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# (E)Merging Identities: The Dynamics of Female Friendship in Contemporary Fiction by Women

Elizabeth Abel

For if Chloe likes Olivia and Mary Carmichael knows how to express it she will light a torch in that vast chamber where nobody has yet been. [VIRGINIA WOOLF, *A Room of One's Own*]

In the half century since Virginia Woolf perceived this literary cavern, women novelists have been shining lights into the dark. Critics, however, have fallen behind. While feminist social scientists have culled from letters and journals evidence of the intensity and power of female friendships, especially in nineteenth-century America, feminist literary critics have focused more exclusively on the mother-daughter bond.<sup>1</sup> My goal is to illuminate the dynamics of women's friendships as they shape

1. There have, however, been some significant recent additions to the literary study of female friendship. In *Among Women* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1980), Louise Bernikow devotes a chapter to "Friends," but concentrates primarily on friendships between women writers; in *Women's Friendship in Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press,

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EDITORS' NOTE: Working with Nancy Chodorow's interpretation of the mother-daughter relationship, Elizabeth Abel uses object relations theory to explain the dynamics of women's friendships in several novels. At the same time, she offers a preoedipal psychoanalytic model for the creative process in all writers—one very different from Harold Bloom's strongly masculinist, oedipal theory of creative indebtedness. Judith Gardiner's response to Abel shows interesting parallels with the sociological critiques of Chodorow's theory, also in this issue.

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and are shaped by the contemporary female literary imagination.<sup>2</sup> I have selected for close analysis recent novels that explore women's relationships as a serious and central issue in a variety of cultural contexts: Doris Lessing's *The Four-gated City* and *The Golden Notebook*, Christa Wolf's *The Quest for Christa T.*, Ruth Praver Jhabvala's *Heat and Dust*, and Toni Morrison's *Sula*. I have deliberately chosen to call attention to less familiar works that reveal the psychological underpinnings of female friendship rather than to works that display a primarily ironic attitude toward friendship, such as Fay Weldon's *Female Friends* and Joan Didion's *The Book of Common Prayer*, or to works that use friendship largely as a device for representing alternative female life choices, as do Mary McCarthy's *The Group*, Marge Piercy's *Small Changes*, and Paule Marshall's "Reena."<sup>3</sup> The broadest implications of this analysis suggest a link between a characteristically feminine response to same-sex relationships and the particular orientation of much contemporary psychoanalytic and literary theory. Female bonding exemplifies a mode of relational self-definition whose increasing prominence is evident in the revival of psychoanalytic interest in object-relations theory and in the dynamics of transference and countertransference, as well as in the growth of literary emphasis on theories of influence and intertextuality.

Female friendship has become a trendy topic for filmmakers, but such recent films as *The Turning Point*, *Girlfriends*, *Julia*, and *One Sings, the*

1980), Janet Todd provides a very thorough and illuminating analysis of female friendship in eighteenth-century English and French fiction; in *Communities of Women: An Idea in Fiction* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978), Nina Auerbach also addresses the question of female bonding, but focuses on female communities rather than on individual friendships. The portrayal of female relationships by male novelists has been analyzed by Lillian Faderman in "Female Same-Sex Relationships in Novels by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Oliver Wendell Holmes and Henry James," *New England Quarterly* 51 (September 1978): 309-32.

2. Since the literary representation of psychological processes shifts in response to historical variables, I have limited this analysis to a sample of twentieth-century fiction by women. The conventions of nineteenth-century fiction tended to fit the portrayal of female friendship into the narrative progression toward the marriage of the heroine(s), limiting the potential scope and depth of the female relationship, while real geographic and social limitations on the pool of available friends shaped these friendships and their literary portraits in ways different from their twentieth-century counterparts.

3. The last three examples conform to a traditional novelistic use of female friendship, a use that predominates in some of the major turn-of-the-century novels by American women. In these works the protagonist's relation to her friends is less significant than the rather schematic options these friends often represent. Thus the heroine of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* is neatly situated between two friends who represent the single artist and the "mother-woman"; the heroine of Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* stands similarly immobilized between the unpalatable drabness of the virtuous Gertie Farish and the unscrupulous self-aggrandizement of the glamorous Bertha Dorset. The twentieth-century works which I discuss privilege the dynamics of the friends' interactions rather than the static function of emblematic secondary characters.

*Other One Doesn't* subordinate the actual friendship to an exploration of the different choices women make and the effects of this divergence on the relationship. The impression created by these films, and by works of fiction that use female friendship primarily as a device for exploring the differing trajectories of women's lives, is that women seek complementarity rather than commonality in their friends. This emphasis on complementarity, however, is a misleading by-product of primarily narrative and thematic considerations. Narrative interest encourages the differentiation of the female protagonists, and concern with the fragmentation implicit in the exclusive quality of women's roles makes dividing the female character into different "friends" an attractive strategy. Serious novels that focus on the actual friendships of women, however, suggest that identification replaces complementarity as the psychological mechanism that draws women together. Though it was Cicero who described friendship as a mingling of souls "as almost to create one person out of two," this description characterizes the dynamics of female friendship more accurately than male.<sup>4</sup> Lily Briscoe's (unfulfilled) desire in *To the Lighthouse* to merge with, not know about, Mrs. Ramsay demonstrates this feature of women's relationships:

What art was there, known to love or cunning, by which one pressed through into those secret chambers? What device for becoming, like waters poured into one jar, inextricably the same, one with the object one adored? Could the body achieve, or the mind, subtly

4. Cicero, *From Friend to Friend: An Essay on Friendship* (New York: Dodge Publishing Co., n.d.), p. 111. An analysis of literary portrayals of male as well as female friendship is beyond the scope of a single article. Sociological studies of male and female friendship, however, suggest that female friendships are emotionally deeper and involve a higher level of self-disclosure, while male relationships tend to be more instrumental, oriented toward purposive group activity rather than intimate verbal sharing. See Alan Booth, "Sex and Social Participation," *American Sociological Review* 37 (April 1972): 183-92; Mirra Komarovsky, *Dilemmas of Masculinity: A Study of College Youth* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1976); Lionel Tiger and Robin Fox, *The Imperial Animal* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1971); Phyllis Chesler, *About Men* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1978); Herb Goldberg, *The Hazards of Being Male: Surviving the Myth of Masculine Privilege* (New York: Nash Publishing Corp., 1976). Literary evidence reinforces this distinction. When male friendships are intimate in nineteenth-century fiction (as in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *Moby Dick*), the intimacy tends to be instigated by the friend whose racial otherness enables him to play the conventionally feminine affective role. Closeness between men in twentieth-century fiction is generally either limited (as in *The Sun Also Rises*), or fails (as in *Women in Love*, *Of Mice and Men*, or *Humboldt's Gift*), or achieves an aesthetic rather than emotional fulfillment (as in *Absalom! Absalom!*). Group activity usually supersedes individual bonds. Louise Bernikow characterizes the difference between male and female friendship as follows: "Their eyes are forward, like the eyes of men marching to war, fixed not on each other but on what is out there. They are shoulder to shoulder. Female friends are more often eye to eye. It is the creation of 'us' that is important, we *two*—and in this very different arrangement lie the great depths and the great raptures of our friendship" (p. 119).

mingling in the intricate passages of the brain? or the heart? Could loving, as people called it, make her and Mrs. Ramsay one? for it was not knowledge but unity that she desired, not inscriptions on tablets, nothing that could be written in any language known to men, but intimacy itself, which is knowledge, she had thought, leaning her head on Mrs. Ramsay's knee.<sup>5</sup>

Through the intimacy which is knowledge, friendship becomes a vehicle of self-definition for women, clarifying identity through relation to an other who embodies and reflects an essential aspect of the self.

Recent feminist psychoanalytic theory provides a clue to the importance of same-sex friendship in female identity formation. In exploring the effects of maternal responsibility for early child care, Dorothy Dinnerstein in *The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise* and Nancy Chodorow in *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* uncover the origins of enduring female bonds.<sup>6</sup> Dinnerstein is concerned with male as well as female psychological development and thus with the quality of much human experience, Chodorow with the specific structure of the female child's psychological world. Chodorow's approach is more systematic and also more pertinent to this study, but many of her conclusions about female relationships are suggested more sketchily by Dinnerstein as well. Neither writer, however, takes the final step in asserting the influence of female bonding.

The question Chodorow attempts to answer is why women mother. Rejecting biological explanations as inadequate, she adopts a psychoanalytic approach, specifically that of object-relations theory, which emphasizes the relation of the psyche to the social context in which

5. Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1927), p. 79. This desire is unrealized in *To the Lighthouse*, partly because of the difference between the two characters, who are used by Woolf to represent alternative female attitudes. The feeling, however, is a leitmotif of female friends in fiction. The intensity of identification increases as erotic feelings enter the relationship. Thus Nora cries in Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*, "A man is another person—a woman is yourself, caught as you turn in panic; on her mouth you kiss your own. If she is taken you cry that you have been robbed of yourself" ([New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1937], p. 143); Anaïs Nin explains in the first volume of her diary, "The love between women is a refuge and an escape into harmony and narcissism in place of conflict. . . . It is, in a way, self-love. I love June because she is the woman I would like to be" (*The Diary of Anaïs Nin, 1931–1934*, ed. Gunther Stuhlmann [New York: Swallow Press, 1966], p. 41); and the narrator of Monique Wittig's *Le Corps lesbien* exclaims, "j/e te suis j/e te viens j/e t'approche, j/ai forcé le passage, m/on sang alors se mêle au tien" ([Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1973], p. 100).

6. Dorothy Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976); Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978).

it develops. For both male and female infants, this context consists almost exclusively of the mother, but the mother responds differently to son and daughter, identifying much more closely with the child of her own sex. In psychoanalytic parlance, she cathects her daughter as a narcissistic extension of herself, her son as a more clearly differentiated sexual other. Because of the identification between mother and daughter, the female child has difficulty establishing definite ego boundaries; the primary sense of self she develops and carries through her life is one of self-in-representation. One of the major contributions of object-relations theory is its emphasis on the significance of the preoedipal phase of development, in which the relation with the mother is primary. Chodorow argues that the girl's preoedipal attachment to her mother, an attachment more intimate and prolonged than the boy's, is crucial in determining her sense of identity and her experience of the oedipal phase, which, like the preoedipal, is not equivalent for girls and boys. While the boy finally represses his eventually sexual feelings for his mother because he both fears paternal anger and desires the benefits of masculine identification, the girl does not abandon her attachment to her mother, but rather adds to it her libidinal attachment to her father (which Chodorow argues is itself a product of the daughter's need for freedom from her symbiosis with her mother) in a more complex triadic relationship. Both mother and father remain love objects for the girl, whose development, Chodorow claims, will be marked by oscillation between the preoedipal mother-related concerns of fusion and separation and the oedipal concerns of male-female relationships. Because she does not give up her preoedipal bond with her mother, the girl maintains her earliest relational mode of primary identification and continues to experience permeable ego boundaries and to define herself relationally.<sup>7</sup> In its negative extreme, however, this enduring preoedipal connection can intensify the opposite impulse toward a bounded, separate identity.

In contrast to the girl's process of relational self-definition, masculine development depends on the denial of the relation with the mother and thus of relatedness in general, for the boy's bond with his typically distant father does not replace his early intimacy with his mother. Consequently, men are particularly ill-prepared to satisfy the deep and complex relational needs of women, who retain both the desire and capacity for fusion and the more specific desire for union with the mother, a bond that heterosexual love can partially restore only for men. As a result, Chodorow claims, women tend to find men erotically pri-

7. This most central point of Chodorow's is also made in different terms by Jungian psychologists. See Anna Belford Ulanov, *The Feminine in Jungian Psychology and in Christian Theology* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1971); and Erich Neumann, "The Psychological Stages of Feminine Development," *Spring* (1959), pp. 63-97.

mary but emotionally secondary, or at most equal to other women, who offer the best solution to the need for identification that originated in relation to another woman.

Chodorow turns this radical assertion of women's centrality to each other's psychic wholeness into an explanation of the urge to mother: through her intense relation with her child, a mother reexperiences her union with her mother. Chodorow's conclusion is certainly plausible, but her course toward this conclusion leads her to underestimate the role of women's friendships in fulfilling the desire for identification. Chodorow asserts that "one way that women fulfill these needs [for fusion] is through the creation and maintenance of important personal relationships with other women. . . . Women tend to have closer personal ties with each other than men have. . . . In our society there is some sociological evidence that women's friendships are affectively richer than men's" (p. 200). However, she later qualifies this statement by claiming that "women's desires for intense primary relationships tend not to be with other women, both because of internal and external taboos on homosexuality and because of women's isolation from their primary female kin (especially mothers) and other women" (pp. 203-4). Chodorow's need to explain the desire to mother leads her to blur her powerful distinction between erotic and emotional primacy: the taboo on homosexuality might effect a separation between female friend and sexual partner, but it need not qualify the emotional significance of the friendship. This taboo, moreover, is diminishing, as is female isolation in the face of women's deliberate efforts to sustain relationships with one another. Recent fiction by women points to the alternative that Chodorow slights: women friends, as well as children, play a crucial role in relaxing ego boundaries and restoring psychic wholeness. Identification, especially with a woman who is older or who is perceived as either older or wiser, is essential in these novels to the achievement of the central figure's full identity.

The process of identification shapes the emotional and philosophical core of Doris Lessing's novel *The Four-gated City*, in which the friendship of Martha and Lynda is both the agent of Martha's enlightenment and a paradigm of relatedness derived from a specifically feminine mode of identification. By discovering in Lynda an aspect of her own identity, Martha enters a relationship which differs from that of the novel's adult male characters, who react to Lynda with a mixture of compassion and detachment, clearly distinguishing her "madness" from their "sanity." The ironically named Dr. Lamb provides the clearest example of the scientific, objective attitude that is undermined by the conclusion of the novel and revealed as self-serving in Lessing's description of his therapeutic practice. Mark's response to Lynda, though anguished, echoes Dr. Lamb's insistence on maintaining objectivity and holding "reality" before the patient's eyes. Martha's relation to Lynda, in

contrast, is fluid, open, and nonhierarchical. When she imitates Lynda by bending down to drink out of a saucer, Martha not only avoids judging Lynda's action, but also takes the risk of throwing off her rational guard, thereby uncovering a portion of herself. Martha's understanding of Lynda depends on her understanding of the ground they share, and this she must discover through her own experience. In striving to know Lynda, Martha comes to know herself, and through this self-knowledge finally understands Lynda's past, which Lessing withholds until it can be rendered through Martha's empathic imagination, the antithesis of Dr. Lamb's external clinical judgments. Not knowledge, pleads Lily Briscoe, but intimacy, which is knowledge, though Lessing insists that intimacy requires common experience. The union achieved by Martha and Lynda becomes an emblem of the breakthrough essential to human survival, the transformation of the brain from a "machine which works in division" to the unified and unifying organism invoked by the Sufi tale that forms the dedication of the novel.<sup>8</sup>

Lessing's juxtaposition of Martha's response to Lynda with Dr. Lamb's attitude toward his patients draws attention to a significant dimension of women's friendships: their affinity with the analytic relationship. Both relationships generate understanding through intimacy and the collaborative construction of meaning from experience, but the differences between the two modes of interaction clarify the particular dynamics of female friendship. In classical Freudian analysis, the roles of patient and analyst are clearly differentiated. The patient provides the "raw material" of the analysis—dreams, free associations, and contemporary conscious reactions—and the analyst constructs from these a picture of the patient's past; Freud likens the analyst's work to the archaeologist's.<sup>9</sup> The interpretive work of the analyst requires an empathic response to the patient as well as superior organizational capacities. Empathy, however, is not identification. Despite considerable recent controversy on this subject, the classical Freudian position holds that the analyst's role is to interpret, not reflect, the patient's unconscious. The analyst may undergo a brief "regression in the service of the ego" or a "trial identification" with the patient in order to facilitate a sense of the patient's experience, but must guard against developing a chronic identification that would damage objectivity and thus analytic competence.<sup>10</sup> The most extreme formulation of analytic detachment is Freud's

8. Doris Lessing, *The Four-gated City* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1969), p. 496.

9. Sigmund Freud, "Construction in Analysis," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1958), 23:259.

10. The arguments for and against identification are summarized by Otto Kernberg in *Borderline Conditions and Pathological Narcissism* (New York: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1975), chap. 2. The phrase "regression in the service of the ego" is René Spitz's adaptation of Ernest Kris in "Countertransference: Comments on Its Varying Role in the Analytic Situation," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 4, no. 2 (1956): 256-65. "Trial

proposal of the "surgeon, who puts aside all his feelings, even his human sympathy" as the model for the analyst.<sup>11</sup> Although Freud at other times denies that objectivity entails indifference, and though most analysts deny the possibility of perfect objectivity, the classical view accepts the goal of minimizing the expression of the analyst's personality. Countertransference, or the transference of the analyst's unconscious feelings to the patient whose responses unintentionally evoke them, is generally perceived as a problem to be dealt with and ideally dissipated by the analyst's self-analysis. Though some analysts maintain that countertransference can be enlightening for both patient and analyst, and many insist that the analyst's total response to the patient is essential to the therapeutic process, the orthodox position continues to view countertransference as a more disruptive than beneficial complication.<sup>12</sup> The analyst may gain self-knowledge through awareness of the countertransference, but often at the expense of the patient's therapy. This incongruence indicates one important difference between the characteristic processes of therapy and friendship. While women friends in fiction frequently adopt roles analogous to those of patient and analyst, one providing the raw data of experience and the other providing inter-

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identification" is Robert Fliess's term in "The Metapsychology of the Analyst," *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 11, no. 2 (1942): 211-27. See also Robert Fliess, "Countertransference and Counteridentification," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 1, no. 2 (1953): 263-84, and Annie Reich, "Further Remarks on Counter-Transference," *Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 41, nos. 4-5 (1960): 389-96.

11. Sigmund Freud, "Recommendations to Physicians Practicing Psycho-Analysis," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1958), 12:115.

12. The question of countertransference has been much debated. For a historical perspective on the various positions, see Douglass W. Orr, "Transference and Countertransference: A Historical Survey," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 2, no. 4 (1954): 621-70. For a summary of the outlines of the controversy, see Kernberg, chap. 2. The negative position is represented in the articles cited in n. 9 above. Positive evaluations of the role of countertransference may be found in Julia Tower, "Countertransference," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 4, no. 2 (1954): 222-55; André Green, "The Analyst, Symbolization, and Absence in the Analytic Setting (On Changes in Analytic Practice and Analytic Experience)," *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 56 (1975): 1-22; and Hans Loewald, "Psychoanalytic Theory and Psychoanalytic Process," *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child* 25 (1970): 45-68. Jacques Lacan also insists on the crucial role of countertransference in the analytic process. See especially his essay "Intervention sur le transfert," in *Écrits* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1966), pp. 215-26. There has been considerable recent interest in the general role of countertransference outside as well as inside the strictly psychoanalytic context. See, for example, Arthur F. Marotti, "Countertransference, the Communication Process, and the Dimensions of Psychoanalytic Criticism," *Critical Inquiry* 4 (Spring 1978): 471-89, and George Devereux, *From Anxiety to Method in the Behavioral Sciences* (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1967). There has also been strong opposition to the requirement of analytic impersonality from several psychological schools whose orientation is not Freudian. The therapeutic models suggested by R. D. Laing and Carl Rogers approximate the mutuality characteristic of female friendship, though the process of self-discovery remains less reciprocal.

pretation, these roles are interchangeable and ultimately indistinguishable. Martha is alternately Lynda's "analyst" when constructing the story of Lynda's past and her "patient" when following her guidance into madness. Identification in friendship becomes a means of mutual recognition instead of an obstacle to objectivity, and interpretation turns into a self-reflexive enterprise as each psyche gains definition through relation to the other.

Two works of fiction meriting closer critical attention in this country, *The Quest for Christa T.* by Christa Wolf and *Heat and Dust* by Ruth Praver Jhabvala, explore this process thoughtfully in different cultural contexts. In *The Quest for Christa T.* Christa Wolf, a major East German literary figure, examines the interrelationship of female friends through the story of a narrator's attempts to reconstruct the life of a close friend who has died. The narrator has to interpret the meaning of this life from the "raw materials" of her friend's journals, letters, and manuscripts, as well as her own often uncomfortably different memories. This interpretive process, however, requires the projection of self into other and thus some reshaping of the narrator's identity. The mirroring relationship of narrator and friend is initially suggested by the author's choice of her own first name, inevitably associated with the unnamed first-person narrator, to the title character. The dynamics of interrelationship replace those of biography, as Christa Wolf herself explains: "Later on, I noticed that the object of my story was not at all, or did not remain so clearly herself, Christa T. I suddenly faced myself. The relations between 'us'—Christa T. and the narrator 'I'—shifted of themselves into the center. . . . If I were a mathematician I should probably speak of a 'function.'"<sup>13</sup>

Wolf alerts us to the basic problem of the novel by the epigraph she chooses from Johannes Becher: "The coming-to-oneself—what is it?"<sup>14</sup> Ostensibly, the epigraph characterizes Christa T.'s search for self; yet it applies as well to the narrator's attempt to understand her friend and consequent discovery of her own individuality. The opening sentences extend the ambiguity: "The quest for her: in the thought of her. And of the attempt to be oneself" (p. 3), or in the richer German: "Nachdenken, ihr nach-denken. Dem Versucht man selbst zu sein" (p. 7). Immediately, Wolf suggests the inescapably subjective dimension of human knowing; only the narrator's mental act will reveal her friend to her. The interrelation of self and other is heightened in the German by the division of "nachdenken" into two words, calling attention, as does the dative case, to the force of the prefix, which suggests "in conformity with" as well as

13. Christa Wolf, "Interview with Myself," in *The Reader and the Writer: Essays, Sketches, Memories*, trans. Joan Becker (New York: International Publishers, 1977), pp. 76-77.

14. Christa Wolf, *The Quest for Christa T.*, trans. Christopher Middleton (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1970), originally published as *Nachdenken über Christa T.* (Halle/Saale: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1968).

the more literal meaning of "after." Thinking about someone shades into thinking as that person does. This mental mirroring becomes increasingly complex as the quest for Christa T. suggests "the attempt to be oneself," a potential contradiction resolved in the following sentence, which attributes the words to Christa T. The author omits transitions between the minds of these two characters to imply the disappearance of mental barriers as the reconstructive task becomes a self-constructive one.

The reasons for this psychic fusion initially derive from the nature of intimate relationships, epitomized by Wolf in female friendship. Early in the novel the narrator freezes the action in an emblematic tableau of herself and Christa T. and comments:

One would be able to guess, from the picture, that under such a sky people can easily lose one another. And that we would soon be doing just that: losing one another and ourselves. The ingenuous open heart preserves one's ability to say "I" to a stranger, until a moment comes when this strange "I" returns and enters into "me" again. Then at one blow the heart is captive, one is prepossessed; that much can be foretold. Perhaps all our going out and coming in teaches us to repeat this moment. Perhaps it makes sense that Christa T., Khrischan, should be repeating it again.<sup>15</sup>

The description moves from the general sense of diffused ego boundaries experienced by the girls to the actual transformations wrought by intimate exchanges and expressed in the combination of "strange(r)" and "I" ("fremde Ich"). The ingenuous open heart has belonged to the narrator, who admires the older girl's more clearly defined sense of self and who changes in the process of identifying with her. The surprising but characteristic movement of the final sentence, however, asserts the reciprocity of the exchange as the present tense suggests the entrance of Christa T. into the narrator's contemporary self-perception. If emotional intimacy blurs ego boundaries, especially in the adolescent's internalization of an idealized friend, memory diffuses them even further. The adult narrator intermingles details from her own experience with those from Christa T.'s as she abandons the unachievable goal of objectivity and begins to fashion Christa T. imaginatively. The psychic field they share, sowed in adolescence by identification, now grows through imaginative projection until their mental barriers become completely permeable in the concluding dream incorporating both women's psychic

15. Wolf, *The Quest for Christa T.*, p. 14. In German the crucial third sentence reads: "So dass man ungerührt 'ich' sagt zu einem Fremden, die unbefangene bewahrt, bis zu einem Augenblick, da dieses fremde Ich zu mir zurückkehren und wieder in mich eingehen wird" (*Nachdenken über Christa T.*, p. 20). The use of quotes exclusively around the first "ich" differentiates it more clearly from the "fremde Ich" and suggests a more harmonious relation with the accusative "mich."

lives. By projecting her own experience into the mold of Christa T., the narrator gives shape to her own life as well. In a telling passage that concludes the major portion of the novel, Wolf provides another characteristic ambiguity that reveals the mutual effect of this relationship: "The goal of this account of Christa T. was to find her—and to lose her again. To know both and to accept both. . . . To withdraw her support, having just made certain of it. Or to be certain of it only then" (pp. 98–99). The support, we expect, is provided to Christa T. by the narrator's imaginative enterprise; yet it is also granted by Christa T.'s provision of an alter ego that refines and clarifies the narrator's self-image.

The narrator's imaginative exploration actually forms a parallel between her mode of self-discovery and that of Christa T., who uses fictional sketches to grant form to her experience. For greater flexibility in shaping her persona, Christa T. writes only in the third person, the "she" who allows the author to explore possibilities concretely and objectively. Like the narrator, Christa T. experiences the "difficulty of saying 'I'" (p. 170); both women overcome it by defining their experience in terms of an alternative, reflecting self. This approach also resolves the dilemma confronted by the narrator from the first paragraph: how to "know" and recreate Christa T., whose diaries often contradict the narrator's memory. Conclusive knowledge of Christa T. is impossible because her essence is the denial of fixity and certainty: knowing her entails knowing as she does. The narrator never succeeds in synthesizing the multiple facets of her friend; yet her failure paradoxically is success, for the process of exploration she reenacts is a more faithful reflection of Christa T. than any finished product could be. As the history of Christa T. is embedded in and echoed by the story of the narrator's epistemological quandaries, the novel itself becomes the truest image of its heroine. Christa T. is rendered not through the substantive "Nachdenken," but through the verb "nach-denken," a process that finally extends to the reader whose involvement is invited with the novel's closing words. Reading *The Quest for Christa T.* should bring us to the personal experience of richness that the narrator discovers in response to Christa T. For Christa T. is finally the archetypal individual, not the exemplary heroine of socialist realist fiction, yet paradoxically exemplary of personal potential. Her mutability leads the narrator "down and back" to an encounter with her own capacity, and in this Christa T. enacts Wolf's view of the goal of literature. Christa T.'s relation with the narrator ultimately transcends the specific concerns of female friendship; yet Wolf uses the intimacy characteristic of this relationship to dramatize the imaginative identification she feels is the essence of literature and of moral growth.<sup>16</sup>

16. In her essay "The Reader and the Writer," written in the same year as *The Quest for Christa T.* and reprinted in the collection called *The Reader and the Writer* (n. 13 above), Wolf elaborates on the literary theories she puts into practice in the novel.

Imaginative identification also motivates the action of a novel that explores the relation of two women in a different culture. Ruth Praver Jhabvala's *Heat and Dust* portrays a woman's search to understand the life of her grandfather's first wife, a kind of spiritual grandmother to the narrator. Her quest takes her to India, where her predecessor Olivia had accompanied the narrator's grandfather. The materials from which the narrator must reconstruct Olivia's life are the letters Olivia wrote from India to her sister Marcia in Paris. Like *The Quest for Christa T.*, *Heat and Dust* examines the attempt of an unnamed female narrator to interpret the meaning of another woman's life from the fragmentary data found in personal documents, and it insists on the reflexive nature of this enterprise. In *Heat and Dust*, however, the narrator has no personal memories of Olivia and, perhaps as a consequence, she is drawn more thoroughly into Olivia's footsteps as she retraces them. There is an element of danger in *Heat and Dust* that is absent from *The Quest for Christa T.*, partially because of the novels' different cultural concerns. Feminine identification in *Heat and Dust* is associated with the mysterious and feminine lure of India which threatens the recommended "virile, measured, *European* feeling."<sup>17</sup> The threat to the self is greater in *Heat and Dust* than in the German novel, yet the degree of self-definition achieved is proportionate to the degree of absorption in the reconstructive process.

Paradoxes begin on the second page of the novel, where the narrator informs us that "this is not my story, it is Olivia's as far as I can follow it" (p. 2), and then follows this statement with her own journal entry on her arrival in India. Third-person narration appears impossible: the story of Olivia somehow entails the story of the narrator, as if the only accurate portrayal includes the relation between their experiences. The clue to this relation lies in the use of the word "follow," played by Jhabvala to emphasize the literal base of the metaphor, recalling the verbal play on "nach-denken." Only reenacting Olivia's story will reveal its full significance, and the novel becomes the story of constructing Olivia's story, the earlier life dependent on the latter to explain it and the later on the earlier to give it form.

This interdependence emerges gradually. Initially, the narrator's experience seems primary, and she fits Olivia's story in only when events or places trigger the association. Transforming Olivia's letters into a coherent story apparently demands some common experience, or such is the illusion that the narrator creates in her retrospective juxtaposition of journal entries and narrative. This condition at first does not seem coercive, and the parallels that evolve between the women's experiences appear coincidental. Gradually, however, the narrator's experience begins to anticipate Olivia's. After the narrator seduces Inder Lal at Baba Fir-

17. Ruth Praver Jhabvala, *Heat and Dust* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), p. 171.

daus's shrine, an action we later recognize was prompted by Olivia's earlier seduction by the Nawab at the identical shrine, the narrator alludes to an event from Olivia's letters that she has not yet described in the narrative. The effect is to remind us that the narrator knows the entire course of Olivia's experience and may unconsciously or consciously be following her pattern. The rapid shifts between closely parallel scenes of their two lives and the synchronization of journal dates with the equivalent months in Olivia's life conspire to challenge our faith in the narrator's independence. Her experience, which had seemed primary, begins to seem derivative as we recall that the scenes from Olivia's life that follow in the narrative are antecedent in the narrator's consciousness. Until the moment the narrator decides to have her baby, she is molded to the shape of Olivia's life. Yet this break from Olivia's pattern occurs only through the intervention of the holy woman Maji, another strong female influence whose almost supernatural powers seem needed to break Olivia's hold.

This hold, of course, is not fully broken, for the narrator shares Olivia's fate of staying in India. The ending of the novel is highly ambiguous. The only point of view we are offered belongs to the conventionally British Major Minnies, whose belief that Olivia succumbed to the seductive lure of India should presumably apply to the narrator as well. That there is something feminine about this lure is suggested by the personification of India as "she," by the matriarchal character of family relationships, most evident in the "rule of the mother-in-law" (p. 53), and by the mysterious emotionality attributed to the Indian response to life. The narrator's identification with Olivia, according to this view, would have absorbed her into the larger feminine being of India: the fact that both women cement their bond with India through pregnancy would provide a biological manifestation of a feminine mode of entanglement. Yet the ending cannot be dismissed so simply. The snowy mountain peaks in which Olivia and the narrator make their homes are neither feminine nor entrapping and are characterized in the novel as the height of spirituality. The narrator believes that there Olivia must have developed the strength her stereotypically feminine character had previously lacked. The narrator herself freely chooses the ascent into the mountains and there completes the skillful interweaving of narrative and journal in the novel that bears witness to her final understanding of the patterns of her life.

The narrator does grow through her response to Olivia, whose gifts to her include opportunities for both aesthetic and biological creativity. The differences in style between the two parts of the novel reveal the contribution of Olivia's letters in transforming the sparse private into the richer public narrative. The narrator's joyful experience of pregnancy should also be attributed in part to Olivia's influence, which suggests a path for the expression of the narrator's sexual, procreative self. If

Olivia moves toward incorporating the strength missing from her initially extreme femininity, the seemingly “unfeminine” narrator moves through her enjoyment of female experience to a fuller androgyny than that implied by her early resemblance to the *hijras*, eunuchs parodying women’s gestures. This achievement of internal sexual balance is important in a novel that repeatedly uses the language of sexual difference and demonstrates the failure of traditional sexual polarization in Olivia’s marriage to Douglas. It is impossible to pass unambiguous judgment on the novel’s ending, for it is the power, not the value, of the women’s interrelationship that Jhabvala emphasizes. The unnamed narrator becomes the child Olivia never had as the younger woman follows in the older woman’s path. Olivia and the narrator give spiritual birth to one another, for the narrator frees the shape of Olivia’s identity from distortion and neglect, and Olivia shapes the curve of the narrator’s experience. All this transpires without personal contact. Feminine identification works here at a psychic level separate from that of tangible encounters or resemblance. The narrator’s relationship with Olivia is echoed by Olivia’s relation with her sister Marcia, whose importance to the novel becomes apparent at the end, when the Nawab, now Olivia’s husband, and his old friend Harry deny Marcia’s resemblance to Olivia. The bond between the sisters, according to Marcia, derives from a common temperament that transcends both their obvious differences and geographic separation. This extension of a bond through apparent difference and absence contrasts with the friendship of Harry and the Nawab, dependent on contrived agreement and unwavering physical presence. The psychic connection of women in *Heat and Dust* is deep and not readily explicable. In its most absorbing form it binds women who have never met in an exchange of influence that creates new identities.

Because this identification process can engulf as well as shape identity, its course is smoothest when the object of identification is remembered or imagined rather than physically present. The portrayal of a friendship’s actual evolution uncovers the tensions generated by the conflict between identification and autonomy. Toni Morrison’s *Sula* explores these tensions by tracing the growth of a female friendship from its adolescent origins to its complex adult denouement and pitting this relationship against the most traditionally disruptive experience of competition for a man. The novel repeatedly assaults our expectations by planting its narration in an existential context in which the nature of identity itself is problematic. The self in *Sula* is equally open to fragmentation or expansion, as Morrison graphically demonstrates in her image of the soldier’s headless body running and her portrayal of the fusion of three separate little boys into the indistinguishable triple “dew-eyes,” a “trinity with a plural name.”<sup>18</sup> Since the outlines of identity are

18. Toni Morrison, *Sula* (New York: Bantam Books, 1975), p. 33.

subjectively determined, the friendship between Sula and Nel can create the single comprehensive entity implied by Sula's reminiscence of the days when she and Nel were "two throats and one eye" (p. 126). The problems of sustaining this entity while allowing for personal growth provide a focus for the novel's exploration of the boundaries of the self.

As readers, we are informed about the varied backgrounds of Sula and Nel and consequently are attuned to differences between them. The children themselves, however, do not share this point of view. Morrison deliberately builds their friendship out of each girl's private dreams about a comrade like herself: "They were solitary little girls whose loneliness was so profound it intoxicated them and sent them stumbling into Technicolored visions that always included a presence, a someone, who, quite like the dreamer, shared the delight of the dream" (p. 44). Although the seeds of the two girls' differences are already implicit in their fantasies, these differences are submerged within the common longing that enables them to feel like friends from their first encounter across the vacant swing whose ropes suggest a mirror frame. The girls quickly share their strengths and equalize their friendship; Sula encourages Nel's independence and Nel enables Sula to experience consistency. They grow so alike that they have "difficulty distinguishing one's thoughts from the other's" (p. 72); for Nel, "talking to Sula had always been a conversation with herself" (p. 82).

Morrison carefully prepares the ground for this friendship, especially through her treatment of Nel's separation from her mother Helene, an essential step in Nel's orientation toward a peer relationship. The train ride to New Orleans provides Nel with the simultaneous joy of freedom from her mother, triggered by the soldiers' hatred of Helene, and fear that her mother's vulnerability necessarily implies her own. This is an archetypal daughter's dilemma: to achieve independence from one's mother, frequently by devaluing her, without thereby devaluing one's feminine identity. Nel receives some assistance from the discovery of her grandmother, a woman sufficiently different from Helene to provide an alternative object of identification. As a result Nel experiences an independent sense of self for the first time: "I'm me. I'm not their daughter. I'm not Nel. I'm me. Me" (p. 24). This confidence enables Nel to pursue her relationship with Sula despite the initial disapproval of her mother; and Sula, in turn, reinforces Nel's budding sense of self, providing the real alternative female identification that Nel needs.<sup>19</sup> Sula finds equivalent support in Nel. Though, unlike Nel, Sula

19. This process corresponds precisely to one described by Helene Deutsch in *The Psychology of Women* (New York: Grune & Stratton, 1944), vol. 1. According to Deutsch, the adolescent girl attempts to become independent from her mother by developing attachments to other women. Around age twelve she often chooses a "best friend" who is an alter ego, "an extension of the girl's own ego, identical with her in respect to age, interests, and desires," in order to feel "doubled" and consequently stronger (p. 13).

has no rigid family structure against which to rebel, she also craves the confirmation of an alter ego. Mutual validation gives the girls the strength to grow: "In the safe harbor of each other's company they could afford to abandon the ways of other people and concentrate on their own perception of things" (p. 47).

The friendship between Sula and Nel occurs at a crucial moment in their development, yet it transcends its developmental function. Because it is a freely chosen expression of self, friendship is a privileged relationship in *Sula*, implicitly contrasted to both parental and sexual bonds. Sula's discovery that her mother Hannah "loves" her (in this novel a biologically determined response) rather than "liking" her as an individual forms one of her crucial insights into human solitude. Significantly, Hannah's explanation of her failure to "like" Sula in terms of the differences between parents and children reinforces the connection between friendship and similitude. Sexual relationships, like parental ones, derive more from biological and cultural conditioning than free choice. The need to adopt a "man's role" drives Jude to marry before he had intended and to select a particular type of bride; the need to soothe and mother draws Nel from Sula to Jude. As she moves away from Sula, Nel relinquishes the active portion of herself that had a role to play in their egalitarian friendship to adopt a purely female complementary role: she and Jude "together would make one Jude" (p. 71). In the world of *Sula*, sexual relationships, not friendships, induce complementarity and a consequent reduction of both personalities. Even Sula cannot completely resist succumbing to a nurturing feminine response to Ajax that drives him away and, by violating her essential self, appears to precipitate her own death. In *Sula* only friendship is free from the compulsions that restrict or disregard the self.

The blend of perfect freedom with complete involvement, however, makes it very difficult for friendship to endure. Morrison suggests the nature of this problem by juxtaposing Nel's wedding to Jude with the town's realization that the deweys would grow no further because their psychological development had stopped. Personal growth appears incompatible with interpersonal identification, and Nel chooses, or thinks she chooses, her own growth: "And greater than her friendship was this new feeling of being needed by someone who saw her *singly*" (p. 72; my italics). Sula makes the same choice, though less as a move away from Nel than as one toward her own development. Sula recognizes, however, that she and Nel have diverged, and that their closeness has consequently dissipated, to be revived only if and when they recover a common identity. For Sula, relationships exist only in moments of psychological contact; the traditional obligations of friendship and marriage are irrelevant to her. Sula can offer Jude the freedom to choose her without feeling she is betraying Nel because Nel will either see the experience as Sula does and disdain a marriage bound by obligation rather than choice, or she

will see it differently, thereby destroying the foundation of their friendship. Friendship for Sula demands complete identification, which to her means a shared understanding of personal discovery. Nel's position is more traditional: friendship means loyalty. The novel offers support for Sula's seemingly egocentric view and undermines Nel's morality by pointing to its hollowness. In a world in which control and stability are illusions, the only valid enterprise, however frequently thwarted, is the effort to create the self, and the only authentic human contact grows from that activity. When Nel rests her cheek on Jude's shoulder and lowers her eyes behind her wedding veil, Sula struts out the door and out of town, fulfilling Nel's childhood dream of leaving Medallion. Morrison forces us to reckon, however uncomfortably, with Sula's final words to Nel: maybe it is Sula, not Nel, who is the good one.

The balance of growth and identification necessary to friendship in *Sula* is almost impossible to achieve and, on a practical level, Nel and Sula fail. At a deeper emotional level, however, their bond is ultimately re-created as Nel undergoes a process of self-discovery recorded through the image of the gray ball of fur which appears on the periphery of her vision the first time she spontaneously thinks of Sula after Sula's affair with Jude explodes Nel's ten-year marriage. The ball's muddy strings recall the girls' shared experience of Chicken Little's drowning, the last extended time the friends are shown together in part 1. This is the scene which Nel must confront again in order to recognize her similarity to Sula, a resemblance Sula's grandmother asserts despite Nel's denial. As Sula had watched her mother burn, gripped by the purely visual excitement, Nel had taken pleasure in the sight of Chicken Little drowning. Both had snapped the conventional link between perception and moral cognition, delighting instead in the play of sense data. Nel's acceptance of her basic kinship with Sula bursts the ball of fur she had avoided facing and frees the cry of grief—not for Jude, but for Sula—that had stuck in her throat nearly thirty years ago: “‘We was girls together,’ she said as though explaining something. ‘O Lord, Sula,’ she cried, ‘girl girl girlgirlgirl!’” (p. 149). Even the fusion of her words, formally echoing Eva's response to the first of the triple deweys, recalls the union of Nel's girlhood friendship with Sula, recovered only with the recognition of sameness. Friendship in *Sula* is both the vehicle and product of self-knowledge, the uniquely valuable and rigorous relationship. By combining the adolescent need for identification with the adult need for independence, Morrison presents an ideal of female friendship dependent not on love, obligation, or compassion, but on an almost impossible conjunction of sameness and autonomy, attainable only with another version of oneself.

The tensions engendered by female identification are also a central concern of Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*. In it, however, Lessing explores the dynamics of growth and separation (which do not attract

her attention in *The Four-gated City*) in terms of the mother-daughter paradigm rather than that of two equally maturing friends. The relationship of Anna and Molly, while less dramatic than Anna's confrontations with men, is an essential part of *The Golden Notebook*, especially of the frame story ironically called "Free Women." This irony is twofold: the friends are unfree not only in relation to men, but also in relation to each other. Anna's evolution in regard to Molly defines the progression of the "Free Women" sections, which form a coherent novel balancing the development depicted in the notebooks. *The Golden Notebook* reflects the form of feminine development described by Chodorow: the male-female (oedipal) concerns predominate in the notebooks and the female-female (preoedipal) in the progress of "Free Women."

"Free Women" is Anna's novel, composed out of the sentence Saul gives her in the final notebook: "There are the two women you are, Anna. Write down: The two women were alone in the London flat."<sup>20</sup> In her retrospective portrayal of her life, however, Anna reinterprets Saul's sentence to describe not her own internal duality, but her relationship with Molly, using "Free Women" to fill in the side of her development not covered adequately in the notebooks. Anna's reaction to Molly's possessiveness reveals the significance of their relationship: "Anna nearly said, stubbornly, 'But I'm not an extension of you,' but knew it was something she might have said to her mother, so stopped herself. Anna could remember her mother very little; she had died so early; but at moments like these, she was able to form for herself the image of someone strong and dominating, whom Anna had had to fight" (pp. 41–42). Spared much painful filial conflict by her mother's early death, Anna must confront it now in relation to a friend who wants to fulfill her own frustrated artistic potential through Anna's literary talent.<sup>21</sup> If the narrators of *The Quest for Christa T.* and *Heat and Dust* reveal the positive thrust of identification between female friends, Anna's response to Molly enacts the counterthrust of separation that completes the preoedipal dynamics Chodorow attributes to female bonding.

Neatly framed between the scenes of Anna and Molly in Molly's flat, "Free Women" charts Anna's evolution from the role of daughter to mother, tracing her growing ability to differentiate herself from both Molly and the world in general. The first scene brings the women to-

20. Doris Lessing, *The Golden Notebook* (New York: Bantam Books, 1973), p. 639.

21. In "Family Structure and Feminine Personality" (in *Woman, Culture, and Society*, ed. Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere [Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1974], pp. 43–66), Nancy Chodorow discusses the cultural pressures reinforcing a mother's identification with her daughter and consequent resistance to the separation process. Molly's desire in *The Golden Notebook* to have Anna achieve her own unrealized life goals reflects the inadequate differentiation of older from younger woman that frequently characterizes the mother-daughter bond.

gether after a separation, reveals Molly's reluctance to accept changes in Anna, and raises the question of the friendship's ability to move toward equality. Sections 2 and 3 of "Free Women" do not deal directly with Anna and Molly, but by switching focus to Molly's son Tommy they pursue the mother-child orientation in a different key. In her fictional portrayal of Tommy in "Free Women," Anna rudely plucks him from his actual life (as described in her blue notebook), brings him to her flat to read her private notebooks, and has him violently blind himself. Anna transforms Tommy into her dark double, who confronts the same tormenting existential questions, vehemently denies that he is going through a "phase" that differentiates his point of view from hers, and, on the brink of plunging into the same chaos she faces, chooses the alternative route of blindness as the limitation that preserves control. From his powerless position in his mother's house, Tommy acquires power, specifically over his mother, by his manipulative assertion of his disability; by later adopting his stepmother Marion, a substitute mother, as substitute girlfriend, Tommy reaffirms his choice of dependence as the vehicle of self-assertion. Tommy's route highlights Anna's mode of achieving autonomy by the painful individuation process depicted in the notebooks and presided over by the spiritual mother, "Mother Sugar," the psychological and finally internalized counterpart to Molly. By "Free Women 4" Anna can intervene between Tommy and Molly, adopting the maternal role to protect her friend from Tommy's domination. Anna's maternal role motivates her actions throughout this section, propelling her finally to evict her homosexual boarders in an effort to protect her daughter Janet; this confrontation with men, not a psychosexual struggle but a conflict over authority, is noticeably different from those that predominate in the notebooks and is consistent with Anna's fictional emphasis on her evolution from daughter to mother.

In the final section of "Free Women," Anna has matured to face the difficult role of mother that initially belonged to Molly. She accepts Janet's differences and separation from her. Without Janet's stabilizing presence, however, she undergoes a breakdown that differs significantly from the sexually induced breakdown described in the notebooks. The "Free Women" version of Anna's breakdown reflects the problems Chodorow attributes to women's weak ego boundaries: in her daughter's absence, Anna extends her maternal identification and sense of responsibility to the world in general. In accordance with Chodorow's claim in "Family Structure and Feminine Personality" that Western women frequently experience a sense of guilt derived from inadequate differentiation from and feeling of responsibility for the rest of the world, Anna becomes engulfed in her attempt to organize the meaning of world events by compulsively pinning newspaper clippings to her walls: "It was as if she, Anna, were a central point of awareness, being attacked by a million uncoordinated facts, and the central point would

disappear if she proved unable to weigh and balance the facts, take them all into account" (p. 649). Anna experiences her sense of responsibility for the world through an explicitly maternal image in her dream of nursing two children and failing to provide enough milk for the child that is not her own—be it Tommy, she realizes, or some half-glimpsed stranger. Anna's breakdown in "Free Women" is cast in the preoedipal terms of fusion and differentiation, and Anna can be rescued from it only by a man with an all too defined sense of ego boundaries. In transforming Saul into Milt, Anna radically alters and condenses the notebook experiences to accord with the central focus of "Free Women." Whereas Saul's primary function in the blue and golden notebooks is to break down Anna's ego boundaries and confuse their two identities, Milt's is to restore these boundaries and rescue Anna from her fusion with the world. Anna ultimately recognizes Saul as brother, but Milt plays the role of son instead of sibling. Milt is younger than Anna, admits that he feeds off women, compares her newspaper mania explicitly to that of his father figure, and demands of her the ultimate in maternal love and self-denial: to give him all he wants and to make no claims on him. By accepting Milt's terms and his departure, Anna passes through her final maternal crisis, decides to move into a smaller flat that will fit the shape of her own psyche, and plans to get a social welfare job where responsibility for the world is finite and concrete. When she meets with Molly in the final scene that parallels the opening, there is no doubt about Anna's equality or the autonomy that grants psychological resonance to the novel's closing words: "The two women kissed and separated" (p. 666).

The distinctive dynamics of fusion and differentiation that characterize fictional female friendships suggest that equivalent dynamics may operate in a literary avatar of friendship: influence. The most prominent contemporary theorist of influence is Harold Bloom, whose model of oedipal struggle between precursor and "ephebe" rests on a theory of male psychology. Although Bloom's successive revisions of the model conflate the Freudian paradigm with the rhetorical models derived most centrally from Vico and the Kabbalah, expanding the narrowly oedipal scheme into a more general theory of defense and influence, his exclusive concern with "strong" post-Enlightenment poets continues to make his theory psychologically and historically inadequate for women writers.<sup>22</sup> Joanne Feit Diehl challenges the sexual parochialism of Bloom's

22. The particular relevance of Bloom's literary psychoanalysis to women writers has been brilliantly analyzed by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1979), published after this essay was written. Gilbert and Gubar contrast the female "anxiety of authorship," stirred by the "inferiorization" of women in patriarchal culture, with the male "anxiety of influence." The woman writer's struggle, the authors declare, is not with any precursor, masculine or feminine, but with the male tradition's

theory by examining the relation of three nineteenth-century women poets to their muse, but though she demonstrates the need to enlarge Bloom's paradigm, she subsumes the question of influence to that of inspiration in her theory of a composite male Precursor/muse who evokes simultaneous fear and desire in the woman poet.<sup>23</sup> The identification of precursor with muse is problematic, but even if the hypothesis of women's ambivalent relationship to a male-dominated tradition is true, it accounts for only one side of a female writer's situation. The question of a female literary tradition, which Diehl alludes to in passing, is central to Ellen Moers's study, *Literary Women*.<sup>24</sup> The difference between Moers and Bloom is immediately apparent in Moers's adaptation of T. S. Eliot's theory of tradition, the source of the "idealized" vision Bloom attacks. Moers uses Eliot to suggest that women writers constitute their own fertilizing tradition, drawing from each other's work the confidence denied by their exclusion from the established forums of male interchange. Moers's assertion of the "family relationship" of women's work should be held against Bloom's vision of the "family romance," her view of "sibling rivalry" against his insistence on oedipal conflict. While the rivalry Moers perceives in George Eliot's reaction to the fiction of Jane Austen might be considered a version of Bloom's *clinamen*, the motivation Moers imagines for this swerve is not misprision for the sake of originality, but self-definition through the discovery of differences. The female tradition Moers finds operative in the work of Austen, Eliot, Dickinson, and others is characterized more fully by the search for resonant female voices than by the quest for individuality. The thrust of Moers's argument is sociological, but a psychological argument could be made as well. The willingness to absorb literary influence instead of defending the poetic self from it is consistent with the flexible ego boundaries and relational self-definition described in the theories and novels of women's relationships.

The theories of Diehl and Moers are speculative, but they provide a way of provisionally sketching a theory of influence to balance Bloom's account. Diehl's suggestion of women's ambivalence toward a male-dominated tradition differentiates their stance from the oedipal struggle of "strong" male writers, yet maintains the role of conflict, now sexual as well as filial, in women's relationship to the dominant tradition; Moers's vision of a female tradition subordinates conflict to the search for commonality. Once again a triadic female pattern emerges: the relation to

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assessment of female possibilities; in this struggle, female precursors become essential aides, not rivals. My own brief analysis offers a psychoanalytic model for describing women writers' dual response to the literary past.

23. Joanne Feit Diehl, "'Come Slowly—Eden': An Exploration of Women Poets and Their Muse," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 3, no. 3 (Spring 1978): 572–87. See also the responses to Diehl in *ibid.* 4, no. 1 (Autumn 1978): 188–96.

24. Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (New York: Anchor Books, 1977).

male tradition reflects women's oedipal issues, the relation to female tradition reflects the preoedipal. Such a formulation provides a framework for the complexities of women's situation overlooked by Bloom. For Bloom not only fails to consider female psychology, he also fails to address women's literary situation, which is that not only of the tradition-burdened post-Enlightenment writer, but also of the formulator of tradition, a role that reinforces the orientation toward community. At one point Bloom acknowledges women's potential to create an independent tradition, but he imagines this shift to be too absolute and links it mistakenly with sexual ideology rather than with sexual identification: "I prophesy though that the first true break with literary continuity will be brought about in generations to come, if the burgeoning religion of Liberated Woman spreads from its clusters of enthusiasts to dominate the West."<sup>25</sup> Women writers since Austen and Dickinson have felt a particular bond with one another, and twentieth-century women writers are explicit about their concern with formulating and conserving a tradition. This concern with collectivity mediates the desire for originality and places women writers in a different historical as well as psychological situation from their male contemporaries. As the dynamics of female friendship differ from those of male, the dynamics of female literary influence also diverge and deserve a theory of influence attuned to female psychology and to women's dual position in literary history.

Bloom fails to incorporate women writers in his theory; yet his approach accords with the characteristically female concern with relationships and suggests a link between the attitudes this paper treats and the orientation of contemporary criticism. However insistently Bloom's "strong" poet asserts his originality, his very struggle embeds his art in a network of relationships that make the comparative orientation of "antithetical" criticism more useful than the narrow focus on discrete texts. Bloom's concern with intertextuality links him with the dominant critical movements of this decade, united in their disaffection from the creed of the autonomous text and preoccupied with various modes of interrelationship. Even the structuralist assertion that meaning is not represented by discrete signs but produced by the relationships of signifiers fits this pattern, but the clearest emphasis on a collaborative relationship that echoes the dynamics of female bonding occurs in reader-response criticism. The emphasis on the reader's crucial role in creating literary meaning that characterizes this theory, however, is itself a pragmatic version of the principles underlying phenomenological criticism and contemporary continental hermeneutics. This concern with relationship is also apparent in certain aspects of contemporary

25. Harold Bloom, *A Map of Misreading* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 33.

psychoanalytic theory. The recurrence of British and American psychoanalytic interest in object-relations theory, with the related focus on the preoedipal period; the importance given the role of transference and especially of countertransference; the new psychology of the self—all these emphasize the relational matrix of personal development and the analytic process.<sup>26</sup> This emphasis on relational identity and meaning, embodied in Loewald's insistence on the "interactional origin and nature of psychic reality" and in Holland's belief in the "mingling of self and other, the creative and relational quality of all our experience, not least the reading and writing of literature," suggests that the definition of self through other that characterizes women's intimate bonds with one another is not an aberrant or localized phenomenon, but a process whose correlatives extend through human inquiry.<sup>27</sup>

In the works of contemporary women novelists, Chloe and Olivia have enacted their relationship as variations on the theme of reflexivity. Attracted by the perception of some crucial similarity defining a fundamental aspect of the self, these friends do not maintain distinct ego boundaries. The relational identity shaped by women's earliest childhood experiences is reflected in and reinforced by the bonds of female friends, bonds both particular to female intimacy and representative of relational models increasingly central to different disciplines. Lighting a torch in the dark chamber of women's relationships reveals the sketchy pattern of the intersubjectivity that permeates the framework of recent humanistic inquiry.

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26. For an explanation of the recurrence of interest in object-relations theory, see Leonard J. Friedman, "Current Psychoanalytic Object Relations Theory and Its Clinical Implications," *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 56 (1975): 137-46. The concern with countertransference is demonstrated in the works by Marotti, Devereux, Loewald, and Lacan cited in n. 12 above. Loewald suggests a connection between object-relations theory, the preoedipal phase, and the interest in transference and countertransference in his assertion of an originally undifferentiated mother-child matrix which is partially recreated in the analytic situation. The "psychology of the self" is a phrase used technically by Heinz Kohut in *The Analysis of the Self* (New York: International Universities Press, 1971) and *The Restoration of the Self* (New York: International Universities Press, 1977), and more loosely by Norman Holland, who claims in "Literary Interpretation and the Three Phases of Psychoanalysis" (in *Psychoanalysis, Creativity, and Literature: A French-American Inquiry*, ed. Alan Roland [New York: Columbia University Press, 1978], pp. 233-47) that psychoanalytic thought has shifted its focus from the unconscious, to the ego, to the self, which is an intersubjective rather than intrapsychic orientation. Holland believes that psychoanalytic literary criticism has gone through analogous stages: the third stage involves "giving up the illusion that I can only understand reality (or a text) by keeping myself out" (p. 244).

27. Loewald, p. 67; Norman Holland, "UNITY IDENTITY TEXT SELF," *PMLA* 90 (October 1975): 821.

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### [Footnotes]

<sup>1</sup> **Female Same-Sex Relationships in Novels by Longfellow, Holmes, and James**

Lillian Faderman; Henry Wadsworth Longfellow; Oliver Wendell Holmes; Henry James  
*The New England Quarterly*, Vol. 51, No. 3. (Sep., 1978), pp. 309-332.

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<sup>4</sup> **Sex and Social Participation**

Alan Booth

*American Sociological Review*, Vol. 37, No. 2. (Apr., 1972), pp. 183-193.

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<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0003-1224%28197204%2937%3A2%3C183%3ASASP%3E2.0.CO%3B2-4>

<sup>12</sup> **Countertransference, the Communication Process, and the Dimensions of Psychoanalytic Criticism**

Arthur F. Marotti

*Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 4, No. 3. (Spring, 1978), pp. 471-489.

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<sup>23</sup> **"Come Slowly: Eden": An Exploration of Women Poets and Their Muse**

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*Signs*, Vol. 3, No. 3. (Spring, 1978), pp. 572-587.

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<sup>26</sup> **Countertransference, the Communication Process, and the Dimensions of Psychoanalytic Criticism**

Arthur F. Marotti

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