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Acting hysteria: An analysis of the actress and her part

Stryk, Lydia, Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1992

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ACTING HYSTERIA: An Analysis of the Actress and Her Part

by

Lydia Stryk

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in
Theatre in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

1992


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LYDIA STRYK

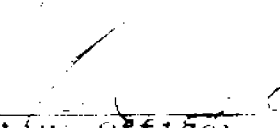
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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

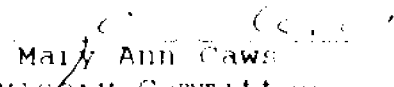
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Abstract

ACTING HYSTERIA: AN ANALYSIS OF THE ACTRESS AND HER PART

by

Lydia Stryk

Adviser: Prof. Marvin Carlson

This dissertation examines the woman's part in dramatic representation as a hysterical construct and explores the hystericizing effect that the playing of this construct has on the actress. Drawing on feminist psychoanalytic analyses of male psychology and on the historical origins of male-invented female hysteria, this study uses dramatic representation as a model and metaphor for woman's hystericization in Western culture.

Charcot's theatricalization of female hysteria through public performances of hysterical acts and the Ophelia as psychological/aesthetic model in British mental asylums are investigated as metaphorical sources for a new definition of female hysteria as a disease of performance, of acting.

Case studies of Eleonora Duse, Vivien Leigh and Liv Ullmann are presented as vivid examples of the effects of hysterical parts on the actresses who play them.

Feminist strategies are offered for the actress (the woman) in an attempt to explore how one recognizes the hysterical construct at work (at play), and the ideas of feminist theorists such as Luce

Irigaray, Helene Cixous and Elin Diamond are explored as tools to help the actress-woman question and subvert the oppressive, maddening effects of the hysterical part. Michel Foucault's investigation of madness and Bertholt Brecht's estranging techniques serve as sources of recognition and strategy for the feminist approach to acting hysteria.

Finally, case studies of several hysterical dramatic roles, categorized as 1) pure victims, 2) hysterical minds, 3) modern, analyzed hysterics, 4) actresses, are offered as examples of feminist strategic analysis.

Preface

This study examines the nature of the female part in plays written by men and the effect this part has on the actress and her "acting" of the part. The part consigned to women, I believe, in so much of Western dramatic literature, is a male construct of woman, namely, the hysteric. The accepting and playing of this hysterical part induces this constructed state in the actress.

My interest in this problem is the result of my own experiences as a professionally trained actress. Thus my reading of the texts is circumscribed by my emotional, psychological and physical response to the woman's part. My training in the Method, auditioning--with its dieting and grooming, analyzing and learning roles, rehearsing, performing, watching and knowing other actresses--what is said and written of them, are behind my concern for the actress as woman and performer. This perspective led me right to feminist psychoanalytic theory which, for me, vividly assists my focus on the actress, existentially, creatively and politically.

I agree with Rosi Braidotti that a post-modern perspective with its disintegration of the subject only subverts the work that must be done to reveal the nature of woman's suppression in the text and on the stage. Braidotti explains:

The truth of the matter is: one cannot deconstruct a subjectivity one has never been fully granted; one cannot diffuse a sexuality which has been defined as dark and mysterious. In order to announce the death of the subject one must first have gained the right to speak as one . . . The fragmentation of the self being woman's basic historical condition . . . women have been postmodern since the beginning of time.¹

In thinking about the actress--why what's there for her to play is there, what it is that is there and is not there, I am limiting my study in a way that is unnatural to the theatre. I want to keep away from the audience, and therefore, phenomenology, and from the director, who bridges stage and house. However, in doing so, I am building an artificial dike, one which will occasionally, unavoidably, allow the presence of the audience to spill over.

Feminist psychoanalytic theory offers the most compelling insights for my purposes, because, on every level, theatre is the playing field of the psyche--under all that culture, language and aesthetics. Madelon Gohlke points to the source of feminist psychoanalytic investigation in her discussion of culture:

As a culture we cling to the language of presence and absence, language and silence, reason and madness to describe the relations between the terms masculine and feminine. . . one might ask [about] the spectrum of psychic needs served by specific conventions and genres.²

I have chosen the term actress to separate her from her male counterpart who does not concern me in this study. Although, as Marianne Novy has noted, actors as a male/female group are a lot like women in their role and status in society. She describes an "anti-theatrical prejudice" which leads to suspicion of both actor and woman:

Both are traditionally expected to survive by pleasing others and are therefore dependent on others This necessity to please leads to much of the role-playing of which women are accused.³

If this adaptability is threatening to society, so, too, are the emotions expressed by both actors and women: Novy sees "the ability of the actor--or the woman--to express emotions felt briefly or not at all" as a source of unease, something threatening to non-actors, non-women.⁴

This connection between women and acting is at the center of this thesis, but I will be primarily concerned with the specific double-bind of the actress, whose situation I hope to present as unique because the roles assigned to her are very different from those assigned to the male actor.

I will argue that most of the women's roles in the male canon are representations of a male construct--the woman as hysteric. Attempting to act these constructs creates a "hysterical" reaction in the actress. And yet, I believe, there are feminist strategies for playing with the texts--digging into and under the hysterical sites.

Like other broad, oppressive forces that stifle women--hysterical constructs are damaging to the spirit of truth as well as to women. Offering feminist strategies for performance demonstrates a belief that there is much of worth and certainly of beauty in the Western drama but only if women are free to re-create for themselves, so that drama says something they would like to say about women--or, at least, about the hysterical way men have written about women. I quote Mary Jacobus:

What if the features of hysterical narratives-- . . . about "hysterical" women, reenacting the hysterical disorders they present--turn out to embody the repressed (because disruptive, unassimilable, and contradictory) aspects of all narrative?⁵

But first, it is necessary to explore man's perception of woman and how he creates his idea of woman from that perception.

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PART ONE: Introduction to Hysteria

We may wonder what type of man makes a woman hysterical.

Monique David-Ménard

The universal "I" of male discourse is the eye of the beholder in recorded culture. Monique David-Ménard describes the process of male discourse as "the idea that there is a simple, univocal relation between the order of . . . perceptions and the nature of the phenomenon under consideration."¹ The completeness of this "truth" of perception is not questioned. What is perceived does not share a place in discourse, has no need to speak of its existence outside of he who perceives. It was Lacan who admitted that "There is no woman not excluded by the nature of things that is the nature of words."²

Linda Walsh-Jenkins describes the history of language as the separating of the male and female perception of experience--the ascendant public male experience from the "mundane" domestic female experience.

The father tongue became the language of the other-than mundane, the life of the mind and the life of the church. . . . vocabulary of misogyny develops in the father tongue to distinguish it from and elevate it from the mundane. . . . And so boys learn the father tongue . . . and the older boys get and the more male-identified they become, the more fluent they become.³

And so the male voice comes to speak for all--"all" being male; woman being absent, lacking a voice, the "her that does not exist and signifies nothing." (Lacan)⁴

Feminists like Mary Jacobus agree with Lacan's assessment of woman's place in male discourse. "The feminine takes its place with the absence, silence, or incoherence that discourse represses . . ." Jacobus writes.⁵ Psychic needs are served by the repression of women, but repression of women from discourse does not mean that men are not interested in woman as sign.

If hysteria, as it is clinically described, involves "a style of thinking and of experiencing the world characterized by a massive use of repression and denial," then what is repressed or denied will appear as symptoms.⁶ Man's perception of woman--his construct--is a symptom of the repression of the feminine in himself--of all those characteristics he considers out of control, excessive, effusive, diffuse, changing, emotional, irrational. This repression is expedient--even necessary--in a culture built on war and power: men cannot show fear, emotion, dependence . . .

Deborah Hooker describes this repression:

Male hysteria manifests as an inescapable fixity, a paralysis-through-action, an inability to respond to any given situation outside the parameters prescribed by the male-warrior status quo.⁷

Such hysterical male entrapment is nowhere more vividly described than in Wilfred Owen. In the spring of 1918, several months before he was killed, Owen--the shell-shocked poet of World War I--began to write the preface to a collection of war poems he hoped to publish. The male role of hero, by now, sickened him. He begins his preface so: "This book is not about heroes." He will write, instead, poems about the horror and ignorance of war and of the fear that war produces, because, as he says, "all a poet can do today is warn. That is why the true poets must be truthful."⁸ Owen's poems are full of the ugly irony of the oppressive, deadly construct, hero, in its relation to the real young man sent off to defend and die. In the end, it is the role that kills. The following fragment is from a poem about a young soldier who takes his own life-- unable to live up to the demands of HEROISM:

...His eyes grew old with wincing, and his hand
reckless with ague. Courage leaked as sand
But never leave, wound, fever, trench-foot, shock,
untrapped the wretch. . .⁹

In her book, The Female Malady, Elaine Showalter describes the appearance of male hysterics, returning from the front in World War I. Their numbers could not be ignored; their presence "undermined [an] ideology of absolute and natural difference between women and men."¹⁰

The most masculine of enterprises, the Great War, the 'apocalypse of masculinism,' feminized its conscripts by taking away their sense of control.¹¹

For officers, however, Showalter says, the "pressure to conform to British ideals of manly stoicism were extreme."¹²

The "cure" of male hysteria--which manifested both physically and mentally--was achieved when the hysterical man "at last reached the desired state of numbness...stopped being introspective...felt nothing," was again in control of the disturbing, irrational, feminine elements that had paralyzed his will to look death square in the face--even cheerfully--and, not to be forgotten--to kill with gusto.¹³

In the symbolic order which is male, woman, then, is replaced by man's perception of her which is hysterical. Jane Gallop describes the male sign "woman":

She has no desires that don't complement his, so she can mirror him, provide him with a representation of himself which calms his fears and phobias about (his own potential) otherness and difference, about some 'other view' that might not support his overinvestment in his penis.¹⁴

"She" is all that is repressed in himself--and must at the same time reassure him of his status as hero. Madelon Sprengnether sees the literal and linguistic penetration of the vagina for the male as:

a means of filling a gap, confronting and defeating fear provoked by sight of a woman's genitals and establishing a dominant/submissive relation in which a woman's 'masculine' auto-erotic power is denied.¹⁵

Fear is subsumed in the dominant relation to women which is one of power. Men have ridiculed, belittled, minimized,

humiliated the very construct they have forced upon women. As the Infiniti G20 car ad says: "You Know How Relaxed You Feel When You're in Control." This double power play ensures men of their superiority:

1. Force women into the role
2. Ridicule the role

The hysterical scene is played continuously in male/female dialogue. He talks on and on about himself, his ideas and beliefs never asking her for her opinions--or about herself. When she ventures to bring herself into the conversation his eyes glaze over and it is clear that he is bored and irritated by this intrusion in his monologue. The woman, chastened, incapable of giving offense or dominating, sinks back into her passive role as reflection--encouraging his monologue with questions, giggles empty of content and appreciative clucks and sighs. And in this scenario, she is the one who appears foolish.

From recorded time, at least, man has perceived and diagnosed woman as illness/hysteria; an unknowable, lacking, mysterious, uncontrollable otherness. Physicians and then psychiatrists, were fascinated yet repelled by this construct hysteria. They saw themselves as explorers, adventuring into strange, dangerous, unknown territory as conquerors, as if exploration of this "place" brought it into existence--gave it presence, life, a place on the map where there was emptiness, blank space before. Just as the explorers of the "New World"-

-a world with its own inhabitants, culture, mythologies, values, ways of seeing, naming, speaking, expressing, feeling, -- found nothing that they knew or could explain on its own terms, so the patriarchy and its hysterical discourse have seen fit to interpret woman for her and itself as hysterical-- a sign composed of many characteristics and behaviors that stand for what is inexplicable for men.

The concept of female hysteria has from its recorded origin in Ancient Egypt been attributed to a woman's sexuality. The original diagnosis was a wandering uterus for which the "illness" is named. It was not until late in the seventeenth century, when postmortem examinations of the uteri of hysterics found no pathological changes, that nerves took over as the cause célèbre. However, in the nineteenth century, postmortem brain examinations of hysterics led to the conclusion that there was no organic change in the nervous system of the afflicted women either.¹⁶

All along, the behavior and character of female hysterics were determined to be the result of lack of sex, sex with the devil, nymphomania, lack of a penis. . . The history of this constructed hysteria is one of man's obsessive search for a cause for woman's behavior which is blind to the needs, desire and body of the woman, as well as to the way she thinks, feels and experiences the world. Naming the feminine, hysteria, equates hysteria with that which is not understood, that which is inexplicable, frightening--female desire.

The hysterical personality is, in contemporary textbook psychology, described as behavior "characterized by excitability, emotional instability, overreactivity, and self-dramatization . . . which is always attention-seeking and often seductive." The hysteric is "immature, self-centered, often vain, and usually dependent on others."¹⁷ The following table charts the patterns of the "hysterical personality" as viewed by psychologists working in the field today.

TABLE 1

Common Patterns in the Hysterical Personality¹⁸Long-Order Patterns: Interpersonal Relations

Repetitive, impulsive, stereotyped interpersonal relationships often characterized by victim-aggressor, child-parent, and rescue or rape themes

"Cardboard" fantasies and caricaturelike roles for self and others to play

Drifting but possibly dramatic lives with an existential sense that reality is not really real, frequent experience of self as not in control and not responsible

Medium-Order Patterns: Traits

Attention-seeking behaviors, possibly including demands for attention and/or the use of charm, vivacity, displays of sex appeal, childlikeness, passivity, or infirmity

Fluid change in mood and emotion, excitable, episodically flooded with feeling

Inconsistency of attitudes, suggestibility

Short-Order Patterns: Information Processing Style

Global deployment of attention

Unclear, inhibited, or incomplete statements of ideas and feelings, possibly with lack of details or clear labels in communication, nonverbal communications not translated into words or conscious meanings

Only partial or unidirectional associational lines

Short circuit to apparent completion of problematic thoughts

The above patterns present man's impression of a problem with woman's emotional, psychological, intellectual, being. Her unconscious, passions, desires, ways of seeing, thinking,

compensating and surviving under an oppressive patriarchy become an illness in the eye of the beholder. From this chart it is apparent that, as H.M. Wolowitz has written, "the psychodynamics of the hysteric are uncomfortably close to the dynamics of the idealized 'normal' feminine personality." And elsewhere, psychologists note that "the hysterical character as usually described in the analytical literature . . . is developmentally appropriate for women . . ."19

Such statements amount to an admission that the hysteric is man's perception of what is female, feminine, woman. Even those who create the construct cannot ignore the sameness of psycho-sexual illness and male-perceived "woman". If there is an opposite "healthy" female, she is the embodiment of feminine masochism and passivity, the "extreme selflessness" that Nancy Chodorow says "analysts do not consider difficult for most 'normal' mothers to fulfill."20

Today, mental health professionals admit that hysteria is a perplexing disease. They cannot explain the cause, though they point to symptoms in daughters and wives of sociopathic males.21 They intone with scientific conviction bordering on the religious, their protracted desire to eliminate the strange sameness of hysteria and femininity:

The challenge for diagnosticians is to refine their ability to evaluate . . . structural and genetic-dynamic considerations in a manner that will extricate them from the present confusion between hysteria and femininity.22

P. Chodoff and H. Lyons, in their work on the hysterical personality, have noted that it is "a picture of women in the words of men and . . . what the description sounds like amounts to a caricature of femininity."²³

Descriptions of both the hysteric's mind and her emotions are clearly male interpretations of how women think and feel and are based on the frightening, unacceptable potential of difference. A typical clinical diagnosis of the hysteric's cognition describes:

the relative absence of active concentration, the susceptibility to transient, impressive influences, in a relatively nonfactual subjective world of impressions . . . often very vivid, but . . . not detailed, not quite sharply defined, and certainly not technical . . . Ideas, concepts and facts are not easily available to them.²⁴

Extreme emotionality is also diagnosed as hysterical:

To an observer's eye a hysteric's emotions seem exaggerated and unconvincing . . . not . . . sincere Their subjective world seems to lie at a great distance from an intellectual understanding of their own behavior.²⁵

Back again to the relationship between women and acting. It would seem that what a "male observer" cannot understand, explain or feel on his own terms, must be false, and also, beyond the "intellectual understanding" of the hysteric, herself (such "understanding" being male discourse).

It is valuable to note here that French feminists have celebrated woman's unique cognition and experiencing in terms that echo the clinician's description of the hysterical

patient's. Luce Irigaray has written of the woman's mind which:

goes off in all directions . . . in which 'he' is unable to discern the coherence of any meaning. Contradictory words seem a little crazy to the logic of reason, and inaudible for him who listens with ready-made grids, a code prepared in advance.²⁶

She asks:

If the female imagination reached its full extent and could operate in other than fragmentary ways, in scattered bits and pieces, would it appear in the form of a universe?²⁷

Hélène Cixous describes a woman's language, a woman's "unconscious" [which] is worldwide . . . without ever describing or discerning limits . . . [which] lets the other language speak--the language of 1,000 tongues. . .²⁸ For Cixous, feminine objectivity has, as Ann Rosalind Jones notes, a "pre-conceptual, non-appropriative openness to people and to objects."²⁹ Cixous describes feminine perception:

She who observes with a gaze that recognizes, studies, respects, doesn't seize or make marks, but attentively, with a gentle stubbornness, contemplates and reads, caresses, bathes, makes the other radiant.³⁰

However, there is a danger in this alternative defining of hysterical symptomology as feminine difference that should be mentioned. It is one thing for the woman to, as Tillie Olsen says, tell "the truth about one's experiences as a

body."³¹ But the feminine ideal can also trap women--even as it seems to open the possibility of a true expressiveness.

Olsen is concerned that "the feminine" can be "falsifying [of] one's own reality, range, vision, truth, voice . . ." ³² leading to self-limiting strategies or visions:

Being charming, entertaining, 'small,' feminine [rather than serious, 'large,' deep and complex. Using] "irony, wit, the arch, instead of directness; diffuse emotion or detachment instead of tragedy. Avoiding seriousness altogether. Concealing intellect, analytical ability, objectivity; or refusing to credit that one is capable of them. Abdicating 'male' realms: 'The large,' the social, the political."³³

In short, Olsen warns against abdicating one's right to power. Beret E. Strong worries that "theorizing" hysteria has always involved theorizing the feminine, and he offers a harsh political critique of "the feminine" as a true and present danger:

When hysteria is theorized, it is now clear, so is the feminine. And the contemporary French feminists, though celebrating woman's plurality and freedom in her body, have not moved beyond the vocabulary of a stagnant tradition of theorizing hysteria. What is more alarming is that in the 1970s, Irigaray, Montrelay, Cixous and Clement were actively engaged in theorizing the feminine. That their discussions of hysteria in often revolutionary texts tend to echo, if not support a dangerous ideology threatens feminism's many projects. It is not enough to make affirmative what was negative: as has been said too often, this is to remain trapped within the snare of binarism. The history of hysteria needs to be understood, through a new lexicon, in terms of how it has functioned to

serve masculine ideology and repression. Then we will break a centuries-old theoretical habit complicitious with a diseased typology of sexual difference.³⁴

I hope to argue that the danger has always been the effects of theorizing on women: how a hysterical model has been forced onto women as a truth and role/ideal. Theories are never dangerous unless they are swallowed/absorbed--become a kind of truth.

At the same time, there are clearly ways of seeing, feeling, thinking and coping that could be termed "feminine"--biologically determined to a much smaller extent than by adaptation, by coping and expressing what is possible in a repressive, silencing male world.

Massive repression of emotions and feminine cognitive traits surface in the sign woman/hysteric in male discourse. The discourse must organize, name, separate out, control. All that excess which women experience becomes symptoms that are frightening, threatening, mysterious and disgusting (as Freud defined disgust--a turning away from, a repressing).

From the beginning of recorded history, male physicians have sought "cures" to remedy the hysterical symptoms of woman: medicinal cures such as dried male excrement; purgative treatments like bloodletting; purification rituals like the lighted stake where "witches" burned--and always there has been the proposed phallic cure for hysterical girls, spinsters and widows.³⁵

In the nineteenth century (Breuer and Freud were by no means the first), physicians assigned to take care of hysterical women in asylums began to listen to what these hysterics were saying. They recorded their "histories", described their actions, how they spoke, what they said. Woman began to be read like a text. And like a text, she had to be interpreted, because she could not be explained.

Freud on hysterical behavior:

Hysterical attacks can be interpreted partly as universal forms of reaction . . . partly as a direct expression . . . but in part, like the hysterical stigmata found among the chronic systems, they cannot be explained in this way.³⁶

In an image hard to separate from male sexuality, Freud began to explore the unconscious of his female hysterical patients as they lay in a recumbent position, attempting to root out what was missing, inexplicable, in the texts of their bodies and minds. He finds a gap, a lack, a place he can enter but not explain. It frightens yet draws him. He will drown inside it. He cannot control or make sense of it. He must withdraw, separate himself from the unknowable place and name it.

Ned Lukacher describes the hysteric as "a nonstory whose very unnarratability binds the discourse of the hysteric to the discourse of the psychoanalyst."³⁷ This "presentation of unspeakable desires" which is woman proved a riddle, a mystery to the analysts because as Monique David-Ménard explains:

The principles of analysis of the object, the unconscious, are the universalization of certain factors identified in the interpretation of a group of particular fantasies.³⁸

These fantasies of the psychoanalysts can never quite solve the riddle of woman's expressive facilities under patriarchy--her "acting out." Her sexuality was such a mystery that many descriptions of uncontrollable hysterical symptoms sound a lot like the female orgasm:

A paroxysmal attack preceded by the voiding of large quantities of limpid urine, loss of consciousness, general muscular contractions . . . alternated with bouts of laughter and crying, "false imagination", and some degree of delirium . . .

Hysterical convulsions . . . might result from a turgescence of blood in the genital system.³⁹

Why would men know or recognize that which had not been allowed into existence--into language? Throughout the hysteric literature, there are expressions of frustration and obsession as woman's symptoms continue to elude understanding or cure.

And yet doctors went on attempting to interpret woman. The telling of the hysteric's story, finally, became an act of creation, a literary act, a fiction. In his interpretation, the psychoanalyst provides "meaning", clarity, sense, logic, order for her telling, her language. He creates a narrative and a closure: an hysterical story which represses what is there with his own fantasy of what is there and not there. Mary Jacobus calls the following passage which introduces the

last of Freud's five case studies of hysterics a "literary confession":

It still strikes me as strange that the case histories I write should read like short stories and that, as one might say, they lack the serious stamp of science. I must console myself with the reflection that the nature of the subject is evidently responsible for this . . . The fact is that a . . . detailed description of mental processes such as we are accustomed to find in the works of imaginative writers, enables me, with the use of a few psychological formulas, to obtain at least some kind of insight into the course of [hysteria].⁴⁰

Mary Jacobus comments on the fictionalizing of the hysteric's story:

This uncanny turn in the literature of psychoanalysis . . . toward literature can be traced, not simply to hysteria, but to women. The strangeness of hysterical desire is inseparable from femininity. . . "Femininity" and "hysteria" name the otherness or strangeness which inhabits psychoanalytic theory (and literature) and which psychoanalysts must marginalize in order to found itself as a theoretical body of work.⁴¹

For Jacobus, femininity and hysteria play the same role in a text as the uncanny. They are "points of instability which threaten to expose . . . products of representation . . . as constructs."⁴²

The narration of hysteria--repressing all that threatens to expose it as incomplete, unknowing, is where hysteria is to be found. Woman hides in the "gaps, absence, and silence" of the hysterical text.⁴³

Jacobus links the satisfactory therapeutic outcome to a "successful" aesthetic creation:

The analytic task is to reconstruct chronological sequence, facilitating the "work of reproduction", and imposing . . . (con)sequentiality necessary both for satisfactory therapeutic outcome of the analysis and for its subsequent literary representation--which in the end amount to the same thing, the case history . . . [eliminates] gaps, lead[ing] simultaneously to closure and cure.⁴⁴

If hysteria is expressed by gaps, absences and omissions, then woman remains outside representation, overwhelming the feminist reader "with the absence which . . . hysteria attempts to repress in the name of woman."⁴⁵ (Jacobus) What men cannot fathom about her remains as signs of her. And yet, as Jacobus suggests, the hysterical narrative knows more than it knows:

The assumption of one-to-one causality between the text and social reality does away with the unconscious of the text--specifically with its literariness, the way in which it knows more than it knows (and more than the author intended).^{46xx}

Bethany Ladimer's feminist analysis of André Breton's Nadja offers a practical strategy for reading hysterical male texts--for uncovering what the text knows that its author doesn't about women and the madness assigned to them. Nadja also offers a revealing look at the need for and the satisfaction derived from making women mad. Finally, Breton's text is a vivid example of how a work claiming to bear the stamp of true experience crosses over--through the aesthetic frame of

surrealism--into an admission of the fictional nature of experience--or at least its confusion.

Breton's poetic documentation of his affair with the "hysterical" Nadja is dictated by the clinical discipline of the psychiatrist. His chosen "system of representation and textual strategy," Ladimer suggests, is the result of his World War I psychiatric training. She cites Breton:

The tone which I have adopted for this text is an attempt to imitate that of medical observations, especially neuro-psychiatry, which is characterized by a tendency to preserve every trace of evidence which examination and interrogation can yield, but which is not in the least concerned with literary effects of style.⁴⁷

It is ironic that Breton opens his text with a denial of its literariness while admitting to the adoption of "tone" and to the imitation of medical observation. If this text is an imitation of scientific observation, is it scientific observation or art imitating the style of scientific observation? And ultimately, of course, what is the difference?

The surrealists--in their revolt against rationality--reified the feminine, which for them (like all those non-surrealists before them) represented irrationality--or the "extrarational." Breton, Ladimer says, believed that "woman actually represent[ed] a system of understanding that could ultimately help him expand his own."⁴⁸ That Nadja was a real rather than a fictive woman was both critical and irrelevant.

Through her, Breton could encounter and explore the feminine in himself. Ladimer:

She provided the rigorous and revealing test of reality for Breton's theories and principles concerning . . . the extrarational or 'feminine' mode of thought, including madness.⁴⁹

Breton's experiences with Nadja are recorded and verified with documents and photographs which allow him to diagnose the irrationality of both Nadja and their encounter from an aesthetic posture of science.

Ladimer argues that more than the evidence of her and their reality became necessary to prove the truth of his claims:

Breton may have begun with the assumption that a verifiable experience would surely guarantee plausibility. The problem is that even the verifiable events in a narrative cannot seem 'real' without a complementary system of interpretation ideologically, and hence aesthetically, wide enough to include them.⁵⁰

By juxtaposing what is true (the documentation of Nadja's existence) with his own experience of her, Breton sought reassurance for his surreal position. By claiming to demonstrate that Nadja could not be understood because she was madness itself, Breton hoped to explain away his inability to understand her. Breton used surrealist notions of the irrational and madness in the same way psychoanalysts used their theories, to fill in the gaps of understanding.

Ladimer is very interested in what eludes Breton in his study and analysis of Nadja:

It would seem most pertinent to investigate precisely which elements in Breton's reported experience remain elusive to him, especially those concerning the specific nature of Nadja's madness, and precisely why these are invisible and difficult to interpret They are invisible to him and not simply absent, because they become visible to the reader, provided another system of interpretation is applied that includes the reported facts and Breton's own observations of Nadja's behavior out of Breton's own terms of literary representation ironically emerges a fully 'real' image of an oppressed, rebellious, desperate, and eventually psychotic young woman.⁵¹

Within the text, Breton links women and madness to the actress. Nadja is compared to Blanche Duval, a famous performer of madwoman parts and she is, as Ladimer says, "assimilated generally into the role of actress."⁵² There is at the same time, however, "an increasing frequency of symptoms."

The text, by virtue of its parti pris against fictional interpretation, openly encourages us to consider in clinical terms the question of Nadja's psychosis.⁵³

At the same time, however, Breton celebrates the mystical nature of their union and the beauty of Nadja's madness, which is, as Ladimer describes, oddly inseparable from his own mind:

These are moments of communion with Nadja, when she seems to be able to divine his thoughts in the transparency of their understanding. It is then that she seems to him to be a projection of himself, but one could say equally well that she has actively assumed, on his behalf, the formation of his speech.⁵⁴

Ultimately, then, Nadja's madness is a celebration of Breton's own irrational potential. But, as the text knows more than the author, something further is revealed. Ladimer is right to assert that Breton's psycho-aesthetic analysis of the hysterical Nadja reveals:

A mad woman [as] merely the hyperbole of the specific female experience of oppression.⁵⁵

David-Ménard offers this insight into hysterical symptoms, which begins to offer an analogy to theatrical presentation:

The subject uses plastic and figurative thought to try to achieve the presence of the desired object and to achieve jouissance in which nothing will have to be represented, that is acknowledged as absent.⁵⁶

As Freud himself wrote, "Anyone who studies hysteria soon finds his interest turning away from its symptoms to the phantasies from which they proceed."⁵⁷ The theorist-artist turns in disgust from the truth of woman toward aesthetics--to the staging of his own fantasies.

It is not surprising that if the medical man has perceived woman as a hysterical construct, so, too, has the man who writes plays. Like physicians of old and turn-of-the-century psychoanalysts, male playwrights have created narratives that portray woman as hysteric. Madelon Sprengnether writes here of Freud's attempt to interpret Dora, the girl-hysteric who would become a feminist symbol of defiance:

Against her silence, his simulated conversations sound awkward, a manic insistence on the power of his voice to create her reality. Finally, however, . . . she is . . . a seductive but empty image, composed literally of dead metaphors.⁵⁸

Sprenghether's "dead metaphors" are the timeless symptoms and cures associated with the hysteric, "the misunderstandings of female sexuality. . . the misnamings of the source of female pleasure."⁵⁹ She holds Freud's work up as a model of representation which in the theater remains entrenched:

Freud's own anxieties and confusions regarding the nonreproductively oriented nature of female sexuality . . . provide . . . an insuperable barrier to . . . noncoersive representation.⁶⁰

Theatrical analogies abound in psychoanalytic literature, and, indeed, the relationship is less symbiotic than incestuous. The psychoanalyst narrates the story of his hysterical character whose acting out he interprets from his own unconscious drives. Mary Jacobus describes Freud's mentor, Breuer, at work on a patient, Anna O.:

Breuer transforms Anna O. from a speaking subject into a senseless body . . . in his scenario . . . No longer an actress in her own drama, but a patient bearing mute testimony to psychoanalytic theory.⁶¹

In her study of Hélène Cixous's play about Freud and his hysterical patient, Dora, Portrait of Dora, Sharon Willis quotes Jean LaPlanche and J.B. Pontalis' description of the structure of fantasy--which is viewed in theatrical terms--a "scenario with multiple entries."

Fantasy . . . is not the object of desire, but its setting. In fantasy the subject does not pursue the object of its representation, but is himself represented in the scene, although in the earlier forms of fantasy, he cannot be assigned any fixed place in it.⁶²

Like psychoanalysts, playwrights have been involved in producing fantasy--scenes in which their place in the scene is the source of their creation. If plays function as fantasy structures, the actress, like the patient in psychoanalytic observation, is trapped in this structure by the mute role she is assigned.

Trapped in a play that oppresses her, keeps her silent, object, reacting or acting out, the actress is turned into a "hysteric"--the real woman, unspeakable, unactable, her desire unrecognized in the language and narrative of the play--the fantasy scene in which she is placed.

The female dramatic character, like the hysteric, is a sign of uncanniness, inexplicability, irrationality, incomprehensibility. "Her" actions cannot be explained, only interpreted. "Her" motives are a mystery. "She" is an unresolvable case, falsely clothed and closed in a narrative driven by fantasy that explains the hysterical construct but not woman whom "she" claims to represent.

Jill Dolan has noted that theatre and psychoanalysis are analogous:

The female hysteric positioned as spectacle for the theorizing of the male psychoanalytic gaze can be read analogously with the position of women within repre-

sentation. Both the psychoanalytic and the theatrical narratives demand that women accept their silence within the dominant order and abdicate their desire.⁶³

The stage itself becomes the hysterical site on which woman's absence is filled with the anxieties and confusion of the male playwright. David Willbern argues that theatrical space has been viewed as "female interiority." Theatre, then, is created on/in the stage/woman. Musing on the O of nothing, the blank center of any circle--or stage, Willbern says:

denial and negation trace only half of our original circle. Its reciprocal, the positive half, represents fullness rather than emptiness, presence rather than absence, whole rather than hole. . . . Nothing in other words, is the very ground of being, just as silence is the ground of speech. . . .⁶⁴

Woman may be the absent, silent source of everything, yet nothing, Willbern admits, is the no-thing of woman and "signifies the . . . imperative, to create 'something'--some meaning or sense: a name for absence."⁶⁵

This name is woman. Willbern cites Anthony Wilden on Lacan's "hole" or "lack" into which "meaning is poured" and Derrida's idea that a sign is a wound:

These metaphors of an original lack, hole, defect or wound signify that anatomical manifestation of presence and absence. . . . genital difference.⁶⁶

In theatrical representation, the emptiness behind the sign "woman" is represented by the living woman on stage. "Woman" as the "primary ground of nothing"--as stage and

hysterical character into which man pours his anxieties of castration and engulfment--must surely be upset, distressed by this real presence of the actress. And conversely, such a stage and character most certainly distress the actress. For if the woman's role in history has been to be misunderstood and misdiagnosed, the actress' role has been to represent that hysterical construct which man has invented for women, to play that role, and to act as if it were real and really her.

PART TWO: Acting as Hysteria

A woman acting puts me in mind of a dog dancing.
 Nick Greene

Woman as illness. As hysteric. From the beginning of recorded history. Among the first written words. Scraped on papyrus. Hysteric as actress. From that time--"classical"--as Foucault distinguishes--when woman's "illness" resisting the discovery of any true source is, thus, depicted in literature as an illness of deception. A falseness. As acting. Acting as disease. Woman's disease, an act. But real all the same. Foucault: "hysteria . . . appears as the most real and the most deceptive of diseases."¹ Why? The answer lies in acting. Woman as actress, then. And finally, a new category which represents the rest: actress as hysteric. Bringing woman's historical role under patriarchy to its most perfect metaphorical stature.

And conversely for the feminist theatre person, the entire history of woman and hysteria presents itself as metaphor for the role of actress in the theatre.

Thomas Sydenham, (1784), Hysteria

imitates almost all the maladies to which human flesh is subject, for in whatever part it lodges, it immediately produces the symptoms that are proper to that part, and if the physician does not have great wisdom and experience, he will easily be deceived and will attribute to

an illness essential and proper to such and such a part, symptoms that are entirely the result of hysterical affection.²

Hysteria is a disease of imitation, then. And it attacks women more than men because women's bodies are:

indiscriminately penetrable to all the efforts of the spirits, so that the internal order of organs [gives] way to an incoherent space of masses passively subject to the chaotic movement of the spirits.³

Women are natural actresses. Quite remarkable! This skill of the body of the hysteric. Hysteria becomes an ART (though of a low form--not "high art"). The body and the emotions of the woman--so susceptible, open and fluid become the site of a terrifying, supernatural ability. And when spirits give way to morality, woman becomes the site of seething corruption. In 1866, Jules Faret notes the following about his hysterical patients--with great alarm:

These patients are veritable actresses: they do not know of a greater pleasure than to deceive . . . make an equal travesty and exaggeration of the movement of their soul, their ideas, and their acts.⁴

And, finally even in contemporary psychological accounts, acting is noted as a real need in the female psyche:

[the hysteric] may be attracted to drama or similar pursuits where her exhibitionistic needs can be satisfied.⁵

The ancient primal role of the theatre is itself the starting place of man's view of woman as hysteric: actors as conduits--able to absorb the forces and spirits that harm--or

fill one with passions, able to make the imaginary manifest into a kind of TRUTH--that cannot be trusted.

Foucault's description of madness reinforces its uncanny connection with acting--thus, woman:

Madness is thus beyond imagination, and yet it is profoundly rooted in it; for it consists merely in allowing the image a spontaneous value, total and absolute truth.⁶

The madman:

believing what he sees . . . admits as realities the hallucinations of his imagination.

Joining vision and blindness, image and judgement, hallucination and language, sleep and waking, day and night, madness is ultimately nothing, for it unites in them all that is negative. But the paradox of this nothing is to manifest itself, to explode in signs, in words, in gestures.⁷

Out of nothing, through the body come signs, words, gestures that mimic real signs, words, gestures. But these are false, because imagined. Cannot be located within the sphere of reality which, finally, is threateningly similar to its counterpart, madness.

Foucault sees the classical urge to draw a clear boundary between reality and madness as motivated by practical societal needs. The mad were locked up with other indigents because they could not work, and they begged. However, this cannot explain the full nature of confinement of the mad. Foucault:

[If] madness in the classical period ceased to be the sign of another world, . . . and became the paradoxical manifestation of non-being . . . confinement merely manifested what madness, in its essence, was: a manifestation of non-being.⁸

Confinement was in "the strict expression of its meaning, an operation to annihilate nothingness."⁹ However, confinement succeeded in institutionalizing madness as theatrical spectacle:

Here is madness elevated to spectacle above the silence of the asylums, and becoming a public scandal for the general delight.¹⁰

The director of Charenton organized "famous performances in which madmen sometimes played the role of actors, sometimes those of watched spectators. . . ." ¹¹

Until the beginning of the 19th century, . . . madmen remained monsters . . . beings or things to be shown.

In the Renaissance, madness was present everywhere and mingled with every experience by its images or its dangers. During the classical period, madness was shown, but on the other side of bars; if present, it was at a distance, under the eyes of reason that no longer felt any relation to it and that would not compromise itself by too close a resemblance. Madness had become a thing to look at: no longer a monster inside oneself.¹²

The theatre of the mad was a prison. The "mocking and insulting" audience--laughing through their terror, horror and fascination--were protected by the aesthetic distance of bars.

Perhaps, it can be argued, that for the actress the stage, itself, is like that classical asylum--a prison. And the audience enjoys her portrayal from as great an aesthetic distance.

Madman as non-being.

Madman as actor. Woman as madman. As actress. As laughable, terrifying no-thing to be viewed.

I turn now to a particular home for the mad: the woman's asylum, Salpêtrière, in Paris, in the second half of the nineteenth century, under the direction of Jean-Martin Charcot. Charcot's exploits as "world expert" on hysteria have been carefully documented and often discussed in histories of neurosis and feminist analyses of hysteria. But I think that a re-examination of the famed doctor's direction of hysterical acts--the setting, the physical scripts, the hysterical role, the patient-actresses themselves--can serve as a model for the hystericized actress of the theatre.

Charcot's hysterical theatre, perhaps, more perfectly than any other event in medical history (through its very thatricality), demonstrates how men have gone about making women hysterical--turning women into hysterical constructs. And how through a process of force, control, deprivation, intimidation--a system of reward and punishment, and suggestion (called the magically derived "hypnosis") men have convinced themselves and women that women are mad. Or

perhaps, more perfectly, convinced women that to play the expected role is their reality.

Charcot, as becomes clear when one examines the series of hysterical acts he created and directed, was also able to reduce the mysticism and tragedy of women's lives to scenes of ribaldry and pornography. Whether saints or whores (which in Charcot's theatre become one and the same: their imagery merging and switching and trading places until they are indistinguishable), the female hysteric is ultimately reduced to clown. A contortionist whose success depends on the level of believability she can bring to the grotesque and exaggerated presentation of lust, pathos, ecstasy, release, tension, helpless vulnerability, pliability, emotional flexibility: in short, on her acting ability. That imaginative, mimetic art which creates truth out of nothing. Makes the imagination manifest itself as something real.

As Elaine Showalter points out: "Charcot's hospital became an environment in which female hysteria was perpetually presented, represented, and reproduced."¹³ In great part this was due to the director's approach to his female patients. His analysis was "strongly visual and imagistic."¹⁴ He had opted for a medical career over painting but approached his work with the eye of an artist. George Frederick Drinka describes Charcot thus:

prone to sketching at odd moments over the years, he developed a visual orientation. . . .¹⁵

It was said by those who observed him at work diagnosing, that he would sit and look and look until something suddenly visualized in his mind:

able to sit for hours in the presence of a patient with an unexplained symptom . . . Then--in the manner of a scientific genius--the symptoms would suddenly fall into a definable order in his mind.¹⁶

More often than not, it would seem these symptoms belonged to female hysteria. Or, to put it more exactly, female hysteria was for Charcot the phenomenon known by these symptoms, which he so brilliantly ordered in his mind. His wildly popular lectures--his hysterical theatre--were structured around this ordering of hysterical symptoms.

Charcot's fame as a doctor, cannot be separated from his creative genius as creator and stager of highly entertaining drama, theatrical presentation at its most spectacular. Every Tuesday, joining awed medical students and doctors at Charcot's so-called "lectures", "the huge amphitheatre was filled to the last place with a multi-colored audience drawn from Tout Paris, authors, journalists, leading actors and actresses, fashionable demimondaines."¹⁷

Charcot's evenings appear to have begun legitimately enough with his lecturing on some hysterical symptom--with a female hysterical patient as his visual aid. He would locate these symptoms on her body and demonstrate his findings, then send the patient to be hypnotized by his assistants.¹⁸

Although much is difficult to fathom about the nature of these lectures, it is clear that the female hysterics were the site of the drama. They were the actresses who performed Charcot's texts: they were the stars without whom nothing would exist, for behind their theatrical presenting was really nothing that existed in reality. The hysterical show put on by Charcot's star patients were manifestations of his mind. Unable to locate any physical proof of a disturbed nervous system in the autopsies of females identified as hysterical, Charcot would rely on his inspirational bursts.

Or as Drinka says:

He fell back on his visual talent . . . undertook a careful study of the clinical phenomenon of the disorder and scrupulously classified the symptoms he saw." ¹⁹

What Charcot saw in his mind's eye and recreated on stage in the bodies of his hysterical ACTRESSES:

Charcot's Classification of Hysteria²⁰

-TWO MAJOR SYMPTOMS-

<u>Seizure</u>	<u>Stigmata or Symptoms</u>
<p>In Four Parts (Acts?!) I. <u>The Epileptoid Phase</u> resembled convulsion of epilepsy "The patient would spontaneously drop to the floor" and flail and jerk. Foam at the mouth II. <u>The Grand Movement or Clownism Phase</u> "peculiar twists and turns, bizarre and grotesque feats of dexterity were performed the ultimate grand movement, the pirouette of hysteria, Charcot called <u>arc-en-cercle</u> ... The patient arched her back, balancing on her heels and head like an acrobat. Contortions III. <u>Passionate Attitudes</u> "In this phase, the patient experienced various false sensory or mental images, reveries, had visions. . . seemed frightened or glad morose or giggling in turn. The patient would babble or shout, repeat phrases and gestures."</p>	<p>(present between seizures) -anesthesia: loss of sensation -tremors -paralysis -astasia-basia: difficulty in standing or walking (tottering or near swooning in Latinized Greek) -tunnel vision: narrowing of visual to see only objects directly in front -presence of hysterogenic points on body: French neurologists had found that most of their patients subject to hysterical fits possessed a number of points on their bodies, that, if pressed, either caused a seizure or aborted one." (based on a theory of reversing or setting off electrical impulses in the nervous system.)</p>

IV. Delirious Phase

"noisy weeping and lamentation, or laughing and giggling mixed with stupor."

Many issues are raised by this fantastic performance, purported to be a representation of truth--or rather truth itself. It is impossible not to be struck most immediately by the pornographic context of hysteria--both in its stigmata and seizure symptoms--or acts. As Drinka notes:

A number of sketches in French publications depicted these so-called hysterogenic points on female patients' bodies.²¹

The woman's body becomes a site of total suspectibility, and once hypnotism was linked to psychology--suggestibility. The hysteric, at the slightest touch (if one knows where her points of vulnerability lie) drops immediately to the floor, writhes and jerks on her back. She trembles, contracts, swoons, cannot move or see. And then, remarkably, she becomes a contortionist, twisting her body into bizarre (highly provocative) positions--culminating in the grand arc-en-cercle. Her sexual organ lifting into the air, balancing precariously on hands and feet, head dropped back, so that she appears headless.

This "clownism"--both vulgar and suggestive-- a ludicrous and hilarious act for its audience, is followed by the climactic phase of passionate attitudes. In this phase, the female hysteric demonstrates her capacity to experience the range of

human emotions and the full range of female experience--from the erotic to the visionary and back--through posturing, emoting and language. Here is a telling description of a hysterical patient in the throes of passionate delirium:

Genevieve went back and forth between ecstatic and crucified poses. Intermingled with these poses were a series of erotic gestures in which she pleaded for kisses and sexual intimacy . . . uttering such words as 'vagina' and 'penis'. back and forth. Back and forth, back and forth she would go, saint to prostitute, saint to prostitute, in minutes."²²

From hysterical saint to whore--the actress' repertoire in perfect metaphor. The female hysteric demonstrates for Charcot, his belief that saints and whores, female vision and desire, are merely hysterical symptoms: an act. And conversely, always, that this acting--fluid movement from saint to whore--is woman. Is hysteria.

Back and forth, in and out, ecstasy, arc-en-cercle, erotic posturing, laughing, crying, giggling, crying . . .²³

Through Charcot's early work at Salpêtrière focused on describing and presenting the physical symptoms of hysteria, he began to explore the psyches of his individual patients, inviting young psychologists to do his research. Drinka:

His disciples and admirers did take the time to record and publish voluminous histories of the lives of the most prominent hysterics [and] . . . the case histories . . . spell out the desperate details of the lives of these French women.²⁴

And through the suggestive approach of hypnosis, they fathom and expose to ridicule through performance not only the eros and passion of woman's body but also her hysterical mind.

Through various experiments, Charcot became convinced that hypnosis could induce hysteria and its dramatic symptoms:

Just as he had done with hysteria, Charcot set out to describe and classify the phenomena he and his colleagues were witnessing in hypnotized hysterics, and by way of this classification he assembled a sensational new thesis.²⁵

In 1882, he outlined three stages of hypnosis:

(See Chart on Following Page)

CHARCOT'S THREE STAGES OF HYPNOSIS²⁶

I. Catalepsy

Loss of consciousness

"The experimenter would move the limbs of the of the patient in different directions and the patient then hold the pose long periods of time. "Also, when the hypnotist shaped the hysteric's hand into a fist, suggesting anger, or opened and placed her hand above her head, suggesting surprise and fright, this would cause the rest of the body to assume a pose of anger or fright. The teeth would grit, the hands would clench, the eyelids would narrow in anger; or the eyes would grow saucer-wide, the mouth would open as in fright."

II. Lethargy

"placing patient in a cataleptic or frozen state and then turning off the light or closing the eyes of the the staring hysteric. The patient would then fall down limp. In this limpness an exciting new phenomenon . . . neuro-muscular flexibility [occured]. . . . If a muscle was touched it would contract. Once contracted, . . . seemed paralyzed. No force applied by the doctors seemed to break the paralysis . . . the patients sometimes manifested superhuman strength."

III. Somnambulism

"Induced by different techniques, such as simply scratching the head of a cataleptic patient The patient awakened would in a twilight state walking and talking like a robot."

This drama of mind-control--loss of conscious self, and reduction to utter suggestibility--grew into one of the more entertaining theatrical spectacles on Charcot's and his disciples' hysterical stage.

In the 1890s, a new interest in the subjective led to an emphasis on psychology in relation to female hysteria. The mind takes over from the neurology of the brain/body as site of this hysteria. Memories, personal associations, words, language, thought, replace the signs and gestures of her body. What she thinks, says, tells, becomes a new source of wonder, horror, derision.

Showalter reminds us, though, that the mind, too, on display is theatrical spectacle: "The hypnotized woman patients put on a spectacular show before this crowd of curiosity seekers."²⁷

She cites the observations of one of this crowd, describing the female hysterics under hypnotic suggestion.

Some of them smelt with delight a bottle of ammonia when told it was rose water, others would eat a piece of charcoal when presented to them as chocolate. Another would crawl on all fours on the floor, barking furiously, when told she was a dog, flap her arms as if trying to fly when turned into a pigeon, lift her skirts with a shriek of terror when a glove was thrown at her feet with a suggestion of being a snake. Another would walk with a top hat in her arms rocking it to and fro and kissing it tenderly when she was told it was her baby.²⁸

The "hysteric" under suggestion: an actress at work on her part. Her reactions--the marvelous dexterity and swiftness of her emotional suggestibility, moving from horror to tender devotion. Swallowing dirt as if it were truffle: suggestibility of her senses. Her ability to believe away her humanness--to become animal--dog barking on all fours or bird unable to fly. . . . Notice the ACT: the roles assigned her: her skill in executing her own humiliation so that she is utterly believed.

The sophistication of psychological interest develops to the point where the hysteric is asked to comment on her hypnotic reactions to the doctor's experiments.

Drinka describes one such experiment in which various colored pieces of glass and then strong odors were held before an hypnotized hysteric and her reactions recorded.

To each she responded with a strong emotion. When awakened she was asked about what she had experienced. At first she was demure, refusing to answer. Then pressed by the questioners, she recounted all the bizarre things she had seen. First she was in the arms of her lover (the red glass) 'full of contentment and pleasure.' Then suddenly she saw the sea (the blue glass) and was pulled into a cave and felt weighted with sadness. In the cave she saw a yellow torch (yellow glass) whose flames mounted upward. Then in an instant she was transported to a ballroom filled with flowers and green plants (the dull green glass), and she could only admire. Suddenly the scene changed again and she found herself in a tomb surrounded by the dead (sulphur), and she grew frightened. Next, miraculously, she was in a garden, in the middle of clumps of flowers (eau de col-

ogne), and she grew contented. Finally she noted a peculiar odor like that from moist earth, and the air became unbreathable (chloroform). She thought she had nearly died. She swooned and awoke.²⁷

Thanks in large measure to psychology, then, the hysterical female/female hysteric--the actress-- is given a greater and greater creative role in the theatrical event. Forced into the resources of her adaptable imagination, she creates a scenario to please. The actress as creative artist relies on her inner world because the outer stimuli is meager, meaningless and incomplete. Here, the hysteric creates meanings for emotions. She is expected to produce on call--at the sight of splintered glass which cannot reflect her true being and obnoxious odors that offend but must be tolerated--or accepted, at the very least.

A new kind of pornography of personal emotions, senses and imagination enter Charcot's theater. What is personal is exploited as evidence of hysterical delirium.

The stories women began to tell the doctors were fantastic dramas of the imagination--"private theater"--a term I borrow from one of Breuer's patients, Anna O. The psychological scenes they enacted under hypnosis on stage were created by them to dramatize as fully and realistically as they could a will-less, selfless, suggestibility--and susceptibility to whatever their doctors chose to do with them. It is they and not Charcot who succeeded in making hysteria "real" in the imaginations of all--including themselves.

As I have hoped to suggest, it is clear that the actresses in Charcot's Theater of Hysteria were creative artists in their own right. Charcot could not possibly have directed every manifestation of symptoms, erotic and passionate gesturing, and delirious personal dramas that he set into motion at the touch of an hyst-erogenic zone or at the rub of a hypnotized hysterical head. Some of their performances must, indeed, have astonished and thrilled him for they took his hysterical stages and phases onto new planes of imaginative grotesquery and eroticism, and in their believability, gave credence to his theoretical and theatrical vision.

It is much easier to imagine what motivated the hysterical actresses than to conceive what Charcot and his assistants could have been thinking. The best of the female hysterics were richly rewarded for their talent. Drinka says:

Charcot's female patients won fame in Paris and in the international world of medicine for their performances, from which they stood to gain a great deal--namely, attention and notoriety.³⁰

However, the price of that fame and notoriety can only be seen as worthy, when one considers the dismal trapped condition of women's lives at the time. Off stage, back in the asylum, the great stars must have lived in a perpetually anxious state of performance. Hiding the nature of their creative input to the point where, perhaps, they began to convince themselves that the role their improved condition depended upon was really true.

How the hysterics learned their parts has been investigated by critics of Charcot--even some skeptics of his own time. Drinka says:

It is . . . clear now that [the hysterics] were unwittingly trained by their doctors. After being examined by physician after physician in Sâlpêtrière, they gradually collected ideas of how they should behave when having a fit or when hypnotized. Besides, they watched each other and learned, some even learned from the epileptics who lay in the bed next to them.³¹

Showalter notes that:

Because the behavior of Charcot's hysterical stars was so theatrical and because it was rarely observed outside of the Parisian clinical setting, many of his contemporaries, as well as subsequent medical historians, have suspected that the women's performances were the result of suggestion, imitation, or even fraud. In Charcot's own lifetime, one of his assistants admitted that some of the women had been coached in order to produce attacks that would please the maître.³²

In the wards of Sâlpêtrière or on the great lecture hall stage, the hysterical performers produced their seizures and stigmata in the presence of the doctors. Often expressing personal longings, details of their pasts, allusions to real or imagined events that meant something to them, it would seem that the actresses of Sâlpêtrière used what was clearly a performing experience as a real chance to express themselves. The women were free to talk, to feel, to let out pent emotions, to use their bodies freely, wildly, only when they were

convincing enough in their portrayal of what their doctors described and illustrated (directed) as hysteria. They were allowed the freedom to break through the terrible moral, physical, emotional constraints of ideal womanhood by playing the fool, the madwoman.

No doubt, there is a paradox in something being gained and much destroyed by concealing the performance aspect of their condition. Free to express and invent, to fantasize and escape--into what? Only the hysteric's role was available to them. And, clearly, it was an exhausting, emotionally draining part: the largest, most noticeable woman's roles always are.

As suggested earlier, the success of Charcot's hysterical theories rested heavily on the shoulders of the women he chose to perform the hysterical acts. Drinka describes Charcot's dependence on leading actresses:

Like a film producer, Charcot possessed the ability to make breathtaking 'finds.' Blanche and hypnotism were two of his greatest discoveries.³³

I would go further, and say that Blanche and others of his stars were his single great discovery, because hypnosis was only possible through their creative ability. Was their work. Blanche Wittman, according to Drinka:

was the most hypnotizable hysteric. Her induced paralyzes, her expressions of fright or anger, her somnambulistic trances proved the most astonishing in the Sâlpêtrière . . . by the late eighties she was dubbed the Queen of Hysterics.³⁴

The dying Blanche's response to skeptics eager to hear her denounce Charcot as fraud has the ring of all great actresses' insistence on the integrity of their creative part in the theatrical event. Great acting, is after all, entering the role so fully that one believes it. Great acting, then, like Foucault's madness, crosses the boundary of sanity to revel in the imaginative. To live there and make truth out of nothing.

According to Drinka, Blanche insisted that accusations that she had simulated her hysterical symptoms under hypnosis and intentionally duped Charcot were utter lies. Drinka quotes her as arguing the following in her defense:

If we were put to sleep or had a crisis, it was impossible for us to do otherwise. Besides fits and so forth were not pleasant . . . Simulation! Do you think that it was possible to trick Charcot? Sure, there are many who tried, but he could throw a simple glance at them and say, 'Keep quiet!'³⁵

Perhaps most interesting is the nature of the attack--aimed at her--and not Charcot. Poor Charcot is innocent. Women are false. But in this defense of Charcot's innocence lies the destruction of his theoretical construction: hysteria. Hysteria exists only as PERFORMANCE.

Charcot's star, Augustine, who arrived at Sâlpêtrière in 1875, at the age of 15, is described by Showalter in a way which vividly suggests the sheer professionalism of the actress' work--as well as the source of their ability.

Showalter bases her analyses on the series of photographs taken of the girl in hysterical poses.

All of her poses suggest the exaggerated gestures of the French classical acting style, or stills from silent movies Among her gifts was her ability to time and divide her hysterical performances into scenes, acts, tableaux, and intermissions, to perform on cue and on schedule with the click of a camera.³⁶

Was Charcot duped? What could he possibly have imagined was happening as the young hysteric performed her hysterical symptoms for the camera? If one assumes for argument's sake that he really believed in his theory of hysteria, was he, then, so blinded and bound that its very theatricality became for him symptom rather than source?

I think it must be assumed so. Charcot used his theory of hysteria to argue against the existence of spiritual mysticism and revelry, against witchcraft and devilry, against miraculous healing. But the question at the center of his determined belief in hysteria was what exactly was this thing that accounted for centuries of miracles and demonic possession? I believe it can only be, finally, defined as PERFORMANCE. As acting. Hysteria as acting. Not through acting. Not acting as symptom of. But, rather hysteria, as disease, acting. Acting as disease.

Drinka makes a provocative connection between hysteria, artistic genius and degeneracy current at the time of Charcot's theater spectacles in France:

Hysteria and hypnosis, which mingled the scientific with the histrionic, played into [a] growing national concern. The hysteric was seen as both a degenerate and a kind of genius, or at least as a great actress, and the French nation saw itself as at once the nation with the greatest science in the world, the finest art and the greatest nerve weakness.³⁷

Drinka points out that:

. . . On a number of occasions [Charcot] used the catch phrase of the Decadent movement 'art for art's sake' in describing his hysterics.³⁸

A striking kind of admission for a medical man devoted to the scientific analysis of observed and controlled behavior. Art as science? One wonders what he meant exactly.

Perhaps, his patients were so talented because they were hysterical. Perhaps hysterics make good geniuses. Certainly, suffering and feeling deeply were associated with talent: talent, or genius, with tragedy. However, despite the fact of these female patients' lives wrought with the suffering and resistance that brought them shattered and furious to asylums, hysteria was never accepted into the canon of experience known as tragedy.

The acts these women performed were shocking, surely, and often hilarious. Aristotle's empathy which was necessary for tragic reception was never granted these women. They simply were enigma--freak show circus. Not something one could understand. Merely entertainment. Theater of a low form.

Those who claimed more for the lectures at Salpêtrière were confusing an artistic fantasy of science or truth with science and truth. Freud was among the young impressed men who would hold their image of this hysterical theater of women with him--even as he obsessed for some cause other than art.

Before looking at the professional actress and her hysterical part, I want to turn briefly to one other metaphor for her dilemma because it raises several interesting issues for feminism and theater.

In England, even before Charcot began his lectures in the 1870s, an aesthetic dramatic role for female madness had evolved. It grew out of asylum reform ideals of the middle class and was directly attributable to the influence of Shakespearean imagery on contemporary Victorian culture--and, as we shall see, the pseudo-scientific categorizations of the asylum doctors.

The English hysterical model differs from the French in that it is less concerned with theatricalizing female hysteric's behavior than with establishing an aesthetic/dramatic ideal of female madness--namely that of the hysteric Ophelia. Ophelia became the archetype for woman who was diagnosed, analyzed, costumed and posed according to the dictates of the Victorian understanding of Shakespeare's heroine.

Showalter, in her study, The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980, further extends the Ophelia model by splitting it into three sub-categories.

The troubling, ambiguous nature of female insanity was expressed and perpetuated by the three major Romantic images of the madwoman: the suicidal Ophelia, the sentimental Crazy Jane and the violent Lucia . . . all these conventions can be traced to the figure of Shakespeare's Ophelia.³⁹

Thus, unlike Charcot's hysterics, British asylum inmates had their dramatic scripts assigned them. Pathetic idealized images rather than erotic contortionists, the female hysteric in Britain could play, according to Showalter, exactly three parts:

1. Ophelia who kills herself because of her grief after going mad
2. Crazy Jane who abandoned, goes mad
3. Violent Lucy, "her dangerous counterpart who represented female sexuality as insane violence against men."⁴⁰

The motivation for the adoption and imposition of these models seems to imply a terrible resistance to see what might really be there before them--the true stories of women's lives. The Ophelia was sexual victim--weak and helpless.

Victorian psychiatrists and superintendents of lunatic asylums were often enthusiasts of Shakespeare. They turned to his plays for models of mental aberration that could be applied to their clinical practice, and the case of Ophelia was one that seemed particularly apt.⁴¹

Showalter describes their method of bending life to imitate art:

When young women in lunatic asylums did not willingly throw themselves into Ophelia-like poses, asylum superintendents with cameras imposed the conventional Ophelia costume, gesture, props and expression upon them.⁴²

Ironically, asylum superintendents like John Conolly, are said to have "urged actresses playing Ophelia to come to the asylum and study real madwomen." Showalter describes Ellen Terry's visit in the 1870s:

She visited a London asylum to get ideas for her role, [but] she found the madwoman much too 'theatrical' to teach her anything.⁴³

From the 1870s, hysteria was the major preoccupation of European and American doctors. British doctors elaborated a

vast, unstable repertoire of emotional and physical symptoms--fits, fainting, vomiting, choking, sobbing, laughing, paralysis--and the rapid passage from one to another suggest[ing] the lability and capriciousness, traditionally associated with the feminine nature.⁴⁴

[Caprice: sudden change of mind without adequate motive.

Lability: liable to lapse or change; unstable.]

The British express their distaste for a theatrics which does not suit their rigid definition and hierarchy of roles. Unlike the French, they were eager to contain woman as spectacle. Symptoms become moral character defects. The British hysterical model is Victorian morality at work in effecting control over hysteria, rather than manipulating it with fascination like the French. To the Victorians, it was

wrong--a crime against society--to resist the female ideal role of angel in the house. Acting is encouraged--even enforced--while it is at the same time condemned as a woman's disease. Here, too, acting a part takes on metaphorical stature for the actress in theater.

In a society in which appearance and correct decorum are everything (on what else can a morally rigid society sustain itself?), one is not only defined by signs--of behavior, codes of dress, propriety--but judged. Classification, as Foucault has suggested, becomes a form of judging.

Will, self-restraint, and self-control were still considered the ultimate development of mental health. (Showalter)⁴⁶

In the asylums, released from social restrictions, English women could express themselves in ways unthinkable in society.

Both asylum doctors and male patients reported being shocked by the obscenity of the female patients.⁴⁶

Because their goal was suppression as reform, the British doctors ordered solitary confinement for unruly women--as well as men. This confinement created a condition of self-less suggestibility akin to hypnosis:

"The prison chaplain can--after a few months of solitary confinement work on a patient's feelings in almost any way he pleases; he can, so to speak, photograph his thoughts, wishes, and opinions on her patient's mind, and fill his mouth with his own phrases and language."⁴⁷

I believe that the actress exists in a metaphysical solitary confinement. Like those patients assigned to solitary confinement, she loses resistance and adopts the feelings and text of her jailer.

Foucault, in his treatise on the origins of madness, describes the moral order of the Victorian asylum:

Everything was organized so that the madman would recognize himself in a world of judgement that enveloped him on all sides; he must know that he is watched, judged, and condemned ⁴⁸

"Moral progress" was rewarded with positive judgement to those who best played the appropriate role. The hysterical inmate, like an actress, aware that she is watched, judged-- must take care to play the required part. Out of fear of punishment and guilt, she must convince herself--believe in her own transformation. Terrorized by the patriarchy with ostracization, the actress is led to believe that her refusal or inability to play the given, scripted part assigned her is madness.

The asylum methodology as theater of oppression is well illustrated by a social ceremony inflicted on female hysterics as sign of progress, discipline, perhaps cure. Foucault describes:

The directors and staff of the Retreat thus regularly invited several patients to 'tea parties'; the guests dress in their best clothes, and vie with each other in politeness and propriety. The best fare is provided, and the visitors are treated with all the attention of

strangers. The evening generally passes with the greatest harmony and enjoying. It rarely happens that any unpleasant circumstance occurs; the patients control, to a wonderful degree, their different propensities, and the scene is at once curious and affectingly gratifying.⁴⁹

What Foucault has to say about the effects of this self-estranging role and stifling script as the source of reward, acceptance and the stamp of sanity is telling as model for the pressure on the actress to conform to her part which is empty:

Incessantly cast in this empty role of unknown visitor, and challenged in everything that can be known about him, drawn to the surface of himself by a social personality silently imposed by observation, by form and mask, the madman is obliged to objectify himself in the eyes of reason as the perfect stranger, that is, as the man whose strangeness does not reveal himself.⁵⁰

Photographic images preserve the oddly inexpressive poses of female asylum inmates. The camera occasionally captures unlooked-for truths. Despite the moralistic attempt to rid them of themselves, the cameras reveal fear, distrust--perhaps a conspiratorial touch of resistance in the eyes of the posed hysterics.

In contrast to their hard and dangerous woman's lives outside the asylum, Showalter suggests it may have been wiser to don the Ophelia garlands and shawl and pose as mad.

One of the most appalling ironies of women's treatment was that despite its limitations, asylum superintendents thought it offered a more tolerant, comfortable, interesting life than some

women could expect outside the success of moral management for woman may have had less to do with the humanity of the asylum than with the dreariness of life beyond the walls.⁵¹

From metaphor, I turn now to the role of the actress in Western society. It is my belief that woman as actress--like her asylum-confined counterpart--is forced to become the embodiment of the construct "hysteric". She must become hysteria--on cue--on stage, film, even on the television talk show.

Witness an embarrassing display on Johnny Carson's Tonight show. The young starlet giggling, jittery, sexually teasing, presenting a childhood prank, a romantic episode, sentiments for parents, her career aspirations, in over-reactive, emotional and histrionic behavior. She becomes a little girl to Johnny as father. The feminist viewer turns away because there is no way into the scenario for her nor a way out. The starlet is framed and viewed from Johnny's perspective. His gaze. His show. The starlet performs for him exactly what she has come to recognize is expected of her and what, indeed, may have become her, under patriarchy, on stage. One hopes she is an intelligent young woman who knows and is getting what she wants. But framed on the tube, through Johnny's mock-bemused gaze, she is hysterical.

I deliberately use an example of the actress outside of the play to demonstrate that this hysterical construct pervades her life. The actress epitomizes what can and does

happen to woman denying her reality and nature in response to the psychic needs of man.

In his study of Katherine the Shrew, John C. Bean describes Petruchio's strategy for transforming Kate in a way that I feel is very analogous to what the male text does to the actress:

She is to be immersed in chaos, in that irrational world where we lose our bearings and our old sense of truth, and she is challenged to respond . . . by yielding to confusion, abandoning her old identity . . .⁵²

Her new identity is the male construct of "her". I should note that Bean sees this as "challenge"--an optimistic, rejuvenating scenario for Kate.

The hysteric's part which the actress must present reproduces that hysteria within her. This hysteria expresses itself almost mechanically, reflexively as:

embellishments
obsession with physical appearance
sexual innuendo
hyper-emotionality
crazed sense of the unspoken leading to mad appearance
fear of aging and unattractiveness
mysterious vocal expressions
over-reaction, making much of little
resorting to comic vacuousness
coquettishness
exuding of charm, mystery, pain, phallic-directed lust
relying on tradition, stereotypes, expectations

These hysterical symptoms create the following existential condition in the actress:

emptiness
 self-loathing
 sense of self-betrayal
 dissatisfaction
 anxiety
 unfulfillment
 dependency
 confusion
 listlessness
 fantasizing
 dustractedness
 sense of unreality
 frustration

Thus, an actress in becoming a sign of male anxiety and confusion becomes an expression of symptoms. Acting is a paradox for the actress, because she is primarily reacting to a hysterical construct--acting out a profusion of energy, desire and passion which cannot be put to active use in pseudo-feminine hysterical roles. It is paradoxical to act emptiness, nothing, unknown. What the actress actually succeeds in doing is:

endowing nothing with an icon
 reacting emotionally
 crying on call
 reaching emotional frenzies
 justifying unnatural, impossible behavior
 pleasing the male spectator through grace,
 charm and sexuality

(Men have "presence", women, charm--that ethereal, evaporating, mysterious quality)

playing mystery, uncanniness, what is fearful,
 not written because unknown
 self-parodying pseudofeminine behavior
 relying on madwoman "turns"
 suffering, holding back, sacrificing her self-expression
 bringing more to a role than is there--over-loading,
 over-acting (trying to take action), making
 strange, complex, confusing noises

Great actresses have sometimes attempted to transcend their roles. Filling the gap that is their part with the promise, the seduction, of what a full and interesting life is being kept hidden from appearance/existence on stage. All that is not spoken or acted, rages just under the surface. They have resorted to gesture; contiguity or nearness in their stage relationship with objects and other performers; to both ferreting out small truths and moving on other planes of reality than the script's whose words they mouth.

The best actresses have used their bodies and faces as CANVAS. As site of expression. But the canvas reflected in the mirror is MASK. Emotions are sundered from any experiences or ideas which could substantiate and support them. Imagining, which can offer truth, takes the actress further away from where she stands on stage--not nearer to the text.

As Cixous has written:

Flying is woman's gesture--flying in language and making it fly. We have all learned the art of flying and its numerous techniques; for centuries we've been able to possess anything by flying; we've lived in flight, stealing away, finding, when desired, narrow passageways, hidden crossovers women take after birds and robbers. . . .⁵³

However, this flight and the creative use of gesture, canvas and mirror, imagination, pull the actress apart. Fragment her. What do you do if you have

no language?
no words?
no action?
no role?

no rationale?
no place?

Only space, objects, reaction, and her position on stage are real for the actress. Her reality, then, must be a kind of temporary schizophrenia. Elaine Showalter comments on schizophrenia and women:

The abyss that opens between the schizophrenic's body and mind . . . can be seen as an exaggeration of woman's 'normal' state. The art historian, John Berger, has suggested that woman's psyche is split in two by her constructed awareness of herself as visual object and her resulting double role as actor and spectator.⁵⁴

The actress watches the stage from the distance of her own sanity while her body and emotions react. In order to play the hysterical role, then, she in some sense, hypnotizes herself, becoming the passive vessel of suggestibility required of her by the text. Showalter:

Schizophrenic symptoms of passivity, depersonalization, disembodiment and fragmentation have parallels in the social situation of women dependency on external, often masculine, definitions of self, split between the body as sexual object and the mind as subject.⁵⁵

The actresses' schizophrenic condition can be seen as self-hypnosis: as her creative condition--a fragmenting which she must allow in order to work. And she has, at best, to accept this fragmented state as her life in the theater. However, there is always the danger of true psychosis--of

adopting this unreal state as reality. Showalter describes Laing's analysis of psychosis:

In psychosis. . . the person experiences an acute division between the body and mind; the inner or 'true' self is relegated to a disembodied mind, which becomes the detached spectator of the behavior of the 'false self' located in an unfeeling, mechanized body.⁵⁶

PART THREE: ACTRESSES

Ah, the waking, every morning, what a horror! But of my own person I have only a confused recollection as of one dead my own image has vanished.

Anna, Act One
The Dead City
 D'Annunzio

Using three actresses' working lives as case studies, I would like, now, to explore the effects of her hystericization on the actress. Eleonora Duse, the world-revered turn-of-the-century Italian star, Vivien Leigh, legend of instability, and Liv Ullmann, Ingmar Bergman's filmic muse, will serve, I hope as successful models. Each of these three actresses represents, for me, a most perfect expression of three different aspects of the actress as hysteric. By producing a small record of their struggles, I hope to illustrate a phenomenon that envelops all actresses equally--those whose lives were never as glamorous or successful as my models.

Nearly one hundred years ago, Havelock Ellis, in his misogynistic "scientific" reading of woman, Man and Woman, had to admit that when it came to the art of acting, women's gifts were remarkable.

There is at least one art in which women may be said not merely to rival but naturally to excel men: this is the art of acting.¹

Motivated by that desire to pin women to their sex which has spanned recorded time, Ellis found the answer to woman's acting talent in the nature of the female species.

It is not difficult to find the organic basis of woman's success in acting. In women mental processes are usually more rapid than in men; they have also an emotional explosiveness much more marked than men possess, and more easily within call.²

Interestingly, though, Ellis was also able to see that women's role in society was a master teacher for the art of acting. Society forces the acting role onto women.

The circumstances of women's social life have usually favored a high degree of flexibility and adaptability as regards behavior; and they are more trained in the vocal expression both of those emotions which they feel and those emotions which it is considered their duty to feel.³

Eleonora Duse was literally placed on a stage at the age of four and made to act. As Eva Le Gallienne notes, "She did not choose to be an actress, she was forced to become one."⁴ This child of a troupe of ragged, hungry players becomes a perfect example of the way actresses have coped with the hysterical part they have been forced to accept on stage. Through Duse, one can study the techniques available to the actress in her struggle to make something out of nothing (out of that hysterical sign of woman's absence). Duse used every part of her being and all the objects of her senses to make

art. She is most famous--worshipped in her time--for the techniques she developed specifically to attempt transcendence over the roles that suffocated her. These transcending techniques, however, were not enough to free her from the woman's part.

In Vivien Leigh's case, life as actress became a confusion of life and art. Through examining Leigh's struggle to embrace the psychological truth of her hysterical part, it becomes very obvious that these roles have a considerable effect on the actress. The twentieth century emphasis on psychologically real performance takes the actress beyond self-defeating technique across the border of believing into becoming. We must question the claim that Vivien Leigh brought some inherent madness to her hysterical roles. The source of her illness lies in the part she was forced to play--in her integrity and struggle as artist.

In 1976, Liv Ullmann published what is less an autobiography than a self-conscious study of self as actress. In the example of her approach, one discovers a new dimension for the discussion of the actress and her part. Ullmann's analysis, though written a decade and a half ago, is post-modern in its self-conscious record of role playing. Ullmann represents acting as a kind of schizophrenia. One could argue that while she prepares her hysterical roles and acts them, she watches herself and comments through a psychic/aesthetic distance on their effect on her as acting/self. Through Ullmann's

insights, we discover a consciousness of the breakdown between the public and private domains of presentation and pain.

Mask and Exposure are in constant dialectical relation in actresses' lives. However, what is masked or exposed is nothing other than the PAIN of masking and exposing. What is masked/exposed is acting itself. Acting as woman's disease. Acting as root/cause of the hysterical act itself.

Gertrude Norman, in a 1906 Theatre Magazine piece on Duse, makes a telling comment on Duse's work: "Every woman finds in her some unspoken part of herself."⁵ Perhaps, in ways that the idolizing journalist was unaware of, Duse acted the unspoken, the unwritten--something other than the lines she had been given to speak.

It is no wonder, then, that critical praises of her work are a form of FETISHISM: of her body, her voice, her emotions. Ignoring the parts she is playing, her role in the telling of the play's story, critics worship her expressive capacity as it strains to find an outlet.

The nineteenth century repertoire of female characters that Duse was to play until her death suffer. They are, almost without exception, representations of man's hysterical vision of woman as emotionally unstable, weak in character, judgement, sense; deserving of suffering and only capable of desire, reaction--not of action, control or thought.

Duse was to bring suffering and desire to a high art through the brilliant orchestration of her body parts, nerves,

muscles, emotions, her sense of touch in relation to self and objects, her voice and the stretches of filled, transcendent silence in those long scenes actresses must always endure when the action of the play moves forward without her participation.

Luigi Pirandello describes Duse's acting:

muscles vibrant, nerves tense . . .
hands, divine hands, that seemed to talk,
and a voice such as may never again be
heard on the stage . . . Duse's acting
. . . was like the surface of deep, still
water, momentarily responsive to the
subtlest tremors of light and shadow.⁶

Duse was a master of reaction, as Pirandello suggests. One is reminded of the Art of Zen where all response comes out of absolute stillness.

Gertrude Norman offers this particularly vivid account of Duse that, like many, many others, makes of Duse's fragmentation a fetish, and of her exposed pain, a kind of vicarious masochism. (Which is, after all, what the theater is all about, according to Freud.) Gertrude Norman:

[Her] eyes are obscure, crepuscular, full of cryptic inexpressible sadness, as if all the maladies of evil, sin and torments of all the ages, made weary the soul behind. A brooding silence is around her, like that which envelops the Sphinx in the night desert, like the unheard, creeping up of the moaning autumn winds. Her voice has a lonely timbre, as if telling of unfulfilled love, lost illusions, goals never reached, dreary waste places. The hands . . . are poignant, full of pain, mysterious as her heavy eyelids-- . . . seemingly able . . . to evoke and reach into the dark chambers of another's hidden soul.⁷

One British critic observing Duse late in her career as Mrs. Alving in Ibsen's Ghosts felt Duse was "above the part."⁸ The comment is no exception. There is, consistently, this reference to Duse's outsider status in the plays in which she was exalted. With all due respect to Ibsen (whom Duse worshipped), it appears that Eleonora Duse's acting took place on an other different plane. Perhaps she was turning her being into canvas, as one critic implied:

Her grief is august. She helplessly waves her arms and wrings her hands in arabesques of suave beauty. Beauty! That is the key-note of the performance: beauty of line, of sound, of gesture, of every kind of emotional expression . . .⁹

However, in her study of Duse as actress and spiritual muse, Eva Le Gallienne equates Duse's acting with transcendence of self. This mystical creative process Le Gallienne describes begins with the transcendence of the character's lives and worlds.

Such works as La Femme de Claude, La Dame aux Camélias, Denise, Magda, The Second Mrs. Tanqueray and countless others, were merely theatre pieces designed to entertain the public with vicarious thrills and decidedly worldly passions. But she succeeded by the peculiar quality of her genius in raising them to a high spiritual level; she was like a crucible in which the sufferings and sins of all these various women were sublimated into a pure essence of pity, terror and pain. Her acting--to use that 'ugly word'--was sacrificial; it was as though each time she played she immolated herself upon an altar

[Her aim] was the elimination of self--the 'self-naughting' of the mystic--in order that she should become merely an instrument by which the Universal Self could be expressed.¹⁰

Le Gallienne implies that, as with Charcot's hysterical stars, Duse's genius was extracted at the expense of her self. Duse, Le Gallienne says, realized "that only through self-forgetfulness could she reach 'the highest summit of her art.'" ¹¹ Only by allowing herself to be, in a sense, hypnotized out of her own mind, was she able to completely realize the portrayal of the maladies assigned her by the playwright.

It is useful to recall that Foucault connected genius with the madness of non-being. Duse's genius--this mystical self-annihilation, then was perhaps a compensating form of madness which expressed the "pity, terror, and pain" of some imaginative world originating not in her own soul but in the playwright's mind. However, Duse's creative role, like the hysterical stars', involved expanding, decorating and aestheticizing the hysterical part:

Oliver M. Sayler, editor of Plays:

She leaves the author and his text behind to create out of herself something new, something usually transcending the conception of the author . . .¹²

Vyacheslav Ivanov, Russian writer, 1891:

In the performance of her parts there is nothing of what is called acting From the author Madame D. takes only the main theme; all the other inventions of the author's imagination are, for her, only external bonds in the game of the artist. And under this exterior, a life of her own throbs and feels, filled, idealized and penetrated by a creative idealization.¹³

Jeanne Bordeaux:

To the mystery and exaltation of her art was added a strange element of aloofness which made her, not the hybrid of actress and dramatic character . . . but a great person in the cast of another drama, which we call 'life.'¹⁴

Gordon Craig, 1928 (after her death):

The good lady did her best; for years she would solemnly enter the playhouse, and there donning something grey, grey-white and floating, would explain by gestures and sound all the sad sadness that is in life.¹⁵

How did Duse achieve this transcendence? Obviously by being somewhere other than the text and character dictated. This was rebellion--and it registered as transcendence for most (but as neurotic vision for others). Arthur Symons spoke of

that something else, divined underneath all she says, and all that she looks, which gives her incomparable power.¹⁶

Renata Simoni writing in 1921 described the way in which "every word" that Duse spoke on stage "revealed a mystery to us."¹⁷

Jeanne Bordeaux ascribes a conscious technique to Duse's transcendence:

She had the art of saying one thing, and letting the public understand that she was thinking another.¹⁸

Hugo von Hofmannsthal on Duse as Nora:

She played cheerfulness that was not happiness and laughed brightly to portray the dark void hidden behind that laughter; she played I-don't-want-to-think-about-it and I-must-think-about-it; she played at being a squirrel and a lark and her timid wildness aroused a physical sense of fear; when with a sudden gesture she threw herself into a frenzied rhythm of mortal terror; she turned pale, cast down her chin, and her tormented eyes screamed at us in silence.¹⁹

One young actress studying Duse noted that technique of obscure leanings, unconscious fears, smothered aspirations. . . all glimpsed in the subtlety of intonation, the singularity of a gesture, a look, a silence, beyond and behind the essential line of her performance."²⁰

It would seem then, that the "something else" Duse brought to her acting was either at an obvious distance or in direct opposition to the character's role in the play. Obviously, this must have been a great strain for the actress: filling the void through the constraints of the author's hysterical vision. Fans and critics alike--including some professional rivals--focused in on the tension inherent in her attempts to create through resistance. The famous actor

Tomasso Salvini--a master of the old declamatory style--argued in 1892 that:

The only thing [Duse] has to lean on, and that in a way accounts for her unprecedented successes in a scant repertoire, is an exaggerated bundle of nerves.²¹

Luigi Rossi goes so far as to suggest that Duse's talent as actress derived from a nervous disorder and describes the medical men's descriptions of female hysterics (acting as disease).

Her expression was such as one generally sees in nervous disorders, and is known to physicians as the nervous face. The eyes were agitated by imperceptible nervous tremors; the color changed from scarlet to pallor in a second; the nostrils and lips twitched continually; the teeth closed together violently, and all the facial muscles were constantly moving. The slight body moved with a serpentine grace of profound abandon, and synchronized perfectly with the actions and contortions of the arms, hands, fingers, chest and head. Owing to this natural nervousness she was unrivalled in nervous, hysterical parts.²²

How far are we here from Charcot's hysterical theater? The asylum performers represented man's scientific theories about women. Duse's acting places the "scientific" event in its true home. Here, the acting is acknowledged as representation. Hysteria is recognized as ART.

And now the ironic circle is completed. For in the making of that hysterical art, Duse becomes the scientific phenomenon of nervous disorder--for real. For some critics

Eleonora Duse came to stand for the hysterical effects of modernization to stand for symbolized by man as "woman".

[She was] the living epitome of the twentieth century poets' vision of woman-- touched always by the feverishness of the age, by its extreme morbidity . . . she had all the fragility, the poignancy, the tenderness of a harp-string that vibrates at the slightest touch. The staccato, nervous attitudes of her hands, the incessant brooding of her white face, her thousand certain ways of getting an effect--with a slight tremor of her lips, a confused gentleness, or a tragic quiet that was fine be-cause of its intensity . . . Duse was admired for her inequalities, her nervousness, her lack of control . . . she was strange, always individual, and different enough to gratify our modern passion for the abnormal.²³

Because she allowed--even disciplined herself--to lose her self in the art of expressiveness beyond order, control, rationale and meaning (she was given none of these by the parts she had no choice but to play), she opened herself up to neurosis.

Romain Rolland's observations of her portrayal of Marguerite, the consumptive high-class whore, is telling of this lack of distinction between the part and the actress:

Hers is an elegiac art which lacks force and health. Little moans, little convulsive movements, a tremor of the lips, hands which shake feverishly, a strained expression, sighs, subsidings: the genius of neurasthenia.²⁴

It is clear that Rolland's denouncement of Duse's creative expression of a troubled, desperate, duplicitous, dying coquette is a denouncement of Duse herself.

Ironically, ~~because~~ Duse brings the truth of her art to the role, Rolland accuses her of not acting. When confronted with the truth of the hysterical construct which is its untruth, he accuses the actress of falseness. He cannot separate his idea of what is feminine from acting.

Behind both the critical notion of Duse's mystical transcendence and of her neurasthenic acting out is Duse's attempts to survive creatively as an artist. Given the nature of the hysterical part she had to play, she gave it beauty and truth--exposing it as hysterical construct by transcending its limited vision. However, in the act of bringing more to it than was there, she created a struggle; in tension with the limits imposed on her creativity by her parts, she appeared, ironically, not to be acting at all, but to be resisting some unhappy destiny.

One might recall that for Charcot the mystical experiences of saints could be reduced to hysterical seizure, and that hysterical seizures, under hypnosis, could be recreated for an audience. The marvelous acting feats of his hysterics were, likewise, reduced in his mind, to hysterical seizure. In other words, all that is transcendent in the spirit and in art can be reduced to FALSENESS: the appearance of sourceless symptoms.

Duse was a great artist. She used all the resources available to her--including every nerve and muscle under her conscious control, and props, which within her sphere, seemed

to take on lives of their own. She had the spiritual strength to make of the empty silences of her parts something full of her own meanings. She knew her emotions to such an extent that she was able to call on them, physically, on cue. In her making of nothing into something, Duse was indeed mad--transforming the non-being of her hysterical role through her imagination into vivid performance full of the truth of madness.

Sue Ellen Case, the contemporary feminist theorist, has noted "there is no real woman under the requirements of costume, make-up and body language."²⁵ What Duse presented was, rather, an exquisite fragmentation of sensation, emotion, and expression with no basis in the falseness of that representation, or conversely, in the complete truth of woman. Rather she demonstrates the anguished efforts of the prisoner, the silenced, the trapped, to communicate through any means at her desperate disposal. The genius speaks to the "sane" world in another tongue.

Le Gallienne quotes the critic, Hermann Bang, who describes Duse's magical ability to infuse inanimate objects with seeming life.

She knows how to communicate, not only through her body and through her hands, but through everything she touches. No one has ever used 'properties' as she does. A rose, a handkerchief, a chain, come to life under her hands; and while she herself remains silent and almost motionless, these inanimate things act for her. As though by magic they reflect the slightest change of mood.²⁶

Bang describes how Duse, "by an imperceptible movement of her hands . . . caused [a] flower to die of Marguerite's grief" in La Dame aux Camélias.²⁷

Bernard Shaw described Duse's bit of stage business of tying up flowers in the same play as "the final development of a highly involved dance with the arms. . ."²⁸ And Jeanne Bordeaux describes a scene in The Second Mrs. Tangueray in which "the parasol . . . became the protagonist."²⁸ The following description of Duse's use of her shawl suggests a wonder of physical control and musical sensitivity.

She has the power which no other actress, known to me, possesses, of transmitting physical properties to her very clothes; when she drops her shawl from her shoulders at the end of the second act after a period of trouble, it seems to be as weary as she is, to have gathered weariness into its folds, so that it drops almost to the ground in sheer fatigue. In some strange and inexplicable way she is able to communicate sentience to insentient things.³⁰

One is reminded of the "contiguity" or "nearness" which the French feminists describe as being unique to feminine experience: that connection with things through senses--that intuition seems which seems to feel into and through whatever hides, encloses or contains something that contributes to the women's knowledge of the world--to her survival.

Duse played with the oppositions of stillness and gesture. And used silence as a means of summoning complete attention to the contents of her mind. Le Gallienne:

I have never seen an actress with such repose. Sometimes she would sit on a chair for a long period completely motionless, holding us all spellbound by sheer intensity of thought.

It was a silence made electric by unspoken thoughts. It was the kind of long, charged silence that often occurs in life--but seldom, if ever, on the stage.³¹

Le Gallienne records Duse's reaction as Mrs. Alving to the terrible moment at the end of Ghosts where she hears her son becoming his father in the next room, cavorting with the servant (who is his half-sister).

When she heard them, Duse did nothing; she stood absolutely still; the blood drained from her face; her eyes grew enormous; life seemed to flow out from the tips of her fingers; she seemed cold --numb . . . the boldness of truth.³²

Shaw was stunned by her ability to blush. This description of Duse in Magda is famous:

Then a terrible thing happened to her. She began to blush; and in another moment she was conscious of it, and the blush was slowly spreading and deepening until, after a few vain efforts to avert her face . . . she gave up and hid the blush in her hands. After that feat of acting I did not need to be told why Duse does not paint an inch thick. I could detect no trick in it: it seemed to me a perfectly genuine effect of the dramatic imagination.³³

Susan Bassnett in her study of Duse's acting technique, hypothesizes, based on photographic evidence, that

the famous Dusan ability to blush at will . . . [was likely] a simple technical device of holding her breath and

keeping the tension in the chest which would cause a rush of blood to the face and head.³⁴

And she suggests that, based on photos and drawings, Duse's famous "distorted face" was created through "a dislocation of the neck muscles (which also inhibits the pelvis . . .) and [the] subsequent rigidifying of the chest muscles and shoulders."³⁵

These physical contortions which the actor, Luigi Rasi, who worked with Duse, claimed were "the basis of her acting" align her in a very direct way with Charcot's hysterics.³⁶ The contortions were necessary to play the hysterical role: represent and manifest the distortions of man's view of woman. If Duse had to develop to high art the distortions of her muscles and nerves, it was only in an effort to play her part. Distortion is never truth. That Duse's faccia convulsiva--its quivers, trembles, tightenings and rigidities were viewed as truth--as woman's truth-- were the truth of her art on stage is perhaps more a tragedy than any play she acted in.

Duse's performance of the climactic scene in La Porta Chiusa, the last play she appeared in before her death several days later, is vividly recounted by Charles Chaplin, a critic from the Los Angeles Daily Times:

La Duse sank into a chair and curled up her body almost like a little child in pain. You did not see her face; there was no heaving of the shoulders. She lay quietly almost without moving. Only once through her body ran a sort of shudder of pain like a paroxysm. That and the instinctive shrinking of her body from her

son's outstretched hand were almost the only visible movement . . . This scene fairly wrung your heart. . . . When she turned at last, both hands flung out in one gesture of utter despair, resignation--surrender--it was the finest thing I have seen on stage. Through all her grief, her self-abasement, her contrition, ran terrible irony. It was all in that one gesture.³⁷

Duse's acting techniques, like her use of ironic gesture in the example above, suggest the possibility that she was, in fact, often commenting on her role through her acting.

Screaming for help without a word, holding her breath, gesturing in despair, refusing to move, working magic on objects, distorting her face, sending blood to and from her cheeks--finally, all her techniques could not save her from the hollowness and empty sense of loathing that acting out of nothing true left her feeling. Accounts of Duse are rife with her disgust expressed in her letters, conversation and actions deemed (predictably) "hysterical tantrums."

Luigi Pirandello asks, with the bewilderment of the male playwright, how Duse could have come to hate the craft she made into an art:

In the various people she came to impersonate, however commonplace and insignificant . . . she found a certain potentiality of humaneness which she could bring to full expression How was it, then, that at a certain moment she suddenly seemed to feel them no longer and actually in some cases to have a haughty disdain for them, almost a physical revulsion at having incorporated them in her own being, endowing them with theatrical life from the substance of her

own soul and in the form of her own body?³⁸

Jeanne Bordeaux says Duse made the following commentary on her parts:

I myself am humiliated in the part of the person I am forced to represent. And often the disgust becomes so great, and so proud the protest of my conscience, that it seems to me that from one moment to the next I must lose the physical acting force, and the nervous currents that move the arms will not arrive and that I will not be able to awaken my intellect, and may against my will remain stupidly inert before the expectant public.³⁹

Here, Duse suggests most clearly the act of will she must signal--the sheer physical/mental and emotional energy she must muster to create out of the void of her hysterical role. The dreaded inertia is revealed to her dearest friend and former lover:

Oh! Arrigo--I feel terror at resuming my work with the eternal Dame aux Camélias--my very mouth at this point, refuses to say those words! Tedium, the tedium that is more fatal to the artist than any anger! . . .⁴⁰

A letter to Lugné-Poe links her role with images of death--perhaps suicide: "I have been drowning in the river Sardou and Dumas."⁴¹ The words can no longer be transcended. In a letter to D'Annunzio, she describes herself as "the femme a barbe" squeezing my soul out over the framework of a rotten, vulgar piece."⁴²

A bearded lady, interestingly, is a phony freak of nature--like the freakish hysterics of Charcot. Although "truthfulness" is invariably tagged onto descriptions of Duse's acting, she insisted on the unnatural, unreal nature of her work. In a 1898 interview with the Roman Tribuna she openly expressed longing for some new vehicles that would allow her to work more honestly.

I feel something dying within me and something coming to birth; I feel all the false, fleeting--indeed, already fled--aspect of the productions in which I act; and I feel at the same time, the still vague desire, the still undefined aspiration for a form of art that corresponds more directly and deeply to the present state of my spirit.⁴³

Even the poetic and intellectual works of D'Annunzio and Ibsen--both of whom she revered as great masters--could not erase the disturbing, disquieting reaction of her spirit to the hysterical part she was given to play. Le Gallienne sought to understand what could have made the actress she most admired and modeled herself after creatively retire from the theatre. She links the morally corrupt nature of the parts Duse played to mental unhealth, unrest, spiritual malaise.

To one who was striving to achieve serenity in her personal life, to arrive at a wholeness of soul and spirit, to become one with the Universal Good, this constant exposure to the storms and disruptive passions of the creatures whose lives she was forced to share on the stage could only prove a serious handicap.⁴⁴

Though couched in moral overtones that are only a part of the story, what Le Gallienne says seems very apt. Serenity, wholeness--or oneness--exist in opposition to the uncontrollable reactivity and fragmentation of hysterical constructs.

Duse was reacting and fragmenting in her part as she attempted to transform and transcend it. She failed in the end because the means at her disposal were exhausting, and ultimately, frustrating and tedious. Though she left the theatre, she was forced to return to the stage after the war because she had lost her money. She died, exhausted, on the road in America, at the age of 64, still playing that hysterical part.

Susan Bassett notes that the seeming "presence of an internal struggle" going on in Duse's acting "came to portray for an entire generation the ultimate in realism, because her acting did not appear to be acting at all." Ironically this internal creative struggle that eventually broke Duse's spirit was to become the ideal of a new generation of performers. They saw, as Bassett rightly notes, the struggle askew--as proof of artistic truth. The fact that her acting did "not appear to be acting at all" should not be accepted as the most honest gesture she was capable of making given her trapped status in the parts she played.

Transcendence techniques, finally, gave Duse an always frustrated, strained escape from the tyranny of the hysterical part. Perhaps she was luckier than the actresses of a new

generation for whom the ideals of psychological truth became the aesthetic goal.

Immersion was to replace transcendence. The twentieth century actress would sink deep under the skin of her hysterical part--absorbing it to the point where believing means becoming--blurring then crushing the border between acting and reality--the role and madness.

Even though it is dangerous, the tendency toward immersion is natural to woman, to the actress: implied in Cixous' description of the woman speaker is a kind of martyrdom to complete expression--a glorification of giving all:

Listen to a woman speak at a public gathering . . . she doesn't 'speak,' she throws her trembling body forward; she lets go of herself, she flies; all of her passes into her voice, and it's with her body that she vitally supports the 'logic' of her speech. Her flesh speaks true. She lays herself bare. In fact, she physically materializes what she's thinking; she signifies it with her body. In a certain way she inscribes what she's saying, because she doesn't deny her drives the intractable and impassioned part they have in speaking.

. . . .In woman's speech . . . that element which never stops resonating, which, once we've been permeated by it, profoundly and imperceptibly touched by it, retains the power of moving us--that element is the song: first music from the first voice of love which is alive in every woman. Why this privileged relationship with the voice? Because no woman stockpiles as many defenses for countering the drives as does a man. You don't build walls around yourself. You don't forego pleasure as "wisely" as he.⁴⁶

Pleasure in the pain of immersion, however perverse, is, of course, the ideal of twentieth century performance, epitomized in the work of Vivien Leigh. Through Leigh's example, it is possible to see the effect of the hysterical role on the actress. "Living the part" begins to expose the truth of woman's subjection. Because she identifies so closely with the part, the "psychologically truthful" actress exposes the effects of that part on woman.

At twenty-two in 1935, Vivien Leigh became a star of the London stage overnight and within months had signed a long-term Hollywood film contract. Until her death in 1967, she never stopped acting on stage and in films, though she suffered continually from what her biographers describe as:

periods of depression
 mental disturbances
 mental breakdowns accompanied by bouts of mania
 severe manic-depressive spells
 mentally disturbed states
 long depressive bouts
 manic attacks, and, of course,
 manifest hysteria

Her life was fraught with complicated emotional attachments and break-ups, physical ill health--including tuberculosis, miscarriages, and alcohol abuse. But she was also the recipient of two Oscars for best actress in parts she fought to win over considerable competition, and she often protested and stood up against the patriarchal industry on whom she was utterly dependent for work--for her creative life as an actress. Like Duse, who arduously managed her own successful

companies, Leigh sought some measure of control in her life and career, and resisted the authority of others. She was less a victim of her role as film star--just as Duse was less a victim of her role as international star--than a victim of the roles she was given to portray.

I mention her personal life only briefly to suggest that Leigh was a determined artist who sought some control over her creative destiny. She was successful and obtained the status she desired. However, what she obtained--the acquisition of the parts--succeeded finally in reducing her creative legacy into a kind of painful exposure. The roles she fought for and gave all of herself to--psychologically--ultimately exposed their emptiness, left her only the hysterical expression of their emptiness.

Alexander Walker is the author of a popular biography of Leigh, and it is interesting to see how her hysteria overwhelms the biographer's interest and how persistently he records those incidents that can be constructed as female madness. Describing her performance in an early film in which she exhibited, already, "for the first time on screen, something desperate," Walker comments:

She injected a note of mania into the part which succeeded in colouring her acting more realistically than another actress playing it simply for comedy might have done.⁴⁷

The part was a secondary role in the film A Yank at Oxford described as

the town vamp, the wife of a fusty bookseller, who bicycled around Oxford seducing any young man who put a spoke in her wheels.⁴⁸

It is no wonder that Leigh argued that the part was wrong for her and did not want to play it. Of course, under the contract system, she had no choice. She tried to play the role for subtlety, but was "wisely overruled" and placed in a leopardskin collar. It was around this time that her conduct was said "to bewilder people."

With hindsight it is possible to diagnose an early stage of incipient mania, but at the time it was attributed to 'acting up.' She suddenly developed a severe pain in her foot, which caused her to limp.⁴⁹

Leigh began to exhibit what a senior MGM staff member described as "incomprehensible and inexcusable behavior" when she initiated a battle over the inclusion of the cost of shoes in her contract. The studio threatened to not renew her contract, and, after an explosive confrontation with her agent, she defined her failed attempt to exert some control as a "state" outside her control--as an "outburst" of a kind that sometimes overtook and frightened her.⁵⁰ The studio had intimidated her into temporary silence.

Walker describes Leigh's screen tests for the coveted Scarlett O'Hara role in Gone With the Wind.

Her second test played even more strikingly because of the neurotic desperation that charged her emotions The others had played the scene for its

straightforward passionate content, begging Ashley to marry them with a yearning look. But Vivien didn't plead: she demanded. Ashley must marry her. She introduced a note of near panic, like someone teetering on the edge of imperious hysteria. She managed to touch the precariousness of her own stability and it heightened her sexuality.⁵¹

Here again the connection between hysterical presentation and pornography is apparent. The acting out of lost control and insatiate sexual desire under the suggestion of the director is the pinnacle of delighting entertainment. Her presentation was truer than that of the lesser actresses, because she captured what was there: the hysteria that was the part.

Once filming began, Leigh took to arguing for the logic in her character--for reasons for being and actions. She was given none. Her schedule was relentless.

She had two days off each month, corresponding with her menstrual cycle But Selznick saw a deeper malaise in Vivien, one which no biological reason could easily explain. She clashed with him now with a hysterical fierceness. She took to shouting on the set, then just as suddenly switching to tears. A running cause of conflict was a passage that Vivien claimed to be the truest one in the script, but which Selznick kept eliminating from each new revision of the screenplay.⁵²

It should be noted that, as Walker's biography reveals, Leigh's life has proved to be of as much dramatic interest as her work. This is, of course, not unusual for public figures--particularly women--and actresses. But in Leigh's case,

there does seem to be a heightened connection--even confusion--between stage/screen and life that epitomizes the actress's dilemma.

Walker describes a game that Leigh "proposed her guests play at parties: 'Ways to Kill Babies'":

The players took it in turn to mine some out-of-the-ordinary means of disposing of an unwanted infant Even allowing for English eccentricity, this game gave rise to so much gossip that Selznick decided Vivien was in need of the very man he had pulled strings to have sent away Olivier made a dash by air to be with Vivien for twenty-four hours She threw her arms around his neck and, between kisses and embraces, lamented the hardship she was suffering.⁵³

There is a kind of terrible rightness to the play that Vivien writes and directs for her Hollywood acquaintances: the archetypal hysteric who murders her infant in an unnatural frenzy. Her director's response, like that of the medical physicians before him is to diagnose this "acting out" as a hysterical symptom that can only be cured by having sex with a man.

More and more, it becomes clear that Leigh used the hysterical role as a means of self-expression in a repressive system that allowed her no other voice. Her cry and fight for logic--for substance--goes unheeded.

As time went by, Walker suggests, the repertory of hysteria she played imprinted itself on her psyche in its several variations with disturbing consequences.

Vivien made a discovery around this time--possibly during these tests--that was to stalk her ambitions and eventually upset her emotional balance for the rest of her life. She found that the role she had just played was coming between her and the next one she had to assume. . . . she found it hard to shake off the experience, put it out of her mind, even erase the dialogue from her memory. In later years, so some of her closest friends believed--she overlaid the roles she played so that they accumulated like different identities, stacked out of sight and mind while times were benign, but suddenly and uncontrollably repossessing her in some cycle of crisis.⁵⁴

Walker suggests that Leigh found it difficult to move from one part to another successfully--and sometimes lost parts she wanted because she couldn't leave the old one behind. This was particularly true, he says,

whenever she had committed herself to a part over a lengthy period, one that caused her stress and drained her physically, even precipitating intemperate outbursts at work or after hours.⁵⁵

It could be argued that psychic revulsion with the hysterical part lay behind this failure to quickly assume the role again in a different guise.

Interestingly, and in contrast, Laurence Olivier, was, according to Walker, "himself never possessed by any role he played to the extent of finding it difficult to shake it off once the show closed."⁵⁶ The range of male characters with their diverse roles and varied actions stands markedly against the sameness of the female hysteric. Had her roles been so very different, it is unlikely that Leigh would have had

trouble "shaking them off." In fact, one role weighed heavily in its same oppressiveness on the other--explosions were Leigh's way out.

During the filming of Caesar and Cleopatra, Leigh had a bad fall and then a miscarriage--her second. Back at work, Walker says

She simply found no part of her being involved in the filming. . . . In front of the camera she would fail to respond to the call of 'Action.' And then, with startling suddenness her depression turned into manifest hysteria.⁵⁷

It seems only fitting that while playing Shaw's "innocent-looking child-queen" Leigh should find herself paralyzed by the "masquerade of femininity" and hearing the call for action could find no way to move. In a later scene, she would suddenly stop playing the part and begin to scream at her dresser. Then, she had what Walker describes as "a hysterical fit." She could not return to work for five to six weeks.⁵⁸

Apparently, Leigh's aesthetic method did not give her the distance which enabled Duse to perform the same masquerade over and over again while maintaining enough stability to know the fault for her discomfort lay in the part and not in her. Leigh's working method would be, perhaps, best thought of as anti-aesthetic. She played the construct for real.

Even in her passionate quest for truth within the hysterical construct, Leigh was stifled by those who, perhaps, were afraid of what was actually there. This is most obvious in the clashes of will between Leigh and the director of Anna

Karenina. Leigh wanted to express the hot physical nature of Anna's love for Vronsky. Her director insisted on playing the scenes romantically. Throughout the making of the film, she was "undergoing one of her depressive attacks," Walker says.⁵⁹ The stifling of creativity in an actress is akin to the stifling of *jouissance* in a woman. Here the actress must stifle the *jouissance* of both her creative will and of the character she is playing. Depression can only be seen as the natural outcome of this suppression. Perhaps, too, it is possible in this light to view the medical term "depression" as a male euphemism for the condition of suppression--that stifles woman's creative and sexual drives.

It is well known that Leigh was desperate to play Blanche Dubois on stage. Walker says:

Even as she was rehearsing Antigone, Vivien was reading and rereading the text of a play about another woman whom the gods made mad before destroying. . . . Blanche Dubois was the part that might turn her into a great actress.⁶⁰

Blanche Dubois, Tennessee Williams' Southern belle heroine is, of course, the archetypal hysterical personality. Why was Vivien Leigh so eager to play a role that, given her susceptibility, was dangerous play?

The answer lies in the paradox of the leading mad part. Knowing much more than it knows about what men see, feel and fear about women, the large hysterical construct has allowed the creatively starved actress an opportunity--if not to think

and act on stage--at least to act out, beyond the boundary of the passive, noble angel role--to scream and cry--to throw the fit on stage that is an expression of her condition off stage. Of her performance, Walker says:

Perhaps she succeeded too well. She played Blanche for over eight months at a time of recurring emotional stress. . . . Towards the end of the run, her behavior began to endanger her safety. She would dismiss her driver and walk home through the West End's red light district, stopping to chat with the street-girls plying their trade. She said she felt an affinity. . . .⁶¹

Walker quotes the critic Alan Dent, who visited Leigh backstage:

She was still on the stage. She was still in the mood of the terrifying last scene when Blanche is taken off to the mental hospital. She was shaking like an autumn leaf, and her lips were trembling. She clutched me . . . and said in no more than a whisper: 'Was I all right? Am I mad to be doing it?'⁶²

Walker says that Leigh spoke of voices that "criticized and chastised" her--and while she performed, she "had the feeling of being viewed askance, of being judged." He quotes Leigh on playing Blanche:

Blanche is a woman with everything stripped away. She is a tragic figure and I understand her. But playing her tipped me into madness.

Walker comments:

It was as if she were being forced to externalize her own guilt, heartbreak,

or, what she had come to fear the most, insanity.⁶³

What could be the source of this endangering--maddening--effect that Blanche has on Leigh? We know that Blanche is exposed and humiliated during the course of the play--all sense of self-respect, all dreams, any identity other than that of sexual victim is eliminated. She is left with as a mass of hysterical symptoms: exposed as nothing but an actress and locked away. There is nothing behind the facade. That is Blanche Dubois' illness. It is terrifying that within the hysterical construct what is exposed is emptiness. Playing Blanche, the actress is stripped away to nothingness.

She is allowed no revelation like a Lear. Hers is a very different kind of tragedy. There is no final self-recognition because, finally, there is no self. To play this part fully--to believe in self-eradication would be deadly for any artist. Night after Night. Eight months. Year after year without a voice to raise in one's own defense.

Leigh said she "understood Blanche as a woman with everything stripped away."⁶⁴ To believe this of woman--this of herself--could only have terrible consequences. Leigh accepts, believes and comes to embody the hysteric's part and beyond. She takes onto herself the burden of judgement pronounced on their idea of woman by men.

Her success in the part landed her the film role of Blanche worth \$100,000, making her the highest paid actress in England.⁶⁵

Leigh's concern about costuming reveals a painful truth about the way actresses have not only accepted their hysterical role, but have also done what they could to aestheticize their hystericization, victimization, eradication. The costume designer of the Streetcar film recalls:

Vivien was very anxious about how she would look when madness had overwhelmed Blanche. I'd figured out a way of making the strait-jacket out of soft material that would wrap around Blanche, but not imprison her. Vivien thought it essential to let Blanche look peaceful.⁶⁶

Making art out of her essential nothingness: acting/artifice/mask becomes an end rather than a means with which to convey other realities. The soft strait-jacket which does not imprison is a beautiful lie, the poetic part of Blanche itself.

Two years after filming Streetcar, Leigh was in a psychiatric ward receiving electro-convulsive therapy. Walker:

As stabilizing drugs like lithium had not yet become available, ECT was still the usual method of inducing calm in the mentally disturbed. About five shocks were delivered over a few days . . . Vivien said later . . . 'It leaves my mind totally numbed and when I come out of it I don't know where I am or what I've been doing.'⁶⁷

The gossip and excessive stories upon which biographers thrive has quite a lot to say to the theorist interested in the actress and her part. Vivien's behavior, as Walker says, "began to exhibit manic signs" often in the course of her

working life. She would lose control--telling false stories, disappearing, throwing off her clothes in public, flying into rages. But, as Walker says: "On stage, where she felt safest, she was again perfection."⁶⁸

It is fascinating that Leigh could control her behavior on stage while experiencing this loss of control in her personal life. It is almost as if the two experiences had switched places. In life, she acted out behavior and feelings that are usually reserved for the stage: exotic, large, bursting feelings. On stage, she was careful to play the part written for her. However, the strange truth is that the artist always exhibits most control during creation. It is in her life and not in her art that one sees the detrimental effects of the hysterical part she performs with such control.

However, in 1963, Leigh did have a "breakdown" on stage while performing in a musical which she disliked and in which she felt humiliated.

She sang her first number three times faster than usual. The conductor simply could not keep up with her. She turned her back on Aumont during their duet. In the second act, she had to confess to having been raped--and this was the detonator. Suddenly she began clawing at her co-star and kicking his shins--all of which he had to pretend was part of the scene they were playing. Then she stopped quite abruptly and stood totally silent. Aumont relates how he tried coaxing the lines out of her. 'Answer me!' he prompted. Vivien advanced to the footlights, ignoring him, and said to the audience, 'an actress needs time to think before answering.' Then she walked off. . . . At the finale she resisted being

drawn into the general on-stage waltzing. She stood to one side, sad and tearful and staring numbly into nothingness.⁶⁹

Here in both a literal and metaphorical way, Leigh has crossed the boundary between art and reality. She steps forward to the audience and makes this appeal:

An actress needs time to think before answering.

It would be both futile and arrogant to attempt to explain Leigh's thought. But in the silence that precedes it there is clearly utter refusal to "answer." Aesthetics is replaced with personal rebellion. REVOLUTION. Walker suggests that the "confession" to having been raped sent her out of control. Her part in the musical might then be seen as a kind of violation--a forcing out of something painful and private--and then, having to turn it into something sinful that must be confessed, owned up to--absolved in the telling.

Ironically, Leigh is said to have insisted that she would be going back to the theatre to perform again that evening, and then to have recited all her lines "with only her maid and the two doctors who had been called, for an audience."⁷⁰

If the "breakdown" on stage was a kind of spontaneous revolt, the subsequent demand to return to the part demonstrates how deeply the role of actress possesses the actress. Offstage, she recites the lines she could not speak--refused on stage.

Leigh experienced the longest depression yet after this incident. She appears to have lost her self:

The curtain over her face didn't lift for months. During this time she neglected her usually immaculate appearance, used foul language, and . . . said such outlandish things it was hard to follow her line of thought.⁷¹

Her behavior was childish, violent, troubled, by turns. When she finally came back to herself--when "the curtain lifted" as her mother described it--she was offered yet another hysterical role: "an American divorcee, menopausally waspish, fond of the bottle" in the film Ship of Fools. Her co-star, Simone Signoret, recalled that Leigh was "From one minute to another . . . scintillating or desperate."⁷² She would play the waltz theme from Gone With the Wind at night.

Walker:

Much of Vivien's role in Ship of Fools looked like a recycling of bits from earlier films: Mrs. Stone's menopausal panic, Blanche Dubois' sexual fear . . . but there was a cruel, self-lacerating feel to the role and her playing. Alone in her cabin, and in torment, she grabs a make-up pencil and wildly draws a cosmetic caricature of herself on her face.⁷³

Leigh had become a parody of and by herself. Inevitably, Leigh's behavior disturbed the working sanity of the set: she insulted other actors and in a scene in which Lee Marvin forcibly bursts in her cabin and kisses her in a drunken gesture meant for someone else, she really hit him with her spiked heel. Finally, she was discovered unable to make up her face, "being forced to start over and over again." She was given ECT.⁷⁴

The masquerade of femininity--the MASK--was losing its ability to function. Here was a woman for whom acting was no longer acting and reality had become a stage. Leigh's sense of self, I believe, became so violated by the hysterical part she was forced to play again and again, that there was eventually nothing left but acting as illness. Constantly forced to expose her very being as if it were composed of empty gestures and unreal feelings she became them. Her constant attempts to exert control offstage over some aspects of her artistry, her fights for some motivation and truth in her roles could not save her, but in fact, paradoxically, it was this struggle for truth which made her lose her sense of reality.

Turning to Liv Ullmann as a final example of the actress and her part, one discovers a mask that is watched from behind itself and exposure that comments upon its nature. This contemporary self-conscious and self-referential artist analyzes the actress and her part and discovers her self. She takes the self as actress apart. What is the she apart from her role, what is the she that is the role, why and how are they both the same and not the same? Is Ullmann spared the aesthetic psychosis of an irreversible splitting of body and mind by her awareness of such a split? Her identification with the hysterical part is complete, and yet, not all of her. She saves herself as commentary.

In Ullmann's working experience there are the same demands for hysterical reaction and an intense fragmentation. The fact that she was directed so often--and developed artistically--with the father of her daughter, Ingmar Bergman, with whom she had a long love relationship is an interesting aspect of her hystericization. There is a passivity--an insecurity--that embodies the father-daughter archetype--the need to please. However, there is also resistance to the immersion that cost Vivien Leigh her health. Through the acceptance of Brechtian acting techniques--which, though they were most certainly not devised for the intensely emotional and exposing film work that Ullmann has done (rather for political theatre spectacle), placed her in a schizophrenic aesthetic position that ironically allowed her to maintain balance and perspective. The woman must distance herself and watch the effects of the hysterical role on her body and mind in order to survive artistically.

Through the act of writing, perhaps, Ullmann is freed to reveal the way acting and life as a woman merge. She describes an encounter with the man who will publish the book she is writing: she is fearful, insecure. She chooses her role for this meeting:

I don't put on any make-up. Am glad to see that my nose is shiny and that there are black shadows under my eyes. For a moment I wonder whether Camille wouldn't make a deeper impression on him than The Monster. I elect to go for something in between and set out in the worn trousers I garden in. . . . The Monster gives way

once more and more to Camille. I am at the edge of tears.⁷⁵

Ullmann heads home after the meeting:

Never had so abused a martyr looked so sorrowfully at her oppressor before stumbling out and home. In the car I wonder if I am having a nervous breakdown. And if so, can I give it an artistic expression?⁷⁶

There is a wonderfully playful self-consciousness in this description. But the range of expressive opportunity is also sadly acknowledged without, I believe, the resistance that would lead to her escape. Perhaps, for the actress there is no way out--only this awareness. Ullmann plays, too, with a sense of her own lack of resistance to the part and with her fate--which is to make art from the role she cannot resist, does not choose to escape from because she is, after all, an actress. Ullmann watches herself play Monster, Camille, martyr and hysterical victim--always with an eye to the effect she is producing. This saves her. Is it the actress's role that saves the woman? Or the woman that saves the actress from the role she plays?

Ullmann's early experience as an actress was one of exhilarating self-annihilating identification with her part.

I really borrowed from Anne's soul for those two hours on the stage. Let Anne play Anne My acting was not pretense, but reality. . . . It was like when I was a child. I lived in fantasy, yet I employed real emotions and longings within those fantasies. Now I became indignant if anyone suggested that it was

only a role. . . . 'I'm not acting, I'm not deceiving.'⁷⁷

But Ullmann also recognized that this "complete absorption by one's profession" could be dangerous if it continued unchecked: "Some very few never find their way back to life outside the stage."⁷⁸

While still a very young actress, she worked with a former leading director of the Berliner Ensemble, a close associate of Brecht's:

He taught me that everything we portray on the stage ought to be shown from two sides. Be illustrated in both black and white. When I smile, I must also show the grimace behind it. Try to depict the countermovement--the counteremotion. . . . I learned to work more consciously.⁷⁹

There are echoes here of the transcendence techniques that Duse used to bring "truth" to her work with hysterical texts. Ullmann's association with the aesthetic distancing or estrangement techniques of Brecht allowed her to resist total immersion:

I, who for years had kept Stanislavski's book on the art of acting on my bedside table, now began to look for other ways Partly I found a new technique which seemed right for me. I placed more weight on details, something that would benefit me later in films Less feelings, more concentration on giving expression to the feelings.⁸⁰

Like Duse's, Ullmann's art became one of fragmentation. To play the hysterical part, she too, resorts to detail work--with her body parts, with objects, with gesture.

Ullmann describes the following account of Ingmar Bergman as an example of the "technique" she consciously began to employ in her work. It is important to know that Ullmann's character in the film Persona, which Bergman describes, is an actress who has stopped speaking--a classic hysteric and the epitome of the hysterical role that woman is given to play. Bergman describes Ullmann listening to a woman's erotic fantasy:

If you look at Liv's face, you'll see that all the time it's swelling. It's fascinating--her lips get bigger, her eyes darker, the whole girl is transformed into a sort of greed. There is a profile shot of Liv, here, which is incomparable. One can see her face transformed into a sort of cold, voluptuous mask. . . . When we were going to shoot it, I told Liv that she must gather all her feelings into her lips. She had to concentrate on placing her sensibility there--it's possible, you know, to place your feelings in different parts of your body. Suddenly you can summon your emotions into your little finger, or your big toe, or your buttock, or your lips. And that is what I insisted she did.⁸¹

Bergman orders Ullmann to emote through her lips, because, on film, her face is now an abstract canvas, a "cold, voluptuous mask" through which Bergman constructs his hysterical reactions. In order to comply, Ullmann has developed and refined the aesthetic technique of turning her face into this mask: emptying it of self-expression.

In one of the many moments of self-analysis in her book, Ullmann describes what is, after all, a classic feminine

characteristic--one that is imposed on her as woman and as actress.

I have spent hours completely involved in what I thought other people wished to see me doing. The fear of hurting, fear of authority, the need for love have put me in the most hopeless situations. I have suppressed my own desires and wishes, and ever eager to please, have done what I thought was expected of me.⁸²

One of the most telling incidents in her story stands as metaphor for the effect of her role on any actress.

There were four clever men and they moved in my living room for a week with their cameras, lights, tape recorders and pre-conceived ideas.

I was famous and to be immortalized in a 'personal' portrait! I welcomed them and felt quite flattered. There was much I wanted to say, and I thought I'd come far enough to have the courage of my convictions.

When they left I stood on the steps waving good-bye, but inside I felt humiliated, a little stupid, and alone. . . . They never phoned to say thank you, and I wondered why I got the feeling that they had hurt me.⁸³

Returning to the scene for answers, Ullmann discovers how she is seduced--or intimidated--into a public exposure of pain which is then used at her expense. The interviewer imposes his hysterical questions on Ullmann and she is left to answer them--trapped in the role he has chosen for her: she responds. She reacts:

"We hope you will be very amusing," said the interviewer. He was preoccupied with

his own private worries and mostly talked about loneliness. He wept when I told about mine. But the camera was not turned on him.

. . . . I wanted to explain . . . that I really could laugh. But when his questions were so serious, his own voice so melancholy, and when he even had tears in his eyes most of the time, it was not easy for me to contribute humor.

Yet when they turned the camera on him and he repeated his questions he spoke lightly and easily and his eyes were all intelligence without a trace of sorrow.⁸⁴

Ullmann had been set up. Betrayed. The actress's work is full of such betrayal. The hysterical expression is transferred to her--and she is forced to act it out through her body, emotions and mind. She continues:

All four were friendly and they went away, taking my face and voice on their rolls of film and tape, leaving an empty space in my house.

They let me express publicly a sorrow and a longing and thereby created an insecurity in me. Which they left behind.⁸⁵

The actress, through this public exposure of a directed and imposed pain is left emptied and in this emptiness can only feel that self is something public and not her own. The emotions that are expressed, then, are not her own.

Rather than becoming increasingly obsessed with uncovering the truth of the female characters she portrays (perhaps because of experiences like the one above), Ullmann ultimately chooses to play them as MASKS. Here she describes her

aesthetic goals for yet another, perhaps her last, portrayal of Nora in Ibsen's A Doll House.

I want the public to see through Nora's mask I want the doll to be seen dancing I have to know what I do with Nora. In a sense stand behind her--present her: do you recognize this woman?⁸⁶

The woman as mask: a face she may or may not paint, which is not her because it belongs to the public, her audience. (Ullmann titles her last chapter, "Masks.") Who she sees in the mirror is disguise. Woman's sensitivity to the role that appearance plays in her reality and how this estranges her from external self--creating a kind of psychotic/aesthetic distance--is interestingly evoked here by Ullmann's appearance at a theatre function in a hat and a friend's dress:

I am wearing a hat for the first time in many years. And everything that happens to me throughout the evening I experience from a distance, as if it is not me, but someone in a strange hat, and Barbara's dress.⁸⁷

Ullmann's identification with the mask greatly influences her playing of her hysterical parts. This is most vividly presented in her description of her work on Jenny, the suicidal heroine of Bergman's film Face to Face. Ullmann describes Jenny:

The film . . . deals with death. Loneliness. Anxiety. It tells the story of a woman of my age who will soon reach the crossroads. . . . Anxiety has become a part of everyday life, but she is not

able to accept it. She cannot live with it, and decides to take her life.

Jenny has been clever. She has managed to live a part, live behind a mask, conceal a pain.⁸⁸

Most telling in Ullmann's discussion of her experience with the part is how centered it is on Bergman's creative needs and goals and his emotional and psychological connection to the "Jenny" she is playing--really, it appears for him. Of course, it would seem that an honest dramatist or film maker could do little else except create out of parts of himself or herself--and natural for others to then stand in for those parts.

My concern here is not with the validity of the creative approach, but with the hysterical part the woman is forced to play, and its effects. Bergman and Ullmann "walk up and down the corridor, discussing Jenny's depression." Ullmann describes her own state:

I see myself as a sieve. Everyone's feelings flow through me, but I am never able to retain them.

In the evening I am put aside empty--only to be inundated the next day with new emotions.⁸⁹

The empty vessel she describes as her creative state as actress is filled with Bergman's needs.

What he wants I feel distinctly: there I recognize myself in him.

That is my fortune as an actress.

(His women, whom I always see as real, become a natural part of me...⁹⁰

Ullmann's record of her acting experience of Jenny's suicide attempt is worth quoting at some length because of what it has to say about the potentially psychotic effects of her hysterical part on the actress--and on the nature of the part itself.

Today we shall film the suicide scene. Ingmar has ordered facsimiles of real sleeping tablets. The manufacturer promises that they will be filled with grape-flavored sugar. There are a hundred of them, a whole bottle full. I am almost sick with fear, imagine that the manufacturer has made a mistake, that perhaps they contain the real thing after all Ingmar gives me loose directions and says, "Now we will see what happens. Action!" I can hardly take an aspirin . . . and now I have to swallow a hundred pills.

Jenny arranges the bed covers, fluffs up two pillows and fixes them nicely so that her head can rest on them, pulls down the shade, locks the door, straightens out the covers once more, sits down on the edge of the bed, fills a glass with soda, opens the medicine bottle, puts two, three pills in her hand, swallows with a little difficulty. Next time there are more pills in the palm. She stuffs them into her mouth, drinks. Suddenly Jenny's hand begins to tremble so violently that the glass knocks against my teeth--and while Jenny is trying to take her life I know how it feels.

The long preparation, the strange stillness. Jenny and I are doing it together. I experience it at the same time as I am standing outside, watching. I am living through a suicide.

Ten, twenty pills in my mouth at a time go down easily. Jenny becomes increasingly agitated, but the countenance remains calm. She sits for a while looking at the empty bottle, shakes her head,

then she lies down and rests her head against the pillows she has arranged. For a while she lies staring at the ceiling.

It suddenly strikes me how right it would have been if she had looked at her watch, noted the time of her death--and at the same moment the thought comes to me, she does it.

It only becomes theatre when I turn my face toward the wall and do not die.

Afterward I feel empty. . . .

Ingmar is quiet and subdued and says, 'Well, now at least I won't have to commit suicide.'⁹¹

It is difficult to analyze Ullmann's experience and Bergman's satisfaction without some personal revulsion and anger. And yet, for the actress, the opportunity to commit suicide is, (ironically, of course) one of the most active, fullest experiences she is allowed. On stage or in front of the camera, self-annihilation is one of the hysterical parts' greatest rewards.

At no point, in a searingly honest account of herself, does Ullmann ever sound the least predisposed to suicide. She kills herself for Bergman, who, through her performance, is released.

Perhaps most interesting in her description is the way in which Ullmann and Jenny become confused--or inhabit different parts of her body and mind at the same time. (The italics are my own.)

Suddenly Jenny's hand begins to tremble so violently that the glass knocks against my teeth.⁹²

Ullmann's aesthetic/psychotic distance from her role begins to break down. Paradox takes over:

"I am living through a suicide."⁹³

The swallowing of the dreaded pills under Bergman's direct order for 'Action' epitomizes Ullmann's part in the aesthetic project. The physical act of taking the pills empties her mind of its own will--and Jenny's (Bergman's hysterical projected alias) takes control.

Is this submission acting? Does watching it take place protect Ullmann from the devastation of immersion, finally? In commenting on acting, Ullmann uses the imagery of broken flesh, self-fragmentation and wounds as signs of the actress's health:

One of the things I like about my profession, and that I find healthy, is that one constantly has to break oneself to pieces. Wounds do not have a chance to fester.⁹⁴

Destructive self-defeating emotions are associated with the positive aesthetic goal of letting the part live inside the actress:

What happens to a role is a kind of life, and now as I sit talking with my colleagues, Jenny is living inside of me. So that in a way I am she; and what are her tears and fear and anger keep open in me that which I shall use to portray her.⁹⁵

It becomes apparent that the actress is forced to draw on the negative, unhealthy aspects of herself to play the hysterical part she has been given. These "tears and fear and anger" on constant call are the perverse skills upon which her success as an actress are based. We are back to the hysteric and her debasing contortions--to illness as acting. The actress is emptied of anything but the acting of illness.

Ullmann herself comments on the effect of the hysterical part on her life.

Much of what I have experienced I use in my profession. The fatigue, the disgust, the fear I have known. Life experiences become acting experiences, which in turn become life experiences.⁹⁶

It is ironic that possible release from the negative, pathological circle comes through hysterical outburst:

I scream with Jenny in front of the camera and feel tremendously relieved afterward.⁹⁷

Here, Ullmann watches as the hysterical role takes over and does her physical harm:

Jenny is hysterical. She cannot reach anyone. Sees her daughter in a dream. Runs after her, calls to her. The daughter disappears. Jenny stops, screams, leans her head against a wall. That is where the scene is meant to end, but Jenny begins to bang her head against the wall. Too late, I discover the sharp edge, but cannot stop. The camera rolls.⁹⁸

Warning then: the hysterical role is bad for your health. The hysterical part possesses the body. The actress has no control: this hysterical possession is irrational. It is

man's idea of woman; it is a mask within her. For the woman, acting itself, is this hysterical possession.

Ullmann's final humiliation is the filming of a scene in which Jenny is dreaming her own death: she lies, flower-strewn, in a coffin. Ullmann records what can be read as metaphor for the actress:

I have to lie absolutely still so as not to disarrange the decoration.⁹⁹

Ullmann writes the notes that will become this description of her acting from inside the coffin.

When Ullmann thinks back on her experience with playing Jenny she can only comment: "Perhaps it is good to have been through it."¹⁰⁰

"Perhaps not," is written into her hesitation. Like Duse and Leigh, Ullmann acted to discover truth about herself.

Through the years I have struggled with my profession. Tried to find out who I am and why I am.¹⁰¹

The truth might be that she was used by her profession-- by those seeking to fulfill their vision of a truth which is only, finally, a hysterical act.

*

Though achieving prominence in different generations and developing their own quite different acting-as-coping techniques, Duse, Leigh, and Ullmann ultimately strove for truth through their work as actresses. (Ullmann continues to do so.) It is this aesthetic goal--making it all appear true-- that leads to hysterical reaction. Though debate has long

raged over the superior aesthetic method--big emotion or beautiful gesture--the argument has always turned on the nature of conveying truth. In this history of truth as ideal, woman has played no vocal or otherwise active part. Assuming the part she has been allotted, has left the actress--either willfully or passively, with or without struggles--playing the "truth" of the cluster of symptoms that bear her name. Acting has truly been a disease for her.

In the contemporary world, a highly-developed system has evolved to teach the actor how to believe in his part, and, thus, to convince an audience of the truth of the play itself. The system serves the author.

Training in Stanislavsky's method provides even the actor with the smallest part with a means of finding actions and their motivations within a scene which are united in a larger "through-line" of action and a huge, all-encompassing motivation or goal. Stanislavsky's motivation in providing this system has been described by Marvin Carlson as primarily to bring authenticity to the stage picture. The believability or truth factor of the events on stage depends on every character being "at all times a fit subject for audience contemplation." The illusion of reality within each character keeps the focus on the plays broader truth.¹⁰² However, as Sue-Ellen Case has stated:

objectives and through-lines might not be suitable acting techniques for representing women's experiences. . . .Neverthe-

less such work is required by the texts
the actors inherit.¹⁰³

As an actress trained in Stanislavsky's "method"--taught to search for action and truth in roles I was assigned--I found myself in an existential and artistic dilemma more often than not, "building" quirky characters, unsuccessful in facilitating the play's "flow", or ones I didn't understand. These characters left me mystified, more often acting out than acting (these I was more often praised for). In acting out, I was knowing more than I knew about the construction of the hysterical female part.

The hysterical construct is neither representative of women's experience or actable. Case, again:

a wedge is created between the sign "woman" and real women that insinuates alienation into the very participation of women in the system of theatrical representation. . . .¹⁰⁴

A parallel can be drawn with the work of women writers. Juliet Mitchell has written:

I do not believe there is such a thing as . . . a "woman's voice," . . . there is the hysteric's voice which is the woman's masculine language.¹⁰⁵

It becomes imperative to ask why women have submitted to play the part that is no woman. Luce Irigaray asks such a question:

As for woman, on peut se demander, why she submits so easily . . . to the counterphobic projects, projections, productions of man relative to his desire.¹⁰⁶

Irigaray's answer is, I think, valid for the actress as well as for the "hysterical" patient of psychoanalysis. She maintains that woman's exclusion is:

inscribed in her relation to the father.
 . . . the vicious circle by which desire
 for the father's desire . . . causes her
 to submit to the father's law.¹⁰⁷

In order for the actress to escape this "father's desire," it becomes necessary to look at its nature, to explore the unhealthy connection between woman as object of desire and as hysterical construct. Much has been written about woman's objectified status on stage and in film. What is of concern here is why men have desired their woman object to be hysterical. What is desirable about illness? Transference and projection of confusion and fear do not go far enough to address this question of desire. We are told that men desire their mothers and, at the same time, fear them--and so this desirable object is created that must also excite revulsion.

It would seem that woman only becomes desirable after her hystericization. When reduced to an expression of symptoms, she becomes an object of longing. Her sexuality and her 'illness' are inseparable.

Carole Spitzak has described the way in which women's bodies are disabled and thus sexualized by men:

in clinical efforts to correct and monitor the female body, the bodies of women in fact became 'disabled.' Corrective procedures underscore female disease and reposition women within the discourses of

disease and sexuality. In the Chinese practice of footbinding, for example, a 'medical procedure' transforms the feet into sexual signs or fetish objects; at the same time, the feet become unhealthy (completely non-functional for the body's inhabitant) in the process of transformation. A woman who hobbles on 'lotus hooks' is both a sexual vision and a disabled person.¹⁰⁸

Like the bound feet of these Chinese women, the hysterical female on stage is a sign of male control and domination over the woman's body. In making her ill, the male exerts his power. To control and re-create woman, the man disables her--and through this disability, she is made an object of fetish. It is most disturbing that woman as object must be annihilated and reconstructed as helpless to become desirable.

At the same time as "she" is desired as a sexual object, the female is also an object of derision. Reduced to hysterical signs, she is laughable.

The origins of woman's objectification on the Western stage begin long before the actress takes her part. All begins with classical Greek theatre--which, according to Aristotle, depended on a system of actor/audience empathy: the aesthetic goal of truth, even then. Interestingly, it was a masked male actor who played the woman, acting a transvestite's part. This convention, accepted by the male audiences, bares a glaring connection to the actress's dilemma. One could argue that this masked transvestite part was passed down through the ages until women were allowed to assume it. The

actress appears on the stage, but the part remains that of the hysterical male in drag.

The origin of the female part has been the object of considerable feminist analysis. Sue-Ellen Case has noted that:

The feminist critic may no longer believe that the portrayal of women in classical plays by men relate to the lives of actual women. Instead the feminist critic may assume that the images of women in these plays represent a fiction of women constructed by the patriarchy The result of the suppression of actual women in the classical world created the invention of a representation of the gender 'Woman' within the culture. This 'Woman' appeared on the stage, in the myths, and in the plastic arts, representing the patriarchal values attached to the gender 'Woman' while suppressing the experiences, stories, feelings, and fantasies of actual women.¹⁰⁹

Case describes the new gender role of 'Woman' as a category of "difference and polarity"--a representation of opposition portrayed in such a light as would explain and justify man's dominance over woman. Thus drama arose as "gender-specific to the male" and enacted "the suppression of actual women as well as the representation of the new 'Woman.'" ¹¹⁰

As women were, of course, not allowed to represent the construct 'Woman' on stage, men not only created the woman's part but acted it. Case asks, reflecting on what must have been an aesthetic predicament--though certainly not a conscious question (not a question of conscience):

. . . How does one depict a woman? How does the male actor signal to the audience that he is a woman? Along with the female costume of shorter tunic and the female mask with longer hair, he might have indicated through gesture, movement and vocal intonation that the character was female. . . .¹¹¹

Athenian politics oppressed and excluded women; suppressed their participation and silenced their voices. . . . Theatre was the supreme site of this hysterical repression. Thus it is, that the aesthetic choices of man have dictated Woman's representation. Case:

This vocabulary of gestures initiated the image of 'Woman' as she is seen on the stage--institutionalized through patriarchal culture and represented by male-oriented signs of her appropriate gender behavior. Moreover, the practice of male actors playing women probably encouraged the creation of female roles which lent themselves to generalization and stereotype. The depiction and development of female characters in the written texts must have accommodated the practice of their representation on stage. . . . Female characters are derived from the absence of actual women on stage and from the reasons for their absence.¹¹²

For Case, the origin of the Woman's part in patriarchal culture is not only the source of its lack of connection to actual women but is the model for all subsequent portrayals of Woman on the Western stage. And perhaps, most frightening, this false creation has served as a model for appropriate female behavior--as representation and ideal.

As the masked transvestite actor on the ancient stage reveals, the woman's role has developed as an ornamental vessel containing men's beliefs, expectations and experiences. Just as there was no actual woman on the original stage, the woman's part which the actress assumes forces her to de-actualize--empty herself of woman in order to represent 'Woman' and adopt its MASK.

A parallel to the actress's self-purging aesthetic ritual can be drawn with woman in society. In her disturbing personal essay, "The Confession Mirror: Plastic Images for Surgery," Carole Spitzak describes woman's submission to her representation at its most extreme: woman as "seemingly pure surface."

Woman submits to starvation and mutilation--and affirms her emptiness. Describing "prospective" plastic surgery clients in the waiting room (waiting for what?) Spitzak notices:

a beautiful featureless woman positioned at a reception desk. . . Each woman is finely dressed, following closely the dictates of seasonal hemlines and shade combinations. Great care has been taken to replace the natural face with one streaked by manmade color and definition, without evidence of fabrication. They know the secrets, they have mastered the look. Susan Griffin writes that the 'objects' of male sexuality are 'somehow magically... reduced to only matter.' I see these objects before me, seemingly pure surface, carefully orchestrated and magical.¹¹³

The beautiful, ideal woman represents SUCCESS: the complete eradication of nature, reduced to surface. She plays the role of self-obliteration to perfection--to the point of self-mutilation.

Teresa Podlesney takes the construction of the actress's part to its most extreme manifestation as hysterical fragmented falsity: the Hollywood Blonde as construct. Podlesney, in examining a number of bottle-blond stars, concludes:

These women, actresses, . . . were all a function of their hair color. These women were blondes.¹¹⁴

Identifying the dying of the actresses' hair as "the blond phenomenon" Podlesney sees "a problem body, currently involved in an analytic situation."¹¹⁵ Podlesney is bold enough to link hysterical fragmentation with biographical tragedy:

Blondes in their pre-corpse state (death comes so horribly, tragically, to the blonde, yet fulfills and continues the process of her signification). . .¹¹⁶

The actress's life as her greatest tragic role. A new definition of the tragic hero emerges for woman as actress--the tragedy of reduction to what is not real: the woman's tragedy of eradication of self.

The following fragmented portraits might serve as models for the female tragic archetype:

Everything about her now, engaged in a mundane task, seems non-functional. In motion she looks artificial, like a doll impersonating a woman. . . . She is

inhibited by the fact that she is human.¹¹⁷

The patient appears happy about the prospect of her own effacement.¹¹⁸

The job of taking a young girl and turning her into a glamorous movie star is quite a production out in Hollywood. They call it 'processing'. . . Given a girl who seems to have a rather unusual personality, Hollywood will, by physical tortures only the experts can dream up, begin the business of making her completely unlike herself when she came to them, as possible.¹¹⁹

Finally, Podlesney makes an interesting juxtaposition of blonde as artificial constructed phenomenon with the image of the real man:

Does the blonde, characterized as mere image, mere haircolor, make possible the emergence of the 'real' man, the sensitive man of the 50's? Because one half of the screen is so obviously and transparently constructed, the other half, reflected, can be seen as 'real,' not constructed, 'natural.'¹²⁰

To take this further in relation to the position of woman as hysteric, one could say that woman as falseness/actress/hysteric makes the man and male actor appear not only as real and natural but as HEALTHY and SANE. Against her emptiness--that illness of not being there under the mask (her acting disease) the male actor exists.

PART FOUR: The Parts and Strategies for Playing Them

Don't put your daughter on the stage.

Noel Coward

In his history of sexuality, Foucault asserts that in the "twilight" of the bourgeoisie era, sexual life was "driven out, denied, and reduced to silence." However, repression was not complete, and Foucault is interested in the way in which sex was put into discourse:

If it was truly necessary to make room for illegitimate sexualities, it was reasoned, let them take their infernal mischief elsewhere: to a place where they could be reintegrated, if not in the circuits of production, at least in those of profit. The brothel and the mental hospital would be those places of tolerance: the prostitute, the client, and the pimp, together with the psychiatrist and his hysteric . . . seem to have surreptitiously transferred the pleasures that are unspoken into the order of things that are counted. Words and gestures, quietly authorized, could be exchanged at the going rate. Only in those places would untrammelled sex have a right to (safely insularized) forms of reality, and only to clandestine, circumscribed, and coded types of discourse.'

This profitable "safe" haven of sexual discourse in the whore and the hysteric merge on the stage in the body of the actress. The theatre has always been a legitimate site of

breaks from repressive codes--through bursts of hysterical dialogue.

In their discussion of madwomen in Elizabethan drama, Maurice and Hanna Charney argue convincingly that the nature of female madness under the pen of male dramatists was one of release.

Madwomen offered the dramatists an opportunity to write speeches of exuberant fancy and lyric grace. They also provided a sanction for witty sexual innuendo and outright bawdy, since love melancholy could be pathetic, pretty and sensual all at the same time. If the madwoman was a conventional role on the Elizabethan stage, it was unconventional--and even disturbing--in its exploration of feminine consciousness. Through madness, the women on stage can suddenly make a forceful assertion of their being. The lyric form and broken syntax and unbridled imagination all show ways of breaking through unbearable social restraints. . . .
 . . . madness on stage releases the emotional and imaginative powers it would seem that only imaginative women have the capacity for either true or feigned madness. There is an art in madness by which a character may bring her imaginative energies to fruition.²

The Charneys proceed to equate the dramatic representation of "woman's" madness with woman's madness. This is problematic though useful questions are raised.

We need to work through this question of how women are used symbolically and what sort of release madness offers. The next step in the discussion is to explain the social norms that shape and energize the madness of women in any particular historical period. In this area, we are likely to find remarkable consistencies between Elizabethan attitudes and our own.³

The Charneys believe that "the literary and theatrical problems of how madwomen express themselves" are equivalent to woman's self-expression as madness within a given society. They question the use male dramatists have made of women's madness rather than seeking the source of theatrical madness in the male psyche.

However, it seems very right to assert that woman's self-expression under patriarchy has been constructed as a mad sign and to ask about the kind of release the mad sign offers the male dramatist.

Thomas Sydenham's words seem an appropriate place to begin thinking about the scope of hysterical presentation: like females, so, too, female parts.

"Study of Hysteria" (1848)

Of all the chronic diseases hysteria-- unless I err--is the commonest As to females there is rarely one who is wholly free from [hysterical complaints].⁴

Yet they appear so varied, the canon of women's parts in Western drama: and on the surface, they are. However, as the clinical description of the hysterical personality (see page 8) reminds the reader, the characteristics of the hysterical construct are broad enough to embrace nearly the entire spectrum of female representation on stage. There are any number of ways one might categorize hysterical constructs. And all categories overlap. Stressing one aspect of hysterical construction is, ultimately, artificial, though useful.

1. Diagnostic Categorization

For the contemporary actress faced with a hysterical role, the challenge might be viewed as diagnosis and cure. Just as in personal analysis, the actress recognizes symptoms and patterns of behavior that result in her performance. The symptoms are always sexual in nature.

2. Historical Categorization

Hysterical types fall into a historical pattern that mimics the "evolution" of the explanation of the origin of female hysteria. Broadly, this evolution can be seen in three phases:

- hysteria in the womb
- hysteria in morality
- hysteria in psychology

Within dramatic literature, changing attitudes toward hysterical characters are revealed in treatments and "cures." These include sex, marriage, public exposure and humiliation, trial, murder, suicide--depending on the character's social status, the genre of the play, and, of course, the given time.

3. Metaphysical Categorization

Foucault's notion of the changing status of madness offers illuminating parallels to the hysterical female part. For Foucault, theatre is madness.

The theatre develops its truth, which is illusion. Which is, in the strict sense, madness.⁵

And if drama is madness in any way, as Foucault suggests, dramatic history as the development of the Western man's imagination, runs parallel with the development of man's relationship with madness. Foucault's historical account of madness might be an important way into dramatic texts for the actress who hopes to uncover the origin of the part she is assigned.

The following is a breakdown of the ages of madness according to Foucault. For each, one or two of his thoughts are presented. This is in no way intended to offer more than a glimmer of the range of Foucault's vision, to suggest the relationship between changing attitudes toward madness and women in representation.

The Ancient World

"We must try to return in history to that zero point in the course of madness at which madness is an undifferentiated experience."⁶

The Middle Ages

"The world sinks into universal fury. Victory is neither God's nor the Devil's: it belongs to Madness."⁷

The Renaissance

"Madness no longer lies in wait for mankind at the four corners of the earth; it insinuates itself within man, or rather it is a subtle rapport that man maintains with himself."⁸

"incessant dialogue of reason and madness"⁹

Early Classical Age (Second half of 17th century)

"Order no longer freely confronted disorder. . . . Madness was. . . torn from that imaginary freedom . . . it had been sequestered, and in the fortress of confinement, bound to Reason, to the rules of morality and their monotonous nights."¹⁰

Late 18th/Early 19th Century

"A structural cycle of passion and delusion. . . constitutes the classical experience of madness."¹¹

19th Century

"Now madness belonged to social failure, which appeared without distinction as its cause, model, and limit."¹²

"a common language becomes possible again, insofar as it will be one of acknowledged guilt."¹³

There is also the possibility of viewing hysterical constructs numerically. The number of hysterical constructs

within a given work says something about the nature of the hysteria expressed in a simplistic, but perhaps, very precise way.

Hysterical women are presented in groups--en masse--as a threat to the stability of the community/patriarchy--as a race, a species apart. From the Bacchae to the Furies, from the weird sisters of Macbeth to the hysterical possessed nuns of Loudon in The Devils, hysterical groups of women pervade the psyche of men of all ages. Today's feminist movement appears on stage as hysterical groups of women out to upset the community/patriarchy--its order, its law, its "sanity." The vengeance theme runs strongly through the hysterical group. As Froma Zeitlin says, in a culture that values self-control, anger is displaced onto women in representation.¹⁴ Whenever hysterical groups appear, a male victim stands at the center of the drama.

Hysterical constructs also appear in pairs--most often mother/daughter, monster/victim, whore/virgin combinations. Ophelia/Gertrude, Madame Arkadina/Nina, Amanda/Laura. Most often, when these pairs appear, there is a male hero to whom they are attached: this hysterical pair reflect/affect/serve dramatically his tragic development. Zeitlin has noted that in classical Greek archetypes of feminine rage the symbiosis of mother and daughter is particularly threatening.

There is a genre of hysterical plays in which a single hysterical construct is often the main character--or, in other

cases, a dominant character. These individual hysterics are often outcasts--powerful, masculine, uncontrollable--standing apart, conspicuously, from the idealized feminine norm. In usurping a main role on stage, these hysterical constructs sentence themselves to hysterical/abnormal diagnosis. It is unnatural for a woman to play an active part and thus such a woman's part is inevitably unnatural: "mannish," frigid, promiscuous. Zeitlin points out that the fruit of female anger in Greek archetypes is a monster. This monster in the guise of a powerful central dramatic figure has played a continuous and obsessive part in Western theatrical tradition. These isolated, hysterical female constructs are usually surrounded almost completely by male characters (like Charcot's hysteric) who witness and comment on her condition. This hysteric, seen as a victim of her desire is surrounded by those with the power to satisfy or destroy her.

Hysterical constructs can perhaps be viewed most purely in a category of sexuality. Though modesty or confusion sometimes gets the better of psychologists:

whatever makes the individual hysterical.
 . . has not been properly identified.¹⁵

Sexuality has been and is viewed as the root of all women's madness: of woman and of her part. As absurd as the following may appear, there are few female characters in drama who do not fit somewhere here.

Sexual Categorization

Pure Virgins	Prostitutes	Sado-masochists
Unhappily marrieds	Rape victims	Masochists
Widows	Victims of un-	Dying of shame & guilt
Spinsters	requited passion	Dying of betrayal
Frigids	Adulteresses	Broken-hearted
Man-haters	Mystics	Man-worshipper
Lesbians	Devil-fornicators	Love-fearers
Nymphomaniacs	Perfect wives	Teasers
Seductresses	Perfect lovers	
	Husband-seekers	

Combinations of Above

Frigid spinsters	Perfect wives dying of love
Lesbian seductresses	Perfect lovers dying of
Pure virgin victims of un-	shame and guilt
requited passion	Broken-hearted nymphomani-
Widow nymphomaniacs	acs
Unhappily married adulteresses	Frigid teasers
Prostitute seductresses	
Erotical Mystic Man-worshippers	
Raped prostitutes	

More Combinations

Erotical mystic seductresses	Lesbian man-worshippers
Frigid victims of love	Mystical prostitutes
Betrayed nymphomaniacs	Pure virgin man-worshippers
Pure virgin spinsters	Man-hating love victims
Nymphomaniac spinsters	Unrequited adulteresses
Prostitute widows	
Adulteress man-women	
Nymphomaniac unhappily marrieds	

All constructs in this category are the various manifestations of a single phenomenon: woman's sexuality as illness/hysteria.

Finally, the hysterical female part can be viewed in sharp contrast against the classical, timeless backdrop of the

Aristotelian definition of the tragic hero. In this case "she" is categorized as Absence/Silence/Mirror according to Sue-Ellen Case, who described the role of women in Aristotle's tragic-heroic aesthetic for the drama:

Aristotle's assumptions rest upon the intersection of social reality and aesthetic prescriptions. In both realm's the women are the outsiders. They function only to provide the limits of the male subject, which help to complete his outline, or they illustrate differences from him, which highlight his qualities. Once more, women are invisible--there are no qualities ascribed to them, and their invisibility provides the empty space which organized the focus on the male subject.¹⁶

Woman's invisibility in dramatic theory and theory's manifestation in the tragic experience lead Case to a radical conclusion which places the hysterical construct outside the realm of categorization altogether.

. . . .Excluded from the categories of tragic character, from cleverness, from the authority of deliberation, and from dialogue, women seem to be excluded from the dramatic experience. The drama is not appropriate to the class of the gender 'women'.¹⁷

Though the temptation to dismiss Western dramatic theory and its fruits out of hand is strong for the feminist theorist and actress (she is, after all, utterly excluded), still it is useful to look at what this powerful body of thinking--originating with Aristotle's Poetics--says about dramatic characters and where this leaves the actress and her part.

(Strategies of resistance and revolution depend on the knowledge of where one is situated.)

The deep structure of Western drama--at its origin--rigidly adhered to the aesthetic principles derived from man's identification with gods: a moral order in which woman and her part in drama stand as a supreme test by which the tragic hero's moral resistance is measured.

Aristotle is the first theorist of drama in the Western tradition. And it is he who initiates a kind of dramatic cult of "nature" in which tragedy is said to represent the truth of what is. "Tragedy advanced by slow degrees," Aristotle writes, and "having passed through many changes, it found its natural form, and there it stopped."¹⁶

This idea of nature of some kind of guiding absolute--in content and form--can be traced throughout dramatic theory--to Stanislavsky and his theory of acting which, he claims, is based "on the laws of nature." Nature, as authority, can have no challenger. Nature, in this sense, is a kind of holy sanction against alternative visions of reality, rather than a thing in itself.

As anyone who studies the theatre is forced to know, Aristotle defines tragedy as an "imitation of an action and of life, and life consists in action."¹⁶ The "personal agents" of this action are the dramatic characters. Characters are vessels which serve the dramatic purpose which is moral.

Character is that which reveals moral purpose, showing what kind of things a

man chooses or avoids. Speeches, therefore, which do not make this manifest, or in which the speaker does not choose or avoid anything whatever, are not expressive of character.²⁰

This is the first statement of an idea which will be glorified by the German Romantics centuries later: character as choice. Without free will to take action which is chosen there can be no drama. Where does this leave the woman and her part? The tragic notion of dramatic characters has no place for those with no free will, no choice to act.

Hysteria can be defined as the inability to act, to speak out, to ask directly. Its manifestations are bursts of diffuse reaction--distorted responses. Reactions. Contortions. Hysteria is an answer to entrapment, to slavery, to repression. It is never freely chosen.

The dictates of tragedy exclude anything but direct consciously willed action. Aristotle adds:

Within the action there must be nothing irrational. If the irrational cannot be excluded, it should be outside the scope of tragedy.²¹

Man's control over the irrational must appear complete in this highest of representational forms. However, the playwright is given complete artistic license to present his fantasy of reality. The past, present and future belong to him--as does the interpretation of events.

The poet being an imitator. . . must of necessity imitate one of three objects--things as they are, things were or as they are said or thought to be, or things as they ought to be.²²

A kind of representational tyranny is established. Perpetration of aesthetic lies are sanctioned--if they serve the moral imperatives of those in power.

If it be objected that the description is not true to fact, the poet may perhaps reply--'But the objects are as they ought to be' In examining whether what has been said or done by someone is poetically right or not, we must not look merely to the particular act or saying, and ask whether it is poetically good or bad. We must also consider by whom it is said or done, to whom, when, by what means, or for what end; whether, for instance, it be to secure a greater good, or avert a greater evil.²³

The standard for representation established here confuses "poetical rightness"--or aesthetic laws--with moral imperatives. This must be seen to have had an overwhelming influence on the way female characters are portrayed in drama from the classical Greek period to the present.

For even "the impossible" can be justified by:

1. "artistic requirements"
2. "higher reality"
3. "received opinion"²⁴

And censure is saved for that which is irrational, morally dangerous, contradictory--contrary to poetical rightness.

Woman's truth, then, comes under censure even before it is acknowledged, for it stands outside the tragic realm of freedom and choice of action. Woman has no choice as tragic character.

The glorification and moral elevation of rationality and freedom of will reached its zenith in the theoretical writings on the drama of the early German Romantics, Friedrich Schiller, August Wilhelm von Schlegel and Arthur Schopenhauer. And here, the woman's role becomes disturbingly clear.

Rational man who is the subject of tragedy is tested by suffering and temptation--by the passions, the impulses, the sensuous, the irrational--embodied in the construct, woman. The female characters serve Aristotle's moral purpose as that which must be overcome, rejected, superseded through the free will of man if man is to reach tragic stature.

The Romantic idea of tragedy is a private "men's only" club (one might call it Infinity), where free will, moral elevation, the sublime state of mind are available--granted at the high price of suffering, sacrifice and determination. What must be overcome--and is externalized in drama--is man's struggle with passion, dependence, sensuous nature, his earth-boundness, bodily death--the finite.

A sample of words and phrases that stand in for WOMAN in the theoretical writings on tragic character in the Early German Romantics:

passion attack	torments of the senses demons	tempest which stirs up the whole of sensuous nature
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feelings sensuous	weakness animal nature
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nature	(a reminder of the conception of madness in the Classical Age as described by Foucault)	the act of natural force
blind sway of instinct	vulgar or common	final triumph of necessity
physical necessity	utter perversity natural force	full load of suffering earthly life

For Schiller, tragedy becomes a celebration of the triumph of free will over sensuous nature. Action taken by the tragic hero must be moral--"That is, an action comprehended in the field of free will."²⁵ The hero is a suffering man discovered "half way between utter perversity and entire perfection." Struggle can either be active or contemplative--the latter, a state which stands in exact opposition to the hysterical reaction of the female construct. The "sublime state of mind" which signals the victory of man's freedom of will is not open to women. "Everything sublime proceeds exclusively from reason."²⁶

In his essay "The Pathetic" (1793), Schiller elaborates on tragic representation:

It is not suffering in itself, but only the resistance opposed to suffering, that is pathetic and deserving of being represented.²⁷

Schiller places independence above all human capacities--nearest to God, to the sublime state valued above all others and celebrated in representation. Independence is tested by temptation:

In order. . . that the intelligence may reveal itself in man as a force independent of nature, it is necessary that

nature should have first displayed all her power before our eyes.

The sensuous being must be profoundly and strongly affected, passion must be in play thus the reasonable being may be able to testify his independence and manifest himself in action.

To resist a tempest which stirs up the whole of sensuous nature, and to preserve the freedom of the soul, a faculty of resistance is required infinitely superior to the act of natural force.

It will not be possible to represent moral freedom, except by expressing passion, or suffering nature, with the greatest vividness.²⁸

In this discussion of suffering woman is never mentioned. But the history of female dramatic characters leaves no doubt that the hero's most vivid suffering is produced by women. And it is man's resistance to all she represents that raises his suffering to tragic pathos and leads to the eventual triumph of independence will, reason--often over women's dead bodies.

Schiller concludes that the independent spirit of the tragic hero or "spiritual being" can manifest itself in two sublime ways.

As state: "The possibility of a will absolutely free"

As action: "This absolute freedom of willing."²⁹

In contrast to the religious aesthetic language of tragic heroism, the hysterical female characters are inscribed by censure, ridicule, revulsion--the language of eroticism and sin.

Schlegel writes that in order

to establish the claims of the mind to a divine origin, its earthly existence must be disregarded as vain and insignificant.³⁰

Schlegel's "earthly existence," heroically transcended, is a euphemism for woman and the longings she evokes--for lust--which "prostrates" man's "mental energies" or "calls forth the most heroic endurance."³¹

In Schlegel's estimation of the Greek Tragical State, the hero is in a battle of opposition between "inward liberty and external necessity."³² Necessity is not only physical but spiritual--destiny or fate. And man's will asserts itself against needs and eventual death.

In his brilliant Romantic extreme, Schopenhauer asserts that the tragic hero's ultimate act of independence and will is the "surrender. . . of the very will to live." (The World as Will and Idea, 1818)

In tragedies the noblest men, after long conflict and suffering, at last renounce the ends they have so keenly followed, and all the pleasures of life forever, or else freely and joyfully surrender life itself.³³

Such noble tragedy in the life of a man is the result of "pure perception," even beyond the will--but only reached through free will.

Clearly, notions of "pure perception" and the triumph of free will over the very will to live--and their elevation to tragic status--are entirely the preserve of men. Woman suffer

and die--often by their own hand--in drama and in disproportionate numbers, but they are never tragic heroes. They are kept out of the tragic role by their irrationality, eroticism and lack of will--their utter dependence. They are only and ever hysterical victims. Even suicide is a succumbing, not an act of will or renunciation of will. To renounce the will one must first possess it.

Pornography and circus are the appropriate stages for women characters. Even "saintly" female constructs experience God differently than the tragic hero. Again, man's contemplation of God is rational--the product of will and independence which transcends physical/sensuous passion. The female revels in the sensuous, passionate, erotic, ecstatic contact with God. Where the tragic male's spiritual state is ultimately heroic, her ultimate state is hysterical.

WOMAN: Hysterical/Orgasmic Erotic Bliss: Pornography
 MAN: Heroic/Resistant Contemplative/Sublime: Tragedy

If female characters have no free wills to resist suffering and no choice to take action, what have they been doing in drama for centuries?

The theory of the tragic offers them the role of representing all that the hero must suffer from and finally overcome. The contemporary feminists' phrase, "object of desire," is perhaps not strong enough to suggest the morally

corrupt/aesthetically necessary place the woman's part takes in tragic structure.

Even seeming action of some female characters can only, finally, be viewed as Reaction in the classical sense. For example, the great classical Revenging women present rage but demonstrate no conscious will to overcome its suffering--no resistance to passion, to the emotions of anger. Thus their actions are hysterical--not rational. Never heroic.

In the contemporary world, there is the temptation to believe that we are post-heroic. However, as wars continue to flourish--and new heroes in the classical, repressive, rational mold are created, it should come as no surprise that the Aristotelian definitions still hold.

However, for the feminist theorist or actress, it is surely rather shocking to discover Stanislavsky echoing Aristotle and the Romantics--with the added legitimizing weapon of science--replacing the old moral and sublime bases of heroic theory with "psychological truth."

Stanislavsky's theoretical writings on characterization insist on the privileged status of action--but even more rigidly: they are devoted to a system of unwavering, direct lines of desire and action.

In the Method one is taught all parts are an equal challenge and should be prepared in the same way. Stanislavsky makes no distinction between male and female characters. However, his insistence on the importance of emotion in

truthful representation leads one to suspect that his system is designed to bring some sort of emotional truth to men's acting--to color men's roles.

Also, there seems to be an attempt written into the system to control or direct women's feelings by giving the female character something to do.

Stanislavsky's psychological answer to the challenge of characterization offers the actress a three-pronged approach which arguably leads her on a space-walk--wandering the moon on an imagined plane with little to do with the world of the play. Cast into the turmoil of a system that is not structured for her:

- Believing
- Feeling
- Inventing

In his teaching text, Building A Character, Stanislavsky describes the process of creating a character with the imagery of control. Preparing a role involves

working out the means of reuniting all these parts we have been studying and harnessing them in a common action.³⁴

This directing and controlling method, he says, "is a part of our organic natures."

It is not possible to invent a system.
We are born with it inside us. . .³⁵

This innate creative system is rooted in action and "all action in the theatre must have an inner justification, must be logical, coherent and real. . ." ³⁶ Clearly, the illogical, fantastic part the actress plays cannot succumb to this

"innate" system. For the actress, the "unbroken line" of her part leads to madness, death, sacrifice of self. Hardly the goal of conscious logic. Something else is at play.

When Stanislavsky speaks of the "real" or truth for the stage, he is adamant that the actors understand that artistic truth "is what you can sincerely believe in."³⁷ Truth and belief become one on stage. Like faith, the actor's belief in an imaginary world carries him or her to a creative plane--to a true life on stage.

Meanwhile, Stanislavsky argues, the inner life of a character must grow out of the actor's "own inner elements." This confusion of faith, the calling up of inner feelings and imagination, with logic and directed action must be put under control of the actress. In an illogical, hysterically reactive part, what happens to the actress's sense of truth as she tries to create some motivation--through-line of action, some logical goal?

If Stanislavsky's system elevates belief while constraining it to logic and directed objectives, Foucault's study of madness demonstrates that illusions of the madman are founded on the language of logic--on a system unshakably believable within its own set of rules and order. When the actress accepts the fantasy of her part with belief, and seeks out and invents a logic for it, she has entered the twilight where illusion becomes King.

What Stanislavsky's system asks of the actress is as fantastic as the narrative conclusions of psychoanalysis--a logical sequential, motivated explanation of hysterical fantasy which is most clearly open to acting out of feeling--the presentness of re-action outside logic and sequence.

The circumstances of her given character, the emotions appropriate to its life on stage, are in the case of most women's roles in opposition to a system of directed action. The actress is torn by the illogicality of her part and the imposed logic of the system in which she is asked to participate.

It is like a woman indeed
to take rapture before the fact has shown for true.
They believe too easily, are too quick to shift
from ground to ground; and swift indeed
the rumor voiced by a woman dies again."

Agamemnon (lines 483-497)

The chorus of old men expressing distrust of Clytemnestra's belief in signals of Troy's defeat.

This assessment of woman's gullibility and untrustworthiness might stand up well as an expression of the actress's plight in the theatrical system of realistic acting. The hysterical text, struggling to construct the female--always just outside its grasp--takes circuitous routes in its efforts to represent woman. The text presents first one, then another "rapture"--each compromising the last.

The actress, in giving herself up to raptures, these hysterical "rumors"--must continuously "shift from ground to ground"--finally "building a character" whose being is perceived as changeable and untrustworthy.

For the faithful (in Stanislavsky's meaning) actress, each hysterical rumor must precipitate another representation to replace the last. Ironically, the multiple personalities of the female construct which lead to its condemnation as acting hysteria-- are the result of an actress intent on overcoming and unifying the fragments of her part: only exposing the falseness of their union--as illness.

Given the nature of her reactive part, the actress must feed her artistic instinct for belief and truth with emotions. She holds on to emotions at the expense of other parts of herself because they are the only truly used tools of her trade. She dismisses her own ideas, actions--minimizes her potential vision in this emotional confine. Emotions are what the actress has been conditioned to parade, keep active, stirred, readied, elevated in herself. This is surely a kind of crime against her. Stanislavsky believed that feelings cannot be controlled: "they control us" and thus have to be left up to nature. However the actress has had to learn to control and manipulate emotions: to rely on their capacity as expression and reaction. Emotions are the actress's psychic muscle.

Stanislavsky held the grotesque in highest esteem--perhaps against the better judgement of psychoanalytic theory.

The true grotesque is the ideal of our theatre creativity. . . . a vivid and bold externalization based on such tremendous all-embracing inner content that it reaches the limits of exaggeration.³⁸

And here, in this grotesque vision, the actress seems to have the greatest chance to realize the truth of her part. Her part is a vivid and bold externalization of male hysteria taken to the limits of exaggeration. In saying "I am" as Stanislavsky asks the actor to do, the actress enters the heart of the madness of her part.

"An imaginary fiction has taken possession of you," Stanislavsky writes.³⁹ Ironically, Stanislavsky admits that inspiration, when it comes, defies his systematic acting technique--exposes a "lack."

The "unexpected something" carries the actor "beyond his own consciousness" into "bold illogicality, rhythmic in its unrhythmicness, full of psychologic understanding in its very rejection of ordinarily accepted psychology."⁴⁰

Acting, ultimately, "breaks all the rules." Like Freud, Stanislavsky turns to confession:

I confess that in the realm of the intuition and the subconscious I know nothing, except that these secrets are open to the great artist Nature.⁴¹

It would seem that the actress's difficulty with the Method, finally, establishes the truth of the irrational hysteria inherent in her representation. Hers is, perhaps,

the most believable part in a fantastic world of repressed emotion and single "unbroken" action. What is true is the male hysteria--in female disguise. But as the actress is given the part, clearly it would be wisest (as Stanislavsky finally concedes) to trust her to act it out as it is written--illogically, diffusely, ripe with irrationality. There is also the possibility that the hysteric is the only truly willful hero in drama. Full of the will of defiance--caught in a repressive dramatic structure.

Having explored the nature of the hysterical part, it becomes imperative to ask what the actress can do to cure herself. I begin with Foucault who discovered several ideas for the cure of delirium of madness in the classical period. Ironically, these seem to offer some analogous possibilities--even in this age--for the actress. Foucault introduces these techniques by suggesting their radical, varied nature. He categorizes these treatments which enter and open up irrationality as opposed to locking and hiding it away--that "suppressing." The first "cure", he calls AWAKENING:

Since delirium is the dream of waking persons, those who are delirious must be torn from this quasi-sleep, recalled from their waking dream and its images to an authentic awakening, where the dream disappears before the images of perception.⁴²

He holds Descartes up as model of an effort of self-cure through radical consciousness--"the very awareness of the dream."⁴³ To be absolutely awake one must be struck by the contrast between consciousness and dream. Sudden shock can produce such an awakening, but, so too, can wisdom which is gradual.

The illusion of the woman on stage is so great and so bound up with the origin of theatrical representation, that awakening is very difficult to achieve. The actress embodies physically, the delusion--the delirium--of the hysterical part which is a dream. Acting on stage, in this sense, is a dream which can be ended only through the very body of the actress. Wisdom means really seeing what is there which is most trying when one is impersonating the no-thing that masks what is there. Seeing the mask of nothing is an important first step for the actress's recovery.

Foucault identifies a second technique for curing delirium which, he says, is "rigorously opposed to that of awakening": THEATRICAL REPRESENTATION.⁴⁴ It is a fascinating paradox that illusion should be put at the service of curing illusion. However, for the actress, there are some helpful ideas and strategies at play in this process. If acting is disease, can it not also be cure?

Psychodrama is now a legitimate and trusted tool. Those who work with people for whom reality is problematic use

acting as a means of revelation: exposing truth in its hidden place in representation of memory, emotion or action.

The psychological discovery of truth through the distancing of self from act to see what acting can teach is in direct opposition to the psychology of immersion in which acting is being. In immersion, there is no distance from which to make a discovery.

Foucault describes the idea behind the practice of theatrical representation as cure practiced two hundred years ago:

Here the therapeutic operation functions entirely in the space of the imagination; we are dealing with the complicity of the unreal with itself; the imagination must play its own game, voluntarily propose new images, espouse delirium for delirium's sake, and without opposition or confrontation, without even a visible dialectic, must, paradoxically, cure. Health must lay siege to madness and conquer it in the very nothingness in which disease is imprisoned.⁴⁵

The method for achieving this end has useful implications for the actress in her illusionary role:

Without a break, without a jolt, perception can continue the dream, fill in the gaps, confirm what is precarious about it, and lead to its fulfillment.⁴⁶

Foucault continues:

Representation within the image is not enough; it is also necessary to continue the delirious discourse. . . . The problem is not to pursue the delirium, but by continuing it to bring it to an end. It must be led to a state of paroxysm and crisis in which, without any addition of a foreign element, it is confronted by

itself and forced to argue against the demands of its own truth.... If it represents it at the risk of confirming it, it is in order to dramatize it.⁴⁷

Summoning all the imaginative power at her creative disposal, the actress continues the delirious discourse--the dream--fills in the gaps and confirms the hysteria which is her part.

It is within a continuous discourse that the elements of delirium, coming into contradiction, bring on the crisis. A crisis which is, in a very ambiguous manner, both medical and theatrical.⁴⁸

Transcendence, immersion, resistance are replaced by theatrical representation: by the imaginative fulfillment of the hysterical discourse so that it is exposed in all its contradictions as a lie--as madness.

There was yet another method by which the illusions of madness were thought to be cured--the logical extension of theatrical representation:

Since madness is illusion, the cure of madness, if it is true that such a cure can be effected by theatre, can also, and still more directly be effected by the suppression of theatre.⁴⁹

This "return to the Immediate" technique has an interesting connection to Brechtian anti-theatrical, anti-illusory techniques of performance. The goal of immediacy, Foucault says, is anti-aesthetical:

To entrust madness and its empty world directly to the plenitude of a nature which does not deceive because its immediacy does not acknowledge non-being.⁵⁰

The 18th century doctors sent their lunatics away from the seat of aesthetics to the natural world, but Foucault explores the psychological applications as well as the physical:

The cure of madness thus supposes a return to what is immediate . . . in relation to the imagination--a return that dismisses from man's life and pleasures everything that is artificial, unreal, imaginary.⁵¹

It is interesting that feminist psychoanalytical theorists have discussed the hystericization of women as an illness that can only be cured through the woman's immediate connection and consciousness with her own body and mind. The strategies they propose sound a lot like those classical ideas about the cure and the reform of madness. Strategies for resolving the actress's dilemma can be similarly discussed--and have been already, in relation to specific acting challenges.

Feminist psychoanalysis, however, suggests that any feminist strategy for acting must begin with the question of desire. In her discussion of the hysteric, Monique David-Ménard identifies what may be the root of the actress's dilemma:

The hysteric's problem lies in her lack of a body. The failure in the symbolization of desire, the prohibition of jouissance that polarizes the history of her body, simultaneously eradicates the reality, even the perceptual reality of that body.⁵²

Any way clear from this problem must begin in the text itself for the actress. Madelon Gohlke advises:

read on the margins of discourse. . . to become engaged in a fundamentally historical process, that of making what is unconscious conscious and thus altering and displacing the location of the unconscious . . . transform[ing] its metaphoric base.⁵³

As has been suggested, the creation knows more than it knows. The actress can engage this unconscious "truth" in the dramatic text. Only after dislodging the unconscious can the actress "begin to affirm her own reality."⁵⁴

Rosi Braidotti finds the possibility of self-representation in the margins of discourse:

The woman-in-me is . . . elsewhere--on the margin, in the periphery, in the shade. . . Contrary to Lacan, I maintain that my ex-centricity vis-à-vis the system of representation points to another logic, another way of "making sense": . . . not silent. . . part of a symbolic referential system by and of women themselves. . . radically different.⁵⁵

If the actress cannot step outside of language, sexuality, or bound off the stage, she can, as Braidotti suggests, exist "In language but in process within it," refusing its old definition of woman by presenting a different woman:

to disengage . . . from the trappings of a "feminine mystique" defined as a dark continent, or of "femininity" as the eternal masquerade . . . [is] the liberation of woman's ontological desire to be female subjects.⁵⁶

But, how, practically, is this work to be accomplished as actress? At the outset of such a quest, it is valuable to

recognize an inherent resistance in the texts to feminist revision. Kathleen McLuskie has written that in the case of Measure for Measure and many other texts, feminist criticism is "restricted to exposing its own exclusion":

It has no point of entry into it, for the dilemmas of the narrative and sexuality under discussion are constructed in completely male terms . . . ⁵⁷

McCluskie insists that in some cases a feminist can only enter a text that has been radically altered--reconstructed in terms of its narrative and scenes, and she points to a rather disturbing consequence if such radical strategy is employed:

to take up that position involves refusing the pleasure of the drama and the text, which imply a coherent maleness in their point of view.⁵⁸

Even avoiding the question of the audience's pleasure, there is the real question of the actress confronting her own pleasure in the cohesive male text. There is a way in which the aesthetic unity of the text seduces the actress--just as the father's law seduces the daughter and provides pleasure.

It is worth noting, however, that by the very fact of her difference, woman interferes radically with the text she reads. Clever as deconstructionist Jonathon Culler's idea may sound, "reading as a woman" or even acting as a woman is not a construct--unless one denies the subjective difference of female/male experience.

Shoshana Felman has described the way in which woman, in assuming her "place as speaking subject" interferes with male

writing, through "female utterance and reading." Here, she writes of her own reading of Freud's "interrogation" of femininity:

I have enacted sexual difference in the very act of reading Freud's interrogation of it . . . with the purpose not of rejecting Freud's interrogation, but of displacing it, of carrying it beyond its stated question, by disrupting the transparency and misleading self-evident universality of its male enunciation.⁵⁹

Beyond the act of being female subject, there is the possibility of active critique. Jane Gallop offers Luce Irigaray's feminist critique of Freud's final essay on "Femininity", as "an important training ground for a new kind of battle." In her *Speculum*, Irigaray employs a new kind of analysis. Gallop explains:

Irigaray's tactic is a . . . close reading, which separates the text into fragments of varying size, quotes it, and the comments with various questions and associations. She never sums up the meaning of Freud's text, or binds all her commentaries, questions, and associations into a unified representation, a coherent representation. Her commentaries are full of loose ends and unanswered questions . . . [Freud's] discourse is "shaken up" and reduced to unredeemed disorder.⁶⁰

It might be argued that disorder can provide a new kind of aesthetic and even intellectual pleasure.

It is not surprising that Stanislavsky's method of textual analysis for the actor relies on the breaking of a text into fragments. Science and the exciting science of

psychology were models: as they were for his recognition of an unconscious text--a subtext--underlying the words and actions of the characters. However, like his contemporaries in psychoanalysis, Stanislavsky's textual analysis calls for a final unifying idea to which all others direct themselves. And the fragmentary examination of the text is a temporary means to a cohesive picture. Questions must always be answered by the text in Stanislavsky's method; just as Freud counted on the answers of his theories. Irigaray's analysis "does not aim to decipher . . . but rather to unravel 'an old dream'. . . of symmetry."⁶¹

In analyzing the text, the actress can refuse to aim for a unified interpretation. She can "unravel", disrupt, question, comment: breaking up the coherency and exploring the underbelly--the unconscious of the text, where the text knows more than it knows about its failure to close the gap that is woman.

The "woman" in the text is the place where the actress can work best at this unraveling. Jane Gallop describes this point of entry:

The female sex organs are the blind spot . . . But a blind spot can also be thought of as the locus of greatest resistance in a dream, the least easily interpretable point and thus the most tantalizing. . . The locus of greatest resistance. . . is the heart of the dream, the crisis point crying, begging for analysis.⁶²

The blind spots in the text, the gaps which lack, appear as hysterical sites where the sign of woman reacts. Mary Jacobus points to the "site where something (the feminine) is hidden by what comes to stand for it."⁶³

One might speak of places where the text goes mad. Erupts. If, as Marianne Novy argues, Ophelia "must go mad in order to escape social restrictions and take center stage, then the feminist reader/actress must ask how an Ophelia comes to stand for what is hidden in the male text."⁶⁴

What, then, is the actress to do about creating a character when the "feminine" resides in "the unsayable, unrepresentable of discourse and representation?" (Jacobus)⁶⁵ It may be that rebellion is in order. Mary Jacobus argues the need for a new kind of critical question:

Perhaps the question feminist critics should ask themselves is not "Is there a woman in this text?" but rather: "Is there a text in this woman?"⁶⁶

The feminist actress might ask, as Stanislavsky advises:

Who am I?
Where am I coming from?
What are my given circumstances?
What do others say about me?
What do I want?
Where am I going?
Why am I here?

But her answers may hardly lead the actress to a unified, whole character. Mary Jacobus has described the experience of the woman writer as unavoidably estranging. The feminist actress's experience could be analogous. The theatrical insertions in the following are my own:

The hystericization of the woman writer [actress] is not only an aspect of the hystericization of women: it is a symptom of the hystericization of writing [the script]. Woman has become a metaphor for the singleness that writing [drama] has lost [when it consisted solely of male participants] so that the woman writer [actress] comes to figure both for herself and for her readers [audience] the hysterical doubleness and incompleteness which representation must repress in order to figure as true, unified and whole.⁶⁷

In turning to practical feminist strategies for the actress and the hysterical dilemma of her part, it is quite extraordinary to discover that a kind of philosophy of fragmentation is proffered. If nothing whole is true, then aesthetic truth must have at its base a consciousness of its incompleteness--shattering the unity of perception. Elin Diamond argues very convincingly that Brechtian theatrical theory offers the most useful methods for the actress approaching her art with feminist goals.⁶⁸

Resisting what I have called the hystericization of the woman's part involves a triple fragmentation: The woman in her historical time resists and observes the actress who, in turn, stands apart from the character she presents. Diamond elaborates upon Timothy Wiles' interpretation of Brecht:

The historical subject plays an actor presumed to have superior knowledge in relation to an ignorant character from the past, but the subject herself remains as divided and uncertain as the spectators to whom the play is addressed. This performer-subject neither disappears into representation of the character nor into

a representation of the actor; each remains processual, historical, complete.⁶⁹

Woman, as feminist political being in her time, stands as body on stage. She is not the embodiment of absence. Nor does she act. She is fluidly available to present actress and character: the role of actress as consciously distinct from her as the character the actress presents. Diamond calls this woman-on-stage "the body in historicization . . . always insufficient and open."

The performer's body is also historicized, loaded with its own history and that of the character, and these histories ruffle the smooth edges of the image of representation.⁷⁰

In this way, the actress resists the fetishization that so clouded Duse's attempts to transcend through fragmentation. She removes the annihilating power of the female part to disturb and dislodge the actress's self. Vivien Leigh's fate was the culmination of a tragic aesthetic lie of wholeness. It is, perhaps, paradoxical that the actress's reclamation of aesthetic control should involve the representation of incompleteness and contradiction.

Brecht called for what he termed "historicized performance" in which, as Diamond explains:

gaps are not to be filled in, seams and contradictions [are to be] shown in all their roughness.⁷¹

The gestus was social/aesthetic weapon that Brecht imagined would revolutionize performance:

The social gest is the gest relevant to society, the gest that allows conclusions

to be drawn about the social circumstances.⁷²

In gestic performance, the actress is asked to stand apart from--to show off--her hysterical role and is called upon to unceasingly question, observe, contradict its speech and behavior, its premise and position.

And due to the special nature of the hysterical part (hysteria as acting), a fourth fragmentation becomes necessary: the woman stands apart from the actress who plays a character whose mode of being is actress.

It is worth noting that Brecht's first theatrical influence was the cabaret--comedians commenting on their roles. His ideal epic actor was Charlie Chaplin--originally a music hall artist on the London stage. He liked his actors in the white face paint associated with clowns--a technique he considered estranging. And here it seems appropriate to ask whether the hysterical female part might not benefit from the absolute white face of the clown--and the exaggerated grotesqueries--the physical, emotional and vocal antics of Charcot's hysterics. What happens to the woman's part when the ridicule is ritualized in a comic manifestation that does not allow any illusion of reality? Placing the hysterical female in the circus atmosphere in which it most naturally belongs and does reside--subliminally: in the world of unabashed fantasy and cruelty--of mockery and riot.

With Brechtian strategies it is possible to move from circus performance to the potential for political presence.

Jill Dolan has written of the possibilities of Brechtian strategy:

The female body may no longer be a hysterical spectacle, but a term in the new representational debate.⁷³

Margot Heinemann in her essay, "How Brecht Read Shakespeare," recounts Brecht's strategies for approaching a Shakespeare text. Brecht saw great and endless theatrical possibilities:

It was above all contradictory, unpredictable dialectical comment . . . that he felt was . . . raw material to be worked on, a problem not yet resolved.⁷⁴

If the dialectical is there within Shakespeare, then it might also be possible to find it or create it in other texts. And the dialectical presence/absence as "raw material not yet solved" could allow the absent woman to become present--like a conjuring trick--in the dialectical process. The stage allows her to appear out of its nothingness, its nowhere.

Brecht on Shakespeare brings to the feminist reader's mind the possibility of female performance:

I would call your attention to the wealth of living elements still to be found in such works at apparently dead junctures. An infinitesimal addition, and they spring to life, specifically now, specifically not till now.⁷⁵

Irigaray's disrupting strategies can also be used as methods of attack on dramatic texts--and also as analogy for any woman's revolt against her hystericization--the hysterical part. Deborah A. Hooker takes the latter approach in her

study, "Coming to Cressida through Irigaray." Hooker is not directly concerned with using Irigaray's methods, but rather with re-viewing Cressida as an Irigaray-like figure hystericized by an oppressive patriarchy but involved in a struggle to subvert expectations--her exploitation and victimization--through performance and play. Here, acting is no longer a symptom of disease (or the disease itself) but a means of preserving or recovering some resistant self.

The apparent paradox of acting as self-preservation can be clarified if one recalls that acting and women were inseparably linked as illness by men. Whether Shakespeare thought Cressida hysterical or not is irrelevant in Hooker's feminist interpretation of her behavior. It is not impossible to imagine that women maintained their health and sanity through acting what was expected of them, while real emotion and reactions stayed hidden and preserved--feeding some instinct for survival and self-sustenance.

Is acting itself a female strategy? And if so, how can such a suggestion aid the actress trapped by the hysterical text. Why do women resort to performance? Is acting truer than the "truth" of male perception of woman as hysteric? Is acting hysteria a legitimate feminist strategy? What can it teach us about representation, self, and the madness of non-being?

Peter Erikson has argued in his "Rewriting the Renaissance, Rewriting Ourselves," that a feminist critical approach

to history draws its power from "its belief that the present has a valid, positive role in historical studies and from its commitment to cultural and social change." In contrast, new historicism, which is fixed in its period of study is "accompanied by neglect of politics in our own period," and thus, according to Erickson, is finally "apolitical and incompletely historicized."⁷⁶

The feminist position is similar to Brecht's idea of historicization which, as Elin Diamond explains, is an anti-realistic aesthetic approach for one's own historical time as well as the past. In Brecht's thinking, there can be no one legitimate way to act the historical "reality" of any character--let alone the female hysterical part. Plays and parts are constantly open to the ideological perspective and needs of the present political moment. Diamond:

Realism disgusted Brecht . . . because it is hegemonic: by copying the surface details of the world it offers the illusion of lived experience even as it marks off only one version of that experience.⁷⁷

In approaching Shakespeare's *Cressida* as a kind of historically trapped Irigaray, Hooker is able to find a "way of seeing" (Diamond's term for historicization) the character which, in turn, opens up the possibility of a feminist acting approach--a way of playing a character traditionally portrayed as a hysterical/dissimulating victim/whore. Hooker's *Cressida* is woman as revolutionary:

Irigaray recommends what *Cressida* in fact practices, that she 'speak only in rid-

dles, allusions, hints, parables.' Even if asked to clarify a few points . . . to double the misprision to the limits of exasperation.⁷⁸

Such an analysis could be transformed to performance through historicized gestus. Cressida puns and teases with irreverent wit, though she is "emphatically branded as 'coy' by readers who miss the desperation of her verbal fencing," Hooker argues.⁷⁹ Shakespeare's language is rich and open to subversive interpretations, but it is possible, too, that the language of any female hysteric is open to the strategy of tease and irreverence.

Perhaps there is a potential Irigaray inside every hysterical part: a deep point of disruption that sees and feels what the text doesn't (can't, won't): that the woman behind the character is there, acting the part assigned her-- and in the acting is preserving her self. If the self can be made visible as it struggles against, manipulates, uses, the role of hysteric, the actress can perform an anti-realism which is TRUE and full of the complex aesthetic questions Brecht longed to bring to the theatre.

As Sue-Ellen Case suggests, feminist theatrical strategies are "tactics to be employed" either in combination or as "alternative theoretical strategies for specific political purposes." In any case, theory must feed performance:

Retaining theory in a dialectical partnership with practice is one way to alleviate the anxieties among feminists that [theory] is elitist. If a theory does

not assume a transcendent posture, it can be used for the politics of the moment.⁸⁰

Lorraine Helms has demonstrated the possibility of applying various feminist acting strategies as they become necessary in a given character, scene or narrative structure. In her essay, "Playing the Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism and Shakespearean Performance," Helms begins with the female body as the historical source of feminist strategy:

The presence of the female body and female voice, quite apart from the details of interpretation created new meanings and subversive tensions.⁸¹

She argues that the woman's presence can powerfully transform the woman's part and rock traditional performance expectations.

Helms refers to the performance of Imogen Stubbs as the Jailer's Daughter in The Two Noble Kinsmen--"a crazed and nameless victim in the text"--to illustrate how an actress can command an extraordinary and feminist presence on stage:

During her mad scenes, her skill enabled her to climb a flagpole and to cross downstage on her hands while singing When the Jailer's Daughter was realized as the enactment of Imogen Stubbs, the performer's skill and strength turned the madness. . .to power.⁸²

Helms also applies textual analysis to "confront the linguistic recalcitrance of the Shakespearean construction of gender." Examining stage directions within lines of dialogue and in soliloquies, Helms finds that the female characters are "rarely alone on stage and even more rarely do they address

the audience directly." In these instances, Helms calls for a "gestic feminist criticism" to foreground the positioning of the actress."⁸³

A gest can "foreground the social contexts from which the character's alienation arises." Elsewhere, an actress may try to "discover performance choices which offer . . . scope for motivated activity."⁸⁴

Because this study is limited to the actress (or rather, "focused upon"--the actress is limitless) and her part, the luxury of stagings cannot be explored here, though such work is the fulfillment of a feminist theatrical vision. Hélène Cixous' staging of her dramatized version of Freud's case study of hysterical Dora can serve as an ideal analogical model for the performance of male playwright's hysterical characters.

Sharon Willis gives this account of the intention of Cixous' Portrait.

What Freud strove to organize into a complete narrative account is reproduced in the play as fragmented, divided, a stream that is perpetually disrupted by obstacles or diverted in detours.⁸⁵

Willis points to an important strategy that Cixous uses to expose the role of the hysteric as actress: hysteria as performance undermines the stage as site of truth.

The hysteric becomes an actress to make visible the scene she describes, thus sundering the analytic space and literalizing the figuration of the hysteric as an 'actress,' as a faker.⁸⁶

A wide range of theatrical devices stage a "fragmented ventriloquization of Freud's text," and show up in the way in which theatre hystericizes the actress in her role which is only an acting out at the scene of fantasy. In the end, Willis says, "the stage is an hystericized body--a giant relay where identifications are acted out, but never consolidated in identities."⁸⁷

And Cixous' staging goes further: not only is the "hysteric" freed from the trappings (trap) of identity but she is exposed as a lie:

Femininity is revealed as a masquerade in the domain of masks: the theatre. But this hyperbolic performance of image construction calls into question the purity of the mask, source of theatrical pleasure. This performance refuses complete separation of mask from body, stage from social space, illusion from reference Thus it is possible to conceive of the body inscribed as it is in social space, as itself a mask, a masquerade.⁸⁸

This idea of woman as masquerade has a theoretical history which can serve feminist acting strategies. Joan Riviere's 1929 article, "Womanliness as a Masquerade," defined womanliness as a protective, and at the same time, repressive mask. The highly feminine woman, according to Riviere, became a parody in her conscious effort to cover up her masculine tendencies.

Womanliness could be assumed and worn as a mask, both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it--much as a thief will turn out his pockets

and ask to be searched to prove that he has not the stolen goods.⁸⁹

The masquerade as a defence that Riviere recognized becomes offensive--an aesthetic attack--as masquerade theory evolves. And the penis-envy that lurks behind Riviere's feminine excess is transformed by feminist thinking: masquerade comes to expose the emptiness, the nothingness behind it in its terrifying excess of unreality. Feminist psychoanalysts begin to look at the psychic source of psychoanalysis itself. And behind the hysterical parodic masquerade they find the male who has created and imposed the mask.

Thus, masquerade theory can be seen to support the position of those who believe that the female part is a transvestite role. The hysterical female mask once assumed by the actress as unquestioningly as her off-stage counterparts' assumption of their social/sexual "femininity" can become a weapon of exposure. Not penis envy, but the surprising of the hidden flasher, playing woman.

Mary Ann Doane has discussed the masquerade in its relation to the woman's part in film:

Masquerade . . . constitutes an acknowledgement that it is femininity which is constructed as mask--as the decorative layer which conceals a non-identity.⁹⁰

And she offers the masquerade as a technique.

The Masquerade, in flaunting femininity, holds it at a distance. Womanliness is a mask which can be worn or removed . . . Masquerade . . . involves a realignment of femininity, the recovery, or more accu-

rately, simulation, of the missing gap or distance. To masquerade is to manufacture a lack in the form of a certain distance between oneself and one's image. If, as Moustafa Safouan points out, ". . . to wish to include in oneself as an object the cause of the desire of the Other is a formula for the structure of hysteria," then masquerade is anti-hysterical for it works to effect a separation between the cause of desire and oneself.⁹¹

This is a theoretical work intended to explore the acting woman. It would be naive to suggest that some of the analyses, suggestions and practical strategies offered here would be accepted by the traditionally-oriented power structure of the theatre or made room for in the unifying conception of most directors. Still, the actress can make a place for herself to examine the problems she faces as interpreter, artist and woman in playing the woman's part.

Stanislavsky's example, his "building a character" is misguided from the very conception. The actress, rather than building a character, must become a construct-shatterer. The "as-if-I-were-the-character" approach of Stanislavsky's method is dangerous for the actress. Her part must remain a "she" as the actress discovers what it is that is there and not there. No affirmation or complicity with hystericization is the essential starting attitude for a feminist strategy. (A psychological textbook and history of hysteria are useful tools in the study of female parts in drama.)

About the gaping holes or mysterious lacunae that are inherent in the hysterical representation of women: the actress is cautioned against an impulse to demystify, make whole; close in this sense, the wounds of her part. The impulse to cure is natural, but the cure can never be performed by covering over, hiding, making it all seem right.

Rebecca Smith's valuable analysis of Hamlet's Gertrude is a case in point. Gertrude, as Smith describes her is riddled with holes--something like a victim of machine-gun spray.

. . . Gertrude is problematic not because of layers of complexity or a dense texture but because . . . Shakespeare does not provide all the 'answers', all the necessary clues that would allow one to put together her character and fully understand her speech, actions, and motivations.⁹²

Smith approaches the "problem" of Gertrude, then, as a series of questions:

The murder of old Hamlet is not public knowledge, but does Gertrude know, or at least suspect? Is she guilty of past adultery as well as current incest? Does the closet scene demonstrate her acknowledgement of sexual guilt, and does she thereafter align herself with Hamlet in his quest for revenge and thus shun Claudius' touch and bed? Indeed, does Gertrude demonstrate change and development in the course of the play, or is she incapable of change?⁹³

Such questions presuppose:

1. a logical character to be discovered
2. the existence of answers

It may be that the actress must reassess the motives for questioning in the first place: it may be that answers are the source of her hystericization. Perhaps it is in answer-

ing that which can only be questioned, that constructs are legitimized as truth. It is possible that answers are the enemy of truth.

Smith wants to make a case for a new redeeming characterization of Gertrude that breaks through the traditional stereotype (based on the attitudes of the play's male characters toward her).

her personality is, both figuratively and literally defined by other characters . . . because of her malleability and weakness, the distorted image created and reflected by others--not the one created by her own words and actions--has predominated.⁹⁴

It is striking that what Smith defines as Gertrude's character is very much the non-being, self-less sign of woman that, indeed, stands in for the "distorted image created and reflected by others."

But Smith is determined to rely on Gertrude's words and actions (which she admits are negligible) in order to build a logical, whole and consistent character, where, it would seem, none exists. What do Gertrude's words and actions say, finally? How are they the source of the answers to the problematic questions that seem to Gertrude as questions that Hamlet can never solve?

Gertrude's words and actions . . . create not the lusty, lustful, lascivious Gertrude that one generally sees in stage and film productions but a compliant, loving, unimaginative woman whose only concern is pleasing others: a woman who seemed virtuous.⁹⁵

Gertrude's seeming virtue is exactly what enrages and confounds Hamlet into the philosophical heroism which is the play's meaning. The questions that Hamlet has about his mother (those Smith seeks answers for) have no answers that can possibly find expression in the course of the play--or in Gertrude's presentation: they are Hamlet's questions without answers, they are the story.

Thus, clearly, Gertrude is a very powerful example of a hysterical construct that can never be solved or answered in a unified interpretation. Gertrude is outside of wholeness. She is only, finally, the doubts and uncertainties that Hamlet sees in her: a construct of hysterical uncertainty.

Oddly, it may well be that the stylized, masked drag performance of the Player Queen is closest to the truth of Gertrude.

In her analysis, "This is and is not Cressida: the Characterization of Cressida," Janet Adelman uses Cressida's strange silencing and distancing into inexplicability in the course of the play as an opportunity, not to search for clues that can make her appear whole once again--but, instead, as a way to understand something about the construction of female characterization. There is, Adelman acknowledges (and this must be particularly the case for actresses)

. . . the need to respond to Shakespeare's characters as whole psychological entities. But characters may not always permit us to respond to them this way, or the presentation of character may shift in a way that disengages us from concern

with their inwardness The characters may be shaped by psychological pressures not their own. The psychological fantasies embedded in the creation of another character or in the play as a whole may require the sacrifice of the internal psychological consistency of any single character female characters are particularly prone to being so sacrificed, partly because of their status as "Others". . . . %

The following strategic model is offered as a possible way to begin questioning the role the actress must play. Such a model works best for the larger woman's parts--those in which a fair share of reaction and dialogue (action is rarely the providence of the female part) involve the female character. The model is a series of questions which can be asked, ignored, jumbled, in any order. Many of the questions are those that both male and female actors are traditionally trained to ask. But here, they are meant to provoke analysis and not to answer the fragmentation, inconsistencies, mysteries of the text and character with a unified, whole characterization. Like Irigaray, the actress questions to open and expose.

A place to begin is with the question of self. Barbara Johnson has noted that "the very notion of a self . . . has always . . . been modeled on man."⁹⁷ Where does that leave the female part?

Character Analysis: A Strategic Model

1. SELF
The actress seeks out the role's sense of self: The self as source from which all behavior and action flow. How does the character express her self? What does she say about herself?
2. Does she want things? What things? Needs?
3. What does she do in the text? Trace actions she takes. (Don't attempt a through-line.)
4. When does she react? To what does she react?
5. Describe her behavior (making no judgement, simply recording).
6. When is she present? In which scenes does she appear on stage?
7. When is she absent?
8. Record her ideas and thoughts, attitudes and opinions.
9. Record her silence. (Breuer has written of silence that it is the "hysterical text.")
10. What is left unspoken, unutterable, untold. (Is this Stanislavsky's sub-text?) Remains MYSTERY?
11. LOCATING SITES:
Jacobus has written of women, hysteria and the uncanny as "points of instability which threaten to expose theory, sexual difference and 'reality'... as constructs." "The site of repression . . . contains both strangeness and enslavement."⁹⁸ The hysterical sites are places of performances. The actress acts the character as actress: acting out through the character acting out.

12. When does she act? What about her part is conceived as performance--falseness?
13. Is it possible that the text is unable to contain her and that she becomes her own subject? What does the text know/see/say that the author doesn't? (How does the character know more than the author intended?)
14. Record her relationship to other characters as given in the text.
15. How is she described by others (author, characters)?
16. What are her symptoms?
17. What is she blamed for? What kind of sexual root has her illness?
18. What is she victim of?
19. What is the cure? Aesthetic Closure: moral satisfaction or destruction?
20. What is the future of your character? (If she is alive at the end of the play)

21. QUESTIONS FOR THE TEXT

Why? How? Can you find inconsistencies? Lies?

Things unprovable?
 unbelievable?
 unjustifiable?
 impossible?
 unmotivated?
 ridiculous?
 irrational?

Can you explain her actions?

What is behind the mystery of her motives?

22. ACCUSATIONS

Woman as sign of:

uncanniness
 inexplicability
 irrationality

Unresolvable

Unanswerable

Incomprehensible

23. PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS

What constraints are put on you by the script itself?

Language: look at the character's dialogue and monologues.

Her place in the scenes.

Staging: directions and action.

The physical life of the character: appearance.

In what way does your character entertain/affect others? The audience?

Traditional playing of the part: separating tradition from what's really there.

Genre

Stereotype

History of the text: What time does it represent?
When was it created?

Final thoughts on fantasy: What does the author hide?
What is he repressing/
transferring on to the
female part?

PART FIVE: Case Studies: Hysterical Parts

An actress needs time to think before answering.

Vivien Leigh

I have chosen several hysterical parts to analyze and categorized them by type. The distinct categories are, as mentioned earlier, artificial, but they are meant to elevate certain aspects of representation. They in no way represent the range of hysterical construction in the female repertoire, but I hope they can be seen as models for ways of looking and questioning female representation more generally.

Categories and Parts1. Pure Victimization and Hysterical Reaction

Io.....	<u>Prometheus Bound</u>	Aeschylus
Lavinia.....	<u>Titus Andronicus</u>	Shakespeare
Laura.....	<u>The Glass Menagerie</u>	Williams
Ophelia.....	<u>Hamlet</u>	Shakespeare

2. The Hysterical MindCassandra..... Agamemnon..... AeschylusMedea..... Medea..... EuripidesHelena..... All's Well That Ends Well... Shakespeare3. The Diagnosed Hysteric: Modern "Analyzed" Hysteria
of Repressed DesireJeanne..... The Devils..... WhitingJulie..... Miss Julie..... Strindberg4. The Actress as HystericalNina..... The Seagull..... ChekhovArkadina..... The Seagull..... "

Such diverse genres as 19th century opera and Japanese Noh drama contain vivid examples of hysterical constructs as do all genres and periods of Western drama. Later, I will make reference to the ongoing perpetration of female hysterification in contemporary drama and film--and their parallel and guiding force, political reality. With the advent of televised political debate, the parallels are more and more exposed to view.

It should be noted with interest that comic genres have been truer in their representation of women: Restoration Comedy and the French farce tradition stand out. In Restoration drama, female characters (which were played by women for

the first time in English theatre) sometimes exhibit control over their sexual destinies--with empowering wit. In French farce, males join females in their hystericization: implied in male comic hysteria is the relevant idea that men who exhibit "female" attributes (i.e. hysteria) are hilarious.

Dorine, the outspoken and clever household servant in Moliere's Tartuffe, is one of the rare, inevitably comedic female characters to escape hystericization. As in Moliere's French heirs, the farceurs, the leading male characters in Tartuffe are given and mocked for the irrational, possessed attributes of "women". Why does a Dorine exist at all? Perhaps because of her class, she is spared the fate of most women's parts. Moliere was a court-writer, after all, inhabiting a bourgeois environ in which servants were most often asexual in representation (though exploited in perverse ways in private realities).

Dorine battles hypocrisy, speaks her mind with passion, wit and sarcasm at every opportunity--and at length. She schemes the plot into being by manipulating lust, and finally, with the aid of a deus ex machina, she resolves the moral and emotional crises of her Master's house. Expressing no sexual desire of her own, she is one of the few truly freakish women in drama, possessing will and reflection. Dorine is allowed to perform and act because she serves the house and play from a social position outside of acceptably representable desire.

Is it possible that the maid's role in drama, when it

exceeds its several lines, is sometimes, by a quirk of fate--a running off at the mouth of insolence--that rare woman's part of wholeness, presence and voice? Or, is it as maid that the woman is seen and written to be in her proper place--thus, sane, normalized? Elaine Showalter has written of the great belief in back-breaking, mind-dulling, time-consuming housework as moral cure for hysteria that was practiced upon female patients in Victorian asylums. Though the actress may be grateful for Dorine, she must cautiously observe what keeps her free from sexual disease--the washing, the scrubbing, the cooking, the running, the serving--her acknowledged if unspoken role in drama.

The following analyses of hysterical parts will be based on the strategic model that closes Part Four. The first several analyses will adhere closely to the model's questions to illustrate its use. Afterwards, a freer utilization (a weaning away) becomes possible. Once the ear and eye are tuned to feminist questioning, patterns emerge and answers come with alarming sameness.

Pure Victimization and Hysterical Reaction

Poor Ophelia
Divided from herself and her fair
judgement
Without the which we are pictures,
or mere beasts.

Claudius Hamlet IV.V.

Io, Lavinia, Laura and Ophelia are pure victims. Among the least interesting of the hysterical canon, they are, perhaps, the most difficult to perform. They are extreme metaphors--without dimension--for woman as sexual illness. Utterly dependent, incapacitated by their desirability, reduced to hysterical outbursts, their suffering is sexual at its source: pure victimization and its hysterical reaction, based on literal and figurative rape. Their shared role of daughter is essential--even primary--to their identity. Their sexual victimization is the result of this subservient, unmarried, virginal position in the patriarchy.

Each of the plays in which these virgin hysterics appear have a male hero whose sufferings are tragic and are overcome through consciousness and will. The hysterical victims represent manifestations of the humiliation, guilt and shame of these hero's ennobled suffering. They can never reach tragic/heroic status themselves: they are dependent, helpless, without the will or the capacity to change their state. As metaphor, they are necessarily extreme and pure. They are physicalized in such a way that the question of will and

tion of their victimization. All that is open to these constructs is hysterical reaction.

I begin with Io, surely one of the oldest extant hysterical victims--and the most extreme.

IO

Sense of Self

She introduces her self as pain/fear/madness, as reaction to physical pain, bodily and mental exhaustion and terror. Her clearest sense of self is an explicit recounting of the tortures she suffers. Io is her punishment. She is hysterical in the hands of her torturer.

O,O,O,
 There it is again, there again--it stings me,
 . . . Keep it away. . .
 I'm frightened . . .
 He stalks me . . .
 to hunt me . . .
 drives me starving . . .¹

Io questions her fate. She has no knowledge. Dependent and without will, she asks of her oppressor-God:

Where are you bringing me, far wandering
 wanderings?
 Son of Kronos, what fault, what fault did
 you find in me that you should yoke me to
 a harness of misery like this, that you
 should torture me so to madness driven
 in fear of the gadfly?²

She can only plead for an end to her suffering:

Burn me. . . hide me in the earth: cast
 me away. . . but do not
 grudge me the granting of this prayer,
 King.
 Enough . . . I cannot find
 a way to escape. . ."³

She names herself:

Do you hear the voice of the cow-horned
maiden?

A victim of jealous plots.

The unlucky wandering maid.⁴

She laments her seduction and rape by the night visions that led to Hera's revenge--the loss of her beauty (her desirability) and her mind.

that ruin of my beauty

My mind and form were changed
and all distorted, horned . . .
pricked on by the sharp, biting gadfly,
leaping in frenzied jumps. . .⁵

She pleads for knowledge of her self, her fate, from Prometheus. Prometheus describes how she will bear the descendant who will free him. The questions end in the abrupt return of her madness:

Eleleu, Eleleu
It creeps on me again. . .
The mind destroying madness, burning me
up
And the gadfly's sting goads me on--
. . .and my heart in its fear knocks on
my breast.
There's a dazing whirl in my eyes. . .
the crazy frenzy; my tongue ungoverned
babbles, the words . . . strike wild
without aim or sense.⁶

Wants and Needs?

Io wants to end her suffering, to die. She needs to know how long she must suffer--her future. She begs for a "cure" for the "disease the Gods have sent me."⁷

What does she do in the text?

Io suffers and questions. She moans and babbles, trembles and foams at the mouth. She screams. She expresses unbearable torment. Her one moment of clarity in which she is able to ask Prometheus questions concerning her fate provides the audience with knowledge of Prometheus', the hero's, future.

When and to what does she react?

She reacts to the gadfly's sting, the madness, the burning, her terrible fate (past and future).

Behavior.

Desperate pleading. Maniacal questioning.

Presence and Absence.

Io appears on the scene only to disappear. She makes an entrance and exit and is never mentioned again. She comes as the embodiment of Prometheus' fate and is dispensed with as soon as his story is told.

Her ideas and thoughts, attitudes and opinions.

Io has no ideas, thoughts or opinions: only an attitude toward the cause of her suffering. She says she wants Zeus to fall from power in reaction to her pain.

Record her silence.

There are several long speeches in which Prometheus tells the story of Io's fate. Prometheus describes her as "crying and lamenting" even before she has heard what the future holds in store for her. As she listens to the news of the terrible continuation of her suffering, she becomes crazier and crazier until she is, once again, in her own world of hysteria.

What is left unspoken, unutterable, untold; remains mystery?

Rage at her father, Zeus, Hera.

Resistance to her fate--any suggestion of struggle.

Zeus has lain with her in her dreams. Prometheus calls her suffering "a curse" brought on by Zeus' desire--"marriage." Is she, then, already pregnant with the first of the descendants who will eventually result in the "son mightier than his father, Zeus?"

Prometheus:

You shall bear Epaphos, dark of skin, his name recalling Zeus' touch and his begetting.⁸

Is Io, possibly, a metaphor for pregnancy?

Locating hysterical sites.

Io's entire appearance on stage is a hysterical site representing both "estrangement and enslavement." She is clearly not present in her terror and raving mind, and yet, is trapped in a reactive, inescapable body.

When does she act?

Her entire scene is an acting out--a re-enactment of sexual frenzy--of rape and reaction. She arrives, hunted--the cow-maiden pursued by the "earth-born herdsman," Argos: with twitching spasms, aroused, pursued, hounded, stung. Thus, she is acting out woman's sexual desirability as pursual and, at the same time, woman's suffering from desirability. Causing lust, she babbles, strikes out, to no avail--in madness--pursued and taken by Zeus-God-Man. Her sanity will return with childbirth.

Prometheus:

Zeus shall make you sound of mind
Touching you with a hand that brings no
fear
And through that touch alone shall come
your healing.
You shall bear Epaphos...⁹

Io is the ultimate hysterical virgin who needs the completion of the sexual act to end her suffering. Suffering which begins in her desirability, readiness, ripeness becomes pornographic presentation of a prolonged, painful penetration and impregnation.

Does Io contain more than the author intended?

Io is devised as a pathetic mirror of Prometheus' heroic willed resistance through suffering. The text lays down moral and historical justification for her victimization, and she moves the plot's story. However, it is possible that Io's suffering transcends Prometheus' as horror...

Record her relationships as given in the text

The play's chorus are the sisters of her father. She is the future mother of Zeus' child whose distant descendant will rescue Prometheus.

Io has no identified history or role other than that of being a daughter and future mother. Nothing else is necessary. Daughter status implies virginity, marriageability, pawn in male rites of power. All her relations are defined by one thing: her sex.

How is she described by others?

The chorus of women frame their description in judgement.

the best by far
is to marry one's rank and station:
let no one working with her hands aspire
to marriage with those lifted high in pride
because of wealth or of ancestral glory.

. . . I dread such things beholding Io's sad
virginity
ravaged, ruined, bitter wandering
hers because of Hera's wrath.¹⁰

Io's reputation precedes her: she is legend because, as Prometheus says:

She set Zeus' heart on fire with love and
now she is violently exercised . . .
driven by Hera's hate.¹¹

Prometheus' description of Io, like her own sense of self, is one of sexual suffering. But, like the Chorus, his is couched in censure, patronizing irony--even a kind of sado-masochistic pleasure taken in Io's seeming masochistic need to hear her fate.

Prometheus describes for Io, her suffering, past, present, future--defining her as sexuality:

You groan too soon: you are full of fear
too soon:
wait until you hear besides what is to be

Bitter indeed
you found your marriage with this suitor, maid.
Yet you must think of all that I have told you
as still only in prelude.

Again you are crying and lamenting: what will you
do when you hear of the evils to come?¹²

At the same time, Prometheus suggests that Io's torture is nothing more than hysterical spectacle, sharing a kind of mocking wink with the audience at her expense. Prometheus to the hysterical Io:

To make wail and lament for one's ill
fortune, when one will win a tear a tear
from the audience is well worth while.¹³

The Chorus and Prometheus exchange commentary on Io in her presence: in the third person. She, thus, becomes a non-person, object of a story--even when she is there on stage. The Chorus asks:

Is there something else to her sufferings
of which you will speak?

Prometheus answers:

A wintry sea of agony and ruin.¹⁴

Symptoms

Io's symptoms begin from the moment of her "night-visions" of Zeus--her sexual penetration. They include the

following, all of which are attributable to hysteria, or sexual desire as illness:

terror
 wandering
 aimless, senseless striking out
 spasms
 burning
 dazed whirling
 crazed frenzy
 babbling, "ungoverned" tongue

What is she blamed for?

Io is blamed for her sexual desirability, her pride; for listening to Zeus' winning words--his desire to have her "in marriage." In short, the text blames the victim for Zeus' lust and rape.

What is she victim of?

Again, of lust. She is also a victim of Zeus' wife Hera's jealous rage. Ultimately, Io is a victim of her beauty, virginity, her sex.

Cure: aesthetic/moral closure

Childbirth will cure Io's insanity, according to Prometheus. Having satisfied Zeus' lust and in bearing his child, Io will save Prometheus.

What is the future of the character?

Io's future is well-described in terms of her bodily/sexual function: she will bear Zeus' child, regaining sexual equilibrium, her sanity. Her individual future is utterly unimportant--a story of no relevance--once she is foreseen as the bearer. We are told sanity returns and "healing." In the hysterical vision of the play, this news must be viewed as a happy ending.

Questions for the text

The Greek drama's characters are beyond questioning. All is justified, possible; serving and answering fates which need not be motivated by a rational sequence of events. Io's is a presentation of horror that is accepted on faith. Her behavior is certainly symptomatic of the Greek vision of femininity as hysteria and cannot be questioned textually in a world governed by irrational gods and mythology.

Performance Analysis

Io is an information-providing device in Prometheus' story. She appears only long enough to ask to hear her story, which reveals Prometheus' fate.

Her language leaves room for great expression of suffering. However, her questions leave no place for resistance, rage, or for any expression of self or desire. Only reaction.

Physically, she is presented as a cow and is given physical directions of bodily frenzy and pain. The stinging gadfly that pursues her without end is lust and penetration.

Even Prometheus and the Chorus admit that Io's suffering and madness is wonderfully entertaining for the audience: the more grotesque (and the physical fulfillment of her description can be nothing less), the more vivid and exciting the horror and disgust will be. Moreover, her suffering suggests a continuous dance with lust/rape, desire/resistance. Moaning and running; stinging and thrashing...

Clearly, Io's state is one of continuous rape. Rape in motion and perpetual rape. However, what the body signifies in suffering is the perverse pornography of pleasure in the performance/aesthetic of suffering: the inescapable and aesthetically useful (if, on the subconscious, hysterical plane) inseparability and confusion of the signs of sexual arousal and need with those of fear, pain and resistance.

Elin Diamond has noted in her discussion of the hysterical suffering of Realism's "heroines" that masochism (the perverse desire for suffering: excitement and arousal through pain), is at work in the reception of hysterical characters by an audience. Surely, then, masochism is working in some interior place of the actress whose humiliation defines her art, her aesthetic satisfaction.

Freud, as Diamond notes, was adamant about the feminine nature of this masochism:

To experience pleasure only through pain and humiliation is to be, according to Freud, in the feminine, or passive, position.¹⁵

History of the Text

The following first-hand account offers insight into sexual attitudes of the times, and also how Io's suffering might have been designed:

"Origins of the desire for procreation."
Athens, 4th Century B.C. (Plato, Timaeus 91 (excerpts))

And the seed having life, and becoming endowed with respiration, produces in that part in which it respire a lively desire of emission, and thus creates in us the love of procreation. Wherefore also creates in men the organ of generation becoming rebellious and masterful, like an animal disobedient to reason, and maddened with the sting lust, seeks to gain absolute sway; and the same is the case of the so-called womb or matrix of women; the animal within them is desirous of procreating children, and when remaining unfruitful long beyond its proper time, gets discontented and angry, and wandering in every direction through the body, closes up the passages of the breath, and, by obstructing respiration, drives them to extremity causing all varieties of diseases, until at length the desire and love of the man and the woman bringing them together. . . sow in the womb. . . . Thus were created women and the female sex in general."¹⁶

The following account builds on the latter's explanation, offering moral/aesthetic insight into wandering Io's responsibility/guilt/complicity. Proud Io awaits Zeus. In visions.

"Hysteria in Virgins." Cos, 4th C. B.C.
(Hippocrates, On Virgins)

As a result of visions, many people choke to death, more women than men, for the nature of women is less courageous and is weaker. And virgins who do not take a husband at the appropriate time for marriage experience these visions more frequently, especially at the time of their first monthly period. . . . For after the first period blood collects . . . and then the blood which has no place to flow out, because of its abundance, rushes up to the heart and the lungs . . . and then, because of numbness, insanity takes hold of the woman. . . . Shivering sets in with fevers . . . the girl goes crazy . . . becomes murderous . . . and is afraid and fearful because of the darkness . . . their will, distraught and anguished because of the bad condition of the blood, forces evil on itself. In some cases the girl says dreadful things . . . a desire sets in which compels her to love death as if it were a form of good If they become pregnant, they will be cured.¹⁷

Io exists, finally, to punish her desirability. It is her desirability that will allow gods to fall and men to suffer. In Aristotelian fashion, Prometheus stands as a model of the tragic hero's resistance to fate's torments through his conscious will. Io's suffering, on the other hand, is madness and offers no resistance to her fate which is sexual conquest.

Finally, it must be noted that the transference of responsibility for Io's suffering onto the jealous wife, Hera, is a clear example of Aeschylus' blindness in the way in which he describes the source of woman's suffering. The text knows more about his attitudes--his delight in the pornography of the female's supposed maddening desire--than the playwright can face.

Lavinia

From Greek tragedy in its most extreme expression of suffering the focus turns to Elizabethan spectacle at its most obscene. Titus Andronicus is a hair-raising "show"--the piling of one gruesome, unabashed taboo upon another. No horror is spared: no detail, no chance to add to the repulsion of the stage events and picture is left untaken. Anyone seeking tragedy must look elsewhere--here is entertainment at its purest: grotesque spectacle meant to lead an audience from one gasp to the next. Like most horror, the victim at center stage (only in her victimization, of course) is a young woman. Upon her body, every possible insult and violence is committed, so that, finally, as pathetic spectacle, she becomes a travesty. Her suffering is grotesque, and she is perversely, kept on the stage, within the action--like the animal that she has become: a ravaged, mute, armless, monster paraded through the play. Lavinia's violated and mutilated state, in simplest terms, is in very bad taste. Did Shakespeare go too far? Or simply realize the ultimate fantasy of violence and silencing of woman? Does the actress accept the part in its grotesque extreme--a spectacle not of ridicule but of terror? Is it possible? What is Lavinia's suffering? In some way, she is the ultimate hysterical construct: the ravaged, defenseless daughter reduced to symptoms. Tongue

torn out, unable to speak or to care for herself or take action, she reacts to the horror of her sexual mutilation in the only way available to her--hysterical desperation.

Self

Lavinia presents herself as a happy worshipful daughter and when she first appears, welcoming her father--a Roman.

And at thy feet I kneel, with tears of
joy,
Shed on the earth, for thy return to
Rome:
O, bless me here with thy victorious hand,
Whose fortune Rome's best citizens applaud!¹⁸

Her father, like a god, contains her sense of self: she is his daughter, nothing else. She does not speak again until she is handed over as wife to Saturnius, the brother of the man she loves. She accepts him with absolute obedience though the next moment Bassianus, the lover, seizes her and carries her off. She is given nothing to say.

Lavinia appears next with Bassianus who has openly challenged his brother's claim to Lavinia. At his mistress, Tamora's, urging, Saturnius tempers his rage and agrees to accept their pardon and Lavinia's marriage to Bassianus. Lavinia kneels for pardon and the scene progresses and ends without a word from her, though she has already been the cause of her father's murder of her brother and the rivalry between the Emperor and his brother.

Catherine R. Stimpson has written of Titus Andronicus:

The world belongs to men: fathers, husbands, lovers, brothers The woman's body is a prize in a zero-sum game that men play.¹⁹

This point is clearly demonstrated by Lavinia's presentation as will-less, self-less, obedient body: her role is daughter, wife, lover.

Wants and Needs

When considering Lavinia's needs and wants and actions in the play, it is necessary to see that her role is broken in two by her rape and mutilation. She wants to be a good, obedient daughter and wife--and Roman--and then suddenly, her needs change to utter desire to escape her victimization at Tamora and her son's hands. She begs for death against the impending gang rape.

What she does

After her destruction as a woman and functioning human being, Lavinia is completely dependent physically and emotionally. However, she has secrets to share: her body and emotions contain the story of her destruction. When, temporarily, and as a plot device, she finds an opportunity to make her story and the perpetrators known late in the play, her ability to act emerges. It is quite startling that mutilated Lavinia is so often on stage and that she is so much a part of the dialogue and action of the play: she is addressed by the others, comforted, exhibited as evidence and call to revenge,

her tears are wiped away; she even kisses her father. After her silencing, in her grotesque and tainted state, she is more visible and more center stage. Her victimization, being high and horrid spectacle, is displayed and commented upon in a way that is never open to woman victims who have their tongues and hands. She is paraded and included. She follows her father everywhere--like an animal--even carrying Titus' cut-off hand between her teeth, like a dog.

Titus commands her:

Lavinia, thou shalt be employed in these things;
Bear thou my hand, sweet wench,
between thy teeth.²⁰

What audience could fail to laugh at this absurd picture? Revulsion and misogyny are clearly at the root of this hysterical representation.

Reaction

Lavinia is in a constant state of reaction to her suffering. Like Io, she is haunted-hunted by the terror and terrible consequences of her rape. Mutilated within and butchered without. Her state seems to be that of utter shame and degradation. Her sexual ravishing tortures her above and beyond all else. Her recoiling gestures away from comfort and rescue suggest that she, herself, is now a pariah in her own estimation.

Marcus Andronicus, her beloved uncle, discovers the ravaged Lavinia while on a hunt. This is no coincidence: she is now no more than an animal. Marcus Andronicus:

Who is this? My niece, that flies away
so fast!²¹

He is quick to surmise her rape (has rape its own odor?) and her acknowledgement is read in her gestures of shame:

Ah, now thou turn'st away thy face for
shame!
. . . thy cheeks look red as Titan's face
Blushing to be encountered with a cloud
. . .²²

After mourning and bemoaning the beauty and desirability that has been lost, Marcus tells Lavinia, as a kind of after-thought of comfort:

Do not draw back, for we will mourn with
thee
O, could our mourning ease thy misery!

Her ideas and thoughts, attitudes and opinions
Her silence

Truly, Lavinia's text is silence, but in her silence she presents quite a dumb-show. While her mind continues to mirror father, uncle, brother, without opposition, challenge or addition, her body becomes a text in this most complete dramatization of hysterical spectacle. She "sobs and weeps." She kneels and prays with her father. "Her sighs do blow!"²⁴ She kisses her father as if to comfort him. Marcus remarks:

Alas, poor heart, that kiss is comfort-
less
As frozen water to a starved snake.²⁵

And most importantly, Lavinia signs. Titus [to Lavinia]:

Thou map of woe, that thus dost talk in signs!²⁶

She runs and follows and, as if "some fit or frenzy do possess her,"²⁵ she attempts to convey meaning. Titus:

Fear her not . . . somewhat doth she
mean.²⁷

Using the stumps of her arms, she points, tosses, and gestures; she writes, finally, a stick as pen in her mouth. When Marcus censures Titus for suggesting Lavinia "get some little knife between [her] teeth" to kill herself, he answers:

Why, Marcus, what violent hands can she
lay on her life?²⁸

What Lavinia cannot utter--what is left unspoken and untold, Titus interprets--speaking for her as father and fellow-sufferer:

Hark, Marcus, what she says;
I can interpret all her martyred signs
. . . .²⁹

And to Lavinia, he offers this reassurance:

Speechless complainer, I will learn thy
thought;
In thy dumbaction will I be as perfect
As begging hermits in their holy prayers:
Thou shalt not sigh, nor hold thy stumps
to heaven,
Nor wink, nor nod, nor kneel, nor make a sign
But I of these will wrest an alphabet,
And by still practice learn to know thy meaning.³⁰

How perfect a metaphor becomes Lavinia's silenced state and her father's "promise" (or threat). Her silence and his translation represent the historical condition of woman and the presumption of the male voice--in and out of drama.

Lavinia's speech then, and her apparent meaning, are appropriated by her father, uncle and nephew. They read her signs and uncover what is essential for them: the names and crime of those who have robbed and humiliated their honor.

Stimpson describes rape's place in Shakespeare's power structure:

Because in Shakespeare only well-born women are raped, their violation becomes one of property, status and symbolic worth as well. The greater those values, the greater the sense of power their conquest confers upon the rapist.³¹

Whatever else Lavinia might wish to say can only be read in the hystericized body on stage.

6. Sites

There is something mysteriously resistant in Lavinia's refusal to disappear. No longer herself (that earlier obedient virgin readying for marriage), she becomes a strange site of instability--entirely helpless in her mute and mutilated entrapment yet unsettlingly expressive, explosive, revealing, of something men cannot contain: woman's response to her victimization cannot be silenced. Except, of course, with death. And, at the end of the play, Lavinia, veiled (cut off from further performance), is murdered by her own father in an act of expiation of his shame and dishonor.

Ironically, her textual silencing enables Lavinia to become her own mute subject--evoking a terror that may well have been unintended by the author. One cannot look away--she forces the audience to see its complicity in her degrading exhibition. And in those eyes, she records, condemns and insists on revenge. (Why did Shakespeare allow her to keep her sight?!)

Descriptions

Descriptions of Lavinia objectify her in a most vivid and chilling way. Like all good daughters, Lavinia is initially hailed and praised for her virtue.

Titus:

Lavinia, live; outlive thy father's days,
And fame's eternal date, for virtue's
praise!³²

Elsewhere, such a speech would be conventional, hardly worthy of note beyond its obvious reiteration of where a woman's value lies. However, Titus' words take on a terrible import, for with the loss of her virtue, Lavinia is condemned to die--at her father's hand. Morality is outside the dictates of justice for Lavinia. Not her victimization, nor her resistance to the violence perpetrated against her--nor, even, her begging for death rather than rape--spare Lavinia the moral reduction to filth, disease. Stimpson comments:

The fact of having been raped obliterates all of a woman's previous claims to virtue. One sexual experience hereafter will define her.³³

Lavinia raped is pornographic spectacle: the loss of her purity and "honor" reduce her state from one revered to one-who-can-be-looked-at-sexually.

The rapists, Chiron and Demetrius--and their mentor, Aaron--transgress Lavinia's virtuous status even before their act obliterates her virtue. Both Demetrius and Aaron reduce her to animal status, a body to be hunted for pleasure and sport. Aaron counsels:

My lords, a solemn hunting is at hand;...
 Single you thither, then, this dainty dow,
 And strike her home by force. . . .
 The woods are ruthless, dreadful, deaf and dull,
 There speak, and strike brave boys, and take your
 turns;
 There serve your lust . . .
 And revel in Lavinia's treasury.³⁴

What woman doesn't know this reductionism of self to body? But Lavinia's mutilation annihilates every role she has formerly occupied. Marcus presents her to her father, Titus:

"This was thy daughter."³⁵

His lamentation tells the actress more about Lavinia's former existence than is ever shown in the play. Lavinia's loss of self stimulates a lively discussion of a self the audience is never allowed to see. (Unless it is in the one haughty moment she shares with Bassanius at Tamora's expense before his murder and her pleas begin.) Through Marcus, the actress learns that Lavinia was a thinker, a talker, a true charmer, before her tongue was torn from her mouth:

O, that delightful engine of her thoughts,
That blabbed them with such pleasing eloquence,
Is torn from forth that pretty hollow cage,
Where, like a sweet melodious bird, it sung
Sweet varied notes, enchanting every ear!³⁶

Lavinia accompanies her father, who goes to exact revenge on her mutilators. It is her duty to hold the basin that will catch their blood. In his accusations, Titus describes the Lavinia he once loved:

O, villains . . .
Here stands the spring whom you stain'd with mud;
This goodly summer with your winter mix'd
. . . . Both her sweet hands, her tongue, and that
more dear
Than hands or tongue, her spotless chastity,
Inhuman traitors, you constain'd and forc'd.³⁷

Lavinia is forced to "receive the blood" that spurts and flows from her rapists' throats. Another sexual image, that places Lavinia in the "already dead" status of stained woman-

hood that soon will lead to murder. Or as the patriarchy of Shakespeare's world would see it--sacrifice.

Symptoms

Lavinia's symptoms are hysterical reactions to vicious rape and mutilations that silence her and paralyze her ability to act. The cause is her desirability--her virginal sweetness--her sex.

Blame

She is blamed for surviving her rape, it would seem: for exhibiting her "shame" and humiliating the men for whom she had been a treasured asset.

Victim

She is the victim of male desire, of her own beauty. Defenseless against brute power.

Moral Cure and Aesthetic Closure

TITUS: Was it well done of rash Virginius
 To slay his daughter with his own right hand
 Because she was enforc'd, stain'd, and deflowered?

SATURNIUS: It was the girl should not survive her
 shame,
 And by her presence still renew his sorrows.

Future

Lavinia has no future: except, perhaps, in the nightmares of those who watch.

Questions

As in the case of the Ancient Greeks, Shakespeare allows the unbelievable, unjustifiable and unmotivated, places in the metaphorical landscape of his art. That Lavinia survived at all is ridiculous. That she waits until the end of the play to discover her ability to communicate her "shame" is unbelievable.

On the other hand, the irrational, patriarchal, bloody cycle of revenge seems perfectly true--as does the woman's victimization.

Constraints of Script

Obvious. Though, ironically, the cutting out of Lavinia's tongue frees her from dialogue that is not her own--gives her the hysterical "voice" of the body--its presence.

Staging

After her rape, Lavinia is given quite a lot of time on stage (seven scenes) and freedom in the expression of her suffering. Her body contains the secret truth of her nightmare and her desperate desire to release or purge herself of the knowledge is open to gesture; because there are no words

constraining her to woman's modesty. No longer a woman, really, but a grotesque--a monster or animal--Lavinia is free to use her mutilated body in unseemly, unfeminine ways. After her mutilation, no male voices are raised in praise of her beauty, modesty or virtue to constrain her physically to pretty pictures or words. In bitter irony: her mutilation frees her on stage.

How does Lavinia entertain?

Pure pornography or horror-inducing monster? A great challenge would be to deny the ridicule and laughter inherent in her physical state. In order to ennoble her, to deny sex-victim as pornography star, she must terrify with some kind of unspoken (thus hysterical) secret knowledge of the complicity of mankind--and the suggestion of an other-worldly, haunting, uncanny revenge beyond the play's world.

Final Thoughts on Fantasy

Like Aeschylus, Shakespeare tries to shift the blame for women's mutilation onto other women. Tamora, Queen of the Goths, herself kidnapped and forced into sexual submission, who has begged for mercy for her son and then seen him murdered by Titus, is written as the demonic source of the evil perpetrated by the men around her. Is it too simple to see this hysterical denial as guilt or fear of revenge?

Laura

Three hundred and fifty years after Titus was first performed, hysterical victims continue to haunt the literary imaginations of men--and walk the stagings of their fantasies. Modern victims manifest symptoms as if they originate in their psyche. In this way only do they differ from their classical counterparts whose symptoms are of the womb and body, pure.

Laura is another hysterical victim--daughter and virgin. Her role as desirability and marriageability--her sex--leads to the trauma which takes her further into a world of madness--illusion. Though the trauma is not physical rape and mutilation or the stinging sexual terror of the gadfly, the arousal, dance and kiss of the Gentleman Caller and the mutilation of her favorite glass animal (the Unicorn which is her double), transform Laura's hysterical reaction--the repressed desire which is Laura's constant state--into temporary erotic bliss. An irreversible and inevitable crash into non-reality follows. Laura is destroyed by unleashed desire.

Amanda--the abandoned hysterical woman--is the other half of the hysterical mother-daughter pairing so often found in drama. But here I want to concentrate on Laura as pure victim. The tragic hero model is also again at play: while Tom's wanderings, secret and frustrated desires and escape into the celluloid world of film lead to heroic freedom and creative fulfillment (he is, after all, narrating his own

play), Laura's wanderings, secret desires and escape into a world of glass, lead to entrapment and madness.

Williams' play is, perhaps, one of the most honest presentations of male hysteria because it is framed as a memory, staged and narrated by its author. However, this does not solve the dilemma of the actress assigned the part of Laura. How does one play "fragile glass"? Glass is transparent and bloodless--sexless, too--pure. Easily shattered. A vision of Laura played by a china-doll puppet on strings--or an actress wearing a delicate glass mask seems appropriate--with Tom's voice speaking her lines. Or is the play better served as a Southern Gothic nightmare of exaggerated hysteria (in the women's parts, of course)--a parody of male fear?

And Laura limps. Result of a childhood illness or marred from birth? She is glass with a limp. She is a sexual cripple. Why is she confined in this glass bubble of metaphors that repress and hystericize her flesh-and-blood desires? (Her old gramophone records shutting out truths and feelings she cannot hear. A blue rose.) There is something, too, of the hysterical mystic--St. Teresa--in her suffering as ecstasy, in her devotion to the transparent world of glass, which, after all, is a substance that hides nothing.

The scene between Laura and the Gentleman Caller is the hysterical site of the play--allowing Laura a place to explode into a kind of rhapsody--of desire, terror, tension and

release--Eros that escapes in all directions and is, at the same time, full of mystical bliss.

Self

Laura has this to say for herself:

I'm not expecting any gentleman callers.³⁹

Mother, I'm just not popular like you were in Blue Mountain.

Mother's afraid I'm going to be an old maid.⁴⁰

Clearly, Laura's sense of self is seen in relation to her mother--a self-as-diminution before her mother's tales of popularity and desirability. She defines herself by fear and suffering, often haltingly:

I couldn't go back there. I--threw up-- on the floor!⁴¹

I couldn't face it.⁴²

[in a tone of frightened apology] But mother. . . I'm crippled!"⁴³

I'm sick!"⁴⁴

I--I--never had much luck--at making friends."⁴⁵

There is a kind of uncanny distance or estrangement in Laura between what one would think of as a painful sense of self and the ease with which she expresses her own deficiencies--as if they didn't really bother her. Or, it is as if she accepts who she is. Her illness, then, is not a struggle. Rather, it is her sense of self.

Wants and Needs

Laura is offered a wish:

AMANDA: Now! Now, darling, wish!

LAURA: What shall I wish for, Mother?⁴⁶

Laura seems to have no wants or needs or wishes. Are they then repressed? Shut out by the old gramophone recordings she turns to when her world-as-it-is seems threatened? Or is the timeless present available to children, madmen and mystics her home?

What does she do?

Laura's role in the family is that of mediator between Tom and Amanda. She is the still center and yet, ironically, is presented as hysteria. She pacifies Tom. She humors Amanda by listening and encouraging her stories. She enables Tom's night-wanderings, letting him in and quieting him. She makes peace:

LAURA: Tom, speak to Mother this morning. Make up with her, apologize, speak to her!
 . . . If you just say you're sorry she'll start speaking.⁴⁷

Laura understands the needs of others and encourages them. She does housework--particularly, she is involved with the dishes--more glass. And she cares for her glass animal collection. She wanders the streets, the park, when she is supposed to be at business school. The following is her forced confession:

LAURA: I went in the art museum and the bird houses at the zoo. I visited the penguins every day! Sometimes, I did without lunch and went to the movies. Lately, I've been spending most of my afternoons in the Jewel Box, that big glass house where they raise the tropical flowers.⁴⁸

Laura does what pleases her and not what is expected of her as daughter, grown woman, social human being. There is something rather revolutionary in her "actions" which are passive-- watching, listening, looking. Laura lives in her senses which are, perhaps too exquisite for "sane, normal existence." Laura plays, like a child: refuses the adult world--escapes through hysterical symptoms.

Reaction

Laura reacts to everything--physically. She has particularly unpleasant hysterical reactions to work and society. She reacts outwardly to strife in the family, but her reactions to questions that she views as threatening or confrontational and her reactions to social situations are internal-- leading to stomach upheavals or inability to eat.

She reacts with energy associated with desire to her glass and to her memory of the boy she so admired in high school, Jim O'Connor.

Behavior

Laura's behaviors are those that lead to escape from situations. She is always eager to get up and fetch things and clear the table: eager to listen to stories that do not

involve questions addressed to her. She is subversively passive. She hides. She avoids. She faints. She runs away. Her behavior seems to come out of incredible stillness at times. She is erratic and frightened at other times.

Presence and Absence

Laura is nearly always on stage but always, somehow, absent (except in her final scene with Jim when she seems to fill up with flesh and blood). Amanda must invent an errand to get Laura out of the house so she can speak about her privately with Tom. Laura is an ever-present specter--the ghost Tom is exorcising of home. Her marked absence from the table at the dinner for the Gentleman Caller presages her re-entry as climactic transformation.

Ideas, Thoughts, Attitudes, Opinions

Laura offers one eager opinion about the talent of the boy she so admired in high school, Jim. Otherwise, Laura answers when she is addressed, occasionally rejecting an idea or opinion of her mother, but never voicing one of her own. And, in the end, she always succumbs.

Laura enters the minds of her glass animals. Or rather she fills their emptiness with her desire. And perhaps, they mirror the emptiness of her own mind. What do these glass animals think about? What attitudes or opinions do they hold?

Her favorite glass animal "loves the light," she confesses to Jim.⁴⁹

Silence and the Unspoken

Laura hears things that no one else can--or chooses to listen to. She tells Jim how the animals get along so nicely together:

I haven't heard any arguments among them!⁵⁰

And most often, she is silent. The painful regularity with which her mother discusses Laura's desirability, marriageability--with all those words that stand in for sexuality--makes Laura's silence stand out markedly. Her unspoken desire suffuses the text. Against Amanda's hysterical ravings, Laura's unutterable needs, create her as uncanniness--that strange emptiness full of mystery.

Only in her final scene with Jim does Laura speak full sentences of feeling and energy--but, then, it is a hysterical, diffuse flowing.

Sites

Williams describes Laura's encounter with Jim:

While the incident is apparently unimportant, it is to Laura the climax of her secret life.⁵¹

The hysterical eruption of Laura's desire is both terrifying and pathetic. Although Williams sees the scene as "apparently unimportant" in its representation, the text knows better. It

is a mistake to suppress the scene between Laura and Jim into something sad, difficult, unfortunate--even embarrassing--completely written within the boundaries of legitimate dramatic encounters.

Laura's eros erupts and is brutally squelched by Jim's emotional rape. It is clear that Jim O'Connor is increasingly "turned on" by Laura's fragility. Laura is sexually desirable--dependent, vulnerable, powerless. Like the mutilated bound feet of the Chinese women, Laura's crippled foot, her intense shyness, her nervousness--sexualize her for Jim. He feels powerful. His shadow is huge. There is something truly menacing in the delight Jim experiences in Laura's vulnerability to him: her fragility is an aphrodisiac. Her desire is open. For the actress, there is no rationale for the scene except as one of interrupted rape.

Obviously, Jim must stop himself: the others are next door. And true, he has a girlfriend, a fiancée. But this does not lessen the devastating effect he has on Laura sexually.

For Laura, dancing her first dance is the equivalent of a sexual encounter, and Jim's kiss (which must be long and deep) is intercourse, breaking through the hystericized repression of her desire. Her chatter and flattery and questions--that eruption of language which floods the candlelit room with yearning and joy is frightening in its intensi-

ty. Like women. And their sexuality. It must be silenced. With a kiss.

That kiss would be the prelude to Laura's maturation into health and sanity in the hysterical closure of sexual cure. Instead, Jim stops himself and leaves Laura and her favorite glass animal broken. Woman's desire is never fully satisfied. She would devour him.

Laura is orgasmic in this scene. She is carried out of herself by desire. In the context of the scene--and William's portrayal of Laura--she is hysterical spectacle. Something disgusting (to be turned away from).

Can she become her own subject?

It would seem that the actress is trapped in a disgusting representation. The metaphors are loaded against her: the actions of the play have led to the moment which must demonstrate--as climax in the memory of Tom, the narrator--Laura's destruction. However, the actress is given a scene in which to act out unleashed desire. And, perhaps, the scene cannot contain it! Perhaps the text knows that women can terrify men: leap out from the passivity and masochism of victimization into terrifying subjectivity.

Description of Others

Description is most often diagnosis when it comes to hysterical constructs. It is Jim O'Connor, using the pop

psychology he has learned in his Public Speaking Course at night school, who diagnoses Laura:

I'm talking to you sincerely. I happened to notice you had this inferiority complex that keeps you from feeling comfortable with people.

And, at once, offers this cure:

Somebody needs to build your confidence up and make you proud instead of shy and turning away and--blushing. Somebody--ought to--kiss you, Laura!⁵²

Implied in Jim's analysis is the way in which men believe women begin to think well of themselves: through men. Instead of "turning away and blushing" Laura must turn toward--open up--to the male advance. Then she will feel like a woman--no longer a cripple--a sexually desirable woman. However, it is everything that cripples Laura that is attractive to him--the symptoms are sexy.

Williams describes Laura:

A childhood illness has left her crippled. . . . Stemming from this, Laura's separation increases till she is like a piece of her own glass collection, too exquisitely fragile to move from the shelf."⁵³

Her mother's view is hardly as romantic:

I put her in business college--a dismal failure! Frightened her so it made her sick at the stomach. I took her over to the Young People's League at the church. Another fiasco. She spoke to nobody, nobody spoke to her. Now all she does is fool with those pieces of glass and play those worn-out records. What kind of a life is that for a girl to lead?⁵⁴

For Amanda, her daughter's behavior is completely mysterious, disturbing and frightening. It is also threatening. Laura's

detachment from social life and its roles contradicts everything Amanda has justified and romanticized in her life. Laura shows no interest or will in finding a man. Amanda lives in memory of her relationship to men who have desired her. Upon this desirability rests her fragile, slippery identity. In anticipation of the Gentleman Caller upon whom Laura's salvation hangs, Amanda prepares her to play the part of "a pretty girl." She stuffs two powder puffs into Laura's dress--enlarging the appearance of her breasts:

AMANDA: They call them "Gay Deceivers!"

LAURA: I won't wear them!

AMANDA: Now look at yourself, young lady. This is the prettiest you'll ever be!⁵⁵

Laura is a mute participant in the conspiracy Williams constructs between mother and daughter--between hysterical women against men. "All pretty girls are a trap . . . and men expect them to be," Amanda tells Laura.⁵⁶

It is hard to imagine Laura as a trap, but in the play she is Tom's inescapable specter. She haunts him as guilt. He describes her thus, at the end of his gothic nightmare:

I was pursued by something. It always came upon me unawares, taking me altogether by surprise [a] window is filled with pieces of colored glass, tiny transparent bottles in delicate colors, like bits of a shattered rainbow. Then all at once my sister touches my shoulderOh, Laura, Laura, I tried to leave you behind, but I am more faithful than I intended to be!⁵⁷

Symptoms

In contemporary psychiatric literature, the symptoms of hysterical virgins are written as science. Laura's character fits neatly into this clinical evaluation which is not without its moral and judgmental overtones:

The more pregenitally fixated . . . hysteric is characterized by ego-weakness with poor integration of personality elements and poor differentiation of internal and external reality. The diffuseness of cognition and affect is more pronounced and under stress quickly regresses to the passive, depressed, or psychotic role with a serious risk of suicide. They have a few problem-solving techniques--acting out, regression, or sickness frequently being their only resource. Negative self-concepts and poor self-esteem are common. There is poor adaption with an unstable, unpredictable and lonely adjustment.⁵⁸

It is interesting that even as "acting out" is presented as a problem-solving technique, it is condemned as a symptom. In her rejection of conventional and conforming behavior, Laura becomes an actress. Invalidism is the role she takes on to protect her from stressful and distasteful situations. She turns away in disgust from the terrible business course and from the emotionally tortuous, arranged dinner party by acting out illness.

There is no question but that Laura uses acting as her means of survival. Even Amanda is stunned by her "deception": for six weeks Laura has been pretending to go to business college. Amanda asks: "You did all this to deceive me. . . Why?"⁵⁹

Laura's defense/answer is her having thrown up. Performance or reality? The bringing up of stuff or a choking on nothing?

Later, Amanda must watch ("despairingly" as the stage directions note) Laura's fainting fit--which may or may not be a true loss of consciousness. In either case, fainting allows Laura to avoid--to escape--dinner with Jim O'Connor.

In her discussion of Lady Macbeth, Joan Larsen Klein puts forward a valuable observation about the irrelevancy of the distinction between acting, acting out and "reality" in male perception and representation of women. Writing about Lady Macbeth's fainting spell at the news of the murder of Duncan, she says:

. . . it may be that her faint is genuine, a confirmation of her own debility. On the other hand, if her faint is only pretended in order to shield Macbeth, it is still a particularly feminine ploy. True or false, it dramatically symbolizes weakness.⁶⁰

The blurring of this distinction is itself the construct, hysteria: Laura may or may not "really" faint--"really throw up"--within the all's-one of hysterical reaction. This confusion is the hysteric's truth. Laura is certainly acting out--and though this is perceived as weakness/illness--it might also be viewed as rebellion.

Laura's hysteria, then, is an acting up--a resistance to the pressures of the sexual encounter which she is unable to face and cannot escape in any way other than performance.

(Amanda, conversely, enters into experience through performance, which is just as hystericizing--leaving her devoid of self.) Not eating--the escape from the stage of the dining table--is a classic hysterical symptom; as is fainting, a closing off (the curtain comes down). The language of hysterical illness which is judged to be deception is the symptomizing of female revolt.

Moral Cure/Aesthetic Closure

Laura's metaphorical terror of opening the door to Jim O'Connor (Williams heightens this in his staging notes by having the word "Terror!" appear on the screen) is absolved by their erotic waltz and climactic kiss. Jim is the moral and aesthetic cure and closure of Laura's hysterical desire. Under Jim's influence, Williams notes, "Laura's shyness is dissolving": his "warmth" sets her on fire.⁶¹ Giving herself to him in the dance, Laura is temporarily healed. His abrupt withdrawal leaves her back in the incurable madness of unsatisfied desire.

Blame and Victimization

Laura is blamed for her symptomatic dependency. Her role as victim in life's drama costs Tom his peace of mind--and any real escape.

Constraints of Text

Laura is only allowed dialogue expressive of self, of joy and desire in her scene with Jim (and for the short moment she describes him to her mother, earlier). Elsewhere, she is staged as fragile object in reaction.

Effect on Audience

Laura, traditionally, is played like the glass metaphor Williams thinks he has written. The effect is one that confirms the hysterical construct of woman-without-man as illness.

However, Laura can be seen, perhaps, as rebel--knowing more than Tennessee Williams knows he has written. If she is actress in a bad play (life/memory as staged against her truth) she can struggle. Her illness becomes a willed acting out.

The desires she expresses for Jim must be frightening, not pathetic: jolting the text out of its repressive staging. It would be thrilling to see Laura actively seduce Jim--bringing him to just this side of reckless aggression. Because that's really what the text does: blames Laura for not disappearing--for continuing to seduce, to bring up, what Williams must suppress in order to create his fiction of her.

Future

A future of suffering. Laura's future is sealed by Jim's metaphorical rape and betrayal. She is too old to remain a virgin hysteric and so as youth's desirability fades, her virginity ages into another kind of illness. She will die a spinster. Spinsters are particularly subject to hysterical reaction (along with young virgins, widows and lesbians) because they do not receive "the cure."

Amanda offers this vivid picture of her daughter's fate:

I know so well what becomes of unmarried women who aren't prepared to occupy a position. I've seen such pitiful cases in the South--barely tolerated spinsters living upon the grudging patronage of sister's husbands or brother's wife!--Stuck away in some little mousetrap of a room . . . little bird-like women without any nest--eating the crust of humility all their life.⁶²

The punishment for Laura's hysterical resistance, then, is presented in such a dismal light. However, the tragedy belongs to Tom, who must bear her with him always, in memory, like a scourge. She is pure victim and source of his heroic suffering. Tom's is the moral tragedy of the play.

Questions and Accusations

Isn't Laura's secret desire a male fantasy? It seems completely out of character for Laura to fester with physical desire while characterized as glass at the same time. . . .

By using the image of the glass animal to symbolize Laura, Williams aligns himself with the Ancients. She is Lavinia, the fragile, hunted doe; she is Io, the cow-maiden.

Her animal nature is her sexuality which is broken in pursuit. Like other hysterical virgin victims, Laura's madness is in her body. Why won't you let her think? Why won't you let her speak? What are you afraid of?

History of the Play and Final Thoughts on Fantasy

That The Glass Menagerie is transformed autobiography is legend. Harry Rasky cites this Time magazine article (March 9, 1962) in his book on Williams.

His life is a play. The play that best proves it is The Glass Menagerie. In it, Williams held a mirror up to memory and caught upon it the breaths of three lives: his mother's, his sister's and his own. . . . The daughter Laura (Williams' sister Rose) has a mind and a personality as fragile as the little glass animals that deck her room. . . .⁶³

The article's ridiculous blurring--one might say, hysterical--repression of the distinction between truth and representation is telling. Contemporary psychological "understanding" is no further from the classical in its silencing of the woman's voice--reducing her role to metaphor.

Williams is said to have harbored terrible resentment against his mother who allowed his vibrant--if mad--sister, Rose, to undergo the lobotomy that took away her rational mind. He also expressed self-guilt for not having been there to stop her destruction.⁶⁴

The actress might resist Williams' guilt-suffused love that traps Laura in the restraints of his hysteria. She will

not absolve him of his role as victimizer in creating her part. She will see his abandoning of Laura as a signal to abandon the text--and to re-enter where the text knows more than its author about resistance and desire.

Ophelia

Perhaps more has been written about Ophelia than about any other female part in Shakespeare. What most interests critics and draws young actresses (Ophelia is the yearned-for ingenue role) is the ambiguity that must be read into her construction as pure, hysterical virgin: the seeming possibility of impurity, if not in her life, then, at least, and perhaps more tantalizing, in her desire, her psyche.

Shakespeare leaves Ophelia's life and character riddled with gaps--lacunae of erotic suggestion that transform the part into a hysterical display worthy of Charcot: terror and desire; hysterical tension and erotic bursts; riddles and allusions as to the nature of her relations with Hamlet. And finally, there is the ambiguity of her death, which may or may not be anguished suicide or, as Gertrude tells as witness (but who can trust her--constructed as falsity): she fell singing, will-less and unaware, innocently to her death-by-drowning. Helpless before the father/brother/lover trio, she is pure submission and victim. But it is her "mad scene" that has

aroused the fantasies of generations. The purity of virginity, touched by male passion erupts into erotic bliss (that grotesque dialectic of virgin/whore). Desire has the power to make virgins mad, and the madness is always sexual.

Earlier in this analysis, Elaine Showalter's exploration of the Ophelia model as aesthetic archetype of female hysteria was discussed. The Victorian asylum doctors were impressed by the Shakespearean construct of purity victimized by a passion beyond control. Sexuality as madness was innocent. The needs of morality read into Ophelia's madness and death, the only acceptable alternative to the vice of erotic gratification. Mental health, suspect and practically inconceivable in women, generally, could be achieved only through a regime of physical drudgery hard enough to exhaust physical desire. Otherwise, it was better to impose the pathetic, "innocent" model of sweet, suffering Ophelia on the hysterical women they saw--repressing by not listening to what was really there.

Ophelia is forced to act the will of her father against her own desire for Hamlet. Her identity as obedient daughter leaves her no place in the text to oppose the wills of others. She is both innocent and submissive--a combination that is ripe with erotic possibilities for sexual victimization.

She is the star "turn" of the virgin hysteric repertoire because of two scenes: one, the so-called mad scene in which she occupies center stage, and the other, the off-stage scene of her death as described by Gertrude. Ophelia's mad scene is

potentially grotesque and terrifying, though tradition has it played for its pathos and sweetness. Actresses with pretty, delicate features and wispy voices are traditionally cast. Ophelia's death captured the Romantic imagination of the Pre-Raphaelites, who, as Showalter notes, "turned again and again to the subject of the drowning Ophelia."⁶⁵ The pathos of giving herself up to the watery deep--the image of will-less or willing victim, has influenced Ophelia's representation. Perhaps, if her death scene were played on stage, giving the actress the decision as to how Ophelia drowns (I think it must be a terrible, remorselessly unromantic death)--or even if her drowning voice were heard off stage, then the sweetness and aesthetic pleasure of her victimization would be countered.

Because there is already so much analysis of Ophelia, I will only briefly explore her mad scene as an acting challenge. Why her suffering is expressed as hysterical eros has been discussed in relation to other examples presented here. Desire is never overcome in the woman, as it is necessarily in heroes. Woman, at moral best, can only ever be victim of desire.

In preparing the mad scene, the actress is faced with a lacuna: the true nature of her relationship with Hamlet. Some sort of sexual torment is at play, some gadfly. Given the circumstances of her father's status as lord chamberlain--clown though his part may be--it is likely that she would be "safeguarded" from exposure to sexually compromising situa-

tions. Hamlet's expression of his rage, too, seems more likely to be the result of his disillusionment with woman's purity after the shock of his mother's betrayal. Hamlet is a Romantic figure for whom all is now turned ugly: Ophelia, the object of his idealized passion, must needs be virgin. The obscenity of his remarks to her in the course of the play are directly the result of his discovery of the "true" nature of woman as falsity--painted whore. And it is this suggestiveness that appears to bring on Ophelia's hysteria. She is confused, frightened by Hamlet's sexual aggressiveness--and her desire. It is possible that Hamlet infects her mind with self-loathing. He makes her see her own desire for him as lust: he sexualizes her. And this is a torment: humiliating and confusing her sense of self, self-worth, morality, passion. Hamlet makes her inner world and her sex as ugly to her as it has become for him. In short, he reduces her to metaphorical whore. And her madness is the expression of his new terrifying, sexualized view of woman. Her eruption is the performance of his hysterical reaction.

For the actress, to repeat Marianne Novy's insight, one thing is certain: Ophelia "must go mad in order to escape social restriction and take center stage."⁶⁶

Foucault reminds the actress that madness has its own logic. She must find some meaning, some connection, cause and effect for the lines of riddle, license and song that have bemused and excited scholars for generations. This is not to

suggest that such a logic is inherent in the text, only that the actress can use the text to her own end only by moving beyond a generalized acting out of mindless irrationality to some purpose that allows her to become her own subject--knowing more than the hysteria that constructs her about her desire and destruction.

In other words, the mystery of the text allows the actress complete freedom. And her physical presence on stage is unrestricted by the conventions imposed by femininity and its lethal obedience. (Although an interesting possibility is to play the scene as grotesque parody of obedience and femininity.)

Hysteria as performance cannot be overlooked. Ophelia is woman-as-actress gone awry. Illness as acting. The no-self of the woman/hysteric in its expressive state.

Whatever else Ophelia does in this scene, she clearly and immediately makes the others her audience--her position as performer on stage is perhaps the underlying logic. If Ophelia ever had a sense of self, it was ruptured when she was first forced to perform the denial of her desire in a scene with Hamlet which her father and the king directed and observed.

Never free, then, to express her self, but trapped in the position of actress, Ophelia erupts into hysterical performance. Music hall artiste--obscene and radical--able to stir-

-what?--in her audience? Probably, in Shakespeare's time, a great hoot, delighted shock. Yes, pornography.

Again, sexuality in woman as hysterical madness. And in pretty, young innocence--desirable. Unless the actress takes her moment to stir up some terror with the violence of her eroticism.

The Hysterical Mind

Working within the artificial (because so fluid and mingling) hysterical categories of representation, I turn now to the hysterical construct for whom suffering and victimization are offset by a strange power: the hysterical mind. In these plays, women have a lot to say. This hysteric cannot be silenced by violence and suffering--nor, more particularly, by the isolation and estrangement which are the environment in which she is allowed a voice in the first place.

The hysterical mind is victimized by ridicule, disbelief, ostracization. "She" is ignored and presented in the context of madness. Devices of framing, interception and distancing subvert and hystericize the female mind in representation. The motivation for her speech is reduced to that assigned all female hysterics--her sexuality. Thus, the power, value, or truth often uttered by this construct is undermined by the hysterical context from which she speaks.

For the actress approaching these often powerful performance pieces (those explored here are star turns, every one), thinking women's historical status as mystics, witches, seers--and the sexual hystericization of this intelligence--must be seen as a model for the dramatic representation of women's voices. Female knowledge has been viewed as dangerous, flowing from or caused by irrational, fixed desire for men. Hysterical speech can, thus, never be taken at "face value," but is presented as the hysterical utterance of sexual suffering.

In representation, this hystericization of woman's mind: her ideas, attitudes, dreams, knowledge, is accomplished by allowing the woman's part access to speech in the following manners:

1. She talks to herself.
 - no one hears her
 - her words have no effect on the action
 - no one wants to listen to what she has to say
 - she is an outcast
 - men ignore her
2. She talks nonsense: delirium.
 - she cannot be understood
 - she repels the rational needs of listeners
 - inexplicable, unmotivated, mysterious speech
 - incomplete expression--translated or filled in by men
3. She hears voices that speak through her.
 - she has no control
 - the words are not her own
 - she speaks what she is fated to know, has been taught... parrots

4. She has visions which she relays: hallucination.
 - visions are the mad equivalent of male imagination
 - her fantasy is hysteria; his is artistic genius
 - products of a sick imagination that results from powerlessness, inability to act or influence
 - dismissed as unreality
 - she is in a world of her own

5. She is possessed by the gods - (Ancient)
 - the Devil - (Medieval and on....)
 - repressed desire - (Freud on...)
 - possession by lust: mania
 - she speaks only her body's desire
 - she speaks through her body
 - her words appall, excite, ridicule and censure

6. She speaks only to the end of an Idée Fixe: obsessed.
 - the motivation and cause of all she says is reduced to one idea
 - she cannot use her mind expansively--to roam the universe of ideas
 - her words are obsessive, dangerous, full of threats
 - lives in a private, detached world
 - stubborn refusal to listen to--or be silenced by--others

Pierre Janet noted in 1901, that female hysterics were highly prone to fixed ideas:

He observed that early in the course of the disease patients organized their fixed ideas and their resulting manifestations Absorbed in their pre-occupation with their fixed ideas, the patients retained a constant emotional climate that was unaffected by and unadaptable to all external influences.⁶⁷

Fixed ideas, Janet said, are "outside of normal consciousness":

These patients are in general very indifferent, at least to all that is not di-

rectly connected with a small number of fixed ideas.⁶⁸

7. Her speech is memory: Freud's hysterical reminiscences.
 - outside of action; present and future
 - through her speech she relives; acts out secret inner suffering
 - regressive
 - steeped in longing
 - unable to will a future through language
8. She casts spells, curses, spells doom.
 - what she says is terrible to men's ears
 - her words destroy, avenge
 - she gets her wisdom and skills from the Devil, himself
9. She tells lies, plays false roles: ACTS.
 - what she says is presented against "truth"
10. She confesses.
 - speech as outpouring
 - revelation of sin
 - admittance of failures

Hysterical representation of woman's mind cannot repress its contiguity, its disruption, its presence. When not silenced by victimization, the woman's part speaks its entrapment in speaking her mind.

What spews from her mouth, then, is presented as an illness which cannot be stopped with the violence of power. Recognizing that some women cannot be "shut up," their representatives are staged as outcasts. By placing the woman's mind in the context of possession, witchcraft, madness, "she" is excluded, mocked, isolated, ostracized,

ignored, ridiculed. As if contaminated, the woman who speaks out is subject to punishment or cure--a silencing.

Inevitably, the source of woman's mind is uncovered as sexual hysteria. A healthy, content woman has no need to speak out in life or in drama: the ideal woman has nothing to say. Mind, then, in the female race, is an aberration, a sign of disease--which, in women, is sexual.

The following is a part of a Greek fable which explores women's minds. Zeus is said to have created various tribes of women. (The underlining is mine.)

Excerpt, "The Female Mind" On Woman,
Semonides, 6th Century, B.C.

[One] he made from a bitch, own daughter
of her mother, who wants to hear every-
thing and know everything. She peers
everywhere and strays everywhere, always
yapping, even if she sees no human being.
A man cannot stop her by threatening, nor
by losing his temper and knocking out her
teeth with a stone, nor with honeyed
words . . . "69

This fable--brutal and crude as it may be--contains in essence the canon's attitude and representation of the female mind (which is here distinguished from other representation. Whatever the source of her speech, it must speak its mind--and if the hysteria is the author's, then what is heard is his reaction to the thoughts of HER. By recording what he thinks she knows--and framing it as hysterical, can he hope to contain her?

The actress must ask if and, if so, how the voice she is given is really beyond its author's control:

How do the words and thoughts jar with their ascribed motivation and desire?

What is true and real that may be presented as false and mad?

How does the context or frame of her speech undermine, discredit, hystericize the content which otherwise might be seen as powerful, wise and sane response?

Why does she speak? Why is she allowed to use her mind? Why isn't she silenced? Is the author allowing her to accuse him, to punish him, to absolve him? Does she fool him?

What is so frightening about the woman's point of view?

Theocritus, Idyll 2, An excerpt from: "A dramatic representation of a courtesan's attempt to win back a handsome lover."

But today I will bind him with what I
burn here. . . . I will sing to you . .
. Hecate underground, before whom even
dogs tremble as she comes from the graves
of the dead and their black blood. Hail,
Hecate Magic wheel, draw that man
to my house Now the sea is still
. . . . but the pain in my heart is not
still The whole of me burns for
him; instead of a wife, he has made me
miserable, a fallen woman, no longer a
virgin I'll grind up a lizard for
him to drink Magic wheel draw
him into my house.⁷⁰

The female mind in representation speaks its dissatisfaction as unfulfilled desire from man--lust or revenge. Her speech is spell, curse; is memory, calling for presence; argument, reprisal. Verbal foaming at the mouth. Verbal

grotesqueries of ecstasy and pain. Verbal visions or possession.

During the Middle Ages, for a time, under the influence of St. Augustine, disease was linked to witchcraft through the mind. Ilza Veith comments:

Once the aberration of a belief in witches and its dire consequences had come into being, numberless deluded inquisitors obtained confessions of devilish intercourse with even greater numbers of equally deluded witches who confessed to an unending variety of supernatural crimes; most of these in earlier periods, would simply have been grouped under the category of hysteria. But the treatment of a disease that was characterized by odd behavior fell under the authority of the priest.⁷¹

Whether or not inquisitors were deluded in their persecution of odd women who spoke out--these outcasts--is questionable. That the "witches" were tortured into confessions of devil fornication is most likely. However the story--drama?--behind the persecution of "hysterical" women (here, seen as witches, elsewhere as simply lusting-mad, or morally corrupt) is one of battle and ultimate silencing. "Supernatural crimes" is another word for thinking women (not so far from "trouble-making, hysterical" feminists of the 20th century are these witches of old). Before they are silenced, the witches are forced to confess--to implicate their beliefs and words with EVIL--and to renounce their own voice as anathema.

Johann Sprenger and Heinrich Kraemer, Inquisitors for Pope Innocent VIII, laid down woman's relationship to the Devil as a Law of Nature in their Malleus Maleficarum, 1481:

Women, inferior by nature, lying, vicious, and hopelessly impure, are naturally the most serviceable and willing tools of the Devil.⁷²

Those women, throughout history, who dared, or who were unable to stop themselves from the urge to speak out (defying "nature"), were diagnosed and condemned for the act of speech, itself. Even to this day, a woman holding forth is either threatening or hilarious--disgusting, in any case (Freud's usage, a turning away). The "hysterical" mind, then, in dramatic history is best understood as the verbal hysteria of men.

Cassandra

It is not surprising that Cassandra was adopted by Florence Nightingale as a symbol for the martyred voice of woman. Nightingale, as Elaine Showalter describes her, "suffered from years of agonizing mental depression. . . dreamlike trances, religious hallucinations and moments of suicidal despair," before taking that undared leap--leaving home to make her own individually-determined life as a nurse.⁷³ Nightingale, as fictive autobiographer, transformed the enslaved seer-princess of the ancient world into a young woman in her own Victorian age--destined to speak her vision of a

time when women's lives would be free from the hallucinations of the enslaved and mistrusted. Of course, nobody listened: cast into the realm of pariah, the Victorian Cassandra died, ignored.⁷⁴

Clarifying an essential connection between woman's speech and its reception as sexual hysteria, Showalter draws the following analogy between ancient and Victorian attitudes towards woman's sexuality:

In Greek mythology . . . Cassandra is cursed by Apollo for having rejected his love: her prophecies, though true, are fated never to be believed. The myth suggests that women who reject sexuality and marriage (the two are synonymous for Victorian woman) are muted or even driven mad by social disapproval. . .⁷⁵

For Nightingale, Showalter notes, the ostracization caused by, yet necessary for, a free life, was another kind of entrapment: hysterical reaction without the possibility of action and connection--an audience.

What terrified Nightingale was that middle-class women were Cassandras rendered so crazy and powerless by their society that they could rail and rave but never act.⁷⁶

Railing and raving hysteria was the smoke trail of a vicious circle, then, destined to evaporate into non-action, nothingness. Nightingale was well aware of the sexual differentiation which made heroic martyrs of men who voiced their disapproval, while a humiliating diagnosis was pronounced on women who spoke out. Nightingale:

Christ, if he had been a woman, might have been nothing but a great complain-er.⁷⁷

Nightingale's analogical use of the Cassandra character for her own contemporary analysis is a process which must be reversed by the actress seeking to analyze and "act" the ancient Cassandra in Aeschylus' Agamemnon. How can she re-enter a world where knowledge of the future is the fated vengeance of a lusty, miffed God? Nightingale's Christ-like Cassandra receives visions of a society free of deadening restrictions; the ancient woman's part is compelled by a force presented to her by Apollo: her gift of vision, a sexual favor. She speaks and suffers from a knowledge she cannot stop herself from seeing. Loxias, jealous of Apollo's conquest, punishes her with incredulous reception. The dreadful future will unfold because no one will listen. The ancient Cassandra's fate is subverted and transformed in Nightingale's Cassandra's vision. And still, no one will listen.

Is Cassandra a fighter, or a victim of her wisdom? Is her speech full of the effort of one desperate to make others see? Or the terrified record of a dreadful knowledge forced upon her mind? Cassandra's gifts are externalized and sexualized as a favor bestowed by a god. Can the actress, like Nightingale, make the analogical leap into an inner visionary whose wisdom is her own? What does the text allow?

The Cassandra state (if one might so characterize the position of Cassandra in representation) is one of high paradox. Having lost her believability, she loses the role of actress. Cassandra is a truthful female character only and precisely because she is not believed.

Cassandra's sense of "self" is best defined in her cry of defiance against Apollo--and her resignation to the fate she is doomed to see and cannot escape:

Now the seer has done with me, his prophetess,
And led me into such a place as this, to die.⁷⁸

Cassandra is Apollo's vessel--both prophetic and sexual. He has given her the gift of seeing in exchange for sexual favor which she had no choice but to receive. More precisely, it could be said that in his godly semen is the gift of TRUTH. Thus, again, woman is rewarded and punished by the giving and withholding of her sex--by her desirability. And here, it is the contents of her mind which are filled through a god's lust. Thus Cassandra's speech is not her own--literally; she mouths the visions of Apollo, yet her body reacts to the terror of her own enslavement and death.

One who knows the doom of her future has no wants or needs. The crying out of her prophecy is beyond her will. She has only the rhetorical questions familiar to all sufferers:

Apollo, Apollo!
Lord of the ways, my ruin.
Where have you lead me now at last? What
House is this?⁷⁹

Why have you brought me here in all unhappiness?
 Why? Why? Except to die with him? What else
 could it be?⁸⁰

Cassandra reacts to the certain knowledge of Agamemnon's and her own murder with terrible cries of pain, horror--and a bitterness, as one might expect. However, she is described as one possessed, not herself, at all.

CHORUS: You are possessed of God, dazed at heart to sing your own death song, the wild lyric. . . .⁸¹

Even as one possessed, Cassandra is allowed some resistance (does it make her suffering more exciting, like the tug and pull of resistance/desire?). The Chorus--and even Clytemnestra--note it in her body; Clytemnestra reads "rage and strength" in Cassandra's silence. However, Cassandra is given, too, a gesture of defiance and words to accompany it:

Why do I wear these mockeries upon my body,
 This staff of prophecy
 At least I will spoil you before I die. Out, down
 break, damn you! This for all that you have done
 to me.
 Make someone else, not me, luxurious in disaster.⁸²

But her physical tantrum ends in weeping acceptance, so that the Chorus asks:

How can you, serene,
 Walk to the altar like a driven Ox of God?⁸³

Cassandra's volatile behavior is that of a channel of reaction to "her" thoughts which she expresses automatically, reactively. Her body cries out, wails, shakes, recoils, and signs the knowledge of her mind with performance--with the acting out of the visions before her eyes. In this sense, she is speaking

out of the blind-trance state of hysterical reaction induced by the male gods who control her.

In Cassandra's speech, there is nothing left unspoken, unutterable--unless it is everything that would define a Trojan princess possessed of her own voice and will. As vessel, she sees and tells all, heightening--and sexualizing--the terror for the audience in this story. The enslaved princess-turned-whore, writhing before her fate as narrator.

Perhaps the play knows more than it intended about its delight in persecuting women who know more than they should about the future of the world and who remind men of the violent mess they have made of it. A Cassandra cannot survive her insight, because her insight is violent.

Her subject, then, might be perceived as men's violence, not the story at hand. Ultimately, Cassandra's story is, really, that nobody listens. The author doesn't listen to her. He destroys her. Terrified to face the violence within themselves, men sacrifice women--their only observer and commentator--the witness to their crimes.

As a seer, Cassandra is placed in the hystericizing context of a foreigner in a hostile land. Agamemnon refers to her as this "stranger girl,"⁸⁴ and she is received with hostility and disdain by Clytemnestra. The irony of Clytemnestra's invitation to Cassandra to enter her house must be met with laughter at Cassandra's expense.

Clytemnestra demands some signs of understanding from
Cassandra:

If you fail to comprehend,
speak not, but make with your barbarian hand some
sign.⁸⁵

The Chorus "defends" her by reducing her status as foreigner
to animality:

I think his strange girl needs some interpreter
who understands. She is like some captive animal.⁸⁶

It is most interesting to see how her prophetic gifts
(which are, in essence, her nature) are viewed by others. The
Chorus links her wisdom with that of beasts:

The stranger is keen scented like some hound upon
The trail of bloods that leads her to discovered
death.⁸⁷

In the female race, knowledge is reduced to crude sensa-
tion: the scenting of the bitch, able to sniff out her own
death but unable to act to resist it. Her hysterical prophe-
cies substitute for action--for the heroic capacity of man to
transcend his physical state. Cassandra sees terrifying
visions--as if through walls, but her sight is of only
negative value to the chorus of old men who represent the
rational view, framing her cries:

From divination what good ever has come to men?
Art, and multiplication of words
drifting through tangled evil bring
terror to them that hear.⁸⁸

Between Clytemnestra and Agamemnon no words are directly
exchanged about the slave whom he has brought home as sexual
prize. However, her introduction as "flower exquisite" at the

site of her hysterical eruption eroticizes her slavery and ignores her gift as seer. She is watched as object on stage long before she speaks. She is sexual body first.

For a woman, then, it is hysterical to have knowledge: she is not believed. She speaks a foreign tongue. For the woman, truth is a terrible burden flowing through her from elsewhere, beyond her control--outside of her scope. The truth she utters and reacts to does not belong to her. Tortures her. Her symptom is that she knows too much for her own good. The arrogance inherent in God's gift is wasted on her and destroys her. (She is meant for other things.) Knowledge comes to the woman without the accompanying ability to act upon it or lead others to act: her words are an unnatural redundancy.

Cassandra's cure comes when she sees her own death. That is the truth for the woman seer. Death cures her of a knowledge that does not belong to her and for which she must be punished--through the ultimate silencing.

Cassandra is blamed for:

1. Having sex with Apollo--thus receiving knowledge (for her sexual desirability)
2. For frightening the old men with her violent prophecies.

She is victim of:

1. Desire
2. A knowledge that she cannot contain or silence
3. Revenge based on jealousy, that discredits her word.

Whether analogy or literal description, Agamemnon describes Cassandra as possessing the "slave's yoke" that "no man will wear from choice."⁹⁹ It is probable that she appears in chains and that her erotic resistance to her prophecy manifests itself physically--as if it were an erotic inability to resist the "favors" of God and King.

However, an actress might subvert the pornographic picture by giving in too quickly: resistance is sexy. The hypnotic state in which one is mouthing the will of another is more appropriate. Perhaps, she can, like Charcot's hysterics, give the contents of her vision over to puppetry directed by the text--eliminating Cassandra as anything but the hysterical channel through which the author speaks: She doesn't know why, how, she speaks. Terror and knowledge become another hypnotic act directed from the outside.

Why do men fear what women know about birth and surviving? By silencing women do men hope to silence the persistent prophecy of death which they so hysterically ignore?

Medea

Can a feminist heroine murder children? Does she have any other choice within the hystericizing text? The defiance of the nurturing mind--resisting the idealized masochism of motherhood--is analogized as child murder in the hysterical drama.

For the actress winning the "plum" part, Medea is a challenge of resistance and transcendence. Can she overcome the hysterical context which constructs Medea's strong stance as brilliant woman unwilling to let herself be used and abandoned as a woman "should"? Or, is the actress's challenge, rather to enter deeply, fully, into the psychotic fragmentation of hysterical portrayal--thus exposing it?

Medea is so often scrutinized: why and how to justify her murderous intent? The feminist critic asks, instead, why and how a man writes a woman as child-murderer? Indeed, Sue- Ellen Case argues that a man should be cast in the part of Medea, "underscoring the patriarchal prejudices of ownership and jealousy and the ownership of children as male concerns."⁹⁰

The feminist critic as actress asks why women-with-minds are constructed as deceit and danger? The hysterical context offers answers. A clever woman really is deadly for the male psyche unless she is clearly presented as a false threat: as illness, thus subject to "cure"--censure and exposure, punishment.

Medea as archetype of the woman's mind in action is framed by ridicule and disrespect. Her appearance on stage is prefaced by her old nurse--with familiarity and a certain disgust. She is diagnosed as one devoid of full reason whose "illness" is a hysterical performance which exasperates rather than moves to tears:

Fasting she lies, yielding to grief her body,
Wasting in tears continually since first

She had knowledge how her lord was wronging her;
 Neither lifting her eyes, nor from the ground
 Raising her face but deaf as any rock
 Or ocean wave, she heeds not chiding friends

And to herself bemoans her father dear,
 Her country, and house, which she betrayed.⁹¹

The attendant of her sons asks with seeming impatience:
 "Has she not ceased wailing her miseries?" And he comments
 patronizingly on the news of her banishment which he and all
 others except Medea seem to know is about to take place: "Ah,
 blind fool! . . . For of her latest troubles she knows
 naught."⁹²

Written into this diagnosis is censure, and it is quickly
 followed by foreboding: the clever hysteric--the hysterical
 mind--doesn't stop at her own suffering. The nurse comments:

I am fearful lest some mischief she devise;
 Since dangerous is her mood
 For terrible is she: if any rouse her hate . . .⁹³

And, as if such an introduction were not enough, Nurse warns
 the attendant of Medea's two sons:

Bring them not near their mother in this dark mood
 Already I have seen her glaring upon them. . .⁹⁴

Thus is the stage set for Medea. Already, the audience
 knows of her mad reactive grief (its suspected histrionics)
 and her potential danger. By now, the reader of ancient
 hysterical texts should not be surprised that she is preceded
 on stage by her own wailing voice: Medea's is the female
 voice of suffering, suicidal victim--but we are already afraid
 of her.

MEDEA: What misery is mine! Utter grief and despair!
 Ah woe, woe is me! Might I but die now!⁹⁵

"From within," Medea continues to wail her death wish but soon she is cursing her sons, Jason, her betrayer, and the whole house.

CHORUS: What a fierce wild dirge of woe broke forth!⁹⁶

"Fierce and wild" now, rather than pathetic, Medea's off-stage wailings offer a unique representation: VOICE as disembodied mind--so much more terrifying than the female body on stage. Beyond ravishing or ridicule: a mind speaks itself.

Turning now to the actress's analysis, one discovers the most dangerous aspect of this hysterical construct: Medea has a sense of self--self-worth--and wronged! She places her worth in her mind, and thus it is that she can speak of self, reflectively. Medea:

 Since I am wise, some find me odious,
 Some hard to please. . .⁹⁷

Beyond her sense of individual self, Medea also has a sense of herself as woman. In Medea, sense of self, then, for the first time in this investigation, is not cut off from ideas, attitudes and opinions. Medea addresses the Women of Corinth as a leader--one sure of herself, and as a director of opinion:

 We women are the unhappiest creatures born.
 First we must waste a rich dower's price to purchase
 A husband, and accept one to be tyrant
 Over our body--an evil yet more bitter.
 And here's the worst risk, whether the lord we
 choose

Be good or bad: for infamous is divorce
 For women, nor may we disown our lords. . . .⁹⁸

Proceeding to spell out the personal wrongs done her by Jason (in eloquent, deductive rhetoric) Medea argues for the support of the women in her clear-headed stratagem of revenge. "Do not betray me," she demands, with the confidence of one who has reasoned well and knows her audience.

Without going into details so well known, it is enough to say that Medea wants revenge against Jason for abandoning her for a young princess--and she gets it. Her method can best be described as performance--her ability to convince all those with whom her strategy leads her into contact of her "sincerity." What Medea does within the course of her drama is act.

Though she summons Hecate--Women's Goddess and source of their magical powers--as support, Medea is quick to call on her own resources to accomplish her task:

Up then! neglect naught of thy art and skill,
 Medea: some scheme now must thou devise.
 On to dread deed! . . .¹⁰⁰

Medea, clearly, has only her mind as defense and weapon. She is an outcast, banished and homeless--another pariah like Cassandra. She must beg Aegeus to receive her in his land:

Pity, oh pity me. . . .
 Suffer me not to be cast out forlorn,
 But to thy land and to the hearth receive me.¹⁰¹

Finally, Medea must bargain with her mental powers (her "witchcraft") to buy herself a space of refuge:

Thou knowest not what good fortune I shall bring
 thee

I'll make thee a childless man no more
 such potent spells do I know.¹⁰²

It is ironic or perhaps a telling example of the text's knowing more than it concedes that the "child-murderer," Medea, contains within her--and uses--the ability to bring on fertility.

But it is not her exiled status that maddens Medea, according to the text; it is her sexual rejection--her betrayal and humiliation at the hands of Jason whom she continues to desire that ultimately leads to a self-renunciation and censure that seems to undermine Medea's power and stance:

What then do I live for? No home now.
 No country is mine, from misery no refuge.
 Then did I err, when from my father's halls
 I fled, beguiled by the phrases of a Greek.¹⁰³

Medea is forced by the text's ridicule of her position into an uncharacteristic renunciation of her disobedience of Father's Law--and her own desire.

It might seem to the contemporary actress that there are, at the very least, two Medeas in the text of Medea: one, wise, defiant, resolute; the other, a repentant, fearful, self-loathing woman, able to say of her sex:

I am woman;
 And are not we for good most impotent
 But for all evil deeds subtlest artificers?¹⁰⁴

And perhaps, Medea is best approached as a psychotic fragmentation of male perception. A "Three (or four) Faces of Eve" performance: various selves dissolving into the nothingness

of renunciation and contradiction. One face of Medea is the abandoned, sexually insecure, aging hysteric. Of herself, she says to Jason:

Your foreign wife
Ceased, as she lost her youth, to serve your
pride.¹⁰⁵

In fact, all the insecure reaction that leaves Medea hysterically disabled by the text derives from Jason: her desire.

Jason minimizes her claims to his salvation, asserting that desire, once again, is the impetus and source of woman's mind. Desire is given the credit for her wisdom--and it is male:

JASON: I say. . . .
Though a subtle wit be yours . . . nay, but it were
Scarce generous to tell how love compelled you
By his resistless shafts to save my life.¹⁰⁶

However, it is Jason who accuses Medea of precipitating her own ostracization and banishment. The male god of desire compels her mind and fills the woman with skills, but it is woman herself who is blamed for her victimization. Jason's argument is prototypical:

MEDEA: Aye, mock me! You have a home . . . but I must flee
this land,
a friendless exile.

JASON: Thine own free choice was that. Blame no one else.

MEDEA: How so?

JASON: Thank thy wicked curses against the King.¹⁰⁷

Medea as woman-who-speaks-out stands as warning: to raise your voice against male authority (The Law) is to court

the most terrible isolation and banishment. Such arrogance is unforgiveable because it is fearsome. A woman's curse must be hystericized, demonized, in order to detonate its explosive message.

Finally Medea's mental struggle with her own resistance to murdering her two sons--the complexity of those feelings--is utterly subverted by the attitudes of those who watch and comment. The Chorus of Women have lost their empathy with her entirely as the narrative frames her with gloating, possessed, infanticidal intent:

Suffer her not to strike, but chase forth the house
this fell witch, by fiends driven to crime and
blood.¹⁰⁸

And perhaps, Medea's inner debate is best played as a psychotic dialogue between the confused, fragmented parts of her construction. Does she de-construct her own character--exposing its confusion?

As a re-telling of history or myth, Medea's infanticide is an assertion of the only kind of power or leverage that women have--through their reproductive capacity and their subsequent control over children's safety and growth. However, for an actress, seeking out truth, Medea's emotional tug and pull with the murder of her sons must finally be exposed as false, laughable more than horrifying: a hysterical male nightmare.

Diagnosing Medea
Quick Run-down of Hysterical Symptoms and Prescribed Cure.

Cause of Illness

As expected, unfulfilled desire and sexual abandonment.

Symptoms

over-active sense of self importance: delusion
histrionic behavior
falseness: shallowness of feelings
insecurity caused by aging, loss of beauty
over-possessiveness

Cure

Ostracization, banishment

Accusation

Medea is blamed for murderous intent: the successful plan and the plan's success. For not being a real woman--meaning, mother: for being an actress. For thinking cleverly. For possessing a self--and voice which are demonized.

Defense

She is a victim of the withdrawal of man's desire: this solely, is responsible for her madness and infanticide.

Medea's Future

Because she has spoken out, it is unlikely that Medea will take her own life. She is too mad: too immersed in the delusion of self for self-annihilation. She might be stoned to death, or hid away under the world in an underground cave.

Left to rave to herself like all women who refuse to suffer in silence or in self-annihilating motherhood.

Helena

In Helena, the hysterical *idée fixe* is given its most complete embodiment: the virgin fixed on the man she desires; the witch fixed on her victim--casting the spell of her will-as-lust. Helena's sexuality is center stage in All's Well That Ends Well and is framed in a hystericizing context that ostracizes, mocks and denigrates her desire. If she is clever and full of ideas to gain her end, still this mental power is constructed as illness--and fearfully contagious.

As Paula S. Berggren has noted, it is hardly an exaggeration to claim that in Shakespeare's drama, all women represent their sexuality to the virtual exclusion of any other aspect of what it is to be a female human being.

The central element in Shakespeare's treatment of women is always their sex, not as a focus for cultural observation or social criticism . . . but primarily as a mythic source of power, an archetypal symbol that arouses both love and loathing.¹⁰⁹

Helena epitomizes this reduction of being to sex and, more specifically, the female mind to sex--which is, perhaps, the most complex representation women are allowed. For John

C. Bean, Helena "may well be the culmination of Shakespeare's studies of women." Bean adds, in affirmation:

She is unquestionably his most erotic heroine, and her femininity is magically potent.¹¹⁰

Ultimately, Helena is the archetypal hysterical virgin. Parolles' "witty" misogynistic banter on virginity (surely suggestive of Elizabethan attitudes in general)--presents virginity as an illness in itself--with its one inevitable cure. Parolles on virginity:

Tis against the rule of nature
Virginity breeds mites, much like cheese,
consumes itself to the very paring . . .
Besides virginity is peevish, proud,
idle, made of self-love like
one of your French withered pears--it
looks ill, it east dryly . . .¹¹¹

Left alone on stage with her *idée fixe*, Helena uses the vocabulary of disease and cure as she plans her strategic winning of Bertram--he, the remedy for her virgin illness--that hysterical desire:

Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie
the King's disease--my project may deceive me,
But my intents are fix'd, and will not leave me.¹¹²

Helena is a dependent ward, an outsider, not a part of the noble family in whose house she lives. As such, her hopeless desire is merely pathetic. Outsider status, however, quickly regresses to that of outcast when she demands to have her desires met. Helena, in thinking and willing--using her mind and its powers to attain her end--becomes a pariah in the community of men in the play.

The actress must observe and record how all voices rise against Helena--even as she exhibits skill and power--positioning her for ridicule and disgust. Just as a foolish and undeserving man may be placed in a position of power, so, too, can a wise and deserving woman become displaced on an alien and hostile stage. By reducing the fruits of her mind to the fulfillment of her lust, the woman's mind becomes another point of entry and possession by man.

Character Analysis

Sense of Self

Though Helena is introduced as her father's daughter at the play's opening, she defines her self--not in her duty and relation to her father's law--but, rather, in relation to her unrequited desire and suffering for Bertram. Helena says--alone and out loud--that there is no self--no living--without this man whom she loves:

I am undone, there is no living, none
If Bertram be away.¹¹³

"My idolatrous fancy" Helena names Bertram, and the action of the play is the playing out of this obsessive worship and seeking after Bertram's body--his sexuality must fill and define Helena if she is to live.

Helena's hysterical suffering stands in sharp contrast to Bertram's warrior status. Bertram says it best: "I'll to the wars, she to her single sorrow."¹¹⁴ But she is also a witch

and a nag because she insists on speaking up, taking a part. Her voice, then, is defined as interference and disruption. Throughout the play she has monologues full of thought, device, intent; dialogue of witty, sexual repartee; carefully constructed arguments (for example, with the King, whom she convinces she can cure--but for a price).

Only in Bertram's presence is Helena reduced to a virtual silence, obsequious murmurs that deny her a right to a voice. Bertram leaves her speechless, and in the moral order of the play, the speechless state reveals contentment. Abandoned by Bertram, Helena is shamed into self-exile. Possessed by Bertram, she has nothing more to say. All her language--the contents of her sizeable mind and skills--serve her ultimate silencing in Bertram's arms. Helena as constructed by Shakespeare, is willing to be "taken" for someone else as long as she is taken by Bertram. The site of self, then, in Helena is a confusion of confidence and wit, will and driven assurance, with a completely selfless definition as desire-to-become-Bertram's.

Needs and Wants

Though she has inherited the inestimable power to stave off death (wisdom coming from the father, as in all hysterical texts), she is not interested in becoming a doctor like her father. Perhaps, this is simply because in the world of the play (and in the Elizabethan world), a woman's ambitions are

never allowed to transcend her sex. Woman as healer could never be doctor--only witch, ostracized or worse. Helena's needs and wants are confined to the wedding, then the bedding of Bertram.

What She Does

Helena sells her healing power for the price of Bertram in marriage (risking death if her powers fail.)

She disappears into a convent, led by her lust: part of a design to move her one more step towards her eventual entrapment of Bertram. The hysterical Erotic/Mystic dialectic is played out in this "whore" in nun's garb. Helena will resort to anything to get Bertram: including the blasphemy of acting holy. Sex is her hope for salvation.

Reaction

Helena reacts to Bertram's consistent rejection of her with hysterical thinking based upon her desperation. She is capable of manipulating all others in the play and rather than reacting to them, Helena has Bertram's mother siding with her against her own son; the King disavowing and cutting off his own blood-kin for her; and Diana, willing to undergo a complex and dangerous exchange of identities to help Helena reclaim Bertram. She is convincing and effective but, ultimately, all her seeming control is in reaction to Bertram.

He is her motivation and, as presented, the only cause of her wisdom, wit, and will. Desire-for-Bertram creates Helena. Ultimately, then, it is her body, her sexuality, that Helena reacts to in the course of the play. She is in constant reaction to desire.

Behavior

Helena appears for the first time on stage in tears--already hysterical. But she is able to transform her tears into a sexual repartee with the vulgar Parolles. Because she is obsessed with her *idée fixe*, Helena's behavior is erratic and fluid--moving from moments of despair and grief to sexually charged dialogue; from arguments full of wise conviction and determination to unhappy and irresolute moments of giving up. Hers is the fluctuating behavior of the hysterical monster who contains both illusions of grandeur and utter victimization: whose movements are broad and grotesque or else paralyzed by sexual grief. Helena is Charcot's performance: erotic contortionist suddenly frozen in ecstatic pose. But her contortions and poses take place in her mind. Helena's hysterical performance is one that is heard, rather than seen on the body.

Ideas, Thoughts, Attitudes, Opinions

There is an angry, "dangerous," undercurrent in Helena. It is expressed in her battle of wits with Parolles, when she asks:

Is there no military policy, how virgins
might blow up men?¹⁷⁵

This reversal-play with Parolles' use of a metaphor for pregnancy presents the virgin (namely, here, Helena) as one who threatens the natural order of male dominance if she is not contained. Virginity must be obliterated if men are to remain on top, as it were. That a virgin is a dangerous thing is the underlying hysteria of the play itself.

Helena is not afraid of her sexuality and is eager and able to engage in talk of virginity and sex. Her attitude is that of one who sees men for what they are--and is well aware of woman's status in their eyes.

However, as stated earlier, Helena's considerable cleverness serves her obsessive love which must be read as sexual desire in the play's constant chorus of sexual scenes, its erotic theme, and sexually-soaked actions of chase and conquest--lust and repulsion. Bed as centerpiece.

Silence, Unspoken, Unutterable, Untold, Mystery

The unutterable mystery of All's Well, finally, is the purported mystery of Helena--of woman. Female behavior, the female mind and its physical manifestation--is presented as a kind of grotesque and erotic wonder, a power that cannot be

escaped and cannot be fully grasped by its male victims. Helena's abilities and maneuvering are never fully explained.

- How does she cure the King?
- How does she spread the news of her own death?
- How does she discover Diana, uncover Bertram's desire?

The answers to all questions of women's abilities are couched in the disturbing mystery of their contiguous, intuitive, mental state: their madness; the way they see, discover and--like water-- find their way into places (hearts or beds--their own or others').

Hysterical Sites

There is a most terrible moment in the play when revenge is exacted on Helena, sign of the author's hysteria: Helena's sudden incoherence and reduction to pathetic beggar-of-a-kiss from Bertram.

The site of repression . . . contains both strangeness and enslavement. (Jacobus)¹¹⁶

There is nothing recognizable in this Helena but there is, instead, an enforced humiliation--an empowerment of Bertram that hysterically reduces Helena.

Helena as Actress

The construct, Helena, is built upon performance--woman as actress--from the very beginning, when the Countess admonishes Helena for an excessive display of grief over her father's death. When she is left alone on stage, Helena reveals that her tears are, indeed, not what they seem" "I think not on my father . . ."117 Playing the role of dutiful daughter, she is really full of hysterical desire for a man she fears she cannot have. Her father's law is shut out by an unlawful lust. This desire makes her an actress--a willing deceiver, a woman with something to hide.

Helena plays many roles to achieve her end--a wit, able to stand up to Parolles who she knows to share the ear of Bertram; a wise woman-healer to the King; a sincere sister-traveler to Diana and the widow;--and even a repentant Pilgrim with "sainted vow" her "faults to have amended."118 Finally Helena plays dead--moving from blasphemy to Hecate's underworld where the living and dead meet in hysterical performance: desire as death. And in her death, she is resurrected as another. Thus, Helena is never what she seems, how she seems, where she seems or even who she seems to be: she is everywoman, everywhere: a threat that cannot be contained. Through her performance, Helena is lust at its deadliest--inescapable, suffocating, appearing and disappearing, finding its way into one's bed. Woman as sexual disease.

All's Well, as text, succeeds in containing Helena within a frame of demeaning sexual ridicule. Ironically, Helena is given much to say and much more stage time than most female characters, yet she is less able to stand as transcendent subject of her own drama. The play's attitude is too hostile to her power. The text's hysteria is terrified of Helena.

The following extracts indicate the extent of Helena's positioning as pariah--sexual illness--within the male community of the play's world. Woman as object of desire is here turned upside down into woman as object of repulsion. And ironically, it is her claim to the subject position in desiring Bertram as object that stigmatizes Helena as whore/witch.

BERTRAM [to the King]

My wife, my liege! . . . give me leave to use the help of my own eyes.

. . . to bring me down . . . I know her well:
. . . a poor physician's daughter my wife! Disdain rather than corrupt me ever!¹¹⁹

BERTRAM [to Parolles]

Undone, and forfeited to cares forever!

I'll . . . never bed her."

I'll send her to my house,
Acquaint my mother with my hate for her,
And wherefore I have fled.

War is no strife
To the dark house and the detested wife.

Here comes my clog.

[Enter Helena]¹²⁰

Helena as character cannot escape the taint of such negative appraisal--such harsh, vicious language. Viewed by the desirable male in the play as ugly, beneath him in stature, poor, corrupting, disgusting, hateful; a trap, a prison, a disease, Helena is also the victim of Bertram and Parolles' ironic and humiliating deception (his cavalier alibi for excepting her wedding bed.) Thus she is presented as pathetic in spite of her will and cleverness--and, in turn, her will and cleverness come to seem merely pathetic; her mind framed as pathological and pitiable. The audience participates in Bertram's efforts to escape Helena, in his feeble, casual lies that Helena is forced to believe and accept by the text. She comes off as a fool, a dupe: the audience, complicit in her mockery.

It is well known that when one is made to play the fool, the part sticks. Even when there is clearly a deceiver at work, the one deceived suffers the diminishment in the eyes of witnesses.

For the actress, there is the impossible task of swimming against the current of contempt that minimizes Helena's gifts while magnifying the sexual nature of her quest. Though the Countess and King (both aged, no longer capable of sexual appraisal) are fans of Helena (albeit from the patronizing position of superior blood), the people who matter to her don't like her at all. The actress's bold story of success is

consistently undermined by disrespect and ridicule. Helena is a hard part to bear.

Only her purported death-due-to-grief can elevate Helena's status in the play to a place above sexual ridicule and disgust. "Now she sings in heaven," the Lord's report informs the Countess. And suddenly harmless, Helena is exalted to virgin-saint. However, even this praise must be viewed in the ironizing context of its misplaced grief. The extolling will come to seem false, like the "death" itself.

LAFEU: He lost a wife,
Whose beauty did astonish the survey
of richest eyes; whose words all ears
took captive;
Whose dear perfection hearts that scorn'd to serve
Humbly call'd Mistress.

COUNTESS: It was the death of the most virtuous gentlewoman
that ever nature had praise for creating . . .¹²¹

Even Bertram, upon hearing of Helena's supposed death, is given words of praise for her (as false as they may be, they are as true as her death):

She whom all men prais'd, and whom myself,
since I have lost, have lov'd . . .¹²²

And the play continues to mock Helena. Bertram, finally, insults her sexuality in his appraisal of his bedding of Diana (which is really his bedding of Helena):

. . . she got the ring;
And I had that which any inferior might
at market-price have bought.¹²³

Helena as market-price whore. The irony of Bertram's casual enjoyment--his delight in getting away with what he thinks he has, places Helena's sexuality and desirability

center stage. Questions must fly thick and fast: can Helena claim Bertram's desire with the quality of her body? Is she desirable enough? Was Bertram's pleasure in her great enough to give the play a happy end?

Helena, herself, is presented as cured of her hysteria by Bertram's desire for Diana. Her virginity obliterated, she is no longer fixed on the idea of sex: she is woman now. Fulfilled by "ending well," Helena muses on how sweetly men can use the bodies of women they despise:

But O, strange men!
That can such sweet use make of what they hate
. . . .¹²⁴

Glorifying male virility as salvation--utterly satisfied now, Helena is transformed--practically unrecognizable: made normal, she can leave her wit, gifts, mind and voice behind.

The aesthetic closure of All's Well gives Helena what she wanted while removing the symptoms of her illness--her out-cast's voice. Her future is that of silent receptacle of Bertram's sex. She is already pregnant. The death of the rebel Helena is the happy end of the play.

The story of Helena's distasteful quest for Bertram with its inconsistent characterization has been explained by John C. Bean as a conflict between Shakespeare's adoption of old stories and his enlightened presentation of character:

Helena is erotic because she is in love. In such a world, the bed-trick is jarring because bed-tricks can work only when sex is impersonal, . . . where women are things. What shocks us is not the bed-trick itself or any subtle problem of

ethics but the collusion of the human and the mechanical. When Helena pretends in the dark of night to be Diana, we feel on a deeper, more disturbing plane . . . the incoherence that comes from combining old tales and humanized women.¹²⁵

Unfortunately, such justifications of the play's inconsistencies do little to help the actress. How, for example, is it possible to reconcile the passive response attributed to Helena when she receives the news that her marriage and nuptials are indefinitely postponed for an unexplained reason (Bertram doesn't even bother to dignify his flight with a false excuse) with Helena--so full of energy and will? It seems that Helena is reduced to this uncharacteristic incoherence in Bertram's presence. Taken to its furthest psychological dimension (or, spiritual dimension), Helena's great desire for Bertram is the desire for her own obliteration.

And in the end, this is achieved. And in the frame of the play, it is a happy end. All of Helena's wisdom and skill go to serving her complete reduction to her sex. Wit and ideas are the symptoms of her sexual hysteria and are removed at the play's conclusion--with her virginity.

Shakespeare gives Helena an energy, drive and voice that lead the actress into inescapable difficulties. Built on inconsistent feelings of awe and disgust for woman's insight, intelligence and her physical needs, all is not well for the woman playing her part.

The Diagnosed Hysteric: Modern "analyzed" hysteria of repressed desire.

The irony of this hysterical category, which is, in essence, an aesthetic attitude, is that its purported revelatory characterizations turn on the age-old sexual origin of female suffering. The conclusion that psychological science draws about the nature of women, illness and acting differs only from the earlier biological and moral "sciences" in its individualizing and particularizing of the lives of women. Data of an individual life is now presented as proof that the cause of a woman's "illness" is her sexuality (i.e. a woman is her sex). Mystery, inconsistency, gaps are explained away. No piece of life need remain a secret hidden from men. Psychology proves women are hysterical. And ultimately, psychology proves that women are false. The "facts" stand against her performance.

And the "new" psychological drama that appears on the heels of Breuer and Freud serves its scientific inspiration with loyalty. The analyzed hysterical heroines of realistic drama (as psychoanalytically motivated drama was christened) are not the pure suffering victims or the irrational minds of other dramatic forms. Rather, they are products of pasts--of causes and effects, of hereditary traits, environment and situation, who act out the same old behaviors for newly discovered reasons--exposed during the unfolding drama. Elin Diamond has noted:

In deciphering the hysteric's enigma, realism celebrates positive inquiry, thus buttressing its claims for 'true to life.'¹²⁶

Diamond has exposed a "discursive formation" with some very specific structural correlations between psychoanalysis and the "new" realistic drama. Her thesis leads inevitably to the supposition the "realism is itself a form of hysteria."¹²⁷

Hysteria as repression and transference has already been noted in the earlier discussion of man's construction of the woman's part--to the extreme proposition of the "drag" status of women in dramatic representation. But Diamond is interested in the way the new realistic dramatists structure the exposure of "woman's" hysteria (her sexual desire as illness) as psychoanalytic theory. Diamond:

The new therapy and the new theatre depend on exploring and exposing the woman with a past motivation arising from the complications of an 'individual,' shaped by inherited traits, social contexts, and forgotten traumas In both sites, the woman with a past is the theatre of discovery.¹²⁸

A specific hysterical structure emerges for the new drama, according to Diamond, that will finally expose woman as illness (or the woman's part as hysterical):

Like Freud's case histories, the new realism progressed by going backward, revealing the psychobiography of nervous women. Through confessions and self-exploration, woven into dialogue and action, an etiology emerged.¹²⁹

When the truth of the hysteric's dramatically exciting behavior is revealed, it is exactly as it was--her sexuality,

her woman-as-illness status. The new diagnosed heroines are Charcot's hysterics, thrilling with startling antics of behavior--contortions, now, not of the body or mind--but of psychological behaviors--"acting outs," moments of DRAMA that build to a climactic peak of explosive exposure--revealing, nothing.

A working definition of "acting out" is useful: acting out is starring in a drama of one's own, filling a vacuum with performance, reacting through performance. It is thought to differ in some respect from honest, real, behavior--or appropriate pure reaction. However, acting out is thought useful for getting at truths behind its hysterical manifestations--in clinical settings, under the watchful, knowing gaze of the psychoanalyst.

The structure of a hysterical portrayal works something like the following, according to Diamond:

The actor produces symptoms addressed to spectators who gradually understand their meanings . . . In this sense, realism creates the theatre equivalent of the transference, the actor joined to character through 'emotion memory,' reexperiencing past relations, past emotions in the presence of, as Lacanians say, a 'subject presumed to know.'¹³⁰

The actress, then, is signifying hysteria which must be translated by an audience. She cannot say what is repressed--only express the repression as clues. The signaling of clues of what cannot be said (that which is repressed in the name of

hysterical diagnosis) turns the actress into a kind of pathetic player of psychoanalytic charades.

In "realistic" drama, the actress's performance is interesting in precisely this way. The hysterical construct is observed acting out behaviors that cover what is really there. This new notion, that something true exists to be exposed under hysterical performance is the treat of the new drama. "She" is an actress trying hard to fool everyone, but eventually she will be revealed...

As? As nothing other than performance, itself. She is reincarnation of the hysterics of old--complicated and enlivened by the brutal focus and exposure--the keen-eyed interest and detailed presentation of SCIENCE.

I begin this next category of case studies with a fairly contemporary psychological analysis of a historically-based character who in earlier ages was constructed as a hysterical devil-worshipper and fornicator but who, in contemporary characterization, is explained in terms of her past and her resulting psychological illness (re: SEX), Sister Jeanne of the Angels in John Whiting's The Devils.

Then I turn to Strindberg's Miss Julie, which is of most interest for what it reveals about realism and ideology. And finally, I will explore a mother and a daughter (not each

other's) who represent hysterical construction taken to its most inevitable conclusion: woman as actress. Madame Arkadina and Nina in Chekhov's The Seagull.

Sister Jeanne

Post-Freudian interpretation of demonic possession as psychological repression is epitomized in the 1961 play, The Devils. Whiting stages "historical" possession, exorcism and the trials of the so-called witches of Loudon, in order to present the greater tragedy at the center of his concern--the Schopenhauerian hero, Grandier. The characterization of the hysterical nuns--and particularly, of Sister Jeanne of the Angels--is a case-book study in contemporary ideas about women's psyches. Framed in a revisionist history of female demonic possession as the explosive, sexual fantasy of repressed desire, Whiting, finally succeeds in demonstrating how little the construction of the female mind as hysteria has changed over centuries.

In his attempt to recast the accusation of female witchcraft as female psychology, Whiting has apparently consulted texts on hysteria. In this sense, the example of Sister Jeanne is less interesting because so meticulously drawn as a victim of "female illness." For the actress, Sister Jeanne is a trap, offering no way out. Once her hysteria is "diagnosed," analyzed and set down in symptomatic detail (and with case-study care to present memories, re-

pressed desire, objects of fantasy) and her "possession" is cast as the innocent, if clinical, playing out of this repressed desire manifesting as guilt (as devil within), then there is literally no place for the actress to know more than the text knows. All "sites" or gaps have been filled in with the hysterical "insight" (or in-site) of the author.

The Devils' exploration of the female psyche turns on the idea that women live in internal, private, imaginative worlds because they are locked out of the public, external, rational world. Thus, female memory is a filter for fantasies lived through internally over the course of a woman's life. The convent or nunnery is the ultimate site of female imaginative life: cut off, shut away from men and man's world, nuns possess hysterical imagination most purely. There is no real life getting in the way of sexual repression and its fantastic expression. Their vows of silence, chastity and charity lead the Sisters directly to hysterical reaction. Silence becomes possession by other voices which only they hear and can transmit. Chastity becomes uncontrollable seizures and release of desire. Charity twists into an animalism bent on feeding at whatever cost.

Sister Jeanne's first appearance on stage is a spot-lit, desperate prayer to God--her "lord"--in which she prays to find a way into his "sacred arms:"

The blood will flow between us, uniting us.¹³¹

She begs to have the lump of her humpback disappear. She is her need for ecstatic connection, and she is the hump that keeps her from the joys women discover lying flat on their backs. The image of the humpbacked nun in hysterical-ecstatic posture is grotesque: a freak show sign. She prays, but cannot lift or open.

From her first appearance, then, Jeanne is a hysterical clown in the Charcot tradition. When she appears again in the convent, making the first mention of Grandier (her repressed desire), she embarks on a hysterical performance of symptoms: She . . .

"has a fit of coughing"
 "pauses with exhaustion"
 "breaks off"
 "stares unseeingly"
 breaks into "sudden, harsh laughter"
 "calm"
 harsh laughter, again . . .¹³²

and left alone, recites the first of her reminiscences--those stories from the past--that Breuer and Freud were convinced held the key to hysterical trauma and release.

Jeanne's next appearance is a fantastic monologue in which she puts herself into the body of Grandier as he fills with desire for a woman at his side. The monologue is punctuated with laughter, weeping and, finally, a convulsion which brings her to her knees, rolls her onto her back and leaves her gasping, suffocated, orgasm completed.

The humpbacked nun, in hysterical pornography, is "taken" by her imagination. One scene later, Jeanne is confessing to

"visions of a diabolical nature," to "visitations" in which "filth, dirt, obscenity" are directed at her from a man at the foot of her bed.¹³³

And finally, the first act ends, with Jeanne's act of possession by a deep-voiced male demon, named Asmodee.

Whether Jeanne is a "genuine case" of possession or only a "hysterical woman" is a question raised by the Church patriarchy for whom she is a potentially powerful political weapon against Grandier, their enemy. Added to her list of symptoms is a new one--false pregnancy.

And when she appears again, as Asmodee, she is running wildly, pursued like an animal, and finally trapped under a net.

As Asmodee, her male, possessed voice, Jeanne is a witty, vulgar, jovial and sarcastic devil. She uses foul language, "giggles insanely," laughs, and argues with reason and logic, with pride and audacity. Asmodee is bold and contemptuous--and oddly sociable.

When Jeanne's exorcist/prosecutors prepare to torture her in order to silence this demon, he quickly disappears at the threat. Thus, the final and most revelatory symptom is added to Jeanne's hysteria: she is acting.

Interrogated by a Holy Father while literally lying on her back, Jeanne enters a psychoanalytic scene. Her thoughts are recorded by a Clerk, her memories are invoked. She has several reminiscences which mix pain and ecstasy, violence and

passion, anger and tenderness, sadism and masochism. She remembers:

lying at my feet was a stick of hawthorn
 I picked up the unsightly thing
 in rage. It must have been thorned, for
 blood ran from my body. Seeing the blood
 I was filled with tenderness.

She relives an incident of:

a violent trembling . . . and a great
 knowledge of love . . . throughout my
 orisons.¹³⁴

Threatened with eternal damnation and present torture if she cannot prove that her sexuality is demonic possession, Jeanne responds with hysterical contortions, grinding of teeth--and, from the supine and prostrate position which marks so much of hysterical performance, she enters her imagination describing vivid scenes of luxury, gluttony, orgiastic ritual--things she had read about. Finally, she whispers (in an erotic transference to the Father Confessor) devil fornication, and in an orgasmic shudder lies back down and says, "I have found peace."¹³⁵

But soon, she is forced again to perform physical possession by male devils--in her forehead and stomach. Along with the nuns she "infects" she creates:

a clamor of diabolical voices, derisive
 laughter, squeals and howls.¹³⁶

The nuns are "rounded up," "herded," upstage "where they collapse in an untidy heap, exhausted, mere rubbish on the ground."¹³⁷ Pariahs, "raving women"--untouchables.

Ultimately, the question of the "truth" or "performance" of possession, the hysterical female psyche, is seen to be irrelevant. Left along on stage, Jeanne and the male voice within (Asmodee) continue to converse: the demon of guilty, unspeakable passion within her self-tortured, hunched frame.

Clearly, for the actress, Jeanne is a virtuoso hysterical performance--physically and emotionally exhausting--one that asks of the actress that she simulate orgasm several times on stage, throw her voice, incarnate as a beast, contort in every direction and weep, laugh, pray and enter the demonic, all at once.

Several implications must be drawn from Jeanne's character--and are inescapable. The actress playing her part is an accomplice to the following propositions:

the falsity of possession by devils
 the falsity of religious ecstasy
 the truth that women are actresses
 that women are blessed at performance
 that hysteria and possession, the
 acting out of desire,
is woman's truth.

The fantasy of possession is Jeanne's reality. That she can call it up at will and act it out only confirms the content of woman's psyche as hysteria. Acting is real, is woman's truth.

Whiting seems to believe that he is dramatizing a repressed woman's psychology in his presentation of hysterical reaction as performance. Jeanne's climactic moment of truth--her CURE-- comes at the very end of the play when she has

finally seen Grandier in the flesh on his way to his execution. She is able to cry out his name in released, thus resolved, desire:

[crying out in her own voice] "Grandier! Grandier!"¹³⁸

From the study of a part like Jeanne, the actress might conclude that psychological case-study is, ultimately, the greatest enemy of her truth. It closes gaps with symptoms that leave her out completely. The mysterious, the irrational, the inexplicable, the ignored, the overlooked--all those sites in female hysterical constructs that provide an actress with space to breathe some organic response into her performance are strangled.

Thus, ironically, the actress's greatest despair at ever being able to find truth may lie in dramatic "realism" which constrains hysterical construction with explanation, motivation, cause and effect.

It would be wrong to leave Sister Jeanne without some description of motivation, diagnosis and moral judgement as offered by the text.

The nun, in her rejection of male flesh, is represented as the ultimate hysterical sufferer. Beyond spinsterhood, the religious vocation for women is fantasized as a hotbed of repressed lust. No pure transcendence is possible. Erotomania, that disease of fixation on male objects of fantasy--and the imagined pursuit by that male--is, at the least, transferred onto the virile Christ. The female mystic uses Christ

as sexual fantasy and source of sexual release. Her heightened imaginative capacity, instead of lifting her up to Christ, pulls him down to earth. An ecstatic rape fantasy. Small wonder that St. Teresa, that most vocal of mystics, has been dubbed patron saint of hysterics.

Jeanne's interrogators encourage and then demand her to play the part of a demon-possessed vessel. They clearly distrust her and do not themselves believe the part they assign her. She is displayed and ridiculed as freak-show pornography; trapped and netted like Foucault's beasts of madness; tortured and transported on her back, like an invalid. They detest her as a liar but use her fantastic descriptions of demonic intercourse with Grandier to destroy him.

As presented, Jeanne is guilty of a fantastic sexual obsession for a man she has never seen and who has rejected her offer to become spiritual director of her convent. This hysteria leads her to believe that Grandier pursues her, lusts for her, rapes her, in the other-world of spiritual reality. Her demonic possession is an acting out of this fantasy.

Hysterical vengeance is given a most lurid presentation: the success of Jeanne's pornographic performance--its believability--condemns the "innocent" Grandier to death. Meanwhile, Grandier, as tragic "flawed" hero, has, by the end of the play, transcended the flesh. Finding God, losing his will to live, Grandier dies a purified martyr.

While convinced that her possession is an act, the Male Inquisitors accept Sister Jeanne's hysteria as legitimate female behavior. Their cynicism demands a good show, as if to say that men know what women are--mere actresses--and as such, men demand a performance from them that serves men's best interests. Jeanne's interrogators do not care if Jeanne is telling the truth--they demand instead a performance that will give them the verdict they seek against Grandier. A woman, then, is a natural deceiver, motivated by animal desire for the male; power belongs to he who scripts, directs and controls a woman's performance. Simply assessed: the best woman plays the role that promotes male dominance. The better the actress--the more successful her portrayal of woman as constructed by man--the greater the woman's reward. Belief is beside the point: playing the right part convincingly enough is all.

Whiting's play succeeds in presenting man's vested interest in woman as actress, but fails to offer or show any concern for an alternative view of what a woman is. His psychoanalytic fantasy is, finally, identical to that of the interrogators. Sister Jeanne cannot escape her construction as hysterical desire. In his moral condemnation of her demonic performance, Whiting makes Jeanne see the fruits of her work, forces repentance--and thus, silences the demon within her.

Cure in The Devils is the destruction of the hysterical psyche: its fantastic, destructive, imaginative power. The

female hysterical psyche has the demonic ability to believe its visions to the point of confusion between what is and what is not: acting as madness.

The Actress's Trap: Psychology

Psychological truth is an aesthetic that entraps an actress in an inescapable net rather like the one her interrogators use on Jeanne. Through the use of memory and fantasy, Jeanne's mind is presented as hysterical illness. Her repressed sexuality, her obsessive desire for Grandier, her inability to reach some transcendence of her physical being in prayer which she voices several times (her failure as mystic as the hysterical failure of mysticism, itself), her thinly disguised motivations for turning her thwarted desire for Grandier into seduction fantasies and public spectacle, her confusion between performance and reality, are all demarcated on an unavoidable continuum of case-study characterization. Ironically, because Jeanne's mind is so exposed and explicit of its hysterical content, the actress cannot know more than the text knows. The hysterical lie is unavoidable and completely victorious.

While focusing on the female psyche, it is worthwhile to look at mysticism's relationship with women and hysteria. Saint Teresa of Avila, aesthetic archetype of the hysterical female psyche, appears frequently as a subject in discussions of the "problem of truth" in relation to mystical states.

(Teresa is known to have been a favorite author and model of that famous seeker, Duse.)¹³⁹

In his reflective study, Varieties of Religious Experience, William James makes a very critical distinction between the problem of a mystic's truth and his/her psychology. Using Teresa as one example, James argues that her reputation as a hysteric must have no negative bearing whatsoever on the truth of her mystical visions:

if her theology can stand . . . it will make no difference how hysterical or nervously off her balance Saint Teresa may have been when she was with us here below.¹⁴⁰

Indeed, James is convinced that a profoundly religious life is close to pathology in its production of symptoms:

religious geniuses have often shown symptoms of nervous instability . . . been subject to abnormal psychical visitations . . . have been creatures of exalted emotional sensibility . . . led a discordant inner life, and had melancholy . . . They have known no measure, been liable to obsession and fixed ideas; . . . fallen into trances, heard voices, seen visions, and presented all sorts of peculiarities which are usually classed as pathological.¹⁴¹

How oddly like the "symptoms" of woman's sexual illness, this saintly status sounds! James stands in defense of religious subjective truth as distinct phenomena, against the school of thought he defines as "medical materialism." These materialists were quick to use psychology as a sharp prod with which to deflate mysticism to hysterical stature. James:

Medical materialism . . . snuffs out
Saint Teresa as an hysteric.¹⁴²

And later, speaking of the mystical state described so
painstakingly by Teresa, in which the subject is:

in a mode which remains unknown to it,
and can understand nothing of what it
comprehends . . .

James comments:

To the medical mind these ecstasies sig-
nify nothing but suggested and imitated
hypnoid states, on an intellectual basis
of superstition, and a corporeal one of
degeneration and hysteria.¹⁴³

It is worth bearing the medical materialist attitude in
mind when approaching any exalting or knowing female part. As
in the case of Sister Jeanne, the religious female is reduced
to hysterical pathology. And her reduction is symptomatic of
the entire history of female representation on stage. The
truth of the woman, like the truth of the mystic, is a mystery
that cannot transcend biological determinism and psychological
diagnosis. Clearly, like James, the actress must understand
that the truth of female perception cannot transcend these
traps--not because it is weak but because it is a truth that
has nothing to do with the hysterical utterance of medical
materialism: the materialists are chasing their own tails.

James' conclusions about the problem of truth in mystical
experience is a wise and humble one. Drawing on the mystics'
own descriptions and the fruits of their mystical lives--their
actions and attitudes--he offers three propositions:

1. Mystical states are "absolutely authoritative over the individuals to whom they come."
2. "No authority emanates from them . . . for those who stand outside of them to accept their revelations uncritically."
3. They do succeed in "breaking down the authority of the non-mystical or rationalistic consciousness, based upon the understanding and senses alone."¹⁴⁴

One can only wonder what kind of drama--and woman's part--could emerge from the urgings of this dictate. The hysterical reduction to pathological sexuality in the woman's part on stage could be cured with listening and humility and openness, as prescribed by James.

Miss Julie

August Strindberg's call for total stage realism to the point of writing silent mimes of everyday business and actor-improvised monologues into the text, merely heightens the absurdity of Miss Julie's relationship to truth. The actress preparing to analyze the part of the hysterical Julie may be forced to recognize her, finally, as the site of disparate claims to cause, motivation, history, biology, astrology and case-study records of hysteria. Miss Julie cannot exist, whoever she might be: buried under the rubble of disjointed information and explanation that seeks to legitimize hystericalization as truth. Perhaps Miss Julie is best represented by the idea of "the absences of the hysteric's hypnoid state."¹⁴⁵

Under the hypnotic domination of psychoanalytic realism, Julie is absent.

What, then, is there in her place? Ideology. And through realism's example, it may become apparent that all hystericization of the woman's part is political. From the beginning. Woman as sign serves the interests of the power--the scribe as appointee. Realism, after all, differs only from earlier dramatic presentation (which sought empathy and belief) in its "discovery" of provable and thus inescapable answers. Its new stance--attributable to science--declares absolute sovereignty over Gods, mystery, illusion, metaphor--even aesthetics.

However, as Elin Diamond notes:

The hackneyed 'mirror of life' conceit erases agency and ideology--the point of view in the angle of the mirror, the holder of it, and in the life it reflects.¹⁴⁶

Though there are other hysterics in the realistic drama of this period (Ibsen's, for example) who are thought in the judgement of most to be more interesting--perhaps even inspiring--for an actress, no character is more telling of the purposes answered by the female hysteric for realism than Julie.¹⁴⁷ There is a simple explanation: Strindberg prefaced his play with an extensive, rather manic (dare one add, hysterical?) statement of intention that seeks to legitimize the portrayal of Julie as absolute psychological accuracy and

at the same time to use the new drama to promote the political ideology of socialist revolution and utopia.

Clearly, in Strindberg's heated mind, his presentation of psychological realism was the same "event" as his call for social progress --the first feeding or supporting the latter; the latter, becoming possible through and allowing for, the former. Scientific, Darwinian language fuses the two strands for Strindberg so that, for example, the following excited statements follow closely upon each other early in his Preface to Miss Julie:

I find the joy of life in its cruel and powerful struggles.

Every event in life--and this is a rather new discovery!--is ordinarily the result of a whole series of more or less deep-lying motives.¹⁴⁸

Like the committed naturalists he claims to emulate, Strindberg constructs Julie as a composite of a number of exact "circumstances" which he contends, motivate her "tragic fate" which is, finally, her succumbing to repressed and, thus, sick desire. The list is a long one, including the following, among many others:

Heredity -- Her mother's "primary instincts"

Childhood -- The way her father raised her

Moral Psychology -- Her "own nature"

Female Proclivity -- Her fiance's influence

Environment -- The "atmosphere of a midsummer night"

Physiology -- Her menstruation

Influence of the senses -- The effects on her of

dancing
flowers
beer

"Chance that drives the couple together into a room alone"

Her Class -- "The old warrior nobility"¹⁴⁰

Her Age -- Approaching spinsterhood

Within the text all motivations are presented through action, fantasy, revelation or memory--in great specifics; and together they add up to an indisputable diagnosis of hysteria. And Julie's hysteria, as presented, comes to stand in for the social illness of her class. Woman's sexual illness, then, becomes a metaphor for a dying, useless social system. And, finally, Julie's self-destruction is the inevitable, natural sign of social progress and evolution espoused by Strindberg and others of his age.

Nearly a decade before Strindberg wrote his 1888 Preface, August Bebel published Woman and Socialism, a study described by one German feminist historian, Mechtild Merfeld, as "the book most significant to the realization of socialist female emancipation theory and the development of the Woman's Movement."¹⁵⁰

It seems significant that a social theory espousing equality for women, could, at the same time equate its Utopian vision with a return to a "natural" sexual harmony between the sexes that would rid society of the "dissolution and decay"

epitomized in the unwed, sexually-starved hysteric and her other half, the prostitute.¹⁵¹

Bebel's social theorizing seems to correspond with Strindberg's aesthetic-ideological ambition. Strindberg's psychological motivations lead to a "disease" like Julie: in Bebel, psychology is replaced by socio-economic cause and effect. Both, however, end by pointing a finger at the hysterical female they have constructed as the final aberration--she who, if not destroyed, will, quite literally, (through her rejection of/or failure to mate and breed) lead to the extinction of the human race.

Social utopia, then, will be accomplished when the male sex fulfills woman's repressed and hystericized desire. The female hysteric is the Sodom and Gomorrah of the age. Perhaps it is not without relevance, that 100 years later--the contemporary manifestation of the female hysteric--the feminist--is linked as irremediably as ever before with the destruction of the age. How else can one explain the ideological obsession with abortion--as-the-signaling-of-Armageddon and the bloody battle being fought and won to restore the "natural" role of woman (the only social utopia possible in the eyes of the patriarchy). Woman, as being independent of her sexuality, is conceived as not only unnatural but as socially and politically devastating.

Merfeld presents Bebel's theory:

Bebel shows that at the turn of the century in Germany--owing partly to the

surplus of women, but also to the economic crisis and social reorganization--the relative number of marriages dropped, the average age of marriage rose, the number of divorces increased and of births relatively decreased. From this he concludes that Marriage is held in less and less regard even for the fulfillment of its 'natural purpose'--sexual satisfaction and the propagation of the race--and that it is 'caught up in dissolution and decay.' One again, women, especially unmarried women, are the principal sufferers in this development."¹⁵²

As so-called "sufferers," they also come to stand for social illness:

The discrepancy between the age of sexual maturity and the economically and socially determined age of marriage gives rise to disease among female young people. Lasting sexual continence for unmarried women, the threat of material want, increasing despair over the unattained goal and the humiliations to which 'old maids' are exposed give rise, according to Bebel, to nervous disorders, hysteria and insanity, leading to excessive enthusiasm and susceptibility to religious mysticism. Even the frequency of female suicides, which exceed male suicides between the 15th and 30th year of life, he attributes to repressive sexual morality.¹⁵³

The growing numbers of women without the sexual satisfaction/completion of a husband (hysterical, enthusiastic, suicidal)! This is the image--advancing toward an unimaginable future. The modern world must be represented, analyzed in all its terrible "truth" so that society will awaken to its natural origin--the utopia of the male origin.

Merfeld comments:

All forms of expression of sexuality which do not correspond to the social

norm [Bebel] either attributes to the exploitation of privilege or declares them to be a reaction to the repression of the sexual urge. As an antitype he projects the Utopia of a 'normal satisfaction of natural and healthy desires' in the classless society of the future To Bebel, the creation of his socialist society meant the uninterrupted progress of the previous development of mankind.¹⁵⁴

"Natural" sex as cure. Sex as socialist Utopia. Turning back to Miss Julie, Strindberg sets forth his intention to represent the unnatural sexual relations that signify a class-ridden society in its death-throes. An actress need go no further than Strindberg's Preface to find the raison d'etre of Julie:

Miss Julie is a modern character the man-hating half-woman The type implies a retrogressive step in evolution, an inferior species who cannot endure the type is tragic, revealing the drama of a desperate struggle against nature, tragic as the romantic heritage now being dissipated by naturalism, which has a contrary aim: happiness, and happiness belongs only to the strong and skillful species.¹⁵⁵

Without skills and with the "excessive enthusiasm" Bebel cites as symptom, Julie is clearly doomed in the men-of-the-hours' socialist dreams.

For the actress approaching the part of Julie from a feminist strategic position, the connection between psychological realism and political agenda (with its regressive plan for "natural" womanhood) must be understood in its full ideological weight. Obviously, subversion of realism must be the

over-arching preparation for the part. And, at the same time, entering fully into the "realism" is, perhaps, strategy enough to expose the part as hysterical.

One final aspect of realism and the hystericization of women should be mentioned: realism is presented as an evolutionary triumph over fantasy.

Strindberg:

In our time, when rudimentary, undeveloped and fanciful ways of thinking seem to be evolving toward reflection, investigation, and analysis, . . . the theatre, like religion, is dying out.¹⁵⁶

Strindberg does not leave women's place in this thesis to the imagination:

The theatre has always been a public school for the young, the half-educated, and women, who still possess the primitive capacity for deceiving themselves or letting themselves be deceived, that is, are receptive to the illusion, to the playwright's power of suggestion. . . .¹⁵⁷

Thus, woman, hysteria and theatrical deception are, again, braided inextricably in the male imagination. And perhaps it is fitting, then, that the actress approach the hysteria of the part named Julie as pure theatrical deception.

As Diamond has suggested, melodrama and Charcot's hysterical spectacles are never lurking too far below the facade of realism: they keep popping up, these theatrical-hysterical sites which a play like Miss Julie is desperate to repress in the name of science. This is to the advantage of feminist acting strategy. Conversely, this hysterical field,

just below the surface, is bound to cause very real difficulties for the actress who tries to realize the facade on stage with "realistic" acting techniques (that "belief," demanded by Stanislavsky).

Only the luckiest actresses, those "discovered" to have the talent to meet the challenge--the test--of the complex female repertoire, are offered a part like Julie. As has been suggested, this "complexity" is a conscious construction of clues and cover-ups, behaviors, memories, circumstances, that are used to diagnose, analyze and ultimately "cure" a female hysteric. Searching and sifting through the text, attempting to make the connections, to build a logical character, to assess and present the motivations and needs of the character, is a stressful job--mistaken, often, as the inevitable trauma of artistic creation. Finding truth is difficult enough: finding Miss Julie is an exercise in futility--or worse--in self-deception and self-betrayal. At the very least, the attempt to find Miss Julie's truth leads to a puzzled state of non-belonging: the terrible urge to laugh at inappropriate moments, to find oneself hovering above the wild actions taking place on the stage, strangely disconnected.

There are moments of truth in hysterical realism, and, as Diamond points out, they occur where theatricality takes over from--or bursts out from behind--the facade of truth. Then, real truth takes place. And it is within these hysterical

eruptions that the actress is free to reveal her character as spectacle.

As Diamond so vividly captures in her description of Hedda Gabbler's "finale," these hysterical eruptions expose the gap that realism cannot fill--hysteria as pure performance, revealing nothing beyond itself. Hysterical realism is exposed as the repression of what cannot be explained or understood by its psychoanalytic system: the true nature of its representation is an act.

Diamond describes Hedda's final moments:

She has left the visible space for the first time since arriving on stage. She has not exited, however, but has drawn the spectators' eyes to the vanishing point, the stage within a stage . . . using the oldest proscenium-stage object--the curtain--as a prop, she pops her head out like a grand guignol puppet to make one last insolent remark. With He[a]d-da in fragments, Ibsen comes close to translating the 'impossible.' The old puppet trick shivers the wholeness and completeness of the mimetic body, in which the actor is subsumed in character, and for one moment the hysterical body is explicitly equated with the unseen--that which realism represses . . . Hedda's gesture of obvious miming . . . ruins the seamless world of "real" people and offers instead a world already disfigured . . . by the infections of hysteria.¹⁵⁸

It follows that an actress who attempts to resist the hysterical unseen of pure spectacle is engaging in her own hysterical repression. Diamond has described how the American actress Elizabeth Robins cut lines that suggested Hedda's pregnancy and her aversion to the overt theatricality of a

Doll House's Nora's tarantella (a dance linked to hysteria and its release).¹⁵⁹ Such responses suggest denial of those aspects of hysterical texts which are most revealing.

Julie, in Miss Julie reveals, similarly, as Diamond so succinctly names it, "a realism without truth: hysteria's realism."¹⁶⁰ And through Julie-as-spectacle, the actress may enter into absence, undoing realism. Performing "from within hysteria's truth" (Diamond's description of Robin's own case-study drama, Alan's Wife) is, at best, a potentially thrilling challenge for the actress. She would do well to study the theater of Charcot: performance of performance--layers of hysterical representation.

Julie

The first line in Miss Julie is a diagnosis of Julie as hysterical. Jean, the valet, says:

Miss Julie's crazy again tonight; absolutely crazy.¹⁶²

Faced with a barrage of judgments that expose and elaborate on Julie's hysteria, the actress might be reminded of the unavoidable connection between female sexuality and accusation. In the psychoanalytic or realistic aesthetic, judgment consists of inescapable facts that add up to sexual disease. Julie's heredity, childhood, sexual ambiguity, attitudes, behaviors, fantasies, are presented as a whirl of evidence that condemns her.

On stage, Julie is on trial, and the mounting evidence of her insanity finally leads to her guilty plea and death sentence. Foucault's assessment of the asylum's moral cure of female madness seems very fitting. Placed in a setting in which illness was judged unacceptable, those who were different were coerced into feelings of self-reproach and guilt: this was their cure.

Over the short course of Strindberg's hysterical spectacle, Julie's repressed sexual desire for a man erupts in an unsuitable, abnormal manner--in theatrics. In the process of pursuing her desire and expressing it, in excited, overwrought behavior, Julie demeans, prostrates--performs.

The possibility of performing Julie as a parody of psychological realism might be one way for the actress to show off the absurdity of her construction. By any standards, the descriptions of her behavior and its causes along with her own performance can be read as farce. After all, every neurotic, kinky and perverse posture; every hysterical symptom "known" to man has been grafted onto the part of Julie. She is, finally, a walking and talking mass of psychoanalytic nonsense. Taking every crazy accusation to its hysterical limit, the play slides naturally into absurdity. Alternatively, the actress might prefer to play at performance--placing herself in the position of a Charcot hysteric whose actions are commanded by their author, seemingly without resistance, but from a hypnoid state of absence. Working with a strategic

character analysis, the various hypnotic "turns" or acts performed in the play can be separated out from each other. The actress might make use of Charcot's illustrations of his various hysterical contortions and poses. Realism must be exposed as hysterical spectacle. The following analysis, inspired by the "science" of psychology's diagnostic tools, demonstrates the text's potential for this hysterical spectacle:

Julie as Psychoanalytic Text

Behavior

Analysis

Waltzing without stopping

Tarantism: A nervous disorder characterized by a mania for dancing and music, believed to follow the bite of the tarantula.

Crazy pursuit of male dancers

Broken engagement--terror of spinsterhood

Making fiancé jump over her riding crop and whipping him

Perversion--unnatural woman
Kinky pleasures, man-hater

Coquettish gestures--flicking handkerchief in Jean's face
Flirtatious statements
Teasing

Nymphomania

Proud and angry responses to suggestions of impropriety

Over-reaction

Sudden shifts in mood--from anger to submissive gentleness

Unpredictable mood swings
--menstruation

Following Jean and making their relationship something it has never been through flirtation, familiarity and pursuit

Erotomania--fantasizing an attraction--that someone is interested who isn't

Behavior

Ordering Jean around, to take off his coat, kiss her shoe, etc.

Refusal to talk about her broken engagement--defensive posturing

Inappropriate jollity and playfulness

Sudden tense reaction to his advances

Feeling his biceps leading him on

Reacting to their sexual encounter as if they were romantic lovers

Crying, "screaming convulsively," pacing back and forth

Sinking to her knees, clasping her hands, praying to God out loud

Opening up to Jean her terrible family secrets under the influence of alcohol

Following Jean's orders

Giving her bird up to die

Screaming outburst of uncontrollable rage and hate against men

Desperate description of better life directed at Kristine

Taking up razor and asking for Jean to direct her

Self-induced hypnosis

Analysis

Self-aggrandizement

Denial

"Excessive enthusiasm"
Histrionic behavior

Frigidity
False modesty

Sex maniac
Sexual tease

Delusional
Histrionic

Hysterical reaction

Hysterical supplication

Hysterical release
"Talking Cure"

Childlike helplessness

Histrionics

Hysterical feminism/
lesbianism (passed down from her mother, this illness)

Delusional fantasy--no longer in reality

Helpless
Sexual dependency

Ecstatic hysterical state

Behavior

Going off to kill herself
in a religious ecstasy

Analysis

(Death as cure and release)
Whore as Mystic

The hypnotic act that ends Miss Julie (Julie's begging Jean to hypnotize her into taking her life) exposes, finally, the mesmerist Strindberg's failure. Even he cannot present her hair-razing (razoring) suicide. Nor are there off-stage screams. It is his embarrassment that sends her floating out (slinking off, in shame?) in a hypnotic trance: here, no realism is to be found. What should be the great hysterical finale--exposing death as an act only--the letting of blood and the miraculous recovery, would reveal the theatrics and the lie of realism. Julie's slow-march is horror spectacle and excruciating for the actress, compromising any sense of truth. Perhaps, the curtain call--in which, as Bert O. States has described, the actor is phenomenologically present as both "character" and "actor" and absent of either simultaneously (each state rubbing out the truth of the other--States' conception of the curtain call as a liminal field between presence and absence) is the only moment when the actress playing Julie can step forward and take her true place.¹⁶³

The Hysteric as Actress

A word more might be said about Miss Julie that has some bearing on yet another artificially segregated category of hysterical constructs, the actress. Strindberg insists in his preface that Julie is a tragic character, and the play is included in numerous anthologies of Tragic Drama. It is her "fate" that gains her entry into this exclusive club, according to editors:

Her tragedy . . . is pathetic as she struggles against a destiny which cannot be averted, and at last yields, semi-voluntarily.¹⁶⁴

However, if one is not convinced that Julie will slit her wrists when she exits stage left, one can then imagine her making the choice which is not tragic but theatrical. Having abandoned her status as unmarried virgin, she must needs become a whore or actress--or enter an asylum. (This thesis has insisted that the hysterical model is all three simultaneously).

In her discussion of the woman's part in Shakespeare, Marianne Novy notes:

In the tragedies, the central [female] characters must die to prove that their emotions are felt with constancy and not simply pretended.¹⁶⁵

This is a crucial point and is applicable to Julie and many other female characters. If Julie is, finally, theatrical spectacle, her death unimaginable, then she joins the innumer-

able hysterical actresses of the drama--outside the scope of tragedy. Women on stage who survive cannot be trusted.

And, if Julie finds, on running away, that there is no place for her on stage, and turns to prostitution, she will become a participant in an age-old blurring of roles, beginning long before actresses lost their place on stage, with the advent of tragedy.¹⁶⁶

The following description of prostitutes comes from Athens, 4th Century, B.C., at a time when male actors were creating the parts of Io and Medea in the tragic competitions:

First of all, they care about making
money and robbing their neighbors
They take in new prostitutes
They remodel these girls immediately, and
their manners and looks remain no longer
the same They have false breasts
for them like the comic actors
Too dark? She smears on white lead.
Skin too white? She rubs on rouge. . . .
Nice teeth? Then she is forced to keep
laughing¹⁶⁷

No noble tragic fate here. Such references to prostitution as performance link woman with mastery of illusion, while denigrating her acting as sexuality.

For men, acting in tragic competitions led to prizes and fame--and respect. For the woman, "actress" was what woman is when she exploits fully her nature as sex. Thus, the actress character (who begins to appear in the 19th Century) on stage is the extension or aesthetic completion of the woman's part.

It should not escape notice that (as in the cited writing on prostitutes) females who performed for money could lead

independent lives for which sin they were primarily castigated. Living outside of the conventional "angel in the house" role, professional performing women had some measure of control. And this "unnatural" life was finally denigrated and sexualized on the stage: acting and sexual hysteria converging in the part of the actress.

The characteristics of this part can be said to formalize all that went before. All hysterical parts have been constructed on the presumed guilt of female performance. Woman as actress clarifies and makes pure what men have elsewhere suggested and accused through analogy.

The actress part presents:

Actress as seduction
 as mask
 as falsity of woman
 as WHORE
 as changeable, malleable,
 inconstant, histrionic
 as unattainable
 as illusion
 as desire
 as emptiness
 as fantasy
 as unknowable
 as dangerous
 as sorceress
 as manipulator of desire and fantasy
 but untouchable

The stage is the unbroachable distance separating man from woman.

She tempts but she cannot be had.
 She gives all and nothing.

The actress in all women is the disease that prevents men from getting too close; that allows them to keep their distance.

It is a disease with an unknowable origin and it cannot be eradicated: only contained, overpowered, silenced, isolate through sexuality. Her sex is all that is real about a woman.

Anton Chekhov's The Seagull, first produced in 1896, offers the actress interested in her particular representation as hysterical construct two fascinating characters for study:

Irena Nikolayevna Arkadina, a Grande Dame of the stage
and
Nina Mihailovna Zaryechnaia, an aspiring ingenue.

An analysis of these two actress constructs addresses their hystericization. Insights into the following questions emerge:

Why do male playwrights think women become actresses?

What relationship exists between female sexuality and acting in male representation of the actress?

How does the professional hysteric (performing for a living) differ from other women in hysterical representation--if at all?

How does the fate of the woman in theatre on stage embody all women's fate in male-dominated society?

How different or similar is the actress in representation to her counterpart in real life (i.e. the woman who plays her part)?

The Seagull, symptomatic of its time, can be read as a study in the "psychology" of the actress. It is, after all, poetic realism. However, it seems more likely that Nina and Arkadina represent in their hysteria all that Chekhov is attracted to and repelled by in the theatre. WOMEN AND/AS THEATRE succeeds in destroying the playwright hero. The two

actresses can be seen as a progressive disease: from ingenue to Grande Dame. The plot of The Seagull is very simple--and telling: a playwright ends up killing himself because of two actresses. One of them is his mother, who represents all that is false and who abandons, humiliates and emasculates her son; the other is the woman he loves who uses and then betrays him.

Chekhov, in a play of breathtaking poetic beauty, extends the perception of woman as false and untrustworthy to metatheatrical metaphor. Early references to Hamlet play with layers of parallel: Gertrude and Ophelia; Hamlet as playwright; whore, madwoman, performance.

Although it is Trepliov, the playwright, who kills himself, Nina and Arkadina are the ones who are presented as illness. The two women suffer from acting sickness. Its symptoms follow:

ACTING SICKNESS

- Inability to stop acting/performing off stage (always "on")
- Dependency on others for approval taken to its extreme point (need/craving for applause)
- Emotional fluidity and changeable behavior
- Sense of unreality
- Confused self-identity
- Obsession with physical appearance: VANITY
- Terror of aging
- Heightened self conscious behavior
- Emptiness expressed as profound boredom or longing
- Nervous behavior, inappropriate or extreme reaction

- Sexually provocative behavior
- Dependency on men to direct them
- Competitiveness with other women
- Insecurity
- Child-like need for undivided attention, attention-seeking
- Desperation, ready to take extreme actions
- Generalized suffering
- Unhappiness
- Hypersensitivity
- Nervousness
- Sixth sense, uncanny knowledge
- Sense of suffocation/entrapment
- Moodiness, easily influenced by outside circumstances
- Changeability
- Jealousy
- Passionate, strongly expressed and exaggerated feeling.
- Superficiality
- Coldness, inwardly/frigid, calculating, cruelty
- Demanding
- Unnatural responses/bad mother (no maternal instinct)
no self-sacrifice
- Lives for sensual and sexual desire
- Lives through desirability

Arkadina

Trepliov diagnoses his mother, the aging star, Arkadina, before her first appearance on stage. Trepliov on his mother's hysteria:

A psychological oddity--that's my mother. O, there is no doubt about her being very gifted and intelligent: she's capable of weeping over a book . . . But just try to give a word of praise to Duse! Oh-ho-ho! You mustn't praise anybody but her . . . you must acclaim her and go into raptures over her wonderful acting But we can't offer her any such intoxicating praise . . . so she feels bored and out of humour, and we all seem like enemies, we are all to blame. And then she's superstitiousAnd she's close-fisted try to borrow money from her, and she'll just burst into tears When I'm not about she's thirty-two, but when I'm with her, she's forty-three, and she hates me for it She loves the theatre . . .¹⁶⁸

When she does appear, her behavior is symptomatic of all her son's accusations. She quotes a passage from Gertrude's guilty bedroom speech in Hamlet with attention-seeking histrionics: she is always "on." After causing Trepliov to abruptly discontinue the play he has put up (primarily for her approval), she's suddenly struck by a guilt which comes on her like an afterthought:

But my conscience is starting to torment me. Why did I hurt my poor boy's feelings? I'm so worried.¹⁶⁹

In the context of nostalgia and seduction, her words ring hollow, superficial, over-dramatic: the poor son, after all, ran off in a fury while she proceeded to entertain her lover with happy memories.

The actress playing Arkadina must begin to ask questions: to doubt the truth of her part, to seek entry into Arkadina's nature.

- Is she really "so worried"? Suddenly, as she says?
- Or is she acting out a worried mother's part?
- Playing the role she guiltily knows she should play?

Or does the actress begin to see that this confusion is the point: the real and unreal; the woman, the actress, ambiguously merging.

Arkadina, it would seem, represents this confusion of reality and performance. Actress/woman as multiple personalities, hysterically moving in and out; acting out of this insecurity; acting as the only means of communicating or expressing.

Is she to be believed? Or not? Is she not, finally, a monster of true performance? If nothing is uncovered behind the act, the act is.

For the actress playing the actress, Arkadina, a central metaphysical inquiry might be:

- Is insincerity a frailty?
- Or is the frailty insincere?

This inquiry is at the heart of Arkadina's character, and it is not resolved by the text, rather it is left open as woman's enigma. Ultimately, this enigma which is woman's

acting disease is bound to disturb the actress playing the part.

Arkadina raises the issue of aging with mystifying performance:

I've kept so young-looking--because I've never been a slattern or let myself go, as some women do . . .
[walks up and down the lawn, hands on hips] There! You see? I'm as brisk as a bird. Fit to take the part of a fifteen-year old girl!¹⁷⁰

The actress must answer what the text obscures: is she saying what she believes? Is this a vanity which is obsessive and also a terror of truth and inevitability? Is her resistance to growing old and death expressed in hysterical denial? Or is she, conversely, really lying to herself? Playing the part of a young girl and as actress, believing it? Hysterical delusion? Fantasy?

In simpler terms:

- Is Arkadina deceiving herself? And others?
- Or deceiving no one, including herself?

The girl, Nina, is perceived as and proves to be her rival. The irony or pathos of Arkadina's youthfulness comes up sharp against real youth on stage.

Arkadina also appears to parody expectations of unnatural motherhood. Traditional feminine roles have been abandoned. Like all hysterics, Arkadina's "work" is to suffer. But the actress hysteric acts out the mother's part with exaggerated finesse: she is paid handsomely for the art of deception.

However, no performance can contend with the playwright son's true suffering: Arkadina confesses her guilt at abandoning the mother's part. The lines she is given are truly ridiculous:

Here I am going away, and I shan't even know why Konstantin tried to shoot himself He's a great anxiety to me! [Pondering] Ought he to get some sort of job? . . . ¹⁷¹

Her brother hints that Trepliov lives like a pauper--not even owning an overcoat. Arkadina's hysterical insistence on not having any money turns into tears and, finally, into a defiant justification for spending her money for her own needs:

Well, I do have some money, but after all, I am an actress: my dress bill alone is enough to ruin me. ¹⁷²

The reality changes, then, from line to line. Or does it? Is she a liar, or does Arkadina operate from within another system of truth--that of drama? Throughout the play, she makes hysterical scenes. A brief tender moment in which she plays mother-as-nurse to Trepliov deteriorates into a name-calling which becomes cruel on both sides. Tears result from what appears to be a truthful and truly painful encounter.

Arkadina reacts like a mother would:

My darling child, forgive me. . . . Forgive your wicked mother. Forgive an unhappy woman That's enough. We've made up now. ¹⁷³

And she seems to be in control--able to stop or, at least, change the mood of the encounter/scene by becoming someone else: no longer proud and furious, but repentant and mild.

Who is the real Arkadina? It seems that all roles slip away when the actress is confronted with her desire. The true nature of Arkadina is brought out by Trigorin's precipitated betrayal. In his presence, stage directions for Arkadina read like hysterical spectacle. Yet the context of the performance is real desire. Arkadina is agitated, trembling, speaks angrily, then is weeping--embracing and kissing Trigorin, kneeling before him, embracing his knees. She threatens him:

If you leave me even for a single hour I shall
never survive it, I shall go out of my mind--
. . . my master . . .

Now she is kissing his hands and laughing:

You're mine . . . mine All of you is mine.¹⁷⁴

Beneath the facade of the successful actress, a jealous, aging woman rages with hysterical desire. For the actress, this "real" scene is pathetic, nearly--or very far into--farce. After her hysterical display, Arkadina's stage directions read:

(Affecting an easy manner as if nothing had happened)¹⁷⁵

Convinced that she has got her man back, the drama ceases. What is going on? Manipulative performance? Or, the truth of woman as acting disease?

Once again, the distinction may be moot for anyone except the actress who must play the scene. For her, it is a

dilemma. Perhaps it seems obvious, but it seems relevant that Arkadina is a part written for a leading actress--her real-life mirror. Chekhov may have assumed that the actress could bear the burden of responsibility--for locating Arkadina's truth--that she would, in fact, answer the riddle for Chekhov, himself, in her performance. Arkadina's passion is the performance of a lifetime or else acting as hysterical eruption. From the text, this remains indeterminable, and therefore it would seem irrelevant.

Does Arkadina believe her act? Is she conscious of performance? Questions fall thick and fast, like a stage curtain.

- Is truth something different for the actress?
- For the woman?
- Is woman's truth, performance?
- Is truth still truth when it is controlled, manipulated?
- Is acting manipulated truth?
- Are women-as-actresses sorceresses, then, who play with, bend and incite reality?
- Do women call up feelings, make scenes?
- Do they truly believe these feelings, these scenes?
- Are they mad?

The actress must see that Arkadina is framed through disbelief, distrust, the distance of stage. Textual sabotage

leaves her scene's truth open to question. It would seem that acting an actress, is, to say the least, hystericizing.

Nina

Arkadina is diagnosed as hysterical before she appears: Nina appears in a hysterical panic. She arrives at the site of performance, Trepliov's stage, agitated, out of breath; she has been crying, she is terrified that she is late. There is an urgent sexuality in her telling, that climaxes in a release of laughter.

I kept hurrying the horse, urging it on. [laughs]
I'm glad all the same.¹⁷⁶

Acting is the urge beyond control for Nina. She explains it as forbidden, as desire:

My father and mother won't let me come here
They're afraid of my going on stage. And I'm drawn
to this place, to this lake, like a seagull.¹⁷⁷

Nina's fate is written large early on: actresses are born actresses, inescapably, unavoidably. Acting is in the blood of the actress: the hysterical expression of the nature of all women. The saying, "acting is a disease" is well known and understood in the theatre world as the compulsion to take on other identities. For the actress, its special resonance is its equation with her sex, with her being as a woman, her lack of "self."

Nina is fearful of performing although she wants it more than anything. She exhibits classic stage fright. She says she is most afraid to act in front of Trigorin whom she has adulated from afar--through his writing. Stage fright, itself, is like female hysteria: perpetual nervousness, the fear of being exposed, of losing one's lines, of coming out of character--forgetting who, where, what one is supposed to be doing. Stage fright is the gap between what is real and not real: between what is believed and pretended. It inserts itself into that hollow place and subverts identity: threatens to expose what is really there which is unreality.

It is, necessarily, Arkadina who infects Nina with the idea that she has "a gift for acting." (Acting being disease.)

ARKADINA: You must go on the stage!

NINA: Oh, its my one dream!¹⁷⁸

One never knows for certain (can the actress, herself, decide not to decide? or empty herself of everything but performance?) whether Arkadina really believes this--or even what motivates her. Disease spreads uncontrollably. However, for Nina, Arkadina's words become an *idée fixe*. She is obsessed by the desire to fill the void with acting. One day, perhaps, like Arkadina, acting will become life itself for her.

Nina's first role, in Trepliov's play, is not a character at all--but rather an abstract expression of THE VOID. Her

performance of this void has a ring of truth: she recites, trembling with stage fright:

Like a prisoner cast into a deep and empty well, I know not where I am, or what awaits me here.¹⁷⁹

It is Trigorin who frightens Nina and it is for him that Nina performs: acting is desire.

Nina asks Trigorin to decide her fate: whether she should become an actress or not. She has a medallion inscribed for him with these words: "If you ever need my life, come and take it."¹⁸⁰

And it is Trigorin who provides Nina with her life's script. Like a hypnotist, he mesmerizes the hysterical girl with a story that suggests itself to him:

An idea suddenly came into my head. A subject for a short story: a young girl, like you, has lived beside a lake from childhood. She loves the lake as a seagull does. But a man chances to come along, sees her, and having nothing better to do, destroys her, just like that seagull here.¹⁸¹

Nina must follow Trigorin to Moscow and go on stage. She tells him:

I've decided irrevocably, the die is cast--I'm going on stage I'm leaving my father I'm going to Moscow . . . like you . . . We shall see each other there.¹⁸²

The actress as hysterical construct is a victim of her desire. She is no artist. Directed by desire, she arrives on stage. She acts what has been written for her which is a hysterical performance of suffering sex.

Nina is one of the most difficult parts for an actress to play. She is vacant--except for her desire. She expresses no

identity--only this fixed idea of acting. Her final appearance is utterly hystericizing for the woman assigned her part. Is it a mad scene? A hysterical site? Or a performance? Are these one and the same for the actress character? Nina appears and disappears like a hallucination of the night. Perhaps that would be the best way to play her: as Trepliov's nightmare: Nina as ghost of the playwright's imagination.

The essence of Nina's hysterical finale is confusion as to whether she is a seagull or an actress. One is reminded of Charcot's hysterics taking on the characteristics of dogs and birds at his suggestion: down on all fours, heads cocked back and howling, or flapping their arms wildly, on tiptoe, glancing heavenward. Life or death literalized in the actress's hysterical body. Seagull or actress. Nina's confusion does not involve choice. (Trepliov will choose: he wills his extinction.) She is victim or actress. Actress as victim. Or victim as actress. "No matter." She is victim of her desire, acting out of desire.

Finally, (though replete with the doubt any actress casts as her nature), Nina commits herself to her identity as an actress. As if she has evolved from the no-self of victim of desire to the non-identity of the actress. She seems to be on the path of the enigma that marks Arkadina's character. She is a fallen woman now, and mother of a dead child: she has lost virginity, man, and motherhood and thus is left with acting. Nina admits to Trepliov that although Trigorin has

destroyed her she is still the victim of desire for him. Surviving means forgetting desire on stage: lying as life. Hysterical Performance. Desire and desirability as woman's only true identity; destroyed, she is left as actress. Actress is everything that woman appears to be.

Trepliov, The Seagull's tragic hero, is crushed by Nina's indifference to him. The actress kills the playwright. She rejects his vision of truth: refuses to make the part he assigns her in his fantasy real. How can she? Perhaps that is the message of The Seagull: what Nina knows is what Chekhov does not consciously intend: the part is untrue.

ANCIENT DRAMA: A Conclusion With No Foreseeable End

As the 21st century approaches, the hysterical construct continues to oppress women--perhaps more virulently than at any time previously, as women come to take their own subjective place in discourse. The threat is terrible and resisted on all fronts: from political hystericization to women's hysterical exclusion from medical breakthroughs; from Hollywood to snuff.

Political Hystericization

Political "reality" and theatre have merged in the spectacle of televised politics--most memorably, in the October, 1991 Clarence Thomas Supreme Court nomination hearings. The final hearings, purportedly undertaken to investigate a charge of sexual harassment against Thomas, turned into an inquisition of Anita Hill, the woman whose statement of harassment was the source of the last-hour threat to Thomas' confirmation to the highest court.

The hystericization of Anita Hill involved her construction as:

- liar/actress, caught in the act of perjury
- possessed witch, in conspiracy with the devil, through her intimate, secret knowledge of the teachings of the best-seller, The Exorcist.
- erotomaniac, fantasizing a passionate relationship with Thomas which, then, in her delusional state led to her self-perception as a scorned woman
- frigid man-woman, whose sexual "proclivities" were alluded to as unspeakable degeneracy.

More rational defenders of Thomas were quick to censure Hill for over-reaction, hyper-sensitivity, for a celebrity-seeking need to take center-stage.

In this televised presentation of "realism"--this "search for truth" at the highest level of government, a woman who appeared utterly rational, controlled, unemotional, sensible, who had even voluntarily submitted to and passed a lie-detector test, was re-presented through the male body of judgement as hysterical against all evidence to the contrary.

Medical Hystericization

In the spring of 1991, In Health magazine published an investigative piece on women and heart disease. They discovered that:

In 1987 researchers at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine . . . asked doctors for their diagnoses of a group of patients coming to them with chest pain. When the patient was a woman, the doctor was more than three times more likely to list the problem as "psychiatric" than when the patient was a man. "The doctors

tend to say the woman's anxious, or nervous, or she's imagining it . . ." says epidemiologist, Sylvia Wassertheil-Smoller. "There's no rational explanation for that."¹

Hollywood

The full-page ad for the October 1991 release of Ken Russell's newest film, Whore, promises an "Engrossing . . . Riveting . . . Flipside to Pretty Woman. Pretty Woman was a fairy tale about a prostitute who finds true love, "Whore," however, is "Raw,"--"a no-holds-barred portrayal."

Theresa Russell, the star of Whore, was interviewed in The New York Times. The reviewer, Joy Horowitz, prefaces with a description of Russell's parts:

--from the starlet . . . to a drug addict . . . to a fetching sociopath. . . . In 1985, Ms. Russell played a tough street version of Marilyn Monroe, with whom she strongly identifies.

Even Ms. Russell's make-up is Norma Jean-ish: the white, white face powder . . .²

Russell's mask-mirroring of the hystericized victim, Marilyn Monroe, is one-half of the classical entrapping dialectic of all actresses. Horowitz comments with dismissive embarrassment, unable to resist:

It would be too facile to suggest that Ms. Russell's life has sprung from a sort of whore-madonna complex. But the duality surfaces as a recurring motif. Asked who her heroes are, she names only one--Mother Teresa.³

What separates the actress playing the prostitute from the prostitute? From classical Greece to the present time, little seems to have changed:

During the filming of "Whore," Ms Russell said she had a difficult time separating her character's feelings from her own. "It was depressing," she says. . . . "That degradation you're putting yourself in--even though you're acting it. But the feelings come up, too. You do start feeling like a pretty worthless human being. . . . It's kind of schizophrenic."⁴

Snuff

According to Catherine MacKinnon, pornography is "a continuum on which the end point is 'snuff.'"⁵ The history of the Western stage begins with the absence of women, altogether, and in snuff, moves to her representational eradication--a full circle. This is a closure women resist as they speak out and represent themselves. The greater and more vivid obscenity of women's representation--the acknowledged pleasure provoked by viewing women being murdered--must be seen as desperate fury against women's empowerment. It has been rumored for years that in snuff films, women are actually murdered in some instances of violent victimization. Perhaps this is the true realism of hysterical representation.

For years, rumors about "snuff films," in which women and children are killed as part of the sexual experience, have been dismissed as fiction. MacKinnon, however, increasingly, believes they exist.

People have begun coming to her with stories of their experiences . . . of being coerced to appear in films in which victims were killed.⁶

Despite and because of women's new role in discourse and self-representation, the hystericization of the woman's part goes on unabated: old habits and enraged backlashes keep women hysterical. On stage, on screen, in the courtroom or the clinic, woman's sanity reduced to sexuality is subjected to interrogation, disbelief and ridicule. As long as women continue to be viewed as actresses, the woman's "no" will be equated with "yes", woman's testimony and her accusations will be discredited by insinuations of sexual motivations, a woman's ideas will be mocked and belittled as crazy and reactive performance. Even as the "rational" powers lead this world to the brink of total annihilation. The attempt to eradicate woman as anything but her sexuality ends where her representation began: her disappearance as fantasy, an ancient drama with no foreseeable end.

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