

**FEMINISM, DECONSTRUCTION, AND LITERARY CRITICISM:  
A DECONSTRUCTIVE FEMINIST READING OF NATHANIEL  
HAWTHORNE'S NOVEL *THE SCARLET LETTER* WITH THE HELP  
OF ALICE JARDINE AND JACQUES DERRIDA**

*Rossen I. Roussev*

*It is to the credit of human nature, that,  
except where its selfishness is brought into  
play, it loves more readily than it hates.  
Hatred, by a gradual and quiet process,  
will even be transformed to love...*

Nathaniel Hawthorne

***Abstract***

*The text explores interrelations between feminism and deconstruction for purposes of literary critique. The main theoretical sources are Alice Jardine and Jacques Derrida, whose views of 'gynesis' and 'deconstruction', respectively, are taken as complementary. The views in question are discussed first in order to assemble a joint critical perspective that brings forward their relevant conceptual intersections. Jardine's concept of gynesis is seen as a more specific form of deconstruction carried from a feminist standpoint, whereas various Derrida's concepts are brought to bear on the notion of deconstruction in a wider sense. Subsequently, issuing from the critical perspective thus outlined, we offer a reading of Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel *The Scarlet Letter*, in which the main characters, their actions, and specific relations in which they enter are revisited in key terms of the vocabularies of these thinkers. More specifically, concepts like life-affirmation, woman-in-effect, trace, patriarchy, discourse, and phallogocentrism, among others, are transposed in a shifting horizon which carries their discussion from the realm of critical philosophical reflection into that of literary text.*

***Key terms:*** gynesis, gynema, structure, sign, différance, (auto)immunity, patriarchy, writing, sexual difference, (phal)logocentrism

A classic target of feminist literary critics, Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel *The Scarlet Letter: A Romance* has been also a subject to deconstructive reading.<sup>1</sup> In this paper, I shall aim to combine these two approaches at once drawing mainly on Alice Jardine's feminist view of *gynesis* and Jacques Derrida's deconstructive philosophy. Ideally, this would be a gender mindful reading, keeping in mind especially that the notion of *gender* has a special importance in both feminist and deconstructionist perspectives, while being not only a sensitive but also an open-ended issue today. Thus, much of the feminist tradition places emphasis on the 'gender' of the author (whether writer or critic) it approaches, whereas the tradition of structuralist and post-structuralist thought sees 'gender' as inherent to culture as a whole. For much of their early years, though, both of these traditions most typically issued from the preconception that the genders are essentially two, something that in our age is no longer the norm. Thus, to more fully sustain our gender mindful reading here, we will need to stipulate in advance that using terms like 'feminist', 'patriarchy', 'woman', 'man', 'feminine', or 'masculine', among others, need not interfere with the demands of any gender inclusive or gender specific perspective, as the issues raised from feminist and deconstructionist standpoints could be readily identified as – at the very least – complementary to any gender perspective. For instance, to uphold itself, any gender specific perspective today needs to critique the traditional patriarchal culture in its fundamentals and entirety at least as much as a feminist perspective does. Acknowledging this need while paying homage to Simone de Beauvoir, whose book *The Second Sex* marks the radical inception of feminist thought in the 20th century,<sup>2</sup> Jardine writes that "it is up to us to continue moving along the collective pathways she opened for use, in a way that not only change gender and sex arrangements for the better, but change the world for the better, profoundly, deeply, widely, and long term. Radically."<sup>3</sup>

With such thoughts in mind, we now approach Hawthorne's famous novel in two main steps. First, we assemble a deconstructive feminist critical perspective out of common and complementary aspects of the thought of Alice Jardine and Jacques Derrida. And second, drawing on that perspective, we offer a reading of the key developments in the novel's plot.

### *A Deconstructive Feminist Perspective*

The deconstructive feminist perspective which I would like to outline here will have one essential feature, which can be described as *openness to the inexhaustibility of its own field*. This feature is what I think characterizes Jardine's notion of *gynesis*, as much as Derrida's deconstructionist philosophy, even as they articulate it in different ways. This openness is indeed as necessary as it is inevitable in the workings of discourse, as it is coded into the

<sup>1</sup> Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, Complete, Authoritative Text with Biographical Background and Critical History plus Essays from Five Contemporary Critical Perspectives with Introductions and Bibliographies, edited by Ross C. Murfin (Boston: Macmillan/Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, translated by Constance Borde and Sheila M. Chevallier (New York: Random House, 2010); cf. *Le deuxième sexe, 1, Les faits et les mythes; 2, L'expérience vécue* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1949).

<sup>3</sup> Alice A. Jardine, "What Feminism?," *French Politics, Culture & Society*, Vol. 28, No. 2, SPECIAL ISSUE: Simone de Beauvoir: ENGAGEMENTS, CONTEXTS, RECONSIDERATIONS (Summer 2010), p. 72.

character of signification, from where it passes to all critique, interpretation, and culture. Likewise, this perspective will also have another feature, closely related to its openness and indeed one that can be sustained only in the realm of its openness, namely, *affirmation*, which will motivate its critical operation as an assertion of life. While affirmation is not a necessary outcome of neither gynesis nor deconstruction, it can be a motive by choice, which we here certainly make, as opposed to the nostalgic realization of the limits of discourse.

### Jardine's View of Gynesis

As I see it, Jardine's notion of *gynesis* is an attempt to revisit and adopt elements of structuralist and post-structuralist critique of the Western intellectual tradition and culture for purposes of literary and cultural critiques in feminist perspective. This move is as natural and falls into the same (self-)reflective register as the application of universalistic expertise to solving particular problems, or as the search for points of intersection between what I have elsewhere called "global" and "local."<sup>4</sup> But it is not just a move from universal to particular, global to local, or vice versa, as in one important sense none of these takes in any way precedence over the others. There is simply nothing like a move from cause to effect – such as, for instance, from calamity to immunity, the thematic that motivates us here – in the realm of discourse and signification to justify its workings precedentially as this has been done for the realm of natural phenomena. At the very best, the causal determinism is of limited use for purposes of a critique, compared to the vast potential of the realm of signification overall.

Jardine appears well aware of this prospect and her goal is not simply to invent a unique technique or conceptual apparatus to be applied in the feminist criticism of literature or particular products of culture. As she puts it, "I focus on written texts, but am more concerned about the *process* of (reading and writing) woman than about examining the representation of women in literature."<sup>5</sup> What Jardine seems to be looking for is to make feminist critique integrative to a lasting socio-cultural change by making it an indelible part of the discourse which is productive of culture as a whole. This, however, she does not seek to promote by adding her integrative gesture to the well-established pillars of the existent culture, and this for good reasons. The normative and justificatory pillars of the patriarchal culture have already produced a systemic effect of domination that assigns secondary social roles for women. Hence, she wants to start anew in a move that is at once discursive and emancipatory, critical and creative, indeed along her suggested contribution to critical theory – the practice of *gynesis*.

Jardine's eponymous book starts with questions that come from her "concern with women as speaking and writing subjects, their relationship to language, and how sexual difference operates linguistically in a literary text," which she also thinks "need to be addressed by feminists who ... are or will eventually be in dialogue with what is now commonly called 'modernity' ...".<sup>6</sup> It is to be noted here that in recent decades the term 'modernity' has been

<sup>4</sup> Rossen Roussev, "Global Conversation on the Spot: What Lao-tse, Heidegger, and Rorty Have in Common," *Global Conversations: An International Journal in Contemporary Philosophy and Culture*, Vol. 1 (2018), pp. 11-38. <http://philogc.org/vol-1/>

<sup>5</sup> Alice Jardine, *Gynesis: Configurations of Woman and Modernity* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 19.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

loosely used to designate key developments and characteristics of the Western culture since the 17th century, while being opposed to 'postmodernity', which has been also loosely used to designate a period whose beginning has been variedly placed in mid 19th century, mid 20th century, or in the 1980s.<sup>7</sup> Jardine, in particular, has started her interrogation with the culture of modernity under the influence of the French post-structuralists of the 1960s and 1970s, most notably Julia Kristeva, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Hélène Cixous.<sup>8</sup> Her response to the challenges modernity posed to feminist thought was ever since thoroughly informed by post-structuralist critique of modernity and of the structuralist thought of thinkers, such as Jacques Lacan and Claude Lévi-Strauss.

What she accepts from the leading French thinkers of this period on the character of modernity is that "the conceptual apparatuses inherited from nineteenth-century Europe" have obliterated how "our ways of understanding in the West have been and continue to be complicitous with our ways of oppressing." For, they have instead conditioned "the vicious circles of intellectual imperialism and of liberal ideology and humanism," all along "reified and naturalized categories and concepts like 'experience' and the 'natural'; or, in another mode, the Ethical, the Right, the Good, or the True."<sup>9</sup> Thus, beyond the conceptual mask of modernity, undone by the post-structuralist thinkers, a new world has appeared: a world that is now necessarily "denaturalized" and "*unheimlich*," finding itself in "a series of crises of legitimation" after its fundamental pillars – "Man, the Subject, Truth, History, Meaning" – have been radically called into question.<sup>10</sup> The ensuing attempts at "reinterpretation and reconceptualization" of what thus "eluded" the discourse of modernity – "the master narratives' own nonknowledge" – resulted in a peculiar conceptualization and understanding of 'woman': "This other-than-themselves is almost always a 'space' of some kind (over which the narrative has lost control), and this space has been coded as *feminine*, as *woman*."<sup>11</sup>

Thus, for Jardine, as for the tradition of structuralist and post-structuralist thought, 'woman' attains a peculiar cultural significance – that of alterity of the narratives of modernity, which have been historically inaugurated by the Cartesian subject, and which have failed to

<sup>7</sup> For most authoritative discussions on the opposition modernity-postmodernity, see Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, translated by Geoffrey Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 1984), especially pp. xxiii-xxvff, 27-37ff, 46ff, 59ff, 79ff; cf. *La condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1979), pp. 7-9ff, 49-63ff, 75ff, 97ff. Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, translated by Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1996), especially pp. 3ff, 83ff; cf. *Der Philosophische Diskurs der Moderne: Zwölf Vorlesungen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1985), SS. 11ff, 104ff; Anthony Giddens, "Modernism and Post-Modernism," *New German Critique*, No. 22, Special Issue on Modernism (Winter, 1981), pp. 15-18; Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), especially pp. 1-10, 45-53; David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge, MA; Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1991), especially pp. 10ff, 327ff; Agnes Heller, *A Theory of Modernity* (Malden, MA; Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), especially pp. 1-18; Okwui Enwezor, Nancy Condee, Terry Smith (eds.), *Antinomies of Art and Culture: Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity*, (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> Alice Jardine, "What Feminism?," p. 68.

<sup>9</sup> Alice Jardine, *Gynesis*, pp. 23-24.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

convey that alterity. It is in this relation that Jardine sees a necessity for a new form of thinking and discoursing, which is fitting to explore the alterity of modernity, or 'the space coded feminine'. She will call it *gynesis*:

To designate that process, I have suggested a new name, what I hope to be a believable neologism: *gynesis* – the putting into discourse of "woman" as that process beyond the Cartesian Subject, the Dialectics of Representation, or Man's Truth. The object produced by this process is neither a person nor a thing, but a horizon, that towards which the process is tending: a *gynema*. This *gynema* is a reading effect, a woman-in-effect, never stable, without identity. Its appearance in a written text is perhaps noticed only by the woman (feminist) reader – either at the point where it becomes insistently "feminine" or where women (as defined metaphysically, historically) seem magically to reappear within the discourse. The feminist reader's eye comes to a halt at this tear in the fabric, producing a state of uncertainty and sometimes of distrust – especially when the faltering narrative in which it is embedded has been articulated by a man from within a nonetheless still-existent-discipline. When it appears in women theorists' discourse, it would seem to be less troubling. The still existent slippages in signification among feminine/woman/women and what we are calling *gynesis* and *gynema* are dismissed as "unimportant" because it is a woman speaking.<sup>12</sup>

This excerpt from Jardine's earlier publication conveys what I see as the operational gist of her notion of *gynesis* and is likewise suggestive of its interpretative potential. *Gynesis* is 'the putting into discourse of "woman"', where 'woman' has the cultural significance indicated in the structuralist and post-structuralist thought but is also indicative of a radical revision of subjectivity. Another important trait of *gynesis* is that it is a 'process', which in this way goes beyond the metaphysical anticipations of modernity, for instance, in that it is not anything like a program that can be accomplished and thus finished once and for all. It is more specifically a 'process beyond the Cartesian Subject, the Dialectics of Representation, or Man's Truth', which are now very much unmasked as the pillars of the original project of modernity. That process also creates 'neither a person nor a thing, but a horizon' which is called *gynema* described as 'a reading effect, a woman-in-effect, never stable, without identity'. The *gynema* of *gynesis* is thus nothing like a typical metaphysical product of modernity. Instead, it 'is perhaps noticed only by the woman (feminist) reader', though not exclusively, and seems to be an experience of what is 'insistently "feminine"' or of 'woman' as 'magically reappearing within discourse'. It can be marked by a sense of 'uncertainty' or 'distrust', most commonly evoked by a discourse authored by 'a man', but these would be 'less troubling' when detected in women's works, 'because it is a woman speaking'.

The suggestion that Jardine makes here is that a woman reader or critic appears to be in a better position than a male one would be to join in *gynesis* to explore the signification of the 'feminine' – the intrinsic 'otherness' of the discourse of modernity. Yet, with this project she does *not* aim at "painting contexts or texts, representing modernity or feminism, or defining women or woman"; rather she aims at "foregrounding a new kind of interpretant which has surfaced from the interactions among all of these – a 'woman-effect'" – in the hope that it could "open new spaces for women to write in."<sup>13</sup> Thus, Jardine clearly anticipates that bringing

<sup>12</sup> Alice Jardine, "Gynesis," *Diacritics*, Vol. 12, No. 2, Cherchez la Femme Feminist Critique/Feminine Text (Summer, 1982), p. 58.

<sup>13</sup> Alice Jardine, *Gynesis*, p. 28.

together – in *gynesis* – the post-structuralist conjectures on the cultural significance of ‘woman’ and the American feminist tradition of literary criticism, which emphasized the gender in literary representation, will bring a special benefit for the latter. Consequently, drawing on feminist critics like Annette Kolodny and Elaine Showalter,<sup>14</sup> Jardine goes on to describe what she calls the *fundamental feminist gesture* of literary criticism as “an analysis (and critique) of fictional representations of women (characters) in men’s and women’s writing.”<sup>15</sup> Whereas along these lines the gestures of post-structuralism and American feminism seem to be at first divergently positioned, this only motivates Jardine to seek ways to bridge them. In fact, her thought never ceases to oscillate between them. In the process, she raises more questions than she offers definitive solutions, but her discussion of the issues at stake unveils how they reappear within the perspectives of these two intellectual movements, thus availing insights in both directions while keeping the prospects for their mutual enhancement open-ended.

Acknowledging the tension between the two perspectives, Jardine looks for points in common and indicates three their intersections, which are of particular relevance for literary criticism, and which she identifies along modernity’s notions of ‘self’, ‘representation’, and ‘truth’. First, the post-structuralist thought, which does away with *subject*, *self*, and *author*, is in an outright tension with the feminist emphasis on the gender of representation. The manner in which Jardine tackles this intersect is exemplary for her approach of making a double gesture in the directions of both perspectives. On one side, she points out that the feminist’s distrust of “this complex ‘beyonding’ of sexual identity is largely based on common sense” – precisely the one (“sense ‘common to all’, that is, humanism”) that a true feminist critique endeavors to dispel.<sup>16</sup> On another, she makes the assertion that “when you problematize ‘Man’ (as being at the foundations of Western notions of the self)... you are bound to find ‘woman’ – no matter who is speaking – and that most definitely concerns feminist criticism.”<sup>17</sup>

Second, drawing partly on Kristeva, Jardine points to the postmodernist notion of *representation* as a ‘process’ in a complex move from the ‘phantasies’ of the unconscious through the ‘fantasies’ of consciousness, a process which – as “attached to no self, no stable psychological entity, no content” – undoes the border between *theory* and *fiction*.<sup>18</sup> This process has found expression in “acceptably ‘feminized’ domains” such as art, literature, and religion (though not in theology), but its radical rethinking and liberation demand re-exploration of the Greek notion of *physis* – “making it speak differently, in new spaces, within entirely new structural configurations.”<sup>19</sup> Again, troubling as this process of representation and self-exploration might seem to be for a feminist critique, Jardine emphasizes that it “has everything to do with woman and thus with women,”<sup>20</sup> a message that can be fittingly received by the postmodernist thinkers as well.

<sup>14</sup> Annette Kolodny, “Some Notes on Defining a ‘Feminist Literary Criticism’,” *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Autumn, 1975), pp. 75-92; Elaine Showalter, “Towards a Feminist Poetics,” in: Mar Jacobus (ed.), *Women Writing and Writing about Women* (New York, London: Routledge, 1979), pp. 22-41.

<sup>15</sup> Alice Jardine, *Gynesis*, pp. 52, 57.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

Third, drawing again on Kristeva, Jardine addresses the notion of *truth* in terms of the opposition between 'fiction' and 'reality'. One immediate concern that she raises in this regard is the safeguarding of women's "fictional heritage" from the proliferation of fictional products in our technological world, a safeguarding which must go along with "laying bare the logical, ideological, and historical links between that heritage and patriarchal culture."<sup>21</sup> Another concern she points to is the difference that a feminist theory could make, provided that "to treat both ... theory and fiction ... as fictions is to make a gesture assumed by contemporary thought and is also to conform to the feminist impulse."<sup>22</sup> In all events, the relevance of the postmodernist sense of truth to feminist critics amounts to a question they cannot forgo – "Is all of this another male fiction, or is it a larger process that can begin to free women – and men – from Man's Truth?"<sup>23</sup>

This question is Jardine's typical open-ended but is again pregnant with suggestions in both directions, as is also her project of *gynesis* as a whole. Apparently, on her view, *gynesis* encompasses the work of both French postmodernist thought (with its exploration of the cultural signification of *woman*) and American feminist literary criticism (with its *fundamental feminist gesture*) despite their noted divergence. They both venture on "a search for that which has been 'left out', de-emphasized, hidden, or denied articulation within Western systems of knowledge," but *gynesis* in France has proceeded "away from a concern with identity to a concern with difference, from wholeness to that which is incomplete, from representation to modes of presentation, meta-discourse to fiction, production to operation, and from Universal Truth to a search for new forms of legitimation through para-scientific (when not mathematical) models."<sup>24</sup> It would appear, though, that for Jardine each of the two perspectives by itself alone will not be as efficient in *gynesis* as both of them together. For,

... a radical reconceptualization of the speaking subject and language is, in particular, essential to the rethinking of feminism as concept and practice in the late twentieth century. At the same time, the explorations of "woman," with reference to both, in contemporary French thought, are not enough to do so because of the ways in which reality and its fictions have been deemphasized. The (American) feminist in dialogue with (French) contemporary theory may be in a special position to approach this problem by remediating and rethinking the feminist insistence on personal experience as practice with the movement of these theoretical fictions as experience and practice – thus working, potentially, toward a new disposition of the ethical grounded in symbolic process.<sup>25</sup>

We shall seek for such 'a new disposition of the ethical grounded in symbolic process' in our reading of Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, but we will also need to draw attention to several other elements of Jardine's view of *gynesis* to complete our idea of it. Such elements may not necessarily make the usage of *gynesis* for purposes of text reading any easier, as they point also – beyond any good intentions – to difficulties that might seem unsurmountable obstructions. And yet, even as Jardine has warned us that she is not offering definitive solutions, guided by

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

the belief that insights can only be more useful for the purpose than any conceptual irreconcilability, we could readily face them and see what we can get out of them.

One such element that poses difficulties for feminist critics is that, whereas it is inspired and guided by the signification of 'woman' and the representation of women, *gynesis* may not necessarily be about women, whereas "feminism is necessarily about *women* – a group of human beings in history whose identity is defined by that history's representation of sexuality."<sup>26</sup> Jardine is certainly aware that Hélène Cixous' view of *écriture féminine* ('women's writing') is essentially an attempt to differentiate and thus invent a specifically woman's discourse as distinct from the traditional man's discourse which misrepresents women.<sup>27</sup> Jardine also admits that "within traditional categories of thought, women can (have) exist(ed) only as opposed to men," that within a postmodernist perspective "women, especially feminists, who continue to think within those categories are, henceforth, seen as being men," and that this constitutes a problem for feminist critics as "it explicitly negates their own status as readers" – "genderizing the texts" effectively "problematized the gender" to the point of making it unavailable as both subject and object of text criticism.<sup>28</sup>

This by itself already consigns both postmodernist and feminist thought to crises of legitimation,<sup>29</sup> as modernity's grand narratives<sup>30</sup> can no longer work for either of them in this sense. What is more important, though, is that, no matter what form the resolution of such crises might take, the concerns for feminist criticism remain intact, for regardless of the acuteness of the postmodernist critical interventions into the narratives of modernity, for Jardine, they do not "seem to get beyond *gynesis* as it transpires within a *male* economy."<sup>31</sup> Likewise, even when "the demise of Truth," viz., "Man's Truth," is proclaimed, something that a feminist "will most certainly welcome," other key concerns will still remain; namely, "the very conceptual systems" that have inaugurated it, as well as the presence of these systems into "feminist thinking" in the form of "systems of defining the self, perception, judgment, and, therefore, morality."<sup>32</sup>

For Jardine, the way out of the conceptual conundrums in the wake of the crises of legitimation can only be *gynesis*. "The demise of the Subject, of the Dialectic, and of Truth has left modernity with a void that it is vaguely aware must be spoken differently and strangely: as woman, through *gynesis*."<sup>33</sup> Following Kristeva, who designates the intrinsic relation between *truth* (*vérité*) and the Lacanian *real* (*réel*) adopted in postmodernist thought with the neologism *vréal*,<sup>34</sup> Jardine describes the latter as "a kind of 'she-truth'" noting that it is also suggestive of

<sup>26</sup> Alice Jardine, "Introduction to Julia Kristeva's 'Women's Time,'" *Signs*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Autumn, 1981), p. 8.

<sup>27</sup> Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," translated by Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (Summer, 1976), pp. 875-893.

<sup>28</sup> Alice Jardine, *Gynesis*, p. 63.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 65ff.

<sup>30</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, pp. xxiii-xxvff, 27-37ff, 46ff, 59ff, 79ff; cf. *La condition postmoderne*, pp. 7-9ff, 49-63ff, 75ff, 97ff.

<sup>31</sup> Alice Jardine, *Gynesis*, p. 144.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154.

<sup>34</sup> Julia Kristeva, "The True-Real," in Toril Moi (ed.), *The Kristeva Reader*, translated by Sean Hand (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 216-217; cf. "Le vréal," in Julia Kristeva and Jean-Michel Ribette (eds.), *Folle Vérité – Vérité et vraisemblance du texte psychotique* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1979), p. 11.



the French *elle* (she) and thus of the truth-as-woman in *gynesis*.<sup>35</sup> The 'Real' is a key concept in the psychoanalysis of Lacan, where it is understood as what remains beyond the 'Imaginary' and the 'Symbolic', and has been also associated with Kant's *thing-in-itself*.<sup>36</sup> Lacan links it to a specific knowledge which he characterizes as "prohibited (*interdit*)," "impossible," "censured," and "forbidden," but which becomes accessible "if you write 'inter-dit' appropriately," for "it is said between the words, between the lines."<sup>37</sup> Lacan also links the 'truth' of that knowledge to 'woman' and acknowledges that, although he "does not know how to approach" it, "something true can still be said about what cannot be demonstrated."<sup>38</sup> Seizing upon these conclusions, Jardine asserts that "the true, after Lacan, can only be *inter-dit*, located between words, between lines," that it is intrinsically interlinked with the *Real* and *feminine jouissance*, and that they are thus all "*im-previsible*"; that is, "unseen and unforeseeable ...surging out of the unconscious, as terrifying as any God, no matter what name the latter carries."<sup>39</sup>

We need to keep in mind here that, as she explores the interlinkage in question, Jardine always does so with a view to feminist critique and the possibility that the conceptual apparatus of modernity with its front-runner – the speaking subject, dismantled as it is in postmodernist thought, be put to new uses at least provisionally. Lacan is also the psychoanalytic theorist who has offered a landmark discussion of *jouissance* and its links to the subject with its epistemic aspirations that has been most influential on the post-structuralist tradition. Opposing *jouissance* to the philosophical concept of 'being', at one point he declares that "thought is *jouissance*" and that "there is *jouissance* of being,"<sup>40</sup> and at another – that "the 'I' is not a being, but rather something attributed to that which speaks."<sup>41</sup> More categorically, though, he announces that,

The world, the world of being, full of knowledge, is but a dream, a dream of the body insofar as it speaks, for there's no such thing as a knowing subject. There are subjects who give themselves correlates in object *a*, correlates of enjoying speech qua *jouissance* of speech.<sup>42</sup>

In trading the subject for *jouissance*, Lacan has also dwelled on *feminine jouissance*. For him, it is a *jouissance* which is "supplementary," "beyond the phallus,"<sup>43</sup> "of the Other," and so "radically Other that woman has more of a relationship to God than anything that could have

<sup>35</sup> Alice Jardine, *Gynesis*, p. 154. See also Alice Jardine, "Opaque Texts and Transparent Contexts: the Political Difference of Julia Kristeva," in Nancy Miller(ed.), *The Poetics of Gender* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 96-115.

<sup>36</sup> Adrian Johnston, "Jacques Lacan," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/lacan/>>.

<sup>37</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX, Encore 1972-1973*, translated by Bruce Fink (New York, London: W. W. Norton & Company), p. 119; cf. *Le séminaire, livre XX, Encore 1972-1973* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1975), p. 108.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 119-120; cf. p. 108.

<sup>39</sup> Alice Jardine, *Gynesis*, p. 167.

<sup>40</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX, Encore 1972-1973*, p. 70; cf. p. 66.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120; p. 109.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 126-127; p. 114.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 73-74; cf. pp. 68-69.

been said in speculation in antiquity....”<sup>44</sup> Also, woman is said not to know it, not to “breathe a word” about it, which leads Lacan to conjecture a primary presence for the phallic jouissance,<sup>45</sup> as well as – to liken the feminine jouissance to “the essential testimony of the mystics,” who “say that they experience it, but know nothing about it.”<sup>46</sup> The unknowability and mysticism of *feminine jouissance* is due to the status of “the phallus” as “signifier that has no signified” but “is based, in the case of man, on phallic jouissance.”<sup>47</sup> Feminine jouissance thus appears to be ‘beyond the phallus’, or a sort of surplus, an “extra (*en plus*),”<sup>48</sup> which will always make ‘woman’ appear in phallic presentation as “not-whole (*pas-tout*).”<sup>49</sup>

With such considerations in mind, Lacan makes two important assertions that are of particular relevance for feminist, as well as for any other, critical perspective: 1) that “if the unconscious has taught us anything, it is first of all that somewhere in the Other it knows (*ça sait*),” and 2) that “it knows because it is based precisely on those signifiers with which the subject constitutes himself.”<sup>50</sup> That is, there is a certain kind of knowledge that is beyond the phallic signifier, is associated with the ‘unconscious’ and ‘woman’, is governed by feminine jouissance, and is based on and availed by that signifier which inaugurated the traditional subject. From here the notion of ‘woman subject’; that is, a subject governed by *feminine jouissance*, is just a step away. Hélène Cixous’ famous notion of *l’écriture féminine* presupposes this subject and also exacts it:

When I say “woman,” I’m speaking of woman in her inevitable struggle against conventional man; and of a universal woman subject who must bring women to their senses and to their meaning in history.<sup>51</sup>

Cixous clearly gives more than just theoretical import to the ‘universal woman subject’ which she also sees as a carrier or impetus of change. This subject of change has also a clear object of change – the phallogocentric tradition with its entire history of writing and reason:

Nearly the entire history of writing is confounded with the history of reason, of which it is at once the effect, the support, and one of the privileged alibis. It has been one with the phallogocentric tradition. It is indeed that same self-admiring, self-stimulating, self-congratulatory phallogocentrism.<sup>52</sup>

Jardine sees Cixous’ work as “a step farther” in the postmodernist tradition that advances the cultural significance of ‘woman’ and ‘l’écriture féminine’, largely because Cixous has suggested that even “if feminine writing does not require the signature of a woman, women nonetheless, today (after psychoanalysis and Derrida), do have a privileged access to it” to the

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., pp. 82-83; cf. p. 77.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 60; cf. p. 56.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 76; cf. pp. 70-71.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 81; cf. p. 75.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 77; cf. p. 71.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., pp. 7, 60; cf. pp. 13, 56.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., pp. 87-88; cf. p. 81.

<sup>51</sup> Hélène Cixous, “The Laugh of Medousa,” translated by Keith Cohen & Paula Cohen, *Signs*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (Summer, 1976), pp. 875-876.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 879.

point that “women ... seem to be, almost intrinsically, proto-postmodernists.”<sup>53</sup> The notion of ‘woman subject’ having a ‘privileged access’ to the ‘feminine writing’ adds up a good deal of impetus to the potential of Jardine’s project of *gynesis* for feminist critique and literary criticism, even as she has acknowledged the differences in focus and emphasis, to which that the postmodernist thought has awakened the French and American texts. Jardine actually believes that a continued dialogue between the French and American feminist writers can only help discover “*new* configurations of woman and modernity,” as well as decide “the future of gynesis” and its relevance “for women.”<sup>54</sup>

In this regard, and from the view point of feminist literary critique, Jardine notes that “the writing strategies intrinsic to modernity,” which she identified in her discussion of the French postmodernists, are also at work “in the contemporary male American novel” but are imbedded in a “process” that is “qualitatively different” – “an *external* process, manipulating language and exploding the semantic spaces of the *referent*, rather than an *internal* one, imploding the *signifier* itself.”<sup>55</sup> Indeed, Jardine claims that, grounded in an “ideology” of “unconditional freedom and originality of the author-self,” the contemporary male American writer has “remained sovereign, never putting the authority of his own discourse into question in any radical way.”<sup>56</sup> Thus, his text has remained arguably deaf to the “maternal,” rather than “exploding paternal identity, concepts, and narrative to get at their feminine core, through ... a radical rearrangement of gender.”<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, on Jardine’s view, this text has made an entrance into *gynesis* “at the level of *representation*,” though in its own way, in which *gynesis* appears again “as the primary problem for any ‘narrative’ or ‘subject-in-narrative’” but “without necessarily problematizing either one.”<sup>58</sup>

We take it from here that, whereas it may have been limited, this entrance could by itself become a point of departure for a deconstructive feminist critique which uncovers the aspects of *gynesis* alongside the patriarchal ones as coded within a literary text. We can also assume that such an approach can be applied to earlier modern texts as well, as they have been exposed to an even lesser critique of the writing strategies of modernity than the contemporary ones. We hope this approach will be further facilitated if we throw light on Derrida’s sense of deconstruction, to which we turn next.

### **Derrida’s Philosophy of Deconstruction**

Like Jardine’s notion of *gynesis*, Derrida’s view of *deconstruction* does not emulate a specific move between binary oppositions, even though he acknowledges their inevitability in discourse. His gesture of bringing Claude Lévi-Strauss’ ethnological research to bear on the deconstruction of the structure of discourse is not a move from particular to universal, from local to global, or the other way around. These binary oppositions grow increasingly flexible as they are deployed – through the abstractions of discourse and culture – away from the

<sup>53</sup> Alice Jardine, *Gynesis*, p. 262.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 264.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 234.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 234-235.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 236.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 236.

visualities of nature to the point of their significatory self-disbandment, self-annihilation or, otherwise, deconstruction. This process is certainly more subtle and sophisticated than the discourse can convey, especially as the latter inevitably faces in it its own self-disarmament and structural incapacity to proceed beyond itself. It is nonetheless a process in which, as Derrida has shown, discourse becomes increasingly aware of its own “finite” capacity as a “field” which “excludes totalization.”<sup>59</sup>

The sense of deconstruction<sup>60</sup> which Derrida conveys comprises a number of developments in what he calls the “history of meaning” and is tied with the concept of ‘structure’ that is central to the work of such figures as the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, and the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, among others. As is typically understood, ‘structure’ is what introduces order, organization, and systematicity in discourse to make it intelligible, for, as Saussure, the foremost originator of structuralism, puts it, “in language there are only differences without positive terms.”<sup>61</sup>

### *Structure, Sign, and Play*

In the opening of his most widely read essay “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” Derrida speaks of an “event” which constitutes a “rupture” in “the concept of structure,” and which he links to the very sense of “the structurality of structure.” More specifically, he points out that “although it has always been at work, [structure also] has always been neutralized or reduced, and this by a process of giving it a center or of referring it to a point of presence, a fixed origin.”<sup>62</sup> For Derrida, the center of the structure plays the special role of ensuring its stability, organization, coherence, and thus intelligibility, but most importantly – of “limiting what we might call the *play* of the structure.”<sup>63</sup> The center of the structure “closes off the play which it opens up and makes possible,” but itself remains insusceptible to “permutation or transformation” and thus, despite its special function, “escapes structurality,” which is why it was thought of, “paradoxically, *within* the structure and *outside it*.”<sup>64</sup> In other words,

The center is at the center of the totality, and yet, since the center does not belong to the totality (is not part of the totality), the totality *has its center elsewhere*. The center is not the center. The concept of centered structure – although it represents coherence itself, the condition of the *episteme* as philosophy or science – is contradictorily coherent.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, translated by Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p.289; cf. *L'écriture et la différence* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1967), p. 423.

<sup>60</sup> It is to be noted that, even as he used the term ‘deconstruction’ and its derivatives extensively, Derrida was not happy with the label ‘deconstructionist’ for his philosophy, which came to be applied to it rather by popular consent.

<sup>61</sup> Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, edited by Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye, in collaboration with Albert Riedlinger, translated, with an introduction and notes by Wade Baskin (New York: The Philosophical Library, Inc. 1959), p. 120; cf. *Cours de linguistique générale*, publié par Charles Bally et Albert Sechehaye, avec la collaboration de Albert Riedlinger (Paris: Payot, 1971), pp. 194-195.

<sup>62</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.278; cf. *L'écriture et la différence*, p. 409.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p.278; cf. p. 409.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p.279; cf. pp. 409-410.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p.279; cf. p. 410.

Derrida points out further that throughout the intellectual tradition of the West that center has been taking different “forms or names,” different “metaphors and metonymies” – such as “*eidos, arche, telos, energeia, ousia* (essence, existence, substance, subject), *aletheia*, transcendentality, consciousness, God, man, and so forth” – but it has always aimed at “the determination of Being as *presence* in all senses of this word.”<sup>66</sup> Thus, it became historically clear “that the center could not be thought in the form of a present-being, ... that it was not a fixed locus but a *function*, a sort of nonlocus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play” to the point that “everything became discourse,” or “a system in which the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences,” thus “extending the domain and the play of signification infinitely.”<sup>67</sup>

Whereas, for Derrida, there is no particular event or doctrine that marks the beginning of the rupture of the concept of structure, he has singled out the discourses of Nietzsche, Freud, and Heidegger, in which its “work” has found “its most radical formulation.”<sup>68</sup> Yet, for him, such discourses are inevitably involved in a “unique circle” which is indicative of “the relation between the history of metaphysics and the destruction of the history of metaphysics,” and ultimately – of the impossibility of deconstructing metaphysics without using its concepts:

There is no sense in doing without the concepts of metaphysics in order to shake metaphysics. We have no language – no syntax and no lexicon – which is foreign to this history; we can pronounce not a single destructive proposition which has not already had to slip into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest.<sup>69</sup>

One example that Derrida gives in this regard is the concept of *sign*, a key concept of structuralist thought, which – as metaphysical concept – has to be “rejected,” but which at the same time cannot be dispensed with in such a rejection.<sup>70</sup> The concept of the sign cannot secure a transcendence of, or a radical distance from, the metaphysical oppositions it enables (such as the one “between sensible and intelligible,” as Lévi-Strauss had hoped); for we cannot annul its very own metaphysical “self-identity” (of an opposition between signifier and signified) without annulling also its functional capacity – we cannot annul its “metaphysical complicity without also giving up the critique we are directing against this complicity.”<sup>71</sup>

In this relation, Derrida speaks of a “classical way” of annulling or “erasing the difference between the signifier and the signified,” which involves “*submitting* the sign to thought,” as opposed to his own, which contests “the system” of operation of the former one, and most of all – “the opposition between sensible and intelligible.”<sup>72</sup> More particularly, Derrida points to what he calls “the *paradox* ... that the metaphysical reduction of the sign needed the opposition it was reducing,” suggesting – in a circular fashion – that “the opposition

---

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., pp.279-280; cf. pp. 410-411.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 280 (emphasis added); cf. p. 411.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 280; cf. pp. 411-412.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., pp. 280-281; cf. pp. 411-412.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 281; cf. p. 412.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 281; cf. pp. 412-413.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 281; cf. p. 413.

is systematic with the reduction,” which in his view applies “to all the concepts and all the sentences of metaphysics, in particular to the discourse on ‘structure,’” and “explains the multiplicity of destructive discourses and the disagreement between those who elaborate them.”<sup>73</sup> This means that no ‘system’ is possible without differences and oppositions, which are necessary for the ‘reduction’, explanation, or elaboration within its perspective, and ultimately – for the deconstruction of that system itself and its structural elements. That is, regardless of its primary purpose, every usage of metaphysical concepts, including those made within the “destructive discourses” of the likes of Nietzsche, Freud, and Heidegger, “brings along with it the whole of metaphysics.”<sup>74</sup> This also means that the metaphysical deconstruction of metaphysics (indeed its only possible deconstruction) needs to make usage of metaphysical oppositions, as much as to face the impossibility of accepting them, as in the case of Lévi-Strauss’ ethnological research, where his fundamental opposition between *nature* and *culture* collapsed in the explanation of the universal normativity of incest prohibition.<sup>75</sup>

For Derrida, this indicates that “language bears within itself the necessity of its own critique,” which he suggests could be done in two manners: one “questioning systematically and rigorously the history of these concepts,” but in a way different from that of the “classic historian of philosophy,” and instead – in a “step ‘outside philosophy’”; and another, instrumental one, which, while questioning their truth-value, “conserves” their methodological utility.<sup>76</sup> He sees Lévi-Strauss’ notion of *bricolage* as an example of the latter manner in the sense in which the *bricoleur* utilizes various tools that come handy, regardless of the purposes for which they may have been made originally.<sup>77</sup> What Derrida emphasizes here is that the value of *bricolage* is not just “intellectual” but also “mythopoetical,” which for him emulates “the stated abandonment of all reference to a *center*, to a *subject*, to a privileged *reference*, to an origin, or to an absolute *archia*.”<sup>78</sup> Thus, the important recognition that Derrida makes, along with Lévi-Strauss, is that the study of the myths is itself *mythomorphic*, “itself a kind of myth” – “the myth of mythology,” answering “the arbitrary demand for a total mythological pattern,” as much as “the philosophical or epistemological requirement of a center.”<sup>79</sup>

Employing discourse for *totalization*, then, is in an important sense *useless* and *impossible*, but for Derrida this is not just because of the empirical impossibility for a finite subject to master the infinite field of its totalizing endeavor; most fundamentally, it is “because the nature of the field – that is, language and a finite language – excludes totalization.”<sup>80</sup> It is rather that field’s nature of “nontotalization” that needs determination and here Derrida reaches out to the concept of *play*:

This field is in effect that of *play*, that is to say, a field of infinite substitutions only because it is finite, that is to say, because instead of being an inexhaustible field, as in the classical hypothesis,

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 281; cf. p. 413.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 281; cf. p. 413.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 283; cf. pp. 415-416.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 284; cf. pp. 416-417.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 285; cf. p. 418.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., pp. 285-286; cf. pp. 418-419.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., pp. 286-289; cf. pp. 420-423.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 289; cf. p. 423.

---

instead of being too large, there is something missing from it: a center which arrests and grounds the play of substitutions. One could say ... that this movement of play, permitted by the lack or absence of a center or origin, is the movement of *supplementarity*. One cannot determine the center and exhaust totalization because the sign which replaces the center, which supplements it, taking the center's place in its absence—this sign is added, occurs as a surplus, as a *supplement*.<sup>81</sup>

This passage condenses a great deal of Derrida's view on the nature of discourse and deconstruction. It suggests that both discourse and deconstruction are products of the work or 'movement' of what he calls *play*. The field of language is the field of *play* – 'a field of infinite substitutions'. It is 'a field of infinite substitutions only because it is finite'. It is both 'a field of infinite substitutions' and 'finite' because 'there is something missing from it: a center'. It is thus both finite and infinite but that paradox would hold sway as paradox (in its proper sense of contradiction) only in an empirical (or otherwise logical) perspective; in the play of a centerless discourse it would stand as the normal state of affairs. In the 'absence of a center', the 'movement of play' is 'the movement of supplementarity', because 'the sign replaces the center' without being a center and thus adds up to the play, becomes 'a surplus' or 'a supplement'. And yet, that this 'supplement' is only "a floating one," serving only "a vicarious function" to make up for "a lack on the part of the signified,"<sup>82</sup> already suggests that all signifying discourse – with all its presumably centering but fundamentally arbitrary structurality – is duly owed a deconstruction. In other words, discourse already carries within itself its own deconstruction, which only needs to be read out, provided that one knows how to read it.

In this relation, Derrida speaks of certain *tensions* of the concept of *play* with those of *history* and *presence*, which he identifies in Lévi-Strauss as well. First, on Derrida's view, the tension between the concepts of *play* and *history* denies the latter its "classic" oppositionist stance to, and instead points to its "complicity" with, the metaphysics of presence:

With or without etymology, and despite the classic antagonism which opposes these significations throughout all of classical thought, it could be shown that the concept of *epistēmē* has always called forth that of *historia*, if history is always the unity of a becoming, as the tradition of truth or the development of science or knowledge oriented toward the appropriation of truth in presence and self-presence, toward knowledge in consciousness-of-self.<sup>83</sup>

In other words, *historia* is always already *epistēmē*, if, in 'the tradition of truth', 'history is the unity of a becoming' as apperceived – along 'truth in presence and self-presence' – by a subject; that is, as 'knowledge in consciousness-of-self'. For Derrida, then, grasping "the internal originality of a structure" – including that of the "structure of structures, language" – would require "a neutralization of time and history," a sort of suspension of all "its past conditions," which would see that structure's emergence as, in Lévi-Strauss' words, "born in one fell swoop."<sup>84</sup> Now, for Lévi-Strauss, 'born in one fell swoop' does not mean 'created out of nothing', as certain "process" and "transformations" are assumed to be at work there, but – on

---

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 289; cf. p. 423.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 289; cf. p. 423.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 291; cf. p. 425.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 291; cf. pp. 425-426.

Derrida's view – he saw the suspension of all factuality as necessary for “recapturing the specificity of a structure.”<sup>85</sup>

On the other ‘tension’, the one between *play* and *presence*, Derrida points that whereas “presence” is a signification “inscribed in a system of differences,” “play is the disruption of presence” and is thus a “play of absence and presence,” which, “thought radically, ... must be conceived of before the alternative of presence and absence.”<sup>86</sup> In this sense, for Derrida, “Being must be conceived as presence or absence on the basis of the possibility of play and not the other way around,” a stance which appears to condition two approaches to the “impossible presence”:

Turned towards the lost or impossible presence of the absent origin, this structuralist thematic of broken immediacy is therefore the saddened, *negative*, nostalgic, guilty, Rousseauistic side of the thinking of play whose other side would be the Nietzschean affirmation, that is the joyous *affirmation* of the play of the world and of the innocence of becoming, the affirmation of a world of signs without fault, without truth, and without origin which is offered to an active interpretation. *This affirmation then determines the noncenter otherwise than as loss of the center.* And it plays without security. For there is a sure play: that which is limited to the *substitution* of *given* and *existing*, *present*, pieces. In absolute chance, affirmation also surrenders itself to *genetic* indetermination, to the *seminal* adventure of the trace.<sup>87</sup>

Thus, both the ‘negative, nostalgic Rousseauistic side’ and the ‘joyous, affirmative Nietzschean side’ of thinking the *play* are two interpretative approaches, “two interpretations of interpretation, of structure, of sign, of play,” which while “absolutely irreconcilable” find their ways into the common “field” of the human sciences.<sup>88</sup> These two ways of responding to the apparent lack or ‘loss of the center’, to ‘the noncenter’ of the structurality of structure, appear to posit two key aspects of the deconstructive critique, two demands which are as exacting as they are inevitable, and as non-binding as they are indeterminate: 1) the demand for a recurrent substitution of significations in a system of differences, a system of presence; and 2) the demand for the affirmation of play, of the adventure of life; that is, for life affirmation. Still, Derrida does not think we have a “question of *choosing*” here; rather our first task is to “try to conceive of the common ground, and the *différance* of this irreducible difference,” a task which opens up a “glimpse” at the question of “facing the as yet unnamable,” the question whose treatment portends promises, risks, and delusions that can only provisionally announce themselves in a metaphoric of “childbearing,” “nonspecies,” and “monstrosity.”<sup>89</sup>

### *The Play of Différance*

Derrida's view of *différance* adds up to the sense of his deconstructive approach by exploring interrelations of structurality with key concepts of the metaphysical tradition, including difference, being, becoming, causation, subject, time, space, trace, consciousness, and unconscious, among others. While fairly complex and demanding a close reading to get into its

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., pp. 291-292; cf. p. 426.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 292; cf. p. 426.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 292; cf. pp. 426-427.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., pp. 292-293; cf. p. 427.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 293; cf. pp. 427-428.



sense, we will limit its discussion here to only some of its aspects that indicate the openness of deconstruction to literary texts.

Initially described as “neographism,” *différance* obtains through the imposition of the letter “a” in place of the letter “e” in the French word *différence*.<sup>90</sup> As a mere “graphic difference,” the *a* of *différance* can be “read or written,” but it would remain inaudible in the spoken French language:

The *a* of *différance*, thus, is not heard; it remains silent, secret and discreet as a tomb: *oikesis*. And thereby let us anticipate the delineation of a site, the familial residence and tomb of the proper in which is produced, by *différance*, the *economy of death*. This stone – provided that one knows how to decipher its inscription – is not far from announcing the death of the tyrant.<sup>91</sup>

Drawing on the links of the Greek word *oikos* (house) with ‘tomb’ (*oikesis*) and ‘economy’ (from *oikonomia* or “household management”), Derrida here associates the ‘tomb of the proper’ with ‘the death of the tyrant’. This ‘economy of death’, which is an effect of *différance*, involves “the pyramidal silence” of the letter *a* in “the graphic difference”<sup>92</sup> and points to the need of ‘deciphering its inscription’. Further on, drawing on Saussure's discussion of structurality of language, Derrida speaks of *différance* as “play of differences,” which is “the possibility of conceptuality, of a conceptual process and system in general,”<sup>93</sup> as much as it is “the condition for the possibility and functioning of every sign.”<sup>94</sup> Yet, this seemingly transcendental characterization will be duly stripped of its transcendentalism, as *différance* will be seen not only as “what makes possible the presentation of the being-present,” but also as what “is never presented as such, ... never offered to the present,” nor “to anyone.”<sup>95</sup> Thus *différance* will reappear as evading the language of presence very much as its letter *a* evades being detected in speech. We can conjecture here that as the silent *a* of *différance* can only be deciphered in its inscription, so too *différance* itself – in its non-presence, lack of being, transcendental inaccessibility – remains open to discussion, viz. interpretation, as much as anything belonging to the margins of the text. And yet, as “*différance* is neither a word nor a concept,” and is thus “what is most irreducible of our ‘era’” (and indeed without ‘is’),<sup>96</sup> its discussion, which is to unfold inevitably in the language of presence, can only be paradoxical or non-literal.

Within the terms of this language, Derrida has traced two aspects of *différance* along the two senses of the French verb *différer* (and its Latin predecessor *differre*) – rendered in English respectively with ‘defer’ and ‘differ’ – as *temporization* and *spacing*: the former implying “an economical calculation, a detour, a delay, a relay, a reserve, a representation”; the latter – “dissimilar otherness or ... allergic and polemical otherness, an interval, a distance.”<sup>97</sup>

<sup>90</sup> Jacques Derrida, “Différance,” in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 3; cf. *Marges de la Philosophie* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1972), p. 4.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4; cf. p. 4.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4; cf. p. 4.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11; cf. p. 11.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5; cf. p. 5.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6; cf. p. 6.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8; cf. p. 8.

These two aspects of *différance* point to the fundamental categories of the metaphysical tradition 'time' and 'space', which in Derrida's discussion thus appear in perspective. A key pointer here is that the *a* of *différance* is understood as "immediately deriving from the present participle (*différant*), thereby bringing us close to the very action of the verb *différer*, before it has even produced an effect constituted as something different or as *différence* (with an *e*)."<sup>98</sup> In this sense, *différance* reappears as the overall dynamics that underlays or makes possible thinking in terms of language as differences; that is, it makes possible thinking, categorial thinking, metaphysical thinking, as well as writing, altogether.

The elusive character of *différance* has compelled Derrida to appeal in its discussion to Freud's concept of *trace* (*Spur*) and to Heidegger's usage of the same term, both of which are suggestive of a non-literal rendering of what otherwise appears unrepresentable. Thus, Derrida has associated "the movement of signification" towards "the scene of presence"; that is, the "constitution of the present" of the language of presence – via differences and intervals, or temporization and spacing – with "archi-writing, archi-trace, or *différance*."<sup>99</sup> He uncovers *différance* as *spacing* within Freud's "concepts of trace (*Spur*), of breaching (*Bahnung*), and of the forces of breaching," by pointing that they "are inseparable from the concept of difference," as "there is no breach without difference and no difference without trace."<sup>100</sup> Then, he identifies *différance* as *temporization* by pointing that "all the differences in the production of unconscious traces and in the processes of inscription (*Niederschrift*)" can be interpreted as "putting into reserve," because Freud regards "the movement of a trace ... as an effort of life to protect itself by *deferring* the dangerous investment, by constituting a reserve (*Vorrat*)."<sup>101</sup>

Likewise, Derrida links his notion of *différance* with the defining concepts of the metaphysical tradition via Heidegger's usage of 'trace' as well. Heidegger's stance that the "oblivion of Being belongs to the self-veiling essence of Being," as "even the early trace (*die fruhe Spur*)" of the ontological difference between Being and beings "is obliterated when presencing appears as something present," for Derrida, points to *différance* as "other than absence and presence," as what "traces," and is thus the "erasure of the early trace of difference," as much as "its tracing in the text of metaphysics."<sup>102</sup> For Derrida, such a 'tracing' is possible via "an inversion of metaphysical concepts" in which "the present becomes the sign of the sign, the trace of the trace," and because, like Heidegger, he thinks that, even if lost, "the 'early trace' of difference" can still be "sheltered, retained, seen, delayed," precisely "in a text," which is a "form of presence."<sup>103</sup>

Not surprisingly then, for Derrida, such a 'tracing' leads where Heidegger found the first indication of the ontological difference – in Anaximander's usage of *to khreon*, which is typically translated as 'necessity' but – drawing on its etymology – Heidegger translates as

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p. 8; cf. pp. 8-9.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. 13; cf. pp. 13-14.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 18; cf. p. 19.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 18; cf. p. 19.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., pp. 23-24; cf. pp. 24-25.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., pp. 23-24; cf. pp. 24-25.

usage' (*Brauch*).<sup>104</sup> Heidegger's choice of 'usage' issues from his attempt to think "the oblivion of Being," the ontological difference, in the preconceptual terms of the early Greek thinkers.<sup>105</sup> Thus, rather than keeping to its restrictive sense of compelling necessity, "of what 'must be'," he sees *to khreon* in its principally unbound sense of "handing over of presence which presencing delivers to what is present, and which thus keeps in hand, i.e. preserves in presencing, what is present as such."<sup>106</sup> If "usage delivers what is present to its presencing" and is in this sense "the distribution of presencing into disorder," then it "conjoins the dis-"<sup>107</sup> – indeed the dis- of any difference and distinction, of the ontological difference, of the difference between usage and necessity, of *différance*. Heidegger then links 'usage' with 'trace' writing,

What properly remains to be thought in the word "usage" has presumably left a trace (*Spur*) in τὸ χρεών. This trace quickly vanishes in the destiny of Being which unfolds in world history as Western metaphysics.<sup>108</sup>

Whereas this statement can be read as telling us that 'usage' and 'necessity' blend in *to khreon* in a not immediately discernable difference, it is also suggestive that – as Heidegger demonstrates – 'presencing' in preconceptual terms is traceable, as it leaves a 'trace', precisely in 'usage', in *to khreon*, as the non-causal rising of the ontological difference, as an effect of *différance*.

Such a tracing, though, cannot be literal. For, as Derrida has acknowledged along with Heidegger, "clearing the difference (*Lichtung des Unterschiedes*) ... cannot mean that the difference appears as difference."<sup>109</sup> In this sense, there can be no "proper essence of *différance*," nor "a Being nor truth of the play of writing such as it engages *différance*," nor "a unique word" or "a master-name" that can properly name it on the language of presence.<sup>110</sup> Instead, what we are left with for *différance* is to keep in mind that,

This unnameable is the play which makes possible nominal effects, the relatively unitary and atomic structures that are called names, the chains of substitutions of names in which, for example, the nominal effect *différance* is itself *enmeshed*, carried off, reinscribed, just as a false entry or a false exit is still part of the game, a function of the system.<sup>111</sup>

The unnameable *différance*, the play that conditions the 'nominal effects', is itself a 'nominal effect' which is to be traced in writing. It is 'enmeshed' in 'chains of substitutions of names' in

<sup>104</sup> Martin Heidegger, "The Anaximander Fragment," in *Early Greek Thinking*, translated by David Farrell Krell and Frank Capuzzi (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), pp. 50-51; cf. *Holzwege* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1957), SS. 365-366.

<sup>105</sup> For insightful discussions of Heidegger's rendering of *to khreon* see W. Julian Korab-Karpowicz, *The Presocratics in the Thought of Martin Heidegger* (New York, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2017), pp. 84ff; as well as Michael Eldred, *Social Ontology of Whoness: Rethinking Core Phenomena of Political Philosophy* (Berlin, Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2019), 8.1.1.6.

<sup>106</sup> Martin Heidegger, "The Anaximander Fragment," p. 52; cf. *Holzwege*, S. 366.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 53-54; cf. SS. 368-369.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54; cf. S. 369.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51; cf. S. 365 (translation mine here).

<sup>110</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Différance", pp. 25-27; cf. *Marges de la Philosophie*, pp. 27-28.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27; cf. p. 29.

whose 'structures' it can reappear only as 'a false entry or a false exit'. And yet, it is still 'carried off, reinscribed,' 'still part of the game, a function of the system', still leaving its trace in writing. While its eventual tracing cannot be smooth, or ever fixed, it has certainly become a venture in the history of metaphysics and its writing, where through the clearing of nominal effects *différance* has reappeared as the margin of its own text, leaving us with two already familiar options. What is certain, though, is that Derrida's preference is clear here:

There will be no unique name, even if it were the name of Being. And we must think this without *nostalgia*, that is, outside of the myth of a purely maternal or paternal language, a lost native country of thought. On the contrary, we must *affirm* this, in the sense in which Nietzsche puts affirmation into play, in a certain laughter and a certain step of the dance.<sup>112</sup>

Nietzsche's affirmative philosophy is here offered as the alternative to the 'nostalgic' metaphysical thinking that anticipates the 'unique word' on the language of presence. This does not mean that Derrida suggests that the nostalgic thinking is to be fully abandoned, for in a certain sense this is never possible, either. This however does signal that the putative traceability of *différance* can be availed by way of a reinvention of its nominal effects in language. Such a reinvented language will not be necessarily literal but it will be in an important relation with the literality of the language of presence; that is, in *différance* with that language.

#### *The Unconscious and the Becoming Literary of the Literal*

It is in this sense, then, that Derrida draws attention to a necessary *becoming literary of the literal*, which he sees as indicated in Freud's investigations on the unconscious and its interplay with its repressive consciousness. The becoming literary of the literal is not an immediate consequence of Freud's insights, even if he himself has used them as means of literary critique, but one that Derrida elicits via a juxtaposition of Freud's concepts with the fundamental concepts of the metaphysical tradition. Of key importance here is Freud's concept of *repression*.

Derrida sees the Freudian "repression" as different from the "historical repression and suppression of writing," which inaugurates "philosophy as *episteme*" and the "truth as the unity of *logos* and *phone*," in that it is neither "forgetting" nor "exclusion" but rather a harboring of "an interior representation."<sup>113</sup> However, he also sees the "Freudian concepts" too "without exception" as "belonging to the theory of metaphysics, that is, to the system of logocentric repression," which is the repression of "forgetting" and "exclusion" of "the body of written trace as a didactic and technical metaphor," or otherwise – the "repression of writing" that represses "that which threatens presence and the mastering of absence."<sup>114</sup> Thus, Freud will go on a search for 'an interior representation' which – due to the character of its subject-matter – could not be possibly rendered *literally* within the terms of the language of presence.

Freud, therefore, will not assert its presence by straightening out its absence. Instead, he will use metaphors, such as 'trace', 'mystic writing pad', 'life', and 'death', to invoke the fundamental involvement of consciousness with the unconscious, only to assert through this

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., pp. 26-27; cf. p. 28.

<sup>113</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Freud and the Scene of Writing," in *Writing and Difference*, pp. 196-197; cf. "Freud et la scène de l'écriture," *L'écriture et la différence*, pp. 293-294.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p. 197; cf. pp. 293-294.

metaphorics the enigmaticity of that involvement. For Derrida, this is an assertion that suggests the enigma of writing itself and is likewise “a movement unknown to the classic philosophy ..., somewhere between the implicit and explicit.”<sup>115</sup> Indeed, the ‘classic philosophy’ strives for lucidity keeping away from enigmaticity, whereas within the Freudian terms the enigma of writing is *asserted*, thus keeping writing open to interpretation as an endeavor of mediation between implicit and explicit, between unconscious and conscious.

Here, a translation in the usual sense will not be possible because there is no code available for its materialization, no signifier for signified. What we have is only the resistance to the repression, which is the way of life; that is, the resistance of ‘life’ to ‘death’ that places “death at the origin of life,” for life “can defend itself against death only through an *economy* of death, through deferment, repetition, reserve,” through “repetition, trace, *différance* (deferral).”<sup>116</sup> It is thus by such a life-protective resistance (or deferral) that in the lack of a translation code the unconscious can find its way to consciousness – not as “a transcription duplicating an unconscious writing,” but as “originary and irreducible.”<sup>117</sup> This however comes with a fundamental implication for writing in all its forms:

Since consciousness for Freud is a surface exposed to the external world, it is here that instead of reading through the metaphor in the usual sense, we must, on the contrary, understand the possibility of a writing advanced as conscious and as acting in the world (the visible exterior of the graphism, of the literal, of the literal becoming literary, etc.) in terms of the labor of the writing which circulated like psychical energy between the unconscious and the conscious.<sup>118</sup>

‘Consciousness’ is not a substance on its own, which is radically differentiated from its other – it is ‘a surface exposed to the external world’, and therefore to the unconscious. Thus, rather than ‘reading through the metaphor in the usual sense’ – the sense of presence and of consciousness’ own self-sufficiency in self-presence – it is that inevitable ‘labor of the writing’ that oscillates in undecodable manner ‘like psychical energy between the unconscious and the conscious’, to which our understanding of writing must remain open. For, “the trace is the erasure of selfhood, of one’s own presence,”<sup>119</sup> that is, of consciousness, and of consciousness’ self-sufficiency in self-presence.

When it comes to the field of the *literal becoming literary*, Derrida makes a rather straightforward statement that “despite several attempts ... a psychoanalysis of literature respectful of the *originality of the literary signifier* has not yet begun,” thus suggesting that addressing the ‘labor of writing’ as a ‘circulation between the unconscious and the conscious’ aiming to trace that ‘originality’ is still wanting. For,

Until now, only the analysis of the literary *signifieds*, that is, *nonliterary* signified meanings, has been undertaken. But such questions refer to the entire history of literary forms themselves, and to

---

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p. 199; cf. p. 296..

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., pp. 202-203; cf. pp. 300-302.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p. 212; cf. p. 314.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 212; cf. pp. 314-315.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p. 230; cf. p. 340.

---

the history of everything within them which was destined precisely to authorize this disdain of the signifier.<sup>120</sup>

What Derrida seems to suggest here is that ‘the analysis of the literary signifieds’ takes place within the field of ‘nonliterary signified meanings’; that is, within the peculiar type of circulation of the signifier which belongs to the metaphysics of presence. This circulation is itself marked by the repressive ‘disdain of the signifier’, which materializes in writing. For its part, the ‘disdain of the signifier’ stems precisely from, has been ‘authorized’ by, ‘the history of everything within the literary the forms’, which has been (‘destined’ to be) repressed by that disdain. Here, it is important to note that this repressive procedure is inevitable and direct consequence of the radical differentiation of the signifier from the signified within the concept of the sign.

Here, we also need to keep in mind that the circulation of the signifier within the terms of presence is marked by the literality of presence itself; whereas the ‘literary’ is a deviation from that literality – a yet another delay, detour, *différance* of what ‘must’ be present in the inevitability of writing. It is thus the character of this detour that needs to be explored in literature, and through literature. For, the literary presence is not just – like any presence inaugurated by the signifier – a delayed presence, or a veiled absence; it is also an availed absence, an indicated absence, which is itself indicative, and indeed indicative of how the signifier reappears – within the socio-political metaphors of Freud – as disdainful, repressive, exploitive, sublimatory. Still, one will have to know how to read such indications, which are – realistically – only pointers demanding a shuttled journey between presence and absence, between conscious and unconscious, a journey more suggestive than pinpointing, more literary than literal.

### *Style and Woman*

As Derrida has linked deconstruction to affirmation, has also linked it to “the question of style” and the socio-cultural sense of “woman.”<sup>121</sup> Drawing very much on Nietzsche’s posthumously published notes, as well as on thinkers like Freud and Heidegger, he traces pointers of significance relevant to both feminist and deconstructive critique that bring to the fore the affirmative sense of “woman.” Derrida admits that Nietzsche’s discussion of women is mostly anti-feminist but focuses on those of his comments that are “apparently feminist.”<sup>122</sup> This is not without Derrida’s own interpretation but the affirmative sense of “woman” is detected in opposition to the values of the metaphysical tradition, such as “essence,” “identity,” and “truth” – values which Nietzsche himself has already rejected in his own way, which Derrida aims to deconstruct, and against which now “woman” is seen as “one name for that untruth of truth.”<sup>123</sup>

This sense of “woman” is further juxtaposed with the metaphysical thinking which – in its apparently distorting operation – is incapable of grasping it. Instead, “woman” never succumbs to that operation but always evades it and points to its deconstruction:

---

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., p. 230; cf. p. 340.

<sup>121</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles/Éperons: les styles de Nietzsche*, French-English edition (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 1979), pp. 36-37.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., pp. 56-57.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., pp. 50-51.

---

... the dogmatic and credulous philosopher who *believes* in the truth that is woman, who believes in truth just as he believes in woman, this philosopher has understood nothing. He has understood nothing of truth, nor anything of woman. Because, indeed, if woman *is* truth, *she* at least knows that there is no truth, that truth has no places here and that no one has a place for truth. And she is a woman precisely because she herself does not believe in truth itself, because she does not believe in what she is, in what she is believed to be, in what she thus is not.<sup>124</sup>

Here Derrida is quite clear – the lack of ‘place for truth’ for ‘no one’ cannot satisfy the searches of ‘the dogmatic and credulous philosopher’, even as he ‘believes in the truth that is woman’, for he knows ‘nothing of truth, nor anything of woman’. It is instead ‘woman’ who ‘knows that there is no truth’ and thus ‘does not believe in what she is, in what she is believed to be, in what she thus is not’. Thus, Derrida concludes,

Woman (truth) will not be pinned down. In truth woman, truth will not be pinned down. That which will not be pinned down by truth is, in truth – *feminine*.<sup>125</sup>

It is to be noted here that this statement concerns the socio-cultural signification of “woman” previously discussed, which evades the conceptual instrumentarium of the metaphysical tradition, and is not to “be hastily mistaken for a woman’s femininity, for female sexuality, or for any other essentializing fetishes” that could motivate someone sharing in the operation of that tradition.<sup>126</sup> That is, what inaugurates the metaphysical tradition, the ‘truth’, has no power over ‘woman’ and ‘will not pin her down’. And even if ‘woman is truth’ – what is sought after, what is fetishized – ‘she herself does not believe in truth itself’; she is beyond the truth, even as she instates that truth. Thus, she is actually “playing” with the truth and her relationship to truth is markedly “artistic” – her philosophy is an “artist’s philosophy” while her “power is affirmative.”<sup>127</sup>

Consequently, Derrida associates “woman” with “writing” and thus inevitably with “style,” conjecturing in particular that “if style were a man (much as the penis, according to Freud is the normal prototype of fetishes), then writing would be a woman.”<sup>128</sup> Thus, “the questions of art, style and truth” are inevitably bound with “the question of the woman,” and yet Derrida acknowledges that it is impossible to answer the latter; that is, to search and capture the dimensions of “woman” in terms of metaphysical presence, as much as “it is impossible to resist looking for her.”<sup>129</sup>

Thus, Derrida focuses on the relation of “woman” to the metaphysical tradition, drawing particularly on Nietzsche’s sense of “becoming woman,” which, in Derrida’s view, Heidegger has ignored, focusing instead primarily on Nietzsche’s oppositional relation to that tradition.<sup>130</sup> Derrida links Nietzsche’s sense of “becoming woman” with Plato’s sense of “idea,” and more particularly he sees the “becoming female” as a “process of the idea” (*Fortschritt der idee*)

---

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., pp. 52-53.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., pp. 54-55.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., pp. 54-55.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., pp. 66-69.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., pp. 56-57.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., pp. 70-71.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., pp. 84-85ff.

where “idea” is understood as “a form of truth’s self-presentation.”<sup>131</sup> Thus, “truth” and “woman,” which previously have not always been bound together, now “together both form a history,” indeed the history of the epoch in which “the becoming-female of the idea is the presence or presentation of truth.”<sup>132</sup> We need to keep in mind here that, in Derrida’s view, this peculiar inauguration of history has placed a “distance” between “the philosopher” and “the truth,” such that the former begins aspiring for the later which in turn “becomes transcendent, inaccessible, seductive,” such that “he can now only follow in its trace.”<sup>133</sup>

We are already familiar with the clue of the ‘trace’ and its involvement with ‘writing’, and how – along the latter – Derrida also links it to ‘woman’ and her productive bondage with the ‘idea’ and the ‘truth’. Now, another suggestive additive to this network of relations that he makes – again following Nietzsche – is the relation of ‘woman’ to the Christian religion. Nietzsche associates “becoming female” with “becoming Christian,” which Derrida reads as “she castrates (herself)” because Nietzsche regards Christianity as “castratism (Kastrismus).”<sup>134</sup> As Christianity has used castration to “kill the passions,” Derrida now sees Nietzsche’s discussion of castratism as pointing to a subjection of “the truth of woman-idea” to “ablation, excision, extirpation.”<sup>135</sup> Further on, as, for Nietzsche, “an attack on the roots of passion means an attack on the roots of life,” for Derrida, “the Church is hostile thus to woman also who is herself life.”<sup>136</sup> But Nietzsche is the philosopher of life and for him ‘passions’ stand for life, whereas the worst of them come into play exactly in those who have tried to most drastically kill them. For him, the true spiritualization is spiritualization of passions, not one that proceeds from excision/castration; Derrida quotes him:

The spiritualization of sensuality is called *love*: it represents a great triumph over Christianity. Another triumph is our spiritualization of *hostility*. It consists in profound appreciation of the value of having enemies...<sup>137</sup>

Nietzsche’s affirmation of life, as drawing on spiritualized passions, is thus the affirmation of ‘woman’, even as this affirmation finds no consistency in the “heterogeneity” of his text and style. It is thus arguable that at a certain point his anti-feminism is simply confronted and deposed by his feminism, and for Derrida this means that “woman is recognized and affirmed as an affirmative power, a disimulatress, an artist, a dionysiac,” who “affirm herself, in and of herself, in man,” rather than the other way around.<sup>138</sup> Accounting for Nietzsche’s heterogenous approach, Derrida writes,

---

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., pp. 86-87.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., pp. 86-87.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., pp. 86-89.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., pp. 88-91.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., pp. 90-93.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., pp. 92-93.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., pp. 92-93. Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols, or, How to philosophize with the hammer*, translated by Richard Polt (Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1997), p. 26; cf. *Götzen-Dämmerung, oder Wie man mit dem Hammer philosophiert*, im *Nietzsche's Werke*, (Leipzig: Druck und Verlag von C.G. Naumann, 1899), Band VIII, S. 86.

<sup>138</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles/Éperons: les styles de Nietzsche*, pp. 96-97.



Nietzsche might well be a little lost in the web of his text, lost much as a spider who finds he is unequal to the web he has spun. Much as a spider indeed, several spiders even. Nietzsche's spider.

....

He was, he dreaded this castrated woman.

He was, he dreaded this castrating woman.

He was, he loved this affirming woman.<sup>139</sup>

But Nietzsche is not disturbed by such a predicament, for he does not believe in the truth, neither his own, nor of his own text, nor of "style in itself," nor of his own style, even as he speaks of "my truths" or of his being "capable of many kinds of style."<sup>140</sup>

Ultimately, Derrida links Nietzsche's discussions of 'woman', the sexes, love, and eroticism, to what he calls the "process of *appropriation*," which he traces also in Heidegger.<sup>141</sup> As Derrida sees it, marked by the exchange of "give and take," "possess and possessed," appropriation determines the sexes as much as sexuality, but it advances also a point of undecidability, as in the structural relation that it is "man and woman change places" or "exchange masks *ad infinitum*."<sup>142</sup> Derrida also thinks that "appropriation ... is more powerful than the veil of truth or the meaning of being," but he warns against the naivete of simply ignoring the question of being, or of thinking that "the question of proper-ty is thus available to direct examination."<sup>143</sup> He further sees Heidegger's conjecture of propriety with the question of being or with the metaphysical tradition (as in the case of Nietzsche's thought) as a questionable gesture, which points to "proper-ty's abyssal structure."<sup>144</sup> This abyss is actually the truth's "bottomless abyss as non-truth, veiling and dissimulation," which obtains when "the question of production, doing, machination, the question of the *event* ... is uprooted from ontology" to leave us with "proper-ty" as "proper to nothing and no one."<sup>145</sup> Derrida associates this abyss of non-truth with "the style's form and the no-where of woman" of Nietzsche's, as well as with the undecidability of the "give/take" structure in the characterization of the sexes and sexuality.<sup>146</sup> His point appears to be that, if Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche as belonging to the metaphysical tradition is deconstructed along with that structure, then Nietzsche's thought opens up a new field of exploration, "an enormous field of dimensions immeasurable – except perhaps by the steps of a dove."<sup>147</sup> This field is that of 'the style's form and the no-where of woman' and can be measured only 'perhaps by the steps of a dove', which is indeed the 'trace' – the resistance of life to death, to poison/*pharmakon* which would be the price and value of that field's gift as indefinitely suspended.

The field of 'woman' thus lies open to style leaving traces in writing. Such traces will be open to interpretations very much as Nietzsche's seemingly isolated and contextually indeterminate note "I have forgotten my umbrella." But, as Derrida has noted, such hermeneutic

---

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., pp. 100-101.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., pp. 103-105.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., pp. 108-109.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., pp. 110-111.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., pp. 110-113.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., pp. 114-117.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., pp. 118-119.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., pp. 120-121.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., pp. 122-123.

exercises may not necessarily produce results of any worth and may just signal that “there is ‘no totality to Nietzsche’s text’, not even a fragmentary or aphoristic,” and equally – that “unprotected” as one may thus be against the weather, one may as well be “exposed to the thunder and lightning of an enormous clap of laughter.”<sup>148</sup> This exposure to the uncharted territory of time/weather/‘woman’/différance/ unconscious in the wake of such ‘forgetting’ leaves us facing our lack of knowledge of it. It thus points to the need of deconstruction of its essentialist interpretations, as well as of turning in our searches to nonessentialist ‘traces’ of reading, writing, unconscious, ‘woman’, *différance*. Hence, as searching for the “meaning of forgetting” points “to bringing the question of forgetting back to the question of being,” with all ensuing associations in hand, we need to assert that “the forgetting of a being (an umbrella)” is not commensurable with “the forgetting of Being,” for the latter cannot be grasped factologically.<sup>149</sup> Thus, our search will not amount to the putative essence of forgetting, though it will bring us deeper into the meaning of Being. As Heidegger puts it,

Forgetting ... not only attacks the essence of Being (*das Wesendes Seins*) inasmuch as it is apparently distinct from it, it belongs to the nature of Being (*Sie gehört zur Sache des Seins*) and reigns as the Destiny of its essence (*als Geschick seines Wesens*).<sup>150</sup>

In this sense, outside the factology of beings, Being is very much only a ‘trace’ of beings, turning their putative essences, as well as its own ‘forgetting’, into traces as well. And yet, the traces of Being and its forgetting are not commensurable with the traces of beings. Outside factology, traces are outside commensurability; they are ‘traces’.

#### *Immunity and Autoimmunity*

As we began thinking the ‘trace’ within the terms of resistance of life to death, to poison/*pharmakon*, we embarked on the theme of calamity and immunity, which we now find suspended – along a good many of the oppositions deconstructed by Derrida – between life and death, give and take, possessing and possessed, conscious and unconscious, style and ‘woman’, as they join in the workings of writing. In Derrida’s work, *immunity* has been linked with calamity in various ways and has been explored extensively for purposes of literary criticism, especially as *autoimmunity*.<sup>151</sup> Here we will focus specifically on its relation with some of the key terms of Derrida’s thought that we already discussed in a search for pointers to the affirmative dimension of the deconstructive critique in literature.

As early as his *Specters of Marx*, Derrida links the terms of ‘life’, ‘death’, ‘ego’, ‘the same’, ‘other’, and ‘différance’ with those of *immunity* and *autoimmunity*:

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., pp. 134-135.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., pp. 140-143.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., pp. 142-143; cf. Martin Heidegger, “On the Question of Being,” *Pathmarks*, edited by William McNeill (Cambridge, UK; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 314; *Zur Seinsfrage* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1967), S. 35.

<sup>151</sup> See, for instance, Yasemin Karaağaç, “Hostility, Hospitality, and Autoimmunity in Kadare’s *The Fall of The Stone City*,” *Global Conversations: An International Journal in Contemporary Philosophy and Culture*, Vol. 4 (2021), especially pp., 11-15, 20ff, <http://philogc.org/vol-4/>; as well as, Catherine MacMillan, “Looking for the Rogue: Democratic Autoimmunity in José Saramago’s *Seeing*,” *Global Conversations: An International Journal in Contemporary Philosophy and Culture*, Vol. 4 (2021), especially pp. 27ff, <http://philogc.org/vol-4/>.

The living ego is auto-immune.... To protect its life, to constitute itself as unique living ego, to relate, as the same, to itself, it is necessarily led to welcome the other within (so many figures of death: *différance* of the technical apparatus, iterability...), it must therefore take the immune defenses apparently meant for the non-ego, the enemy, the opposite, the adversary and direct them at once *for itself and against itself*.<sup>152</sup>

Derrida suggests that ‘the living being is autoimmune’ because it goes against its own ‘defenses meant for the non-ego, the enemy, the opposite, the adversary’ as well. It manages to sustain itself, ‘to protect its life, to constitute itself as unique living ego, to relate, as the same, to itself’ by ‘welcoming the other within’ itself, even as the other is ‘so many figures of death’. Here the operation of autoimmunity appears to join forces with the intervention of the other, the calamity of the other, against the ego’s immunity; that is, with the forces of death against life, but it is ultimately what the ego needs to maintain its immunity, to protect itself from the forces of death, as well as from its own (auto)immunity. This basically means that a sustainable living being needs to ‘direct its defenses at once *for itself and against itself*’; that is, to be at once immune and autoimmune. Thus, immunity and autoimmunity go together in the sustenance of life and need to be maintained through and through. The ‘living ego’ maintains them by playing them against each other, by playing life against death in life; that is, by welcoming death in life, by welcoming *différance*.

Other terms that later on add up to the sense of *immunity* and *autoimmunity* in Derrida’s work include ‘reason’, ‘unconscious’, ‘conscious’, ‘representation’, and ‘pharmakon’. In his view, not only is “reason” not entirely on its own in its workings, but we also need to “be suspicious of rationalizations” precisely “in the name of reason,” for we can no longer just leave aside “the logic of the unconscious” availed to us by what can be seen as “a psychoanalytic revolution.”<sup>153</sup> Quite to the contrary, it was the intervention of, “among other things, this poisoned medicine, this *pharmakon* of an inflexible and cruel autoimmunity that is sometimes called the ‘death drive’,” that has made it possible for us to realize that “the living being” is not reducible “to its conscious and representative form.”<sup>154</sup> Thus, the ‘living being’, with all its rationality and conscious representations, has been shown to be intertwined with its ‘other’, including with what is most detrimental to it and threatens its own life, such as the poison of *pharmakon* or the cruelty of autoimmunity, which thus will need to be accounted for in all of its workings.

### *The Perspective of Deconstruction*

Derrida’s work has fundamentally revisited the Western philosophical and cultural tradition and has left its mark on both philosophy and literary criticism. His deconstructive critique has brought to the fore the fundamental interrelatedness of concepts like structure, sign, play,

---

<sup>152</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, translated by Peggy Kamuf (New York; London: Routledge, 2006), p. 177; cf. *Spectres de Marx* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1993), p. 224.

<sup>153</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, translated by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 157; cf. *Voyous: Deux essais sur la raison* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 2003), p. 215.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 157; cf. p. 215.

différance, being, nothing, metaphysics, presence, language, literature, literary, literal, style, woman, authenticity, property, life, death, ego, instincts, trace, the same, the other, reason, unconscious, conscious, representation, and pharmakon, among others. It has thus helped dispel undue preconceptions in, as well as open new horizons for, understanding the cultural achievements of our era which has not always been able to come to terms with its own past in the best of ways. While adding up to those who throughout the tradition were able to expose the futility of its most ambitious metaphysical aspirations, Derrida stands for an approach that is alternative to the 'nostalgic' attitude of those who pledged all their hopes on the conscious rationality of the human knowing subjectivity. Drawing most of all on thinkers like Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger, and Levinas, he saw – in the wake of the metaphysics – the deconstruction of the workings of the self-identical subject-consciousness as an affirmation that upholds the ways of life against the background of its threats. It would be thus the life-asserting effect of deconstruction that will induce most interest in its deployment in revisiting our cultural achievements and their 'truth'. This effect, which among other things is meant to assert *writing* through *différance*, *life* through *death*, *style* through *woman*, or *immunity* through *calamity*, is also meant to dispel the elements of metaphysical presence which it inevitably deploys, thus leaving only its 'trace' amidst the traces it would point to. This is also the effect that inaugurates the becoming literary of the literal, for which literature would be the resource.

### **In Summary**

In our critical perspective here, the feminist perspective of Alice Jardine and the deconstructionist one of Jacques Derrida are seen as both intersecting and complementary. The main points of intersection and complementariness that interest us here are detectable in the juxtaposition of Jardine's terms *gynesis* and *gynema* with Derrida's *deconstruction* and *trace* respectively. Gynesis as 'putting into the discourse of woman' and deconstruction as dismantling the phallogocentric discourse of the tradition overlap in that they are both understood as a movement into the *open* socio-cultural territory designated as "woman." They complement each other in that gynesis is meant specifically as literary critique mindful of feminist perspectives, whereas deconstruction is a fundamentally philosophical rethinking of the tradition of writing as a whole. On the other hand, the supporting terms gynema as product of gynesis and trace as the product of deconstruction intersect in that they are non-fixed effects of reading and writing, while they complement each other in that they carry critical literary and philosophical insights respectively. As availing non-fixed effects of reading and writing, both gynesis and deconstruction respond to the need of critical reflection over the *becoming literary of the literal*, a field which opens up from dismantling the phallogocentric structures of discourse, and for which literature is a vast resource for exploratory insights.

A pivotal point in our critical perspective is *affirmation* in the life-asserting sense of Nietzsche, which Derrida opposes to the 'nostalgic' Rousseauistic sense of lost presence. It would be thus those exploratory insights which mark the affirmation of life (as opposed to those invoking a nostalgia over the dismantled discourse) that would be in focus here. They would be the pointers to the *(auto)immunity* of life, which – as contradictorily presentable within the terms of discourse – affirms itself, affirms life, even as it attacks itself, attacks life. As discursively presented in literature (but also in the specific media of other forms of art), life –

in its continuous struggle against death – even as it may appear as bogged in contradictions, absurdities, feelings, or ‘errors’ of untruth of any kind (be they tragic, comic, or anything in between), still *always and inevitably affirms itself by its own means*. It would be thus these means that would be in focus in our critical perspective here, which remains open to them as they leave their ‘traces’ in what is made present in discourse as a product of writing.

### ***Reading Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter***

Our intended deconstructive feminist reading of Hawthorne's famous novel will not aim to exhaustively present – and still less to define – all elements and aspects of this literary text that bear relevance to other possible feminist or deconstructionist perspectives. Such an ambitious task would in fact go against the precepts of our critical perspective and would reinstate what that perspective was meant to do away with by exposing it – the phallogocentric structures of discourse. Instead, we shall endeavor to bring out the ‘traces’ which a deconstructive reading aims to point at, while staying mindful for its feminist import or ‘gynema’. For, both *gynesis* and *deconstruction* make the same gesture here – they seek to search through and bring to light aspects of the socio-cultural significance of ‘woman’. In this way, they would also contribute to the exploration of ‘the becoming literary of the literal’ – the field which legitimately opens up for exploration upon the deconstruction of the phallogocentric structures of discourse and which we approach here through Hawthorne's literary work.

The traces or gynema, which we aim at, will prove to be chains of infinite substitutions, without fixed identities. For, regardless of the exigencies demanded by the phallogocentric structures of discourse, which relies on such fixities, it would be the joint work of *gynesis* and *deconstruction* that plays out its effects in the literary text in a way that is – in its very source – unstructured. The literary text, in its very creation as a cultural product and as art, is always already a subject to the play of differences designated as *différance*. When applied in reading affirmatively, that is, in *deconstruction*, the sense of *différance* deconstructs that text, making at the same time a life-asserting gesture. When joining in *deconstruction*, *gynesis* detects the affirmative feminist aspect of ‘woman’. What more particularly makes *gynesis* different from *deconstruction* is its mindfulness of the power structures that bear relevance to the status of ‘woman’ from a feminist perspective. In other words, whereas both *deconstruction* and *gynesis* join in dismantling the phallogocentric discourse of the tradition, and by the same token – in exploring the socio-cultural space ‘woman’, *gynesis* plays its peculiar role of keeping in sight, of never missing from its sight, the feminist aspect of that dismantling, an aspect which a *deconstruction*, so to speak, *per se*, may as well forgo for other aspects of interest. In this sense, *gynesis* becomes a necessary element of any critical reading of a text that is meant to be at once deconstructive and feminist.

### **Characters and Setting**

The novel *The Scarlet Letter* carries with itself numerous signifiatory pointers that can play out elements of our critical perspective. Central of these pointers are the novel's main characters of men and women, whom Hawthorne present as closely involved in the communal life the

1640s Boston. In this largely Puritan community, the characters appear in various relations both public and private, including with power structures, religious values, cultural precepts, social statuses, other races, nature, as well as of spirituality, piety, service, love, friendship, and parenting, amongst others. They are also presented as acting in several scenes that determine the plot of the novel and are connected by Hawthorne's explicative narrative.

The main scenes of actions include: the public ignominy of the main female character Hester Prynne, Hester's interview in the governor's house, minister Arthur Dimmesdale's vigil, the meeting of Hester and Dimmesdale in the forest, Dimmesdale's public confession and death. Some other scenes of significance include encounters and conversations between Hester and her daughter Pearl, Hester and her former husband Roger Chillingworth, Dimmesdale and Chillingworth, Dimmesdale and his elder colleague Reverend Mr. John Wilson, Dimmesdale and Pearl, Dimmesdale and the "witch-lady" Mistress Ann Hibbins, Hester and Mistress Hibbins, Pearl and Mistress Hibbins.

A characteristic dimension of the novel is the time horizon of its events. Besides the seven years of the plot we have time pointers for at least one year before its opening event, as well as for the years of Hester's life and in part the lives the remaining characters after its closing event. Likewise, Hawthorne makes a number of references to the time before and after these events, up to the time of about two hundred year to the actual writing of the novel. These include mentions of historical personages and events, as well as of changes in the overall ethos of the colony, which contextualize the plot chronologically as well as culturally.

Hawthorne's narrative connecting all the scenes of the plot in a unity is also characterized by a claim to objectivity, which he backs up with a reference to a script "authorized and authenticated" by Mr. Surveyor Jonathan Pue:

The original papers, together with the scarlet letter itself, – a most curious relic, – are still in my possession, and shall be freely exhibited to whomsoever, induced by the great interest of the narrative, may desire a sight of them.<sup>155</sup>

We can note here that it was perhaps due to this claim to objectivity that his attitude towards his main characters show variations, rendering with equal rigor and depth their positive, as well as their negative traits. This is most obvious with regard to Hester, Dimmesdale, Chillingworth, and Pearl.

Thus, Hester Prynne, the main female character of the novel, is described as "a noteworthy personage," "a voluntary nurse," "an angel," but also as "an intruder and a nuisance,"<sup>156</sup> with "passion...imprisoned in the same tomb-like heart."<sup>157</sup> She is the woman whom the colony deems to have committed the sin of having a child out of wedlock, a proof of which is her baby girl Pearl, in conjunction with the absence of her long-awaited husband. As a punishment, she is ordered to wear a scarlet letter "A" fastened conspicuously on her clothing and is placed on the town's scaffold for a time of public ignominy. Asked to make known the name of the father of her child, she answers categorically "Never! It is too deeply branded."<sup>158</sup>

<sup>155</sup> Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, p. 44.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 144.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

Afterwards, her life, although difficult and full of hardships, is an example of genuine penance and even a removal of the scarlet letter "A" is considered.

Arthur Dimmesdale, the main male character, is described as "a young clergyman" having "all the learning of the age," "melancholy eyes," "a vast power of self-restrain," "the speech of an angel,"<sup>159</sup> but at the same time "all that violence of passion."<sup>160</sup> Having won the hearts of the town with his inspiring speeches, he visibly suffers from an unclear disease of the heart. He is the unknown father of Pearl and Hester's accomplice in what Hawthorne calls their "mutual crime."<sup>161</sup> After publicly confessing his sin, he dies at the end of the final scene of the plot.

Roger Chillngworth is described as "a man of skill," "with such a rank in the learned world," "an eminent Doctor in Physic,"<sup>162</sup> "a wise and just man," but also "a fiend,"<sup>163</sup> "an enemy," "a devil," "with cruel purpose," and "malignity."<sup>164</sup> He is Hester's long-awaited husband who finally arrived but keeping it in secret upon witnessing her public ignominy. As the physician, friend, and enemy of Dimmesdale, he displays an eclectic array of both admirable and despicable traits, which has become a reason for this character to be associated with the Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's famous protagonist Faust.<sup>165</sup>

Pearl, as an incarnate evidence of her mother's sin, is described in polar terms as well. She is "a lovely child" with "a brilliant beauty" and "a look so intelligent," but "sometimes so malicious" and "accompanied by a wild flow of spirits," "a demon offspring," or an "elf-child."<sup>166</sup> In her portrayal, Hawthorne never seems to drop an initial concern, apparently well-embedded in his mind, that she, as a "sin-born infant," could easily go astray of the right morals. Conveying some community fears of her predisposition towards witchcraft, he makes Dimmesdale remark on her characteristic "passion" that "in Pearl's young beauty, as in the wrinkled witch, it has a preternatural effect."<sup>167</sup>

In this regard, another female character that gains relevance in our reading is Mistress Hibbins. Hawthorne straightforwardly associates her with the occupation of 'witchcraft', of whose prosecution, he admits, some of his direct ancestors were guilty. Although this character seems to be of marginal importance in the novel's plot, it acquires a particular significance in a critical reading in terms of gynesis, as in the patriarchal culture witchcraft – especially when associated with woman (as has been predominantly the case) – has been a subject of an utmost denunciation. When Hester encounters Mistress Hibbins after the scene in governor's house, and when Dimmesdale encounters her after his meeting with Hester in the forest, the "witch-lady" appealed them to join the "merry company" of the Black Man.<sup>168</sup> She appears also in the

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., p. 130.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., p. 153.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., pp. 152-153.

<sup>165</sup> David Leverenz, "Mrs. Hawthorne's Headache: Reading *The Scarlet Letter*," in Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, pp. 270-1.

<sup>166</sup> Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, pp. 81-88, 94ff.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., pp. 64, 165.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., pp. 150, 172.

night of the minister Dimmesdale's vigil, as well as in the final scene of the novel's plot, where she makes the same appeal to Pearl, too.<sup>169</sup> All the time, the "bitter-tempered" lady shows a considerable insight, or at least suspicion regarding the relationship between Hester and Arthur, as well as regarding their inner states. Besides generally portraying Mistress Hibbins in negative terms, Hawthorne appears to suggest that source of her insights is linked to her secret occupations. "Dost thou think," she asks Hester, "I have been to the forest so many times, and have yet no skill to judge who else has been there?"<sup>170</sup> In this relation, it is also remarkable that Pearl proves capable of such insights and suspicions as well – she can suppose that Hester wears the scarlet letter "A" "for the same reason that the minister keeps his hand over his heart!"<sup>171</sup>

### **Patriarchy, Puritanism, and Phallogocentrism**

The relationships of these characters cannot be fully understood without a reference to the rigorous morality of the Puritan religion, which reigns within the community of seventeenth century's Boston. Feminist critique has already linked the Christian religion with "patriarchy" that sends – by the token of the scarlet letter – a "double message about sin and seduction," which "Hester passes on to Pearl," thus producing the effect of "gendered psychosexual identity" beyond "her individuality" to make of "woman" a symbol of 'frailty and sinful passion'.<sup>172</sup> In other words, this religion, as well as its ethics, represents by its symbolic forms a culture dominated by man, a culture which at the same time advances a certain gender valuation (indeed a 'gendered' valuation) that confers upon 'woman' a more or less fixed 'identity', distinct moral character, and respective social role of lower value to the effect of constituting her as a threat to the moral foundations of that culture.

In our reading, it is important to emphasize that in the Puritan community depicted by Hawthorne, the main female character, Hester Prynne, is present to wear the symbol of the sin, the scarlet letter "A" standing formally for "adulteress." At the same time, her naturally presumed male 'accomplice' in what that community, and apparently Hawthorne himself, deems to be a "crime" remains unknown. In fact, Hester's refusal to point out his name opens the possibility this to be every man in the community; very indicatively, though, while not in the know, that male dominated community refuses to accept such a sinner in itself, instead referring to him as its outcast – the Black Man in the forest. Thus, the signification of evil in that community appears as 'woman' only. Ironically, yet significantly still, the person speaking from the name of patriarchy's discourse on the day of her public ignominy, Arthur Dimmesdale, is actually this real accomplice and the letter "A" could equally properly be placed on him, as well as stand for his name. In his public appeal to her to utter the name, in fact his own, Dimmesdale – regardless of his inner struggles, motives, and expectations – in the end asserts that this name remain unuttered: "She will not speak."<sup>173</sup> This assertion is de facto a formal confirmation of the status quo of power relations and guild distribution in the public discourse.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., p. 187.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., p. 186.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., p. 143.

<sup>172</sup> Shari Benstock, "The Scarlet Letter (a)doree, or the Female Body Embroidered," in Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, pp. 299ff.

<sup>173</sup> Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, p. 68.



In our critical perspective we also emphasize that, even as Hester Prynne accepts to keep the secret and to wear the scarlet letter “A” as symbol of the sin imposed on her by the patriarchy, she refuses to accept the sin as her, of the woman, *identity*. If sin at all, the sin has been committed by two – a woman and a man – and cannot have one identity only. She only accepts the suffering and the formal sanction of the redemption for a guilt that – if guilt at all – is not entirely her own: “And would that I might endure his agony, as well as mine.”<sup>174</sup> The scarlet letter “A,” the token of the sin, is just a signification forcibly attached to her, the woman.

Nevertheless, even as patriarchy’s religion presupposes, the real redemption escapes all kinds of formality, and the sinner cannot remain hidden behind the mask of a symbolism he authorizes himself. In terms of gynesis, we can assume that this symbolism has been created along with the crime itself in the attempts to conceal that crime from the public eye from the position of power, by ascribing it to the one who does not have that power, the woman. It should be clear, though, that just because of that, this same symbolism is equally a failure on its own – it already presupposes and thus indicates the crime it aims to conceal.

Arthur Dimmesdale embodies the suffering for the sin hidden behind the public discourse. Another paradox of patriarchy’s discourse is that it not only ascribes the ‘guilt’ for the sin to woman, it also misrepresents the actual consequences of this concealing for man himself. In the scene of Dimmesdale’s public confession, witnessing his suffering while performing his “mission” to service the formal inauguration of man’s power and symbolism (“the new Governor was to receive his office”)<sup>175</sup> – “his mission to foretell a high and glorious destiny for the newly gathered people of the Lord” – the public discourse demonstrates its inability to adequately judge within its own terms: “This earthly faintness was, in their view, only another phase in minister’s celestial strength.”<sup>176</sup>

In our critical perspective, such a misjudgment is indicative for that the public discourse is begging for deconstruction. For, Arthur Dimmesdale, while serving man’s world (presumably his own, if it is really his own), actually demonstrates that this seemingly celestial manifestation goodness is in reality a cover-up for evil (in a dual sense, as the sin in a Puritan sense and as his own suffering in a life-affirmative deconstructive perspective). Thus, he demonstrates – what in the terms of discourse could reappear only paradoxically – that ‘happiness’ is actually unhappiness, that the discourse is failing him, as it does not add up to his well-being, but only conceals his own desolation. He demonstrates that the men’s world that oppresses woman at the same time oppresses man, since power, like gender, can be very much a fiction, a socio-cultural invention, a construct, no matter who has it or who is who.

When we say ‘he demonstrates’ here we mean that we take the character of Dimmesdale as a symbol of the patriarchal culture and revisit it in a life-assertive deconstructive perspective, in which its symbolism reappears as powerless or inadequate. Thus, as a reinvented symbol in our critical perspective, Dimmesdale, regardless of the extent in which he as a character realizes that, conveys the message – indeed the ‘trace’, the ‘gynema’ – that the public discourse is deconstructed. In this sense, he has lost his ‘identity’ as ‘man’ in men’s world, as Hester has lost her ‘identity’ as ‘woman’ in that same world. The possibility that remains for their identities

---

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., pp. 191-193.

is that of “infinite substitutions,” what Derrida attributed to the character of *play* inaugurating writing.<sup>177</sup>

Another character showing a ‘lack of identity’ with herself is Pearl. Hawthorne has demonstrated his and community’s confusions with regard to her on a number of occasions. While she has been directly associated with the scarlet letter itself,<sup>178</sup> much of the uncertainties about her spring from a certain lack of consistency in her appearance and development in life from the standpoint of the public eye, to which Hawthorne himself attests:

How strange, indeed! Man had marked this woman’s sin by a scarlet letter, which had such potent and disastrous efficacy that no human sympathy could reach her, save it were sinful like herself. God, as a direct consequence of the sin which man thus punished, had given her a lovely child, whose place was on that same dishonored bosom, to connect her parent for ever with the race and descent of mortals, and to be finally a blessed soul in heaven!<sup>179</sup>

That this statement is marked by Hawthorne’s own patriarchal and religious bias is not so important for us here as that it is meant to be ‘authentic’. For, in our deconstructive perspective we are most of all interested to expose the failure of the arbitrary structures of the patriarchal discourse to recapture what inevitably evades it – the unfixed identity of gender. It appears here that – in a logocentric gesture – through God’s symbol of the sin is justified the man’s symbol of the same sin. That is, that the symbol of God’s, Pearl, has the same denotation as the symbol of man’s, the scarlet letter “A.” And this denotation is, according to Hawthorne, the ‘woman’s sin’, (indeed as ‘marked’ and ‘punished’ by ‘man’). However, the criticism as gynesis discerns in this attempt to link ‘woman’s sin’ with woman’s identity through a kind of *logic*, which then falls apart along the ‘strangeness’ of life, just another phallogocentric failure of discourse. It is the kind of logic that ventures to impose to Hester and to the reader thoughts like these:

She knew that her deed had been evil; she could have no fight, therefore, that its result would be for good.<sup>180</sup>

It was a look so intelligent, yet inexplicable, so perverse, sometimes so malicious, but generally accompanied by a wild flow of spirits, that Hester could not help questioning, at such moments, whether Pearl was a human child.<sup>181</sup>

In our critical perspective, this logic spectacularly fails to capture the trajectory of Pearl’s life, as it disintegrates into a genuine confusion. The latter ensues from the decentering structures of discourse, which become traceable in a deconstructive perspective, traceable precisely due to Hawthorne’s clam to ‘authenticity’.

The confusion in question brought a commonly-felt anxiety for Pearl’s future, which prompted a meeting-interview of the nobles of the town with Hester and her child set at the Governor’s house. The spirit of the age related the wrong direction in the development of

<sup>177</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p. 289; cf. p. 423.

<sup>178</sup> Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, pp. 57, 81, 90.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

female infant with the predominantly women's field of 'witchcraft', which in the perspective of gynesis can be seen as opposed to science, at the time a much-honored field of endeavor largely reserved for men. Among the novel's characters, Mistress Hibbins and Roger Chillingworth are fitting representatives of these two fields respectively. On the occasion of the meeting, Chillingworth, who had sought to extend his scientific searches over Dimmesdale's disease of the heart, Hester's secret, and Indian medicine, among others, could only qualify Pearl "A strange child!"<sup>182</sup> which in our critical perspective is indicative of a yet another failure of the phallogocentric discourse to get its hold on the identity of 'woman'. On the other hand, the above-mentioned remark of Dimmesdale and intention of Mistress Hibbins regarding the child show a tendency in the community's thinking that Pearl's growing up with Hester could lead to her future commitment to 'witchcraft'. Hawthorne's narrative is unambiguous about that:

The spell of life went forth from her ever creative spirit, and communicated itself to a thousand objects, as a torch kindles a flame wherever it may be applied. The unlikeliest materials, a stick, a bunch of rags, a flower, were the puppets of Pearl's witchcraft, and, without undergoing any outward change, became spiritually adapted to whatever drama occupied the stage of her inner world.<sup>183</sup>

Along with the status of her mother, Pearl's spirits, thoughts, speech, plays, creativity, objects of interests all contributed to the public concern that led to the meeting in the Governor's house. We already pointed that she was be capable of some unusual insights or suspicions similar to those of Mistress Hibbins as well. And now that her worrying image in the public eye was also sanctioned by the scholar's discourse as 'strange', it had to take the intervention of Dimmesdale – in his decentered, indeed dual, symbolic capacity – to leave her within the custody of her desperate mother.

We will need to bring Dimmesdale's intervention within the terms of our perspective, as it marks a landmark victory of the life-asserting thinking over the logic of the patriarchal discourse which proved impotent on the occasion and throughout the novel, including in its most phallogocentric version exemplified by Chillingworth. In our reading, Dimmesdale's intervention amounts to a gesture on his part to preserve 'the spell of life that went forth from her ever creative spirit', which also proves significant. For, with all the projective skepticism and uncertainty of the public eye regarding the future of the child, at the end of Hawthorne's narrative we are told that "Pearl was not only alive, but married, and happy."<sup>184</sup> She did *not* become a witch, and thus did *not* find her identity in terms of the phallogocentric patriarchal discourse. Instead, she defied that discourse and survived 'to be finally a blessed soul in heaven'.

For her part, Mistress Hibbins found her death and got an identity in this same discourse as 'witch-lady'. For, her opposition – radical as it was – to the predominant male cultural symbolism did not prove life-asserting; her intelligence – remarkable as it was – could not find a viable way outside the terms of the patriarchy. Instead, it can be argued that witchcraft is an opposition to the patriarchal culture within the terms; that is, with the symbolic means, of that

---

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., p. 200.

culture itself. For, it run against the mainstream patriarchal discourse only the discourse of the 'Black Man' – just another man who thought his terms were better. As a representative of this alternative patriarchy, Mistress Hibbins marked with her death the deconstruction of its discourse.

Similarly, Roger Chillingworth died at the end of the novel, since along with the deconstruction of the patriarchal discourse pronounced by the Dimmesdale's death his logocentric conquest became impossible and had to come to terms with its inevitable limits. Indeed, he had to come to terms with all that was left to motivate and move his own life and existence, which Dimmesdale's utmost deconstructive gesture – epitomized by his final service, discourse, welcome of woman, and impending death – placed under a grave threat:

"Madman, hold! What is your purpose?" whispered he. "Wave back that woman! Cast off this child! All shall be well! Do not blacken your fame, and perish in dishonor! I can yet save you! Would you bring infamy on your sacred profession?"<sup>185</sup>

Chillingworth, though, could save neither Dimmesdale nor himself, for he was not only depleted from but also misguided and consumed by his logocentrism, which led him astray from life in the direction of death along revenge. He could no longer play his patriarchal precepts of 'fame', 'honor', and 'sacred profession' against the interpolation of life – 'woman' and 'child'. He could now only witness in desperation the formless face of his own phallogocentric impotence:

Old Roger Chillingworth knelt down beside him, with a blank, dull countenance, out of which the life seemed to have departed.

"Thou hast escaped me!" he repeated more than once. "Thou hast escaped me!"<sup>186</sup>

It is remarkable that Hawthorne regards Dimmesdale's death as a "work of the devil" performed by Chillingworth. In this sense, like Mistress Hibbins, Chillingworth too is given a determinate identity in the patriarchal discourse. Termed 'devil' or 'unhumanized mortal', he could find no more life nor happiness but only death along his quest for revenge:

This unhappy man had made the very principle of his life to consist in the pursuit and systematic exercise of revenge; and when, by its completest triumph and consummation, that evil principle was left with no further material to support it, - when, in short, there was no more devil's work on earth for him to do, it only remained for the unhumanized mortal to betake himself whither his Master would find him tasks enough, and pay him his wages duly.<sup>187</sup>

The criticism as gynesis uncovers here Hawthorne's patriarchal bias that does not allow him to see the death of the patriarchal discourse. For, he seeks the reason for Dimmesdale's death in some of the oppositional terms of the patriarchal discourse – the devil. Within our perspective this means that he links the death of the religious patriarchal discourse to the non-religious science and philosophy, which Chillingworth does indeed represent. However, Chillingworth

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., p. 193.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., p. 196.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., p. 198.

represents more particularly the logocentric discourse and he dies with the death of the patriarchal discourse as well, which points to an intrinsic connection between patriarchy and logocentrism as well. Thus, another opposition within the patriarchal culture has been deconstructed – the one between its religious and logocentric discourses; for they both comport to the signification of ‘man’; that is, to phallogocentrism, thus excluding, reducing, repressing the signification of ‘woman’.

Hawthorne’s bias is also obvious in the characters with ‘lack of identity’ and has been practically proved by his claim to ‘authenticity’. Within our perspective, the authenticity of the narrative accounts for the author’s bias, even as the author may not be aware of this bias at all, while at the same time upholding the denouement of the novel as an ‘authentic proof’ for the main point of our critique. This ‘proof’ is not logical and is thus a “proof” only in quotation marks. For, as deconstruction and gynesis impel us to think, it cannot be conveyed by the means of the phallogocentric discourse of modernity, which was shown anticipating its dismantling. It could be rather conveyed with the help of – and in the extent availed by – what post-modernist and (post-)feminist critiques have not yet deconstructed: “in-between-the-lines,” the margin, the trace, the gynema.

### **Gynesis and Deconstruction as Life-affirmation of the Characters with Lack of Identity**

As Jardine suggests, what is “in-between-the-lines” is availed by practicing criticism as gynesis and announces itself as a reading effect which disturbs the phallogocentrism of patriarchy. At the same time, we expect this reading effect to have the character of what Derrida has called an ‘event’, which would leave its ‘trace’ on behalf of the deconstructive criticism. For, pointing to the ‘lack of identity’ of a character does not by itself amount to an affirmation of this ‘lack of identity’. In our critical perspective, this ‘event’, gynema, or trace is the *life-asserting denouement of the novel for the characters with lack of identity*.

Not only Pearl, but also Hester was able to survive under the burden of the scarlet letter “A” – a symbol imposed on her by the patriarchal culture. Holding off herself up and against that symbol meaning “adulteress,” she gave the letter “A” new connotations such as “able,” or “angel”. Within our critical perspective, we can see the scarlet letter “A” as meaning also “alive,” “assertion,” and “affirmation,” because Hester shows her capacity to affirm and assert herself – throughout her life, on behalf of her life, on behalf of life – by substituting the repressing patriarchal signification without limit. We can also see it as meaning “Arthur,” not only as its literal sense, and not only as a symbol of the deconstructed patriarchal discourse epitomized by the dead Dimmesdale, but also as a symbol of substituted meanings that uphold Arthur’s life – he may be dead as patriarchal discourse, but the alive Hester, the woman, is his viable alternative, his being alive. Indeed, she was the one who brought him back to life, even as he thought he was “irrevocably doomed,”<sup>188</sup> by ‘buoying him up with her own energy’ to give him meaning and will to live:

“Thou art crushed under this seven years’ weight of misery,” replied Hester, fervently resolved to buoy him up with her own energy. “But thou shalt leave it all behind thee! It shall not cumber thy steps, as thou treadest along the forest-path; neither shalt thou freight the ship with it, if thou prefer

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., p. 158.

to cross the sea. Leave this wreck and ruin here where it hath happened! Meddle no more with it! Begin all anew! Hast thou exhausted possibility in the failure of this one trial? Not so! The future is yet full of trial and success. There is happiness to be enjoyed! There is good to be done! Exchange this false life of thine for a true one. Be, if thy spirit summon thee to such a mission, the teacher and apostle of the red men. Or, - as is more thy nature, - be a scholar and a sage among the wisest and the most renowned of the cultivated world. Preach! Write! Act! Do any thing, save to lie down and die! Give up this name of Arthur Dimmesdale, and make thyself another, and a high one, such as thou canst wear without fear or shame. Why shouldst thou tarry so much as one other day in the torments that have so gnawed into thy life!- that have made thee feeble to will and to do!- that will leave thee powerless even to repent! Up, and away!"<sup>189</sup>

Fueled with the woman's vital power, Arthur is back to life thanks to his 'angel':

"Do I feel joy again?" ... "Methought the germ of it was dead in me! O Hester, thou art my better angel! I seem to have flung myself - sick, sin-stained, and sorrow-blackened - down upon these forest-leaves, and to have risen up all made anew, and with new powers to glorify Him that hath been merciful! This is already the better life! Why did we not find it sooner?"<sup>190</sup>

Thus, paradoxical as it may seem at first, in our critical perspective Dimmesdale survives, too. For, his presumed identity too is a subject to substitutions. He is dead as a symbol of the patriarchal culture, but with his death - the deconstruction of the public discourse - he outlived this discourse and is alive as a "symbol" of the life-affirming deconstructive discourse. Here "symbol" is in quotation marks, since in the deconstructed discourse the structures of symbolism are actually set apart, dismantled, de-logocentered, and thus without symbolic identity in the modern sense of the term. As a "symbol," he now signifies as a trace, gynema or "woman-in-effect."

In our critical perspective, the most compelling survival is Hester's. We deem it so, because with all her hardships and doubts about the meaning of life, she quietly but relentlessly affirms life, in all her doings, in all her circumstances. Reading through Hawthorne's biases and insights - which left us wondering, indeed authentically so, whether he was a feminist or sexist, both, or none, before we realized that he has no fixed identity, either - we find that her natural philosophical searches did not deter her from getting the better of life. Her aspirations for meaning and the meaning of 'woman', did not leave her at the logocentric dead end of discourse, never broke her will to live, no matter how her thought swung:

Indeed, the same dark question often rose into her mind, with reference to the whole race of womanhood. Was existence worth accepting, even to the happiest among them? As concerned her own individual existence, she had long ago decided in the negative, and dismissed the point as settled. A tendency to speculation, though it may keep woman quiet, as it does man, yet makes her sad. She discerns, it may be, such a hopeless task before her. As a first step, the whole system of society is to be torn down, and built up anew. Then, the very nature of the opposite sex, or its long hereditary habit, which has become like nature, is to be essentially modified, before woman can be allowed to assume what seems a fair and suitable position. Finally, all other difficulties being obviated, woman cannot take advantage of these preliminary reforms, until she herself shall have undergone a still mightier change; in which, perhaps, the ethereal essence, wherein she has her truest

---

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., pp. 156-157.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., p. 159.

life, will be found to have evaporated. A woman never overcomes these problems by any exercise of thought. They are not to be solved, or only in one way. If her heart chance to come uppermost, they vanish.<sup>191</sup>

While Hawthorne's biases here are to be watched for, drawing on his claim to authenticity, we find useful insights that could help uphold the sense of 'woman' in our perspective. Hester's thought went over the meaning of life and the status of her gender but did not leave her stuck into a powerless desperation, as the one Chillingworth displayed at the deconstructive discourse of Dimmesdale. The need of change, which Hawthorne surmises and nails into his terms, is something that she lives. He has a sense of 'the ethereal essence, wherein she has her truest life', as well as that it 'will be found to have evaporated', but this sense could become affirmative only in terms of a deconstruction and gynesys, as in his own discourse it can still be seen as charged with patriarchal bias. A change of the perspectives thus impels itself. That 'a woman never overcomes these problems by any exercise of thought', in our critical perspective can only mean that the socio-cultural sense of 'woman' evades any viable phallogocentric reduction; likewise, that 'problems are not to be solved, or only in one way', for us can only mean that we will not seek for their solutions in a logocentric operation; and finally, that 'if her heart chance to come uppermost, they vanish', for us can only mean that gynesys and deconstruction of discourse become necessary when discourse impedes life.

In our reading, Hester's survival emulates the thinking that resists phallogocentrism. She survives despite the latter's tumultuous intervention in her life, despite all the threats it unleashed for her and her child, despite her acute sense of lack of meaning of her life. No calamities were able to break her immunity. Calamity only strengthened her immunity to a live-asserting autoimmunity. The same applies for Pearl as well, unlike Mistress Hibbins and Roger Chillingworth, who were victims of their own autoimmunity, of the defense mechanisms that kept them alive until they did only to put them to death. Dimmesdale is a special case due to his dual discursive signification. On one hand, as a symbol of the patriarchal discourse, he dies from the intervention of life into that discourse due to a lack of immunity, viz., power to resist death; on the other hand, as joining in the deconstruction of the same discourse he upholds life achieving in his renewed motivation for life, as well as in the alive and happy Pearl, a life-affirming autoimmunity.

Thus, by upholding herself (indeed her own self) against the interventions of the phallogocentric culture to the point of a life-affirmative autoimmunity, Hester reappears – if the words would allow it in our literary tracing – literally as "woman-in-effect." For the becoming literary of the literal is tracing, tracing the literal in the literary, tracing it as a trace, which in gynesys is "woman-in-effect"; that is, a literary, and indeed a literal literary. But how she did it? What is her secret? Does she have one?

She accepted her fate under the burden of the scarlet letter "A," and she just worked. Not letting faulted thinking sink her life, she was able to come out on top of it continually as a doer. That is, she, the woman, was able to constantly substitute her imposed identity, to uphold

---

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., p. 134.

herself, and to survive by her doings.<sup>192</sup> In this regard, Hawthorne's authentic insights could not help acknowledging that she became a "destined prophetess."<sup>193</sup> And this is why she returned – the woman returned, as she was destined to return, as prophetess. It was the gesture of her life that brought her back, which is also her prophetic gesture. Wise, helpful, "giving advice in all matters, especially those of the heart,"<sup>194</sup> she appears again in the community. Her prophecy is that "of her firm belief, ... at some brighter period, when the world should have grown ripe for it, in Heaven's own time, a new truth would be revealed, in order to establish the whole relation between man and woman on a surer ground of mutual happiness."<sup>195</sup> Hawthorne himself, in his quest for authenticity, could not help forming a very suggestive idea for the mission of the woman, and although his patriarchal bias did not let him see Hester as a possible performer of this mission, *she* is the one who inspires him to proclaim,

The angel and apostle of the coming revelation must be a woman, indeed, but lofty, pure, and beautiful; and wise, moreover, not through dusky grief, but the ethereal medium of joy; and showing how sacred love should make us happy, by the truest test of a life successful to such an end!<sup>196</sup>

Indeed, 'woman' will be at the heart of the 'future revelation' – she will bring 'happiness' through 'love' emulated 'by the truest test of a life successful to such an end'. It is remarkable, though, that frequently as Hawthorne speaks about 'love' throughout the novel, his essential sense of it 'sacred'. Whereas he appears to associate love between people with 'passion' claiming that "hatred and love" are "two passions" that "seem essentially the same."<sup>197</sup> Thus, he sees the encounter of Hester and Arthur in the forest as "their sad and passionate talk,"<sup>198</sup> claiming that her "passionate love has brought the man to ruin."<sup>199</sup> Indeed, although they both decided on leaving the colony together, we did not witness any confession of feelings toward each other there apart from some hints done by Hester. Hawthorne thus did not see Hester's return as related to her love for Arthur, but rather as related to 'sacred' love:

Here had been her sin; here, her sorrow; and here was yet to be her penitence. She had returned, therefore, and resumed, – of her will, for not the sternest magistrate of that iron period would have imposed it, – resumed the symbol of which we have related so dark a tale.<sup>200</sup>

Actually Hawthorne advances a straight Puritan notion of love, in which sexuality is only a means for reproduction of the human kind and thus its pleasure "should not be made an end in

<sup>192</sup> There is a very characteristic notion for the predestination in the Protestant ethics, identified by Max Weber. Unlike in Catholicism, the duty of the protestant citizen is to serve God on their work place; that is, in the real life, rather than in church or monastery. See Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, translated by Talcott Parsons (New York & London: Routledge Classics, 2001); cf. *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus* (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2016).

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 201.

<sup>194</sup> Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, p. 43,

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 201.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 201.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 185, 199.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 185.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 200.



itself.”<sup>201</sup> The straightforward implication of this notion of sexuality is that, while masculine *jouissance* can be accepted as necessary for the good purpose, feminine *jouissance* is in principle not acceptable, except if it just happened. Thus, if feelings of love between woman and man appear in their reproductive relations, for Hawthorne, they would fall into the realm of “sinful passion.”<sup>202</sup>

In the perspective of gynesis and deconstruction, however, Hester's return merges into a different reading, not least because of the novel's (often neglected) subtitle – “A Romance,” which attests to Hawthorne's ‘authenticity’ despite his – often logocentrically derailed – valuative confusions. She, the woman, returned where Dimmesdale, the man, with whom she had committed the ‘sin’ of *love*, had died. She returned because this love ‘defined’ her life, was impending in her life, and kept it going affirmatively to its very end. Her love was the true ‘symbol’ of her life – the true ‘denotation’ of the scarlet letter “A” in the deconstructed discourse of the patriarchy. She still wears the scarlet letter but now it conveys many other connotations in the public discourse, which the “woman-in-effect” makes “never stable” and dully deconstructs. Thus, she survives in ‘the truest test of life’.

The symbol of the phallogocentric discourse may be still on her, but its putative meaning in that discourse has been affirmatively deconstructed. She does not manifest herself in this discourse; she manifests herself ‘in-effect’, in her doings (including in her demonstrated sexuality by which she affirmed herself in a sexual difference). That she wears the letter “A” only shows that it is always around her, like ‘the lines’ of the deconstructed phallogocentric discourse. And yet, the “woman-in-effect” is in “between-the-lines”; her dwelling is in “between-the-lines.”

Now she returned to her man who is in the lines as deconstructed discourse. Actually, in her struggle with the oppressive patriarchal culture, the woman, in her opposition to man, was coming closer and closer in reaching to “her man,” indeed – even as she distanced herself from him. Dimmesdale is her man, Chillingworth is her former husband.

In the end, she found her place next to her man. She found him in death. “It was near that old and sunken grave, yet with a space between, as if the dust of the two sleepers had no right to mingle. Yet one tombstone served for both.”<sup>203</sup> That ‘man’ and ‘woman’ ‘had no right to mingle’, Hawthorne's ‘authentic’ narrative had to put inevitably in suspension – in an ‘as if’; for they do need to mingle in love to affirm life. Indeed, her man was waiting for her in death, but it was by the injunction of life; it was life that made their reunion inevitable, to affirm love in death, life in death, love in life, and life in love. He was waiting for her amidst the deconstructed discourse of the patriarchy, in the gynema which occasions a different reunion of the ‘lines’ and ‘between-the-lines’, a closer reunion, a reunion of life in love that lets them be what they are, as each of them, and as both:

All around, there were monuments carved with armorial bearings; and on this simple slab of slate – as the curious investigator may still discern, and perplex himself with the purport – there appeared the semblance of an engraved escutcheon. It bore a device, a herald's wording of which might serve

<sup>201</sup> Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, pp. 105, 233-235; cf. *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus*, SS. 145-147.

<sup>202</sup> Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, p. 201.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 201.

for a motto and brief description of our now concluded legend; so sombre is it, and relieved only by one ever-glowing point of light gloomier than the shadow: –

“ON A FIELD, SABLE, THE LETTER A, GULES.”<sup>204</sup>

We reach to the margin of our reading, where its gynema must leave its trace. The tombstone, in its presence, is rather a symbol of the death of the patriarchal discourse, where it joins in Hawthorne's biased authenticity and nostalgic grief, and a “symbol” (only in quotation marks) of the alive and life-asserting “woman-in-effect” in the eternity of time.

---

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., p. 201.