for 'transforming the cultural environment' (pp.276, 278). Finally she enjoins the reader to 'act beyond the myth': 'Let's be shameless. Be greedy. Pursue pleasure. Avoid pain ... Seek out the sex we want ... Choose our own causes' (p.291). The most notable difference is her promotion of female solidarity and intergenerational contact; she urges women 'to compliment each other, show our appreciation', even to flirt and be chivalrous as well as to thank the women who 'made our freedom possible' (pp.287, 283).

The apparent resurgence in American feminism betokened by this text continued in the following year with the publication of Backlash: The War Against Women by Susan Faludi. Revised to include examples and statistics from this country to support the book's thesis, it appeared in Britain in 1992, also published by Chatto & Windus, with a preface by British feminist Joan Smith. Despite the polemical title, Faludi, who is a Pulitzer prize-winning journalist, does not use an impassioned political rhetoric

and her argument is measured and analytical. Like Wolf, she sees the last decade, 'the backlash decade', as characterised by a reaction against feminism and a counter-assault against women's rights but, unlike her, she does not elaborate one theory to embrace this. 'The backlash is not a conspiracy' she writes, but a combination of related phenomena. [21] She examines contemporary scare tactics which have been used to frighten women away from their newly-won independence, such as the notion of a 'man-shortage' and the emphasis upon the biological clock which suggests that women are leaving it too late to have children and regretting it. This long book includes discussions of diverse topics such as anti-abortion campaigns; the new right; divorce law reform; women's roles in film; fashion for women; equal pay; reproductive rights; anti-feminist publications in academia. It also traces the history of backlashes against successive revolutions in women's rights (pp.65-95).

Rather than present a scenario of simple opposition, Faludi is attentive to the double-think rife in media debates around feminism. The book begins by counterposing the assumption that women have gained equality with the contradictory message that women are more unhappy than ever and women's liberation is women's enemy. She is concerned with the 'closed system that starts and ends in the media, popular culture and advertising -- an endless feedback loop that perpetuates and exaggerates its own false images of womanhood' (p.9). Faludi writes, '[J]ust when record numbers of younger women were calling themselves feminists, the media declared that feminism was the flavour of the seventies and that "post-feminism" was the new story', and she quotes with approval Brenda Polan in The Guardian: 'Post-feminism is the backlash. Any movement or philosophy which defines itself as post whatever came before is bound to be reactive. In most cases it is also reactionary'. Yet Faludi shows this reaction to be more subtle than mere contradiction; she remarks that she prefers not to imagine 'the conflict as two battalions neatly arranged on either side of the line', for in so doing we miss its 'entangled nature'. Emphasising that the backlash is 'not an organised movement', she demonstrates the power of its 'lack of

orchestration' which allow it to adopt disguises and masks as it 'moves through the culture's secret chambers' (pp.17,18).

By thus highlighting its 'workings, encoded and internalised, diffuse and chameleonic', Faludi begins to suggest ways of discerning certain strategies as post-feminist, rather than merely denouncing them. For example, she finds a hallmark of backlash journalism to be 'the absence of real women in a news account that is allegedly about real women' and shows that a delimiting and stereotyping of the history of women's struggle for liberty and rights as a one-time event is typical (p.66, 103); inversion also appears to be common for 'in a pop-culture version of the Big Lie, it stands the truth boldly on its head'. The backlash, as explored in this book, is 'at once sophisticated and banal, deceptively "progressive" and profoundly backward' (p.12). Faludi recognises the role of popular psychology manuals and self-help classics in the last decade and the way they could be used to suggest that feminism was the cause of female distress. She analyses self-help as anti-feminist in Chapter Twelve, 'It's All In Your Mind' (pp. 369-394). She also suggests the importance of a focus on female criminality, interpreted as the result of women's enjoying greater freedom, for judges and law enforcement officers claimed that they could 'chart a path from rising female independence to rising female pathology' (pp.4, 104).

In the Epilogue, Faludi concludes that the backlash did not work as a counter-assault on women's rights and expectations. Women 'continued to enter the work force in growing numbers each year, ... to postpone their wedding dates, limit their family size, ... still gave their highest ratings to programmes with strong-willed and independent heroines'; 'Backlash designers couldn't even get women to follow the most trivial of fashion prescriptions' (p.492). While she notes the paradox that 'even those women who helped build the backlash levees were simultaneously trying to surge over them', she is conservative regarding strategies of resistance, warning that, 'there are so many ways to rebel that pose no real or useful challenge to the system' (pp.493, 494). She reminds women of men's vulnerability and neediness and quotes with approval a feminist editor's comment in 1988 that women could take advantage

of the fact that 'There are a great many men who know their backs are up against the wall' (p.497), yet resistance for her is only meaningful when women have a clear agenda and a mobilised mass that is forceful and public. Despite the greater subtlety and originality of her analysis, like The Beauty Myth, Backlash is ultimately content with showing that 'women's enemy has not changed, and the same battles need to be won'. [22] These two American neo-feminist texts of the early 1990s begin to put developments of the 1980s in perspective, but in emphasising only the anti-feminism of post-feminism, remain on the defensive, reiterating established feminist positions.

A third voice in the feminist debate surfaced in the American media at the same time, although it was delayed in making an impact in Britain until 1992. Camille Paglia's Sexual Personae was published in 1990, challenges feminist analysis for oversimplifying the problem of sex and reasserts as correct mythology's identification of woman with nature.[23] The book argues that 'feminism has been simplistic in arguing that female archetypes were politically motivated falsehoods by men', and claims that, 'by such techniques of demystification, feminism has painted itself into a corner' (p.13). Paglia criticises feminism's 'irritating reflexes' such as its 'fashionable disdain for a patriarchal society' and was soon sought by the press for her controversial views (p.37). Scourge of American academic feminism, her vilification by feminists seemed to confirm her contention that feminism was unwilling to accept a critique. If this obscured the fact that feminists continued to debate feminist politics, the conduct of the debate in the media revealed the extent to which this was the prerogative only of 'insiders' and underlined the defensiveness which was in danger of keeping this valuable debate on feminist analysis under wraps from a larger public. It also implied scorn for a public which could have more to offer, as well as be more pro-feminist, than self-identified feminists dared to (or deigned to) assume.

Perspectives from the Nineties in Britain

It is telling that in Britain some of the sharpest criticism of feminism from established feminist critics appeared in response to the new generation of American feminist writing of the early 1990s. The American neo-feminists seemed to liberate the former from a defensive position regarding feminism. In response to Backlash, Rosalind Coward asks whether 'the resurgence of an old style of feminist analysis is really equipped to understand the complexities of contemporary life?' [24] Her review of the book highlights 'one of the great feminist weaknesses: the underlying explanation of women's history by men's drive for power'. Coward both attacks the radical feminist explanation that feminism was fragmented because of women's false consciousness (that is, they were too afraid or too dependent on men to support their sisters) as unsatisfactory, and mocks 'global theories' which see rape, abuse, brutality, sexism and economic inequalities all as strategies to keep women down.

Such decisiveness was rare in the feminist debate of the 1980s, and timely in the following decade. But when Coward boldly raises the issue of women's collusion in oppressive structures, one should ask whether the dismissal of Paglia's position as anti-feminist ought to be re-evaluated. [25] Paglia's abrasive attacks are easily derided or ignored by establishment feminists, but Coward's declaration, 'I am no longer satisfied with a historical scenario that views women as passive victims of men's power lust', clearly bears similarities to Paglia's impatience with feminism for patronising and molycoddling young women.[26] Like Paglia, Coward rejects feminist conspiracy theories about the media: 'I find many women themselves clinging to a traditional femininity and often colluding with men in the process'. Her conclusion is identical to Paglia's stance, in content if not in rhetoric: 'There is a danger that the complexities of our relationships with men might be lost in a return to simplistic feminism. Women have to face up to their own role in their oppression and not accept easy answers'. [27]

Another feminist to review Faludi's text was Yvonne Roberts, who comes from a background of journalism rather than academia and brings a perspective which is alert to the distinctiveness of British post-feminism. Roberts shows no defensiveness at the prospect of anti-feminist critique, conceding of the men's movements in 1992, 'Some of Lyndon's points are fair ... it's daft to condemn all men as potential rapists, or deny that some women collude in their victimisation'.^[28] She does not decry post-feminism as anti-feminist, but rather shows its limitations as an attitude which can be indulged only temporarily by 'those in their twenties who have yet to encounter prejudice'. She concedes that the post-feminist mentality may indeed be sympathetic to feminism, but that it has no sense of political project or long-term vision. This article acknowledges a form of feminism which can take anti-feminist attacks in its stride and appreciate post-feminism as a phenomenon worthy of understanding rather than diatribe. It concludes with an emphasis upon justified anger, a focus which is also relished by controversial British female critics of popular culture who bear important similarities to Paglia in their self-appointed role as devil's advocate, such as Julie Burchill. Roberts writes that, 'to acknowledge that the women's movement has made mistakes does not detract from the validity of feminism's driving force: anger at women's inferior treatment and lack of economic power'. In a turn of argument that may emerge as typically post-feminist, she intimates that women can recognise their gains in such a way that enables them to thrive upon, rather than close ranks at, opposition:

'Women who seek equality with men lack ambition', runs a piece of graffiti. It would be sweet justice if, the longer the backlash runs, more and more women come to share that sentiment.

This greater optimism and lack of prohibition seem to be typical of recent British feminist attitudes of the 1990s as revealed in some journalism and popular cultural criticism. The fear that feminism has been 'taken over by mainstream culture and made into a commercial concern', or the crude argument that 'Hollywood has stolen feminist themes and perverted them to make a profit', are more likely to be seen as

symptomatic of a now-redundant 'psyche of alternative politics', in the words of Beatrix Campbell. She observes, 'If you're animated by cultural paranoia then everything is seen as a counterattack or as a backlash, when it's just that everything to do with women matters now'. Bridget Smith announces in Women: A Cultural Review, 'I enjoy looking at what is being done with feminism. I am fascinated by adverts which refer to images and ideas associated with feminism. I don't feel threatened by a film like The Accused and I don't think feminism is threatened by it. It's obvious feminism isn't disappearing'. [29] Suzanne Moore is unperturbed by Paglia's attempt to stir controversy, confidently places her in her national and political context and enjoys a good laugh. [30] In Mad About Women, Yvonne Roberts answers Faludi's Backlash and argues that the tribulations of feminism do not rob it of its continuing transformative powers, and, 'it is time feminism was less prescriptive'. [31] In a provocative article published for International Women's Day in 1993, Catherine Bennett highlighted the differences between British feminist attitudes and American high profile feminism which leads to fame and media prominence. [32] In her letter of response, Lynne Segal was incensed by Bennett's tone, 'Spot the British Feminist' and 'Is there anyone to cheer for?', and lambasts the British media for falling under the sway of the 'climate of convulsive trivialisation' promoted by American publishers. Yet she did not note that the alarmism of those theses which have brought the young American neo-feminists stardom, as well as the entrenched views which allowed Paglia to appear so outrageous, are uncharacteristic of contemporary British feminism. Consequently the outlook of women in this country is somewhat removed and they tend to cast an indulgent eye on the debate overseas. As Anna Freeman retorted: 'We aren't sheep and we don't need shepherdesses'. [33]

Moore, who writes that she has almost as psychotic a relation to feminism as she does to postmodernism, exemplifies some of the dynamic feminist strains in popular post-feminism in her collection of articles, Looking For Trouble. She may remark that 'early feminist writing was often miserable and confessional', but then turns the tables on men's studies, concluding with a demand for more space for women, from the

media to management.[34] Thus combining mild heresy against feminism with humour and practical suggestions for women's empowerment, she avoids feminist defensiveness and preciousness, and has found a successful formula for disseminating feminist ideas and theories without positing them in total opposition to contemporary culture. She recommends 'deconstructing the visual languages of masculinity', and claims that it is important to emphasise the positive as well as negative sides of market-led changes in attitudes to consuming with regard to gender: 'The idea of sexual identity as a disguise or a masquerade is a useful one -- using femininity as a masquerade, women have been able both to acknowledge and deny the constraints placed upon them' (1991, p.10).

Moore explores doubleness, in Prince's 'schizophrenia' and seductive 'perversity' (pp.18-19), and in the wit of Dolly Parton who spends money to look cheap (p.17). Sexual difference and desire are discussed through her readings of popular culture (p.20), as well as 'the possibility of an active female gaze' (p.26). She questions the feminist theory of Screen for dwelling on women as the object of the gaze and quotes Mary Anne Doane: 'In theories of repression there is no sense of the productiveness or positivity of power' (p.31). Hence she uses the rereading of certain genres by gay subculture as camp, applauding 'the wresting of subversive meanings' and ways of 'deliciously disturbing the "true" story', but then inverts Mark Finch's reading of Dynasty to argue 'that the codification of men via male discourse enables a female erotic gaze' (p.31; pp.36-7). She quotes French feminist Luce Irigaray but rejects objectification as 'the ultimate sin' and reminds women of the laughter occasioned by Playgirl and Viva (p.41). Moore complains of the 'suffocating dualism of the theory which provides little pleasure to women', shows that shifts thrown up by the market place work in contradictory ways, and reminds women of 'the fear experienced by men of women's Medusa-like stare' (pp.42,44). In 'Getting a bit of the Other: the pimps of post-modernism', Moore concurs with Jane Gallop's dissection of Baudrillard's reading of seduction as oscillation between activity and passivity,

of a Franco-American affair, which excludes British materialist feminism and is suspiciously akin to attempts to claim global relevance for postmodern strategies (p.370). 'Post-feminist feminism' is reluctant to name feminism, define it or outline a social or political context for it (p.371). Thus it lacks a conflictive element and is prone to idealist abstraction (p.372). 'Postfeminist gynesis', which is Jardine's theory of the deliberate valorisation of repressed femininity, is considered a 'brave and original move' by Moi, but she questions whether it 'might simply repeat the patriarchal exclusion of woman' and finds Jardine culpable of equating woman with otherness (p.373).

Moi's own position emerges between these criticisms. She immediately throws doubts on the credibility of Jardine's position in that a postmodern feminist or feminist postmodernist is an oxymoron if one accepts that postmodernism sees all metanarratives, including feminism, as repressive enactments of metaphysical authority (p.368). But she then asserts, 'I now hold that feminism is strictly speaking an impossible position'. She presents the equality and difference arguments as the two different and opposing stages of the feminist movement, as described by Kristeva in her essay 'Women's Time'. As a straightforward division of these two feminisms will not do, for one is a necessary effect of the other, a third space must be taken up, which is that of the deconstruction of identities and binary oppositions. However, because this means deconstructing the logic that sustains the two earlier forms of feminism which are still necessary, Moi believes that rather than adopt the third, feminists today have to hold all three positions simultaneously, despite their strategic incompatibility. This entails, she writes, living out contradictions of all three and taking sides 'agonistically' (p.369). Against Derrida, she writes that the deconstructive gestures of feminists have to be situated in specific political contexts, and her definition of 'postfeminism' is finally what she regards as the development of Kristeva's third stage. In 'its eagerness to please the high priests of poststructuralism and postmodernism', she writes, it 'takes little or no account of other forms of feminism'. Moi concludes with her belief that feminist criticism and theory may be

pushed past the 'political impasse of postfeminism' by 'attempting the impossible wager of constructing a materialist feminist theory that *includes* the three feminisms outlined in this paper'. Consequently 'postfeminism', as she understands it, should not be rejected.

The philosophical work of Judith Butler has had the greatest ramifications for an understanding of post-feminism in academia in the 1990s. In Gender Trouble she assembles texts to 'facilitate a political convergence of feminism, gay and lesbian perspectives on gender, and post-structuralist theory'.^[40] Her starting point is the danger for feminism in conforming to the requirements of representational politics, and for feminist theory in trying to settle the questions of primary identity (p.xi). In a radical theoretical discourse, she looks at the problems of essentialism, not only questioning 'woman' as the subject of feminism, but also inverting the common feminist understanding of the relation of gender to sex, for the latter 'will be shown to have been gender all along' (p.8). She writes: 'Gender ought not to be conceived merely as the cultural inscription of meaning on a pre-given sex' for 'this construct called "sex" is as culturally constructed as gender' and so gender 'is also the discursive / cultural means by which "sexed nature" or a "natural sex" is produced and established as "prediscursive", prior to culture, a politically neutral surface on which culture acts' (p.7).

'Postfeminist' is an adjective used to refer to 'this juncture of cultural politics' which calls for a reflection 'from within a feminist perspective on the injunction to construct a subject for feminism' (p.5).

Butler calls for feminist self-criticism which bears in mind that 'the effort to identify the enemy as singular in form is a reverse discourse that uncritically mimics the strategy of the oppressor instead of offering a different set of terms' and therefore she looks for a genealogy that might expose the binary options as a variable construction (p.13). From Irigaray's 'mocking citations' which debunk developmental claims of Freudianism, she approves readings that 'exceed, invert, and displace' its

stated aims (p.69). She moves to a theory of 'performative subversion' through camp and drag, and looking for 'subversive repetition within signifying practices of gender' recommends 'practices of parody' (pp.128, 146). These reveal the failure of gender enactments and the concepts of 'the original, the authentic, and the real' are seen to be constituted as effects through the 'subversive laughter of the pastiche effect' (p.146). Locating the political in 'the very signifying practices that establish, regulate and deregulate identity', Butler asserts, contrary to established feminist suspicion, that 'the deconstruction of identity is not the deconstruction of politics' (pp.147,148).

Unlike Moi, who has accepted, albeit with reservations, the necessary impulse of academic post-feminist speculation and the investigation of new conceptual models, Tania Modleski, in Feminism Without Women, focuses upon its 'conservative effects'; [41] Butler's idea of repetition which is not consolidation but displacement is interpreted both as asserting too much ('that the female parodist ends up outside the law after all') and being 'merely a philosophical concern' (p.158). Modleski sees anti-essentialists such as Butler and Donna Haraway as charging essentialist feminists with ethnocentrism or colonialism for the 'theoretical purpose of dissuading feminists from claiming commonalities across class and racial lines' (pp.17,18). The contexts of Modleski's book are the rise of gender studies (which she is concerned may constitute a 'phase out' of feminist studies) and the debate on female essentialism. She is concerned with the appropriation of feminism by male critics and wary that those who proclaim the advent of post-feminism are engaged in negating the critiques of feminism. She elides the two to the extent that radical feminist anti-essentialism which disallows the term 'woman' is seen as on a par with 'the triumph of a male feminist perspective that excludes women' (pp.14-15). Post-feminism appears as a Trojan horse which appears to expand the feminist debate but in fact allows male critics to enter and take over feminism. Feminist theories which attempt to account for women's enjoyment of popular culture are dismissed as a reaction against the politicised culture criticism of the 1970s and early 80s and seen to amount to a complacency over feminist achievements (p.ix). Modleski's pessimism regarding the

incorporation by men of the threat of female power results in a defensiveness which too readily condemns alternative models that may come of appropriations and rereadings by women (p.7). Her conclusion is that 'postfeminist play' or experimentation too easily leads us 'back to our pregendered past where there was only the universal subject -- man' (p.163).

While the driving force which keeps post-feminism alive in theoretical debates is the search for new models for feminist analysis, it is hampered by the need to meet the dual demands of theoretical consistency within the terms of poststructuralism and the wider feminist political project. The nervousness over whether post-feminism means anti-feminism (Jardine) or a premature move beyond feminism (Modleski) may be subsumed into an abstract theoretical stance such as that of Butler, but I have found it productive to look at its articulations in discourses which do not require resolution. Women's popular literature may even offer another version of the above debate. If women's writing which addresses feminist issues is seen to adopt comparable rhetorical and strategic models to those elaborated in theory (of intrusion, inversion, inscription, appropriation, performance, repetition and displacement), could one argue for congruences between the three stages of feminism which Moi borrows from Kristeva, instead of total incompatibility?

Feminism, Post-feminism and Otherness

The concept of 'otherness' in the 1980s had far-reaching consequences for cultural and political theory which may be aligned with trends in British post-feminism. In the debate on postmodernity, otherness forms part of the attack upon universalising presumptions and the critique of master narratives in its privileging of 'heterogeneity and difference as liberative forces in the redefinition of cultural discourse'. [42] For post-Marxism it meant an engagement with multiple perspectivism, a recognition of multiple sources of oppression in society and therefore also of various foci of resistance to domination, no longer positing a homogenous working class as

the single agent of revolutionary change. While post-feminism's free-market pluralism would seem to predispose it to a multiple perspectivism, the WLM may be seen as repressive of otherness simply through its own assertion as a movement. The initial need to subsume heterogeneous social, sexual and political struggles under the name of one political project leads feminism to present its own otherness as unified. The claim that women's oppression is the fundamental oppression, although strategic, is nevertheless politically suspect. Even naming and categorising must be carried out with caution as they are instruments of power and can obscure complexities. As Sheila Rowbotham writes, 'Once named, historical situations and groups of people can be shuffled and shifted into neat piles, the unnamed cards are simply left out of the game'. [43] The privileging of consciousness in the WLM's practice of consciousness-raising is readily objected to as transcendentalism, and the implied aim of reaching the 'right' consciousness suggests imperativism and absolutism.

However, despite both post-modernists' and some French theoretical feminists' criticism of Anglo-American feminisms for empiricism, the latter's emphasis on experience had soon led to a confrontation with otherness and not an avoidance of it. The Women's Movement is both sadly but also healthily riddled with splits. It was perhaps most vociferously challenged by lesbian feminists when arguments for separatism developed into the notion that women who continued to have sexual and emotional relationships with men were colluding with the enemy. The concept of political lesbianism took root in the 1970s and the slogan 'feminism is the theory: lesbianism is the practice' was coined. [44] For black women too a predominantly white and middle-class movement had to be challenged and stretched. There arose the acknowledgement of double oppression for black women, on the basis of gender but also of colour. Barbara Smith described the 'brutally complex systems of oppression' which shape black women's existence, experience and culture, and she states: 'It is galling that ostensible feminists and acknowledged lesbians have been so blinded to the implications of any womanhood that is not white womanhood'. [45] What was required was not a passing nod in the direction of black women; the fact that mere

acknowledgement of their existence was absent from most feminist debate shows how crucial the issues were. Nor was sympathy any better. Joan Riley wrote:

I have listened to white women talking about the suffering of blacks, about how they try to feel the feelings, how dreadful it must be ... I don't want to be labelled any kind of victim, let alone a double victim ... I feel patronised when white women who are not the same and never will be the same act like they want to suffer on my behalf. [46]

Separatism became an issue within the WLM, one example being the turning of some black women to 'womanism'. Indeed, much of the academic debate on the 'other' continued in the 1980s in work on colonialism, neo-colonialism and subaltern studies (as in the writings of Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha, and the journal Third Text). Another poignant instance of the continuing experience of otherness and need for separatism comes from the Working Class Women's Voice in the Eighties:

We, personally, have told middle-class women and their movement what they have done to exclude us. We didn't benefit from that; they or the Movement didn't change ... We're just seen as 'interesting' ... Working Class Women's Voice is for working-class women to come together as one, rather than being isolated with their experience of different forms of oppression. It is a place where they don't have to look for praise and appreciation from the middle-class. [47]

To try to list more of the 'others' in, of and around the women's movement in the last decade would be to risk portraying the issue as one of equal claims to a slice of

the feminist cake and reducing the differences between them. It should be emphasised that these are matters of different social and historical contexts, specific terms of reference (and therefore different identities), distinct strategies for proceeding and therefore different potential solutions. But it goes to show that otherness is not really the property of the postmodernist debate, nor exclusively that of the French feminists. British feminists did not need postmodern theorists to tell them that there were other dissenting voices with strong and valid, as well as revolutionary claims. As Sheila Rowbotham wrote: 'It is clear from the feminist experience that ideas can have different meanings for different groups even within the same movement'. [48]

The attraction for post-feminist thinking lies in the theoretical models and speculative strategies offered by this debate. In the existentialist terms of Sartre and de Beauvoir, the Other is those *who, or that which, have / has been excluded from subjecthood*. Burchill's Ambition shows the post-feminist woman achieving subjecthood on these terms by defying the male reifying gaze. Tobias Pope, the text's symbolic patriarch and arch capitalist, reflects: 'He put her into situations which would have curdled the blood of any normal white woman and she didn't just endure them to please him, and the others did; she *took* the situation away from him and turned it towards her own pleasure. He had never known that before' (p.319). By bringing her own desires to bear on the sexual tasks he sets her and refusing to see herself through his eyes as an object, Street experiences sexual pleasure on her own terms (frequently) which readjusts the novels familiar pornographic scenarios usually premised upon the construction of woman to be acted upon, or performer for male voyeuristic pleasure. This model of defiance, the refusal to be fixed by men's definitions or reified by the male gaze, followed by appropriation, will be examined as a common theme to be further developed in post-feminism.

However, in resisting being constructed as other, post-feminist strategies may be culpable of appropriating the other, not only the male gaze or masculine structures of pleasure. One might imagine that the 'free-market' and 'smash and grab' strains of media post-feminism would, in their individualism and subjectivism, be too concerned

with personal triumphs of the self to be interested in outside othernesses (pp.342, 142). So it is interesting that *Ambition* features both lesbianism and an awareness of racism. The latter is used to serve the novel's defence of materialism, when a comparison of the women's struggle with that of black liberation is used: 'Try saying *blacks* instead of *women*. Try telling blacks they shouldn't go after material success because, oh, I've been there and it's all so empty and meaningless! You see how phony that sounds? It's called *keeping the niggers down*' (p.216). The space given to other underprivileged groups such as people of colour in Sun City, Rio and Bangkok, as well as male homosexuals, however, works in the novel to make the 1980s career woman seem more powerful by her differentiation from them. Burchill embraces a pluralist stance to obscure otherness in the characterisation of Zero, the heroine's lesbian sidekick. By making Zero as ruthless and vulgar as Street, Burchill closes down any potential voice for dissent, yet once the grounds for confrontation are erased, Zero's difference re-emerges to her disadvantage, for she is presented as prisoner of her sexuality. Street has ambition, but Zero only wants girls.

A further model for post-feminism was elaborated theoretically by Luce Irigaray who, recalling the work of Giles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, moved from the idea of the other as constructed by opposition, to an alternately absent and present plurality which is an otherness within:

Thus woman does not have a sex. She has at least two of them ... Her sexuality, always at least double, is in fact *plural* ... 'She' is indefinitely other in herself ... one must listen to her differently in order to hear an 'other meaning' which is constantly in the process of weaving itself, at the same time ceaselessly embracing words and yet casting them off in order to avoid becoming fixed, immobilised ... Woman would always remain multiple, but she would be protected from dispersion because the other is part of her ... That does not mean she would appropriate the other for herself ... Woman enjoys a closeness with the other that is so near that she cannot possess it, anymore than she can possess herself. She constantly

trades herself for the other without any possible identification for either one of them. [49]

This appears to correspond to a doubleness inherent in post-feminism, a theme which I will return to in my chapters. It is beyond feminism although feminism is part of it, and strategically post-feminists need to have it both ways.

As the post-feminist stance is suspect for disposing of the other, it may also be questioned for incorporating pluralism merely to enable post-feminists to have their cake and eat it. Yet, by the same token, post-feminism is not required to be theoretically consistent. Because post-feminism is not a grounded politics nor answerable to a social movement, it was not disturbed by the feminist objections to postmodernism which grew in the 1980s, namely, as Nancy F. Cott wrote: '[In] deconstructing categories of meaning, we deconstruct not only patriarchal definitions of "womanhood" and "truth" but also the very categories of our own analysis -- "women" and "feminism" and "oppression"'. [50] Nancy Hartsock suggested that 'the postmodern view that truth and knowledge are contingent and multiple and may be seen to act as a truth claim itself, a claim that undermines the ontological status of the subject at the very time when women and non-Western peoples have begun to claim themselves as subject'. [51] And Sarah Lennox had neatly exposed the lurking arrogance of the postmodern position with the perception that 'when Western white males -- who traditionally have controlled the production of knowledge -- can no longer define the truth ... their response is to conclude there is no truth to be discovered. [52]

As Jane Flax suggested, feminism's destiny lies with 'those who seek to further decentre the world' yet, despite undeniable links between various aspects of feminist and postmodernist theory, postmodernism, like post-feminism, has not been a friend to feminism. [53] As Craig Owens observed, the issue of sexual difference was notably absent from the modernism / postmodernism debate. [54] By the end of the 1980s, many feminist critics had argued that its suspicious silence about feminism shows how far it falls short of a genuine commitment to the politics of the other.

When applied to fields of study, its approach has often been exclusive or subtly colonialist, working at reappropriation or reterritorialisation. Alice Jardine wrote that the turn to the female Other in postmodern philosophy and art 'has involved, above all, a reincorporation and reconceptualisation of that which has been the masternarratives' own "non-knowledge", what has eluded them" (1985, p.59). And, as Steven Connor pointed out, despite the alleged potencies of the marginal position, it appears that the forces of marginalisation reappear even in post-modern theory' (1989, p.230). Thus, the exclusion of feminism by postmodernist thought is important for anticipating a similar move on the part of post-feminism.

Post-feminism and Style

Post-feminism appears to mimic the French feminist theoretical models in order to evade feminist politics. Post-feminists no longer wish to be identified reductively with the (patriarchal) packaging of feminism, which is accepted rather than contested, for post-feminism lacks an inherent opposition to male culture and male-dominated institutions. As an outlook, it seems to succumb to postmodernist appropriations. Neustatter found that the 'PFW is a construct which is designed to satisfy the yearning of men for a woman who does not appear to be in opposition to them. If she will look good, act sexy, be on their side, then she can go out and be successful at work and drive a flash car' (1990, p.233). Parting here with the terminologies of the academic debate, one clearly has to engage with the popular translation of these issues. As a media construction, post-feminism is fast and fluid, not agonised and thorough like feminism. Like postmodernism which entered the vocabulary of popular magazines at the same time (later becoming the "P" word' [55]), it functions on the level of style in the world of capital, advertising, the city, youth and the popularisation of subcultures. Harvey's list of the schematic differences between modernism and postmodernism provides the following buzzwords for popular postmodernism:

instantaneity, events, spectacles, happenings, image

commodification, commercialisation
 systems, discourse
 play, chance, anarchy, fragmentation
 deconstruction, absence, silence
 style, surface, signifier, rhetoric
 the body, difference, desire, gender, androgyny [56]

They appear not as part of a debated and structured theory, but as indicators and stimulators, and the post-feminism of the 1980s is crucially situated in the media world, in this economy.

A recent example would be Ruth Picardie's playful post-feminist list which measures post-feminism against feminism and reduces the latter to the style politics of the former. Picardie opposes 'bitches' (the post-feminists) to feminists:

	<i>Bitches</i>	<i>Feminists</i>
<i>wear</i>	DMs and lycra	Dungarees
<i>drink</i>	Like a fish	Tea
<i>listen to</i>	KLF	kd Lang
<i>talk</i>	Sexual politics	Oppression
<i>support</i>	Arsenal / Celtic	Greenham Common
<i>believe in</i>	Safer sex	No sex
<i>worship</i>	Madonna	Sylvia Plath
<i>fantasise about</i>	Keanu Reeves and Tom Jones	Steven Berkoff
<i>cry during</i>	<u>thirtysomething</u>	Therapy
<i>hair</i>	Dressed	Short
<i>watch</i>	<u>Baywatch</u> and <u>The Match</u>	<u>Prisoner Cell Block H</u>
<i>read</i>	<u>Viz</u>	<u>Spare Rib</u>
<i>wear</i>	Gossard wonder bras	Badges
<i>worry about</i>	Spots	PMT
<i>travel by</i>	Taxi	Bike

[57]

Thus, we also find in Burchill's Ambition an apt focus on changing surfaces. Typifying popular culture of this decade, from The Face magazine, to the idea of designer mugging for a pair of Nike trainers, one can compare this with postmodernism's break from modernism in privileging the signifier over the signified. The tendency in French feminisms to focus on woman as sign, instead of women as human subjects may be read as a correlative to post-feminism's making womanhood seem passé and femininity an issue solely of style. Burchill drops brand names throughout her novel as an obstructive ploy. Suggesting that in the post-feminist world you are what you wear, she plays with the significance of dress as a total experience in Zero's quip that 'a girl who is tired of the little black dress is tired of life' (p.265). Rates and modes of consumption point to a character's essence; there is the cliché of the designer dress which is worn once and then set aflame in drunken celebrations of excess and Zero goes through so many girls that there are queues of beauties lining up for her outside her office in tears. Oddly enough, the heroine often wears the same Alaïa dress, but this is not resistance to the dynamic of consumption but the apathy that confirms it. Her ability to consume and discern the value of different products gives her the confidence to repeat; the post-feminist woman is so fast and so new that she is static.

In Neustatter's characterisation, the post-feminist woman does not feel hampered as a woman but remains impeccably feminine. But it is not so much a question of women's remaining feminine in the 1980s as being able to pick a style for their moods. The 'New Man' who recognises his 'feminine side' suggests that femininity is clearly no longer the form for the content 'woman'. At the same time, femininity, or femme, as style appeared increasingly in feminist journals and popular magazines in discussions about lesbianism. In the latter, 'designer dykes' were a new focus of voyeuristic interest and myth, whereas the former were engaged with 'challenging the low profile of sexuality within lesbianism' and the 'style wars' between S / M lesbians and revolutionary feminists.[58] In early 1990, Inge Blackman and Katheryn Perry

analyse the 'lipstick lesbians' who adopted 'Riviera chic' and for whom 'culture rather than nature underlies this high fashion urban look':

'lipstick' lesbians with feminist leanings argue that the feminine has been engaged with on new terms, that there is a subtle but crucial distinction between a femininity that is imposed on women and one that is controlled by women who possess the confidence to subvert it. Twinning short skirts with Doctor Martens or lacy underwear with men's trousers, offers a different reading of femininity. (p.67)

Burchill has used such arguments in her characterisation of Zero as 'designer dyke' who proudly proclaims, 'I'm hardly the belle of the Radical-Feminist-Lesbian-Separatist ball, with my satin and tat and wicked ways', but who is all confidence and subversiveness. Her stylishness is not just fashion but part of a female culture of artifice. In an unusually astute summary of post-feminist strategy, which stands out amongst the novel's 'call-a-whore-a-whore' rhetoric, she claims:

I'm not a career girl. I'm a congenital genius. If I were a career girl ... I would work on a Protean basis -- I would recreate myself constantly. I'd be a bitch in the boardroom and a slave in the sack. I'd be what I had to be until I could be what I want. We're lucky: we're women. We can recreate ourselves in a way men can't because artifice doesn't come second nature to them in childhood as it does to us. (p.58)

Blackman and Perry presented a similar picture: 'Today's lesbian "self" is a thoroughly urban creature who interprets fashion as something to be worn and discarded. Nothing is sacred for very long. Constantly changing, she dabbles in fashion, constructing one self after another, expressing her desires in a continual process of experimentation' (p.69). Yet they asked whether such a proliferation of styles is 'a symptom of political disengagement' and note that 'to a beleaguered left, difference and diversity often appear no more than hedonistic frivolity'. While the 'politics of identity' was something that the New Left tried to incorporate in their politics of the 1980s, going beyond the old language of collectivism and tapping

popular desires for choice and individuality, feminists were again wary of appropriation. McRobbie voiced unease at the way 'identity politics' seemed to substitute for feminist issues in Stuart Hall's and Martin Jacques' New Times in such a way that feminism was acknowledged but was an absent presence. [59] The implication was again that multiple difference could mean silence. Blackman and Perry also finally rejected postmodernism's style seduction, suggesting that it was an adjunct to the political attack on lesbian and gay sexuality. They remark, 'Certainly it is ironic that the freedom to dress up has occurred under Thatcherism, which has curtailed our lives under section 28 ...', and that it reflected the dispersal of feminism and heralded its disappearance:

How do we assess that fluidity politically? Now that political lesbianism no longer calls the shots within feminism and the concept of a unified sisterhood has all but disappeared, it is conceivable that feminism is fading and that a 'post-feminist' state is evolving. (p.77)

However, the post-feminism of British popular culture may resist postmodernist relativism. For example, the materialist focus of Ambition underlines that style is dependent upon purchasing power and is not a liberal aesthetics available to all. In this novel 'femininity' and identity are not about gender construction but what are available on the market. Burchill's post-feminism adopts some of the rhetoric of radical feminism and brutally applies it across the board; Street has the word 'sold' tattooed across her forehead but the conclusion is that everybody is a prostitute, and the post-feminist woman comes out on top because she uses the fact that she has more to sell. At the same time, sex and power are central to the book's ethos: 'lust is just love with the gloves off' and 'sex is the biggest threat to everything. It's brought down governments and empires' (p.192). She objects to what she presents as men's compartmentalisation of sex and love, and the belief that 'sex *could* be safe'. In Burchill's post-feminist formula, the choice is between 'bootstrap feminism' and 'sackcloth and ashes feminism'. Her protagonist is clearly dissatisfied with developments in sexual practice seen to derive from feminism which emphasise

female sexual pleasure to the exclusion of emotions and practices such as rage, possessiveness, dominance and submission, which reflect more clearly, and satisfyingly, the condition of warfare between the sexes: 'Colluding with the enemy' is 'pretty much par for the course in wartime' ... 'it's a guerrilla war, and that's why life seems to be going on more or less as usual' (p.342).

The astute post-feminist woman does not delude herself that she can escape reification, as the back cover of *Ambition* announces: 'Strong, hard career girls -- they're the new filet mignon of female. They're the new frontier', but the challenge is to play men at their own game. Street's partner, the 'new man' is significantly blond while she is a brunette; 'handsome, sensitive and successful', he is introduced reading a Virago paperback. 'Fair in both temperament and colouring, a basic blond dreamboat to be eaten up with the eyes and toyed with by the other senses' (p.38), he is soon identified with domesticity, responsibility for the relationship, vague moralistic and socialist concerns, and is consequently characterised by the career woman as a 'big girl' or 'girlie' (p.170). Dismissing men on the terms that men dismiss women, Street also has fun essentialising 'man', his indelible characteristic being a helpless addiction to sex: 'If she ever made it up the Amazon and found a tribe totally untouched by both white man and Playboy, she just knew that once you got down to it they too would love blow jobs, high heels and Janet Reger teddies' (p.12). Rather than focusing on the elimination of debasing or fetishising images of women, a post-feminist culture intimates a balance, where men may also be exploited and subordinated and, by extension, 'the gaze' may also be female.

Ambition showed post-feminism discarding the myth of female passivity. In so doing it borrowed from a variety of discourses, arguments and political stances indiscriminately. Some feminist critics have condemned French feminist writings for erasing the ground for political action. [60] Yet because they are speculative and not prescriptive, I would rather claim that they challenge this ground with the possibility of widening it. By the same token, it is worthwhile retaining some features of the emerging post-feminism as articulated in Burchill's novel to test them in different

contexts, instead of rushing to condemn. The 1980s saw a widespread concern with redefinitions of feminism, and feminists dismiss this as backtracking at their peril. Here the existential formulations in theory retain their relevance through the distinction between being and becoming. Pratibha Parmar found that the paralysis in the women's movement and the black movement was the result of 'a refusal to acknowledge the need to move away from modes of being to modes of doing'. [61] Post-feminist impatience may have some validity in that feminism's advancement may entail starting again on some levels. June Jordan highlights the need to move away from the stalemate of ever-increasingly complex analyses in her statement: 'The first part of the political process is to recognise that there is a political problem and then to find people who agree with you. But the last part of the political process which is to get rid of it is necessary and something which too many of us forget. I am not interested in struggle, I am interested in victory'. [62]

In an ongoing movement such as the Women's Liberation Movement which spans decades and generations, there may be times when women need to envisage victory, whether piecemeal, double-edged, strategic or imagined. Definition through a permanent sense of struggle can be disabling. In her introduction to Making for the Open: An Anthology of Post-Feminist Poetry (1988), Carol Rumens identifies the problems posed by adopting a project which is always linked to opposition and resistance. To illuminate the dilemma of women writers, she uses Mario Vargas Llosa's essay, 'The Writer in Latin America' which shows how the writer may be crippled by the demand to work against the establishment. For her, "'post-feminist" expresses a psychological rather than political condition, although its roots are no doubt political. It expresses a mental freedom'. [63] In the same way that media post-feminism of the 1980s was a motivated and motivating fantasy (Zero tells Street that, as a powerful and defiant woman in a man's world, she is 'in the inspiration business'), for Rumens, post-feminism is about experimentation. Ultimately, post-feminism has progressive strands, in the aim of empowerment for all women, which relate it closely to feminism and feminist theoretical debates, while it readjusts these to meet the needs and fantasies of the

times. It may answer the need of many women, in Campbell's words, 'to displace yourself from something you are partly attracted to, partly repelled by'. While there was a call for a redefinition of feminism, as well as a wholesale rejection of the term by some women and yet no new term was adopted, it seemed at the end of the last decade that, like the many political and artistic movements in the past which were named for posterity by their antagonists, 'post-feminism' might be here to stay and should be recognised by feminists as a force to be reckoned with.

The Chapters

Popular culture of the 1980s offers a variety of locations which exemplify the growing phenomenon of post-feminism. Popular music by and for young women remains a pervasive influence and the career of Madonna, from her rise to fame in Britain in the early 1980s which has received much attention in cultural studies, provides a valuable correlative,[64] Women's fashion is closely implicated, as well as the changing uses of 'style' as a concept denoting attitude (for example 'in your face' post-feminism) and irony. The post-feminist is typified as the yuppie female executive who dresses sharply with dominatrix undercurrents but, as I have discussed, dressing up and disguise, wearing underwear as outerwear, mixing butch and femme, were all features of the post-feminist Eighties. Codes of 1970s punk aggression have been noted for investing stereotypical femininity with a perturbing doubleness: 'Punk fashion was especially good at injecting a kind of violent aura into femme chic that made it trashy and threatening instead of submissive and vulnerable to wear a skirt!' [65] In politics, a study of right-wing and anti-feminist women provides another opening into the topic of post-feminism. Margaret Thatcher is a post-feminist icon who casts her shadow over the decade as surely as Madonna, and is of particular significance for the emphases of post-feminism in Britain as distinct from the more general backlash in the United States. Female protagonists in Hollywood box office films and popular television series provide a valuable measuring stick against which to gauge post-

feminist developments, as do women's roles in soap operas, advertising campaigns and as presenters of television shows. [66] These provide the cultural backdrop against which I read the literature I have selected and the three topics I have chosen to illuminate the post-feminist debate -- self-help psychotherapy, sex and crime -- featuring in them to different degrees.

Romantic fiction is still one of the most popular forms of women's literature, as well as one of the most scorned. While I chose not to focus on the romance, as it is less pertinent to post-feminism than the topics selected, and also because there were many existing feminist studies of this genre, it must remain a subtext to any analysis of women's popular literature. I decided to take up some emphases suggested by feminist analysis in explorations of this (for example, revenge), and both bear these in mind when reading other female fictional genres as well as observe generic mixtures and elements of the romance in related non-fictional forms. [67] Thus self-help texts, discussed in chapter one, address a stereotypical problem of romance (women loving men too much) and also use a romantic structure, of the idealised mother, to create narrative closure and emotional satisfaction. Romantic fiction coincides with post-feminist emphases largely in the sexual undercurrents which post-feminism brings to the fore. Therefore in the second chapter, I selected novels which moved from romantic adventure to redefining sex in female fictional narratives, engaging with pornography and fantasy fiction, experimenting with conventions (and again mixing formulae). In the third chapter I examine a genre, detective / crime writing, which was as well established as the romance, but until the 1980s, when it was invigorated by new female authors, had been less associated with a female readership. I consider women's ability to incorporate the romance as well as reject it in this genre, and discuss crime fiction's particular congruence with post-feminist models and strategies, as discovered and elaborated in the earlier chapters.

The two other areas of women's fictional writing which deserve a mention at this juncture are science fiction or fantasy and horror. These might also prove fruitful in a discussion on post-feminism. However, they are not developed as separate entities in

my research because women's science fiction did not make such a really significant breakthrough in the last decade. Anne Rice, author of The Vampire Chronicles, is the only prominent writer in the horror genre which, in women's writing, tends to shade into crime and suspense fiction, and fantasy may often blend with sex, or erotic, fiction. However, recent years have seen a greater interest on the part of women in true crime, and horror may be a new avenue for women's writing to develop and find a niche, following post-feminist emphases. Angela Carter, whose work is illustrative of many of the positive and feminist emphases that I find in post-feminism, is one of the few British authors to embrace fantasy and horror (for example, in her collection of short stories, The Bloody Chamber); examples of her writing are considered in the chapter on sex writing as well as crime.

It is because post-feminism appeared to be characterised by female individualism as well as concerned to repress any acknowledgement of women's oppression that women's self-help and popular therapy literature in the last decade were selected as the first topic for discussion. Its emphasis upon self-determination for women with an apparent tendency to subsume the political into the personal raised problems for feminism which were typical of post-feminist attitudes, while, from a post-feminist point of view, its appeal to women as victims aligned it with feminism. As best-selling literature which reached a wide market of female consumers, it provided a valuable illustration of the need to find a new language which could carry some feminist themes without incurring post-feminist dismissal. At the same time, like the romance, it was a female genre which was much disparaged, assumed to be uniform in catering for narrow interests in a form whose fixed conventions allowed for little flexibility and led to facile and overdetermined conclusions. However, reading further, I found that the variety of texts available belied the stereotype and I deliberately selected books which illustrated the different articulations permitted by women's popular therapy in the last decade.

The first chapter will consider the issue of control in therapy and to what extent it feeds into these books, as this is so often the focus underlying cultural studies: that is,

how are the public being manipulated, to what effect, by what or whom? I attempt to show how it has been possible to evolve a sensitive reading of cultural influence in some of these texts. The blatant commercialism of self-help manuals, seen in their marketing and self-advertisement, can obscure the complex debates which inform them. They are not merely a self-contained genre but are influenced by the history of radical criticism, particularly socialist and feminist, of the disciplines of psychotherapy. Without looking at some of the ideas within these, one can too easily emerge with conclusions which fall into line with a defensive and dismissive stance evident in some popular cultural studies. I use an example from feminist criticism of problem pages (a form which until now has received more feminist commentary in Britain than the self-help guide) and suggest that a perspective borrowed from feminist therapy may allow critics to re-evaluate this literature, and perhaps other female popular culture, in the light of women's needs for mothering.

In this chapter I experiment with reading statements from the texts which highlight contradictions in the discourses of self-help and psychotherapy to show how unlikely it is that these texts should produce a uniform reader response or reproduce a supposed common sense. Readers are not, as Angela McRobbie emphasises, 'simple-minded multitudes. As the media extends its sphere of influence, so also does it come under the critical surveillance of its subjects' [68] I look at some different interpretations from women to question how a concern with the living subjects to whom these texts are addressed may allow for a meta-critics which is repressed when a particular critical school of thought is followed. Self-help books are appropriate as a starting point from which to study popular culture because their inevitable relation to psychoanalysis immediately raises the question of critical perspective and interpretation. They represent and simulate 'therapy' as a changing concept and practice, as well as develop a formula, part of which has much in common with literary fiction. Having moved the debate from the couch to literary exposition through the case study, they may even be regarded as at a crossroads between non-fiction and popular fiction. This can be illustrated by popular cultural analysis of

closely-related genres. For example, Rosalind Coward writes that while the problem page is 'not quite a novel with the possibilities novels have for tracing minute reactions', the 'spectacle' of the problem page is 'for the general magazine reader a distinct sub-genre of sexual fiction'. [69]

Thus self-help manuals may mark a contiguity between therapeutic and political practice and imaginative literary exposition. Not only does their focus on women encourage a consideration of changing ideas around social subordination and cultural oppression which are of importance to post-feminism, but the similarities between self-help literature and other cultural forms and sub-genres (from the problem page, the radio phone-in, to the romance and sexual fiction) raise formal questions about the needs and effects of narrativisation. According to Stephen Heath, this process, 'the constant narration of social relations of individuals' is part of 'a much wider work of social representation'. As McRobbie explains, 'the individual learns his or her individuality precisely through this ceaseless telling and re-telling of personal failings and anxieties and dilemmas cast in the form of a series of never-ending stories ... The reader learns through seeing the story in print what to expect, how to feel and what sense to make of his or her own similar dilemmas'. [70] This leads most importantly to the question of ordering and interpretation within the form and its contexts. In many ways these books are both 'narratives' of women's lives in the 1980s and the literary criticism of these narratives.

McRobbie believes that 'it is in the problem page that we find, in the 80s, the strongest definitions of teenage femininity', and that, 'it is here, rather than in the realm of romance that female identity is given shape' (1991, p.165). I argue that, for adult women, while the problem page serves an immediate desire for a certain kind of information and consensus, as well as a strong sense of two-way dialogue, it has only a limited capacity to develop and create arguments. Given the fragmented and shortened form of this sub-genre, it lacks the important component of a fuller narrativisation that is offered by the self-help (or problem) manuals. It is from these that I believe we can begin to learn much about prevalent definitions of femininity in

the 1980s as well as note a wide popular access to interpretative possibilities within a debate that involves crucially the politics of feminism and post-feminism.

In the second chapter, I extend the above approach to an examination of discourses of women's sexuality in both fictional and non-fictional literature of the post-feminist period. One of the problems with feminism as popularly perceived is its puritanism on the subjects of sex and pleasure. Cherry Smith writes:

Porn can be both progressive and reactionary, oppressive and liberating and it is naive simply to welcome or denounce its representations. Debates in Britain have tended to pivot on the oppressive nature of power without often recognising the possibility of women's pleasure ... Many radical feminists have striven to protect us from its corrupting force ... Just as it has been taboo for women to express an interest in sex and sexual satisfaction, so feminism has prescribed further taboos declaring politically correct ways of having sex and seeking arousal. [71]

Modleski declares in *Feminism Without Women*, 'If ever there was a quintessential post-feminist issue, pornography is it' (1991, p.135), yet I argue that the pornography debate is only one arena of many which inform a post-feminist stance on women and sex. A new commodification of sex for women is evident from the late 1980s, when sex surveys proliferated in magazines and anthologies of sex fiction by women appeared on the market, and I consider the ways in which it is processed through and addressed by contemporary women's literature. With an eye to changing definitions of sex and the erotic, I examine sexology, the concern with sexual violence in pornography as well as writings on sexual fantasy and women's fiction. Reading such discourses against each other, and situating them in their historical and political contexts, I hope to identify emphases which are typical of post-feminist attitudes and build up a picture of what may be considered post-feminist strategies.

Thus, this chapter focuses heavily on post-feminism and contiguities it may have with different feminisms, revolutionary, radical, and libertarian. The central point of reference here is my analysis of selected essays by Julie Burchill and Camille Paglia

on the subject of sex. In categorising those critics of feminism who deserve, for the purposes of my argument, to be defined as post-feminist, I have deliberately excluded male critics of feminism such as Neil Lyndon [72]. Although he and others who have much in common with the men's movement make pertinent points which lend themselves to an analysis of post-feminism, their general arguments form an agenda which take one into different territory. Rather than study them at length, I have concentrated on controversial women's voices which criticise feminism from a perspective which nevertheless prioritises what is understood to be 'women's interests'. It is valuable to note here that, just as the charge of anti-feminist has been made by certain feminists to the notion of post-feminism (often a knee-jerk reaction, when the phenomenon had not been adequately theorised or agreed upon), those whom I would consider to be post-feminist figures have also been labelled as anti-feminists, or as opportunists who have made their careers out of exploiting the media backlash against feminism. Despite this, these women may either call themselves feminists or, at the very least, express admiration for feminism (Paglia, 1993, p.56; Burchill, 1992, p.49).

Greater subtleties in post-feminism emerge from my reading and are found to derive their coherence from the attention post-feminists pay to gaps or silences in feminism. I then examine to what extent these ways of seeing and similar emphases overlap with those in women's literature about sex. The inscription of female subjectivity and the means by which post-feminism represses or reveals women's oppression are explored through fictional narratives. Maintaining my concern with postmodernity and poststructuralism, I consider the ways in which postmodern fiction by women which engages with pornography anticipates post-feminist strategies. Post-feminist models of reversal and doubleness (having it both ways) appear to echo earlier experiments with deconstruction within a libertarian ethos. This leads to a concern with anger and humour in contemporary women's sex fiction of which I study a few examples to see how the sexual arena may be redefined through post-feminist fantasies of female empowerment.

The final chapter takes further the issue of inscribing female subjectivity and the complexities of balancing the construction of women as victims with narratives of female empowerment. I chose to examine the relationship between women and criminality through true crime literature as well as women's crime fiction because it raised the issue of women as victims in tension with female appropriations of masculine genres. Through the notion of boundaries and norms, legal, social and generic, the texts selected provided a rich context for an examination of the concept of femininity as potentially threatening deviation from a masculine norm. I intend to highlight dualities in the construction of power in such a way as to show how feminist theory which contradicts essentialism bears similarities with post-feminist emphases in popular culture. I read contemporary female-authored crime fiction against male-authored crime non-fiction to question the status and usage of fiction, and how unquestioned notions about objectivity reinforce unquestioned notions about gender.

Female aggression and its representation have become increasingly prominent as post-feminist concerns and the topicality of this issue was confirmed by the problems which arose when in 1993 Michael Winner adapted for film Helen Zahavi's revenge novel *Dirty Weekend*. As Lucy Johnston and Linda Van de Wall write, the feminist principle was turned on its head to the extent that the leading actress regretted having starred in what looked to her like a pornographic translation of the script. They note that this incident 'highlighted a taboo prevalent in society: real women and real violence don't go together'. [73] The chapter examines narrative constructions of such a taboo; my reading shifts between the 'true crime' genre, feminist discussions of real crimes and crime fiction to examine available strategies for foregrounding the constructedness of a narrative in non-fiction and fiction. Intertextual and deconstructive readings as studied in the two previous chapters are seen to have been adopted in two examples of women's writing which grapples with real crime, where they are valuable for questioning subjecthood and identity. The strategies of appropriation and inversion which they employ are considered as post-feminist, and these are developed in further directions in my discussion of women's incursions into

the genres of detective and crime fiction. I consider the use of wit and role-play to destabilise hierarchies of gender and genre, and ask whether reinscription of the genre's conventions, such as the pseudonym, by women may provide an apt tool for questioning the ways in which identities are fixed at the same time as providing a protective disguise or mask.

The three chapters address feminism in different situations: as commercially appropriated in the post-feminist decade through the literature of self-help, as sharing affinities with post-feminism in new literature on sex, and as taking on some post-feminist features as a means to empowerment. To quote Beatrix Campbell once again:

[S]ome Hollywood movies or magazines like *Cosmopolitan* do engage with feminism. They may not be women's movement expressions of feminism but they're in dialogue with it. In this way feminism is a kind of magnet that engages the mainstream and that's amazing because it means it's part of the majority conversation. Not to appreciate that is just an expression of profound insecurity. The fear is that somehow this fragile flower will be stolen or trampled on. (1990, p.8)

Through a consideration of the dialogue of women's popular literature with feminism, this thesis traces the survival of feminism in the last decade. The last two years have seen feminism become an even greater part of the majority conversation. Popular post-feminism is certainly not a women's movement expression of feminism, but will be examined to show how it may have facilitated feminism's engagement with the mainstream and the furtherance of feminisms into the 1990s.

Notes

1. Beatrix Campbell and Bridget Smith, 'Two Generations: A Dialogue', 'Feminisms Now', Women: A Cultural Review, 1:1 (1990), p.8.
2. Mail on Sunday, 8.5.1988. See Angela Neustatter, Hyenas in Petticoats: A Look at Twenty Years of Feminism (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 151.
3. See Nancy Cott, The Grounding of Modern Feminism (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), quoted by Susan Bordo, 'Feminism, Postmodernism and Gender Scepticism', in Feminism / Postmodernism, ed. Linda J. Nicholson (London: Routledge, 1990), p.152.
4. It appeared that only women who had been involved in political activism were confident with the name of feminist. See Claudia Wallis, 'Onward Women' in Time magazine, December 1989.
5. Beatrix Campbell, The Iron Ladies: Why do Women Vote Tory? (London: Virago, 1987), p.1.
6. Julie Burchill, Ambition (London: Corgi, 1989), pp.141-2. All further quotations are from this edition.
7. Julia Kristeva, 'La femme, ce n'est jamais ça' (1974), in New French Feminisms: An Anthology, eds. Elaine Marks and Isabel de Courtivron (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press; Brighton: Harvester, 1980), p.137.
8. Neustatter (1990), pp.151, 232.
9. 'Post-feminist' has come to indicate the view, which has gained currency in the early 1990s, that feminism is an untenable position theoretically. See the following discussion of Alice Jardine, Toril Moi, Tania Modleski and Judith Butler.
10. For example, her first collection of writings published in the mid-1980s discusses the British working class, Thatcherite individualism, the Falklands War, blockbuster novels, agony aunts, wages for housework, teen idols, Hugh Hefner's Playboy empire, and the reception of American culture. See Julie Burchill, Love It or Shove It (London: Century, 1985).

11. Hélène Cixous, 'Sorties', in Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, The Newly Born Woman [1975] (translation by Betsy Wing, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), p.63.
12. Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex (London: Cape, 1953; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), pp.23-4.
13. Sue Margolis, cited in Neustatter (1990), p.152.
14. 'The Past Before Us: Twenty Years of Feminism', Feminist Review, 31 (1989), pp.3-4.
15. Surviving the Blues: Growing Up in the Thatcher Decade, ed. Joan Scanlon (London: Virago, 1990), p.2.
16. Julia Hobsbaum and Julia Macpherson, 'Younger Women and Feminism: A Kaleidoscope of Old and New', Feminist Review, 31 (1989), pp.135-139.
17. Naomi Wolf, The Beauty Myth (London: Chatto & Windus, 1990).
18. Naomi Wolf, 'Last but by no means least', The Guardian, 21.2.1991.
19. This was in the New York Daily News. See Allison Pearson, 'The Obliging Feminist', The Independent on Sunday, 7.10.1993, pp.17, 14.
20. Kim Chernin, quoted on the reverse cover (Wolf, 1990).
21. Susan Faludi, Backlash: The War Against Women (London: Chatto & Windus, 1992), p.16.
22. Publicity, inside cover, Backlash (1992).
23. Camille Paglia, Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson (London: Penguin, 1991), pp.1, 12.
24. Rosalind Coward, 'Lash Back in Anger: have feminists fired a war on women?', The Guardian, 24.3.1992.
25. Ostracising Paglia as 'an embittered anti-feminist' (Faludi, 1992, p.352) suggests a double-standard which is self-defeating. See Chapter Two and Appendix One.
26. Camille Paglia, Sex, Art and American Culture (London: Viking, 1993), pp. 57, 67.

27. For the same emphasis, see Paglia, 1993, pp.56, 55, 64-5.
28. Yvonne Roberts, 'Hits and Myths in the Sex War', The Observer, 14.3.1992.
29. Beatrix Campbell and Bridget Smith (1990), pp.7, 11-12, 8.
30. Suzanne Moore, 'The Gender Agenda: She makes Martin Scorsese look laid back and Joan Rivers look polite. She's aroused the fury of feminists and the venom of the American academic establishment. She's Professor Camille Paglia and she's also very funny', Weekend Guardian, 30.5.1993.
31. Yvonne Roberts, Mad About Women: Can There Ever be Fair Play Between the Sexes? (London: Virago, 1992), p.233.
32. Catherine Bennett, 'Sheep in Need of a Shepherdess', The Guardian, 3.5.1993.
33. Lynne Segal; Anna Freeman, in letters page, The Guardian, 10.3.1993.
34. Suzanne Moore, Looking For Trouble: On Shopping, Gender and the Cinema (London: Serpent's Tail, 1991), pp.5,6.
35. Merck's analysis is, she says, rooted in Queer Studies of the 1970s and theories of the social construction of homosexuality, whereas Moore's analysis suggests a typical post-feminist appropriation for, as she implicitly concedes in 'Here's Looking at You Kid', she may be 'just trying to pull a homosexual discourse into a heterosexual space' (1991, p.44).
36. Mandy Merck, Perversions (London: Virago, 1993), pp.6,7.
37. Toril Moi, 'Feminism and Postmodernism: Recent Feminist Criticism in the United States', in British Feminist Thought: A Reader, ed. Terry Lovell (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), p. 374.
38. Frigga Haug, 'Lessons from the Women's Movement in Europe', Feminist Review, 31 (1989), p.113-115.
39. Alice Jardine, Gynesis: Configurations of Woman and Modernity (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 21.
40. Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (London: Routledge, 1990), p.xiii.

41. Tania Modleski, Feminism Without Women: Culture and Criticism in a 'Postfeminist' Age (London: Routledge, 1991), p.132.
42. Terry Eagleton (1977), cited in David Harvey, The Condition of Postmodernity (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), pp.47-8.
43. Sheila Rowbotham, 'Postleninist Marxism -- Socialist Feminism and Autonomy', in Michael Ryan, Marxism and Deconstruction: A Critical Articulation (London: Johns Hopkins, 1982).
44. Ti-Grace Atkinson, cited in Maggie Humm, The Dictionary of Feminist Theory (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), p.118.
45. Barbara Smith, 'Towards a Black Feminist Criticism', in The New Feminist Criticism, ed. Elaine Showalter, (London: Virago, 1986), p.169.
46. Joan Riley, in Neustatter (1990), pp.38-9.
47. 'Working Class Women's Voice', in *ibid.*, p.37.
48. Rowbotham, in Ryan (1982).
49. Luce Irigaray, 'Ce sexe qui n'est pas un' (1977), in Marks and de Courtivron (1980), p.212.
50. Nancy Cott, quoted in Frances E. Mascia-Lees, Patricia Sharpe, and Colleen Ballerino Cohen, 'The Postmodernist turn in Anthropology: Cautions from a Feminist Perspective', Signs 15:1 (1989), p.27.
51. Nancy Hartsock, 'Rethinking Modernism', quoted in Mascia-Lees (above), p.15.
52. Sarah Lennox, 'Anthropology and the Politics of Deconstruction', *ibid.*
53. Jane Flax, 'Postmodernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory', Signs 12:4 (1987), p.642.
54. Craig Owens, 'The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism', quoted in Steven Connor, Postmodernist Culture (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), p.230.
55. Discussion on Twin Peaks, in The Late Show, (London: Channel Four, 23.10.1990).
56. Harvey (1989), Table 1:1, p.45.

57. Ruth Picardie, 'Are You A Bitch?', For Women, Spring 1992.
58. Inge Blackman and Katheryn Perry, 'Skirting the Issue: Lesbian Fashion for the 1990s', Feminist Review, 34 (1990), p.70.
59. Angela McRobbie, Feminist Review, 36 (1990), p.129.
60. See Toril Moi's discussion of the politics of French feminist thought, Sexual / Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory (London: Methuen, 1985; London: Routledge, 1994), pp.96, 97, 125.
61. Pratibha Parmar, 'Other Kinds of Dreams', Feminist Review, 31 (1989), p.63.
62. June Jordan, in *ibid.*
63. Carol Rumens, Introduction to Making For the Open: The Chatto Book of Post-Feminist Poetry (London: Chatto & Windus, 1985).
64. For example, John Fiske, Reading the Popular (Boston: Massachusetts; London: Unwin Hyman Ltd, 1989), pp.95-132; even The Tate Gallery in London hosted a symposium on Madonna (30.10.1993).
65. 'S/M Aesthetic' (1989), Outlook, Vol.1, no.4, quoted in Feminist Review, 34 (1990), p.71.
66. From Fatal Attraction to Thelma and Louise, Cagney and Lacey to Roseanne; the role of Joan Collins in Dynasty; to the lesbian embraces and relationships in L.A.Law (1992), Roseanne (1993), and Brookside (1993); Tampax's and Nike's campaigns to women in 1993, and the tremendous success of The Oprah Winfrey Show from the late 1980s.
67. See the discussion of the romance genre in the television chat show in Sonia Livingstone and Peter Lunt, Talk on Television, draft before publication (1993), pp.95-102.
68. Angela McRobbie, 'Postmodernism', I.C.A. Documents 4 (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1986), p.58.
69. Rosalind Coward, Female Desire: Women's Sexuality Today (London: Paladin, 1984), p.137.

70. Heath and McRobbie, in Angela McRobbie, Feminism and Youth Culture: From Jackie to Just Seventeen (London: Macmillan, 1991), p.164.
71. Cherry Smith, 'The Pleasure Threshold', Feminist Review, 34 (1990), p.153.
72. Neil Lyndon came to fame in the wake of Faludi's Backlash, with No More Sex War: The Failures of Feminism (London: Mandarin, 1993).
73. Lucy Johnston and Linda Van de Wall, 'Guns and Women', The Big Issue, Vol. 18, No.49 (1993), p.17.

CHAPTER ONE

HELPING HERSELF:

Post-feminism and Popular Therapy for Women

Because society was not altering radically enough to consolidate the changes in consciousness, we found that many aspects of our behaviour ... seemed to stand still. Changing our own behaviour and feelings was also sometimes excruciatingly difficult. We believed that women should now feel assertive and entitled; we believed women should be independent, not possessive or insecure.

Luise Eichenbaum and Susie Orbach [1]

INTRODUCTION: Women's Self-Help Manuals in the 1980s

In this chapter I will examine the popular literary form of the women's self-help manual which saw a significant boom in Britain over the same period that the age of post-feminism was heralded by the popular press.[2] Many of the most successful titles are American in origin, but they have been reprinted repeatedly in the U.K. and were avidly consumed by British women towards the end of the last decade.[3] I have chosen self-help manuals firstly because of their tremendous appeal to women, which makes them a significant part of women's popular culture in the last decade. They are important for feminism and post-feminism as indicators of British women's growing interest in psychology and self-determination. Popular therapy guides for women are also of value when exploring, a generation later, current perspectives on the earlier feminist tenet that 'the personal is political'. I will consider whether they attest not only to the fact that many women feel they are dissatisfied in their personal relationships or in themselves, and therefore are still very much involved in 'the personal', but also, more optimistically, to a sense of growing strength, confidence, and even solidarity among women. Written by women and for women, and ostensibly encouraging assertiveness and a sense of self-worth in women, nevertheless the best-sellers shied away from mentioning feminism. Therefore, in the context of this thesis,

I am particularly concerned with what these books reveal regarding the successes and failures of the Women's Movement in this country and how they might gesture towards a regeneration of feminism, or even a feminist post-feminism.

Contemporary women's self-help guides have important historical and ideological precedents. While the twentieth-century classics of popular self-help literature, such as Dale Carnegie's How to Make Friends and Influence People (1936), were largely directed at men and concerned public life, advice manuals for women have often focused upon not only domestic life, including childrearing, housekeeping, health and hygiene, but also emotional and spiritual life.[4] Self-help as a concept derives from a long and varied tradition whose political affiliations are particularly relevant to the 1980s in Britain.[5] This decade, commonly regarded to have been materialistic and selfish, exemplifies the negative connotations of self-help which come under the auspices of the 'I'm all right, Jack' mentality and shade into the selfish strains of individualism.[6] In so far as post-feminism can be characterised as an individualist and materialistic form of feminism, self-help texts for women may show how these differing and apparently opposed vocabularies and outlooks (i.e., those of the Women's Movement and individualism) negotiated a common ground.[7] As self-help books were one of the sites in which this was taking place, I intend to examine the extent to which they might have been instrumental in establishing a new language of popular understanding around 'women's issues'.

Women's self-help guides of the last decade provide an opportunity to explore the relationship between feminism and post-feminism. To the extent that the self-help therapy movement of the last decade was a women's movement, in that it was led by women and centred on women as the major participants, it could be read narrowly as another ghettoisation of women.[8] That is, the concerns explored by this form of self-help were packaged as of interest only to women; women were again promoted as the guardians of emotional and personal development. This is pertinent to post-feminism in so far as that trend is generally opposed to any form of separatism or essentialist vision of women as nurturing, emotional and sensitive and regards these as

typical of feminism. It is also problematic for feminism, however, which is suspicious of traditional stereotypes of women because of the ways in which they are too easily manipulated to serve a power structure which subordinates women. Rosalind Coward, for example, in Female Desire is wary of the injunction to women to 'tell all', which she sees as symptomatic of the closely-related genre of the problem page, because it constructs women as vulnerable. Post-feminist writers would oppose this too, given their refusal to countenance any perception of women as victims.

However, feminists have also valued the independence afforded women by preserving a space for themselves which is independent of men (whether this is the kitchen, women's clubs, women-only swimming sessions in public baths, romantic fiction or a women's page in a newspaper). This is seen to encourage a sense of solidarity and sisterhood or, in feminist vocabulary, 'woman-centredness'. To the extent that women's self-help manuals constitute another example of such a women-only space, this chapter holds open the opportunity to interpret them in a positive light as well as with caution. Indeed, connections between such books and the feminist classics, such as Betty Friedan's The Feminine Mystique or Germaine Greer's The Female Eunuch, should be borne in mind. The latter analysed women's social situation and urged radical change with the aim of greater understanding and female empowerment. I would argue that many women's self-help books a generation later can even be regarded as inheritors of this legacy of the Women's Liberation Movement as they follow a similar format, propose changes in attitudes and profess similar aims. This may exemplify some ways in which post-feminism inherits feminism.

The distinction which must be recognised, however, and which marks these books as pertaining to the period of post-feminism, is that they rarely affirm feminism and women's liberation as political imperatives. Self-help guides of the last decade could be construed as characteristic products of the Eighties adage: 'I'm not a feminist, but ...', and the self-help ideology of the period may be regarded as a response to a political climate of cynicism and despondency about the possibilities of social change.

In this vein, with regard to feminism, the manuals seem to be complex products of what has now become popularly understood as the 1980s 'backlash'. [9] These books are primarily commercial enterprises rather than political tracts which address the issue of gender; as best-sellers, most of them are marketed professionally by large publishing houses rather than published by small women-only presses. [10] Thus their feminism, in so far as it exists, is not worn proudly, but understated. They may even be perceived to use feminism cynically, as a cosmetic gloss and a palatable tag once watered down. A critical view could readily interpret them as opportunistic inheritors of self-help books for women by men.

I first summarise five texts which I have selected to illustrate the variety of quite different self-help books which were available for women in this period. Of these, two are North American, one is British (based on research carried out in Britain), one is French, and one is German. Not all are self-help manuals in the strictest or most restricted sense of the term, for I believe a comparison between self-help guides and other types of literature on psychotherapy is necessary for a fair consideration of what the ideology of self-help entails for women. I wanted to examine very different texts to show how diverse the field has become and the wide range of perspectives and emphases offered to women under the umbrella of popular psychology. Each one of the books selected was a best-seller in Britain apart from *Jocasta's Children*, which I have chosen because it widens the scope of my enquiry. This text illuminates the difficulties of bridging the gap between academic work in psychoanalysis and feminism and the popular female market, as well as the gap between nations and cultural perceptions. While for the purposes of the chapter I am restricted to presenting only a brief discussion of each text, I am concerned with the argument and focus of the book, its assumptions, the way it is marketed and what kind of readership it implies. I will consider what type of problem the books address, their conventions and rhetoric, whether they present solutions, and to what extent they seem to be informed by or refer to feminism.

Greater attention is paid to Women Who Love Too Much not only because it is the most famous, or notorious, exemplar of the genre in this period, but also because it provides an illustration of how the debate about interpretation in psychoanalysis may be translated into the literature of popular therapy through cultural criticism. This might then promote an awareness of ideologies which sustain socially prescribed gender roles within a popular formula which has the potential to be more self-reflexive about the construction of meanings through reading than is commonly assumed. I then consider some of the biases directed against therapy and relate these to self-help literature, examining the ways in which the latter is able to answer various criticisms through the use of literary form and rhetorical convention as well as by addressing the change in women's social situation. This leads to a discussion of feminist perspectives on psychotherapy and I will consider the ways in which various self-help texts incorporate elements of feminist critique as well as address post-feminist issues in a popular and accessible language. To counter the more narrow dismissals of these books by feminist cultural criticism, I will try to develop a reading that is sensitive to the complexities of post-feminism while it retains some of the insights of feminist therapy. Finally, I will look at two texts briefly to examine the ways in which self-help books may both criticise post-feminism and incorporate post-feminist attitudes, developing further the sense that self-help for women does more than propagate victim culture.

It is because women's therapy guides are so well positioned to exemplify the initial workings of post-feminism that I have chosen to study them for the first chapter of this thesis. In the Eighties the language of feminism became outmoded in a radical political sense at the same time that it was absorbed by the mainstream through catch-words and changing social attitudes. This situation as reflected in the rhetoric of self-help books seems to ensure a simultaneous denial and misuse of feminism which is typical of post-feminism. Yet a less pessimistic view might see beyond the obvious commercial appropriation of feminism by these popular texts, and contend that their borrowings from feminism contain resonances which are potentially empowering and

thought-provoking to women readers. The understatement of a publicly much-maligned feminist politics serves to disguise without necessarily disposing of the feminist impetus which lay behind much of the terminology which is now widespread and used unquestioningly. For example, the post-feminist assumption that feminism is redundant as women have now been sufficiently liberated to have achieved independence may demean the continuing efforts of feminists, but it also retains the stance that women ought to be independent and empowered. I argue that, just as many women of the second generation which followed Women's Liberation of the seventies were no longer motivated by the radical language of the previous generation, these books negotiate more traditional feminist aims with new vocabularies (of popular psychotherapy and individualistic materialist self-improvement) and attempt to create a new hybrid genre out of the classic feminist text and other evolving genre forms.

Selected Texts

Understanding Women (1985) by Luise Eichenbaum and Susie Orbach is a Penguin mass market paperback with a slightly cheap and non-academic-looking cover. [11] It contains many of the ingredients which seem to ensure the appeal and success of the self-help book for women. The back cover promises that it is 'illustrated with case histories', deals with 'the psychological problems commonly affecting women' (such as phobias, eating disorders and depression), and, an original touch, it invites the gaze 'into the consulting room', providing 'a vivid account of what actually happens during psychotherapy'. It does not shy away from feminism in its marketing, the well-known Fat is a Feminist Issue by Orbach is mentioned as an added incentive to readers on the front cover, and the preface is uncompromising about the book's oppositional feminist project (1988, p.x). Using the personal to bring in the political, feminism is presented as a new solution to common emotional problems women experience. The first chapter begins with the Women's Liberation Movement and the way its discoveries gave a new vantage point

from which to understand private lives and individual thoughts: 'the fact of the overall oppression of women' (p.4). It is stressed that 'it is through women's experience in society that an understanding of our psychology must be sought' and this social perspective continues to inform the book (p.7).

The emphasis upon debilitating feelings of insecurity and dependency, prevalent in most self-help books for women, is adopted but explained in the context of how women are brought up to be wives and mothers, how our sexualities are moulded by other women in our lives, how emotions become women's concern, and how we learn to defer to others and therefore feel undervalued. After establishing that women lose themselves (the boundaries to their sense of a separate self), develop 'emotional antennae', and carry 'deep feelings of neediness', the authors move on to the importance of childhood. Here it is maintained that the mother-daughter relationship is critical in the formation of women's psychology (p.36). The little girl inevitably interiorises her mother as the model for femininity and the relationship is characterised by a 'push-pull' dynamic, caused by the mother's negative self-image, her ambiguous role of having to 'prepare her daughter to take her place in society as a second class citizen' (p.41). The little daughter with her needs can become an external representation of those parts of the mother which she has come to dislike and deny, and so she unwittingly 'provides her daughter with her first lesson in emotional deprivation' (p.44). This has repercussions in women's relationships with their bodies and with men, to whom they look for mothering, 'but remain bereft' (p.52).

It is significant here that what is usually the main focus and attraction of the women's self-help book is reproduced in feminist popular therapy and familiar analogies are used. The book does not plunge into the destructive dynamics of problematic heterosexual relationships but, in a chapter devoted to couple counselling in the conclusion, does emphasise that people tend to choose a partner who is a 'psychological fit' and describe the ways the dependency moves back and forth as the 'cha-cha' (p.182). The life-or death situation often emphasised by the self-help genre to advertise its own importance is retained to a degree, given the seriousness of

disorders such as anorexia. Because these still hinge on the primary problem for women of being separate, this text can be seen to adopt the strategy of finding apparent digressions to repeat a central message. However, this is done in a measured and educational manner rather than in a dramatised way. While the implied solution involves a change in women's social role and the practices of parenting, it is presented as a few generations away and short-term steps for recovery of distress are not offered. Despite making use of self-help conventions, this book gives the impression of objective explanation. For example, it is unusual in addressing the power relationship between the therapist and the client, the conspicuous absence of which from most self-help books suggests that its mystification is central to their appeal.

Although much of the groundwork was done in the late Seventies, the book was reprinted in 1986 and '88 and, judging by the continued success of the Women's Therapy Centre on whose work the research is based, the authors were successful in identifying an area of therapy to promote in the mid-Eighties despite post-feminist hostility to feminism. This suggests a willingness on the part of female consumers to countenance feminist politics when combined with a subject of popular interest, such as psychology and eating disorders, although one suspects that this is in spite of the polemical tone occasionally used. The rhetoric makes the book feel somewhat dated, with phrases in the preface such as 'Sisters in Great Britain' (p.vii) and the injunction to 'struggle on all fronts to produce social change' (p.viii). At this point the authors may appear heavy-handed in assuming a consensus which does not exist, but they also note later that at least half the clients participating in the group therapy sessions described were not 'self-consciously feminist' (p.109). Those elements which recall feminist political activism tend to be contained by the professional and academic emphasis.

The individual therapy session is presented with a dry, although simple and accessible, explanation of methodology and key concepts of psychoanalysis. This substitutes critical awareness of different schools of thought within the field for the pleasure of vicarious and voyeuristic enjoyment. The book meets with approval from

both the British Journal of Psychiatry and the British Journal of Clinical Psychology, as the quotations of the back cover testify, and it is slightly unclear who the readership of this work is supposed to be. The detailed notes and references after each chapter indicate that it is not just for a wide-ranging female audience, who indeed may not think that they lack an understanding of themselves, but would equally serve as an introduction to progressive male professionals. This text spans the area between self-help guide and introduction to a field or professional therapists' report and while it thus provides an antidote to the more facile blend of self-help it tends to be less slick in its marketing and a less entertaining read. The general ambience of responsibility and accountability, rather than emotiveness and effusion, provide a way of giving the authors' feminist message legitimation but also stifles this text's popularity, punch and style.

Jocasta's Children: The Imprint of the Mother (1980) by Christiane Olivier was translated into English in 1989. It has an arresting cover, but would not be an obvious choice for younger women as its interest appears not to be personal unless one is a mother or son. It is a book whose immediate appeal would be to feminists, Francophiles, scholars and intellectuals generally (it is published by Routledge). The assumptions of the book are familiar: there is often an impossible distance separating women, an asymmetry of desire, that women often feel needy while men tend to want to escape and that this discontent can be explained by an examination of the sexes at childhood where one discovers that the causes lie in European practices of mothering. The novelty lies in the engagement with traditional psychoanalysis, and the text's style and unusual structure. Unlike Understanding Women, this text focuses on the middle-class nuclear family unit, and does not mention gay couples. The personal appeal would be to heterosexual people who have found problems in their intimate love relationships, for it does not address relationships at work nor friendships between the sexes.

These limitations may well be self-imposed as Olivier clearly wants to attract a popular audience (usually assumed to be conservative and easily shocked) and is

trying to make accessible French feminist ideas which have long been ignored because of their obscurantism (p.vii). Her connections with this school are immediately recognisable in the emotiveness of the language and the psychoanalytic emphases and terminology, [12]. Unlike most self-help guides, this book 'prefers questions over statements' and the experience of reading it corresponds more to that of reading experimental fiction than reading a manual (p.vii). There are overlaps in analysis with Understanding Women in offering no solutions beyond reiterated pleas at the end of the book that we change our system of mothering, but Olivier's work is more interesting for its divergence from the common styles of exposition in the self-help therapy genre. Instead of battling on in the traditional academic domain, Jocasta's Children is an unusual example of an attempt to make abstract intellectual theories approachable within a popular formula (the 'why is it so difficult for men and women to get on?' approach). Thus it expresses a hope for 'the movement towards a new language (p.115) and evinces a self-conscious concern with modes of communication:

Psychoanalysis has its language: sophisticated, complicated, designed to drive away any of you who are not analysts, ... blind you with science.

Feminism has its language: high in colour and imagery, ... made to allow you in, to let you understand, even if you're not a feminist, most of all if you are not a feminist.

Then there are those who don't feel at home in either because in any event they refuse to be extremists. (p.ix)

By addressing the problems of Freudianism, Olivier provides a different slant from that of most popular therapy which is important because Freud has not disappeared from the popular imagination of what it is to undergo therapy. It may be encouraging for women newly approaching the subject to read her demolition of the theory of penis envy and her assertion that male envy of the breast is probably what lay behind its invention (pp.13, 15). The discussion of male psychology also holds out an added appeal, not common in women's self-help books which are generally wary of women's attempt to be their male partner's analyst. With the contemporary interest in

the 'New Man', Jocasta's Children unites a fashionable concern with a practical slant. Men are not demonised, any more than women are idealised; because of her focus on the mother and observation that 'misogyny is a crop sown by one woman and reaped by another', men need not feel under attack and women's responsibility in the emotional drama this book evokes is not shirked (p.43). The text's feminism requires no previous allegiances and is more sympathetic to women than pro-women, in terms of advocating an active political stance.

However, Olivier puts her work at risk by an unquestioning use of the Oedipus theory which, along with penis envy, is the Freudian theme which has been most popularly appropriated, despised and flogged to death. She makes matters worse by using without qualification or apology some typical Freudian jargon ('anal stage', 'oral', etc.) which is likely to inhibit a mass audience's confidence in the text. Similarly, her later use of French feminist terminology of 'the discourse of the other' may leave the reader a little at sea (p.101). The preface does warn that 'the first hand nature of the arguing puts it closer to eager, even impatient speech than to systematic exposition', but such language and style are unfamiliar in Britain (p.viii). Most self-help books appear serious and heartfelt and hyperbolic at times, opting for the poetic, sweeping or sonorous statement at key points, but this is in an Anglo-American way, designed to make a rational or practical point rather than to achieve an emotional climax. Thus, the attraction of novelty in this book is counterbalanced by its cultural strangeness and it illustrates to what degree British readers are more attuned to the American genre and style of therapy. The advantage is that Olivier avoids the hard sell; the fragments of autobiographical narrative are not patently egotistic, but engender sympathy and speculation. The impressionistic style leaves the reader free to take it or leave it, and one does not sense an oppressive overall pattern of belief to which the reader is asked to subscribe.

Alice Miller was a best-selling author in Britain in the late 1980s, her work tapping into contemporary interest in the psychology of child abuse. She is popular primarily

with a professional middle-class readership or those interested in alternative pedagogical methods. Her second book, For Your Own Good: The Roots of Violence in Child-Rearing (1980) was translated from the original German in 1983 and became a handsome Virago paperback [13]. Miller is a qualified psychoanalyst, but the severity of the problem she wished to reveal and her awareness that psychoanalysis was a privilege only for the few led her to write books with the aim of bringing to light that which she believes should concern us all (p.xiii). She deftly explains some of the basic principles of psychoanalysis, of trauma, repression and the consequent inability of the ego to mediate future related experiences in adult life, avoiding, when possible, the use of professional terminology. Similarly she does not mention feminism, and while her work attracts female audiences she does not address the specifics of what it means to grow up as a female in European culture. Rather, she develops connections between traditional authoritarian methods of upbringing (culturally associated with masculinity) and Hitler's rise to power in Germany. Compulsive social injustices are pitted against a background which conveys the sense of 'the Law of the Father' without using the term 'patriarchy' and a concern with gender is removed from individual examples through her defence of the child, who represents the 'feminine' element in terms of cultural definitions of vulnerability. Her writing is urgent and powerful and she makes large claims, raising questions of world-wide, even universal, importance. Forceful rhetoric connects these with personal experience: we 'survivors of childhood humiliations' can still function as the 'dangerous carriers of infections', for the way we were brought up is a poison mixed with ice-cream and labelled 'For Your Own Good' (pp.ix, x).

The second part of the book uses the convention of the case history in an original way by focusing on three lives: Christiane F. (a teenage German drug addict who is the subject of an internationally famous film), Adolf Hitler, and Jurgen Bartsch, a man who sexually abused, tortured and killed four boys. Her accounts of these childhoods are interspersed with excerpts from diaries and letters, paragraphs of generalisations and a steadily developing pattern of interpretation. Diversity is also provided by the odd list and tabulation which give her ideas concrete form and

separate them from the narrative. These methods make for interesting reading; rather than focus upon the repetitive personal traumas of women in distress, one can learn about Hitler, or drug culture, as well as experience pity at the terrible, although only mildly sensationalised, situations depicted. At the same time, the reader learns more about typical patterns of child abuse and gender stereotyping and thus absorbs Miller's analysis. For Your Own Good has much in common with the typical self-help and popular psychology book with its direct appeal to the readership and self-conscious variance with traditional psychoanalysis, yet it is socially and historically interesting enough to attract a wider readership. Miller moves away from gender specificity to a concern which has been associated with women only because of prescribed social roles.

Avoiding a focus on women's problems, Millier negotiates cultural differences successfully. This book is also more than a popular processing of something that was born in academia or politics and does not yet translate very well into a popular market. The author is original in manifesting a positive and appraising attitude towards popular youth culture, for example in her finding Pink Floyd's song 'We Don't Need No Education' an apt illustration of the points she wishes to make about the brutality of child rearing practices. She offers no solutions beyond respecting the integrity and needs of children as individuals, and her attitude is that youthful resistance (particularly in the late 1970s) is to be applauded. She says provocatively to English readers that our land is 'not only the home of corporal punishment, but also of a critical younger generation able to recognise the poisonous aspects of their upbringing and not balk at describing them for what they are'. Thus, her work may be an example of the potential integration of 'feminist' or women's concerns (peace, children) not so much into a male profession, for she stopped practising psychoanalysis, but beyond the caring professions into analysis which unites the personal and the political.

By the end of the 1980s, You Can Heal Your Life (1984) by Louise Hay, an American, was still selling well in Britain's 'alternative book shops' [14]. Hay's other two books, Love Your Body and Heal Your Life Programme, offshoots of the first, were also available by then and, as the titles suggest, they attest to the increasing popularity of New Age philosophy and its marketable connections with women's issues. The back cover tells the reader that it is 'a book to be used over and over again' and it is in many ways the kitchen sink of self-help manuals, designed to incorporate a prayer / meditation book, guide book and dictionary in one text. While it is not directed specifically at women, it incorporates an easy-to-grasp fusion of what are primarily feminine genres; the religious, assertiveness guide, pop-psychology and workout book. Women were the main consumers in Britain and its best advertisers, spreading recommendations by word-of-mouth and lending it to friends. It is a large book and looks purposeful, with a serious grey and white mottled cover (it looks like a religious book) and a colourful rainbow springing from the front cover. The text is set out with gripping headlines in bold print, similar to newspaper headlines, plenty of subheadings, and very short paragraphs which are well spaced out for easy reading. There is no suspense nor analysis and it is far more the manual than the other books previously mentioned. Chapter 15 is called 'The List' and comes before the author's personal testimony, constituting a 'reference guide of mental causes for physical diseases and environmental disharmony'. It explains for instance how venereal diseases are caused by shame about sex and unease with sexual parts of the body.

The book's structure is simple, and spelled out at the beginning. In an intimate and personal tone, the author gives 'Suggestions to My Readers', explaining that we can go through it as though we were on one of her workshop courses or her private clients. Hay explains that there are affirmations with the opening of each chapter, and treatments at the end. Part Two is a friendly 'Session with Louise' where one learns to ask: 'What is the Problem? Where Does it Come From? Is it True? What Do We Do Now?' She explains through this that there is also a physical approach to holistic healing, so 'working' on ideas is not the only way. Generously granting that she does

not have the answers for everyone (p.100), Hay latches on to many available answers in an opportunistic and uncritical manner. Yet the main techniques advocated are affirmations and 'mirror work' (p.52). The former blend into the teaching technique, which is very anecdotal and only allows for ambiguity by dealing with opposite extremes and frequent self-contradiction. The author does not linger over case histories, apart from her own at the end, an improbable rags-to-riches tale entitled 'We Are All One', and she tends to answer questions as soon as she asks them. The book concludes with a glamorous photograph of an attractive and mature blonde woman, smiling and confident. The reader is told that Louise now has her own centre, is given further recommendations for holistic approaches to healing, and is finally presented with a list of Hay's tapes which are for sale.

To sceptical eyes the book is risible; very few British best-sellers dare to come out with comments such as: 'I love my trampoline and use it daily' (p.88); 'the anus is as beautiful as the ear' (p.135); can happily start a sentence with: 'It seems to me that everyone on this planet who I know' (p.11); or instruct the reader to 'Love Your Bills' (p.120). That this paradigm of the American self-help book found such a large audience in this country in the Eighties illustrates changing attitudes towards self-help and spirituality and point to the complexity of reader-response to such books in general. The removal of women's appetite for guidance from rational feminist explanation, or recognisable political concerns to quests for holistic integration of the physical and mental ('for Mind, Body and Spirit' says the publisher's motto on the first page) reveal a reinterpretation of feminist concerns with the personal and political in the light of New Age thinking. The quest for a secure sense of self common in most women's therapy guides is here taken to the extremes of individualism as the book stresses that all problems and cures stem from the self. The two modern terrors which lie behind Hay's message are cancer (from which she cured herself) and AIDS, and her way of dealing with them is to see them as internal problems. The book preaches mind over matter, and this is also applied to society and other individuals: 'If you have a boss who is critical and hard to please, look within' (p.104). This

results in some sinister overtones in the comment that 'gay men created a disease called AIDS' (p.142), or that the reason why some people are poor is that they do not have a sufficient sense of self-worth (p.119).

In the depressed economic climate of the early Nineties, one would imagine that this book's optimistic tone combined with facile and facetious analysis, would lose its appeal. At the same time the forcefulness and assertive tone of the book might attract those with low self-esteem who feel desperate. The hard sell is evident throughout, from the ingratiating foreword (this is 'the powerful and very personal statement of a great lady') to Hay's reassurance that; 'the very fact that you have found this book and that you have discovered me means that you are ready to make a new positive change in your life' (p.8). The rhetoric is direct and arresting, and there is no subtle build-up of argument for Hay seems to assume that the reader is going to be won over by being bowled over. The argument derives its impact from its ability to turn common beliefs upside down, keeping a metaphorical straight face and not allowing the reader space for disbelief. It thus blends familiarity with surprise and evolves a canny method for manipulation. Hay's narrow interpretation of criticism as always negative leads to a philosophy which advocates acceptance in the extreme and is thus logically inimical to divergence, opposition and dialogue. You Can Heal Your Life is the most totalitarian and apocalyptically post-modern of the texts under examination, and takes the hybrid nature of the contemporary self-help guide to a self-deconstructive extreme. In 'Training the Mind' Hay stresses: 'Thoughts have no power over us unless we give it to them. Thoughts are only words strung together. They have no *meaning* whatsoever' (p.85). Aims for personal control in the self-help guide reach a point where social influence must be discounted: 'Your subconscious mind is such an obedient servant' (p.82). By substituting insistence for therapy, this book is valuable for illustrating the potential seduction of schematics.

Women Who Love Too Much is intended for women who are uncomfortably, and probably destructively, dependent on a man who usually is far less emotionally

responsive than they are. On the front cover, Erica Jong declares it to be 'A Life Changing Book For Women' and many women who have read it are prepared to testify that this is indeed the case, as Norwood's second book, Letters From Women Who Love Too Much goes to show. [15] Inspired by this popular text, some women joined support groups, others left their partners, and others still rediscovered whole areas of their childhood, including memories of abuse which they had repressed. Apart from motivating concrete change, the text is also a great conversation stimulator and is a point of special communication between women. It allows the acknowledgement of a *problem and dispersal of it* at the same time, which reduces the unpleasantness of vulnerability; women can talk about their dependency problems, if appropriate or, more generally, about their childhood through this book. It is addressed to women, 'because loving too much is primarily a female phenomenon' (p.3), but is not irrelevant to men (not to close off a wider market unnecessarily). It neither mentions feminism nor suggests that the author shares a feminist perspective. Norwood reminds the reader that, 'Everything happens in context, including the way we love' (p.60), but there is little social analysis of the position of women as a group. The model that is used to illuminate the problem, and relate it to a condition readers may be aware of in other areas of life, is that of addiction, especially alcoholism.

Norwood's authority lies firstly in her being a licensed therapist, which is stressed in the frontispiece. It is supported by a reassuring and flattering photograph of her smiling on the back cover in which she looks calm, well-groomed, professional and middle-class. The inside cover tells us that she is married to a devoted and supportive husband, so the reader need not suspect her of being a man-hater or her work of being threatening to men or family values. Her declaration that she was also a woman who loved too much in the past, and her immediate use of the second person plural ('When being in love means being in pain we are loving too much', p.1) in the first sentence of the preface, gives her credibility and reassures the reader that she really understands. The tone of the book is one of sympathy and concern; it is never flippant or condemning, but is solemn in its emphasis on the need for hard work and a

commitment to change: 'If you are a woman who loves too much, I feel it only fair to caution you that this is not going to be an easy book to read' (p.3). The persona of the author is very strong, which may be helpful in Britain where therapy and the language of psychoanalysis are less accepted than in the U.S. At times Norwood fits a maternal stereotype, both preparing the reader for the hardships of the world, and protecting us from them. At other times she is a minister lighting up the path to recovery, for there are religious overtones later in the book which affirm the need for spirituality. She also appears as a saviour, rescuing Trudi, her second case-history, from the brink of suicide.

The book's claim to importance and seriousness is that the problem it identifies not only causes women emotional distress and exhaustion, but can also be a matter of life and death. This is given full force later in the book in a chapter entitled 'Dying For Love', to avoid sounding theatrical and extreme at an early stage which, one suspects, might discourage the reader. The text is tightly structured, in methodology and also in rhetoric, through emphasis, repetition and exposition. Norwood elaborates reasons for *why* women love too much through a number of case histories, using different examples to prevent her answers from appearing simplistic or over-determined. Analysis follows, working through evolving themes which return in different permutations throughout the book as the theory is further developed. The analysis is often bolstered by a list of characteristics of dependent behaviour. This is quite subtle in that the characteristics are familiar without being obvious and are not so anecdotal that they appear glib, nor so comprehensive as to appear over-schematised.

Norwood's use of the case history also tends to have a pattern. Surprisingly this often involves a physical description of the female client which may carelessly reinforce the belief that one can judge by appearances, for the idea that there are recognisable types of people (i.e. the vulnerable, victims or sufferers) fits in with the structure and premises of the book, despite the disguise. The use of the gaze here also gives Norwood the added status of 'wise woman' or 'see-er'; She can tell when her clients are lying and identifies them even before they enter therapy with her (p.63). At

worst these descriptions may be voyeuristic and gratuitous: 'Her pretty face still displayed yellow and green traces of the terrible bruises she had received a month ago' (p.27). But Norwood takes care to adopt the image of the supportive and appreciative mother, complimenting her clients: 'Tall, with wide-set green eyes, she was a beauty' (p.47). Thus she appears as a woman who loves women, does not criticise and will care for us too, as reader / clients. The use of description sprinkled through the case studies, including evocation of place and an attempt at rendering speech patterns, all help to create the movement of a continuous narrative and make the interviews and dialogues with these women very pleasant reading, contributing to the tensions and climaxes which structure the book.

Norwood's argument establishes the importance of upbringing; the way contemporary popular culture propagates unhealthy attitudes towards love (that it entails suffering); the complicity of women in their pursuit of unstable and exciting relationships, owing to their need for drama to respond emotionally; the tendency to recreate challenges encountered when growing up, which leads to her explanation of the concept of the co-dependent addictive couple. Norwood persuades the reader that women's need to be a saviour is not selfless but an attempt to feel in control. She provokes the realisation that the key to happiness does not lie in motivating the partner to change, along with the discovery that female readers are free to effect change in their own lives. In keeping with holistic emphases, she also underlines the relation of emotional to physical health. The progression is not linear but tends to take a two-steps-forward and one-step-backward approach of circling back to previous points, using varied examples and taking their conclusions in slightly different directions. Not only is this a highly effective pedagogical method, mixing pleasure with understanding, and impressing the necessary lessons upon the reader's memory, but it is also very persuasive because so many different situations are represented and yet none is impervious to the author / therapist's analysis, each further reinforcing it.

Unlike the more academic therapy guides, Norwood is not content with an analysis which offers hope only through progressive social change. Like Hay, she advocates a

recovery programme which goes beyond the book and its impressive sales. The need for a solution in Women Who Love Too Much is generated by the emphasis that the condition is so serious that the reader's children will be badly affected and that it is a disease which in the later stages will impair our health. The last fifty pages of the book offer ten steps towards recovery and consequently the end of the book has a somewhat different tone and pace to the beginning. The protective privacy of the self-help guide is suddenly threatened. There is a helpful discussion on the limitations placed on women's sexuality by the pressure to be 'sexy' (for her partner) rather than sexual (for herself), but injunctions to 'develop your spirituality through daily practice' combined with emphases on the need for workshops and group therapy may begin to alienate a British audience (p.209). In an attempt to pre-empt the distancing of the reader, Norwood's rhetoric becomes more powerful and she tries the hard-sell. She claims she is confident that she has found the right formula for recovery and 'if that sounds like a guarantee, it is', but the reader does have to be prepared to 'invest' time and money into her treatment and treat it as seriously as if she had cancer (p.198).

While the book thus appears to come full-circle back to the self, this manual does approximate to some cultural criticism. Women's problems are the result of a deficient sense of self and, even if the solution offered is self-recovery, changing yourself instead of, or in order to, change your man or relationship, Norwood does not ignore: 'the society in which we live and the ever-present media that saturates and surrounds our consciousness' (p.43). Norwood's strategy is to make sharp and short points on how women are seduced by cultural artefacts, such as songs, literature (e.g. the idealisation of Don Juan and Heathcliff types) and films. Because these crop up throughout the book, Norwood does not expand on them in any great depth and consequently the subject is not coherently developed in terms of sexual political analysis. She does not draw on the concept of patriarchy and remains vague when a feminist point might be made (pp.40, 114). One suspects that Norwood is concerned not to alienate her readers by using a more radical vocabulary or more pointed

analysis. But, as many of these books show, self-identified feminism may not be necessary to stir a feminist consciousness for this can also be effected by introducing new ways of questioning and interpreting women's domestic and social situation.

Chapter 7 which interprets the fairy tale of 'Beauty and the Beast' is the book's forte and most inspired analysis. Norwood claims that it contains a spiritual truth which is hidden because it goes against contemporary values, and so we misunderstand the tale as being about 'denial' (of the Beast's ugliness) and 'control' (changing through love), the typical strategies of women who love too much. The spiritual message however is 'acceptance'; Beauty came to appreciate the Beast's good qualities, had no need to change him, and so he was freed to become his best self. Here, Norwood not only shows the reader how we are influenced by our culture to behave in certain ways, but also takes us one step further into ideology by showing how interpretation also takes place in a cultural context usually working to reinforce cultural bias. The pattern Norwood sets up is not simply: 1. **Cultural stimulus** leads to 2. **Unhealthy action** which then can easily be interpreted with reference to the 3. **Cultural background**. She introduces a third intermediary term, so the process is: 1. cultural stimulus, 2. unhealthy action, which then lead cumulatively to 3. ***Contemporary cultural interpretation*** which will tend to normalise the action without making it seem the outcome of the stimulus, thus creating an interpretation that slides into the first term and negotiating a position that appears static and impenetrable. Hence we are rarely able to interpret and evaluate actions or concrete situations as they stand, for we have already participated and are participating in an attitude towards them.

This chapter is particularly instructive as it suggests the potential limits of the self-help book, and self-help in general. The question of interpretation is crucial to psychoanalysis, and psychotherapy's ability to heal or help largely rests on enabling the individual / client to eschew the limits of his / her old interpretations and integrate a new perspective. Norwood raises the question not only of the cultural or ideological bias of interpretation, but also of control, and the difficulty of distinguishing which

perceptions arise from ourselves from those which arise from our society. She succeeds in timing the introduction of more complex questions when they appear relevant to her reader. In a mass market paperback which seems to focus on one problem only (loving too much) Norwood in fact begins to address the 'whys' and 'hows' of therapy, placing some of the specifics of women's psychology within the cultural context of interpretation.

In conclusion, the literature of popular therapy for women in the Eighties addresses a variety of concerns beyond the personal. Women's self-help guides which are explicitly feminist use similar conventions to those which are not, but the latter manipulate these towards the hard-sell and appear more at ease in the mass market than the former which tend to retain an academic focus or rely upon professional recognition. Those manuals which avoid mentioning feminism have been adept at incorporating a wider variety of related popular concerns into the genre. Although they focus on the self rather than social institutions as the site for change, their proximity to popular culture may illuminate the cultural influences on changing ideologies of individuality.

In terms of popularity, You Can Heal Your Life may be the best seller overall (internationally as well), but it is focused less specifically on women, appeals to a more easily identifiable market as part of the New Age phenomenon, and is primarily of interest in this study for its extremism, rhetoric and for its contrast with the other books. Women Who Love Too Much struck a tremendous emotional chord with women in Britain and is probably the most successful as an all-rounder in terms of sales, being an engrossing and fast read, as well as striking a balance between fairly thorough and rigorous advice, the author's self-promotion, the appearance of genuine concern and cultural interpretation. Understanding Women exemplifies an uneffusive, professional and practical British feminist approach. Although it provides a plethora of insights, it is unrelieved by sensationalism and remains somewhat monotone in comparison with the previous two. Jocasta's Children is also feminist, but its

feminism is obscured by its cultural difference and its containment within a family and class structure. While it is valuable for exploring some ways in which theoretical speculations could be communicated in popular form, one finds that the more successful books in terms of sales and persuasiveness tend to avoid mentioning feminism and read like a 'good story'. This effect is created by a combination of diverse elements: the use of case history, a reassuring authorial presence, the persuasiveness of rhetoric and seductiveness of the argument, as well as the progressive build-up to an acceptable and persuasive conclusion. Some self-help manuals are more coherent than others, but all benefit from a variety of discourses and, as books which have an explicit message, and texts whose function it is to have a message, they all have the aim of finding the smoothest mixture and most attractive recipe for total communication.

Post-feminist and Popular Resistance

In an article entitled 'Women Who Read Too Much', Suzanne Moore adopts a post-feminist angle on self-help books, characterising them as 'the literature of Victim Culture' whose subtext is 'I'm Okay, You're Not Okay'.^[16] However, the insistence that women have a problem, in so far as it is maintained by women's popular therapy, is a characteristic feature of psychoanalysis which is where it should be first addressed. Many female patients treated by Freud and his contemporaries did not undergo psychoanalysis of their free will, but were forced into it by their parents and guardians, and many of them were virtual prisoners of asylums and sanitariums.^[17] Women have long been naturalised as candidates for therapy; as Elaine Showalter observes: 'By the middle of the Nineteenth Century, records showed that women had become the majority of patients in public lunatic asylums'.^[18] As a subordinated sex, women who did not conform to class and sexual prejudices and mores were ready fodder for the medical profession and useful guinea pigs for any new science. ^[19]

While contemporary self-help books may be read as confirming that the legacy of such prejudices is still in existence, these prejudices may also be understood as the cause of the need for therapy in the first place and the self-help genre seen as a contemporary cultural response. In The Female Malady Showalter notes the statistical over-representation of women among the mentally ill, as documented by historians and psychologists, and examines English culture from the Victorian period to the present to demonstrate how madness in women is a consequence of, rather than a deviation from, the feminine role. Popular therapy literature for women agonises over this feminine role in a time of change. Joan Woodward claims that the sources of our inner conflicts are related to the sources of conflicts in society which arise from 'deeply entrenched value judgements that stem from certain groups of people holding the power to determine the life of others'. [20] This would be aggravated when the entrenched idea of how people should behave no longer corresponded to altered contemporary lifestyles. Thus for many women in the decades following the Women's Liberation Movement, there was an inhibition in acting out traditional stereotypes of 'weakness' and sensitivity because ideals and expectations were in the process of changing. Within a post-feminist ethos which lauded female independence and self-assertion, there was even less tolerance for the weakness stereotype. Despite this, it was still true in the Eighties that more women actively sought therapy. It is a measure of the success of the self-help genre that it was able to overcome the many biases against therapy for women, obligatory in the past, in order to present it as a liberating space in which to negotiate changing social roles and gender stereotypes.

Recent movements towards client-empowerment and self-determination in therapy have contributed greatly to the development of self-help guides for women. While the latter often offer rigid interpretations of a generalised situation and tend to be prescriptive in a way which appears to preclude genuine empowerment, it is significant that the particular construction and emphasis upon the self which is necessitated by the book form, as well as the privacy and independence of reading, distinguishes it from most practices of psychotherapy. The paradigm established by

Freud, in which the patient is subordinate to the therapist, is minimised. On the one hand the reader looks up to the author, but she also has to please the reader by making her text interesting. The reader / client is safe from the stigma of therapy, as no-one needs to know if she is reading such a book. Nor is she obliged to reveal her sexual history or fantasies, or make herself vulnerable in any way. The unequal relationship is lessened by the fact that in most of the books the reader is being encouraged to help herself, and also to develop self-confidence, as well as to receive help from someone else. The literary form seems to lend itself to this particularly well to the extent that reading is a more creative activity than listening. The very different time-span involved means that the books have to tie in reflection and motivation much more closely.

Much popular resistance to therapy in the U.K., including that of post-feminism, appears to be reactionary without being informed. In the absence of information, going into therapy appears a self-indulgent leisure pursuit. This attitude reflects both anti-American prejudice and class bias. Psychological problems or bad nerves used to be regarded as the prerogative of a decadent aristocracy who had nothing more substantial to worry about, and therapy continues to be seen as something of a luxury. Radicals of the 1960s denounced Freudian-based therapies as 'Band-Aids for the bourgeoisie'. [21] As mass market paperbacks, most self-help guides of the 1980s were inexpensive and thus the literature of popular therapy overcomes some of the above prejudices by being so patently a popular and accessible form. Moreover, it is accepted that we may read books as a leisure activity with the aim of enjoying ourselves. Yet there are gender reasons too for the idea that therapy is self-indulgent: psychoanalysis has been known, from Freud's 'Anna O.' case, as a 'talking cure' and personal talk does not have very positive connotations in our culture, especially talk about emotions or trivia, which is seen as indulgent chatter and associated with women. [22] Women have been stereotyped as being gossips or nags, and as psychotherapy consequently takes on some of this cliché of what women do, so is the genre of self-help vilified for misogynist reasons.

Another stumbling block to popular appreciation of psychotherapy is the jargon of psychoanalysis which makes up most of its theory (e.g. id, superego, transference, primary narcissism). Most of these terms have not entered our everyday vocabulary and those which have are often discredited or used as a joke or term of abuse, such as penis envy, libido, phallic, anal, schizoid. Naturally, people resist concepts they do not understand; Woodward writes: 'For far too long "experts" have wrapped up knowledge in ways that tend to make people feel ignorant or foolish. This is all part of our hierarchical society where knowledge is used by some people as a way of maintaining power over others' (p.4). The self-help genre, designed to appeal to a large lay audience, counters this. Firstly, one can observe that many authors are promoted in the publicity as counsellors, not psychoanalysts, as the term 'counselling', which has become more common in recent years, helps give the impression of a more open and less mystified profession. When the text focuses upon a particular problem, it is a convention that the author will at least imply that she has undergone the same suffering addressed by her text, for by showing that she is qualified by experience she is least likely to antagonise an audience suspicious of expertise.

Moreover, authors are circumspect in their use of professional terminology and often evolve their own contemporary jargon, drawing upon popular culture and using analogies from ordinary life. As we have seen, the repetition compulsion, or choice of partner which will allow the re-enactment of unhappy relationships / experiences, for readers of Norwood is 'the dance', and of Eichenbaum and Orbach the 'cha-cha'. Anecdotes often provide the basis for a pattern of understanding which takes the place of theory. Colette Dowling's Perfect Women has much in common with Understanding Women in terms of its central analysis, but differs in the creation of an appealing sense of structure through a thematic coherence based on a key word. A simple anecdote mentioned at the beginning serves as the basis for her concept of 'mirroring', which is her answer to the problem of women's obsessional drive to be 'perfect' (women's sense of neediness and incompleteness, for Eichenbaum and

Orbach). The buzz-word or phrase mediates between perceptions which the readers will immediately relate to, matching their own, and those which the author wants to communicate and use to develop her argument. At its most successful (that is, transparent and unnoticeable) and when well-timed, this method achieves an effect akin to 'insight' in psychotherapy, which is when the client / reader recognises herself in what the therapist / author is saying and the latter's interpretation of events no longer seems to be an imposition from outside but instead appears to match perfectly the former's feelings and behaviour within the context of their actual experiences (Woodward, p.14).

Much criticism of the self-help literature for women derives from negative attitudes towards female response which is seen as personal, subjective and uncritical. Reactions associated with the problem page and agony aunts are well-known, with readers writing in as though they know the mothering or auntie-ing person, asking for personalised replies and appearing to hang on their every word. Female editors of women's magazines frequently receive a personal response from their readership. [23] This response has been used to patronise female consumers and women's popular culture.[24] Bearing in mind Eichenbaum and Orbach's view that women suffer so much from problems of emotional dependency because of a culturally sanctioned difficulty in separating from their mothers, the significance of the female author in the self-help guide for women is immense. The emotions attached to mothering, or 'remothering', added to the potential for 'insight' would make these books very powerful indeed. Not only do they inspire strong reactions, but without meeting or seeing the author of one of these books, women readers will call her by her first name, speak of her as though they know her and express a longing to meet her and speak to her privately. Such reactions meet with post-feminist scorn as pathetic dependent behaviour and 'feminist' mollycoddling, yet if one takes women's emotional need for continued mothering seriously then, rather than belittle women's popular culture, one may understand it as a safe opportunity for regression, which is provided in therapy through the transference.

Regression, according to Olivier, is something held back from women, yet something they desperately need. She writes: 'What is always out of the question for women is finding some person to take over, some quiet place to get away to, some time when they can have a rest ... who is going to be "big" for us, so that we may safely regress from time to time?' (pp.126-127) This gap of deprivation is what soap operas, problem pages and self-help guides offer to fill, at least temporarily. In the case of the guides, this gap is actually recognised to an extent - they can serve as a bridge to this long-standing unarticulated recognition. Olivier continues: 'Women have no recourse but to mother each other ... Everywhere they can, women seek gratification ... They will turn to an 'other' - a woman - to ask for a recipe, an address, the name of a remedy, anything, and they are accepted and understood'. Whatever it is called, 'mothering, regression, recognition, presence, sisterhood of friendship', it seems that there is a good case to argue that this is what women are trying to obtain when they find solace in popular culture. The offer of these sadly longed-for things in self-help therapy books for women encourages emotions and projections similar to those expected in transference. In this way the consumption of self-help may be a more dynamic process than the scorn of post-feminism, which typifies it as victim culture, allows.

Feminist Criticism

Feminism's ambivalent relationship with psychoanalysis is the topic of so many books that one can easily become entangled in the arguments, cliques and schools. Perhaps the most important point to establish now, however, is that in the 1990s the issue has still been gathering importance. In February 1991 a talk at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London on a new book by Janet Sayers entitled Mothering Psychoanalysis was completely sold out, with many women waiting patiently for returns well after the talk had started. The debates that took place in the past (in America and France in the 1970s and '80s) did not clinch the issue and to some extent

the field is still open, as women's interest and involvement in psychoanalysis and psychotherapy continues to increase.

As shown respectively by Jocasta's Children and Understanding Women, there are fairly simple ways to explain the reasons for feminist resistance to the core of Freudian theory as sexist, as well as to communicate the focus of a woman-centred viewpoint, and hence how feminist psychoanalysis could develop. Yet overlaps between feminist critique and popular resistance are obscured by feminism's own elite vocabulary used to discuss these issues which unfortunately prevents popular access. With the decline of the activist impetus behind feminism and lack of coherence of purpose in the Women's Liberation Movement, the territory seems to have shifted decisively to the universities and institutions of research, which has posed a problem in particular with what seemed to be the adoption of Lacanian theory per se into feminist critical theory. Lacan entailed a 'return to Freud', in the words of Sayers, to 'a phallogocentric, rigorously theoretical and intellectualised analytic approach'. [25] In Britain, Juliet Mitchell was instrumental in introducing French psychoanalytic feminism as an antidote to 'bourgeois and idealist tendencies' in American radical feminism. [26] Her important text, Psychoanalysis and Feminism (197), criticises much past feminist hostility towards Freudianism; this early feminist position is seen to be ill-informed, suffering in particular from the illusion that psychoanalysis is a recommendation for a patriarchal society instead of an analysis of one. It is 'popularised freudianism' she argues, that should come under attack for justifying a bourgeois and patriarchal status quo (pp.xv, xvi).

Mitchell was alarmed at the prospect of losing a useful political tool for feminism through a wholesale rejection of psychoanalytic theory but, in countering this, she underestimated the flexibility and potential of popular response. The complicity theory, that the popular always supports the status quo, loses weight when one remembers that the popular is not one homogenised mass, and in fact is best situated to engage with the status quo. Just because Freud's work is 'misunderstood' on theoretical terms does not mean that these misunderstandings cannot lead to

discussions by means of which new perceptions and understandings may arise. Feminist and popular, as well as popular feminist (mis)readings of Freud may all be radically enabling and instructive. The argument between feminists over the reappropriation of Freudianism has a tendency to be endless, like Biblical exegesis, while there are far-reaching cultural dynamics and codes of practice to engage with.

For example, the popular term 'subconscious' (used by Hay), which is much disparaged by those in the know, relates to the less 'theoretically correct' Neo-Freudian developments which gave prime position to the 'self-system', less privilege to infantile sexual forces, and placed more emphasis upon direct social forces and interpersonal relationships (Kovel, pp.125, 126). While Neo-Freudianism tends to 'de-emphasise the repressed' and the concept of unconscious thought is weaker and loses subtlety, it remains 'a psychotherapy weighted in a straightforward positive way (as against the dialectic of Freud) with the psychosocial dimension' (p.128). This appears to be a productive way of opening up the field in that it makes interaction between the ego and external reality easier to imagine, more approachable and open to scrutiny. It also justifies the efforts of self-help therapy books, in that with this borne in mind, their explanations are not so easily dismissed as 'pop' (the connotations all too often being 'bastardised and misinformed') -psychology. Neo-Freudian 'ego psychology', as used in the self-help genre, can pave the way for an examination of interactions between ideologies and the unconscious, as suggested in Norwood's examination of 'Beauty and the Beast' as a myth we live by. Moving away from free association and fantasy, Neo-Freudian psychotherapy pays greater attention to self-assertion, self-regard and everyday coping with felt needs which are the primary focus of contemporary women's self-help books.

Of even greater relevance to this discussion, Sayers presents much of the Neo-Freudian developments in psychotherapy as 'mothering Psychoanalysis', meaning that they introduced the 'preoccupations of motherhood' into the discipline. They shifted the focus away from a concern with 'the past and individual issues' of patriarchal power, repression, resistance, knowledge, sex and castration' to current issues of

'present and interpersonal issues - identification, idealisation and envy, deprivation and loss, love and hate, introjection and projection'. [27] The growth of group therapy and co-counselling in the last decade illustrates how convincing the ideas of interaction and interpersonal development have been. American feminism appears to have the edge on British feminism in this trend for it was Nancy Chodorow, through her focus on the infant's relationship to its mother, who succeeded in persuading American feminists that psychoanalysis could be a valuable tool, not Mitchell nor French psychoanalytic feminism. [28] This would help to explain why the recent growth in self-help therapy guides for women originated in the United States, prospering in British publishing only slightly later. Orbach's emphases are similar to those of Chodorow, but her work had a different impact in terms of both market appropriations of it and wider popularisation outside a self-identified feminist community. [29] The emphasis upon the self in 'ego psychology' is crucial to the development of a popular feminist psychotherapy and can be developed in many ways through women's interpersonal relationships. As Orbach writes: 'After learning to love ourselves the next step is learning to trust and value other women'. While much feminist psychology in the late Eighties was concerned with a woman's ability to find her own positive self-image, new work at the end of the decade began to move beyond the centrality of the individual self to how women relate to each other. [30] This is of great significance to post-feminism which, while ill at ease with models of mothering, is hospitable to empowering female friendships.

British cultural studies in the 1980s tends to negotiate a politically motivated suspicion of popular culture with a growing emphasis upon the relative autonomy of response and interpretation. Much feminist critique of therapy and self-help genres has dwelt on the former without giving a sufficiently lively picture of what women might be up to on the borders of these texts and social pressures. In Feminism and Youth Culture, Angela McRobbie exposes Janice Winship's 'conventionally feminist' critique of the problem page in Inside Women's Magazines on these grounds. [31] Winship takes issue with its 'ideological commitment to "the individual"', arguing

that it tends to ignore social and economic pressures and that while it 'reassures women that they are not alone with their problems', it also 'simultaneously undermines that support' by leaving little chance for solidarity or sisterliness among women when such individualism and complacency are built into the genre. [32] Although self-help manuals are a more complex literary form, the same critique could be applied; one could argue with Winship that turning to such a book is a sign of loneliness and isolation, and it is no wonder women's problems seem to be a result of personal failing, rather than an unequal society, when there is no supportive female network to turn to. However, this would not meet many readers' experience of reality. The ways in which self-help books are passed on between friends with recommendations reveal that they are not merely a depressing sign of isolation or a 'last outpost of communication' (p.163). Moreover, as McRobbie remarks: 'Problems may be socially produced, but this does not mean that we necessarily experience them as such'. The focus upon the individual, even when it emphasised personal failings, can very well build an encouraging sense of empowerment, for the readers can do something for themselves, rather than having to wait for outside circumstances to change.

Rosalind Coward expresses feminist reservations about the genre based on 'the compulsion to "tell all"', which 'reveals a powerfully normative mechanism at work'. [33] The ideology behind this is clear, she argues, because sexuality in the last decade has been 'under a discursive injunction' for women. Urging the female reader to be open about their problems, as self-help books tend to do, takes 'no note of the social circumstances in which sexual relationships are still conducted', and Coward concludes: 'In such a situation the pressure on women to talk makes women function as a currency between men. Women's speech sustains men's impersonal relationships between themselves ... perhaps more dangerously, the discussions create the fiction that the only real structural problems between men and women are those which can be wished away by total transparency'. This would appear to coincide with a valid feminist critique of post-feminism, in that the latter ignores such structural problems

of inequality and subordination. However, Coward continues: 'To be totally transparent about your needs and feelings often means owning up to vulnerability, dependency and insecurities. Is it really safe that women, already structurally vulnerable, should further expose themselves?' (pp.140, 141)

One can appreciate from this feminist criticism some of the reasons why post-feminism, with its characteristic brashness, denial of vulnerability and rejection of 'victim feminism' is inimical to the women's self-help industry. Yet perhaps the emphasis on women as victims is more evident in the analysis and assumptions about the texts than in the diverse contexts in which they are read. Cultural decoding can take on a momentum of its own so that what is at first insightful and refreshingly surprising will tend towards rigidity if the stress fall too heavily upon the codes instead of the response. Female Desire, which draws upon Roland Barthes' Mythologies as a model, may suffer from the problematic legacy of structuralism, as suggested by McRobbie:

There was that developing body of work which emphasised the structural constraints on the lives of young people, and there were structuralist readings of the meanings created by working-class youth as they interacted with a number of goods and consumer items transforming them into symbolic statements about themselves. Part of my early project was to shift this interest back to the living subjects themselves. (1991, p.ix, x)

Winship's and Coward's analyses would yield different conclusions if one followed McRobbie's example in her work on the teenage problem page. Rather than concentrating entirely on the internal relations which characterise the form, she takes into account 'the external relations in which it is read, giggled over and passed along the back row'. Thus, she says, we can redefine Winship's model by turning it on its head and seeing the page (and I argue, the self-help book) instead 'as a very public form depending for its effect on a kind of masquerade. That is a public form feigning a private intimacy'. If women's self-revelation through the genre of therapy literature is as much of a pre-ordained narrative as Coward, and many of the books, suggest

one might ask how female readers are actually putting themselves at risk? 'Opening up' could also be a strategic mask for women enabling them to rethink and 'manage' their problems with men. McRobbie's recognisably postmodern emphasis is more in line with post-feminist attitudes than the more traditional modernist and old-Left attitudes towards the mass media. She suggests that critics might regard such public focus upon the problems of women as 'a reflection of the profusion of sexual discourses which fill the air-waves, cover the pages of the magazines and invade the inner reaches of the domestic sphere' (pp.162, 163).

Readings in Conflict

The problems caused by the practice of a fixed and fixing interpretation, as enacted by popular therapy, may also be applied to some feminist assumptions. Feminist prescriptiveness may make it blind to some of the more subtle dynamics involved in the consumption of women's self-help books, unable to perceive their fuller role as ambiguous signifiers. The ideological tensions negotiated by popular self-help therapy are illustrated by the contradictions which appear when one contrasts some of the typical statements, analyses, conclusions and solutions that one finds in and about the genre under consideration.

'God helps those who help themselves' is a maxim brought into common usage by Samuel Smiles. To be able to help oneself, however, entails a level of self-esteem and French feminist Annie Leclerc warns: 'Women hate themselves' (cited in Jocasta's Children p.77). Norwood encourages readers by asserting that 'there are no mistakes in life, only lessons' (p.225), yet this becomes ominous when one considers the repetition compulsion, as hinted in Olivier's statement: 'Misogyny is a crop sowed by one woman and reaped by another' (p.43). Alice Miller's comment that 'our capacity to resist has nothing to do with our intelligence but with the degree of access to our true self' (p.43) may hold out hope of breaking the cycle. But, as Dowling reminds her readers: 'Women's sense of self has not always developed along with her

achievements'. 'Childhood', Dowling insists, 'is where the problem begins' (The Cinderella Complex, p.13), but Miller cautions: 'One is not normally aware of something that is a continuation of one's own childhood' (p.75).

Eichenbaum and Orbach situate the problem by maintaining that 'it is through women's experience in society that an understanding of their psychology must be sought' (p.7), yet Hay opines optimistically, 'We are each 100% responsible for all of our experiences'. Her formulation: 'This is the only way to change others - change ourselves first' (p.104) is challenged by Eichenbaum and Orbach's explanation: '[P]ersistent stumbling blocks to emotional change led us to give more attention to unconscious processes, and the serious study of psychoanalytic, psychotherapeutic practice' (p.13). Susan Forward, however, writes: 'The psychological categories and terminology were not adequate to describe what I was seeing in these relationships' (p.7), and David Cohen goes further in his observation that, among psychologists, 'an interest in symbolism seems to run counter to an interest in people'. [34] Jeffrey Masson complains that 'almost every therapy shows a certain lack of interest in the world', and Olivier points out that: 'In the age of data processing, no-one can defend for very long any thesis that has no connection whatever with real life' (p.27). [35] Freud too illustrates the metaphoric, as opposed to directly-related, base of his theories: 'In psychology we can only describe things by the help of analogies ... But we have constantly to keep changing these analogies for none of them lasts long enough'. [36] Change in the real world precipitates change in the language and practice of psychotherapy.

Many analogies chosen in the past, however, have belittled and offended women. Deleuze and Guattari applaud women's anger: 'The Women's Liberation Movement are correct in saying: we are not castrated, so you get fucked'. [37] Consequently, many feminists are cynical about Freudianism. Benoitte Groult writes: 'Women were perhaps about to take off on their own when a catastrophe befell them: Freud' (quoted by Olivier, p.x). As Eichenbaum and Orbach note, 'a woman ... carries deep feelings of neediness' (p.9) and, while Norwood may present the solution as though it were

simple ('The choice is yours', p.4), she later warns us, with another analogy: 'Hungry people make poor shoppers' (p.14). The issue of public access is illustrated by Deleuze and Guattari's comment: 'The revolutionary is the first to have the right to say: Oedipus? Never heard of it' (p.96). Self-help books are in the business of finding new analogies and myths, following Freud's above observation, and making (as Maurice Sendak writes of Miller) 'chillingly clear to the many what has been recognised only by the few'. [38]

While the above quotations have been selected from different books, the potential for multiple (mis)understandings can arise from even one book. This is the case in all cultural interaction, but is especially resonant in ideologically charged subjects such as the position of women, the role of the family, and the creed of the individual in the 1980s. From even these few selected quotations, one can illustrate the ways in which productive conflicts operate, *between ideologies of individualism and the state*, radicalism and conservatism, feminism and patriarchal institutions, public and private, theory and practice. It is futile to lay out these above remarks in a way that might show a linear progression of thought. They tap into issues such as the history of psychotherapy, popular resistance and feminist ambivalences towards it, and they all represent partial truths without its being possible to organise them into a theory. To position them in such a way as to make them answer each other and reflect on each other is possible up to a point, but cannot be done coherently or finally. It is not at all a clear-cut matter of contradictions, for there are so many assumptions, registers and related but different components that they continue to separate and reform.

For example, the statement that one has to change oneself to change others is complicated and ironised by the remark which recognises the tremendous difficulty posed by the project for personal change in terms of definition of and access to this 'self' and the consequent need for psychotherapy. This in turn is pushed further out of reach by either Freud's admission of how slippery and contingent psychoanalysis inevitably is or Forward's suggestion that psychoanalysis, because it does not work for women, is unable to elucidate certain problems and patterns that are specific to

women. Moreover, the original statement is equally complicated by an acknowledgement of the dependence of the self on social formation and definition, through one's direct experience in society, which then folds back to the problem that much social experience does not appear to meet with psychoanalytic analogies.

All of these examples are recognisable, recalling opinions and feelings most consumers of the self-help genre have probably come across before in some form, and feel sufficiently familiar with to be able to interpret. But once they are placed in a dialogic and therefore potentially controversial context, they begin to resonate with old memories and new meanings. If in the case of platitudes and clichés, the normalising context is shifted, the reader will then reinterpret them. When there is a contradiction at hand, she may well see how the original interpretation was 'set up', and then be enabled to reinterpret the assumptions that allowed this. For example, a statement that holds that there are lessons but no mistakes in life is enabling because it encourages a dynamic focus on change as opposed to a static one on guilt and remorse, yet it sounds remarkably complacent when placed next to an awareness of the immensity of suffering caused by our current practices of parenting. Similarly a recognition of women's negative feelings about themselves can reveal how the 'truth' of the old adage that God helps those who help themselves relies on the assumption that everyone is able to help themselves, or that everyone feels sufficiently positive about themselves to be able to do this: it brings to light the fact of exclusion.

Without access to facilities to conduct a formal survey on women who read self-help, I have had to rely on the responses of colleagues and friends who were regular consumers of this literary form.[39] Although a fairly arbitrary rendering of female response, I believe the quotations used here elucidate variations typical of female response to self-help books. Once one becomes alert to the possibilities for multiple interpretation, it is clear that consumers of the therapy guides are likely to process them in diverse ways. Such endlessly spawning material will be temporarily fixed by its readers, according to their interests and needs. Some will be cautious ('I think they're okay, as long as you don't feel they're trying to make you do things you don't

really want to') whereas others will embrace the apparent message wholeheartedly: 'It really gutted me, it was exactly my life story: I was actually scared to pick it up again'. Many women may find strength in numbers ('To know that as an individual you are part of a social phenomenon takes the guilt and blame away'), but others may feel patronised ('Many of them seem so simplistic, and it makes me angry that they seem to have so many assumptions about me'). Women will pick and choose what they like in a manual, rarely swallowing it whole, for example: 'I liked what she said about not blaming yourself, ... but at the end it got too American for me'. This anti-American component in British attitudes can lead British women towards a valuable critical distance: 'I think these American books are hypocritical, they go on about being open, but in the end they just show you how to act as if you're open'. At the same time, anti-Americanism will not necessarily dictate a response to the point where the book is dismissed out of hand: 'I don't think you should be too negative about them; they can do a lot of good'.

Readers are rarely hoodwinked by the familiar approach, as a more patronising attitude to the female consumer would assume, but are more often aware of the deliberate attempt to make ideas accessible, and appreciate this: 'The main function of these books for me was to stop me feeling alienated, especially Norwood, whose approach is easy to read, non-theoretical and personal / emotional'. Political affiliations of readers will also modify their response, for example: 'I think that the content of the books ideally should base itself within a "political framework", so it doesn't just churn out loads of egotistical, meditating, "tripped-out chicks"'. Responses may be positive in a practical way ('Reading the right books allows you to validate and realise the importance of certain experiences for the first time') but also recognise the relative validity of the book's message: 'Some you like, and then you'll recommend them to a friend, and she'll say she just couldn't get into that, and then she'll lend you one and you can't read it'. Humour, both self-deprecating and ironical with regard to the genre, also plays an important part in female response: 'Of course they sell like hot cakes, because everyone's so bloody miserable', or: 'I buy tons of

them, do exactly what they say for about five minutes, and then move on to the next one'.

As women tend to read these books in a community of friends, their acknowledgement of different perspectives often leads to a wider sphere of reference and critical awareness. For example: 'My friend hates all kinds of therapy because she says it makes you too selfish and individualistic - she thinks her second marriage broke up because her husband went into therapy', or even: 'A friend of mine read Woman In Your Own Right and thought it was *too* assertive!'. Some women might be motivated into action by the therapy guide's identification of a 'problem' ('I joined a group after reading Women Who Love Too Much') but equally, the book's message may be dismissed while the sense of solidarity among women is strengthened: 'Somebody should write one of these books for people like us'. In other cases the form may be appreciated, while other problems seem more pressing: 'Is there one about women having affairs with older married men, why they do it, and what it means?' The narrative construction of authorial presence may move the reader who feels vulnerable, as in the response: 'I want to meet her and ask her what she thinks about me'. But literary and narrative devices are not transparent, as in the remark: 'After a hard day's work you need something short and gripping to read, you want something you can easily pick up ... you haven't got time for long explanations, what you need is a simple, short description of something that happened to someone. The case histories are good because they are interesting *and* you can learn something from them'.

Here again one can observe an overlap with theory and the history of psychoanalysis, such as women's desire for mothering as well as the ideological flavour of the decade, in the readiness for an individualistic focus. The particularities of British response emerge in the distrust of the States, as well as the effect of the mass market, as evinced in the consumerist longing for more. At the same time the contradictions are apparent - resistance and consolidation - as seen in both a rejection of the assumptions promoted by the book and an agreement ('everybody's

miserable'); the readiness to be convinced, and the tendency to select; serious and earnest attitudes, as well as sceptical ones which regard these books as little more than entertainment.

Coward's analysis is valuable for an understanding of the dynamics which surround interpretation of women's self-help books in her emphasis that, while 'the sexual needs of men dominate cultural presentations of sexuality', women 'bear the burden of speech in this area ... Women are incited to shoulder the weight of *sexual consciousness*' (p.139). It would be an oversimplification to suggest that the books are working solely to perpetuate this split, for they debate and contest it, as do their readers. Rather, it can be persuasively argued that the self-help books of the Eighties are, because of their emphasis on female consciousness, an important arena in which gender assumptions are tested. McRobbie's recognition of the importance of differences made by the changes brought about in the 1980s is helpful at this point: 'The possibility of a counter-discourse has come from the impact of feminism and feminist ideas which have found their way into the public sphere over this period' (p.165). Remarks made by female readers bear this out. There is now a language of middle-class female common-sense which appears to have taken many of the ideological conditions and analyses on board. One hears from young women in the late Eighties a different voice from that both heard and emitted by Winship; it is shrewd, engaged, selective and reflective. McRobbie's comments upon Winship's study of the problem pages is equally valid if applied to women's self-help books, that is, such 'feminist critique ... is ironically challenged by that feminism-from-within which has surfaced in so many of the women's magazines over the past ten years'. As she implies, this is partly a result of the people now working in the media and publishing who have themselves been influenced by feminism, as well as 'the young women readers who have benefited from achievements of 1970s feminism and who as a result are more aware of sexual inequality, at a kind of consumer common-sense level'. This could be a productive insight for it shows that not only are we in an era of post-feminism but also, in terms of feminist criticism, we have to engage in a kind of

meta-feminism, that is maintain a consciousness of the naturalised feminist underpinnings of post-feminist statements.

Having moved away from theory to explore the possibilities for interpretation in textual response and cultural readings which are sensitive to inherent contradictions in the text, one can avoid patronising the female reader. This is important for post-feminism which is wary of feminist analysis for this reason. There are similarities in the ways in which poststructuralist readings confront popular culture, armed not with Marxist conspiracy theory against the market, but with a more open attitude towards the latter which sees it as productive of diverse meanings which exist in conflict with each other. Post-feminism can be read positively as impatient with the old feminist masternarrative of women's oppression. It is alert to differences between women and self-reflexive humour just as post-modernity is seen to be characterised by 'difference' and pastiche. While post-feminism effects its interpretations at the cost of belittling feminist analysis which is still pertinent, its opportunism is potentially liberating. Unlike theories of post-modernity it aims not for theoretical coherence, but patently wants to have it both ways when it comes up against stumbling blocks. Thus post-feminism regresses to feminism when it can use it to resist outmoded sexist assumptions. At the same time it may appeal to individual female responses when feminism appears too heavy-handed in its absorption of female discontent into a single theory. This apparently unscrupulous embrace of different sides of an argument has the effect of negotiating areas of tension which feminist critique might overlook out of defensiveness.

This is relevant to the debate about therapy because the acceptance of contradiction as productive can apply not only to the issue of whether social or individual forces are of paramount importance but all the either / ors the debate comes up against. In this way, the consciousness of tension in reading may be used to address what is happening in the women's self-help guides themselves. They inevitably engage with the issue of post-feminism (including its doubleness) in so far as feminism and commercialism are to some degree in the back of most readers' minds. Thus they are

makes the reader just one of many, hand-in-hand with the lively encouragement that tells her she is an individual and can break the mould. Similarly, they may negotiate a path between conspiracy and complicity theories. Their concern with parenting does not present a totalising image of patriarchy, the law of the father, but also addresses matriarchy. When evidence of patriarchal social pressure is balanced by recognition of women's role in perpetuating misogyny as mothers, post-feminist dismissal is prevented by the recognition of women as agents and not just victims. A conspiracy theory which blames men for women's oppression may be weighed against female complicity and dual forces may be acknowledged.

Self-Help and Post-feminism

While post-feminist attitudes have been incorporated into popular culture, the post-feminist woman, despite media hype in Britain, is not exactly a popular figure. She is something of a grotesque, recalling the image of Margaret Thatcher coined by François Mitterand: 'the eyes of Caligula and the mouth of Marilyn Monroe'. She is a woman who knows what she wants, unscrupulous in her ambition, hard, materialistic and selfish. Even in sympathetic terms which might translate as 'confident, assertive, financially independent and centred', readers are led to feel that there is something missing. In this country, ten years of Thatcherism did little to integrate this unyielding figure of the Iron Lady into public sympathy or to provide any ground for negotiation. Yet the dust has not finally settled on these definitions; there is also a 'good' post-feminist woman fabricated for women and sitting pretty on the covers of women's magazines. The New Woman preserves what is left of the feminine and is consequently much more Monroe than Caligula. The above quotation provides an arresting image for the PFW: that is, the Janus face of modern women, as seen from outside. Monroe is the archetypal victim, the woman who loved too much, and frequently appears as an example in self-help books for women. Crude though the

opposition is, it makes for a convenient dialectic upon which to re-evaluate the self-help book for women in the Eighties.

Even in the movement of self-help to the woman's domain one can see both the hardy PFW and the needy Monroe. In the former, publishers found a new market for a female version of the previously non-gender-specific (but originally male) assertiveness books, usually directed towards having friends and making money; in the latter they could ape the concern for women propagated by the Women's Liberation Movement of the 1970s. In terms of the New Woman, self-help therapy books for women reproduce a later version or echo of the WLM method of consciousness raising, in that they represent a kind of consciousness stock-taking or changed-consciousness consolidation. That is, while a certain kind of consciousness was necessary for women to make demands for their economic and sexual independence, yet another is required to deal with the historical and ideological result of these demands. While the 'Juggler' (with career and family) is anxiously working this out, the New Woman appears to be more serene as though the goods have already been successfully packaged for her.

Self-help books provide both a forum for the popularisation of feminist concerns in post-feminist times, and the resistance to, or working through of post-feminism. Dowling in Perfect Women provides an example of a cautionary position on post-feminism, not for the obvious feminist reasons that it is unsisterly, uncaring and capitulates too much to masculine ideals and values, but arguing instead that it feeds on the 'false self' that women develop when they are little girls,[40] Because girls are encouraged and strive to please and succeed, they tend to simulate their own pleasure and are led away from their own 'psychological truth' (p.14). Consequently they move towards a compensatory 'narcissistic posturing' which covers up a lack of self-esteem, or healthy narcissism. Action is used to substitute for a secure essence, which she calls 'an authentic self'. She writes: 'It's ironic that the opportunities of the last two decades have in some respects had a subverting effect on women's search for self. By providing new outlets for action, and thus new sources for outside approval, the

post-liberation ethic has supported the illusion that women will be fine as long as we *do enough well enough*' (p.16). The activities ('Advancing a career, making more money') of the post-feminist, or post-liberated woman, whom Dowling calls the 'New Woman', represent Eighties women's efforts to be 'perfect women'. Because these activities coincide with the contemporary view of success, it is harder for us to see that much of our frantic activity is symptomatic, an attempt to suppress or deny low self-esteem.

This serves as quite a powerful demystification of the media stereotype of the PFW in that it reveals her to be not at all beyond feminism, suggesting instead that she will not be able to sustain herself if she tries to operate without a sufficient feminist base. Perhaps the greatest danger of the myth of the PFW is that its model for femaleness is too driven. Post-feminism, as Dowling presents it, is feminism moving faster than its legs can carry it, a non-therapised feminism. She illustrates this with a comment she overheard from one woman to another: 'The best move I ever made was to quit my analyst and hire a book keeper' (p.45). These new women cross their feminist bridges before they come to them; they are non-centred selves rushing towards change without the adequate psychological basis and support. Perfect Women is self-help directed at post-feminism, and it is Dowling's sympathy which opens up a new perspective. She presents post-feminist women not as mercenary dragons, but as lost in excess, manifesting 'difficulty with self-regulation'. She criticises the exercise compulsion among middle-class professionals, sexual addiction, and buying which she says is 'an act of female macho' or 'female desperation' (p.51). Such a blend of criticism, resistance and sympathy could well prove to be a recipe for a popular feminism (or feminist post-feminism), which appeals because it seems to be conservative. This text may appear to warn women away from self-motivation and ambition, but at the same time helpfully notes that women have not made all the necessary gains, nor developed the strengths, to join the fray without serious side-effects. This could be an ingenious strategy; if women can agree that post-feminism is a trap, then it is likely that they

will feel more genial towards the kind of non-extreme, unstressed, measured-paced and socially acceptable feminism which Dowling seems to advocate.

A consideration of women's self-help therapy guides as an antidote to the negative sides of post-feminism proves fruitful, in that their feminist credentials are thereby increased and one is less prone to dismiss them for setting out to brainwash the gullible with reactionary sentiments. Often these books, while avoiding the word feminism, will recall the rhetoric of Earth Mother, essential female goodness, and the peace-loving strand of feminism. In the late Eighties many women appeared to be receptive to this again, as seen by the growth of New Age alternative therapies which frequently stress feminine values and the feminine ability to perceive 'the whole', deploring our culture's over-development of masculine analytical faculties. This step backwards is not only useful to halt an advance which may have become slightly misdirected in its haste, but has potential appeal in that it returns to old ground. These assertions may be dated, but they are also reassuringly familiar, especially when tempered with contemporary political awareness and the spirit of compromise. For Example, in Men Who Hate Women, and the Women Who Love Them, Susan Forward comments in her final section, 'Finding Your Balance As A Woman': 'I believe our goal as contemporary women is to hold on to those qualities that make us unique - our intuition, our comfort with feelings and strong emotions, and our ability to nurture - while letting go of those self-denying behaviours that have not served us well'. Such essentialism may have lost its appeal from a feminist theoretical point of view, and may be suspicious politically to the extent that it can be used for a disabling kind of passivity, but there is a value in reviewing previous positions. Dowling's contention that it would be a loss if women ceased to be introspective and became materialistic instead is a simple but convincing and helpful reclamation of what was considered to be typical female behaviour.

These books, in providing the means to such a step, offer some important pointers to the state in which feminism found itself at the end of the last decade. As self-proclaimed feminists were on the whole disappointed with the ways in which their

movement had either disintegrated or been co-opted, there was an understandable resistance on their part to risk losing their political edge by espousing aspects of the co-option, for adopting or taking on these changes would entail yielding further ground. Yet the direction in which this moved may reveal potential ground for feminist intervention in the future. Feminist critics have a great deal to learn from examining the new ways in which women are being re-labelled, silenced and packaged. Thus we can examine which areas of post-feminist ideology incorporate feminist ideologies; what women readers are ready to take for granted, which are still the areas of contention, and what kind of political pressures lie behind the arguments. With the collapse of many areas in which feminism was making headway in affecting the lives of ordinary people, much of the grass roots base of feminist activism was eroded. In the absence of this, and beyond what people are doing in their own lives with their own traditions and beliefs, critics must engage with mainstream communication and the media not with the sole purpose of denouncing them, but for an understanding of the methods by which they educate and inform people, providing role models and images which may be construed positively.

Hence self-help guides for women point to some of the cutting edges of mainstream popular feminism. They are a measure of the level of contemporary feminist consciousness because they are moving gradually with the times rather than taking an oppositional stance. By focusing on the current problems in women's lives the authors are keeping their ears to the ground, so to speak. This is a soft approach which certainly has dispensed with the radical edge of Seventies feminism, but it has the advantage of a more widespread and democratic appeal. In many ways these therapy guides exist to break contemporary society, especially women to whom they are addressed, gently into feminist change. Their authors can sit happily on the fence which psychotherapy precariously teeters on, balanced between advising women to change and helping them to adapt. A dilemma within the world of therapy, this is a bonus for self-help manuals because, like post-feminism, the self-help guide can have its cake and eat it.

Thus, while one might not expect the self-help genre to appeal to a younger generation of women, given the refusal of the PFW to tolerate any perception of women as victims, there might be new emphases which the form could incorporate. As it negotiates feminist change in rhetoric acceptable to the mainstream, it is flexible enough to take on a changing market. Such books are resonant of movements within feminism and once the meanings and style of post-feminism consolidate it may be possible to address its concerns in a guide or manual. Good Guys, Bad Guys and Other Lovers, published in the UK in 1989, intimates such a shift. It is written by two women, Shere Hite and Kate Colleran (a collaborative effort in the spirit of feminist post-feminist solidarity) who present themselves as old buddies instead of the all-seeing mother-figure. [41] As the title suggests, the focus is upon relationships and men, but on the back cover also offers: 'How to be single and love it, when all around are panicking'. A chapter is devoted to 'Women as friends, women as lovers', marking the development from mothering to female friendships, as well as diversifying slightly from the heterosexual presumption of most mainstream self-help guides. The tone attempts to be ironic and familiar, almost pally, with the reader (e.g.: 'We must be the ones who can't get it - right?') and the writing is also irreverent and self-conscious in its use of the genre: 'If you've been told once too much that you "love too much" - and you are ready to throw any new advice book out of the window - this one is for you'.

While it bears many of the trademarks of the genre (buzzwords, and anecdotal case studies), it is marketed on its distinction from the typical self-help guide incorporating post-feminist emphases: 'radically new and - unlike the others - it doesn't tell women they are to blame and that *they* should change'. One noticeable difference is that it appears to take for granted women's independent sexual activity: for example, it assumes that women have one-night stands and quotes women who contest the idea that it is degrading to be thought of as a sex object (p.47). It also makes greater use of humour and wit than most self-help manuals. One begins to see post-feminist strategies of reversal come into play in the section on fighting, where some of the

more painful passages are relieved by the observation that women can actually laugh at these situations. It suggests refusal lines to pesky men in a sassy and uplifting way (p.40), and is less self-regarding than therapy, instead turning a belligerent gaze on men. The authors are sceptical about the New Man (p.5), emphasise that women's desire for more communication is not neurosis, and announce: 'it is ... an unresolved "male" problem in our society ' (p.9).

Feminist and post-feminist attitudes seem to merge in this text. For example: 'Although more women are aware of the injustice of being seen as no more than a sexual commodity, some feel that there is a flip side to this: through the age-old game of flirtation, they can turn the tables on men. Here they have the power, however temporary, to be in control of men for a change' (p.48). It bears a weak undercurrent of social radicalism (opposing the political climate which hypocritically emphasises 'Family Values', p.53) but on the whole it is light-hearted and recalls the language and focus of many glossy women's magazines. It is conscious of women's greater need in the late 1980s to appear emotionally strong, acknowledging women's reluctance to tell other women about their problems with men for fear of being labelled a masochist (p.123). However, the issue of female victimisation is not totally discounted, and statistics on battery are included (p.32). The authors attempt to focus not on women's problems, but on their interests. The return of the gaze and language games with inversion are made entertaining: why, they ask, instead of 'vaginal penetration' do we not call it 'penile covering' (p.62)? Feminism is mentioned as an issue, but in a way that portrays it as prohibitive, as when they question specifically whether dressing sexily is 'anti-feminist' (p.49). The authors appear to redress the power balance at the cost of a deeper analysis. There is also a tendency to turn arguments on their head, as in the facetious remark that 'severity in women's appearance does not automatically provide anyone with power' (p.50), as though the Women's Liberation Movement were responsible for such a claim.

Good Guys, Bad Guys and Other Lovers brings to light much of the pertinence of post-feminism to the women's self-help genre of the 1980s. Feminism is ignored, or

at least underplayed, for the purposes of presenting well-established feminist analysis as though it were new. This popularises feminist concerns in the absence of a politically coherent context yet, by dressing up feminist analysis in post-feminist clothing such analysis is made palatable to a wider non-feminist audience. At the same time, one can see a double reversal in the appropriation of post-feminist attitudes by feminism to criticise elements of the former. Hite and Colleran retain an ambivalent attitude towards post-feminism, expressing strong reservations about the way in which the 'New Woman' is now meant to be sexually in charge, and not the victim of men, because it means that the New Woman 'behaves just like one of the guys' (pp.42, 43). Thus one can observe a reincorporation of feminism into post-feminism through the woman-centred discourse of self-help in the post-feminist decade. The above self-help guide gestures away *from therapy towards female friendships*. The angry voices of 'ordinary experience' provided by the young women who are quoted are used in the text to create a sense of community in the place of a structure whereby an expert gives advice to a mass readership. The book maintains that negative attitudes between women are becoming less common, underlines that female solidarity is the source of women's personal strength and women's power (p.192), and concludes with a jubilant exhortation to women readers to respect and support each other.

Conclusion: 'Changes always involve two steps forward and one step back'

Dr. Susan Forward [42]

In conclusion to this chapter, I believe women's self-help guides of the last decade have been instrumental in forming a new acceptable language of popular understanding around women's issues and feminist politics. Feminist analysis and post-feminist attitudes towards this genre are hostile because of women's self-help's ambivalent relationship to them through its appropriations of their rhetoric and implied criticisms of them both. Popular therapy tends to be regarded as facile and patronising towards women by feminists and post-feminists alike. Yet, if post-feminist concerns in particular are applied to the self-help books of the last decade and one

examines the language they use regarding women's troubles, one finds that it is not often one of victimisation (we can note that Norwood makes a point of writing 'martyr' and never 'masochist'). The authors may play on a rhetoric associated with women's suffering for the purposes of establishing a sufficiently emotive response to engage attention, but the emphasis is usually upon moving beyond it. An often repeated message in self-help books is that guilt is a useless emotion and women must stop blaming themselves. They might even appear to overstress assertiveness in order to counter the guilt feelings and misery which common mythology holds as pertaining to women.

These books address women's social situation, their ties with men and the world outside the home. They are not just negotiating a narrow group of interests, but a huge and changing ideology rife with differences and contradictions. Thus I have found that the popular literature of therapy for women is best understood as a *medial* genre, a limbo land in a battle ground, alternatively waging war and keeping the peace. For these reasons one can consider women's 'sickness' as a label serving to restrict women that was originally defined by those in power (and was in part a continuation of the notion of women's physical and mental inferiority) which, in the period of post-feminism, could be opened up for women's own speculations. [43] The female malady may be seen as a weapon traditionally used against women which a new generation could begin to appropriate. This new appropriated space is not 'the revolution', nor the new world with new definitions and the disintegration of structures of power for which radical feminists of the Seventies would have hoped. But, given the fact of gradual and non-violent change, it has lent itself to subtlety and subversion. As Beatrix Campbell says in her discussion on whether the 'feminist agenda' nowadays is 'more comprehensive and subtle' than it was in the 1970s: 'The eighties have taught us that if you don't have a politics of negotiation then you don't have a politics, fullstop'. [44] A post-feminist reading of women's self-help books will concern itself not with the need to evolve a new vocabulary, but with working on women's own definitions and understandings of the existing one.

Thus, what was negatively perceived as the female malady could, through the therapy industry of the 1980s, become a means by which women could look at and assess themselves and their political situation. Rather than fixing women in disempowering definitions, self-help literature testifies to the continuing need for change. It does not propagate the view that women have essential problems but tends to underline that there are new conditions to adapt ourselves to. Fortunately in Britain in the 1980s, they were conditions which allowed greater self-determination for many women. In this light, the tendency of most self-help books to end without presenting a solution or a determined closure is more than a strategy to encourage women's addiction to consuming for it may be read as a recognition of the current open-endedness of the issues. The solutions when expressed as hopes for the next generation are not an avoidance, but mark an awareness of an increased pace of change in attitudes towards gender relations, family structure and parenting.

This change intimated and encouraged by self-help books for women of this period is something that could not be immediately effected by the feminism of the late Sixties and Seventies. As shown by the quotation from Eichenbaum and Orbach at the beginning of this chapter, the dramatic change in consciousness for many women was not consolidated by material changes in society. Self-help books, then, can be seen as weighing up these changes in consciousness with the reality of inequality women still experience in their daily lives. The stereotypically brutal post-feminism of the Eighties may well have been a phenomenon which can now be seen as a stage, a step back to enable another leap forward. One is entitled to make claims for a post-feminism which did not leave feminism behind, but instead was reassessing it 'for the 90s', as the magazines like to say. Critics would do well to be more liberal in their approach and at least entertain the possibility that post-feminism (which even looked at times like pre-feminism or the attempt to get in with the boys) could constitute more than an anti-feminism and retains at least a feminist self-consciousness.

As Good Guys, Bad Guys and Other Lovers goes to show at the end of the post-feminist decade, a near saturation of the market could result in parodies of popular

therapy which could lead to its becoming self-referential and to the potential for greater self-consciousness in the texts and their reception. Moreover, the shifts of emphasis in this text, from mothering to female friendships and from therapy to sexual relationships, lead one further into post-feminist concerns which I will examine in the next chapter on post-feminism and sex.

Notes

1. Luise Eichenbaum and Susie Orbach, Understanding Women [U.S.: 1983] (London: Penguin, 1985; 1988), p.11.
2. Bill and Linda Katz observe the increasing popularity of self-help books in this period, noting the inclusion of a special section on the genre in the New York Times Book Review's weekly listings of best-sellers in the mid 1980s. See Bill Katz and Linda Sternberg Katz, Self-Help: 1400 Best Books on Personal Growth (New York and London: R.R.Bowker Company, 1985).
3. One typical example is Women Who Love Too Much by Robin Norwood which was first published in Britain in 1986 and then reprinted here eleven times in the following four years.
4. American women's advice books were in existence as early as the 1830s. See Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, For Her Own Good: 150 years of the Experts' Advice to Women (London: Pluto Press, 1978).
5. Samuel Smiles' Self Help (1859) provides the classic paradigm in Britain and in popular parlance it still recalls the 'self-made man', the rise of the middle classes and the individual asserting him or herself above the masses.
6. This decade saw the rise of the 'Yuppies', the 'Big Bang' in the City of London, privatisation of many previously nationalised industries, and the success of the ideology of private property (seen for example in the increase in home ownership).
7. The Women's Movement would appear to be opposed to the ideology of individualism in that the former is premised upon recognition of the oppression of women as a group and it promotes female solidarity as a means of resistance.
8. Self-help therapy can be considered a 'movement' in so far as it was not only constituted by a trend in publishing and in the media, but also had further ramifications in group therapy, co-counselling, specific self-help groups which centred around particular problems and the growth of related therapeutic organisations. One feature which characterises this decade is the tenet of recovery

- from addiction, even 'sex addiction'. See Dr. Patrick Carnes, Don't Call It Love: Recovery From Sexual Addiction (London: Judy Piatkus Publishers, 1991).
9. See Susan Faludi, Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women (London: Chatto & Windus, 1992).
10. They appear to be designed at their outset to create media personalities and large fan-clubs, for example Norwood's publication of Letters From Women Who Love Too Much and Louise Hay's Heal Your Life tapes.
11. Luise Eichenbaum and Susie Orbach, Understanding Women, [U.S.: 1983] (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985; 1988).
12. Olivier frequently quotes Hé^lène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Annie Leclerc and Beno^îte Groult. Christiane Olivier, Jocasta's Children: The Imprint of the Mother [France: Denöel, 1980] (translated by George Craig, London: Routledge, 1989).
13. Alice Miller, For Your Own Good: The Roots of Violence in Childrearing (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1980; translation by Farrar, Straus and Giroux, London: Faber, 1983; London: Virago, 1990).
14. Louise Hay, You Can Heal Your Life (U.S.A.: Eden Grove Publications, 1984; Exeter: 1987).
15. Robin Norwood, Women Who Love Too Much (When You Keep Wishing and Hoping He'll Change) (London: Fontana, 1986).
16. Suzanne Moore, Looking For Trouble: On Shopping, Gender and the Cinema (London: Serpent's Tail, 1991), pp.76, 77.
17. For example, the Sanitarium Bellevue in Switzerland, to which Freud sent patients in the 1890s.
18. Elaine Showalter, The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980 (London: Virago, 1987), p.3.
19. In the nineteenth century Germany the diagnosis 'moral insanity' was a necessary precursor to offering women therapy, and was 'most often applied to a young woman who did not accept her subordinate role in society'. Jeffrey Masson, Against Therapy (London: Fontana, 1990), p.46.

20. Joan Woodward, Understanding Ourselves: Uses of Therapy (London: Macmillan, 1988), p.109.
21. Joel Kovel, A Complete Guide to Therapy: From Psychoanalysis to Behaviour Modification (London: Penguin, 1978), p.321.
22. See Peter Lomas, The Limits of Interpretation: What's Wrong With Psychoanalysis? (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), p.5.
23. See Rosalind Coward, 'The Voice', in Female Desire: Women's Sexuality Today (London: Grafton, 1987), p.156.
24. For example, it has become a joke in terms of female response to characters in the media, when women send in knitted cotton socks, etc., when a baby is born to a favourite couple in a television soap opera.
25. Lacanianism, according to Sayers, 'found a wide following within the ivory tower and ... is almost exclusively an academic phenomenon'. See Claire Messud, 'Speaking in Tongues: A feminine angle on analysis', The Guardian, 29.1.1991, p.17.
26. Juliet Mitchell, Psychoanalysis and Feminism (London: Allen Lane, 1974; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), p.xxi.
27. Claire Messud (1991).
28. See Ruth Wallace, Feminism and Sociological Theory (London: Sage, 1990), pp.94, 95.
29. Orbach has had a regular column in The Guardian newspaper and in The Independent on Sunday in the early Nineties but earlier, it seems, her work remained largely within the less public ambit of British socialist feminist therapeutic practice.
30. See Lucy O'Brien, 'Her Girl Friday', in City Limits magazine (25.10.1990).
31. Angela McRobbie, Feminism and Youth Culture: From Jackie to Just Seventeen (London: Macmillan, 1991), p.162.
32. Janice Winship, Chapter 5, 'Between Women', in Inside Women's Magazines (London: Routledge, 1987), pp.66-80.

33. Rosalind Coward, 'Have You Tried Talking About It?' in Female Desire (1987), p.136.
34. Dr. Susan Forward and Joan Torres, Men Who Hate Women and the Women Who Love Them: When Loving Hurts and You Don't Know Why (Reading: Bantam Books, 1986; 1989); David Cohen, Psychologists on Psychology (London: Ark, 1985), p.75.
35. Masson (1990), p.27.
36. Sigmund Freud, "The Question of Lay Analysis", in Two Short Accounts of Psycho-Analysis, translated and edited by James Strachey (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962; reprint, 1984), p.101.
37. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Anti Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1980; London: Athlone, 1984), p.61.
38. Sendak, quotation on the back cover of Alice Miller, For Your Own Good (1990).
39. In 1991 I interviewed 15 women between the ages of 21 and 38 whom I found were at the time, or had been in the late Eighties, avid readers of self-help. Some had become involved in one particular strand of the genre or were fans of one author in particular, and others had gone into the subject in greater depth, read widely and engaged with self-help in relation to *their own experiences of therapy or feminist politics*. I am aware of the selectiveness of surveys and polls and their very tenuous claim to sociological standing, even when conducted formally with a strict and explicit methodology. I do not use these comments as evidence, but to underline that one hears different voices and perspectives not only in the wide range of literature on the subject: a parallel diversity may be found in the ways self-help is processed by consumers.
40. Colette Dowling, Perfect Women: Hidden Fears of Inadequacy and the Drive to Perform (London: Fontana, 1989).
41. Shere Hite and Kate Colleran, Good Guys Bad Guys and Other Lovers (London: Pandora Press, 1989).

42. Forward and Torres (1989), p.284.

43. Following the lead of French feminists Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément who re-interpret the figure of the hysteric in The Newly Born Woman [1975] (translation by Betsy Wing, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), pp.154, 155.

44. Beatrix Campbell and Bridget Smith, 'Two Generations: A Dialogue', in Women: A Cultural Review, 1:1 (1990), p.7.

CHAPTER TWO

TAKING LIBERTIES:

Post-feminism and Sex

Redefining the Erotic in terms of female rather than male experience is crucial to the pornography debate, not only to introduce some truth-telling but also to remind those who want to protect and sanctify, that censorship may replace one kind of gag with another. We don't want men to package us but we must have the freedom to define ourselves.

Jeanette Winterson, Erotica [1]

INTRODUCTION: The New Sexual Revolution

In this chapter I will examine the discourses of women's sexuality in both non-fictional and fictional literature of the post-feminist period of the late 1980's and early 1990s. Drawing from the self-help movement, literature focusing upon (primarily) heterosexual relationships and sex within them has begun to counter the obsessive gaze on women's emotional problems, and provide an emphasis upon mutuality which reasserts women as bearers of the gaze. The sometimes punitive and self-blaming self-regard and internal focus of popular psychology for women here takes the issue of female subjectivity further into the arena where it observes what is going on 'outside' (in the world of sexual politics) as well as 'inside' (in personal psychology). Hence the popularity of books by women on male sexuality. Consequently female agency has become an important issue in discussions of women's sexuality and post-feminism. One of the most culturally significant box-office successes in the latter half of the 1980s in Britain was the film Fatal Attraction (1987), which illustrates the tensions surrounding women's increased agency in sexual relationships with men. The film explores women's sexuality in relation to the institution of marriage, responsibilities for parenting and changing roles in the workplace. It sets these against the growing fear of AIDS, male sexual vulnerability and violence, and makes a misogynist but also complex use of the demonised stereotype of hysterical femininity.[2]

It has been argued in Britain that the second wave of feminism soon became preoccupied with the issue of sex and insisted that sexuality, rather than diverse ideological and material structures, was the primary source of men's oppression of women (Segal, 1992). The potentially endless reversals in such chicken-and-egg arguments yield rich ground for post-feminist intervention. At first glance, it looks as though post-feminism has taken up the baton of sex from feminism and promptly run off in another direction. While contemporary self-help literature for women holds an ambiguous place between feminism and post-feminism, sex has become a primary focus of post-feminism. Indeed feminism's perceived puritanism on the subject may be understood as one of the main motivating factors of the phenomenon of post-feminism. Feminism has been stereotyped as anti-sex, especially where men are involved, and anti-pleasure. It has been perceived as humourless at best, and prohibitive and intolerant at worst, particularly on the subject of sexual politics. There is a kernel of truth in this image. It may have been blown up out of proportion by a media eager to pioneer the idea of a new 'post-feminist woman', who 'looks good, loves men and sex' (Neustatter, 1990, p.232), but for a time feminists were also complicit with it by their silence. Lynne Segal writes that, to avoid courting 'aggressive attack from the "revolutionary feminist" faction, increasingly active from 1978', most feminists 'simply stopped writing about sex altogether, refocusing on the problem of men's violence' (p.4).

If British feminists felt that it was beneath them to engage in tawdry media battles premised on anti-feminist sympathies, and have on the whole been more retiring than their American counterparts in public debates on these issues, it was not beneath them to think of the effect their unsexy image would have on potential feminists of the next generation.[3] Sex remains a great marketing tool and, after the reactionary period of the 1980s which saw considerable sexual angst and repression, it was ripe for recommodification in the wake of post-feminism. For example, The Face magazine claimed that 1992 was 'the year of the Sexy Woman', 'when pornography met feminism' and 'female sexuality' met 'niche marketing'. [4] That year in Britain

certainly yielded memorable phenomena consolidating a post-feminist slant on women and sex, such as London's first sex shop for women (coyly called 'Sh!'), four new sex magazines for (heterosexual) women [5], the marketing of the female condom, and the inescapable gossip provoked by both Sharon Stone's knickerless crotch in the film Basic Instinct and Madonna's book Sex. It also witnessed various television programmes on female sexuality (such as Channel 4's screening of 'Rude Girls'), the Chippendales' male strip-show for women as a permanent fixture in the Aldwych Theatre, London, and the growth of fashions such as Anne Summers parties for women.

This new commodification of sex for women is symptomatic of a trend which was growing steadily through the 1980s when post-feminist attitudes towards sex emerged in fits and starts between the arguments of the British version of the feminist pornography debate. In these years, lesbian feminists largely deserve credit for leading the way out of a purist, even puritan stalemate. While their initial arguments took place within feminist and academic communities and had little impact on the mainstream, new images did, conveying either an independent self-containment or a new tongue-in-cheek glamour. [6] The proliferation of a variety of lesbian role models or icons finally pushed the stereotype of the ugly lesbian off the map and brought a female-identified sexuality for women into wider recognition. From the late Eighties, one can definitely observe a growth in lesbian sexuality as a fashion, from box-office films featuring stylish lesbian and bi-sexual women to the coining of the ambiguous phrase 'designer dyke', and the rise to fame of two lesbian pop singers. [7] Julie Burchill's post-feminist novel Ambition (1990) recognises the high visibility of chic lesbianism in the post-feminist era and the consequent importance of lesbianism, as image and politics, in any discussion of post-feminism.

Prostitutes also took a daring initiative on the censorship arguments (Delacoste and Alexander, 1988) and, while it seems that their voices were not heard so keenly by the feminist community, their opinions entered the mainstream, albeit often in a distorted form. In Britain, the attention given by the media to Streatham Madame

Cynthia Paine, a clever self-publicist, led to the making of the film Personal Services which casts a sympathetic eye on sex work and offers a mild critique of establishment hypocrisy. Shortly afterwards, the film Scandal was released, and the Corrective Party launched, whose leader, Lindi St.Clair, is yet another mouthpiece for a post-feminist position on women's sexuality.[8] These events are valuable not least for underlining a distinction that might be made between U.S. and U.K. attitudes towards sex as reflected in our popular cultures. They mark a very British slant on sex, in which a Carry On mentality coexists with the repressed masculine stiff upper lip.[9] If British post-feminism can be read as having distinctive characteristics which divide it from American 'backlash', it may be useful to bear in mind this particularly British representation of sex which seems to emphasise sex as comedy.

It is important to note that the Nineties commodification and consecration of sex have not focused only upon women. They appear in a wider context, most obviously that of the spread of AIDS in Britain and the United States. This left sex as an activity to defend and celebrate in defiance of the retribution theses of the powerful moral minorities, and safer sex practices involved a redefinition of activities which were seen as constituting sex. This included relocations of sex away from direct physical expression between couples, to the extent that, in response to the boom in sex phone lines, videos, television series, sex advice manuals and numerous other publications, the question, 'Has discourse taken over from intercourse?', and its variations, became a trite favourite in national newspaper supplements.[10] Most visible was the commercial success of sexual clothing. The early 1990s saw the rise of bondage fashion, fetishwear in clothes and sadomasochism as a newly glamorised sexual practice. 1990 was the year of the Old Bailey trial of the Spanner Case and 1992 of the first S/M Pride march. Body piercing, especially genital piercing, received media attention in this period as a growing practice amongst both sexes, young people and the elderly.[11]

If feminists became wary of discussing sex in the last decade, this did not halt the growth of popular sex surveys in magazines and the proliferation of sexological

findings. [12] The contemporary media's obsession with women and sex looks like a rerun of women's magazines' obsession with the female orgasm in the late 1970s. The 'G spot' controversy of the early 1980s, preserving the vaginal versus clitoral orgasm debate, is a typical example of the continuing ready translation of sexological findings (including those of feminist sexology) directly into the women's popular press. By the 1990s, younger women were no longer told that they had to look sexy for men or they would be left on the shelf, but were encouraged by popular women's magazines to believe that they too could enjoy sex and seek out sexual experiences themselves. More positive images of sexually confident and assertive women have undoubtedly begun to permeate advertising, even if they co-exist with the tired stereotype of the housewife and her washing powder and the more sexually exploitative portrayals of women as appendages and sex objects. Consequently, the unsexy image of British feminism of the time was unlikely to attract a new generation of pleasure-seeking young women who were not willing to espouse the whole baggage of feminist ideology but, nevertheless, were able to take some of its original tenets for granted. It has taken post-feminist voices such as that of Julie Burchill to point out the potential sexual political power young women wield (1992, p.87). Camille Paglia encourages young women with the enthusiastic reminder: 'We *have* what they want' (1993, p.62).

Over the same period that women have begun to assume the right to sexual pleasure (however narrowly or coercively this might be defined [13]) and have even dared to complain in its absence, many have learned to equate feminism with the view that intercourse is rape and that to have sex with men is to collude with the 'enemy'. Slogans from the leaders of the American anti-pornography lobby such as Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon do not even require media distortion to alienate many women from feminism. A statement such as, 'Feminism stresses the indistinguishability of prostitution, marriage and sexual harassment' (MacKinnon, 1987) seems intended to court controversy, is easily read out of context, and is inevitably welcome to a sensationalist press. As a result such soundbites receive

wide publicity and are familiar to many British women. Even when such statements are dismissed on the grounds that they are typical of American extremism and thus scepticism on the part of British women can be ascribed to prejudices arising from cultural difference, there remains the sense that feminism's hidden agenda entails the rejection of heterosexuality as incompatible with women's liberation. British feminism has not made a sufficient stand to counter this (Segal, 1992, p.78) and is therefore vulnerable to post-feminist onslaught. The majority of working women have not had the time to examine the validity of the political arguments which comprise feminism's turbulent history and can hardly be expected to embrace self-sacrifice or a strategic separatism in its honour.

The reappearance of such arguments in post-feminism attests to a continuity, even though the contemporary media has nevertheless accomplished the old trick of making it all seem new. I would argue that this could be achieved on the scale that we have seen in the early 1990s only with the consent and active participation of younger female consumers, indicating an eagerness to join the game of new definitions: 'Sex's new adolescence is upon us', writes Leston (1993, p.55). Post-modern pastiche, which rejuvenated 1950's styles, moved into a nostalgia for the fashions of the Sixties and Seventies and has also yielded a revamping of past ideologies.[14] A contemporary example of the controversies this has generated would be maverick academic Camille Paglia's proud identification of herself as a 'sixties libertarian' in defiance of what she sees as an either / or climate of left wing political correctness versus neo-conservatism in the United States (Paglia, 1993). Moreover, connections between the 'new sexual revolution', post-feminism and backlash are suggested by British revolutionary feminists' identification of the 'new libertarianism' as one of the contemporary culprits which ensured a feminist 'anti-climax'. [15]

The positive side of the indeterminacy about sex is that the subject is available for reinterpretation and women may now have a turn at defining it too, not merely having it defined for and about them. To a degree, feminism can claim some credit for this, and the shifting of definitions may be seen as a triumph for its challenge to traditional

proliferate. In the consumerist economy which follows the WLM, 'female sexuality and fantasy' are finally taken seriously when they are not only 'phenomena in their own right' but also 'market forces'. Linda Williams warns: 'This pornographic speech by women hasn't developed out of any spirit of democratic inclusion but rather strictly as a matter of capitalist expansion' (Williams, 1989). Now that one has to engage with media contentions that 'the public face of sex is turning into an all-power-to women, sexual-myth-challenging, gender-role-defying, bondage-for-everyone, let's put-on-a-porn-show-right-here camcorder heaven' (Leston, 1993), feminist analysis -- not only radical separatist strands, but also that which has its grounding in a critique of capitalism -- must beware not to be outmanoeuvred by such shifting of the goal posts. This can be avoided by acknowledging the complexities involved in post-feminism's embrace of the market as well as the reasons for post-feminist reaction against entrenched feminist positions in the debate on sex.

I have selected various texts by women which elucidate those issues I have raised so far in order to examine to what extent enduring post-feminist emphases emerge. This chapter will explore what post-feminist criticism can do to answer some of the problems which have troubled feminism, raised by both sexology (women's sexual ignorance, disempowerment and lack of autonomy) and pornography (women's oppression and victimisation). I will first consider the emphases of popular sexology published in the 1980s. To this end I have selected texts which combine research with sex therapy. I will compare the rhetoric and assumptions used with that of the self-help genre and examine to what extent their arguments can be appropriated by post-feminism. Feminist writings which engage with the problem of sexual violence will then be discussed, with attention paid to cultural differences in the pornography debates between the U.S. and the U.K.. Post-feminist leanings and strategies of reversal which emerge in these will be investigated in greater depth through a discussion of selected essays by Camille Paglia and Julie Burchill on the subject of sex, again paying attention to national differences and emphases.

Having explored the potential for a post-feminist analysis of women's relation to sex through non-fictional writings, I will consider the issue of imagination and women's sexual fantasies. I will examine a selection of stories and novels to see how they have reinscribed women's sexuality and whether the liberties assumed by post-feminist analysis may find a more appropriate form in fictional texts. The end of the last decade witnessed the publication of a number of anthologies of female-authored erotic short stories, as well as some novels by women which either were explicitly about sex or made a self-conscious use of pornographic conventions. I ask whether post-feminism has found a voice in contemporary fiction, and question to what extent this can take further some post-feminist strategies. I will look at two novels of the 1970s to see whether post-modern fiction by feminists anticipates post-feminism and elaborates more complex strategies which can be used in women's sexual fiction in the early Nineties.

Sexual Healing

Women's sexual confidence is one of the professed aims of contemporary sexology and sex therapy, and as such these would appear to be compatible with post-feminism. Yet feminist critics have claimed that historically sexology appeared to be on the side of repressing female sexuality at the same time that it had the potential to liberate it. Anne McClintock argues provocatively that the new sexology was born with Freudian sexual theory, both emerging at 'much the same time as women began to push against the doors of male privilege', and 'was inextricably linked with the repression of clitoral eroticism'. [16] Like psychoanalysis and psychotherapy, sexology was a science whose original practitioners strove to establish it as a respectable discipline; to the extent that popular sexology followed social trends it inevitably served to justify prevalent (hetero)sexist attitudes in the sexual revolution of the late Sixties. While the feminist sexology of Hite is welcome to Julie Burchill as a weapon with which one can provoke male sexual anxiety (1992, p.29), she implies that in general the science

has been the servant of the 'male medical establishment' and given women 'yet another sexual failure to take the blame for' (that is, frigidity).

From a post-feminist point of view, sexology, along with its attendant popularisations in sex surveys and advice manuals, may receive as much scorn as the censorship lobby for perpetuating the notion of women as pitiable and passive. Ironically, it may also be regarded as being anti-pleasure, for the technical and detailed physical focus of most sexology (which represses the psychological inspiration of desire, lust, transgression and danger, as well as love, trust and affection) has a profoundly de-eroticising effect. Burchill is wary of its rationalisation of sex, and this would include the painstaking physical analysis of 'sexual response'. This is also mocked by Segal who berates Hite as well as Masters and Johnson for 'reducing sexual pleasure to measurable movements of the genitals' (1992, p.80). The idea that women ought to have a sexual 'response' in the first place should be anathema to post-feminism, just as it is to revolutionary feminism (Jeffreys, 1990, p.2). If, as Camille Paglia says, we have what 'they' want, then women should be leading the way and defining sex on their terms, not doing what men say is sex and then trying to achieve the prescribed response. Post-feminists wish to preserve the mystery of sex which they present as an essential part of its excitement and pleasure, whereas the telos of sexology is to demystify it, even though this is with the aim of making it pleasurable for women.

The terms of this debate are linked with the nature versus culture problematic which has played a crucial role in feminism's history. Both sides strive to avoid 'essentialism' but neither escapes it. Post-feminists oppose the view of women as nurturing and gentle, implying that it is outdated and restrictively essentialist, maintaining residues of an ideology which aims to control women within a moral sphere. However, they tend to replace this with another primitivist or mythical essentialism, which is that sex essentially draws its energies from difference and constitutes a form of contest. Sexologists on the other hand often find themselves in the paradoxical situation of asserting that while sex is 'natural' it must be learned. The

contradictions are apparent in the early sex manuals' insistence upon teaching an 'instinct', the vaginal orgasm (Segal, p.119). McClintock summarises the chequered history of sexology thus: 'Men of science mustered their forces to retain monopoly over the sexual regimen, bowing to feminist pressure by recognising female desire while containing this idea within a revamped marital morality under the tutelage of imperial nature'.

I will briefly look at The Hite Report and The Body Electric by Anne Hooper to examine how they stand up to post-feminist criticism. Hite has to be very cautious regarding the image she projects and, like the author of the woman's self-help guide, must both retain the trust of her readership (by not appearing too commercial or calculating) and appeal to as wide a readership as possible. Consequently she shifts from sex researcher into a new composite role which negotiates radical feminist politician and agony aunt. Her assertion that the sexual revolution took away women's right *not* to have sex overlaps with the contemporary revolutionary feminist interpretation of Sheila Jeffreys who maintains that 'sexologic' is premised upon the connection perceived between women's sexual response to men and their subordination,[17] In the context of The Hite Report however, this assertion shades into the maternalism of the agony aunt. It is immediately followed by responses to her question as to whether women had been afraid to say no to sex, and what they felt like afterwards (p.460). This is relevant to post-feminism, for it is symptomatic of Hite's tendency to sympathise with women as victims. The patronising tone in this section is not balanced by a fair examination of the reasons *why* the women consented to sex and, if they did regret it afterwards, whether they would do so again in the same situation. The respondents' self-disgust combined with anger in their comments ('I felt like a dead lump. A hole'; '...just plain powerless. Infuriated') suggests not, and, if this is the case, it is surely a matter of learning from experience and not an irremediable situation which calls for great lament.

One can see the influence which the report must have had in the boom of women's popular therapy guides. A number of Hite's questions pave the way to a 'women-

who-love-too-much' market for they do contain intermittent stress upon dependency and women's feelings of lack of control (p.642). While the report is less polished than Women Who Love Too Much and more encouraging of a sense of solidarity among women, there are indications that Hite promotes a victim-mentality and self-pity for women, even urging a sense of powerlessness. In general, I would argue that Hite's position towards women in The Hite Report is protective rather than empowering and it is to these ends that she distorts her material. This has caused outrage amongst critics, especially with regard to Hite's bias against penetrative sex (Segal, 1992, p.80). Another example is the glossing over of positive opinions held by women towards the sexual revolution. Hite gives considerable weight to reservations about its exploitation by men and the media and its potential dangers for women, which were expressed mostly by older and married women. Other responses were less defensive, holding that the increased openness which resulted from it was a very good thing.

Anne Hooper's The Body Electric was first published by Virago in 1980. The attempt to make therapy interesting by personalising it and putting it into a narrative makes for inadvertent parody in the advertising on the back cover of the 1991 reprint, which describes the contents as though they were a film plot: 'Six women meet ... in search of an elusive goal -- an orgasm'.^[18] Where conventional narrative would have us expect fame, love or money, the all-important orgasm appears. One wonders what embarrassment this tone is designed to hide: the individual and emotional side of sexuality, that the women found it that important or themselves so inadequate, or perhaps the pathos of their not having orgasms? From a post-feminist point of view, one inevitably notices from such a book the 'victim' focus, the premise that women have a problem. As a reader one tends to feel sorry for the characters and this is depressing because one is, as in all therapy books, also asked to identify with them. A review quoted from Company magazine recommends: 'Valuable for any woman who's uneasy with her sexuality and wants to help herself'. The emphasis upon self-help looks empowering, and at least the book insists neither that readers should join a

group at the end, nor buy tapes and sequels, but which post-feminist woman would like to declare that she is uneasy with her sexuality?

However, the characters are drawn sympathetically and appear quite lively; those who are 'doormats' or play little girls are challenged by the group as they get to know each other. Moreover, it emerges from the individual stories that most of the women are looking for more than an orgasm and more than physical sexual pleasure is at stake. A number needed to separate from their partners or at least change their relationships in some way, often with their lovers, but also with their parents. Being a therapy book, this does contain a self-help step-by-step set of instructions, and from the advertising it sounds ominously technical: 'Every practical aspect of sexuality comes into their training'. But, while the emphasis is largely on the body, Hooper's book takes care to contextualise sex and love through reporting the female participants' domestic and economic arrangements, and wider lives. As well as the 'erotic homework', the women also receive a mild form of assertiveness training and have certain psychological exercises, such as saying 'no' to various things they do not like.

The ideological pressure upon definitions of sex and sexual behaviour is very apparent in the area of popular sex research and the literary genres which have been adapted for its publication. The self-conscious marketing of the classic Human Sexuality by Masters and Johnson reveals similar contradictions to those negotiated by The Hite Report. In the preface to the third edition published in 1982, the authors are clearly eager to prevent their approach from being perceived as mere science with an exclusive biological and physiological emphasis, and claim that the text functions as an introductory course as well as a contribution towards people's choices regarding their personal sexuality. They write that they have made 'considerable use of personal quotations from ordinary people to give an authentic "real life" flavour to the book and to avoid the dryness and biases of the strictly academic approach'. [19] The rhetorical stress on balance and integration appears designed to compensate for an insecurity in the 1980s as to which literary form fits their work on sex. It appears

from this edition that they were influenced by the self-help genre for it has 'Personal Perspectives' boxes, as well as photographs, charts, cartoons and illustrations which give the sense that it is competing in a large market for such texts. From Hooper's work it appears that the therapy genre is the best-suited to sexology, whereas Hite's publications are an interesting hybrid of this with popular science, some cultural investigation, anecdotal case history and opportunism in her exploration of a potential gap in the market. They illustrate the search for the right balance of genres, tone and image required to enable female sexuality to find its market niche in the early 1990s.

Sexology may appear less monolithic and oppressive of female sexuality if it uses the strategies of the self-help book. Moreover, with regard to female sex research, one should note that although women's public discussion about sex causes great unease when they are assertive or make demands, women are permitted to address sex and sexuality when it is for the purpose of helping others. This allows a new interpretation of the promotion of sex as a health issue: it may not be just a further injunction and pressure on women to have sex (the classic and radical feminist reading), but also, according to a post-feminist reading, a cover-up for women's increasing agency. Masking an interest in sex as a concern with health makes it less threatening to men. The new sexual revolution of this period, when Britain finally has a cable porn channel and hands out sexual advice in prime-time evening television, provoked widespread discussion. It would be misguided to assume that just because this phenomenon was promoted by the media, it was not genuine. Contrary to a classic feminist analysis (for example that of Susan Faludi and Naomi Wolf in The Beauty Myth), the media embrace of sex need not be vilified as merely voyeuristic, exploitative and titillating, but may be seen as removing the subject from the exclusive authority of experts. As with popular therapy, it is both responsive to and creative of cultural and ideological changes.

Sexology, while repressive of female sexuality, once translated to a popular market, permits a space for it to be discussed. It is not hard to see how sexology may be positively appropriated by post-feminism through the latter's points of connection

with both elements of radical feminism as well as libertarian feminism. Masters and Johnson are famous for the emphasis they place upon female masturbation, observing in their research results, as does Hite, that women experience stronger orgasms outside intercourse. Paul Robinson criticised them for their 'masturbatory bias' and linked it to what he called their 'feminism', for they had 'at least theoretically, liberated women from their sexual dependency on men' (Segal, 1992, p.119). Thus a feminist critic such as McClintock is able to value their research, along with that of Kinsey, for providing a basis upon which to refuse the primacy of the penis for female satisfaction and posing the 'threat of women escaping heterosexuality' (p.127). On the more libertarian side, Linda Williams suggests that the popular reception of the research of Kinsey and Masters and Johnson inaugurated a new awareness of diverse sexual pleasures beyond heterosexual penetration, and this had its effect on pornography too, leading to a new ethic of sexual diversity (p.240).

Kate Millett's Sexual Politics (1969) is a good example of how early liberationists found post-war sexology empowering in ways which are coherent with contemporary post-feminism. In her section on the sexual revolution, Millett is able to make explicit feminist use of Masters and Johnson's sexology, in her conviction that:

All the best scientific evidence today unmistakably tends toward the conclusion that the female possesses, biologically and inherently, a far greater capacity for sexuality than the male, both as to frequency of coitus, and as to frequency of orgasm in coition. (1983, p.116)

With confidence and clarity she describes the role of the clitoris in female sexuality, adding that it 'is the only human organ which is specific to sexuality and sexual pleasure' (p.117). Post-feminism has also used this to assert the independence, and implied superiority, of female sexuality.[20] While Millet is not glib, one finds in Sexual Politics the kinds of emphases that appear in post-feminism, such as the observation that 'the male's sexual potential is limited'. [21] There can be no doubt that Millett finds sexology valuable for feminist argument and welcomes its findings, integrating them with her form of essentialist feminist analysis. She bemoans the

profound effects the 'conditions of patriarchal society' have had upon female sexuality which have led to its 'true character' being 'long distorted and long unknown'. She thus sees cultural constraints as being responsible for the distortion of natural female sexuality, that is, its biological potential. Therefore the investigation of the nature of female sexuality may be read as a positive step, as are the pervasive changes of the sexual revolution which lifted 'the major prohibitions against women's pleasure in sexuality' (p.119).

Although Angela Neustatter acknowledges later feminist scepticism about 'the legend of women's self-determining sexuality in the "swinging era"' (1990, p.56), she admits that, at the time, she wanted to know whether she could be promiscuous on the same basis as men and was empowered by the sense that 'I'd entered their domain and coped' (p.57). Hite's aim was also to empower women, but she based her argument on the premise that it would be beneficial for women to reject penetration (Segal, 1992, p.80). In her own sex research, Hite certainly took further the potential feminism in sexology as well as promoted the idea of women defining their own sexuality. However, as I have shown, despite the space she gives to women's voices, the protectiveness which underlies her sexual politics also leads to a presentation of women as confused, unfulfilled and vulnerable. Neustatter's comment is more resonant with contemporary post-feminist attitudes than the analysis of The Hite Report.^[22] This is implicitly acknowledged, as demonstrated in the first chapter, by the different emphases adopted by Hite's later book Good Guys, Bad Guys and Other Lovers, which adapts the self-help genre to her sex research to address the post-feminist generation.

Sexual Violence

Not only has it been easy for post-feminist writers to lambast American radical feminism's stance on sex, but contemporary feminism in Britain also appears to have gained confidence in resisting the arguments of the anti-pornography lobby and the

debates are well documented in recent publications,[23] The 'porn wars' have been very divisive on both sides of the Atlantic, both within the Women's Movement and in terms of alienating many women from feminism. However, it is undeniable that the arguments of the anti-pornographers are heartfelt and in so far as they are motivated by a concern with sexual violence, this is an important issue for women that cannot be simply willed away with glib post-feminist assertion. Moreover, the belief that they perpetuate the idea of women as victims, which post-feminism deplores, does not stand much scrutiny. Sexual Violence, an advice book by the London Rape Crisis Centre, is noticeably influenced by these arguments, discussing the use of rape by men as a form of social control over women, yet it acknowledges that women do not want to talk as victims:

Rape does affect women for some time after it happens, but it often unleashes anger that has never been able to find its target before, which is *strengthening ... Using the word 'victim' to describe women takes away our power and contributes to the idea that it is right and natural for men to prey on us.* [24]

As I have suggested before, there are points of similarity between post-feminism and radical feminist rhetoric. On the topic of sexual violence, these appear primarily within the model of revenge, having 'the scales of justice in one hand and a newly whetted Sabatier filleting knife in the other', as Burchill writes (1992, p.49). In the introduction to the 1989 reprint of the classic Pornography: Men Possessing Women, revenge is soon intimated when Andrea Dworkin mentions the case of Jayne Stamen, a woman who was responsible for the killing of an abusive husband. Dworkin's tone is telling: 'Ironically, there are many women who have hired others to kill the men ... who were torturing them because they could not bear to do it themselves'. [25] Dworkin presents the figure of the survivor as a revolutionary menace, quoting Terence Des Pres, to assert that these women will not abandon the meaning of their experience and 'are not individuals in the bourgeois sense. They are living remnants

of the general struggle and they know it' (p.xxvii). Retribution, female agency and the turning of the gaze onto men appear together in Dworkin's summary:

In this book, I wanted to dissect male dominance; ... Instead, there were artifacts ... an archive of evidence ... some of us understood that we could look at those pictures and see them - see the men ... This book is about him (the collective him: who he is; what he wants; what he needs; the key to both his rage and political vulnerability). (1989, p.xxxviii)

The bone of contention lies in the radical anti-pornographers' assertion that pornography *is* sexual violence. Dworkin uses the example of Linda Marchiano as representative of all women who work in the sex industry in order to elide pornography and rape (p.xvi). Dworkin's system is total: sexual fantasy cannot be tolerated because it is wartime. She quotes a woman who eventually was able to leave an abusive husband who says, 'Pornography is not a fantasy, it was my life reality'. When referring to real sexual violence against, mental cruelty towards and economic control of women by abusive men, she confuses the issue by writing that 'the law has ... no recognition of the injuries done them by pornography'. [26] However, the highly charged rhetoric which Dworkin uses to great effect tends to suppress such observations: 'The Jews didn't do it to themselves and they didn't orgasm' (p.xxxvi).

One may appreciate Dworkin's aim for 'real change, an end to the social power of men over women' but at the same time recognise that her manipulation of language is violatory, of reason, of dialectical thought, perhaps even of the sense of self which she shows is threatened by pornography. Out of context her claim that pornography is 'Dachau brought into the bedroom and celebrated' may seem extreme enough to be risible, but in context it is profoundly disturbing, and meant to be. When anti-pornographers believe in their own metaphor, they become fundamentalists. [27] It is often more upsetting to read Dworkin's writing than to look at or read pornography, especially since, as research shows, in most pornography violent imagery is extremely rare (Segal, 1992, p.6), whereas in Dworkin's books it is the norm. Dworkin's writings exude violence; it is as though she has absorbed the most disturbing aspects

of pornography, sublimated them into her rhetoric and projected them onto her fictional and non-fictional writings.

Repeated references to the Holocaust in Pornography are mobilised to inculcate guilt in the reader. Dworkin writes: 'We smelled the humiliation, the degradation on them; we turned away most of us, most of the time' (p.xxvii). Just as she intimates pop-deconstruction in her suggestion that we read men in pornography, the same post-feminist strategy can be applied to her: we can read Dworkin in her violent language. [28] Her painful and sublime text reads as a displaced but intense working through of the horror of the Nazis' murder and torture of the Jews. The incantatory language, with its repetitions and lack of punctuation to create a hysterical flow of imagery, followed by violated syntax, is exemplified by the moving and graphic passage about the 'concentration camp woman' as 'the hidden sexual secret of our time', 'she for whom there will never be any justice or revenge' (p.145). This material cannot be used to debate pornography, nor sexuality, on the terms which Dworkin pretends to debate them; it serves only the most abstract extremes. Dworkin is caught in the black hole of representational language, the same dilemma as Adorno writing 'After Auschwitz': 'Our metaphysical faculty is paralysed because actual events have shattered the basis on which speculative metaphysical thought could be reconciled with experience' (1973, p.362). Dworkin fights against the balking, described by Adorno, at 'squeezing any kind of sense, however bleached, out of the victims' fate' (p.361), hence the emphasis upon the survivor as beyond bourgeois individualism and her fragmentation as a living remnant of the struggle. Dworkin hates intellectualising, but this is the only level on which this text may be read without her being legitimately rebuked by critics for propagating falsehoods and misinformation.

To follow Adorno's caution - 'If thinking is to be true ... today ... - it must also be a thinking against itself' - to read Dworkin's work against the grain of its emotive telos is hopefully to break away out of the totalitarian logic which marks the revolutionary anti-pornographers' arguments. In the end, it is ironic how the terms of Dworkin's argument resemble Angela Carter's analysis of pornography, written at the

same time. Pornography hovers on the edge of post-modernist self-awareness unlike The Sadeian Woman which consciously embraces post-modernity, but both are deconstructive texts; both ask for revolution, and both use pornography to question the construction and boundaries of individual existence. As Hariett Gilbert suggests (borrowing from Carter), Dworkin may, like Sade, be considered a moral pornographer (Segal, 1992, p.218).

At this point, I would like to cast a glance at the ways in which the porn wars have been staged in Britain and what some of the particular focuses have been in this country on the subject. With the attempt to ban 'Page 3' topless pin-ups in the late 1980s and the 'Off the Shelf' Campaign, a number of London-based anti-pornography and anti-censorship groups attained a high public profile, most notably the Campaign Against Pornography (C.A.P.), the Campaign Against Pornography and Censorship (C.A.P.A.C.) and Feminists Against Censorship (F.A.C). Although there was considerable rivalry and back-biting between and within these groups, the porn wars were not fought so ferociously here as they were in the States. As many feminists have observed, the debate cannot be simply translated over the Atlantic; nor can the legal system here allow comparable legislation to the Minneapolis City Ordinance formulated by Dworkin and MacKinnon in 1983.[29] The attempt to ban Page 3 girls from daily newspapers in 1986, headed by Clare Short, borrowed from the debate of American anti-pornography feminism, but had distinct characteristics. Firstly, Short is a socialist and was considered to be on the hard left of the Labour Party for most of the post-feminist decade; this necessarily prevents her politics from being based upon an analysis which regards sex as the primary locus of oppression. Secondly, she explicitly opposes the 'purist mentality' of those who are 'closely aligned to the censorship lobby' (1991, p.25). Moreover, the Page 3 pin-up is hardly in the category that most people would describe as pornography at all, and in national culture has greater affinities with the sea-side post-card, the Benny Hill Show and Carry On Camping. This comedic and self-parodic aspect of sex, referred to previously, alters and expands the range of available responses to the debate.

The edited selection of the five-thousand letters received by Short was published in 1991 under the title Dear Clare, constructing Short as an agony aunt figure. The book reflects a non-theoretical and empirical approach to the issue of pornography which has a very different flavour from the revolutionary ideological onslaught of the American anti-pornographers [30]. It incorporates a strong emphasis upon democracy and the ability of women to register their opinions; the editors conclude: 'Without representation there is no voice; without a voice there is no power. Many women found a voice on this issue'. They are astute on the political climate of the 1980s for women:

A number of women began their letters 'I am not a feminist, but ...'. The word 'feminist' has been used by many sections of society as a term of abuse, implying man-hating, extremism, frigidity, prudery. Women hold views which object to their inequality and suggest solutions to it, yet they disown the term 'feminism' because they know the stigma that is attached to it and the way it is used, to marginalise or dismiss the assertion of one's individual rights.

Despite its simplistic methodology, the admirable attempt to strike a popular feminist tone, avoiding jargon and making feminist argument accessible, makes this an important book for British feminism. It negotiates women's insecurity and anger with humour and distance, using witty chapter titles and ironic asides. As it is clearly problematic to draw conclusions from a selection of letters, it is important to note that sexual violence is not the exclusive focus of the book; much of it expresses women's strongly held concerns at the general intrusion by men into their privacy and space.

At various points in her introduction, Short makes use of crude assumptions about ordinary people's attitudes; for example, regarding the distinction between pornography and erotica, she writes, 'we all know the difference when we see it' (p.18). She believes there is a link between the widespread distribution of porn and the abuse of women and children, although she concedes in her Bill that this is

unprovable (p.xvi). She does not resist the emotive power of mentioning Nazi use of pornographic images of their perceived enemies to dehumanise them, announcing conclusively: 'It was, as we know, a successful tactic' (p.19). But, along with these customary reactions, there emerges another focus. Short's steady campaigning feminism was at the time beginning to appear at odds with growing post-feminist sexual experimentalism and explicitness, and her optimism for her cause was somewhat dated by the time the book of letters was published. Although she admits no reasons why people should be allowed to consume sexually explicit material for their personal pleasure, or to use it as a sex aid, she is however in tune with her times in her healthy amusement at the ludicrousness of much pornography. Consequently she has less of a need than for Dworkin to demonise it, and thus concede too much power to it. She makes the post-feminist point of noting men's sexual insecurity, whereas women, she acknowledges, have become more secure of their sexuality in recent years (p.20). Most significantly for post-feminism, Short has taken note of the women who wrote to her who 'suggested ... that we demand equal treatment ... They suggested that pictures of men with their genitals fully revealed and crude headlines about the size of their genitalia would produce instant demands from all men for the removal of the pictures' (p.19).

The post-feminist tone of many of the letters, particularly in the chapter 'Tit for Tat', indicates that fear is not the only reaction women viewers have to degrading sexualised images of other women (pp.36, 37). It is heartening that the women can see beyond their own discomfort (pp.45, 46), and there is plenty of assertion of the female gaze as well as hints at revenge: 'I know what my favourite fantasy is now and it involves the Editor of The Sun and a pair of pliers' (p.50). The sheer joy of one woman at the thought of evening the score is infectious (p.55), and the suggestion of post-feminist reversal is everywhere (pp.52, 53, 54, 112). One woman writes: 'How would your male colleagues react to male models nude from the waist downwards, with measurements of buttocks, balls, penis erect and flaccid? How would they cope with questions from their 10-year-old daughter? Good luck, from one who is not a

prude' (p.53). And fundamental observations are made: 'Why I always wonder do men class pictures of naked men as obscene but not women?' (p.113); 'No-one likes to feel or be compared - it makes them feel vulnerable ... The sensitivities of men are protected ... they protect themselves and other men from scrutiny' (pp.114-5).

The message of Dear Clare is pro-censorship, but it is not naive. Even if one believes that it is dangerous to legislate against certain images of portrayals of women, the selection of letters shows that the raising of women's consciousness about representations of female bodies in the press need not be dismissed as a sign of hysteria. Many of the women writing to Short did not believe she would be successful, but wanted to support her after the rude treatment she received from Members of Parliament and the press. Others usually opposed censorship, but the aggressively right-wing political climate of the mid-1980s and the perceived growing influence of tabloid journalism were causing them to reconsider their position. For many women it was not a matter of obscenity or pornography, but that of 'dignity' (pp.123-4). There is full acknowledgement that the issues of sexual violence and women's inequality were the result of related factors, and pornography was not largely felt to be the ogre at the centre of them. One woman writes: 'I have always thought that the silly ideas of female passivity and sexuality preached in The Sun and The Star do more harm than real pornography' (p.47). Another implies that only large-scale societal change will be effective; she hopes, for the future, 'not that Page 3 will be banned, but that the way society views and treats women will be so alien .. that it will simply have no reason to exist' (p.31). The bill failed but the issues raised in the letters remain pertinent in the 1990s. Short is optimistic: 'Retailers and distributors are feeling increasingly defensive and women increasingly confident about objecting to porn'.[31] It is this confidence, this return of the gaze and refusal to be intimidated that marks a post-feminist advance on the subject of pornography and violence.

Post-feminist Perspectives

Calls to battle resonate throughout Sex and Sensibility, Julie Burchill's recent collection of articles on sex. Both Burchill and Camille Paglia draw upon the idea that difference and opposition between the sexes provide the very inspiration for sex. 'Sex was meant to be dirty, dangerous and disturbing', proclaims Burchill (1992, p.46), and even though Paglia has lived most of her life as a lesbian, she holds that 'sex is a turbulent power we are not in control of; it's a dark force. The sexes are at war with each other. That's part of the excitement and interest of sex' (1993, p.65). Both writers use this stance to criticise what they see as feminist platitudes. The former writes: 'Feminists believe that heterosex must be recreated as a vehicle of gentleness, of touch and embrace' (p.49); and the latter: 'It's this whole stupid feminist thing about how we are basically nurturing benevolent people, and sex is a wonderful thing between two equals'. These statements typify post-feminism's reservations about sexology and sex therapy and its antipathy towards the anti-censorship lobby, on the grounds that these encourage passivity and a lack of responsibility in women and tend towards sexual and moral policing.[32]

Burchill and Paglia are appropriating an area of conflict which has largely been dismissed by feminism because of its connections with sexual violence. While these writers do pose problems in the ways they bear out the feminist assumption that the post-feminist woman is male-identified, especially in her sexuality (Paglia, pp.57, 71; Burchill, p.50), it is important to recall that this was also a charge made by men against feminists in the form of the old anti-feminist chestnut that 'libbers' just want to be men. A post-feminist reading would interpret the latter as a masculine statement of territory and in this sense, one can see that it achieved its purpose, encouraging feminists to keep 'male sexuality' at arm's length. I would argue that, by interpreting male sexuality for their own ends, however questionable (reversing, one might argue, the process by which men have remained in control of definitions of female sexuality), Burchill and Paglia's essays on sex illustrate the possibilities of post-

feminism's appropriating it as a rhetorical tool. They are also taking us back to the forgotten stages of second wave feminism. Segal observes: 'At first feminists celebrated sexual pleasure, and what they saw as the *similarity* between women's and men's sexuality', and Beatrix Campbell wrote in 1973: 'Acknowledgement of lust, acceptance of so-called promiscuity must be recognised as potentially inevitable stages of women's escape from sexual conformity' (Segal, 1992, p.3). Thus one should interpret difference in a wider sense: post-feminism may revel in sexual difference and draw its rhetorical energies from forms of difference, but it also reserves the right to question and resist the notion of essential difference.

It is Paglia who holds open the more fluid idea of difference. In Sex, Art, and American Culture she opts 'to blur homosexual and heterosexual desire and see all of eroticism as a dynamic continuum, in constant flux from hour to hour and day to day'. Paglia is aware of the political implications of her argument, and rude and contentious though she is, she contributes to the feminist and post-feminist debates by joining other liberal feminists in opposing the rigidity of some revolutionary strands of feminism and coming out with her belief that it is a mistake to insist, for political purposes, on a total division between gay and straight (p.35). In this reading, the post-feminist position incorporates lesbian eroticism, without fetishising it, into a larger dynamic of bi- or pan-sexuality where consistency of sexual object-choice is not an issue. Definition of certain delimited sexualities is to be eschewed, as role-playing and ambivalence are adopted.

I would argue that the position expressed above belongs to a utopian feminism which is revolutionary in a libertarian rather than separatist sense (p.251). Paglia is a sexual radical whose views derive from the early stages of the Women's Liberation Movement and have been slotted into the post-feminist thinking of the late 1980s to reach an audience. As a champion of Sixties non-conformism, she is critical of what she sees as feminism's attempt to set up a new dogma. She also holds that feminism has suffered from, as well as contributed to, a decline in education which is fostered by an over-preoccupation with contemporaneity and lack of attention paid to the

lessons of history, one of the results being an over-emphasis of cultural influence in determining gender roles and an underplaying of the influence of biology (p.viii). Paglia maintains that the defensive adoption of inaccessible language by academic analysis has infected feminism and contributed to its divorce from popular culture and the energy of the mass media and commercialism (p.ix). The logic of this is pro-feminist; Paglia wants feminism to be in a position where it can have an impact on young women around the world, which is why she originally announced that Madonna was the future of feminism (p.5). To achieve this it must be widely grounded and consistent in its embrace of both theory and popular culture.

Paglia seems to want to recuperate sex for women and has used younger women of the post-feminist generation and their expectations as her models. This can be illustrated most appositely from her two essays on Madonna. In the first, she suggests that feminism should expose puritanism and teach young women to be 'fully female and sexual while still exercising control over their lives', showing them 'how to be attractive, sensual energetic, ambitious, aggressive and funny - all at the same time'. She wants feminism to be an active example, not 'stuck in an adolescent whining mode' which demands that men be more like women (pp.4-5). Thus it should appreciate the beauty of masculinity as well as admire the men who, she says, *are* actually like women. Paglia would like feminism to develop by being alert to Freud's ideas of 'ambiguity, contradiction, conflict, ambivalence'. It should recognise that sex cannot be risk-free and a feminist version of sex should recognise 'both the animality and the artifice' (p.5).

In her second essay on the pop star, Paglia praises Madonna's ability to draw from the culture of American blacks and Hispanics as well as the middle class and to learn from the hard glamour of Hollywood, from gay subcultures and street styles (p.6). In so far as this pertains to feminism, it is a survivalist ethos, balancing feminism's focus on victimisation and oppression with an optimism that takes inspiration from the *jouissance* of non-linguistic popular culture such as dance and music. At its best, the form Madonna has chosen is 'Dionysian ... with roots in African earth-cult' (p.7).

Thus, rather than feel themselves compromised by dominant power structures which they cannot see beyond, feminists can find an 'escape from the conventions of religion and bourgeois society' within contemporary culture. Here one may suggest a correspondence between Paglia's thought and elements of French utopian feminism. Without feeling the need to embrace the difficult language of post-structuralist theory often associated with the latter [33], Paglia stresses the ability of the language of the female body to 'transcend the over-verbalised codes of ... class and time' and warns of compromise with (what feminists might call 'masculine') urges towards definition (p.7).

This utopian essay praises the liberation which 'feminism of the future', which I interpret as post-feminism, is beginning to offer. Madonna's first video ('Burnin' Up') shows how feminism can appropriate the aesthetics of modernist masculine art, such as surrealism; the old feminist preoccupation with the masculine agency of the gaze is liberated by the recognition of the power of the female 'come-hither-but-keep-your-distance stare' (p.8). Paglia even suggests that such a development of feminism's potential could impress middle-aged, working-class women in a way that its academic politics could not. For Paglia, the way is now clear for feminism to view the 'fabrications of femininity' in a sophisticated way that no longer condemns them as oppression and, for the first time, feminism can enjoy a use of comedy and recognise the talent of female comic artists who might otherwise be merely pitied as victims (pp.9, 10). Feminism is free to eschew paranoid fantasies of male oppressors to find that '[w]oman is the dominant sex' and to reassert 'woman's command of the sexual realm' (p.11). This leads to healing the split halves of the image of women as virgin and harlot, which feminism has complained of for many years. For Paglia, contemporary feminism is pro-bisexuality and experimentation, making a positive example of liberation from 'false, narrow categories'. It may also have its weak moments and romantic dilemmas (p.13), but all of the above Paglia would have inserted into feminism's repertoire.

mentality that directs itself towards increased agency and empowerment. In her essay 'Homosexuality at the Fin de Siecle', Paglia writes that contemporary feminism must resist viewing history 'as a weepy scenario of male oppression and female victimisation' and learn to make use of the knowledge that men are driven by sexual anxiety (p.23). This will empower women with the recognition that they 'control the emotional and sexual realms, and men know it' (p.24). Such an assertion may be simplistic and myopic, but it nevertheless holds a strategic appeal. It derives its apparent coherence and persuasiveness from the ploy of inversion which is a constant feature of post-feminism.[34] Yet it is significant that feminists too have found uses in this perspective, that pornography is proof that men feel a lack of power over women and may be read as a sign of masculine sexual anxiety and defensiveness (Elsthain, 1990; Segal, p.77). Thus, even though these readings may suppress the reality that men in general still *do* have power relative to women, they are nevertheless a valuable corrective to the view which sees pornography as the apogee of masculine power. This strategy of post-feminism enables feminists to turn the gaze onto male weaknesses and, with qualifications, to use this to forward feminist theory. [35]

Julie Burchill's writings can be studied to reveal more subtleties in post-feminist strategies, for her post-feminist inversions are more ironic and considered than those of Paglia. In the above collection of articles, Burchill's main thrust is that feminism has retreated into passivity and a protectionism of women, ignoring the pleasures and powers of female agency, and the essential weapon women possess to define what they want and to make men feel inadequate if necessary. Although there are similarities with Paglia's post-feminist position here, Burchill places considerably more emphasis upon women's ability to exact revenge, another form of post-feminist reversal which is more radically political than merely controversial. It is also significant that she acknowledges her chosen post-feminist weapon to be compatible with the emphases of feminism itself: 'The logical and righteous influence of

feminism ... is desirable in most spheres of life from the workplace to the law court' (1992, p.49).

'Kiss and Sell', a short article about 'sexploitation', serves as an illustration. Burchill is sympathetic to the young women who have made careers out of sleeping with famous men; taking Paglia's praise for women who sexually objectify themselves out of myth, she places it in an economic context (p.53). Here it is Burchill's focus on contemporary politics and culture which allows her to stress a justified revenge: 'In a climate where everyone is encouraged to be their own creation and to exploit themselves for all they are worth, these young women have become the typhoid Marys of capitalism' (p.52). Her attempt to raise consciousness of inversion draws its irony from classic feminist observation: 'There is a slight demographic change in the kiss-and-sell trade on the horizon. For a start, toyboys are getting to sell their stories and any profession which men go into tends to gain status' (p.55). The move from feminist to post-feminist logic is clearly expressed:

In the meantime, like abortion, other women may not approve of it for themselves, but any woman worth her salt should defend the right of others to practice it; because to do otherwise is to connive with men in the most craven of ways. Men make the rules, bent as they are, and we should twist them even more for all we are worth. (pp.55-6)[36]

This essay provides a salutary corrective to Paglia's position on the subject by developing it further towards the female object's gaining subjecthood and effecting a reverse reification: 'A man deserves all he gets when the inanimate object is brought to life by a thunderbolt of malice' (p.56).

Like Paglia, Burchill is often deliberately crude, but her use of well-worn feminist arguments in their different stages allows some insights to appear. In 'Where's the Beef?' one finds the growing post-feminist awareness that the subject of sex is 'below the belt' for men, a weakness and not just a weapon which is inevitably deployed against women (p.32). However, this is not cause for naive celebration for Burchill does not conveniently forget that men's physical and institutional power is still in

place and, by comparison with Paglia, she does not deny the significance of women's victimisation (p.25). She emerges as strongly opposed to cosmetic surgery, deploring the 'schizoid scrutiny' of parts of the female body which leads to self-loathing and the 'medical mutilation' which has made 'a million men millionaires' (pp.26, 27). In an angry paragraph at the end of the article she rails against the double standard, remarking on the frequency with which women are killed by men they live with, 'usually over some alleged sexual slur', and noting that those men may receive a suspended sentence because the woman 'taunted him', whereas if women do the killing they are sent to Broadmoor (p.32). Her message here can only be described as feminist and her method post-feminist, for she follows a serious point with the irrepressible post-feminist turn of revenge: 'So why shouldn't we at least enjoy the luxury of telling the truth? Which is that the small penis is the mourner at every wedding and the time bomb in every bed'.

This confirms the emerging pattern: post-feminism draws a premise from feminism (radical feminism even, as in this case) and then provides the post-feminist twist or punch line. Burchill exposes liberal sexual ideas for not taking into account that 'what makes the world a better place for men invariably makes it a duller and more dangerous place for women' while she mocks feminist platitudes. In her writings, one finds a valuable example of post-feminist deployment of inversion and then counter-inversion. Although Burchill turns away from a focus on the victimisation of women towards the possibility of exploiting the weaknesses of men and thus victimising them, she does not suggest that this is the final answer to women's oppression. After the first inversion, female victimisation appears again in Burchill's observation that the sexist premises of the sexual revolution have enabled the continued subordination of women in different forms. She inverts again by mocking sexology (p.29), and then counterinverts with an angry return to women's oppression through the double standard. Her message in this essay is finally that inversion is possible and a valuable tool for women who wish to resist being defined by men, but she has at the same time

alerted women to the wider context of sexual politics as well as to the dangers involved in this post-feminist strategy.

In 'Phantom Nympho Rides Again', Burchill digs gently at feminist political correctness, recuperating various words used for women in British culture and using her working-class credentials and street credibility to inscribe a difference in the conventional feminist debate. True to post-feminist emphases, she notes that the word 'nympho' might be considered inoffensive 'because of the stress it puts on the *active* role of the named one' (p.39). Here Burchill stresses balance, as a milder option than revenge (p.41), suggesting also that a feminist line or analysis often blinds it to the dynamic cultural context of certain female stereotypes. Just as Paglia deplored feminism's ignorance and resultant narrow and negative interpretation of myth, history and art (1993, p.33), Burchill criticises feminism for not recognising the diversity in contemporary British culture and language, which contain inbuilt resources for resistance to both forms of oppression and political correctness.[37]

This article ends with another variant of the post-feminist reasoning mentioned earlier: thriving on opposition and measuring attack as an indicator of success. We can confirm that it is not only to be found amongst journalists such as Burchill, for it is also adopted by feminist critic Joan Smith in her preface to the British edition of Susan Faludi's Backlash: 'In a sense ... the strength and scope of the backlash against feminism are compliments to it ... if feminist ideas were not perceived as popular and threatening, then why make such a fuss over them?' (1990, p.xiv). Burchill's post-feminist version of this argument is this:

Some feminists forget that slander, like Amex, says more about you than money ever can. They get cross about so-called sexist language when they ought to see that, like a boomerang, it goes flying back to he who dealt it. Thus men who are desperate for career success call achieving women 'Thatcherite bitches'; men who aren't getting fucked call women 'slags'. (1992, pp.43-4)

This passage is encouraging to women, emphasising that these are potentially good times for us and we should use the opportunity to exercise our agency. Although Burchill's focus here is upon power and sex in vulgar terms, the strategy has wider political import. It bears a relation to the ways in which oppressed peoples have sometimes taken on the derogatory name given them by a dominant group, from the subversive and angry appropriation of the word 'queer' by gay activists to a similar phenomenon among black and ethnic groups: 'To turn insults into strengths, whigs, Tories, Blacks all chose to wear with pride the names they were given in scorn' (Salman Rushdie, 1983, p.93). Thus 'bitch' is read as meaning 'not a doormat' or another example pertinent to post-feminism would be the distortion of the patronising term 'girl' often used for adult women into the more aggressive, but also playful, 'grrrl' in the American and British 'Riot Grrrl' trend of 1992/3.

So Burchill's subtext is that feminism's alarmism, by encouraging women to feel oppressed by stereotypes or what men call them, depletes women's energy and wastes their time, distracting us from the opportunities for empowerment that this situation offers. Her message, like Dworkin's, is that women can learn to read male representations of women as statements about men. Even better, women can not only take on the gaze, as Paglia's writing and Burchill's article on penis size imply, but learn how to look back and read too. That is, women need not feel defined by words but can learn to reinterpret them. It amounts to a valuable lesson in pop-deconstruction, perhaps even a post-feminist manifesto, as Burchill concludes: 'So let us not sermonise and sulk; let us not miserabilise and moan. Let us instead read between the lines, and decode their dirty minds' (p.44). [38] I would argue that Burchill's essays open the way to a more constructive and typically British method of post-feminist inversion by persisting in turning around inversions rather than hypostatizing them in the mythic utopian model exploited by Paglia. Paglia is more sweeping in her mythic generalisations, whereas Burchill's notorious suspicion of other cultures leads her to a more narrow national focus. Both writers are valuable post-feminist commentators, but national differences are evident; the former's tone is

enthusiastic and dynamic and her work is valuable for a wider contextualisation of feminism and post-feminism, whereas the latter's is sarcastic and acerbic and her work more precise regarding the historical and political period and immediate culture of which British post-feminism is a part. Burchill is also more radical in her suggestion that women take on the gaze actively and belligerently, and her deconstructive approach involves a 'reading' as well as a visual 'looking' (i.e. interpreting and appropriating).

Through an examination of these two writers, one can begin to appreciate a greater subtlety in post-feminism. It can be seen as deriving a productive coherence not from consistent anti-feminist theory, but rather from its focus on the gaps in feminism, its impressionistic interpretations of feminist leftovers such as sex, biology, masculinity, the thrill of conflict, and the pleasure in style and performance for the gaze. Such an awareness of post-feminism provides a valuable model against which to measure the development of arguments about women and sex in popular literature in the late 1980s and early 1990s. I will now examine how these post-feminist strategies of utopian appropriation and vengeful inversion can be incorporated into fiction and to what degree they appear in women's sex fiction of the late 1980s and early 1990s.

From Fantasy to Fiction

Nancy Friday's My Secret Garden: Women's Sexual Fantasies (1973) has been reprinted many times, including twice in Britain in the early 1990s, and led to a second book, Forbidden Flowers: More Women's Sexual Fantasies. Friday is the only other commercially successful American feminist who can compare with Hite in her popular work on sex, and a parallel awareness of the changing market is revealed in the two authors' later focus upon men [39]. Like Hite, Friday was astute enough to recognise a post-feminist generation and has evidently compiled her new collection of fantasies, Women On Top: How Real Life Has Changed Women's Sexual Fantasies

(1992) with this in mind. Unlike Hite, Friday is concerned with the imaginative instead of the physical side of sex and the role of fantasy in sexuality.

The publicity rather coyly recognises My Secret Garden's titillating appeal, and the book is significant for bridging the genre gap between popular sexology, self-help, women's erotic fiction and pornography. Reviews which announce that it will 'make your pulse race' acknowledge that such material does arouse the reader [40]. It redresses the prudishness of much serious sex research and, from the tedium of the technical focus of sexology, at last enters the richer terrain of sexual imagination. The foreword is interesting for its attempts to negotiate salaciousness with respectability (p.xi). It praises 'Ms. Friday's healthy attitude and common sense comments', thus exposing the ideological pressures of the time in its tendency towards the 'sex is healthy' attitude already mentioned. Now, from a post-feminist point of view, it might be more appropriate to praise it for removing itself from an insistent (especially scientific) understanding of sex to preserve its mystery and keep it 'dirty'.

A potential threat to men is intimated in the preface which speculates that the sexes will have different responses to the book: 'Some men, already unnerved by the onslaught of women's lib, will be angered that they are treated as sex objects in women's fantasies and be shocked and frightened by some of the contributors' lusty, dominating, twisted dreams' (p.xiv). This is of obvious import for post-feminism and is cleverly intermingled with an appeal to solidarity amongst women and a claim to educational benefit. Post-feminist 'getting even' is encouraged in the complaint at the double standard which holds that women's fantasies are not acceptable despite the predominance of men's sexual fantasy material in our everyday culture (p.5). Women's vulnerability is acknowledged without their appearing to be victims, and reservations expressed about the Women's Liberation Movement anticipate post-feminism without being anti-feminist (p.6). Friday writes: 'Oddly enough I think the naked power cry of Women's Lib itself was not helpful to a lot of women. It put too many women off'. [41]

Friday writes in the introduction that, after being rejected by a lover to whom she told a sexual fantasy, she was worried whether she had been unfeminine. This underlines the assumed incompatibility of femininity and female sexual agency, confirming the importance of women's public speech on sexual topics. Friday mentions women's need for the opportunity to measure themselves against each other, and takes seriously the growing liberation of women's bodies and minds (pp.6, 7). She presents the book as a radical breakthrough; while, in 1968, editors were not ready for such a book, she remarks that by the early years of the following decade women were writing about sex, from their point of view: 'Today we have a flowering of women who write explicitly and honestly about sex and what goes on in a woman's mind and body during the act'. Although the examples she gives are of Edna O'Brien and Doris Lessing who seem somewhat tame, and even a little grim, by contemporary standards, she does indicate the importance of women's fiction in providing role models for women enjoying sex, observing and describing it and its pleasures in their own language.

When she examines men's sexual fantasies for a new book Men in Love (1980), Friday finds that, 'His secret garden is not like mine'. While her use of popular Freudianism is an obvious strategy for containing her discomfort at the material, from the point of view of post-feminism it is also a more interesting and poignant book than My Secret Garden. She makes herself an easy target for feminist revolutionaries and anti-pornographers (p.4), but one appreciates her admission that some of the men's fantasies frightened her and her acknowledgement that she could accept the previous fantasies because they came from women. This is valuable in a consideration of pro-feminist sex writing for women, indicating the importance of women's subjecthood, women's voice, and women's production of sexual material. Friday grasps at some post-feminist straws, noting, as Burchill does later, that if you ask prostitutes they will tell you that men usually want to be submissive when acting out bondage scenarios (p.6). She finds that men's fantasies are not so much about taking women by force, but about women doing things voluntarily, which again recalls Burchill's interest in

the 1970s 'nympho'. However, she also falls back on self-help terrain, and the book ends with the assertion that inside every adult male is a denied little boy (p.526). Thus it stops short of post-feminism and opts for matronising pity for men, infantilising them as a means to overcome female fear of their sexuality. Nevertheless, it is a tough book and useful for post-feminism in forcing women to look at men's sexuality. This has at least the potential to be empowering and can be compared with the strategy of Angela Carter's story The Company of Wolves where the heroine faces and accepts the wolf / man's desire which in turn liberates her to recognise her own and dispels her fear.

Friday's Women on Top is an apparent testament to the new interest in women and sex, since it has been reprinted eight times in 1992. It has a more sophisticated and artistic cover than the earlier books on fantasy and the advertising copy on the back is sharply up-to-date, referring to feminism, not 'Women's Lib', and confronting the backlash against it. Breaking taboos is no longer an issue, so Friday's work is now advertised as marking 'a major milestone in women's sexual liberation' [42]. Her observations on the changes in women's attitudes are relevant for post-feminism, such as her recognition that anger is a more common and acceptable response from women in the late 1980s and her belief that the younger generation of women suffer far less from guilt about sex (pp.4, 8). She addresses the Women's Movement, greater economic freedom, Madonna, the change in 'rules' for what constitutes a 'good' girl, and mentions her belief that the greed of the Eighties cut the sexual current more than AIDS (pp.19, 12, 15, 13). Masturbation, Friday asserts, is now more common among women and easier to talk about and she suggests that the ideological separation of love and sex is a good thing (pp.19, 27).

The surprising element of this book is the fantasies, which are not as exciting to read as those in My Secret Garden. Their presentation is less accessible and titillating. Friday is more democratic in her inclusion of diverse voices and the book less voyeuristic, but this does result in good sex writing. The respondents are able to describe themselves, and are given ample space for their fantasies, but one has the

impression that some skilful editing would have improved them. Friday's comments are comparatively unintrusive, but this deprives such a huge book of a map or structure. It is a valuable study and indicative of the state of feminist politics in the early 1990s but, contrasted with Friday's earlier text which is more frank about its ability to communicate fantasy and arouse the reader, is particularly helpful for revealing the importance of narrative construction in sex writing. From Friday's combination of a form of sex research with pleasuring the female reader, it appears that the logical next step from women's sexual fantasy is to women's sex fiction.

Along with the boom in sex advice manuals and the growth in pro-feminist sexology for women, the late Eighties saw a proliferation of women's sex anthologies in book shops. Margaret Reynolds' Erotica (1989) is 'By women for women, to use as you please', and this emphasis is common among such publications of the time. It suggests a female specificity in sexual interests and thus uses an acceptable form of separatist ideology to create a subtext which mildly promotes female empowerment. Contemporary sex anthologies range from autobiographical writing on sex, sexuality and sexual identity, for example Women Talk Sex (1992), to erotic stories and poetry, such as Serious Pleasure (1989) which was so successful that a second volume was published.[43] They are in one sense a culmination of a move from sexology to fiction, that is, from a focus on the mechanics of sexual response to sexual politics, love and lifestyle, and from here to fantasy, a form of fiction, and self-conscious literary fiction.

Women Talk Sex is closer to sexology than Friday's collections of fantasies, but although this is a collection of 'true' stories, the significance of writing and literary organisation is emphasised as part of its strategy of empowerment. The introduction states: 'A recurring theme ... is the confidence and power felt by the women who have named, structured, controlled and possessed the raw muddle that is sexual feeling'. Erotica adventurously includes a variety of literary forms such as letters and prayer, as well as poetry and fictional narrative, to show the diversity of women's writing about sex. Here the division between fiction and non-fiction is blurred, as it is

with fantasy. The contents are evocative, arousing, romantic and exciting. It is moving to see Edith Thompson represented, although the passion of her letters is diminished by their being out of context. The token 'snuff', or human sacrifice example in the section on 'Danger' is weak (p.143), but the decision to include Pat Califia's tragi-comic 'A Dash of Vanilla' (p.218), as well as an excerpt from her more usual explicit writing about sadomasochism, is inspired. The story defies facile expectations and is valuable for illustrating the use of narrative to evoke the interweaving of emotional, psychological and physical frustration and release. The vignettes by Anais Nin are short and sexy. Their pleasant perversity springs from their brevity and self-contained avoidance of too much realism, which is not to say that Nin avoids emotion; rather she selects the right blend of emotion to enhance the vividness of the scene without dispersing it. The choice of some of the poetry is refreshing for being unusual, especially Sarah Egerton's 'To One Who Said I Must Not Love' (1703), the forcefulness of whose passion might go unnoticed were it not highlighted by its inclusion in such a collection (p.200). Reynolds even includes a quotation from Anne Hooper's The Body Electric, including sexology with fiction.

As was the case with non-fictional sex writing, the female-edited and-authored sex fiction anthology in the late 1980s can be seen to have created a new space for itself which involves negotiating sexual politics and genre. A significant proportion of the sex anthologies of the 1980s are lesbian, and aim to redress the silencing and invisibility of lesbian sexuality (Serious Pleasure, p.7). They contribute towards the increased public profile of lesbian sexuality which is a feature of post-feminism. Those anthologies which are not explicitly nor exclusively lesbian take care to include lesbian stories and contributions, and are very often (like the sexology of Hite) pro-lesbian (see Reynolds, p.xxx). By combining the politics of sexual identity with a pleasurable and interesting format, many of the new sex anthologies promote a form of popular feminism, and the recognition that feminist reasoning is a valuable marketing tool for popular literature aimed at women in this period illustrates the extent to which post-feminism has incorporated parts of feminism. Publicity for

Erotica emphasises post-feminist variety along with the old feminist model of 'reclaiming' women's voices: 'Here is every kind of sexual preference and expertise. Questioning and celebrating, this eye-opening collection reclaims the articulation of women's erotic lives'. A celebratory tone is most often used, in tune with the new sexual consumerism of the period. Although a focus on the victimisation of women is occasionally required, especially with the more radical lesbian collections, to explain the book's importance in defying repression, a post-modern emphasis upon difference can be deployed. The Sheba Collective announce: 'Our sexuality marks us as "other" and we celebrate that "otherness" as a vital component of our life-force, without which we would not be' (p.8).

With its daunting title, Serious Pleasure recalls the stereotype of the humourless feminist, the dull seriousness with which some feminists have dissected pleasure, and the heavy politicisation of sexuality that seems to leave little room for enjoyment. However, contributions by skilled and established writers such as Barbara Smith broach the topics of humour and sexual pleasure. Her two stories 'The Art of Poise' (p.63) and 'Masturbation is for Wankers' (p.113) are experimental. The first is a deconstructive essay on the role of power in sexual exchange. It has a metafictional flavour, in that its political focus aligns definition by looking with that by writing, while it also exposes the counterbalancing power deployed by the 'actress' (p.64). It is a self-conscious text whose self-referentiality is politicised through its extension to the acts of love-making. It is deployed here to question power, so that the author refuses to reify the beloved by becoming conscious of her own reification. This reveals the dual nature of writing about sex from a post-feminist point of view. Writing is a performance for the reading gaze as well as a re-enactment of its supposedly totalising power to define, fixing its object in words. The second contribution is a comic story about buying a vibrator. The self-deprecating tone of the narrator is balanced in tension with her impatient demystification of the stereotypes of sexual romanticism (p.117). After a farcical scene when the top of the vibrator gets lost in her cunt and she finally flicks it out with a teaspoon, Smith concludes: 'Sorry,

sisters, but this story is true' (p 121). Both of her tales use humour to challenge feminist political correctness.

These collections' function of sexual arousal is acknowledged to very different degrees. The Sheba Collective, for example, are direct in underlining that one of the aims of their anthology was 'to titillate, turn on, lead to masturbation, or making love with someone' (p.9). At times however, the political or moral message obscures the issue of sexual enjoyment or editors fall back on the model of sex research. This may be to avoid appearing to be part of the media hype of the subject, or it may betray an urge for justification of the material. While it is underlined that Serious Pleasure is not a sex manual (p.11), Reynolds significantly strays into the territory of sexual advice in Erotica. Not only does she remark that the clitoris is the only physical appendage designed for nothing other than sexual pleasure, but this is reiterated, as though it is a new observation, by Jeanette Winterson in the introduction, where she also refers to the editor as 'Dr. Reynolds', making her sound even more like a therapist or counsellor (p.xxii). This anthology has difficulties in setting its tone, partly because of its liberal stance on the pornography debate, which does not sit well with its radical feminist prescription and demeaning of heterosexuality (p.xxx). [44] From a radical point of view, the collection *reads as though it is cashing in on everyone's sexuality, hinting at political differences, but underlining mere preferences*. This nevertheless makes it an apposite book for the end of the post-feminist decade.

One sign of its post-feminism is the attempt to have it both ways as it negotiates taking post-feminist liberties with classic feminism. Winterson's introduction, also published separately in Marie Claire magazine, is post-feminist in its insistence that women can take on the male gaze (p.ixx), its emphasis on women's power, and unblinking focus on practical issues (p.xx). She refers to the 'endless Page Three debate' and offers reasons for opposing censorship that are also post-feminist. The issue of performance when women write publicly about sex is illustrated by Winterson's notoriously large ego, her focus upon her own 'exposure' (p.xx), and her

remark: 'If I do not admit to a touch of vanity you will know me for a liar'. Pop-deconstruction is also intimated beyond mere inversion: 'It is salutary that women know how to turn the tables without falling into the same traps' (p.xxii), and Winterson concludes that 'we need to remake the language of sex', for which she uses as a model: 'the two-fold image of Kali, as we destroy with one hand, we will have to build with the other' (p.xxiii).

Porn for Women and the Uses of Sex Fiction

While editors of sex anthologies for women acknowledge the question of use regarding sexy writing by women, few are bold enough to demand that there should be pornography for women or to enter libertarian debates. They allow women's erotic writing to be sexually and emotionally stimulating, but do not usually address the possibilities of women going out and actively seeking stimulating and explicit material. As Loretta Loach shows in her study of women who use pornography, the 'realm of experience' is still repressed for most women who feel they have only the options of accepting the topic neutrally or rejecting it with ferocity or indignation (Segal, 1992, p.266). Sex anthologies remain on the politely political side of sex writing. Feminism, or a feminist rationale, may be useful for covering up the threat and rawness of women and sex. It provides a safe umbrella under which women can discuss sex because it allows them the illusion that they are really talking about something else, namely power and its manifestations in relationships, body politics, aesthetics and advertising.

It is important to recognise that it is still not acceptable for women to talk publicly about sex unless it is in either a nurturing or a titillating capacity.[45] Apart from radical libertarians involved in avant-garde writing in the 1970s, for example Kathy Acker in the United States and Angela Carter in Britain, an unblinking experimentation with the uses of pornography for women has appeared only recently and, apart from lesbian writing, has not yet had great success. [46] There seems to be

a problem about the level at which to pitch literary pornography for women, and popular market-led efforts in visual porn and magazines have generally failed despite good intentions. Pornographic videos for women and heterosexual couples have been more successful; it is estimated that women buyers account for more than forty percent of all X-rated video rentals (McClintock, Segal, p.130). Yet it was only in the late 1980s that Femme Productions, run by ex-porn actress Candida Royale, began to make heterosexual pornography for women that responded to women's desire for better sexual fantasies and also took into account the critique of dominant heterosexual pornography (Williams, Segal, p.263).

While a significant form of 'sex fiction' by women did appear in the 1970s, for example Erica Jong's Fear of Flying (1973) and Lisa Alther's Kinflicks (1976), this was largely a comic genre of self-discovery, detailing the romps of the intellectual middle-class liberated woman and how she felt about her sexuality. The latter was marketed as a sex book, with Cosmopolitan announcing that it 'reinforces our newfound knowledge that women can and do write just as powerfully ... and unsqueamishly about sex as men. [47] Both novels are valuable for pointing out that what is quite often scorned as post-feminism has precedents in feminism itself and held considerable popular appeal in the 1970s. They highlight the gap in our feminist legacy, the gap in fun.[48] The extent to which they are sex fiction is overemphasised, presumably to sell them and also because it was still seen as daring for women to write about sex. While they do not really approach pornography, but rather examine the role of sex within life and love and prevailing mores and conventions, they do introduce a female subjectivity to the activity of sex through the first-person narrator and inscribe female pleasure. The sex is often funny or it is analysed technically, which also demystifies it in a way that disperses its effects in terms of arousal. These novels are landmarks as books by women which examine sex in the decade after the sexual revolution and the beginnings of second-wave feminism. But it still remained for women to explore pornography and sexual desire in fiction.

Acker's Kathy Goes to Haiti (1978) and Carter's The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman (1972) are rich examples of such exploration. Even if Acker were not male-identified by virtue of her own writing, she certainly is by others'

perceptions, and this is one of the reasons why her writing is an early contender for the category of post-feminism. Her novels have been described as 'post-punk porn' and 'post-punk feminism' and are noted for describing sexual acts graphically, frequently and seldom in the approved 'feminine', 'Romantic' manner [49]. In the 'Introduction to my early lust to write', Acker explains that the book 'was my attempt to make money through writing by writing a porn novel' (1989, p.vii). Through grappling with her unaccommodating style, which is aggressive, flippant, ironic and crude (as it is in her fiction), the reader gathers that Acker is using pornography to experiment with language and accepted genre boundaries. To explain her purpose, she deploys an image redolent of violent pornography, with a mocking qualification: 'I wanted to stick a knife, a little one, up the ass of the novel' (p.viii). This she does primarily by denying humanist novelistic conventions, such as narrative plot and 'well-rounded characters', replacing them instead with those of pornography: 'I decided to write a novel that, while seeming to have a story, has none and whose characters were so deprived of psychology as to almost not exist'. In the process, Acker also manages to disrupt the conventions of pornography, which she clearly does not want simply to reproduce; she says that the novel is 'mathematically composed; every other chapter is a porn chapter' and is also 'my version of a Nancy Drew book ... and of a travel journal'. Thus, 'using mathematical structure and genre parodies were my final two joke stabs into the form of the novel'.

The novel itself is humorous and uncompromising. The grotesque and very funny sex scenes can be described as anti-pornographic, for the fumbling, distractions, argument over contraceptive devices and lack of build-up are precisely what pornography avoids and they thus serve to expose its artificiality. There are various narratives taking place in this text, including the tortuous subjective one of Kathy's desire and suffering. As postmodernist fiction, the novel powerfully deconstructs ideologies around sex and love. Despite her comments in the introduction, Acker's pornography exploits sex not for money but to gain a grasp on love, the gaining and losing of self. Unlike sexology its telos is not the orgasm, for Kathy's orgasms are

demystified by being plentiful and unexpected (pp.50, 92); they figure as insolent interruptions which still lead to more sexual and emotional activity and angst. Acker refuses to grant primacy to the unified consciousness which would correspond with and validate humanist and moral values. Desire / stream of consciousness, flesh / body, word / thought, and physical dissociation / association remain unresolved, mysterious, cruel and ephemeral. The remorseless minimalism which Acker borrows from pornography, but displaces so that it does not have the comfortable boundaries and simple function of pornography, is radically disconcerting.

The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman (1972) anticipates The Sadeian Woman which Carter published seven years later. It explores through fictional writing (in the genre of fantasy), as opposed to polemic, many of the same themes elaborated in the later book, including the post-feminist strategy of invading pornography with an ideology not inimical to women (Carter 1979, p.37). This is Carter's most postmodern novel and is very intricate philosophically, exploring pornography with reference to time, reason, and reality as well as to desire and self. While the style is altogether different from Kathy Goes to Haiti, the two books share the same decade of libertarianism, drugs and psychedelia; both are anti-humanist, deconstructing character and desire. It is interesting that both authors refer to the concept of 'architecture' with relation to writing. This is an indication of their mutual concern with language as form and structure and their radical scepticism about the concept of content. Both novels can be described as feminist postmodernist [50]; as with Acker's later fiction (see the reworking of Jane Eyre in Don Quixote), Carter makes use of various famous stories in classic literature and film. Whereas Acker resembles Burroughs in his 'cut-up method', Carter borrows his images: Albertina as the Ambassador recalls the mugwump in The Naked Lunch (p.32).[51]

Their feminism verges on post-feminism and both texts bear features of post-feminism. The influence of Burroughs and Miller on these works is significant, not least for showing how texts which some feminists have decried for their misogyny, sexism and pornography can be appropriated by pro-feminist writers. Carter and

Acker prove that the sexual and literary radicalism of such masculine texts is a valuable tool for feminism, and need not be rejected merely because the works may offend feminist sensibilities. Thus a reading of their work would uphold the argument against censorship. It is interesting for showing that the ethos of equality was sufficiently strong in this period that these women writers did not feel prohibited from borrowing and rewriting intellectual male pornography because of the individual men's gender or anti-feminist politics.

Like Acker, Carter has used a precise attention to detail to make pornographic description self-conscious and to complicate pornographic effect, emphasising the unnaturalness of porn. One of Acker's achievements in her fiction is to expand the frontiers of the activities of sexual intercourse; Carter's is to expand the conventional formulae with both a more astute eye and a more fantastic imagination.[52] Carter's novel shows that pornography can be defamiliarised, as illustrated by the fantastic scene in the brothel. She does not take pornographic conventions into an elaborate literary context only to make an aesthetic and philosophical point, but also makes a sexual political one. She shows that there is no inherent reason why pornography should degrade women. Both male and female protagonists are raped in the tale, but it is Desiderio who is degraded by Albertina's rape by the centaurs because it emerges as his sexual fantasy and Albertina is dignified in her recovery. Moreover, Desiderio is reified as a sexual object by the river people, whereas Albertina is able to take on different sexual roles, many of which make her threatening and powerful such as the swan, the Ambassador and the mistress of the brothel.

It is a romantic tale which deconstructs romantic dualism, and a metafiction of metaphysics which exposes the myth of transcendence while it makes transcendence the source and apogee of desire. For example, early in the narrative the Minister tells Desiderio a parable about the existence of the Devil to illustrate that the opposite roles of the binary pair are mutually dependent and interchangeable (p.38). While the book certainly offends against purism and is not 'politically correct' according to the dominant ethos of mid-1980s feminism, Carter clearly does not perceive her narrative

space as one that ought to protect against diverse literary and ideological forms. That is to say, she refuses self-censorship. She demystifies the power of pornography and reinscribes the power of desire as it exists in time; this may take inspiration from pornographic conventions but is more wide-ranging and experimental, creative rather than merely imitative or responsive.

Elfriede Jelinek in *Lust* (1989) uses pornography to deconstructive effect in a similar way to Acker. This novel was translated into English and published in 1992 amidst a small media storm on the topic of feminist pornography. [53] *Lust* had been very popular in the author's native Austria where it was apparently consumed enthusiastically by men for its sexual content, despite Jelinek's avowed intention to create a cutting satire on the hypocrisy which underlies her country's national culture and politics. It is a painful and violent novel, resonant with modernist overtones; and ostensibly tells the story of the domestic life of Gerti whose wealthy husband no longer dares to experiment sexually outside their marriage and so focuses all his tyranny and brutality on her body. However, Gerti is not given a subjectivity in the novel and she is often referred to as 'the woman', significant only for her sex (for her face has been 'rendered indecipherable by her husband', p.95), as is typical of much pornography. [54] The character is cut up and universalised, and in the many sex or rape scenes (to which she always submits and, without a description from her point of view, one cannot tell which they are) she is described only through her bodily contortions or through dehumanising metaphors for rough sex which are exhausting in their violence: 'He drags the woman from the swamp of her cushion and he cracks her open' (p.48); 'The Man wants to drive his cart into the woman's dirt' (p.49).

The narrative is fragmented, arranged in paragraphs, sometimes of two lines or a remorseless two pages of dense and bitter wordplay. The translation is exceptional in its ability to sustain the punning, alliteration, distorted repetition and general cacophony which further destabilise novelistic conventions. The sense of timelessness in pornography is evoked, as the narrative pace is altered only by geographical

displacement, denying character or emotional development. Masculinity is vilified through its association with business and machinery (the paper mill), leisure (skiing and sex), Austrian culture (the factory choir), tyranny and the naked power redolent of fascism. Femininity is downtrodden and, at best, artificial, victimised and reified beyond the point of humanity. The tone is sarcastic and the humour so bitter that the horror of Gerti's life is unrelieved by passages on the logic of capitalist expansion and suburban drudgery, for they only reinforce the sense of imprisonment. Lust explores pornography and commercialism with acrid and precise anger, sustained until Gerti finally suffocates her son (the replica of his abhorrent father) and drags his naked corpse to the stream. After this, the narrator, who has addressed the reader in the novel's many metafictional moments, enjoins, 'But now rest a while' (p.207).

f/32: The Second Coming by Euridice is a sexually explicit comedy in the genre of fantasy. As the publicity announces, it is a 'Rabelaisian romp' which indeed bears similarities to the fiction of Jong, but it is far more outrageous and surreal. It was published by Virago in 1993, and tells the story of Ela, whose cunt is the marvel and obsession of many men (whose sexual insecurities are humorously underlined in the first twenty pages) until, in a graphic and apocalyptic scene, it is cut out of her on the street by a blind old man. It turns into a camera lens with a mind of its own, and finally Ela recovers it and it rejoins her body for the happy ending. It is a bizarre story, with finely observed descriptions recalling the precision of Carter and language which is often poetic. It redresses the long history of repression of female genitalia with the most florid, tactile and sensuous descriptions of a woman's cunt that can ever have been collected in such a short novel. The mystery of female sexuality is preserved with light humour. Of the severed cunt, Ela observes: 'The Grafenberg spot, probably hidden in the folds, is, as usual, difficult to locate' (p.52). The work of Carter is recalled by the focus on narcissism and the self, artifice and signs. Euridice also is concerned with the gaze as applied to female genitalia which leads to fantasy, and explores this with similar preciousness of expression. But the narrative is

more fragmented, like that of Acker, and holds more in common with the post-structuralist emphases of some French feminist writing such as that of Luce Irigaray (pp. 27, 172). The role of punning also resembles the self-conscious use of language in Lust (pp. 166, 168). Acker reviews the novel positively on the back cover: 'It's wonderful to see a woman not interiorising male fear of her, especially her body, but rather confronting that fear, fighting it and celebrating her body and her sexuality by creating a fabulous and funny tale'.

The Butcher by Alina Reyes received considerable attention when it was published in Britain in 1991 and was soon noted for containing an 'erotic force' that 'leaves the Jilly Coopers and Jackie Collinsees of this world cold'.^[55] It was marketed definitively as a sex book and the conspiratorial delight communicated in the lurid reviews quoted on the back typify the hype women's sex writing was receiving in the early 1990s. In their enthusiasm, The Evening Standard, The Literary Review and The Daily Express revelled in confounding erotica, pornography and obscenity: the first announced, 'an erotic tour de force ... an exploration of raw sensuality - fleshly, beautiful and obscene'; the second, 'It is pornography, pure and simple. Utterly absolutely sexy'; and the third, 'this is eroticism on a fantasy level which just about saves the book from obscenity. I think. But you have been warned'. This last review is the most playful, beginning, 'I never knew such goings on were even possible in a freezer', both fully embracing the titillating marketing and parodying it at the same time.^[56] The text is worthy of such game-playing for it is also self-conscious about both its appeal and its threat.

After such a build-up, the first sentence, 'The blade plunged gently into the muscle and ran its full length in one supple movement' comes as a rude surprise (1992, p.3). But lest the alarmed reader take offence, it soon becomes clear that various pornographic conventions are being demystified. Like Carter, Reyes is interested in the function of flesh. Her writing does not exploit horror of the body so much as the radical terror and potential subversiveness of human sensuousness which Carter

examines in her fiction. In this first scene which recalls the visual assault of horror films rather than a conventional novelistic setting, the pornographic and psychoanalytic images of the vagina as meat or a lack are confronted immediately: 'I could feel that cold elastic mass beneath the palm of my own hand. I saw the knife enter the firm dead flesh, opening it up like a shining wound'. This is the language of pornography, but it describes the female narrator's empathy with (not fantasised submission to) the male butcher.

The reader is soon to find that this apparently feminised flesh, 'Bright red, beautifully nauseating', is that of a bull -- a male victim and icon of masculinity -- and the butcher, 'who talked to me about sex all day long was made of the same flesh, sometimes soft sometimes hard' (p.4). Only then does the female narrator concede her own flesh and possible reification: 'And my flesh was the same, I who felt the fire light between my legs at the butcher's words' (p.5). This becomes a pattern in the narrative; the butcher does the sex talk, but the narrator is the voyeur. When she is ready she and the butcher enjoy one afternoon of sex in which she purges her emotions of the memory of her lover Daniel. This is described at length and graphically, with emphasis upon altered states of consciousness through sexual arousal and temporary existential fulfilment achieved through the alternation of abandon and control in sexual exchange. While the sinister implications in the title of the novel dissolve in mutual sensuous enjoyment (the reviews conveniently see no further than this point of sexual consummation), the threat of sex and desire is preserved by the unsettling ending. After a disturbing experience with two young men with whom she goes into the woods at night, the young woman walks along the road thinking of herself as an animal, intensely aware of minutiae. Her choice of freedom seems to have resulted in a dangerous liberation in which she is purged of a unified consciousness and her mental state recalls Dworkin's image of the woman as a revolutionary figure beyond bourgeois individuality. As in [f32](#), female sexuality when unattached to possessive love or monogamous desire emerges as powerfully subversive of social definitions of womanhood and humanistic mores.

Conclusion: 'You have been warned'

Contemporary sex fiction by women published in Britain can be seen to incorporate elements of early libertarian fiction as well as the more deconstructive exploration of desire and self exemplified by the work of feminist writers of pornography. Thus fiction and fantasy provide post-feminism with imaginative space where once-taboo subjects and genres can be explored away from hard line feminist analysis. Prominent sex novels published at the end of the post-feminist decade tend to be either characterised by humour or fired by anger, in the post-feminist form of revenge. Women's fiction which exemplifies post-feminist attitudes tends to use sexology as a self-reflexive parody on the body and the elusive mysteries of sexuality. As post-feminism has shown with regard to sexology, naming and taming amount to a desexualisation of sex, so one should remember that while it was positive to stress female pleasure in sexuality, it would flatten the experience of passion and representation of desire if it were not emphasised that sex also involves conflict and pain. Friday, who was one of the first to identify a market for women's sexual fantasy and pornography, prefigures this awareness in her early attempt to address rape fantasy. She stresses the fun, but also acknowledges the unfulfilled needs of women (1974, p.126). On masochism, she shows how the desire for pain can show the degree to which women want 'to feel something at last, to feel at least something' (p.116). As with the feminist criticism of Modleski, the emphasis finally reaches a concern with getting even: 'Whether as brute or brutalised, in fantasy at least the centuries of female submission are about to be avenged'. [57]

The above study bears this out, for from female agency emerges the threat of female freedom as a destabilising force as well as female retribution. Redefining the erotic in post-feminist novels means confronting, demystifying and often appropriating the pornographic. This entails an engagement with sexual violence which is then reprocessed by inscribing a female subjectivity. The debate on women's

sex fiction continues into the 1990s.[58] The establishment of female agency and subjectivity in the arena of sexuality involves deconstructing a dualistic hierarchy, and post-feminism engages with this with as eagerly as feminism. Returning the gaze to reflect on men is one strategy, but also, as post-modernist fiction by women illustrates, language and narrative structure can be questioned to reveal the presence and absence of female subjectivity. The complex situation of women resisting male definition with the tools of their own oppression is thus appropriately signified by the two-fold image of the post-feminist woman as suggested by Winterson, Kali who destroys and creates at the same time.

Helen Zahavi's novel Dirty Weekend (1991) is an exemplary post-feminist evolution of the sex novel into the revenge story and, as such, must be one of the few works of fiction to boast of approval from figures as diverse as Burchill and Dworkin. Naomi Wolf, Marie Claire magazine, and Zoe Fairbairns are also quoted on the cover in praise of the book, acknowledging its 'deadpan desperately funny voice', its 'mordant humour run riot', and 'bloody triumph'. [59] The liberating sexual consummation achieved in The Butcher is not conceivable in this novel, whose protagonist, Bella, is 'the kind of women men dig into' (p.18) until one day she wakes up and 'she knew she'd had enough'. Bella would like to be a 'spectator', but for her the only options are 'the butcher or the lamb' (p.40), so she seduces and kills the men who terrorise and abuse her and finally stabs a serial killer to death, first graphically opening up his face with a knife (p.184).

Dirty Weekend is a psychological thriller which confronts female fear and responsibility in a way that is uplifting for the female reader. Zahavi is very aware of doubleness, the importance of power and the subtleties of its reversals in human exchange. The negotiation of a sense of self in dialogue, both interior and between people, is sensitively evoked, and empathy is an underlying theme. Bella always knows what people mean but this, rather than glorifying female intuition, exposes the necessary alertness of the vulnerable as well as the damaged ego of the oppressed. The victim / survivor is a chameleon figure, as Dworkin suggested, a remnant of

struggle. Thus the post-feminist model of reversal can here be read as an imitation of victimisation, at the same time that it refuses to acknowledge it. The novel uses inversion in such a way as not only to reaffirm the post-feminist model, but also to reveal it as a symptom of repression. Doubleness may be interpreted as the result of oppression and not having been allowed a stable identity, which precludes women from taking a strong and coherent political stance. Yet the capacity for transformation also lends itself to glamour and a shifting power (hence Paglia's interest in drag and transvestism).

The final scene cleverly plays upon this empathy and connection between aggressor and victim in the repetition of certain perceptions of Bella and the serial killer. Just as Bella is an avenging angel, post-feminism appears with regard to the feminist debate on sex and power as a phoenix rising from the ashes: Bella, as an anti-humanist, post-feminist woman, is at the end of the narrative triumphantly leaving behind the feminist battle scene of male power and sexual violence. Dirty Weekend shows that women at the end of the 1980s are not only representing and exploring their sexuality, but that they want more explicit fantasies of empowerment. This will be examined in the next chapter on women's different faces of trespass, post-feminism and crime.

Notes

1. Jeanette Winterson, Introduction, Margaret Reynolds, ed., Erotica: An Anthology of Women's Writing (London: Pandora, 1990), p.xx.
2. This film has attracted a flood of feminist and post-feminist commentary and its themes of threatening female sexual agency been elaborated further in films of the early 1990s. See Joan Smith, Misogynies (London: Faber and Faber, 1989); Julie Burchill, Sex and Sensibility (London: Grafton, 1992), pp.41, 47-48; Susan Faludi, Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women (London: Chatto & Windus, 1992), pp. 140-152. And for examples of films, see Basic Instinct (1992) and Body of Evidence (1993), as well as a new strain of female suspense in The Hand That Rocks the Cradle (1991), and Single White Female (1992).
3. For British feminists' unease with such public display, see Catherine Bennett, 'Sheep in Need of a Shepherdess', The Guardian, 8.3.1993.
4. Kimberly Leston, 'Review of the Year', The Face, No. 52, January 1993, pp.54.
5. For Women, Women Only, Women on Top, and Ludus. That these magazines did not last for long indicates the media orchestration of this trend.
6. By 1990, Feminist Review (Nos. 34, 36) was able to devote considerable space to an overview of the lesbian feminist argument on the subject of pornography. See also City Limits (*Review of the Year*, December 1992) and the adoption of the 'Marlene' look by Madonna (1992).
7. For films, see The Color Purple, Mona Lisa, and Desert Hearts. The Hunger grew in cult status in this period, and one can see Basic Instinct as the culmination of this trend. Popular singers Michelle Shocked (US) and kd Lang (Canada) play on images of androgyny, and Lang in particular has a large lesbian following.
8. See Lindi St. Clair, letter published in The Guardian, 23.4.1993; 'Boadicea For the Modern World' by Francis Wheen, The Spectator, 28.3.1992; 'Scourge of the Private Members' by Geraldine Bedell, The Guardian, 12.9.1992.
9. See Suzanne Moore on the anarchic sexuality of Barbara Windsor and the seaside humour of Carry On in 'The Merry Life of Windsor', Looking for Trouble

(London: Serpent's Tail, 1991).

10. Suzanne Moore, 'Let's Talk (and talk) about sex', The Guardian, 6.3.1991.

11. See 'Love Hurts' by Alex Kershaw and Corinne Sweet, Guardian Weekend 28.11.1992.

12. Shere Hite's work is the paragon of popular sexology. The Hite Report (New York: Dell, 1976) was reprinted through the 1980s (London: Pandora, 1989) and was followed by other studies, including one of male sexuality (1981). In the first two years of the 1990s, nearly all teen / adult magazines, from City Limits (1990) to Arena (1992) held a sex survey in which consumers were intended to fill in a questionnaire on their sexual habits and preferences.

13. See Sheila Jeffreys, Anticlimax: A Feminist Perspective on the Sexual Revolution (London: Women's Press, 1990), pp. 1,2; Suzanne Kappeler, The Pornography of Representation (London: Polity, 1986), p.160.

14. For example, New Age philosophy of the late 1980s; Grunge's synthesis of hippie and punk in the early 1990s; national art exhibitions and analytical retrospectives of the ideology of the 'Swinging Sixties' in the early 1990s.

15. Jeffreys identifies the 1980s as the decade in which women's liberation was hijacked by sexual libertarians (1990), p.3.

16. Anne McClintock, 'Gonad the Barbarian and the Venus Flytrap', in Sex Exposed: Sexuality and the Pornography Debate, ed. by Lynne Segal and Mary McIntosh (London: Virago, 1992), p.118.

17. Jeffreys argues that in the 1960s, women were 'enjoined to respond in more varied sexual positions' and 'single women were conscripted into active heterosexual sex' (1990, p.2).

18. Anne Hooper, The Body Electric (London: Virago, 1980; London: Pandora, 1991).

19. William H. Masters, Virginia E. Johnson and Robert C. Kolodny, Human Sexuality, Third Edition (London: Scott Foreman and Company, 1988), p.v.

20. As illustrated by the parody of female macho in the lyrics from the all-women band 'L7': 'so much clit she don't need no balls'. Bad Attitude, Issue 3 (London: Brixton, 1993).
21. Millett does note the importance of psychological considerations, the 'regulating factor' of physical exhaustion', the distinction between biological capacity and psychic satisfaction, as well as the social forces to which women's sexuality is subject. Kate Millett, Sexual Politics (New York: Doubleday, 1970; London: Virago, 1983), p.118.
22. See Elissa Van Poznak, 'Angry Young Women', The Guardian, 24.4.1993.
23. See Carol Vance, Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality (Routledge, London; 1984); V. Burstyn, ed. Women Against Censorship (Douglas & MacIntyre, Vancouver; 1985); Caught Looking: Feminism, Pornography and Censorship (New York 1986); E. Donnerstein et al, The Question of Pornography (Free Press, New York; 1987); Gail Chester and Julienne Dickey, eds. Feminism and Censorship (Prism Press, Dorset; 1988); Linda Williams, Hard Core: Power, Pleasure and the Frenzy of the Visible (Pandora, London; 1990); Lynne Segal and Mary MacIntosh, eds. Sex Exposed: Sexuality and the Pornography Debate (Virago, London; 1992).
24. The London Rape Crisis Centre, Sexual Violence: The Reality for Women (London: The Women's Press, 1988), p.x.
25. Andrea Dworkin, Pornography: Men Possessing Women (New York: Perigree, 1981; New York, E.P.Dutton, 1989), p.xxix.
26. See also p.xxiv. While it is true that the law has been slow to recognise sexual violence against women, surely to equate pornography with rape is, by misusing, to exploit the pain of women who have been raped.
27. At the beginning of her introduction Dworkin mobilises the old analogy of women's oppression with the oppression of black slaves, just as later British Suzanne Kappeler was to compare pornography with the violent fascism of South African apartheid (1986). But in her crusade, Dworkin has little time for other oppressions;

later she writes sarcastically: 'it isn't chic to help such women; they aren't the Black Panthers' (p.xxiv).

28. For a further explanation of post-feminism and pop-deconstruction see the discussion of Julie Burchill in the next section.

29. See Mandy Merck, 'From Minneapolis to Westminster' (in Segal and McIntosh, 1992), p.55.

30. The editors explain: 'Many of the definitions and concepts here are the product of British culture which, while it does not exclude other cultures, doesn't necessarily represent them. The objectification of women is not singular to this country, but its methods differ from place to place'. Dear Clare: ... this is what women feel about Page 3, eds. Kiri Tunks and Diane Hutchinson (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1991).

31. In an interview in March 1994, Rupert Murdoch finally declared the obsolescence of the Page 3 girl, and said she would soon be disappearing from The Sun because the time for her had passed.

32. See Burchill, 1992, pp.29, 42, and 'The Dead Zone' (pp.45-51); Camille Paglia, 'The Rape Debate Continued', in Sex Art and American Culture (London: Viking, 1993), pp.61, 65.

33. Paglia is opposed to the language of post-structuralist criticism, describing it as a lobster shell under which thinkers hide their ideas (Interview, February, 1993. See Appendix).

34. It can be compared with the over-simplified and literal readings of Alan Soble who inverts the feminist anti-pornography position to argue that pornography gives men a sense of control which is missing from the rest of their lives (Segal and McIntosh, 1992, pp.75,76). While post-feminist inversion often has the appearance of a similar reductionism, I believe this is not a necessary effect of inversion and it may have more positive and complex results.

35. Jane Gallop for example has insisted upon the precarious nature of bodily masculinity as part of the work necessary to displace the notion of the idealised

transcendant phallus, in Thinking Through the Body (New York: Colombia University Press, 1988), p.131.

36. The radical perversity of post-feminism here seems to hold significant points in common with Mandy Merck's deliberately perverse readings in Perversions: Deviant Readings (London: Virago, 1993).

37. This bears a resemblance to the notion of 'resistance through rituals' in British Cultural Studies. See Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, eds. Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain (Birmingham: Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, 1975).

38. There is a sense of female solidarity, or girl-gang feel, to Burchill's writing at this point: '[L]et us crack open a bottle of Bolly, and drink to the Phantom Nympho; our sister under the skintrade' (p.44).

39. Shere Hite, The Hite Report on Masculinity (London: MacDonald, 1981) and Nancy Friday, Men in Love: Their Secret Fantasies (London: Arrow, 1980).

40. Nancy Friday, My Secret Garden: Women's Sexual Fantasies (New York: Pocket Books [Simon & Schuster], 1974). See review by The New York Times on the back of this edition.

41. Friday is referring to the opposition she perceives between separatists and heterosexual women who were afraid of sounding aggressive and alienating men (p.7).

42. Nancy Friday, Women on Top (London: Hutchinson, 1992).

43. Women Talk Sex: Autobiographical Writing on Sex, Sexuality and Sexual Identity, eds. Pearlie McNeill, Bea Freeman and Jenny Newman (London: Scarlet Press, 1992); Serious Pleasure: Lesbian Erotic Stories and Poetry, ed. The Sheba Collective (London: Sheba Feminist Publishers, 1989).

44. Reynolds denies a difference between the terms 'erotic' and 'pornographic' (p.xxix), but has nevertheless chosen 'erotica' (rather than 'pornographica') to denote the kind of sex writing she has collected.

45. The former is exemplified in the agony aunt or sex therapist who is desexualised herself by her function of solving women's sex problems.

46. Such as the excellent pornographic literature written by Pat Califia in the United States (see Macho Sluts) which is still not easily accessible in Britain (much of her work is published by Gay Men's Press, and not stocked by feminist bookstores such as 'Silver Moon' in Charing Cross Road, London). 1993 saw a new attempt to market literary pornography for women with the publication of 'Black Lace, Erotic Stories for Women', cheap mass-market paperbacks, which update the bodice-ripper and include scenarios and fetishes typical of S / M pornography.

47. Lisa Alther, Kinflicks (New York: Knopf, 1976), quoted on reverse cover (Middlesex: Penguin, 1982).

48. See Nicola Upson on how feminism can result in downplaying fun in her Editorial to the new journal, Second Shift, (Spring 1993).

49. Acker, according to Punch, is 'in the great tradition of experimental American writers, Jack Kerouac out of Bill Burroughs'; see publicity on the reverse cover of Young Lust (London: Pandora, 1989).

50. The legacies of early 1960s structuralism are evident in both authors' concern with writing as architecture and form, whereas the use of pastiche and fragmentation, as well as their subversive deconstruction of genre, identify them as post-modern writers.

51. Angela Carter, The Infernal Desire Machines of Dr. Hoffman (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1972; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986).

52. For example, in the first peep-show exhibit in Carter's novel, the gaze of the viewer does not stop with the classic 'O' (void, hole, gap or lack) typical of male pornography (including experimental intellectual pornographic writing by men), but is led into 'a miniature but irresistible vista of a semi-tropical forest' (1986, p.45).

53. See 'Porn Again Austrian' by Desmond Christy on the furore caused by Jelinek's Lust, The Guardian, 15.10.1992.

54. Elfriede Jelinek, Lust (Hamburg: Rowohlt Verlag GmbH, 1989; translated by Michael Hulse, London: Serpent's Tail, 1992).
55. Review by London Magazine, quoted on the reverse cover of Alina Reyes, The Butcher (translated by David Watson, London: Methuen, 1991).
56. Review by The Daily Express, quoted on the reverse cover of Reyes (1992).
57. Tania Modleski, Loving With A Vengeance: Mass Produced Fantasies For Women (London: Routledge, 1985), p.45.
58. See Joanna Coles, 'A Book at Bedtime', 'Guardian Women', The Guardian, 19.4.1994.
59. Helen Zahavi, Dirty Weekend (London: Flamingo [Harper Collins], 1992).

CHAPTER THREE

FACES OF TRESPASS:

Post-feminism, Women and Crime

Women artists not only can borrow from male-authored fictions to create feminocentric plots: they must. A reinscription of phallogentrism may be a sign not of weakness or plagiarism but of woman's own ability to signify, that is, her ability to play with, to control, and to restructure patriarchal traditions. If a dominant discourse not only defines woman as 'other' but becomes the source of her self-alienation, it is only in the act of appropriation that her own heteroglossia may be freed, that she may, in other words, be freed to speak.

(Linda Yeagar [1])

INTRODUCTION: Discourses of Femininity and Criminality

In this chapter I intend to further my investigation into post-feminism by examining contemporary women's crime fiction with reference to other popular discourses which focus on the relationship between women and criminality. Women's crime and detective writing has been in existence for over a century but has received particular attention in the post-feminist decade, where it became a focus for debates on sexual politics.[2] Critics, publishers and authors (usually, but not only, feminists) have made a case for the emergence of a new subgenre of crime writing by women in this period.[3] These authors number over thirty, are largely British and American and, while some began to write their novels (often series novels with familiar sleuths) in the 1970s, or even the 1960s, their rise to prominence has undoubtedly been in the last decade.[4] Names such as Sara Paretsky, Sue Grafton and Barbara Wilson, all of whom have published five or more novels in the last ten years, are gaining a wide currency which cannot be ignored.

This new wave of women's crime writing has provided a welcome opportunity for feminist critics to explore and develop feminist literary theory. However, I will argue that it may also stimulate feminist criticism to take some new intertextual directions.

An understandable haste to champion these texts, claiming their relation to 'sister' texts and elaborating upon theories of 'otherness' often tends to ignore the areas in which they are read and enjoyed by a large number of people.[5] While many feminist critics have been keen to relate crime fiction to real social events and historical shifts, it has not been considered as having a dialogue with widespread non-fictional discourses on crime.[6] I suggest that an approach to contemporary women's crime novels could benefit from an intertextual reading with the genre of 'True Crime'. This popular form known also, more respectably, as crime non-fiction (or, incorrectly, as criminology) holds a prominent place in the book market. Therefore I first examine the conventions of true crime literature and its particular construction of gender with relation to crime, with the aim of addressing ways in which contemporary women's crime fiction may critically engage with the social construction of femininity and criminality.

True crime is valuable for this study because it provides a rare example of a patriarchal discourse which is self-conscious and overtly concerned with the dynamics of reader response.[7] Consideration must be given to where this leaves feminist critics in a post-feminist era and explore to what degree the denials of true crime apologists may serve as points of insight. I argue that the conceptual axes of sensationalism / morality and fact / fiction are two of the main points of intervention for both feminist critique and women's crime fiction, and examine Nicole Ward Jouve's *The Streetcleaner* as a critical text which marks the beginnings of objections to the genre based on gender difference. This then leads to a discussion of the way women's crime fiction can popularise this approach and take it further. Angela Carter's short story, 'The Fall River Axe Murders' is analysed at some length at this point to illustrate the ways in which fiction may also serve critical and deconstructive purposes. Finally I contrast the feminist critical position which is sceptical about women's appropriation of crime fiction as a masculine genre with strategies promoted by a number of crime novels by women to dismantle the polarisation of gender and genre and assumptions about female victimisation. I consider to what extent these

strategies relate to post-feminist models of inversion and appropriation as discussed in my earlier chapters.

I have chosen this topic for the thesis because the novels and short stories which belong to the genre of women's crime are particular to the period in which they have proliferated and exemplify a new form of popular culture for women. They are visible in book shops and various alternative best-seller lists and clearly are steady sellers. They have developed a collective identity as they began to be grouped together in short-story compilations with playful and telling titles such as Ms. Murder, A Woman's Eye (1991) and Reader, I Murdered Him (1987), and they have recently reached the stage at which they are read on the radio and made into box-office films. [8] Moreover, this fictional subgenre is significant for its distinct importance with relation to feminism in the period. It refers, sometimes obscurely but often very directly, to feminist debates which are not similarly highlighted in other popular cultural products. Some critics, such as Rosalind Coward and Linda Semple, and Maggie Humm, have even used the term 'feminist' to define it.[9] Rather than fall into an interpretative over-assertiveness which may fix the meanings of these fictions, particularly by reading them as feminist statements, I argue that the majority of these texts acquire a discursive and political value by addressing feminist issues. The ability of this fiction to make a fraught and unfashionable subject so palatable is intriguing and raises more questions about the overlaps between feminist and post-feminist ideologies.

'Virago Crime' was initiated as a distinct genre in 1987. Indicating its success and the commercial sense of drawing more attention to crime as an autonomous product, it was newly packaged a couple of years afterwards when the covers showed a new arresting bright green colour supplanting the usual Virago pine green trademark and a large red apple, apparently symbolising a maligned history of female seduction and the illicit pleasures for women in crime fiction. A genre distinction was also marked in the same period by other women's presses, such as Women's Press Crime, the Pandora Crime Series, and Naiad in the United States.[10] This is a clear indication

that the 1980s was felt to be the appropriate decade for publishers to respond to and promote a growing engagement with an area which mixed 'women's interests' with fictional narratives of crime,[11] The two appear to be a perfect match, for both feminism and crime fiction can be seen at this time as having reached a mid-term stage in which the injection of something new could prove the saving grace.[12] At the same time that the media was remorselessly exploiting the concept of post-feminism, emphasising its negative connotations for feminists, the fashionable edge of crime fiction was shifting to a contemporary fascination with serial killers and perverse psychological thrillers, illustrated for example by the work of Thomas Harris. Feminist and women's concerns in general provided a platform which could serve as a thinking space for the traditions of the genre, working to revitalise detective fiction in particular, which was felt to be sinking 'under the weight of its own clichés'. [13] Hence widespread claims for the genre's 'renaissance' which hold that women writers dominate the path to its future.[14] Conversely, the recent availability of the crime genre to a more sub-generic and as-yet undefined influence contributed to a more tolerant attitude towards experimentation and a reduction of constraints, of which women writers who were looking for a new vehicle for their ideas, particularly feminist and lesbian writers, could make good use.[15]

If one examines other cultural media, one can see that it is little wonder that crime and detective novels and stories retained their perennial appeal and that women also wanted to write and read themselves into this literary genre. Given the numbers of television serial dramas on the subject of crime, as well as successful box-office thrillers, it is little wonder that women should appear from time to time as active protagonists as well as the more usual passive victims of violence and circumstance. While a profitable way of diversifying the market and expanding the product, this is also a recognition of the presence of women as active consumers in the market for these related genres, and a testimony to female pleasure in seeing ourselves empowered and taking part in the action.[16] In particular, the growth in the Eighties of the televised police procedural story has seen women as major protagonists, and the

mild progressivism and diversity of this form has effected a shift in common genre divisions, bringing traditional male street action and office work closer to the family dynasty soap opera associated with female viewers.[17] Cultural familiarity would therefore find many women at the end of the decade ready to enjoy some streetwise but sympathetic, tough-talking sleuths in literature. The post-feminist strains of such a shift are recognised in Sarah Schulman's The Sophie Horowitz Story, where the narrator comments that the detective form in popular culture is 'the working girl's soap opera'.[18]

As Helen Carr writes in her study of gender and genre: 'Many younger women would not call themselves feminists even though they express what in the 1970s would have been thought feminist views. They don't want to talk about oppression, certainly not to consider themselves victims' (1989, p.5). As feminism is likely to have negative associations with oppression and victimisation for a post-feminist younger generation of women who are reading these texts, contemporary women's crime fiction is immensely valuable for its ability to use the subject of crime and its generic conventions to speak to these problematic areas. Women's detective and crime fiction of the 1980s has reached a new independence, poise and self-consciousness which illuminate and expand the various genres of crime writing. But I argue that it is a reading which is attentive to non-fictional discourses concerned with gender and deviancy, law and crime that is most able to reveal how this female genre has moved feminism in further post-feminist directions.[19] Alison Hennegan is the only critic I have come across who confidently assumes such levels of intertextuality, and I have found that the fictional texts are in fact more articulate on this subject than their critics. They tend to be remarkably informed and articulate about wider social and political issues, ranging from drawing attention to specific injustices or inequality, to problematising definitions of crime and deviance per se, as they relate to the social order.[20] Women's crime writing raises questions about the position of women in contemporary society and the advances made by feminism, opening up a space in

which to consider whether the latter amount to something which may be described (either negatively or positively) as post-feminism.

In this thesis so far, I have found that, contrary to the suspicions of many feminists who regard post-feminism as anti-feminism, feminism remains an inevitable and awkward component of post-feminism, investing it with a productive doubleness. Almost by definition, the pervasive inheritance of feminism remains part of the post-feminist formation, so that post-feminism is more complex than a mere anti-feminist stance or 'backlash'. At the same time post-feminism takes liberties where feminism is cautious, making use of language, attitudes, genres and hierarchical structures which feminism has opposed as masculine. Contemporary women's crime fiction as well as other discourses which focus on the relationship between women and criminality are well placed to negotiate feminist and post-feminist positions in the decade after the WLM had its initial impact. They are concerned with male and female fantasy, duality in the construction of power which may allow for reversals, and they bring into play models of deviance, invasion and appropriation.

True Crime Constructions

True crime literature is easily identifiable in bookshops by its stark red and black paperback covers. [21] Apart from books it also has a significant magazine output, such as True Crime Monthly. The popularity of true crime collections is indicated by their tendency to go through a number of reprints and revised editions and they are often sufficiently commercially successful for the authors to follow up the original publication with a second volume.[22] The subject tends to be violent crime, for these books focus almost exclusively upon murder, and it is stomach-churning reading, even for the 'most hardened reader' to whom many such books claim to appeal. While it is commonly a fragmented form, resembling a hastily-compiled collection of very short stories rather than a novel, it is a gripping read for its conventional narrative structure promises a climax. The first shocking details of each

entry grab the reader's attention and prompt an interest in what the result was (conviction, hanging, etc.) or what provided the motive for the murder, which is usually discussed at the end of the entries.[23] Yet it is the howdunnit detail which provides the essential shock factor -- not simply whether it was poison, a knife, a gun, a push -- but what was done with the victim's body afterwards. With women (and sometimes children and young men) the ultimate 'before and after' is rape and dismemberment.

True crime may usefully be described as a genre, constituting 'groups of norms and expectations that help readers assign functions to various elements in the work'. [24] It resembles fiction more than it does history or social science. [25] Characterisation is important, for the interest is more in human individuals than in social analysis. Photographs, excerpts from letters and reported speech are often used further to bring the murderer or victim to life and the attempt to make characters seem real and to simulate closeness to them is engineered as though they were fictional characters.[26] True crime reconstructs factual details in such a way as to mimic a tight conventional narrative structure, the sense of a controlling, omniscient narrator, and an account of causes and motivations. It is also heavily formulaic, achieving the familiarity associated with much popular genre fiction; it is likely that this use of formula accounts for much of the pleasure afforded by reading true-crime collections. Kathleen Gregory Klein notes that: 'popular fiction studies are now reconsidering the use of formula ... as an all-purpose explanation for the genre's success. Questions of pleasure, the relation between book and reader, and the manipulation of formula all cross the boundaries between high culture and popular culture' (1991, p.xi). I would argue that they also cross the boundaries between popular fiction and non-fiction.

However, unlike the case with crime fiction, it is still rare to find a female author or editor in the true crime genre, and it appears to be addressed in its marketing to male readers.[27] That true crime has not been a user-friendly genre for women comes as no surprise after even just a cursory glance at the characteristic selection and organisation of its material. As a rule the murderers are men and the victims female.

The main focus of attention and identification is almost invariably upon the actor (it only touches upon the victim's feelings at the beginning to create a sense of horror and suspense) and so the victim is securely reified. The true crime collection presents acts of physical violation in a titillating manner and even when these acts have not been perpetrated against women, the victims are feminised. This is achieved through a number of generic and literary conventions: the predominant subject matter; the position and structure of 'the gaze' suggested by true-crime writing [28]; its rather crude manner of creating suspense; the expected tone of masculine identification; its nostalgia and historical distancing; its narrative closure; and even its humour. For example, many opening sentences flirt with a hint of rape, the threat for women of sexual abuse, or the implied horrors of decomposition of their bodies: 'On 28th April 1979, men looking for mushrooms on the north bank of White Lick Creek, Indiana, found the body of a woman, almost naked, lying face down in the water' (Wilson and Pitman, 1984, p.177). The absurd is highlighted: 'On 11th March 1983 Luigi Longhi, an unemployed lorry driver with a mania for shampooing women's hair, was sentenced ... to indefinite psychiatric confinement for the murder of Heike Freiheit, a young West German girl hitch-hiker' (p. 208). The deliberate phrasing here is clearly designed to evoke a perverse humour whose tastelessness is made especially apparent by the reminder of the female victim at the end of the sentence, and consequently it works particularly against woman-identification. The genre uses familiarity with its conventions to invite a voyeuristic attitude in its readers.

True crime cannot be read as an indicator of what kind of crime takes place in society, contrary to the impression given by the adjective 'true', for it is strongly selective: 'The subjects have been chosen according to my own preferences, with due regard for variety, oddities of character and quirks of fate', writes James Bland (Vol. 1, p.7). Female criminals usually make up less than 10% of the examples, but women represent the vast majority of the murder victims. Its almost exclusive focus upon murder -- which makes up only a very small percentage of crime in society, British and American -- and also its choice of especially inventive or salacious murders helps

to explain why women are over-represented as victims and under-represented as protagonists. Women's crimes tend to offer breathing spaces for the readers, indicating clearly that they are presented as either less threatening or absurd,[29] On the rare occasions when female murderers are included, they are treated differently from men, and their offences romanticised as tales of jealousy and guns, often with men as actors behind the scenes (e.g. Edith Thompson and Ruth Ellis),[30] Thus true crime represents the kind of crime readers expect and want to read about, which relates it again to fiction and, more importantly, to ideology in terms of prescribed gender roles.

Tony Bennett finds Discipline and Punish by Foucault a useful tool for the examination of crime literature,[31] He writes:

In absolutist regimes, Foucault argues, the power of the king is dependent on its being made manifest in the form of public rituals ... in which the naked fact of power is written on the body of the condemned for society to read. Viewed in this light, the popular literature of crime ... was complicit with, indeed formed part of this apparatus of power, one of the means by which power was broadcast and dramatised although not, Foucault notes, without being contested in the process. (pp.215-216).

One can draw from Foucault's ideas here to understand true crime as a narrative drama in which patriarchal power is inscribed on the body of the condemned -- the mutilated corpse, which is the female body -- for contemporary society to read. Historically, female criminals have been pathologised more than their male equivalents, both in the discourses of criminology and in practice by criminal justice systems,[32] Although it has been found that women's decision to murder is usually far more rational than that of men, the ensuing contradictory rationale for the true crime genre results in a very 'untrue' portrayal of women. The misplaced moral claims of the genre which tend to demonise the murderer result in its shying away from the more sympathetic murders committed by women and true crime's quest for the sensational and extraordinary, which consequently excludes the ordinary abused

women who tend to commit murder, obliterates the character and humanity of the (typically female) victim. Instead the voyeuristic strain of the genre, along with its need for shocking and horrific physical details, results in an oppressive focus upon the female body as corpse. Thus true crime broadcasts a power which is punitive to women, which needs to discipline them.

An examination of the narrative construction of the female criminal, as this figure is one of true crime's most glaring blind spots, provides an insight into the ways in which patriarchal power might be contested through an engagement with the literature of crime, fictional as well as non-fictional. Much contemporary women's crime fiction features female protagonists and narrators and, while, most are detectives, it is significant that this literature also contains female characters as criminals, including murderers.[33] This serves to widen the field of interest from detection and definitions of accepted womanhood, engaging with Alison Young's observation that 'Sexual difference is one of the key ways in which the normal is marked out from the deviant' (1990, p.ix). The self-conscious use of female criminals tends to move beyond familiar stereotypes which may have been established through the genre's history to more female-identified and complex representations. For example, Vera in Barbara Vine's A Dark-Adapted Eye is presented through the female gaze of the protagonist and is securely located in a feminine domestic ideology. These texts can thus be seen to problematise and resist the dramatisation and broadcasting of power in popular fictional and non-fictional discourses which speak of women as criminals and victims. However, to do this, contemporary women's crime fiction has to negotiate a powerful legacy of representations: the mercenary 'femme fatale', the masculine woman (or pseudo-man), incarnation of evil, hysterical neurotic, 'sexual threat or sexualised virus' (Humm, p.187), or inhuman and disposable object.

Such stereotypes have a dual and paradoxical relationship to an enduring popular interest in crime. Although, on the one hand, crime and deviance are expected of the marginal, on the other, femininity has been constructed in such a way that it bolsters patriarchal law through women's roles as nurturers, moral guardians, and as property

to be protected. Women, while situated precariously on the borders of social normality and institutional power, are also perceived to be at the heart of it, and so add a greater sense of taboo to this fascination with deviance. Thus, when associated with crime, they become in many sense criminals or deviants twice over.[34] So transgressive is female crime against femininity and notions of normality for women that it is not absorbed into social myth in the reassuring fashion that often accompanies male acts of lawlessness and, consequently, the status of hero, being largely male-defined and identified, is less likely to accommodate female offenders. [35] Rather, the myths involving female transgressors and killers serve as horror stories of the 'unnatural', corresponding to the fact that female law-breakers are often judged to be mentally unstable instead of 'criminals'.[36]

Criminal women are eagerly received into popular discourse and readily mythologised, enabling the history of their deeds to be expanded and amplified by speculation and fabrication, as well as spiced up with projected sexual fantasy. Craig and Cadogan show how Mata Hari 'has been surrounded by so much retrospective fantasy that although her existence was real enough, she has almost become a fictional character' (1981, p.53). The revival of interest in Lizzie Borden initiated by the popular true crime writer Edmund Lester Pearson resulted in numerous fictional reconstructions of her story -- on stage, in several plays, a ballet, an opera and feature length film on television. Like Mata Hari, but with less justification, the potential sexual interest has been milked to the full in 'suggestive Freudian scripts' (Jones, 1991, p.249). Jean Ritchie went to remarkable trouble to find out about Myra Hindley's relationships in prison to bear out one of her contributor's beliefs that she is 'highly sexed' and 'really needs it', and to titillate her readers with what she calls the 'lesbian overload' (1988, p.184). Thus, one observes the shock and threat these women pose to male identity and social order reconstructed as a sexual enticement. [37] Not only does this serve to dispel anxiety occasioned by the woman who flies in the face of femininity, but it has been used to explain what is otherwise regarded as an unfathomable behaviour. Women's crimes may be interpreted as the result of sexual

(i.e. dependent, feminine, irrational) compulsions in keeping with gender assumptions, as opposed to motives of legitimate anger, economic need or entrepreneurialism, which are regarded as masculine. [38] Jones suggests that this is why Borden was acquitted for the murder of her parents; while the motive of financial gain was staring everyone in the face, prosecutors were at a loss for a motive, for no one could believe that a woman would kill for this reason. Such sexualised constructions of female killers are thus a defensive symbolic castration of the castrating woman, allowing a more consoling perception of women as prisoners, again, of their sex.

The appeal of women as perpetrators of crimes seems to hinge on the readily-accessible perception of women as victims, determined by their sex. Those who cannot be thus contained are demonised as witches and monsters, terms used in the past to exact a bloodthirsty and sexualised retribution. Such women's stories live on without their being able to tell or defend them. Even if they are still alive, the momentousness of their transgression precludes it from being spoken, and it passes into a public discourse which fetishises and recycles it, dispersing its threat or message through fragmentation, reification and cliché. Beatrix Campbell writes of the Moors Murders case: 'As Brady disappeared from public view ... Myra Hindley remained powerfully visible ... Her blond impassive head was endlessly recycled in the mass media'. Her partnership with Brady 'has become the focus for a collective fantasy endlessly renewed in the absence of any information' (in Jones, 1991, p.xii). The appropriation of women's stories and the paradox of female silence is well illustrated by the myths and spectacle constructed around Hindley. While opportunistically profiting from such myths, Ritchie, when asking why Hindley has occupied such a cultural space, rightly observes: 'The main answer has got to be [her] gender. The fact that she is a woman ... has made the Moors Murders case ... an unremitting horror, fed by myths and rumours' (p.viii). Hindley's silence was probably inevitable given the raging of voices against her, yet, even though silence is usually appreciated as a feminine trait

bespeaking passivity, lack of agency and innocence, it has been used to bolster the public perception of her fiendish unfemininity (Campbell, p.xii).

Thus there is a circle of interpretation available given the popular reconstruction of stories of female crime. To reduce their threat, female criminals are perceived as, or made, victims of some sort (their sexuality, the crimes of others, punishment, a 'criminal justice' [39]). This brings them into a familiar social orbit where they can be fixed and understood. When these women are characterised as victims in coherence with their gender, that is, in relation to their passivity (which is interpreted as consonant with femininity), they are deprived of the motive or agency of their offence. When they are so characterised in contradiction against it, they are silenced and appear as *mythically reified* monsters. Female criminals, and killers in particular, represent a challenge to the status quo which usually is *successfully dispensed with by* having them meet the common fate of the female victim, on display and silenced, yet not engaging pity or compassion. Yet, while they are an ambiguous role model for women, they provide undeniable advantages over the female victim when reified as corpse (a patriarchal ideal from some radical feminist perspectives [40]) or disempowered by her availability for sexualised reconstructions. As the latter is such a pervasive trope underlying all discourses on crime, the great aberration of murder, because of the gender stereotyping of women as life-givers and nurturers, may be construed as subversive.

Consequently, the history of this figure -- deviant woman, rebel and murderess -- is one some feminists have recently attempted to recover, exemplified by Ann Jones in her true crime text, Women Who Kill (1991). This book does more than substitute the more familiar male murderer with a female one and as such goes beyond a simple post-feminist inversion. Its argument appears to be that a focus on female perpetrators of crimes in a consciously feminist context may provide a 'rehabilitation of women's agency' or be read politically as an 'act of prepolitical violence' (pp. xiii, xxix). The post-feminist position may maintain that our culture's frequent portrayal of women as victims testifies to their power and subversive potential, but this represses the feminist

acknowledgement of the eroticisation of female victims and the recognition that the victimisation of women is so widespread in actuality. These concerns lead directly towards a meeting place between post-feminism and feminism in analytical models of subordination.[41] As I have shown in the earlier chapters, this is where feminism may reach a stalemate in the question of whether it should appropriate and invert. The debate has usually hinged upon whether female victims should be seen as contesting or conserving existing power relations and often results in a pessimistic leaning towards the latter, in that rebellion on the axis of inversion is easily co-opted and the deviant female figure tends to metaphorise destruction as opposed to enacting it. This is by now a familiar impasse which feminist critics are often led into by a mixture of the powerful forces of theoretical coherence (often demeaned as 'political correctness').

Yet, in the context of popular discourses of women and criminality, I argue that there is more on offer. There is, for want of a better expression, an 'experiential' field of enquiry afforded by popular culture which goes on largely unheedingly, in much the same way that women have continued to explore fictional forms of crime widely perceived as misogynist. At certain points this may develop to such a stage that it can inform and expand the above debate.[42] In recent years, a fully fledged interest in female murderers appears to have burgeoned in popular cultural forms, as well as in law and academia.[43] While an urge to defend female outlaws has inevitably been a part of feminism, the recent media attention paid to the female murderer is a point where feminism overlaps with post-feminism. Fictional representations of this figure are significant for claims that a more advanced post-feminism may incorporate feminist elements, for they tend to engage primarily with female rather than male fantasy and they not only effect a sex-switch, but alter the common narrative structures in which the murderess acts.

For example, the women who kill in film have been less frequently partners in crime with men, signifying a shift away from the romance genre which relates to the appropriation of elements of the hard-boiled form in women's crime fiction. The new

bad woman tends to be more female-identified than the traditional femme fatale and more sympathetic to female audiences. Examples in film would be Black Widow, the tale of a female detective's growing fascination with a female serial killer; Dance With A Stranger, the 'true-story' of Ruth Ellis, the last woman to be hanged for murder in Britain; and, more recently, Thelma and Louise, a uplifting tale about female rebellion, murder and emancipation. In 1991 Carol Wuornos was celebrated in the press (incorrectly) as the first female serial killer, causing speculation in women's pages on the relationship between women's independence and their committing 'male' crimes' ('Guardian Women', August 1991). In the same year Sara Thornton, who was convicted of murdering her husband, became a household name in Britain. Magazines such as Marie Claire in the same period presented an alternating picture of women's relation to crime as victim and agent, coming out on average with an emphasis upon the latter. [44]

Thus there is the potential for female fantasy and pleasure, as well as oppression, in the arena of the true crime genre. There may be ways in which the sad and constrained history of the female killer can please the female as well as the male gaze, and a study of the difficulties which arise in the representation of the female criminal / killer can provide some clues as to where female fantasy finds its spaces. This is made possible through a penetration of the ambivalence of masculine fear and desire, revealing the instability of masculine power over this figure and her consequent openness for active female identification and desire. A study of the construction of images of the female criminal leads one to the contemporary feminist problematic regarding women's victimisation, and post-feminist culture is where this can be best worked out. Women's crime fiction is situated to provide precisely the moments of clarity and insight that I suggest an 'experiential' or non-theoretical field of enquiry can produce. For example, while feminist critics such as Humm have noted the female sleuth's merging with the victim, little has been made so far of the female detective's points of similarity with female culprits. This is seen in the sexual jealousy and power play between amateur sleuth Emma Victor and murderess Stacy

Weldemeer in Mary Wings' She Came Too Late. This is also a noticeable paradigm in contemporary non-detective women's crime fiction, such as the novels of Barbara Vine. For example, in House of Stairs the female narrator feels an immediate sense of recognition and later has a sexual relationship with the female murderer.

However, one is reminded that simple post-feminist substitution, reversal or inversion may be self-defeating when isolated from a woman-centred context. Male authors of true crime have been quick to exploit current feminist and post-feminist leanings towards the female murderer.[45] Murderous Women by Frank Jones attempts to eliminate the feminist grounds for such a study and reappropriate a popular interest which has simple fascination as its rationale (p.vii).[46] While acknowledging that at one time the study of murderesses was 'almost a branch of demonology', the author misinterprets the feminist Women Who Kill to imply that it is part of a supposed contemporary swing towards regarding women almost invariably as victims' (p.ix). He can easily restore the mystery, mythology and even a tempered demonology, of the female killer by making such rational studies seem ridiculous, parodying them as holding that a murderess is merely an ordinary woman in a temper. This is a typically simplistic post-feminist move: taking feminist material, and even a feminist impulse (for Ann Jones stresses that she does not wish to portray women as passive), yet disparaging feminism for regarding women as victims and conveniently bypassing its politics to take advantage of potential profits. The rational aspect of feminism committed to explanation, and its outrage and contestation, are unsurprisingly less seductive than a retention of mystery and the speculative explanations of fantasy.

When feminism happens upon something that is marketable, its selling points can still be increased once it is stripped of the feminism. As inversions are so easily turned on their head in a post-feminist era in which it takes so little time before feminist strategies are appropriated, attention should be given to a more complex and woman-centred post-feminism. This may encourage and begin to cater for an active and powerful female gaze by means of its inscription of female subjectivity in the

text. It would work at deconstructing, as opposed simply to inverting, the trite hierarchical and pornographic structure of true crime. I will now consider the genre in this light.

Inscribing female subjectivity

Having established True Crime's bearing upon the social construction of women with regard to crime, I wish to examine the rhetorical as well as symbolic production of these texts. Such examination will reveal that not only are they oppressive, but they vacillate about their own moral foundation. I intend to examine this genre's self-justifications to illustrate the ways in which the more woman-centred discourses of contemporary crime fiction have been able to penetrate beyond true crime's simple structures of voyeurism.

The gruesome and distasteful material of true crime combined with its blatant sensationalism tend to embarrass true crime's authors and readers, to the extent that an attempt to defend it has been integrated into the genre itself. This is usually found in the extended introductions to the collections and takes the form of an apology. Because it is so concerned with reader-response, it often appeals to a moral consensus (imagined or imposed) and tends to borrow from different discourses and ideologies to justify itself and settle its score with each. Although true crime's moral uplift is far less apparent than its voyeurism and sensationalism, Colin Wilson argues in his introductory essay, 'The Study of Murder', for regarding murder as a moral issue, and claims that reading about it can lead to an ethical judgement of life (1984, p.23). Yet he avoids noting the sinister irony of his claim in Volume Two, when he mentions the reading of Brady and Hindley, as pre-empting the events to come, a book entitled Sex Crimes and Sex Criminals.^[47] The true crime genre is valuable for its revelation of contradictions, through its necessary exploitation of them. James Bland equates factual reportage with morality along the lines that the former constitutes 'the truth' whereas fictional embellishments lead to sensationalism and

have been used unscrupulously by true crime authors (1989, p.7). Yet, as seen in journalistic reportage, factual details may easily be exploited as titillating entertainment under a consumerist ideology of democracy and freedom of information.

[48] Indeed, Bland's first collection contains some of the more brutal treatments of true crime material, as seen in his retelling of the case of the Boston Strangler:

She had been stripped naked, tied up, raped and strangled; finally, a broom handle had been thrust into her body and, as a cruel act of mockery, a New Year greetings card placed against her right foot. ... He was to remember ... 'she was looking like she was surprised and even disappointed with the way I had treated her'. (pp. 12-13)

It also harbours the more fantastic stories, such as the shark vomiting up a human arm in front of restaurant diners (pp.119-121).

Supposed parallels with 'serious' literature are frequently used to justify the true crime genre; this allows it recourse to the defences of fiction in order to juggle truth with imagination. For example, it may claim in its defence to be more universal than rational or scientific / objective enquiry, and thus the apology moves closer to traditional defences of literary fiction. Wilson compares it to High Culture: 'There *are* other ways of learning about human free will -- for example from Dostoevsky and Strindberg and Wedekind. But this volume is the raw material of Dostoevsky and Wedekind. After spending a year compiling it, my feeling is not one of revulsion, but a sense of tragedy' (1984, p.17). Pitman appeals to rather spurious comparisons with the novels of Jane Austen to claim that true-crime can teach the readers about 'Life' (p.48). It is also significant that crime fiction writers are occasionally brought together to rewrite the story of a real crime, with the publishers selling the idea that they might reveal some other nuances or even solve the crime by presenting it in a different light.

When connections between true crime narrative and fiction are used to strengthen the former's claim to serious and moral purport, emotional response and imaginative identification are repressed. Wilson scornfully dismisses anyone who feels a frisson at

the scene of a crime (p.39), and Pitman raises the exciting and anguishing spectre of identification with the murderer only to deny it (p.50). Devotees of crime fiction may manifest a similar unease with the ambiguous interrelation of fact and fiction, and their critical introductions bear an interesting relation to the true crime apology. James R. Reilly and Kathleen Klein both evince unease at what is proclaimed to be 'the paradox of violent entertainment'. [49] Reilly uses a form versus content dichotomy to correspond to moral, or respectable, versus sensational (or, as he says 'skill' versus 'perversity') to contain this unease and close the argument with the defensive argument that art exists merely for its own sake (p.vi). By insisting that the genre's 'primary field of reference is literature' (p.viii) he cuts off the possibility of an intertextual reading and simplifies the issue of pleasure. The distance from the real subject of crime which he claims for the reader is in fact one which he is attempting to preserve for his critical position. He claims that readers enjoy a distancing from the content and argues that this is why they appreciate a plot in which they are sensitive to the artist's hand, asserting 'the dominance of the tale over the subject'. Yet there is so much evidence to suggest the contrary that the critical reader is led to ask why *is* 'the subject' (his euphemism for crime) so embarrassing for him that he needs to dismiss it in such an elaborate way? [50] His argument even works against itself, for the result of his uncompromising stance, particularly his insistence that 'imaginary accounts of murder engender no anxiety', is to diminish claims for the evocative power of fiction and what some may consider to be its advantage over factual reportage. Reilly's need to force such a distinction between the subject of crime and the literary form of crime fiction in his apology for the latter is patently a denial.

I argue that it is at this intersection of crime fiction and true crime that the question of why people like to read about distasteful and frightening subjects, in an imaginative narrative context that encourages fear and identification, is best confronted. In the more secure literary-fictional niche of the genre this issue is too easily side-stepped, because the higher certain literary forms have been placed in cultural estimation, the more questions of reader-response have been obscured through containment in the

containment in the philosophy of formal aesthetics. Because the true crime apology has only second-hand access to the formal defences of fiction, it engages in a more diverse and creative way than much literary criticism with problems that are encountered by both crime fiction and non-fiction. The problems raised self-consciously in the true crime apology actually meet many feminist concerns and the denials of the apologists, and the ideologies which their explanations borrow from, may be points of insight for feminist critics. As we have seen, the feminist argument with true crime lies in the consistent representation of women in a subordinate position, the eroticisation of female disempowerment and women's exclusion from subjectivity. For a feminist critic, crime narratives clearly raise questions of gender representation, imaginative reader-response, and the encouragement of identification by the construction of the gaze. By appealing to moral and existential, as well as ontological and epistemological, universals, as well as questions of high cultural relevance, the true crime apology is led to confront the issue of personal identification with criminal action.

While the claim that the true crime genre encourages male consumers to identify with murderers would lead feminist critics into the same dilemma faced by pornography and censorship arguments, it is fascinating to note that there are in fact ample suggestions in the true crime apology that, if this is not the case, then at least it offers a titillating appeal. These suggestions are effectively contained by means of the ambiguity and contradictions inherent in the form of the apology, illustrated best by Pitman's denial that identification is an issue immediately after she herself has encouraged it: 'to put our interest in an even more serious light, is it that we relish the courtroom details about bludgeonings because we wish that we had been doing the mutilating?' (1984, p.50) [51] But they do form part of the self-acknowledged appeal of these texts, which cannot be said to be the case in the discussions of most critics of crime fiction. This impulse to consider identification in true crime is crucial for feminist criticism.

Pitman in her apology for the Encyclopaedia of Murder, mark potential objections to the genre based on gender difference. [52] Jouve answers and exposes the masculinist genre of true crime through a combination of feminist criticism and deconstruction. Her methods bring into play post-feminist strategies in the refusal of victimisation, the turn of the gaze back at men and masculinity, and the appropriation of sensational true crime material (the 'Ripper' is still the ultimate symbol of the sexually sadistic male serial killer of women in this country) for her own purposes. Jouve includes the textual reconstructions of her own personal history -- her diary, her dreams -- the fictional texts she has read and finds important, newspaper headlines, police reports, the Oedipal script of psychoanalysis, French feminist rewritings of this, and her own reinterpretations. By appealing clearly to the discourses of feminism, autobiography, psychoanalysis and post-structuralism, as well as fiction, biography and investigative reportage, Jouve confronts the status of literary genres in her work, rather than merely exploiting it in the inauthentic borrowings more typical of the true crime apology. She foregrounds the role of reader-response, the effects of reading, and the ways in which different messages are construed (including the 'message' received by Sutcliffe to kill prostitutes), through misreadings and dyslexia (pp.28, 29). [53] Thus Jouve successfully brings out many of the elements which true crime apologists and traditional defenders of crime fiction repress.

Jouve's arguments are more frank than those of Reilly; instead of stalling analysis with the blanket term 'paradox', when considering violent entertainment, she accepts that the subjects of crime and murder hold general fascination: 'When you are fascinated, you just can't help looking at the very thing you want to avoid. It's got under your skin' (p.17). She also pursues the concern that in Pitman's discussion is no more than a hint; acknowledging the importance for women of the fear of potential male-identification with the figure of the male murderer, in a political turn Jouve connects it with the designation of women in public discourses as deserving victims. She notes the messages from the newspapers at the time: 'being a woman meant that you were murderable and it was wrong of you to be so' (p.25), and thus the injustice

She notes the messages from the newspapers at the time: 'being a woman meant that you were murderable and it was wrong of you to be so' (p.25), and thus the injustice of this rebounds to awaken a consciousness of the sexual political basis of such a fear. Jouve continues: 'you had to be especially good ... Not wander away from the protective side of a man: your man. For no other was safe and perhaps even he?' The openness of this unanswered question - even he *what* ... Shares the same sex and perceptions of the perpetrator of these crimes? Finds sexual murder of women titillating or sympathetic? Would do such a thing if he could get away with it? -- invites the female reader to supply the answer based on her subjectivity as a woman, and to identify with the woman who can no longer trust men, not because she is paranoid, but because it is implied that she cannot trust her own sexual nature not to court a brutal death.

After this personalised appeal, Jouve begins to shift the gaze away from the demonised figure of the male serial killer towards masculinity and patriarchal discourses. She recounts the chilling story of the response of Leeds supporters to the police investigation, which seems to indicate that 'these football fans clearly identified with the killer' and, in chanting 'eleven -- nil', were venting their own hatred of women (pp.31-2). While Jouve underlines the significance of this for women and for her feminist reading, and the book serves as an exposure of misogyny, she moves beyond female fear to analyse relationships between men (p.33). In this way, Jouve confronts the issue of gender identification, and the threat of male sadism, to reveal also the workings of patriarchy, to turn the fascinated and repulsed, but also blinded, gaze away from the female victim (which can only see her as an 'obscene inscription', p.32) back towards men and the motives for their actions. Such an enabling turn from fear towards a reappropriation of the gaze is made possible by Jouve's avoidance of the moral / objective fallacy exploited by true crime, replacing it with a reflexively subjective text.[54]

It has been a common strategy of feminist criticism to use autobiography. In true crime this invites identification with the fears of its author, and in this case, Jouve's

confrontation and explanation of them may serve to dispel the female reader's fear. [55] Because true crime is dependent upon the contradictions of reader-response and reproduces these in its intermittent attempts to both bring close and distance the readers from its material, it is usually unable to confront the tragedy of identification, the fear that it brings and the irrationality of this fear. Through her chosen combination of literary forms, Jouve can articulate the pain of the closeness of identification, as when she writes of her dreams that the corpse of Sutcliffe was in her garden: 'Hence perhaps the pain that writing about him gives me: I'm forcing my ink to touch him' (p.26). Jouve's strategies also serve to dent the sense of universal destiny that true crime likes to project in its grander moments and more sweeping editorial generalisations. By personalising the true crime narrative, the author's sense of fate appears more realistically as an unpleasant obsession: 'It was as if my own life insisted on mixing me up with it' (p.18). This relates it to readers' sense of addiction and compulsion with regard to the terrors awakened by true crimes. In close connection to debates on pornography and censorship, Jouve subtly hints at the feeling of intrusion occasioned by exposure to true crime reportage; detailed true stories of murders do not simply constitute information and bare facts, but in the way they are reported (the area in which she lived being called 'Ripper Country', for example), they may also infringe upon one's sense of self and freedom.

Jouve confronts the grotesque and absurd in her true crime work, but uses them subversively, to question rather than avoid. At times her writing borders upon humour, as when she writes about going to Bradford where she was overtaken by panic and lost her bearings. But by using the diary form at this point she succeeds in retaining the pathos (and terror) of this situation, emphasising the thin line between paranoia and empathy, so that the fear may be used as a springboard for Jouve to think of, and feel sorry for, other women (p.20). Shortly afterwards, Jouve unwillingly identifies a recently-murdered woman with her friend, Polly. In this passage, the reader feels the movement of tragedy from one woman to another; the murders affect all women as a group, women share in it, but are also unpleasantly

reminded by each other of the terror (p.23). Anger is not at the end directed towards the murderer, for Jouve is able to read the murders as a product of a certain social and interpretative context as, I will argue, are recent women crime novelists. Jouve introduces the urge for revenge but, through a subtle interpretation of the colours of anger, redirects it towards the conditions in which the murders took place and were publicly disseminated: 'I was literally seeing *red*. Black-red. That's how you become part of a lynch mob' (p.24). Jouve, as semiologist, or literary critic, becomes empowered in a way that relates to female detection:

But I saw it clearly ... in the missing letters? Saw that there was a will to destroy women, ... prevent them from being seeing subjects. Talking subjects ... I must have felt that if only I could go through the broken sign, supplying the missing letters ... I must arrive at some answer. (p.24)

However, Jouve's intertextuality is not entirely a popular one. The project of her work is overtly deconstructive, to find the case's 'blind spot'. [56] As such it lies between genres and significantly is not labelled as 'True Crime', but rather defined on its back cover as 'Feminism / Psychology' (by which the consumer is presumably meant to understand 'political / specialist'). Thus marked, it is not likely to reach the same audience as the true crime genre and, even if it did, its third chapter which leans rather heavily on Barthes and French feminism, would certainly prove alienating. There is an attempt to raise literary echoes and the issue of fictionality, when Mrs. Gaskell and Heathcliff are invoked as part of the mythology of the geographical context. It is important for Jouve to believe in the potential of writing to liberate and 'the redemptive powers of the imagination' (pp.29-30), but this is done in a somewhat cumbersome and self-conscious way which contrasts with the second, fictional approach to true crime which I wish to consider. Jouve's text is an innovative non-fictional critique of true crime, but it is for women's crime fiction to popularise this approach and take it further.

Fictional reconstruction

As we have seen, fiction may also serve critical and deconstructive purposes at least as effectively as non-fictional analysis, and women authors have also dealt with true crime material in fictional form where readers can often find covert feminist re-readings of real events. For example Barbara Vine's novel, *A Dark-Adapted Eye*, refers explicitly to the true crimes of Edith Thompson and Ruth Ellis only at the end whilst the issues they raise are explored imaginatively throughout the text. The narrative model for this work is primarily the fictionalised biography, but intertextual readings are woven into the novel's structure and the narrative of investigative journalism is gently mocked.[57] More postmodern and feminist approaches have been able to evolve in parodies which expose the creation of the true crime narrative and the expectations it meets and feeds. Saturated with irony, Angela Carter's 'The Fall River Axe Murders' is a rich example of such a parody. This short story treats with characteristic Carteresque irreverence and moral ambiguity Lizzie Borden's murder of her father and stepmother in 1892 -- a particularly appropriate subject, given its role in the beginning of a spate of true crime investigation undertaken from the 1920s onwards. Carter's reworking of this frequently-recounted tale probably does more to explode the masculine moralism and pretension, as well as voyeurism, of the true crime form than would be possible in any painstaking non-fictional analysis.

The widespread cultural dissemination and creation of true-crime mythology is announced in Carter's preface to the story with the children's rhyme, *Lizzie Borden with an axe*'. [58] The tale begins with the usual true crime 'objective' factual statement, placing the incident irrevocably in history by giving the date and place. But Carter interrupts this, displacing the confident assumptions represented by such narrative forthrightness before the crime is mentioned in its factual integrity, and shifts to an impressionistic, very subjective, and patently 'fictional' account: 'Hot, hot, hot' (p.103). The omniscient narrator and fragmented snippets recall true crime's approximation to journalism but subvert its professed avoidance of fiction.

true crime exploits the reader's imagination and tries to bring events closer for the reader's delectation. By the way she plays with tense, Carter deliberately obliterates suspense, reminding the reader (what we tend to forget in our imaginative involvement with true crime) that we already know the outcome. Just after she has drawn us into the scenery and we are ready to identify with a character, she reminds us of the murder: 'On this morning, when, after breakfast and the performance of a few household duties, Lizzie Borden will murder her parents, she will, on rising don a simple cotton frock, but, under that, wear a long, starched cotton petticoat...' (p.103). By mentioning the crime in the subclause, Carter ironises the interest in it, making it subservient to the details of Lizzie's dressing procedure. The female identification with Lizzie's discomfort, women's oppression through customs of dress, which culminates in the mention of her menstruation, suggests by contrast the extent to which a focus on murder, the 'real action', is male-identified. Carter's use of menstruation here is in fact 'fictional' [59], and this is an interesting example of the sympathetic approach facilitated by fiction to wider or related 'facts'. Not only does it make good dramatic sense for Lizzie to be suffering from extreme pre-menstrual tension but it also seems to be a conscious effort on the part of the author to connect her story with contemporary debates about P.M.S. as a mitigating factor in women's crimes,[60]

This paragraph also foregrounds the sexualising of suspense as it is created in traditional masculine narratives of crime (true and fictional). Carter parodies voyeurism by laughingly focusing on the clothing instead of the body beneath. It frustrates the conventional sequence of the male gaze to produce a reverse strip-tease, ending with the unappealing prize of the sanitary napkin Lizzie finally straps between her legs. The conditional future tense of imaginative reconstruction is revealed to be potentially as coercive as myth when the tale deconstructs itself in a self-conscious or metafictional moment:

She will heat up a flat-iron on a stove and press handkerchiefs with the heated iron until it is time for her to go down to the cellar to collect the

She will heat up a flat-iron on a stove and press handkerchiefs with the heated iron until it is time for her to go down to the cellar to collect the hatchet with which our imagination --'Lizzie Borden with an axe'-- always equips her, just as we always visualise St. Catherine rolling along her wheel, the emblem of her passion. (p.104)

The surreal comparison with the religious martyr hints that both women are an ambiguous kind of victim (that is, not passive, but active victims of their own making), trapped in the popular imagination.

Like Jouve, Carter undoes the masculine grandiloquence of fate characteristic of true crime, and teasingly reminds the reader of Lizzie's father's 'pressing appointment with destiny' (p.104). She then frustrates the narrative sequence (and again the suspense), undercutting fictional 'realism', by taking the reader back to the beginning of the story: 'but nobody is up and about yet; it is still early morning before the factory whistle'. This underlines that not only are the events after 'the beginning' the author's invention, but also that the beginning itself is a narrative construct used to make accounts of crime intelligible, as well as enjoyable. It also parodies true crime's pretence to get to the root or cause of the murder.

The subservience of fact to the conventions of narrative which demand a unified story with no loose ends (and particularly the classic detective form whose reader feels cheated if there are inconsistencies) is hammered home by Carter's reference to the obliteration of the evidence of the second man who was in the house: 'Write him out of the script' (p.105). The authorial intrusion here not only draws attention to the exclusions necessary for the construction of myth, but the abuses possible within law, for the tale's subtext is about judgement, and who makes and keeps alive 'the facts'. As Ann Jones argues, paradoxically, the defence of Borden became the defence of the patriarchy itself, because the men involved (including even the prosecutor) could not bear to consider that a woman brought up in much the same way as their own daughters could commit patricide. Thus, '[r]itual drama is always oversimplified, for its purpose is to reduce human ambiguity to unitary, straightforward statements that

can be acted out'. The patterns set by narrative apply also to drama, and illustrate the relation between fiction and law (1991, p.241).

Carter uses the dreariness of Lizzie's life and lack of socially valued activity not only for sympathy or for writing in history's exclusions, but also to expose the intense voyeuristic efforts of most true crime writing and popular journalism to 'reveal all' about the private lives of people who have been associated with violent crimes. With the sudden disarming honesty of the self-reflexive narrator, Carter rescues the inscrutability of the past: 'The girls stayed at home in their rooms, ... sewing loose buttons more securely ... or staring vacantly into space ... What the girls do when they are on their own is unimaginable to me' (pp.107-8). At the same time, we have here a post-feminist exploration of the subtleties of being the voyeur who, as the outsider looking in, is also excluded. This passage recalls men's well-known fascination (part excitement, part fear) with what women do when they are together and what they talk about (do they talk about them?), owing to its being one of the rare occasions that men experience themselves as 'others' because of their sex. This situation is illuminated by the theoretical speculations of Judith Butler in her introduction to Gender Trouble where she refers to a Sartrean dialectics to suggest how women may take on the gaze within the confines of the binary frame; the masculine subject of desire is troubled by the 'sudden intrusion, the unanticipated agency' of the 'female object' who 'inexplicably returns the glance, reverses the gaze, and contests the place and authority of the masculine position', [61] Thus, '[t]he radical dependency of the masculine subject on the female 'other' suddenly exposes his autonomy as illusory' (p.ix).

Butler also refers to Beauvoir's observation that to be a woman within the terms of a masculine culture is to be a source of mystery and unknowability for men. Carter reveals the ambiguity of this situation in terms of post-feminist reversal. In a patriarchal social structure knowledge of women constitutes power over them and therefore it can be argued that women's mystery and subversive power resides where they are not yet defined. But inscrutability can rebound on women in that if a pre-

ordained narrative cannot make sense of them, they simply do not exist. The non-existence of women who do not catch the male imagination, their ghostly existence the margins of events, is indicated here in the character of Lizzie's sister who is a 'blank space'. Thus at the same time that this story rewrites a woman's history (implying also that Borden's maid and sister may have a history), it uncovers the processes by which women are deprived of the power to be represented adequately in patriarchal history.

Carter plays relentlessly on the inappropriate relinquishing of rational perspective to the gender stereotypes of myth. Her story may be read as a true crime fairy tale or legend, in her sporadic and cruel forcing of Lizzie into the familiar romance of the youngest daughter, whose natural mother is deceased, father is a soft touch, but who is afflicted with an evil stepmother (p.114),^[62] This exacerbates the pain of its real-life contrast, as shown through the bitterness which undercuts the familiar tone: 'But Lizzie *loves* her father. All are agreed on that ... the adoring father who, after her mother died, took to himself another wife' (p.114). All fairy tale ingredients are raised to be subverted: Lizzie's name was not, as the reader might expect, an affectionate diminutive (p.113); her mother was not sweet and docile in accordance with the paradigm, but a violent and angry woman, who 'might have taken the hatchet to old Borden on her own account' (p.114). Shock tactics (in this case the mixture of genre forms -- fairy tale combined with true crime) are used not to focus horror on the corpse nor demonise the criminal, but to expose the misleading mawkish ideal of family life and the filial / paternal bond: 'On his pinky ... he wears a gold ring ... his youngest gave it to him when she left school and asked him to wear it, always, and so he always does, and will wear it to the grave to which she is going to send him later in the morning' (p.111).

Carter also uses fairy tale to explore women's self-image as an effect of the construction of the gaze (pp.113-4). The first glimpse into the supposed privacy of Lizzie's bedroom gives a fetishised focus on details of clothing. Lizzie as 'Sleeping Beauty' is arranged as though for display; she has taken care over her appearance and

conveys a vague sense of repulsion, as the object does not meet its expectations. Not anticipated by the 'reckless sleeper' whose 'nightdress is rucked up above her knees', the narrative becomes cruelly descriptive. Lizzie cannot be made to perform, for she is deconstructed by her dreams: the coy voice of the projected unified subject willing to please is supplanted by the split unconscious: 'Sleep opens within her a disorderly house ...' (p.113). Carter exposes through narratorial self-reflexivity and reversals the neediness of the subjectivity which tries to impose the gaze and construct a narrative. For her this is the point of intervention from which she can raise the subversive issues of sympathy and identification. The object of the gaze may be unwittingly resistant, which then disempowers the viewer who in some ways becomes subjected to, or victim of, the myth he or she has tried to impose.

For example, Carter deconstructs the hungry gaze of true crime by addressing the common reproduction of photographs of murderers. She shows how the reader and bearer of the gaze struggles to construct a fixed image around a well-known name, distancing it with the designation of murderess, but then falls prey to this construct for, 'the face now haunts you, you look again and again' (p.119). In the process of reifying Lizzie and participating in depriving her of subjectivity, the reader's sense of identity is threatened. Here Carter offers a more complex answer to Pitman's question whether we are fascinated with murderers because we identify directly with them; we may experience an identification with the ways in which they have been socially constructed, and excluded as 'others'. Carter writes: '[I]f, indeed, it *was* a mad light in the first place, for don't we all conceal somewhere photographs of ourselves that make us look like crazed assassins?' Lizzie's resistance to the gaze, first indicated negatively, is now inscribed sympathetically: 'she does not look so much like a crazed assassin as somebody in extreme solitude, oblivious of that camera in whose direction she obscurely smiles, so that it would not surprise you to learn that she is blind' (p.119). The role of mirrors and blindness in this passage of the story are used to illustrate that, because of the many identities projected upon Lizzie in the absence of

being able to make sense of her story, she serves to reflect the fears of the reader of true crime.

Carter's radical reconstruction of this true crime story preserves Lizzie Borden as a threat for today's patriarchal assumptions. She is the 'intruder' in the home, the defiler (p.108), and symbolic rapist of her father (p.109). She overturns the social order of patriarchy, capitalism and progress and brings the threat of anarchy. The father-figure is anathema to life: 'Andrew Borden was an undertaker, and death, recognising an accomplice, did well by him'. So is the masculine culture which he represents: '[He] was a perpetual reminder to all who witnessed his progress that it was not *natural* to be upright, that it is a triumph of will over gravity, in itself a transcendence of spirit over matter' (p.111). His daughter has no use for the family name, the history of which is mocked (p.110). Lizzie is presented as subversive because of the unequal terms on which she exists. Sexual difference is championed in its dangerous potential: matter rising up against the spirit, nature against culture, the irrational against the rational. Lizzie turns upside down the birth ritual by killing those who gave her life. This model is post-feminist, being, as Butler says, a 'dialectical reversal of power' which is still not quite enough to constitute a subversion of patriarchal models. It assumes a constant inversion between subject and other, ignoring unequal power relations between masculine and feminine and the operation of power in the production of the binary frame itself (Butler, p.x). However, it is not presented in Butler's argument as a final model for subversion, not is it an idealised solution for Carter; what is important is that it is shown to be a troubling of the patriarchal models, or the polarised, binary frame. Following through this line of thought, I suggest that post-feminism troubles patriarchy on its own model of hierarchy, while the feminism within it attacks it on a resisting anti-hierarchical model. This is consistent with my general argument that the component of feminism in post-feminism serves to trouble the easy options of the latter. At the same time post-feminist inversion is valuable for its refusal of fixed identity.

As unseeable and unknowable, Carter's female murderer is a woman on the edge of time, still unformed ('She traces the outlines of her face with an uncertain hand as if she were thinking of unfastening the bandages on her soul'), but nearly ready to give birth to herself (p.20). Demonisation and sympathy must exist in tension together for 'she isn't ready to be seen yet'. Recalling for the reader Dworkin's survivor and Zahavi's murderous Bella, she raises the question of feminist identity for the female protagonist of women's crime fiction. It may be still undesirable to create a perfect feminist heroine, given that hero glorification would cut off the potential for greater pluralism and repress the knowledge that there are different feminisms. As Butler writes: 'It is no longer clear that feminist theory ought to try to settle the questions of primary identity in order to get on with the task of politics' and she later explains: 'By conforming to a requirement of representational politics that feminism articulate a stable subject, feminism thus opens itself to charges of gross misrepresentation'(p.5).

I have shown that there are a number of methods through which feminists can respond to the problematic issues raised by the genre of true crime. While criticism of the paradigms sustained and flaunted in the form has emerged most prominently with respect to pornography and reification of women's bodies in advertising, in certain works of art or entertainment that may be described as post-feminist, women have begun to appropriate and manipulate images of their own powerlessness, using them not for self-revelation, but to reflect the gaze back onto itself.[63] True crime has been addressed through feminist biography which has focused upon specific injustices and popular obsessions (such as Weis' Criminal Justice) and feminist true crime (such as Jones' Women Who Kill) which have revealed some post-feminist leanings, making new claims for women reading about real murders by women and thus redressing the balance, while they attempt to place murder and its punishment in its gender, social and political contexts. Deconstructive critique which borrows from different genres of writing, such as Jouve's The Streetcleaner, brings further post-feminist strategies into play by turning the focus back to men and patriarchal social and interpretative structures, inserting a female gaze to expose the latter's blind spots. But, as I have

shown, women are able to engage critically and pleasurably with true crime material in narrative fictions, using them as feminism's 'own forms of serious play' (Butler, p.x). A postmodern and post-feminist approach exemplified in the true crime fairy tale written by Carter serves in this way as a post-feminist parable answering the critique suggested by Beatrix Campbell:

It therefore challenges what has perhaps been a shortcoming of feminism over the last few decades: whilst it has reinterpreted women's behaviour it has sometimes shared stereotypes of femininity instead of challenged them. It has often reproduced a picture of women as victims, life-givers rather than life takers. (in Jones, p.xiii)

Generic intrusions

Women's crime fiction of the Eighties holds a double-edged sword. It feeds on the sensationalised and salacious interest of true crime, and to an extent may promote it, but it also deconstructs its structures and mechanisms of pleasure and from this creates new sources of pleasure and entertainment. As non-fictional texts illustrate, stories of women and crime are not easily absorbed into patriarchal historical and conventional 'factual' narrative forms. True crime patently does not approximate to the truths of women's crimes nor our experienced relationship to crime, and neither does journalism or the legal system. [64] This is what makes fiction and certain fictional forms so appropriate for writing the stories of women and crime. By means of its imaginative freedoms and generic and aesthetic restrictions, fiction may be used to rework stereotypes, placing them in contexts which problematise conventional gender assumptions and, without renouncing pleasure, may subversively frustrate the voyeuristic and misogynist aesthetics which mark the most common patriarchal constructions of female (non)-identity in relation to crime.

For example, the crime fiction may use verisimilitude to advantage: characters must be placed in convincing and lifelike situations to provide the titillating thrill of

identification but, equally, their greater psychological depth than that of the protagonists and victims of the true crime report prevent the narrative from effecting simplistic reification. One finds that the genre boundaries and formulaic restrictions of the fiction, as well as its relative freedom, working together and against each other, make for greater creativity. Non-fictional genres tend to be more conservative and less creative because they contain less of this dynamic tension. Even though true crime is an oppressive genre for women, I have shown through a rhetorical reading that there are ways of making it work against itself, as Carter does in her post-feminist true crime fable. It is now left to consider whether a similar operation can be effected in the hard-boiled detective genre of crime fiction which has many overlaps with true crime, even though this has largely escaped critical attention.

From a feminist perspective it could appear ideologically risky for the women's presses to promote crime fiction, particularly with its hard-boiled American 'mean-streets' leanings, which was the main source of female and feminist innovation in the last decade. Hardly renowned for its progressive tendencies, the genre has been much maligned by critics of various schools and persuasions. The preface to the third edition of *Twentieth Century Crime and Mystery Writers* (hereafter *TTCMW*) notes: 'Detective fiction has for so long been described as a conservative genre or an economic commodity by Marxists, and as escapist entertainment by critics of "high culture", that these labels have assumed a life of their own' (pp.x-xi). Inheriting this labelling, a consensus developed among feminist critics which held with Maggie Humm's claim that '[t]raditional detective novels distrust friendships and emphasise the security of stable class and geographic boundaries. Such novels deny complex sexual and social anxieties in favour of gender stereotypes' (1991, p.185). Critics such as Klein have remarked upon 'the extraordinary power' of their 'patriarchal script' (1988, p.4). Detective fiction, from its classical roots onwards, is a genre widely perceived as glorifying the individual detective hero (or, less commonly, heroine), supporting the status quo, which involves transparently patriarchal institutions such as the legal system and police force, and in its most common forms it

is seen to effect an uncritical closure upon a narrative of disturbance. The reification of social processes and human behaviour by character stereotyping and the use of 'clues' contribute to the sense that it promotes a ratiocinative, linear model of interpretation and understanding (which, in much criticism informed by feminism, is considered 'masculine' [65]) as adequate to the complexities of social life as well as moral questions of innocence, guilt and punishment.

The hard-boiled subgenre may problematise some of the staple ingredients of the classic form, the self-criticism of the private eye and his frequent appearance as anti-hero suggesting a distance from the moral certitudes of the Golden Age's scheme of (good) status quo versus (evil) individual. Yet it also adds insult to injury by inscribing an ethos which is usually accepted to be masculinist, individualist, violent and misogynist. The very specific historical, geographical and political origins of the hard-boiled school in the United States in the 1930s may account to some extent for its brutal and anti-feminist flavour, but its most prominent and now classic authors, Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, and especially Mickey Spillane have done much to secure this reputation.[66] For Humm, the texts' misogyny or anti-feminism is primarily located in the imagery of gender created by their male authors; in the narratives of Chandler and Hammett, she writes: 'Women are conspicuous as erotic triggers of criminality or as victims of the sexual politics of crime' (p.187). Yet it is not only the positioning of the female characters in relation to their gender that is at issue, but also the construction of male characters and the celebration of a masculine ethos. As Klein points out: '[T]he protagonist is not only a man, but the glorification of masculine traits' (p.224). However, women crime writers, including feminists, seem to have been undeterred by these objections, pursuing a political incorrectness that resonates of post-feminism. They have persisted in writing in the genre despite these limiting and unsavoury conventions of sexual stereotyping, gender imagery, the macho individualist tone, the terse and dry use of language and vocabulary and the creation of suspense.

While the hard-boiled detective form has been the most common home for many of these authors, it is important to bear in mind that the classic detective form has also retained its appeal, seen most clearly in the work of Amanda Cross and P.D.James. The development from detective to crime writing which does not involve a central detective protagonist is borne out by the work of certain contemporary women writers such as Ruth Rendell in her earlier non-Wexford novels as well as her writings as Barbara Vine.[67] There are new connections to be made in the shift from the whodunnit to the why-dunnit with regard to women's writing and feminist theoretical concerns.[68] Nichols' and Thompson's observation that 'a woman's style of storytelling tends to focus less on the actual crime and more on the relationships of the characters involved with the case' leads in this direction, with its suggestion that women tend to be more interested in motives than in blame and punishment.[69] Such a change of focus can be related to Hennegan's point that 'those who observe from the sidelines, from a position of exclusion or subordination, see more, see differently, and see different things' (in Green, p.10). While this shift was observed originally within non-detective crime writing, many contemporary women writers have incorporated this focus away from criminal perpetrator and the popular idea of the 'criminal mind' back into the hard-boiled detective form. Often the murderer is of less importance than the victim who, in turn, yields importance to the political situation which has created the social crisis which gives the story its context and theme.[70]

Other forms which overlap in crime fiction (such as the suspense novel, the thriller, the mystery tale and even the Gothic novel and the romance of adventure [71]) as well as the whole question of genre and subgenre boundaries, are of particular interest in this discussion. Genre has become increasingly important for feminist criticism partly, as Carr writes, because of the realisation that it is no longer possible to try to discuss women's writing as a single category. Yet women's writing, it is argued, has of necessity a problematic relation to genre, for it is more likely to be a mixture of conventionally defined forms: 'From the beginning, detective fiction has

shown a remarkable capacity to incorporate, adapt and transform elements borrowed from other genres, and women quickly established themselves among its finest practitioners', writes Hennegan (in Green, p.3), the implication being that it was this historic flexibility of the form which attracted such female creativity. Critics have successfully argued that women have been involved in redefining the conventions of crime and detective fiction from their very start and, even though this has often led to a dismissal of their works, for example as the 'Had-I-But-Known' story [72], the genre continues to be effectively redefined by women in a variety of ways in the present. The works of P.D.James and Barbara Wilson serve as examples of the very different contributions to the challenge to genre.

However, an obstacle to this challenge has been the construction of genre and gender as a related polarised couple, the criticism of Klein being the most emphatic on the incommensurability of this pair. It works on the hierarchical axis, in which the former is the masculine province and the latter the feminine (the masculine gender is socially normalised, so that it appears that there is only one gender). This problem has been particularly acute in the detective form where the role of the detective is seen as incompatible with that of woman, her femininity barring her from successful detecting. Yet it also applies in a looser guide to the crime form in so far as the concept of heroism is one on which masculinity has a special purchase, and so a female protagonist tends to appear either weak or self-doubting, or strong but evil. In 1988 Klein warned against revisionist feminist attempts to redefine the genre and claim it for women's uses. She shows that when crime fiction has featured women detectives, they are seldom allowed to function as heroes; their professional competence is brought into question; and she believes that the pressures are such that this situation continues into contemporary women's detective writing. The genre, she claims, has such an uncompromising gender script that even recent female authors such as Liza Cody unwittingly tend to undermine their own efforts to rewrite it: 'In choosing plausible behaviour for her protagonist over more typical genre heroics, Liza Cody challenges the formula of detective fiction. But, because that character is one of

a long line of women detectives who have been portrayed as less able than their male counterparts, Cody also undercuts her own efforts to revise the genre' (p.159).

This problem encompasses not only the difficulties posed by female detectives working to support a patriarchal status quo and the parallel issue of female writers reproducing a traditionally misogynist fictional genre, but Klein also finds in many novels that 'there is an unresolved narrative tension between the development of a strong competent protagonist and an underlying message that she is too strong for her gender' (pp.210, 164). This clearly applies to the grittier and more hard-boiled female detective heroes who appear as feminist role models (such as Grafton's Kinsey Millhone) and whose apparent machismo suggests a 'male-identification' which is problematic, as we have seen, for a radical feminist argument such as that used by Klein. It is important that one cannot really say this about Wilson's and Wings' lesbian detectives Pam Nielson and Emma Victor because the feminist politics of these characters, who work respectively in a radical publishing press and a woman's help hotline, make such alignments overtly self-conscious. This supports my thesis that post-feminist inversions and substitutions can be made successfully on feminist terms when they take place in a larger women-identified context which highlights the element of role-play. For example, Victor visits a group of male union employees in their home in the process of her investigation into the death of a lesbian colleague of theirs:

Inside the house it was all boy ... I offered him a hand; I like to shake hands with men. I can usually tell if it makes them nervous or if I can expect a friendly equal footing or a display of strength ... 'Wanna Brew?' he asked, which I assumed meant he was offering me a beer. 'Sure, nothing like a good brew', I said. I sometimes like playing with boys.

(She Came Too Late, p.32)

However, Millhone plays with machismo in a similar way. Male-identification is thrown into relief by the character's non-masculine trait of self-observation, for

example in her admission that she likes the smell of her own sweat, or her awareness of the performative function of her wisecracks.

Apart from thus introducing gender awareness into the genre, other genres with overtly feminine gender scripts may be self-consciously incorporated. These contemporary texts often invite the reader to the pleasures of elusive romance, which offers the opportunity to build tantalisingly on the customary secondariness of sex / love interest in the genre. The increasing professionalisation of the female detective allows these texts to elaborate the common post-feminist theme of redefining the roles of love and sex in a working woman's life. They may play with the relationship between personal and social in romantic subplots, as does Katherine V. Forrest in Beverley Malibu, and provide a sense of empowerment in the ways in which the female protagonists are able to draw boundaries around their sex lives and emotions. [73]

P.D.James' An Unsuitable Job For A Woman (1972) can be read as a 'text-of-break' in this sense (within her own oeuvre, which can generally be aligned with Golden Age classicism, and within women's crime writing) for its intense anti-romanticism, underlined later by James' essay 'Ought Adam to Marry Cordelia?' [74] It marks the beginning of female crime writing's negotiations with the romance form and, while it is a seriously flawed novel, it is an early text which radically suggests that elements of the hard-boiled form may be appropriate to the detective when she is female.[75] For this story explores in some detail women's unsentimental confrontation with death; female powers of observation and insight; women's control of emotion; meticulous female rationality; potential solidarity amongst women against men; cynicism about sex and love; scorn for or rebellion against father figures; and, not least, women's use of guns and manipulation of a patriarchal law for their own interests (pp.12, 169; p.97; pp.57-8; p.175; p.82; pp.14, 194; p.163). [76] The danger of a too-eager prescriptiveness on the part of feminist criticism is illustrated by Klein's dismissal of this seminal text, which does actually fulfil the criteria she sets down at the end of her critical work for the directions which a feminist detective

novel should take (1988, pp.228-9). This is particularly resonant with regard to the predicament that comes of delimiting potential feminist developments to an explicitly feminist politics. James is a conservative and cannot rightly be said to have feminist leanings, and yet this work foreshadows future developments which stretch beyond the issues which Klein's analysis addresses, most importantly for post-feminism, the way in which a masculine or phallogentric genre can be rewritten and restructured.

Thus the new wave of women's crime writing leads to a reconsideration of the definitions, formulations or packaging of certain genres by critics, opening up a wider arena for gender politics, one that is less defensive and prohibitive. This should include a more flexible critical assessment of crime writing from traditionalist male critics who maintain women's ignorance of the subject and their inability to sympathise with the appropriate world view and humour of these genres, and also from feminist critics who perhaps in the past have too soon associated a genre form with an inflexible position on gender and thus relinquished it to the hands and pens of men. One such paradigm would be the radical view that the classical form can be seen as 'the last bastion of racism, imperialism, outmoded class attitudes, sanitised violence, sexism, too much respect for authority and an unhealthy tendency to see moral issues in absolute terms' (Carr, p.44). This is one of Klein's greatest objections to the genre and her question: 'Can or should a feminist detective operate professionally to bolster a patriarchal system?', presented in such a rhetoric, tends towards a disabling purism which illustrates how a simplistic presentation of the original form can restrict liberative possibilities (1988: pp.220, 13). Klein's conclusion about gender and genre is not borne out by the texts under question and illustrates how a defensive posture in feminist scholarship can lead to the underestimation of the ways in which a female readership may begin to constitute a distinct market which in turn provokes greater changes in the genre. Such an argument may not have appreciated the extent to which women part-identify with certain self-conscious aspects of supposedly masculine genres, with male as well as roles. The thrill afforded by the exposure of the masquerade combined with the

explicit invitation to join in with the fun is seen recently in the evident delight in Grafton's witty use of the genre which has spurred her increasing output in recent years.

Strategies for Appropriation

The development of more flexible evaluations has begun to take place through the contemporary feminist impetus which prioritises understanding and valuing the writing that women read [77] Tania Modleski's Loving With A Vengeance (1982) was one of the feminist texts of the early 1980s to confront the devaluation of popular culture consumed by women as a devaluation of women's lives and concerns, and a similar argument may hold for the literature that women produce. Coward and Semple write: 'Attributing to detective fiction such conservative forms tends to imply rather negative reasons for women's prominence in the genre. It would suggest women writers are best within safe, repetitive genres with conservative implications' (p.44). Feminist critics already mentioned have begun to sketch out which of the hard-boiled characteristics are the most ripe for feminist incursion, but there is still much room for wider and further analysis. A post-feminist awareness, taking on Coward and Semple's contention that victimisation is the key to women's particular interest in crime writing, but bearing in mind the potentials for reversals in this, would be especially useful. An example might be a reading which is free to interpret the ideology of misogyny as a rich field for feminist trespass and invasion because of its need to differentiate and polarise gender attributes.

Contemporary women's crime writing often counterbalances the passive figure of the female victim with the active, tough, and often implicitly post-feminist, figure of the female detective (who already existed in fiction before she did in reality). It may characterise the female victim as an active, knowing person, sometimes forceful or misguided (for example Amanda Cross's Janet Mandelbaum in A Death in the Faculty, or Barbara Wilson's Loie Marsh in The Dog Collar Murders) who is a participant in

the actions that led to her murder rather than an empty shell who functions as a sign of terror and reminder of female lack. Often it subverts conventions and expectations by taking the decisive action out of the unknown murderer's hand and reveals the mystery to have been a carefully-planned suicide (Cross in the above) or an accidental killing which the killer has then tried to hide (Joan Smith's A Masculine Ending). It may reduce the (hetero)sexualising of the female victim, by making the murderer also a woman (and revealing the motive to be something other than stereotypical jealousy over a man), thus challenging the male gaze and assumption of feminine passivity. At its most daring, it may throw all the familiar titillating or sensational ingredients in together and baffle the genre by adding even more sexual thrills and seedy scenes (Sarah Schulman, The Sophie Horowitz Story). Or it may confront social hierarchies and fixed patterns of gender relations directly with a subtext that highlights issues of power, sexuality, and the eroticisation of female victimisation and subordination (Wilson's Sisters of the Road, and The Dog Collar Murders).

Such experimentation is a considerable achievement when it still maintains a rounded narrative and inserts new features without upsetting the genre's reassuring and comforting familiarity, or relinquishing its most pleasurable structures and enjoyable features. New women's crime writing has proved adept at finding amongst these structures elements that do not sustain a misogynist aesthetic. In this way it can be seen to follow a positive post-feminist strategy of appropriation as opposed to a feminist one of resistance. The movement from mystery to resolution may be achieved on an emotional level, rather than merely restoring law and order; for example, in the novels of Sara Paretsky the investigation often becomes therapeutic for the protagonist (Klein, 1991, p.829). This writing has absorbed patterns of suspense, but altered them so that they correspond less to the more usual masculine pornographic repetition than to female sexual pleasure. A model for this may be found when key moments in the suspense and narrative tension are less mind-shattering, violent or final -- less ultimately climactic -- and instead, subtly lead the reader on a little more each time. Miko's attempt to make pornography erotic for a lesbian audience in The Dog Collar

Murders serves as a correlative. The first is suspenseful, but divided very much into stages; the second uses a split-narrative where the thoughts of the two women talking reveal their passion, but the action does not; and the third mixes shots of parts of the body generally considered erotic with less sexualised parts. [78]

Often the plots of contemporary women's crime fiction are less linear than traditional examples of the genre. The narrative is generally less over-determined and predictable, the protagonist reaching the heart (or hearts) of the mystery almost by accident. Mary Wings' amateur sleuth, Emma Victor, exemplifies this, whilst Barbara Vine's plots dispense altogether with the conventional process of discovery by making the 'who-dunnit' known by her characters at the beginning of her novels, as in A Fatal Inversion and The House of Stairs. There are many pauses in the 'central' action which leave the reader waiting, able to share her / his interest with other minor characters or thematic concerns and often finding engaging sidelines, such as a romantic, domestic or political focus, which are more developed than in the traditional models. The connections between police corruption, building contracts and state politics in Paretsky's Burn Marks serve as an example, as does Wilson's examination of the ethics, politics and economics of prostitution in Sisters of the Road. Such models or textual rhythms are not necessarily more pleasurable to women than to men, but the conventional linear suspense plots have been more dominant and particular to male authors and a male readership in the past, and the newer experimentation tends to represent structures of feeling that have been excluded.

Another strategy one encounters in this fiction is the textual construction of reader-identification, or sympathy, followed by its removal which serves to make character assessment more complex and avoid crude good versus evil stereotyping. This may also be reversed to subvert complacent dislike of characters, especially in the novels of Cross, for example Professor Cudlipp in Poetic Justice and Janet Mandelbaum in A Death in the Faculty. Cross undermines the authority of her protagonist at these points to encourage a more self-critical attitude in the reading of character.[79] Contemporary women's crime fiction, particularly the more classically oriented, does

not shy away from the pleasures of intellectual game-playing, but it tends to be less arrogant and is used self-consciously, drawing from fields of reference which are not exclusive of women; for example cooking is used as a metaphor in A Dark-Adapted Eye. Similarly, this fiction retains a touch of voyeurism and, like post-feminism, challenges the assumption that the gaze is male; it balances the active gaze with the ambiguous sensations of being watched thus replacing female reification with female subjectivity. Kate Fansler notices to her surprise the assumptions mobilised by her own gaze on her ex-lover, McQuire, in Poetic Justice, whilst he both comments on the power of definition he feels that she wields through watching him and is led into further self-revelation (p.24). Wings provides a subtle examination of women's access to and deployment of the gaze, as watchers and watched, in She Came Too Late when her lesbian sleuth turns up at a strip show:

While the men were busy with her back, she was looking me squarely in the face. Our two faces glowed ... I watched her decide what to do with me. Our mutual realisation was making me fall into a well growing between my legs. She kept going ... turning around and looking me in the eyes as she drew it through her crotch. (1986, p.180)

The worldly cynicism which is a staple ingredient in the genre tends to be still present but, rather than being nihilistic it is often directed at political targets, as in V.I. Warshawski's comments on politically corrupt Chicago in the work of Paretsky. Kinsey Millhone can be hard: 'Everything happens for a reason, but that doesn't mean there's a point'. But at this point she is grieving for a friend and, despite her bluff exterior, she is one of the few private eyes who is allowed to share grief and tears with her clients (pp.101-2). Kay Scarpetta's clinical gaze is in keeping with her profession as the county medical examiner; Patricia D. Cornwell's explicit treatment of the most shocking and painful material for women in Post-Mortem is thrown into deliberate contrast with this protagonist's wariness and impatience with aggressive and florid crime reportage (1991, pp.3, 4, 96). Cornwell's crime novels, while violent, are attentive to the emotions of female readers and evince a sensitive, although

unblinking, treatment of women as victims. Both Post Mortem and Body of Evidence are serial killer novels in which the victims are predominantly female, and the female protagonist's expressed identification with the dead women and their terror provides an escape valve as well as a helpful, more empowered point of identification for the female reader. In the latter Cornwell shows exceptional mastery of the tension and pace of narrative, introducing remarks such as, 'I examined his wife. I literally held her heart in my hands' (p.12), without garishness nor unintended slippage into gallows humour. The effect of Cornwell's fiction is thus delicately to balance horror and control, illustrating the need for levels of distancing for emotional survival without falling into inauthentic macho posturing.

The usual individualistic swagger of the private dick is not totally diminished in these texts -- the authors evidently know better than to underestimate the appeal of the traditional detective's big, reassuring ego -- but it is often undercut by humour. After a close shave, Grafton's Millhone laughs to herself, admitting to us: 'Actually it's fun to horse around with danger. It's fun to snoop around in people's dresser drawers' ('C' is for Corpse, 1990, pp.53-4). Humour, perhaps rather underplayed in critical summaries of deconstruction, and also in the critical appreciation of the detective novel in which it has an important role, is one strategy proposed by Annie Leclerc for undoing the female-subordinating aesthetics of male heroism: 'One must simply deflate his values with the needle of ridicule ...'; 'My best proof: the laughter that takes hold of me when I observe him in those very areas in which he wishes to be distinguished; I laugh at him with his important airs, his tragic antics'. [80] In a similar way, Millhone mimics the dry masculine tone of the private dick, and then subverts it with her wry aside:

It had not been a very satisfying day but then most of my days are the same: checking and cross-checking, filling in the blanks, detail work that was absolutely essential to the job but scarcely dramatic stuff. The basic characteristics of any good investigator are a plodding nature and infinite

patience. Society has inadvertently been grooming women to this end for years. ('A' is for Alibi, 1986, p.36)

Recent detective novels by women have used the humorous wisecracks and wry remarks of the hard-boiled form, but tend to place these on different textual levels so that they emerge as metafictional jokes, or originate in a character's mind as well as in dialogue and first person narrative. For example, Pam reflects on detective fiction: "I could never write a book like that", I said a little enviously. "Mine would be full of dead ends, tentative conclusions, back pedalling, outright wrong assumptions". [81] Humour has been an essential strategy for women crime writers to deflate the sexism and misogyny of the form in which they are writing, encompassing poststructuralist pastiche, and inscribing female otherness into patriarchal discursive forms. Paretsky's *Warshawski* jokingly contrasts herself with Mike Hammer, Lord Peter Wimsey and Grafton's *Millhone* to mock her own detective proficiency and poke fun at the genre. The wisecracks may often reflect upon gender through the exposure of masculine uses of irony and sarcasm to silence women, and then suggest women's appropriation of them by the inclusion of scenes of witty banter between women. Grafton enjoys writing female dialogue in this way and revels in what she portrays as a productive difference in women through the generation gap. Her detective often feels great solidarity with elderly women who come out with cheerful one-liners such as: 'The only cleavage I got left, I sit on' (1986, p.31).

Hennegan suggests that the role of humour in the crime novel may be to allow women a dual relationship to the topic of crime: 'The subject matter of much crime fiction is inherently disturbing ... Little wonder that writers have so often turned to comedy, either to distance themselves and their reader from the horrors they have conjured up or to make affectionate fun out of a genre so utterly dependent on our strange attachment to the terrifying' (in Green, p.9). Hinting also at the sheer pleasure of having it both ways, this begins to highlight what is usually excluded in critical assessments of women's crime fiction, its liveliness and good spirits, even 'joie de vivre', permitted by the adoption of different roles. For it may be seen in some

instances as an overflowing, abundant form, basking in irreverence; Sue Grafton's incessant jokes on food culture and her female characters' cryptic remarks on eating serve as an example.[82] Wings' lesbian detective going to a party in 'drag', dressing as a heterosexual woman and thus highlighting women's ability to use stereotyped gender roles as a disguise, is the source of much slapstick and hilarity (1986, pp.89-100).

Humour plays a role not only because the genre has reached such self-consciousness and pastiche for, as Hennegan reminds us: 'Parodies, of individual writers and of the genre, are almost as old as crime fiction itself', and there is a long tradition in which crime writers, including women, have gently bitten the hands that fed them.[83] It is significant that humour has appeared in many of the punning titles of the novels when the issue of gender is highlighted.[84] Contemporary women writers have absorbed this tradition, but have used it to suggest potentially subversive interpretations. Reader, I Murdered Him recalls the final words of the ever-influential nineteenth-century gothic romance Jane Eyre to suggest not only the more sinister side to female - male romantic attachment, but also that 'happily-ever-after' for women may well go beyond female consummation in male arms and in fact reverse this romantic model. As we have seen, Carter's 'The Fall River Axe Murders' takes this use of parody one step further by throwing crime fiction and non-fiction together to humorous effect in a clear and proficient synthesis of various deconstructive strategies. Vine's A Dark-Adapted Eye also uses fiction to reflect ironically upon the formal restraints and blind spots of the true crime genre (through the work of investigative journalist, Daniel Stewart) as well as to develop a more sympathetic reading of true crime events (the execution of Thompson and Ellis).

Thus I argue that women's crime and detective writing of the last decade is able to operate along the lines of a deconstructive or poststructuralist feminist critique which locates the space for intervention, through humour, irony and self-reflexiveness, in the polarised extremes which have been read as marking the distinctions of the genre (masculine / feminine, hard-boiled / romance, fact / fiction). New crime fiction by

women is careful to resist reproducing the established hierarchies; it challenges them on a realistic level, contextualising crime by focusing on social and environmental determinants, as well as destabilising them through wit. Thus it illustrates the philosophical as well as social inadequacy of the dualistic structure and I suggest that, through self-conscious role play, the endless battle of two competing elements through the vertical axis of hierarchy, may be transformed into a horizontal and pluralistic model.

CONCLUSION: 'I'm lucky I'm one and not the other' [85]

Having noted the inconsistencies in the inevitable metaphoric extensions which equate masculinity / femininity, activity / passivity, normality / deviance, law / crime in an examination of true crime, one becomes aware of the danger of reproducing and strengthening the conceptual force of these metaphoric extremes by absorbing them into a critical model. The radical feminist thought which attacks male pornography and violence serves to produce alternative action and a resisting reading for women, but it has also been seduced through its reading of binarism. It may be so thorough and totalised, particularly through its emotive impact, that there seems to be no exit from a vicious circle in which women have always been, and always will be, the victims of men. Gracie in Wilson's The Dog Collar Murders makes this point polemically:

One might reasonably ask, given the long list of women who, although they were born female, grew up female, and consider themselves female, are not female identified, who *is* female identified? The answer, quite simply, is that you might identify as a female if you identify as a victim or if you identify with women who are victims. (p.39)

The impasse created by the arguments of radical feminism is that if a woman does *not* identify as a victim, she is ostracised as male-identified; this imprisons women-

identified women in negativity and excludes them from affirmative action. Gracie relates this critically to the radical feminist anti-pornography stance:

The view that supports these facts is based on acceptance of a certain biological interpretation of history -- that men have used the penis as a weapon against women to force them into subordination. Anything that contradicts those assumptions -- from the election of Margaret Thatcher to the vocal presence of lesbian sadomasochists -- is simply dismissed as male-identified behaviour ... female executives are male-identified ... women who don't call themselves feminists are male-identified. (p.39)

This dismissal of what can now be clearly seen as post-feminist phenomena is here portrayed as a self-defeating kneejerk reaction. The impasse is both practical and theoretical. Practical, because it leaves feminists with but a few ineffectual tools with which to work, for the rest are supposedly 'masculine', 'phallo(go)centric', 'hierarchical', 'patriarchal', 'male-identified' and therefore contaminated and unusable. And theoretical, because refusing the tools of patriarchy results in the irony of reproducing its structures. It sets up a pattern of polarised and reactive influence, with one system perceived as total (i.e., totally masculine and exclusive of women), and therefore it must be totally resisted. It is then of necessity replaced by another closed system, which also may meet only with either total agreement or resistance. What it does not take into account is the double-think inherent in patriarchal polarity which is revealed in a reading of discourses which construct women's relation to crime and deviance.

As Linda Yeager suggests, a reinscription of phallogentrism may be the first stage of restructuring patriarchal traditions. It may not be the case after all that 'the change must be radical and complete' (Klein, 1988, p.227). The need for appropriation may apply not only to the fictional genre of crime but to concepts such as rationality, or to narrative closure, and the power of the gaze. Should masculinity be allowed to retain its special purchase on rationality, or on the pleasures of a rounded narrative form? Are there not elements of masculinity, when questioned or deconstructed, that would

empower women if they could get their hands on them? If the dualism which allows the construction of these as masculine in the first place is acknowledged and foregrounded self-reflexively, it may be preserved as a doubleness which allows invasion on either side of the binary pair.

Such doubleness may be illustrated by the role of the pseudonym which has a long tradition in crime fiction and has a double resonance for women which can be played upon reflexively. Its implication of secrecy and undercover work links the author metaphorically to the detective protagonist or even the suspect criminal, and it has a clear significance for female authors throughout history who have had to hide their gender by using false (men's) names. [86] Rendell's new pseudonym as Barbara Vine in the early Eighties was a result of a conscious difference in style on the part of the author. [87] However, Vine's identity is an open secret; not only does it sound like a pseudonym, but the covers announce: 'Ruth Rendell writing as Barbara Vine'. This indicates the importance of the contemporary crime writer's public name as brand name, designed to appeal to the established market as well as to attract a new one. One can see therefore, in the exceptional case of Rendell, not only women's fiction breaking from conventional genre categories, but also the female writer's ability to respond to a second necessary shift, which is that of breaking from the appropriation of her name as another subgenre form (in a smaller sense of the individual author's brand name) to create yet another identity for her writing.

It could be that crime and detective fiction, by the nature of their established conventions, are not simply restrictive and rigid narrative forms, but invite an imaginative and creative response along the lines of the popular adage that 'rules are there to be broken'. [88] I would argue that this is more the case in some popular genres than others. For example, it is less acceptable to break the codes in non-fictional genres because of the different social investment in fact and fiction (hence the static form of true crime which lags behind social progress and ideas), and greater value placed upon fact. Within fiction, it could be that the more emotional investment there is in a genre form, the less its rules may be broken; it depends therefore on

what the texts are used for by their readership. [89] The pseudonym or alias leads to a final sexual political consideration regarding the connection between women's crime writing and the true crime genre which has not been explored by critics and illustrates how feminism may be consonant with post-feminism. This is the use of the crime genre itself, especially hard-boiled strains within it, as a form of disguise. It helps us meet the problem mentioned earlier of many younger women in the Eighties not wishing to call themselves feminists because they do not consider themselves victims. The political vocabulary is alienating and therefore the recognition that women are oppressed takes on different masks. In a post-feminist era it has become practical and less emotionally sweeping to acknowledge that different groups of women are discriminated against in certain situations. Apart from not wanting to feel sorry for themselves because self-pity can be disabling (especially in the age of self-help, which presents women's oppression as internal), many women in recent years are anxious not to be *seen* to be sorry for themselves. The 'macho' strains in this, not dwelling upon self- or group- pity, but 'getting ahead' and doing 'what a (wo)man's got to do' -- which may entail disowning feminism or taking selective parts of it along -- suggest an important explanation for the reason why the hard-boiled aesthetic has become so popular in women's crime writing in the 1980s.

What the hard-boiled form of the genre, and other forms of crime writing in more subtle ways allow, is a fantasy of female empowerment which allows exhibitionistic posturing while it affords a self-protective irony. The 'twin careers' of Sue Grafton and Kinsey Millhone began after the author decided that, rather than go ahead in her plot to kill her husband, she would write it in a book instead. [90] The pleasure of pastiche in postmodernist play is used for political survival; by drawing attention to the use of the tools of patriarchy, patriarchal conventions cannot be normalised. Jessica Mann, a British suspense writer, confirms this productive use of genre as a form of alias in her discussion with Radice on her choice of the crime genre for her fiction. When she started writing, she found that her attempts at 'straight' novels were very autobiographical and self-revelatory, the 'equivalent of a strip-tease on page',

and, Radice explains, 'it therefore suited her to write with the disguise of the genre form' (1989, p.72). [91] This may serve as a more complex model of reappropriating phallogentrism, foregrounding the use of the 'phallus' as shifting signifier, rather than fixed biological and metaphysical apparatus. Instead of reversal, whereby the hierarchical dualistic structure is temporarily inverted in post-feminist polemic, the elements of the binary pair are cut loose from their gender affiliations. I find that women's crime writing of the 1980s has not only mixed feminist concerns with a bold post-feminist disregard for the obstacles in its way, but by highlighting the two sides to the path to empowerment troubles the certitudes promoted by the polarised binary frame.

Notes

1. Linda S. Yeagar, '"Because a Fire Was in My Head": Eudora Welty and the Dialogic Imagination' (PMLA 99.5: 955-73), quoted in Kathleen Gregory Klein, The Woman Detective: Gender and Genre (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), p.227.

2. Anna Katherine Green's *The Leavenworth Case*, published in 1878 is popularly believed to be the first detective novel by a woman and the length of the women's tradition has been well-established with the acknowledged prominence of female authors in 'the Golden Age' of crime fiction in the 1920s.

Adding to *Crime on Her Mind* (1975), in 1981 there appeared The Lady Investigates by Patricia Craig and Mary Cadogan, and three books in 1988: Silk Stalkings by Victoria Nichols and Susan Thompson, Women Detectives: Gender and Genre by Kathleen Gregory Klein, and Sisters in Crime by Maureen T. Reddy.

3. For example, see Rosalind Coward and Linda Semple, 'Tracking Down the Past: Women and Detective Fiction', in Helen Carr, From My Guy to Sci-Fi: Genre and Women's Writing in the Postmodern World (London: Pandora, 1989); the introduction to the Pandora 'Women's Crime' Series; Sara Paretsky's work through 'Sisters In Crime' and her introduction to the 1991 collection A Woman's Eye.

4. Writers of other nationalities include Gillian Slovo (South African) and Maria Antonia Oliver (Catalan); Carolyn Heilbrun as Amanda Cross, writing two decades ago, is often seen as the forerunner.

5. Maggie Humm makes use of anthropology in her critical discussion of women's crime writing because of its centrality in the debate about otherness. See Border Traffic: Strategies of Contemporary Women Writers (Manchester: Manchester University Press; 1991), p.190.

6. For example, the female detective in fiction is related to her real life counterpart and to the growth of women's emancipation in Kathleen Gregory Klein, The Woman Detective (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), p.1, and Patricia Craig and

Mary Cadogan, The Lady Investigates: Women Detectives and Spies in Fiction (London: Victor Gollancz, 1981), pp.16, 130-131.

7. The genre of true crime has gained further popularity through television crime reconstruction series such as Crimewatch, True Crimes, Crime Story, In Suspicious Circumstances, Crime Monthly and Michael Winner's True Crimes. These proliferated in the early 1990s and (following the denunciation of their sensationalism by Michael Grade, Chief Executive of Channel 4, in 1994) have recently become the subject of a public debate which follows the arguments of true crime apologists as discussed in this chapter. See Simon Shaps, 'When Moral Panic is the Real Villain of the Piece', The Independent, 11.5.1994, p.23.

8. Sara Paretsky's stories (the first five of which were published in the U.K. and Britain through the 1980s) have in the early 1990s been broadcast on British radio, and the first film appeared in 1991, V.I. Warshawski (the name of Paretsky's series heroine), starring Kathleen Turner. Also, Joan Smith's novels have recently been televised in Britain, starring Imogen Stubbs.

9. Coward and Semple, p.41; Humm, p.185.

10. Naiad Press in Florida have published many of the more radical women's crime novels in the States. Virago began its publishing in women's 'Modern Classics' in 1972; it started to specify the crime and detective genre by publishing 'Virago Crime' in 1987/8, and this was revamped with the new eye-catching design in 1990. The Women's Press actually preceded Virago, introducing 'Women's Press Crime' early in 1986 (and planning it, they say, from 1984). The Pandora Crime Series, edited by Linda Semple and Rosalind Coward were contemporary with Virago (see their introduction in Pamela Branch, Murder's Little Sister (London: Pandora, 1988), p.5.

11. It is worth noting, regarding the success of the mixture of crime fiction and women's interests, that while The Women's Press no longer publish science fiction as a separate category, 'Women's Press Crime' still continues into the 1990s.

12. See Penguin new 'Classic Crime' which, probably as a spin-off from the initiative of the women's presses, began to reissue the Twenties classics by Queens of Crime

such as Josephine Tey, Margery Allingham and Dorothy Sayers, in a nostalgic and traditional packaging.

13. Review in the Sunday Times, quoted on the back cover of Sarah Paretsky, Burn Marks (London: Virago, 1991).

14. See Melvyn Barnes, Murder In Print: A Guide to Two Centuries of Crime Fiction (London: Barn Owl Books, 1986), p.202, and Coward and Semple, p.41.

15. These are related especially to the forms of suspense, mystery and psychological thriller which have burgeoned in recent decades. See Amanda Cross on her choice of the genre in Twentieth Century Crime and Mystery Writers (London and Chicago: St. James Press, Third Edition, 1991), p.272. (Hereafter TTCMW).

16. See Craig and Cadogan on the common reasons for making detectives female (1981), p.13, also pp.12, 246.

17. For example, Hillstreet Blues and later, L.A.Law. See Alison Hennegan's introduction in Jen Green, Reader, I Murdered Him (London: Women's Press, 1987), p.7. Cagney and Lacey is the epitome of such a synthesis and, as such, has been much-studied by feminist critics.

18. This suggests that the post-feminist working woman is less likely to identify with the supposedly passive and domestic pleasure of the soap, and finds in detection a more appropriately active substitute. Sarah Schulman, The Sophie Horowitz Story (London: Sheba, 1991).

19. See Alison Young's theories on how women are made deviant in the discourse of news media, in Alison Young, Femininity in Dissent (London: Routledge, 1990).

20. It is important that women are adding their perspectives to a genre which is already much championed for its social relevance. See Craig and Cadogan (ibid.), pp.13, 14, and Kathleen Gregory Klein, in TCCMW, p.xii.

21. Usually published by Futura, Grafton, Headline, W.H.Allen, or Xanadu, typical titles are: Encyclopaedia of Murder (1964), The Murderer's Who's Who (1979), Classics in Murder (1984), A Murder Guide to London: An A-Z of Metropolitan Atrocities (1986), True Crime Diary: A Gruesome Gallery of Shocking Murders

(1987), Murder Update: The Full Stories of Today's Most Famous Cases (1991), The Art of Murder (1991), The Sex Killers (1991).

22. For example, The Mammoth Book of True Crime, 2 (1990); James Bland True Crime Diary, Volume 2; Colin Wilson and Donald Seaman, Encyclopaedia of Modern Murder (1983).

23. See Colin Wilson and Patricia Pitman, Encyclopaedia of Murder (London: Pan, 1984), pp. 288, 276.

24. Jonathan Culler, in Carr (1989), p.6.

25. See John Reilly's discussion of the importance of 'construction' as opposed to 'veracity' in the Pinkerton Works in TCCMW, pp. ix, x.

26. For example, James Bland, True Crime Diary, Volume One (London: Futura, 1989) has photographs on the covers, and inside a photograph of Ruth Ellis is placed next to a copy of a letter she wrote from Holloway prison in 1955.

27. It is significant that when women do venture into the true crime arena, they tend to write particular case studies which often amount to biography or autobiography. For examples of this, see Jean Ritchie, Myra Hindley: Inside the Mind of a Murderess (London: Angus and Robertson, 1988); Kate Wharton, Blood Money (London: Headline, 1991); Ann West, For the Love of Lesley and Lindy Chamberlain, Through My Eyes.

28. I go on to examine the importance of the gaze in this chapter, as adopted by feminist and cultural studies. See Lorraine Gamman and Margaret Marshment, The Female Gaze: Women as Viewers of Popular Culture (London: Women's Press, 1988).

29. See Alison Young on the relation of the construction of women's stories to the grotesque, (1990), pp. 99-101.

30. Murders by women have been omitted because they do not fit into the stereotype of what real murder is about. See Anne Campbell, The Opposite Sex (London: Ebury; 1989).

31. Tony Bennett, Introduction to Section 4, in Popular Fiction: Technology, Ideology, Production, Reading, ed. Tony Bennett (London: Routledge, 1990).
32. See Elaine Player in Crime and the City: Essays in memory of John Barron Mays, ed. David Downs (London: Macmillan, 1989), p.111; Frances Heidensohn, Crime and Society (London; Macmillan, 1989), p.89; Susan Edwards, Women on Trial (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p.3.
33. For example, Barbara Vine, A Dark-Adapted Eye; Barbara Wilson, The Dog Collar Murders; Mary Wings, She Came Too Late.
34. It is commonplace in feminist criminology to observe that when a woman is tried for an offence, her first crime is seen as being a woman. See Beatrix Campbell's foreword and Ann Jones, in Ann Jones Women Who Kill (London: Victor Gollancz, 1991), p.ix; p.119.
35. Even scholarship on the subject of criminal men often 'becomes hero worship'. See Jones (1991), p.xix.
36. See Trevor C.N. Gibbens, 'Female Crime in England and Wales', in Freda Adler, The Incidence of Female Criminality in the Contemporary World (New York: New York University Press, 1981), p.114.
37. The case of Ruth Snyder, who received numerous proposals when charged with the murder of her husband, is a striking example (Bland, Volume 1), p.89.
38. See Jones on Belle Gunness who killed men for their fortune (1991), pp.146-7.
39. Criminal Justice is the title of Rene Weis's true crime biography of Edith Thompson, deliberately suggesting that her connection with crime lay in the injustice she received rather than in any action perpetrated by her.
40. See Andrea Dworkin, Intercourse (London: Arrow, 1987), pp.223-5.
41. Here the dominant metaphor of patriarchal ideology which organises discourse and sets the parameters of what is thinkable. See Hélène Cixous, 'Sorties', in Catherine Clément and Hélène Cixous The Newly Born Woman [1975] (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986).

42. See Suzanne Moore on the operation of choice and fantasy when theory lags behind what is actually happening, in Looking For Trouble: On Shopping, Gender and the Cinema (London: Serpent's Tail, 1991), p.26.
43. This is a result of the number of legal test cases in Britain in the early 1990s, for example: Sara Thornton, Kiranjit Ahluwalia, June Scotland, Pamela Sainsbury.
44. From the end of 1990 to August 1991 Marie Claire ran stories on: women working in the sex industry; 'the woman who murdered her mother'; demand for justice for women who are raped; the media trial of Hedda Nussbaum; criminal women who are the lovers of criminal men; 'mothers who let their children die'; Jodie Foster's fascination with serial killers (emphasising that her role in Silence of the Lambs was as a survivor, not a victim); female terrorists, which appeared in the same edition as an interview with Susan Sarandon on her 'strong, sexy' role in Thelma and Louise; and Wuornos as 'The Woman Who Murdered Men'.
45. For example, Clarkson Wensley, Hell Hath No Fury: True Stories of Women Who Kill (London: Blake paperbacks, 1992).
46. Frank Jones, Murderous Women: The True Tales of Women Who Killed (London: Headline, 1991).
47. Colin Wilson and David Seaman, An Encyclopaedia of Modern Murder (London: Pan, 1989), p.66.
48. See Graham Murdoch's summary of the problem with crime reportage in Crime, Justice and the Mass Media, ed. Colin Sumner (Cambridge: Cropwood Conference Series, no.14, 1982).
49. TCCMW, p.vii (Reilly); p.xi (Klein).
50. See crime fiction presented as factual reportage: Ann Jones (1991) p.118, and 'Hoax: Secrets that Truman Capote took to the grave', The Sunday Times Magazine, June 21, 1992.
51. Pitman denies this by writing that this is the fashionable view, the implication being that it is therefore frivolous and wrong, and also by her bland and unsubstantiated claim that aversion to murder is inborn.

52. It may be proposed that the diametrically opposed arguments of Pitman and Wilson on this subject are related to gender difference, Wilson's romantic existentialist paradigm pushing Pitman further towards a defensive and conservative model.
53. Nicole Ward Jouve, The Streetcleaner: The Yorkshire Ripper Case on Trial (London: Marion Boyars, 1986).
54. In her 'word about method', Jouve explains that she has uses Barthes' theories, 'because he had been led to see that the subject must be re-integrated into discourse (p.29).
55. As suggested by Spare Rib's review of the book, printed on the back cover.
56. See the Times Educational Supplement's review, quoted on the back cover. Note also that the text's subtitle is The Yorkshire Ripper Case on trial [my emphasis].
57. Barbara Vine, A Dark-Adapted Eye (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), pp.13-15, 22-25, 62-63, 290.
58. Angela Carter, 'The Fall River Axe Murders', in Black Venus (London: Picador, 1986), p.101.
59. According to Ann Jones, it has been established that Borden's menstruation had ended by the time of the murder (1991), p.234.
60. Dr. Katharina Dalton is the most prominent exponent of these theories (see her books Once a Month, and Premenstrual Syndrome Goes to Court).
61. Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (London: Routledge, 1990), p.ix.
62. For further examples of the fairy-tale romance, see pp.111, 118, 119.
63. For example Cindy Sherman's photographs of the late 1980s and the images appropriated by Madonna through the last decade, culminating in the publication of her book Sex in 1992.
64. For the continued inadequacies of the legal system when faced with women's crime, see Heather Mills, 'A Crime to Make Justice Falter', in the Independent on Sunday, 5.4.1992.

65. See Catherine Belsey, 'Deconstructing the Text: Sherlock Holmes', in Tony Bennett, ed. (1990), p.279.
66. See Dennis Porter, 'The Language of Detection', in Bennett, p.88.
67. For example, Ruth Rendell, The New Girlfriend and Other Stories (London: Hutchinson, 1985).
68. See Radice's foregrounding the evolution of the form in Lisanne Radice, The Way to Write Crime Fiction (London: Elm Tree, 1989), pp.25-6.
69. Susan Thompson and Victoria Nichols, Silk Stalkings: When Women Write of Murder (Berkeley, California: Black Lizard Press, 1988), p.xv.
70. For example, Barbara Wilson, The Dog Collar Murders and Sara Paretsky Burn Marks. See also Humm (1991), p.200.
71. For the influence of the romantic adventure on the genre, see Reilly (TTCMW), p.x. For the blurred lines between gothic, romance, macabre and detection, see Coward and Semple (in Carr), p.41.
72. This term is still in use as criticism, See Roz Kaveney on Mary Wings, TTCMW, p. 1101. Sue Grafton uses it self-consciously to ironic effect in 'B' is for Burglar (London: Pan, 1990).
73. See Lyn Pykett, TTCMW, p.391.
74. See Murder Ink: The Mystery Reader's Companion, ed. Dilys Winn (Newton Abbot: Westbridge Books, 1978), p.68.
75. Its movement towards the hard-boiled form is directly related to the gender of the female protagonist and detective in that, as A.S.Byatt has noticed, James' female characters often feel themselves to be cold, and this new female hardness pervades the text. See Writers in Conversation: P.D.James with A.S.Byatt (London: I.C.A. Videos, 1987).
76. P.D.James, An Unsuitable Job for A Woman (London: Faber, 1972; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989).

77. Coward and Semple's essay, and Klein's later introduction (*TTCMW*, 1991) fit in with a recognisable pattern of ideological revisionism of critical modes of evaluation in Cultural Studies.
78. Barbara Wilson, The Dog Collar Murders (London: Virago, 1989), pp.110-113.
79. See Amanda Cross, Poetic Justice (London: Virago, 1991), p.140.
80. Annie Leclerc, from 'Parole de Femme' (1974), in New French Feminisms, ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle De Courtivron (Brighton: Harvester, 1980), pp.79, 86.
81. Quoted by Humm (1991), p.188.
82. For Grafton on food, see 'A' is for Alibi (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston: 1982: London: Pan, 1985), pp.23, 65, 82, 91, 138.
83. For example, Pamela Branch's Murder's Little Sister (1958) and Marion Mainwaring's Murder in Pastiche.
84. An example of this would be the novels from the late 1950s to the early 1970s of G.G. Fickling, who created the 'sexsational' female detective *Honey West*, and whose last work was entitled Stiff As A Broad.
85. Sue Grafton said this to me with regard to her being a female crime writer rather than a female killer in acknowledgement of reversibility in women's relationship to crime (interview on 22nd November 1993).
86. See A Woman's Eye, ed. Sara Paretsky, pp.viii-ix, and Carol Kountz, 'You Call it a pseudonym, we call it an alias', Winn (1978), pp.45, 48.
87. Ruth Rendell, Writers in Conversation: Ruth Rendell with P.D.James (London: I.C.A. Videos, 1990). Doris Lessing also adopted a pseudonym (Jane Somers) in this period.
88. Carr suggests this (1989), p.6.
89. This may be the case with the romance, which serves strong emotional needs on the part of its readers. Genres of crime fiction have been used playfully for many decades and thus it may be argued that emotions are less attached.
90. See the frontispiece to Grafton's novels, printed by Pan Books.

91. See also the I.C.A. Writers in Conversation videos in which Rendell and James speak in a similar vein (1990).

CONCLUSION

Why not ... acknowledge a wide range in women's views, including feminism, and be on the lookout for possibly shifting and changing feminist aspects or effects in any of these? Rather than connecting large areas of women's thought adjectivally under the rubric of feminism, we ought to multiply our vocabulary. We ought to invent additional new terms in women's political and intellectual history in order to protect feminism's distinctiveness and to understand the full complexity and range of women's views.

Nancy F. Cott [1]

In this thesis I have addressed post-feminism in the arena in which it was most vociferously broadcast and developed an understanding of post-feminism which is specific to popular culture in Britain. Through my examination of contemporary literature, I have identified a productive dialogue and closer relationship than is generally assumed to exist between feminism and post-feminism. This has led to an acceptance of a flexibility or doubleness in post-feminism whereby it has been seen to incorporate, for example, misogyny and anti-feminism as well as resilience and pro-feminism. In the popular media, post-feminism seemed to establish itself in those areas which had been problematic for feminism, such as autonomy and self-help, sexuality and its representations, and violence and crime. Those rhetorical strategies which, I found, typified a post-feminist stance have been questioned in the contexts of very different writings by women on these topics. Where appropriate, I have drawn attention to similarities between post-feminist modes of argument and conceptual models used increasingly in feminist theoretical speculation. I was concerned from the outset not to pre-empt any characterisation of post-feminism by maintaining a definition of post-feminism as postmodernist or poststructuralist feminism. However, overlaps between popular post-feminism and the latter have been discovered.

Post-feminism and Neo-feminism

Criticism of feminism from within feminism has become more established in the popular press following the high media profile achieved by Wolf and Faludi at the

beginning of this decade. In the wake of Paglia's much-trumpeted views on the date-rape debate, Katie Roiphe was propelled to fame in 1993 for her supposedly controversial suggestion that some feminists, by exaggerating the dangers that await women in the sexual arena, have taken away the sexual freedom that her mother's generation had fought so hard to win. Although the New York Times magazine, which ran an excerpt from Roiphe's new book, The Morning After: Sex, Fear and Feminism on Campus, received letters of protest and Roiphe appeared on talk shows to fan the argument, feminists have been able to reincorporate this discourse which in the past would have been easily denounced as a backlash phenomenon. The President of the National Organisation of Women welcomes the public discussion and is pleased that the issue of date rape is back on the agenda: 'What Katie Roiphe raises that has legitimacy in the discussion is taking responsibility'. Even Susan Brownmiller, whom Roiphe attacks, is philosophical, viewing this as a younger voice in an ongoing debate. [2] In the mid 1990s the 'sisterly remonstrative tone' seems to be replacing the fear of the erosion of feminism which dominated the major publications at the end of the post-feminist decade.[3]

In Fire With Fire (1993), Naomi Wolf has observed some of the strategies post-feminism has adopted with regard to feminism, such as equating the feminist movement with a discredited and victim-centred ethos. She writes: 'Right now critics of feminism such as Katie Roiphe in *The Morning After* and Camille Paglia just about anywhere are doing something slick and dangerous with the notion of victimization. They are taking the occasional excesses of the rape crisis movement and using them to ridicule the need to raise consciousness about sexual violence'. [4] Wolf counters this with a parallel move, dividing feminism into 'two traditions' of 'victim feminism' which is 'when a woman seeks power through an identity of powerlessness' (p.147), and 'power feminism'. Wolf's 'power feminism' is a media-friendly feminist post-feminism for it 'encourages a woman to claim her individual voice rather than merging her voice in a collective identity'; 'is unashamedly sexual'; 'seeks power and uses it responsibly'; 'wants women to acquire money, both for their own dreams ...

and for social change' (p.149). It also 'acknowledges that aggression, competitiveness, ... even the danger of selfish and violent behaviour, are as much a part of female identity as nurturant behaviour'; 'has a psychology of abundance; wants all women to "equalize upward" and get more'; and 'knows that making social change does not contradict the principle that girls just want to have fun' (p.150). The book is prefaced by two quotations which appear to contradict each other: 'The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house' (Audre Lorde) and the proverbial 'Fight fire with fire'. These highlight again the contemporary challenge of finding a way to integrate feminist opposition and post-feminist appropriation and underline the continuing relevance of the debate on whether to risk reinscribing phallogentricity, as discussed in my final chapter.

Wolf's attempt to redefine feminism has led to a formulation which is a logical outcome of the pressures of the post-feminist period, offering two stereotypes in the place of one. Her next book too, which will be devoted to female sexuality, adolescence, and promiscuity, reveals that American neo-feminism is engaging with post-feminist phenomena and redefining feminism with the hindsight afforded by post-feminist objections to feminism.[5] From reaffirming classical feminism in The Beauty Myth, Wolf has become an outspoken advocate of dissent within the women's movement and this has the advantage of undermining the more facetious and anti-progressive arguments of post-feminists. She recommends that women claim full representation, 'and fight our beliefs out in the public arena, as men do who cannot be reduced to a group identity' and recognises Camille Paglia as a feminist on the level that 'all women should be able to own the word feminism as describing a theory of self-worth' (p.151). She does not feel that opening up the definition risks making the term 'feminism' meaningless and recommends power feminism on the grounds that 'the ideology it upholds is flexible and inclusive' (p.150). Although she has said that both of the two traditions she outlines are necessary parts of feminism, her schematisation of them which counterposes one against the other would tend to obscure their common ground and the history of cross influence and discursive

similarities. A shortcoming of the book may be that, in its enthusiasm to open up the term 'feminism', it substitutes nominalism for strategy. Wolf redefines feminism for a younger generation instead of examining the various ways in which it has already been redefined. Fire With Fire may be seen as a neo-feminist appropriation of post-feminism, although the result is anodyne in comparison with the cultural dynamics and rhetorical strategies in which the argument of feminism and post-feminism is conducted in contemporary popular literature.

New Directions

The topics and styles which I have suggested typify post-feminism have continued to proliferate in the last two years. If Fatal Attraction characterised the late 1980s, Basic Instinct has done the same for the early 1990s. It is a psychological thriller about a castrating bisexual woman who writes best-selling fiction about sex crimes and has female murderers amongst her friends and lovers. Incorporating topical ingredients, it is as though the film were made to post-feminist specifications. The protagonist calmly exploits the male gaze to her own advantage and uses her sexuality to manipulate and humiliate men (she even drives a car faster and with more panache than the male cop). Themes of doubleness are exemplified in her lesbian partner and look-a-like with whom she lives, as well as in her ex-lover, the female psychoanalyst, who serves as a murderous alter ego.

The niche in the popular media for female aggression, women and guns, and now female gangs which use violent crime, has dramatically increased.[6] Increasingly important in popular music has been the more belligerent music by women on the alternative fringes, particularly those who were part of the punk movement or its renaissance in the late 1980s.[7] Amongst younger urban woman in America and Britain in the early Nineties there appeared the new female role model of the 'riot grrrl'. Her emergence coincided with a wave of publicity about 'girl gangs' in the

United States whose typical attitude suggests a shift in post-feminist attitudes away from individualism towards a self-consciousness of female strength in numbers. [8]

The hype in America emphasised solidarity with glib enthusiasm; according to Markie Robson-Scott, who writes of this fashion, 'Women have never found their own company more enjoyable'. Freda Garmaise, author of Tough Girls Don't Knit and Other Tales of Stylish Subversion proclaimed: 'Women are coming to realise that other women are not the enemy ... Girl gangs are the biggest thing that's going to happen in the nineties'. These gangs are supposed to be 'support groups with soul and without a trace of worthiness', with 'no networking, no cattiness, no competition' [9]. Blithely named 'Chicks with Dicks', one gang's money-and-lipstick brand of women-centredness might raise despondent shrugs from some feminists, but marries post-feminism with female solidarity. As is the case with the post-feminism, there is no pretence that this is a political movement; one gang elucidates: 'It's not a dykey thing, and there's no women's lib crap. We're not into causes: the cause is to be someone's friend'. [10] Riot grrrls have advanced a few steps further, regarded by some as a 'movement of radical young feminists'. [11] Not dissimilar from the PFW in her brash sexuality, street credibility and aggressive and direct attitude, the differences lie in the alternative music scene which hosted the new image, the predominance of female solidarity with a political edge and lesbian sexuality. More articulate and angry, the riot grrrl is uncompromising in the face of the liberal press. Her dress and attitude pertain more to the British punk movement of the late 1970s and this also marks a significant class distinction from the materialist and yuppie PFW. There is also a closer connection with grass roots feminist movements which was absent, if not scorned, by post-feminists.

The greater emphasis upon female solidarity may take over from the importance of individual self-determination in post-feminism and provide a different context for post-feminist themes, reintroducing a more political stance. Even advertising has begun to portray women-only leisure activities, featuring women sitting together in restaurants or cafes, or driving together, and there appears to be a shift in emphasis

from the cliché of female competitiveness to those things women enjoy in common with each other. The Levis advertisements pre-empted the new sex magazines in attempting to appeal to a female gaze and market research has acknowledged women's anger at tired stereotypes of femininity and interest in images as different facets of identity that they may embody by choice.[12] As well as studies on female friendships and cultural studies texts appearing on subjects such as the girl s' night out, same sex relationships among women have been highlighted in documentaries and flaunting men's exclusion has become fashionable.[13] The marketing trend which uses glamorous lesbian images has also reached new peaks. Joanna Briscoe notes: 'As feminism moulds itself to the present, sexual and cultural separatism is becoming less relevant, less didactic ... Lesbian Chic marries suffragette with supermodel and catches the zeitgeist. It has been staring us in the face'. [14] The issues of appropriation and counter-appropriation clearly remain relevant, and Briscoe is optimistic: 'I have to say I think it can only be politically positive in the long run. Beyond all that it's a bit of a hoot ... More power to the spin doctors, more power to the cause.'

If a new form of female solidarity that is not primarily feminist is becoming fashionable again, this is a crucial development from earlier post-feminist attitudes and should be re-evaluated among feminist critics. A productive location for it which would bear further investigation might be women's humour, from Dawn French and Jennifer Saunders to Jo Brand, The Golden Girls to Absolutely Fabulous. Humour is recognised as an increasingly important factor in advertising to women and is the other obvious subject to bear on post-feminism.[15] My research points to it as the next area for study, as a way of taking further the models and strategies I find to be post-feminist. It could be considered only tangentially in this thesis, as it does not constitute a literary form or genre on its own. However, it would be interesting to take existing studies of women's comedy, such as The Joke's On Us by Morwenna Banks and Amanda Swift, expanding them to include a new generation of

comediennes and examining self-deprecatory humour, defensiveness and disguise, as well as the reversals of wit and performance, from a post-feminist perspective [16].

From reappropriating the cultural space of feminism in the 1980s, post-feminism may now be seen as ready to cede ground to feminisms. This has been facilitated by the high media profile of neo-feminists and arguments in the public arena amongst women on feminist issues which have left behind the negative stereotype of the feminist. A Guardian opinion poll on 'What Women Really Think' in 1991 found that on the subject of feminism:

58% were willing to wear the label of feminism, and -- importantly -- self-proclaimed feminists were more likely to be under 35 than over, despite the fact that more than two-thirds of younger women (and more than half overall) believe feminism is frowned upon. Only 9% believed feminism was viewed positively. Three quarters believed that the status of women had improved in the past two decades, including the provision for women's health. [17]

In 1993, Cosmopolitan ran a twenty-one-page supplement on 'feminism now' which included the long-unfashionable voices of young lesbian, socialist, and ecologist feminists. Lesley Abdela opines:

After a decade of being treated as the 'F' word ... feminism with a brand new media sexy image is on the rise across the country ... Nineties feminism isn't simply about 'women's issues' ... [it] is repositioning itself, making those ... words 'feminism' and 'feminist' upbeat and mainstream. [18]

Such conclusions and findings are likely to have little sociological validity, but reveal a new investment in feminism on the part of the British media in the 1990s. When asked midway through my research what I thought would succeed post-feminism, I suggested feminism would, not merely because movements and countermovements tend to follow one another in cycles, but because feminism was an increasingly visible

component of post-feminism and seemed to be gaining a stronger foothold as the 1990s progressed. New terms, from 'power feminism' to 'riot grrrl', show that our vocabulary can be multiplied both within the rubric of feminism and without.

Post-feminism has provided an inspiration for younger feminists: it offered a thinking space and freedom from established feminist conformity, as well as a new image to experiment with and against which, eventually, to rebel. To the extent to which it opposed feminism, it invited its own counter-assault: as Yvonne Roberts suggested, a backlash might encourage women to seek further than equality. However, post-feminism in its doubleness which allowed for multiple reversals and ironic displacement was more subtle than a backlash against feminism and fueled an incipient challenge to feminist orthodoxy from within the women's movement. As my research into popular literature has shown, post-feminism and feminism are entangled with each other and there are many areas in which they meet conceptually and strategically. As a debating couple, they are popular because they stimulate controversy and dissent; they keep feminist issues in the media, and they also sell. Post-feminism has reinvigorated feminism and, as long as the two are not viewed reductively in opposition but are understood to challenge each other as different versions of each other, then their complexities are valuable for holding open the possibility of congruences between oppositional stages of feminisms as elaborated in theoretical debates. I do not believe that equality, difference and deconstruction can be held together simultaneously as Moi has suggested but, as the first two stages, when in dialogue with each other in popular literature, lead to deconstructive strategies, I find that these need not be left behind in favour of rigorous poststructuralist critique. [19] I began by questioning whether a popular feminism was evident in contemporary writing by women, whether female popular literature could be seen to be characterised by post-feminism, or whether, at the end of the 1980s, popular feminism and post-feminism now amounted to the same thing. This resulted in a concern in my research to locate the feminism in post-feminism -- as Cott writes, looking out for 'possible shifting and changing feminist effects' in post-feminism, as

well as identifying the post-feminist outlook in feminism. I conclude that it is in those areas where feminism and post-feminism meet and overlap in popular literature, as discussed and identified in this thesis, that one may find the impetus for a popular feminism.

Notes

1. Nancy F. Cott, Comment on Karen Offen's 'Defining Feminism', Signs 15:1 (1989), p.205.
2. Quoted by Monica El-Faizy, 'The Rapes of Wrath', The Guardian, 25.10.1993.
3. Lesley Garner, 'How the campus sisters have fallen from free spirits to whining wimps', The Daily Telegraph, 15.1.1994.
4. Naomi Wolf, Fire With Fire: The New Female Power And How It Will Change the 21st Century (London: Chatto and Windus, 1993), p.147.
5. Dylan Jones, 'Wolf in Chic Clothing', Elle, December 1993, pp.71-2.
6. After Blue Steel of the late 1980s and Nikita in the early 1990s, there is now a focus on real female gangs in L.A. in the film Mi Vida Loca by Allison Anders (U.S., 1993). See also Erin Cotter, 'Girls in the Hood', The Face, No. 62, November 1993, pp.78-86.
7. From Debbie Harry of 'Blondie' of the late 1970s to Courtney Love of 'Hole' in the early 1990s. For further examples consider the singer PJ Harvey's apparent debunking of feminine dress codes yet refusal to engage in feminist discourse, Caroline Sullivan on Harvey at the Forum, The Guardian, 25.5.1993. Also Dick Hebdige on punk and post-punk girls who turn being looked at into an aggressive act, Hiding in the Light (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 29-30.
8. See Markie Robson-Scott, 'Girls Just Want to Have Fun', The Guardian, 27.3.1991, p.38.
9. Laurie Pike, 'Girl Club', in *ibid.*
10. Also: 'There's a chemical reaction when girls get together ... it's not the kind of feminism that needs to go to rallies; it's feminism in our private lives' ('Girl Club').
11. See Hester Matthewman, 'Rock against men is music to the Riot Grrrls' ears', The Independent on Sunday, 14.3.1993, p.7; also Bad Attitude: Radical Women's Newspaper, Issue 3, April/May (London: Brixton).

12. An contemporary example of market analysis which is wary of generalisation and tries to recognise the complexity of the individual consumer would be 'Needstate Segmentation' which describes women relating to product bands by selecting 'The-me-that-I-am-when'. See Wendy Gordon, 'To Generalise Is To Be An Idiot - segmenting the masses to target your brand's female consumer', in Marketing to Women (London: Centaur Conferences in Association with Marketing Week), 19.10.1994.
13. Gilda O'Neill, A Night Out With the Girls: Women Having A Good Time (London: The Women's Press, 1993).
14. Briscoe's novel Mothers and Other Lovers is the first which deals with a lesbian relationship to win the Betty Trask Award. See Joanna Briscoe, 'Lipstick on her collar', The Sunday Times, 5.6.1994, pp.12-13. 1994 is supposed to bring 'the summer of lesbian chic', according to Lisa O'Kelly, 'Why girls just want to have fun, with each other', The Observer, 5.6.1994, p.15.
15. A survey conducted by the research group 'Vox Pops International' found that female consumers ought to be regarded as at least as creative as the advertiser, and responded best to humour which did not address them as housewives, preach to or patronise them. See Diane Coulter, 'Replacing Stereotypes with Stereotypes - Is the Creative Approach to Female-Targeted Advertising Improving?', in Marketing to Women (1993).
16. Morwenna Banks and Amanda Swift, The Joke's on Us (London: Pandora, 1987). A example for contemporary women's humour would be the formidable Texan comedienne, Thea Vidale.
17. 'What Women Really Think', The Guardian, 7.3.1991, p.21.
18. Lesley Abdela, 'Action Women', in 'Feminism Now', Cosmopolitan October 1993, p.30.
19. Toril Moi in Lovell (1990), as discussed in the introduction.

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APPENDIX ONE

INTERVIEW WITH CAMILLE PAGLIA

Article for Over Here: Reviews in American Studies (British Association for American Studies) *to be published in Summer 1994.*

Camille Paglia: Between Backlash and Whiplash

Sex, Art and American Culture (Viking, £16.99)

Her initials provide a reversal of p.c. as surely as American professor, Camille Paglia seeks to reverse political correctness, from her hatred of Women's Studies to her remarks on date rape. In Backlash: the War Against Women (1992), Susan Faludi called Paglia an 'embittered anti-feminist' motivated by sheer spite. Yet although she is championed by the media for her more misogynist soundbites, Paglia actually considers herself a feminist who is providing feminism, especially in its American academic forms, with a necessary critique.

Paglia is something of an anomaly in the early 1990s. She is not strictly post-feminist, in terms of the anti-feminist but pro-women individualism and materialism promoted by the British media in the last decade. Her age (now 46) marks her as coming from the tail-end of the first generation of second wave feminists, and she describes herself as a 'sixties libertarian'.

Nor is her critical approach typical of the current generation; her penchant for comparing all contemporary artistic figures to mythological types recalls the archetypal criticism of the 1950s instead of slotting easily into late-1980s New Age goddess cults and spiritual quests, for these are too closely aligned with alternative healing and the therapy industry to meet with her approval.

Paglia is rather a sceptical feminist whose views have come into prominence in the wake of post-feminism. Her evangelical style suggests that she either does believe

strongly in what she says and writes, or has found a formula which allows her to embrace various cultural phenomena into her world-view with vigorous consistency.

Her predictability makes her easy to consume. I find that it is worth elaborating her patterns of argument and finding a correspondence, or sympathy even, with feminist aims in them, as well as searching out her inconsistencies and the flaws in her rhetoric and persona. To find the feminism in Paglia's anti-feminism, one can benefit from probing the sixties ideology beneath the hyped neo-sixties (and facile anti-feminist/post-feminist) image Paglia has permitted to slip through her media persona. Her introduction to Sex, Art and American Culture is a useful point of departure:

First, Paglia praises *the sixties generation* for parting with the conformism of the fifties - she makes use of the stereotypes and stasis of myth, but decries conformism - but criticises it for failing to harness its own incipient power. Her criticism of feminism should be read in this light; it emerges a generation later, and must therefore be regarded within the perspective of its historical backdrop. Presumably, the Women's Liberation Movement also broke through the previous generation's prescribed sexual conformism for women but, according to Paglia, did not sustain its assault.

Secondly, Paglia declares *popular culture* to be her passion and uses this as the springboard for her first anti-feminist plunge. This is not 'popular culture' as defined by Cultural Studies in Britain, but owes more to an American aesthetic built upon individualism and non-conformism, a perception of popular culture as an embodiment of human energy and striving. For Paglia it has mythic overtones, being 'the never-defeated Paganism of the West'. Thus she manages to imply that feminism has more in common with conformism (it is anti-pagan which, in her schema, tends to mean anti-Dionysian, anti-pleasure, etc.) despite its sixties origins; that is, it has created a new conformism, through its failure to 'sustain its own energies', perhaps?

Paglia writes that the 'brazen aggression and pornographic sexuality' of popular culture are 'at odds with current feminism, whose public proponents are in a reactionary phase of hysterical moralism and prudery' (p.vii). One should observe her

qualifications, even though they are slight: she writes 'current feminism', and mentions a 'phase', thus appearing not to write off feminism as a whole but, rather, decry the elements of reaction, hysteria and moralism which she sees in its current manifestations. To the British reader this may look like a critique of right-wing feminism, that is, the kind of conservative feminism which has long been closely aligned with moral policing. Feminist objections to such a stance are not new, but it is perplexing that Paglia has set feminism up in this way and no other.

Thirdly, Paglia goes on to address *contemporary politics* which, she claims, is in an impasse caused by a now-meaningless polarity of 'liberal' and 'conservative'. There is an irony here: although she has been guilty of stereotyping feminism in a narrow way in the previous paragraph, here she is arguing for a widening of political definitions and greater subtlety in understanding critical positions.

The subtext of this argument is Paglia's having been criticised as a neo-conservative and anti-feminist, and she is persuasive in her self-defence: 'In today's impoverished dialogue, critiques of liberalism are often naively labelled "conservative", as if twenty-five hundred years of Western intellectual history presented no other alternatives' (p.vi). Beatrix Campbell, British author of The Iron Ladies: Why Women Vote Tory, would loosely agree with this, although she might be less sweeping. And this remark is clearly applicable to the knee-jerk reaction that claims Paglia to be anti-feminist when she is criticising what she sees as a negative phase in the development of feminism; the narrow concern with politically correct language is analogous here to 'impoverished dialogue'.

Paglia will define herself only in so far as she says her 'thinking tends to be libertarian', presumably a correlative to pagan, non-conformist and Dionysian. She brings out the contradictions in right-wing neo-liberalism immediately by saying that she opposes state intervention in the 'private realm', in which she includes abortion, sodomy, prostitution, pornography, drug-use and suicide, swiftly making enemies of conservatives, feminists and liberal humanists with just a short list. Seen practically, this should be read as her stating that she does not want to be part of any faction;

Paglia is on nobody's side, except her own, and therefore is no more anti-feminist than she is pro-feminist.

However, she ends this part of her apology, or self-justification, with another implied jab at feminism, raising the spectre of 'date-rape'. This functions in Paglia's invective as a short-hand for over-protective, privileged, middle-class squeamish extremism and is counterposed by the dignity of 'general ethics', on whose side Paglia situates herself (she sees 'real rape' as a crime). The underlying point here, in Paglia's thinking, is that feminism has tried to police sex and that it therefore has tendencies towards totalitarianism.

In the ensuing explanation Paglia appears to be looking for balance, a combination of sixties' progressivism with the rational reaction of the 1970s and 1980s. Potentially, this project could apply to feminism as well: the utopian impulse of early feminism tempered with the caution exercised by its inheritors. (Feminists such as Lynne Segal and Yvone Roberts in Britain have already said this too, that is: 'let's not be too pessimistic and victim-orientated' but, at the same time, 'don't forget that there is still inequality and oppression to fight'). This is Paglia at her most sensible, going for 'pragmatic liberalism', yet also at her most facile, 'a synthesis of the enduring dual elements in our culture, pagan and Judeo-Christian, Romantic and Classic'. Feminism would presumably find a place here if it remained concerned with the practical pursuit of equality and did not overstep itself.

Next, Paglia mentions *education*, which she wants to reform because it has 'become the prisoner of contemporaneity'. The past is not studied enough; this is a message received regularly from Paglia, and much of her critique of feminism slots neatly into her analysis of America's educational predicament. 'Feminism' then (here read 'feminist scholarship') neglects the past and tries to open the door to the future from the dizzy present. It has contributed to the degeneration of education, as well as suffered from it (as seen in Paglia's insistence upon the decline evinced by the small age gap between Faludi and Wolf: 'Faludi was Harvard 1981; Wolf, Yale, 1984'). Paglia often likes to proclaim against the ignorance of feminists - Faludi is one - and

their insufficient grounding in history and the arts - here, Wolf is her primary example. In her view, this has resulted in the inadequacy of feminism's theoretical bases which do not comprehend that there are basic universals rooted in biology and myth which it is naive to try to change. That is, feminism overemphasises the role of culture in forming the behaviour of the sexes.

Here, Paglia seems to imply that feminism is utopian and totalitarian in a Maoist sense, although she fluctuates between emphasising its power and pernicious influence, and stressing its unappealing wimpiness and wingeing. There is a similarity in Julie Burchill's post-feminist aesthetic; both critics are enamoured of power and its manifestations. In her criticism of a selected part of feminism, Paglia has to tread the thin line between presenting it as a threat and yet not making it look too inviting in its potency.

So far, we can see that Paglia's animus against feminism lies in her interpretation of it to be not only radical separatism (the anti-pornography, all-penetration-is-rape strand), but also academic feminism. While one could argue that the fragmentation of feminism into different feminisms has allowed such narrow definitions, the effect is nevertheless cynically manipulative through Paglia's choice of two stereotypes of feminism used to represent feminism as a whole. Nevertheless, as an American and an academic, her professional and political positions do explain why she has focused on these two issues. Paglia can therefore be seen not as an anti-feminist, but as an idealist opposed both to the tenets held by separatist and revolutionary feminists, and to materialist feminism as exemplified in professional academics (which represents feminism joining ranks with the 'pedestrian, toadying careerists' who are the blight of American universities). Paglia largely ignores, and there is a sense here that she agrees with and therefore does not mention, a wider area of feminist politics.

Further contextualisation which helps to explain Paglia's complaints about feminism is her dislike of the 'pedantic jargon, clumsy convolutions, and prissy abstractions' of *French post-structuralism*, which have indeed held a powerful influence over academic feminism in the past ten years and over the development of

feminist theory. However, Paglia is not the first feminist to express unease at this, nor, to her discredit, does she examine its specific disadvantages for feminist theory, but rather groups feminism with other academic pursuits which have, for various reasons, fallen under the sway of professional academic language.

Finally, Paglia's approval of *the media* as a representative of opinions to engage with (p.xiii) implies yet another potential criticism of 'feminism'; in its revolutionary form, feminism is isolated from the media through its oppositional extremism and, in its academic form, it is divorced from it because of the ivory tower. While Paglia's opportunism and need for outside approval (and perhaps her Italian Catholic familial roots) can be seen to have led her to defend her views with reference to black Afro-Caribbean and Hispanic cultures in America, and to 'World culture' internationally, the result may be positive with regard to an opening up of feminist orthodoxies to areas of resistance and differing perspectives.

I believe we can now see where Paglia is coming from, as well as where she has landed. Her pronouncements incorporate valid criticisms even though they are obvious fodder to the contemporary American backlash against feminism, as well as to the anti-feminist strains in British post-feminism of the late 1980s. Paglia has stereotyped feminism, but for reasons that are not primarily anti-feminist. Her reactivation of reaction is naive and not a serious threat to feminism which should know itself already to have addressed the points she makes. Thus Paglia can be seen as a provocative inspiration to clear up feminism's public image in line with what different, and differing, feminists really think.

In her middle-age, Paglia frequently recalls her strategies for attention-grabbing as a child. Reading through her rhetoric, and talking to her in a milder mode, I would argue that the media machine around this woman and her inevitable war with all-and-sundry provide an opportunity for a discussion of backlash and post-feminism which still have to be brought out of American and British journalism into the academic establishment. This interview with Camille Paglia is offered as a hopeful gesture towards such a dialogue between the academy and the media:

Interview with Camille Paglia - 5th February 1993

by Barbara Kastelein

Camille Paglia was raring to go. Her eager voice conjured up the image of the overkeen sprinter who starts running when everyone is supposed to be still on their marks.

She managed to sound energised and out of breath even at the beginning of a long-distance phone call, but took time out to correct my mispronunciation of her surname. I was prepared to fight to get a word in edgeways, given her reputation as a motormouth, or, more recently as a Sunday Times headline pronounced 'The Mouthtrap: Camille Paglia, the talker of the town'. But it is not common to meet a person who evidently likes talking so much that, when she can't interrupt you, she proceeds to interrupt herself with great enthusiasm and gusto.

In love with her boisterous ego rather than words, she trips up on the latter in the attempt to express the former. Her conversation, or rant, comes in wild fits and starts and, provided you avoid firing her impatience with the predictable, has the attraction of resembling slapstick. Had I not resorted to flattery, she would have proceeded to interview herself.

Therefore I told her (truthfully) that I had enjoyed her recent publication, Sex, Art and American Culture. This gave her a brief pause, while she took this in, so I slipped in how it had provided a welcome opportunity to see some of her more controversial remarks in context.

As is well-known, she has received a good deal of media attention with these comments and obviously enjoyed playing with the media (being such an unashamed egotist she must have thought she could take them on single-handedly), but I wanted to know whether she felt her work had suffered from the way her more outrageous soundbites had been plucked out of their wider arguments by journalists. 'That is *exactly* what happened', said Paglia, 'the media circus has distorted my work. There is an inability to read, even when it is already there to read. It is a symptom of the hysteria and emotionalism that surround these issues'.

Which issues in particular? Well, from the essays, it could be anything from feminism (which is 'stuck in an adolescent, whining mode') to Madonna (feminism, like her, should recognise 'both the animality and the artifice' in sex). More controversially, Paglia's comments on male homosexuality, date rape, and lesbianism

have indeed been surrounded in hysteria, not a small part of it her own. Rape is a subject she felt compelled to elaborate upon in somewhat confusing terms. She did denounce rape in the essays, but hastened to add that 'all rape is erotic'.

The woman can't resist bandwagons, and wants to be the dominant voice of every one of them. She is even champion of rock music, which she sees as a contemporary hotbed of romanticism which must not become slave to the audience with its hunger for hits. (I feel there might be a moral in that for Paglia herself, but she is the oracle, and not the listening type).

One effect of reading the essays is a kind of overload that makes you giggle, sometimes out of embarrassment, sometimes at the outrageous nastiness of her personal attacks, and more-often out of sheer exhaustion. So I told her I thought the essays were funny. 'Yes they are', she enthused, 'that's one of the things that people have missed'. She said that she sees herself in a tradition of satire, but 'Critics are just so slow. Somebody said that I am like Myra Breckenridge from Gore Vidal...'. She had liked that, but my wrist was aching; asked whether she ever gets tired, she said that, at forty five, she has a lot of energy. 'So did Margaret Thatcher', I threw in (she reputedly slept only four hours a night). What did Camille think of her?

The first signs of sensitivity manifested themselves, 'Well, over here I didn't have to suffer her policies. If I had, I'm sure I would feel differently, but I think she was an interesting figure'.

Hardly a surprise, it emerged that it was Thatcher's media persona that attracted Paglia. A performer herself, notorious fag hag and drag queen groupie who is genuinely fascinated by the artifice of femininity, Paglia saw a mirror image of herself in our ex-P.M. But when asked to explain what she thinks her self-classification as a 'sixties libertarian' might mean to people in Britain she insists that she is not on the right. 'I call myself a libertarian to stop the defamation of me and what I am saying by those who are calling me conservative. I do believe in State intervention. Capitalism is Darwinian, and there has to be a safety net'. She says she is neither a capitalist nor a socialist.

Paglia prefers to criticise and insult others, rather than define herself. The interview took place just before the war of words between Paglia and Julie Burchill, so it is entertaining in retrospect to hear her hopeful generosity to Burchill after I implied there might be points of comparison between them. When asked about her views on the differences between British attitudes towards her favourite topics of debate and those in America, I suggested that she might find some overlaps with the views of Burchill. Paglia remarked tentatively that Burchill is unknown in the U.S., hoping perhaps that this meant she was unimportant. When it was pointed out that she probably deserves to be as she used to boast that she has never been there (until marrying Cosmo Landesman, Burchill's anti-Americanism was one of her trademarks), Paglia was not offended, but said that parallels had been pointed out to her regarding their criticisms of feminism and mutual interest in popular culture.

Once assured that Burchill was not an academic, Paglia was astounded that she did not go on television, but later struggled with an opportunity to champion her at the expense of what she sees as the 1930s attitude to popular culture, the 'Frankfurt School influence, which is so outmoded'. Somewhat out of her depth she announced, 'The problem is, people love to name drop. Now, Julie Burchill is better than these French theorists, with her simple lucid style. Real English style is vital!'

Unbeknown to Paglia, Burchill had just published a mocking, although mild in comparison with Paglia's style of invective, review of this collection of essays in The Spectator. Maybe it was English humour, instead of style, that Paglia should have picked up on. Burchill points out that the 'g' is silent in this great satirist's surname, 'the only thing about her that is'. She parodies Paglia's famous quotation about academic feminists not being able to think themselves 'out of a wet paper bag' in her remark that, like her heroine, Madonna, Paglia, 'when it comes to sex, ... couldn't think her way out of a wet paper bag with a machete in one hand, a Bowie knife in the other and Friedrich Nietzsche leading the way with a flaming torch'.

Soon afterwards, the custard pies started flying. Paglia conveniently forgot about real English style and proclaimed Burchill's work was 'sloppy, dishonest' and marred

by 'cliched locutions, braying rhetoric and meaningless incoherence'. Burchill retorted 'I'm ten years younger, two stone heavier and nastier'. Well talking with Paglia, I believe that, but even Germaine Greer entered the fray, describing the battle as 'mud-wrestling with tits'...

Where does that leave feminism? Back to the bitching between yanks, Paglia, when asked about her description of Naomi Wolf as a Tiny Tim to her Carouso and the reasons for her refusal to appear in public with the best-selling author of The Beauty Myth (1990), announced she simply cannot debate with her until Wolf has read more and knows something about art history. She believes that people were able to grasp her own point once Wolf's symptomatic book came out: 'It is a problem of the white middle-class'.

Paglia's quarrel with feminism can look like an argument about class and race. But before you can say we've heard this before from a few other people, she proves the novelty of her ideas by declaring that not only is she for the legalisation of drugs and pro-pornography, but she is also in favour of snuff movies and kiddie porn in the name of the individual's right not to have the state interfere in the private realm.

Questioned further about this, she blames Catherine MacKinnon. Paglia tried to find out how widespread snuff movies were and concludes, 'it's a hysterical fantasy projected in the popular mind by the feminist anti-porn lobby'. Current feminism has simply become a religion and cult, according to Paglia, which preaches 'lies', that is, 'what they say about pornography being about the degradation of women, about the rape of women. The truly avant garde feminist artist should make a snuff film'.

Remarks such as these, when met with incredulity, only escalate to a higher pitch of frenzy: 'De Sade should be studied. We should encourage atrocity, to go after people's assumptions'. She praises Ozzy Osbourne, bemoans the hypocrisy of the establishment with regard to the work of Robert Mapplethorpe and draws her tirade back into line with her views on popular culture, which is 'obsessed with rape and murder. The point is that popular culture understands this fascination'. She underlines the importance of the true story of Amy Fisher, the young woman who killed her

lover's wife. Three films had recently been made about this sex crime, and Paglia concludes that 'the cultural elite in this country are out of sync. There is a real dynamic going on'.

She says she likes popular culture because it is so glitzy. When asked whether it would not be too much if the phenomenon kept on growing, saturating our mass culture with representations of extreme violence, she suggests that 'popular culture remedies what is going on in academe' and that, in fact, we need them both.

So again, Paglia is taking the position of devil's advocate but, on further probing, asserts the need for balance. Her stance of dissent has now been taken up by Wolf (who is '*terribly* small potatoes'), but in a more measured way. Paglia is incensed by what she sees as Wolf's U-turn in *Fire With Fire* (1993). Alliances appear to be anathema to her, and it is difficult to resist the conclusion that this is because she is so loathe to yield centre stage to other critical voices. Susan Faludi's *Backlash* is 'a piece of crap', even though she admits that Faludi is a sincere person. Paglia announces her approval of controversial theses, and says she should have liked the work of these of other two musketeers of American feminism. But Wolf was 'interested in being a star' (and Paglia? - one wonders) and Faludi's writing is riddled with 'feminist cliché'. The latter is guilty of repressing the fact that *Time* magazine devoted a single issue to women 'with no dissenting voice'. For twenty years, Paglia explains, the New York media has been incestuously pro-feminist.

So back to British feminism and the differences. 'The problem in the U.S. is that Women's Studies is a massive institution. In comparison, Oxford and Cambridge have not even been touched'. She is delighted at the quality of mind of Cambridge female dons she met, but 'The United States is so different'. At Brown, she was accosted by two young female students who wanted to ask her a question and would not listen to her answer. This was 'obscene' in Paglia's view: 'Middle-class culture pampers women', but in a Cambridge College, she was inspired by the angst about feminism to the point where she wrote 'preserve your classical education - don't let Women's

Studies in!' on a piece of paper and pinned it up, signed on the board. 'I don't know who saw it!'

Returning to her generation, Paglia admires The Female Eunuch and says she was a fan of Greer: 'She was witty, sexy and stylish and she put men in their place, but she took the wrong turn and both Greer and academe lost out. Later she may be more powerful; we may see that Greer is one of the women of the century, and Sontag too'. But before we reach the analysis, the egotism steps in. They should have critiqued feminism, but 'left it for me to do twenty years later'.

So what about now? She is not hippie or New Age. 'I really liked the Mods. I was a Mod then; I wanted that Carnaby Street look - I wore those *Tom Jones shirts*, *big belts*, *violet suede vests*, with ornaments'. Of course, she liked the dandyish quality. Paglia thinks this element of swinging-sixties London has been overlooked: 'a new kind of woman was being encouraged'.

But she is rethinking her position of being an Anglophile, she says. From the reviews of Sexual Personae in this country, she has been able to see why Britain is in a creative crisis. 'In England you deride and mock'. Anyone here would be afraid to be passionate and creative and she cautions us to think twice about this destructive tendency. It is somewhat ludicrous to hear Paglia insist that she and D.H. Lawrence are trying to do similar things. But she continues, 'O.K., he embarrassed people', and seems to feel that this shame about exposing one's opinions in the public arena is one of the causes of the adoption in academia of the complex and daunting, not to mention inaccessible, language of French critical theory.

This takes us back to the institutions of higher education. According to Paglia, this is the reason why Lacan and Foucault have done well. The jargon that has been assumed as a result of their adoption by the critical establishment serves, in her view, as a 'lobster shell that people have to put on to be taken seriously'. All because in the U.K. we have this 'Terrible knee-jerk derision'. She underscores this point by observing that we would never get Italian opera from England.

So I try Barthes, whom she did not mention in her essays and who, I claim, had a strong influence on feminist cultural studies on this side of the Atlantic. Barthes, Paglia says, had much less of an impact in the States - she loved Mythologies when it came out... but the flamboyant language takes over again: Barthes 'shot himself in the foot by becoming infected with all that Saussurian garbage'. She despises S/Z, and despite Barthes' potential, she despairs at 'this stupid new book reviving Barthes as a queer'. Like Greer and the other priests of late 60s radicalism, perhaps, Barthes should have gone on but instead became 'a nothing'.

This is one thing Paglia will avoid at all costs. Before she participated in the British television documentary "Diana Unclothed" (broadcast 16/3/1993), it was possible to sympathise with Paglia's views on Baudrillard, with whom she shares interests. Surprisingly enough, his problem is that he has been misled, 'All those people, they shouldn't write about America. Lyotard too. All of that Frankfurt School influence'. But shouldn't it cut both ways?

Paglia's opportunism seems to know no bounds. First it was Madonna who was the 'future of feminism' (the Essays), then last spring she told British people that our Princess Di 'is a splendid role model for women around the world', representing 'feminism for the future'. Burchill had already noted Di's potential as a role model (Sex and Sensibility, 1992), but her pop criticism was anchored in her national culture and was more assuredly ironic. Paglia couldn't get into the Madonna machine (she told me there was a time when she wanted to meet her, but the younger star wasn't sure apparently, and now Paglia doesn't want to talk to her anymore) whereas she was given a voice by the B.B.C. in the Di debate.

It appears that Paglia couldn't think her way out of the dilemma of selling her voice to an unfamiliar British public without some serious toadying and backtracking. Her impatience and disgust for privileged white middle-class women with eating disorders (who are for her the exemplars of feminism's ills) is conveniently forgotten in her panegyric on Di. Put crudely, Di is more of a turn-on than Madonna because she looks harder to get. Her class status and Britishness provide the aura of a more

classical distance which appealed to Paglia, and allowed more intrusive readings and projections onto her: virgin princess, girl next door, mother, sex symbol and, not least, for Paglia, also a beautiful boy prostitute and even Nefertiti.

It is telling that Paglia called Diana 'the last of the silent film stars'. The documentary revealed how unfamiliar the public is with Diana's voice. Now compare this to Madonna (British comedians Dawn French and Jennifer Saunders can impersonate her in their sketches because we all know what she sounds like); Di is about image, Madonna about image *and* voice. Madonna is the loudmouth, and Paglia doesn't like this - she wants this role for herself. She has often complained about Madonna voicing her opinions; one essay is titled 'Madonna don't preach'. Poor Diana was left, with Paglia's approval to communicate with her eyes. This is sinister really; Paglia's role model for women visibly regressed.

Thus, out of her depth and culture, Paglia resorted further to myth than she did in her more perceptive essays on her own national personages, Brando and Taylor. Consequently, the documentary ended with a fairy tale post-feminist utopia: two palaces, one for Charles (who she had earlier described as 'dog meat') and the other for Diana, where she can have power and boy-toys. Paglia's positive summary of feminism followed, as though it were consistent with this vision: 'Feminism is about woman reaching her potential and exercising her power as much as she can'. It looked as though her definition had changed (become more generous) as her role model regressed to someone who was, at the time, less articulate.

Paglia affords many such interesting quirks of rhetoric and unconscious balancing; it is a timid feminism, Paglia's, after all. And it is worth remembering that she would hate to be accused of timidity, as she is easy to goad.

Meeting the self-made myth, Paglia emerged as not only painfully sensitive to criticism but also surprisingly vulnerable when faced with a taste of her own medicine. Satirist or clown, she seems to fear that she will not be liked. Her eagerness to please may be what makes her ultimately entertaining rather than offensive. Is this the reason why she ended the interview by volunteering the information she is

'officially bisexual'? I wonder if this is to avoid alienating her male admirers (of whom she has many), to make sure she annoys hard-line gay activists, or if she is desperately hoping that people will be interested in her sexuality.

Paglia sets herself up as a joke, one suspects, to pre-empt any loss of personal control. She needs to be the boss, is clearly intolerant and jealous of other people's successes. But her greatest danger to feminism, given the publicity she receives, is that she is blind to her effects on others. Challenge is her forte, not politics, and her appearance on the feminist political scene at this juncture is a salutary warning. It is not worth suspecting her of hidden agendas, she is too impulsive. She is simply convinced that she is more interesting than others, and can, and deserves to be, read as the open book she is.

APPENDIX TWO

INTERVIEW WITH NAOMI WOLF

17th January 1993

By Barbara Kastelein, for The Big Issue

BK: When I saw Fire With Fire, I thought it's about time too. You seem to have a very good knack for timing...

NW: Thank you.

BK: Madonna has had this knack too. Could I consider you as a kind of academic or literary Madonna?

NW: That's very nice of you.

BK: What do you think about Madonna?

NW: I admire things about her. I think that it was probably very helpful for women in the Eighties to have an image of a woman who was completely unashamed about her sexuality, even if one can have mixed feelings about how that was used as a commodity. But I think women really respond to her fearlessness about power, about controlling her own empire, if you like.

BK: I was thinking about the fact that people always comment about your appearance - does that annoy you? I was just going to say that I'm not going to write anything about your appearance. Are you bored of it?

NW: Well I think it's very boring, I think that's the right word. It happens to all feminists as a way of undermining, or calling attention away from, what they have to say and it really has very little to do with me, it's just a standard issue hurdle that the popular culture puts in the way of debate about women's issues.

BK: What do you think of the attitude of older feminists to your work? Because I remember when The Beauty Myth was published here, Joan Smith wrote an unfriendly article about you. What do you feel about that now? Are you still getting those kinds of vibes as time moves on?

NW: I think it's complicated; I think that the Second Wave worked incredibly hard and changed the world and no one ever thanked them. That is not right, and I can understand that if you've spent twenty or thirty years giving young women a life that they never would have had and young women say, 'right, ok well, what's the next thing...', well, that would be irritating. I mean it's irritating in personal relationships between mothers and daughters and it's irritating on a Movement level as well. To that I just want to say: 'Second Wave, thank you'. I completely appreciate everything my foremothers did. I know that my work is based on their work and that my life is based on things that they gave me. At

the same time I know that if the Movement isn't moving forward it's dying and that solutions that were absolutely right in the seventies aren't as relevant to the nineties. By the same token I hope that when I'm forty or fifty, there will be young whipper-snappers annoying the hell out of me! Or else we're really in a state of fossilisation.

BK: So you see the generation gap as a positive?

NW: I do, I guess what I'm trying to say is that men have mythologies about this and it's called the Oedipus myth. Men know that it's healthy for younger men to try to overthrow them and they build institutions in a way that takes that into account, because there's going to be generational tension between younger and older men. And I think that we are so mired in a denial as women about our competitive and aggressive impulses that we're refusing to look at the fact that mothers and daughters have tensions, and that a healthy daughter is one that's in the process of overthrowing her mother, just like the Second Wave overthrew their mothers.

BK: Painful though, isn't it?

NW: I think there's a way to do it. I hope that I'm acknowledging and affirming, and challenging also, some received wisdom that I inherited, and saying 'here's one way forward and if you agree, great; if you don't agree, dissent is important and that strengthens your position'.

BK: I really agree with your term 'victim feminism' in the sense that I think it's a very catchy phrase that people will respond to, and it will certainly wake up women who have a problem with feminism through thinking, 'oh there's victim feminism, but there's not only that', so I can see that it's a very good tool - but at the same time it does sound a little patronising, or perhaps offensive, to women who have been objecting to their victimisation?

NW: I'm not saying 'victim feminism' is a secondary thing, I'm saying that 'victim feminism' and 'power feminism' have always co-existed. All of us waver between the two. There was power feminism hugely in the early seventies... You know I applaud all the legislative victories of the Second Wave, all of the organisation: that's what I call power feminism. Victim feminism isn't championing the rights of victims, I think that is very important. Victim feminism is getting mired into a psychology of self-marginalisation, of eschewing the use of the master's tools, of polarising the genders and I'm not assigning that to any one age group; that's a temptation that we all have.

BK: Do you see yourself as a controversial figure? I was wondering how you compare to Germaine Greer, if you remember the way that she was stereotyped in the seventies because of the way she looked and the problem people have had with her individualism. What do you think of her?

NW: She's a total icon of her... she's a total icon of... for, me... interesting slip... She blazed this trail and in a way The Female Eunuch was the original power

feminist document and Fire With Fire is just very much saying 'let's get back on the track; we've veered off course, and let's go back to first principles which is this flaming individualism and this notion that it is more empowering for women to think for themselves than to follow a party line'. Especially with her courage in relation to owning her own sexuality ... you know whenever I'm getting blasted for asserting my right to be sexual, I always think that she did this twenty years ago and what I'm doing is old hat. That gives me courage. She's a bright, bright star. And I like it that she rejects being appropriated by any one faction.

BK: Do you find that difficult yourself, because obviously you like debate, you're good at mediating between people; on the one hand there's something quite gentle about you. So how do you negotiate that: wanting to compromise and get people to hear different sides of the argument, with the controversy and anger there?

NW: That is an incredibly good question; that is a very insightful question and I really don't have the answer to that because I think those are two sides of me which may actually be two sides of any woman; which maybe is what this book is about. I mean I think that nurturing and facilitating other people's growth and synthesising so that we can all move forward is an incredibly useful skill that we need now, especially when so much debate is polarised. At the same time, there is this part of me, that is a part of any woman - and I hope that Fire With Fire gets through to this - that is absolutely transcendently committed to the expression of my own voice and my own vision, even if that annoys people. In writing the book I always felt the tension between these two things. And I've written subsequently about the tension and I think that when we encourage young women to enter public life and to take a stand, part of the reason that I wrote of my own ambivalence about conflict and controversy, is because it's so important that I don't lie to them and leave them unprepared for the kinds of hurdles that you do have to overcome psychologically in order to feel comfortable having people be angry. So I guess that's my way of saying that what you described as a tension is a tension and we need to acknowledge that it is a tension. Ideally I would like there to be room in my life to build consensus, or to empower others. I would like there to be so much complexity allowed to women that it doesn't feel like a conflict to do both; you know, one day following your Joan of Arc vision and another day sort of helping two friends communicate. That shouldn't have to be contradictory.

BK: A friend of mine asked me to ask you: 'Aren't power feminists the new pop stars?' That is, 'isn't the difference between nineties post- or power-feminism and the original movement of the seventies that it's just a debate conducted in the press, especially the liberal press and has no grass roots movement'. What do you think of that?

NW: I think I understand his question and I think that he hasn't read the book, because many of the examples that I use are precisely grass-roots organising, like local clerical and technical workers who got together to raise their salary and raise their benefits. Some of the other examples are voter registration

drives that went to poor neighbourhoods to give women electoral empowerment. The other examples are Harriet Tubman who was an escaped slave - so it is absolutely a matter of attitude rather than ...

BK: Are these contemporary examples?

NW: The first two I gave you are contemporary. I mean to come back to... consumer activism: who are consumers? Housewives. You know, working class women are spending the bulk of the consumer dollar in this country, and that's a way for them to use the power that they have, that they have every single day when they go to the supermarket.

BK: What I thought, coming out from this naming different kinds of feminism, what about the disadvantages of divide-and-rule? Don't you lend yourself to the game of one-up-manship? I know that it is very difficult to control what the media says and writes about you, but that is just what's going to happen, and they're going to enjoy the battle between what Naomi Wolf thinks and somebody else, and they are going to accentuate the differences.

NW: OK, here's why I wrote this book and why I think dissent is so important in feminism: men are not given the obligation to write one letter to the world, and all men in Britain aren't expected to agree on what that letter to the world would be. Men take up 85 percent of the media space to have their debates and it's assumed that men are individuals with different points of view. I've seen this Movement choke and choke and choke on enforced consensus, and choke on hiding our dirty linen because we don't want them to use our differences of opinion against us. What I'm saying is: demand 51 percent of the media space to have our differences of opinion, because it's only by having principled responsible debate that we're going to move forward, and, frankly, it's only by having real debate that people are going to be interested in the Women's Movement. Because, if you keep mouthing the same old ... I mean, if there were like six soundbites that are permissible, you know, and acceptable, that won't get you in trouble with your sisters! - Why should anyone tune in? - Those soundbites are increasingly out of sync with real women's lived experience.

BK: You think we still need the term 'Feminism' as a banner? Why?

NW: Yes, I do. Here's why: because no matter what word you would use to describe the struggle by women for equality, historically, that word will get sullied by people who don't want women to be equal. You see this happening, whenever women take a step forward - like in '20, '21 ... the vote - the word feminism got blackened and then the next generation came and said 'well, we don't want that nasty word, we don't want anything to do with it'. What happens then? You have no word with which to describe a movement for women's equality and so women languish in isolation for the next thirty years until it gets revived again. I think what we have to do is just insist on redefining it; back to first principles: a human rights, a civil rights movement which is the logical extension of equality; every woman's right to determine her own life and, if

that's how we define it, every woman's choice, then: a) very few women are going to disagree with it; b) you'd have to be a fascist to object to it; and c) it's a way of making sure that we're not spinning our wheels historically. There's never going to be a nice, acceptable word to describe women taking away men's power base.

BK: Talking about fascism, not that I'm calling Margaret Thatcher a fascist, but I would like to know your opinions on her as a woman, and to get on then to a personal question that I really wanted to ask you, which is what do you see as the difference, or the greatest difference between American and British feminism?

I'd like to know first, to what extent do you write for a British audience, but I'd also like to know if you think that, for us having ten years of a woman in power, who wasn't for women, but who was a strong woman, that this was very confusing for women of my generation, who are considered 'Thatcher's children', i.e. women in their late twenties and early thirties?

NW: I lived in Britain off and on for five years. I wrote The Beauty Myth in that time, and a lot of the criticism of the feminist subculture came from my work in feminist British grass roots, so I think it's very relevant to Britain...

BK: So you were not writing the book primarily for an American audience?

NW: No, I really do feel that I live in both cultures and, in many ways, I wrote the book with an eye to British women being able to draw the benefit of what's been going on in the United States without going through the social upheaval. In other words, what works in the United States is what can work in Britain, and I am trying to alert women in Britain to this. For instance, Emily's List U.K. which is, I think, the big saviour, has just started up here and I would like to let every woman in Britain know that that's the answer; that is what worked in the United States and it's what will work here.

It seems like British feminism is mostly articulated by the Socialist left and that there's long been a belief that the collapse of capitalism and the collapse of gender inequality are linked, which brings us to a real problem with British feminism, as I understand it, which is that since 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union, that's not a plausible answer anymore, and so I think that ...

BK: There's always been an uneasy marriage between British feminism and socialism; I think feminism can recuperate more easily than the male British socialist side of it...

NW: That's for sure, absolutely, but I think one thing feminism has to do in Britain is to shed its attachment to a Marxist solution, because that isn't going to happen, and to do what I recommend, which is seize the market place, as a way to empower women.

BK: But that isn't the only strategy surely?

NW: No, of course not, also engage in money politics, engage in electoral uprising, a reader uprising, and all these things that have nothing to do with having access to money. But I specify money just because Marxists tend to shun engagement, and that isn't going to get us anywhere at this point. I think that also it's very important for feminists in Britain to stop thinking that the Left owns feminism? Just as - I'm getting a lot of flak for this but I know that it's true - there is such a thing as Republican feminism; it's kind of individualistic, entrepreneurial, and they're so estranged from the Women's Movement, because the Women's Movement is always determined to be only left wing. If you look at Thatcher, she said some really quite remarkable things about women's autonomy that I think women on the left ignore at their peril. For example, she says, she never understood why feminists oppose the paternalism of men, but have no problem with the paternalism of the State. And she's kind of got a point! Is welfare dependency for women more empowering than, say, financial autonomy for women? You know, I don't think that it is! I'm not saying that we don't need a Welfare State, I'm left-liberal, I think we do but, there's a kind of individualistic, entrepreneurial power feminism, if you like, which I think that a lot of socially conservative women feel, and that feminism would be a lot more powerful if it was willing to build coalitions across party lines. That's my point. But I don't think that simply having a woman in power making sure that other women don't get into power is a great victory for women.

BK: No, I think it is so confusing that other women become ambivalent about that kind of political power. I think that a lot of women have a good instinct regarding their own power and it seems that one of the problems of feminism is that it is, or has been, patronising towards large numbers of women. And it can underrate, and has underestimated, women in the appearance of championing women ...

NW: Well, exactly. I mean I'm really sick of hearing feminists say that certain women's views are false consciousness ...

BK: One thing I was going to ask, you talk about power feminism, what about revenge feminism? About women taking the law into their own hands. This has surfaced in the British press, and probably in America as well, with a focus on women killers - women serial killers are the top sensationalist end of it - but, I'm also thinking that 'Fire With Fire' has a Biblical ring to it, like 'an eye for an eye' and I wondered if that was deliberate, or where it comes from? From the early nineties women who have killed abusive men have been a big issue over here. The press find it problematic, and most men just can't deal with it at all. What are your opinions on these issues? Do you think a woman should be convicted if she murders a man who raped and abused her? Do you think rapists should be castrated?

NW: There's a strong thread which I hope I made clear in Fire With Fire explaining that one reason for the political events of about two years ago, is that women have begun to have retaliation fantasies. We saw these movies like Extremities, Burning Bed, Fatal Attraction, even Basic Instinct, Sleeping With The Enemy and Thelma and Louise. I worked in a rape crisis centre and when

victimised women start to get better, they often fantasise about revenge against the assailant. It's a sign of mental health. The danger is when this is taken too literally. For instance I think it's very wrong for feminists to be marching in support a woman who cut off her husband's penis ... I just think that the right response is to acknowledge that that's the dark side emerging, and to direct that energy toward retaliation on a political level, i.e., instead of cutting off someone's penis, you put teeth in the laws that make it a crime to batter a spouse. What we saw in the election returns in the United States is that women leaders were being elected on the theme of retaliation for what Anita Hill had been put through and, again that's what I'm encouraging British women to do, to understand that if they're angry at being put down in their lives, it's not the most effective thing to direct that anger personally at the men in their lives although there's certainly room for argument. And it's not that effective to fight all alone in the workplace; it's incredibly effective to exact your vengeance at the ballot box ...

BK: One of the articles that came out here on your new book, had a box listing the characteristics of victim feminism and included man-hating in it - is that what's wrong with man-hating then, that it's not effective?

NW: Well, I think it's fine to express anger in a cathartic way. I think it's fine in private subversive conversations, or even in public subversive conversations, to acknowledge and express generalised anger. I think that hatred of any group that is generalised is racism, it's sexism, it's anti-Semitism, it's homophobia. It comes back to taking responsibility for the dark side. I think it's very important for us to acknowledge that it gives us a vicarious sense of catharsis to hear that an alleged rapist's penis was cut off, and acknowledging that it's very different from institutionalising that kind of behaviour or generalising about men in any way that we wouldn't want to be generalised about. What I'm trying to say is that it's all to do with how much power you think you have; if you think you are completely powerless it is incredibly subversive to do to men what men do to us. But when you are on the verge of taking 51 percent of the power, or you can, then it starts to have real consequences. What I object to is a feminism that, even as other women are not yet taking the power that is at their disposal, will do things like say to a man, 'oh, you can't join this discussion; you're the enemy, you're the oppressor', you know, 'all men are potential rapists'. This is not accurate and it's not humanistic.

BK: There are times when I really appreciate being in an only-women space...

NW: There's nothing wrong with that...

BK: But men still have a bit of a problem with that, don't they?

NW: Well, too bad! All I'm saying is that the goal of feminism shouldn't be separatism. I think it's absolutely fine to have your own spaces ...

BK: So you acknowledge that it's a fair strategy, or part of the process, for women to adopt separatism?

NW: Absolutely. I would go further, I think that women have to create alternative power networks because men are not going to let us in to their power networks.

BK: Who do you think are women's greatest enemies currently - which social institutions?

NW: Well, in Britain what amazes me is that corporations can and do discriminate against women with, it seems, no repercussions. For instance I just read in, like, page eight of The Guardian what should be front page news: which is that the BBC pays women in comparable positions 25 percent less than it pays men! And that's a government institution. So I think that it's the judiciary, I guess, I don't know enough about the British system, but the Equal Employment Commission seems to be putting no obstacles in the way of mass and systematic discrimination, and that's women's biggest enemy. And that is what women need to scream and yell about at the ballot box here in Britain because it seems as though there's literally no disincentive for corporations to root out sex discrimination, and as long as women know that they have no recourse in the workplace, they will just not have the power.

BK: To change the subject a little, I spoke to Susan Faludi about a year ago and she said something along the lines of: 'men tend to overestimate women's power while women underestimate it' ...

NW: I disagree with her. I think women underestimate women's power and men do not overestimate women's power.

BK: What do you think men's attitudes are towards women's power, do you think they might underestimate it as well?

NW: No. See, Susan pointed out that it takes two women in a room full of a hundred men, and the men start freaking out, and her conclusion is that men are overestimating the power of those two women. I don't think that's what's happening; I think men are freaking out at that point because they know perfectly well that if they don't freak out at that point, it will be 51 percent women, and then they will lose their power base. They also know that women now, in a democratic capitalist society have the power to force open the doors, and are just not using it. So men know that their power base is provisional at this point ...

BK: What do you think of conspiracy theories? What you just said sounds like it might be leaning towards a conspiracy theory...

NW: No, come on! It doesn't take a conspiracy theory - look at South Africa! Look: the white people don't sit around saying, 'well, let us secretly keep black people from taking ...', you know, it's obvious to everyone! 'They're the majority, we won't have all this stuff if they have their share of the stuff, and so, what can we do to prevent it?' The point I'm trying to make is that women tend to

overpersonalise the struggle with men; they don't understand that no ruling class has ever given up power without a fight. If you and I ran the world, we would be scheming to keep him out [the photographer]...

...It's much more comfortable for us to say, 'oh, look, we're standing still as the evil backlash hits us on the head', when in fact we are not standing still! We're dismantling the theological superstructure. We've got to think about our status as the majority: when we get equality, they will be the minority. And it's not like any other group getting equality.

BK: Then what's to stop us keeping them out, just as they did to us?

NW: Well, that's why my feminism is so humanistic and, I hope, fair because I really believe that if we're going to deserve it, we need a social contract that's fair to men as well as women.

BK: How do you get on with Susan Faludi? Do you feel that you're competing, have you debated together?

NW: We've appeared together. As I say, I respect her immensely. I think she's a very gifted reporter and writer, and I think her book was really important, and I think she's great! I think that there's room in feminism for many voices and I think that it's good for there to be many positions, and that I think that our positions were more similar in our last two books. Men take it for granted that they can have rich, intellectual friendships with people that are about argument rather than about consensus.

BK: Where do your ideas fit into New Age beliefs in general? 'Power feminism' sounds a little bit like a legacy from the eighties in the sense of 'power dressing' ... it might sound materialistic to people, or uncomfortably like eighties post-feminism, or individualistic feminism.

NW: But that's not what the book is about You know that I'm talking about using power for social justice.

BK: What do you think about women's spiritual power, the more mystical aspects of women's power, if you like? i.e., the less visible, the less obvious aspects of it?

NW: OK. What I think is that spiritual life is immensely important for all of us to find now as we hurtle towards the millenium, and - just as I think women don't have any innate talent for housekeeping, and men can't share child-rearing - I'm completely unconvinced that women have higher or more special spiritual powers that men don't have. If you look at all the great humanistic religious traditions from Buddha to Jesus, the life of spirit is not gendered.

BK: One last question, you don't believe that women's strength lies in the fact that some men don't see women's strength?

NW: It would be great if women knew their strength and men didn't. That would give us a tactical advantage, but since alerting women to their strength means inevitably that men will be alerted that women are being alerted to their strength, there's no way round that! And anyway, I think that the fight should be fair.