

**Self and Other:
Rethinking Women's Voice in the Context of
Bakhtin's Heteroglossia and Dialogism**

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ABSTRACT:

This paper investigates the nature, function, and significance of women's voice in literary practice. Bakhtin's speculation of language as multiple-voiced and socially interactive provides the theoretic background for the discussion. Women's crave for a voice to express their experience and have a dialogue with (literary) history is examined by, and in turn challenges, Bakhtin's theory of heteroglossia and dialogism. The paper also explores both feminist and Bakhtinian notion of self and other for their compatibility, and looks into what women may do with language in writing poetry and the novel in light of Bakhtinian poetics and prosaics. The paper demonstrates how a gender-conscious inquiry may benefit from, and reorient, a gender-free theory.

KEY WORDS:

women's voice, Bakhtin, heteroglossia, dialogism, feminist literary criticism, self, other, literary theory

In this paper I will investigate the intersection of feminist inquiry of women's voice with Bakhtin's theory, especially heteroglossia and dialogism. In its process both feminist and Bakhtinian notion of self and other will be explored for their compatibility. In the end the two major literary genres, poetry and the novel, will be studied through investigation of women's literary practice against Bakhtin's model of poetics and prosaics. It is hoped that both Bakhtin's and feminist's inquiry may reveal, and learn from, each other.

One of feminist critics' major concerns is about women's voice. In "Women and Literary History," Dale Spender challenges the literary canon and literary history, and raises questions about women's disappearance from them. She views that suppression of women's achievement is equivalent to suppression of women's meanings and values. She devotes her book *Mothers of the Novel* to retrieving women's lost voice before Austin. Other feminist critics also search for women's voice from different perspectives. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's idea of "madwoman" accords a tormented quality to women writers. Helene Cixous's "The Laugh of the Medusa" celebrates women's aberrant voice unbound and unconfined by patriarchal disciplines and thus disturbing to the phallogocentric order. Some may not agree to image imaginative women as mad or as mythological monsters, and yet such analogies are attractive in articulating a disquieting alternative to the univocal privileged voice.

Elaine Showalter proposes a preliminary anthropo-cultural model of women's double-voice. She is concerned with giving a shape to feminist criticism by defining its subject and approach, and she comes up with a criticism distinctively made up of women's voice. One of the problems of feminist criticism is that it is deeply implicated in many other disciplines since women's writing, reading, and representation are not independent phenomena, and in the same way its entanglement with general literature has been inextricable and inseparable. In order to clean the (battle)ground and delimit boundaries, Showalter introduces in "Toward a Feminist Poetics" (1978) a neologism "gynocriticism" as opposed to androcentrism practiced unreflectingly by most critics (261-2). The coined term designates a scholarship that breaks away from dependence on male-centered literary models, and looks for a female writing tradition by studying women as writers. By so doing Showalter hopes to offer a coherent feminist literary theory to depict women's creative and interpretive activity, and establishes it as a discipline with its own particular rights and concerns. This is a call for a genuinely women-centered criticism.

To further her gynocentric critical inquiry, Showalter examines the theory of sexual difference in the four models of biology, linguistics, psychoanalysis, and culture ("Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness"). The last, she believes, can subsume the former three and incorporate them to make a most complete study. She proposes, based on Shirley and Edwin Ardner's anthropo-cultural model, that the "wild zone" be the realm for feminist creative writers and critics to work in. Beyond the overlapping part of men's and women's sphere, there is a "wild" zone exclusively belonging to women, spatially, experientially, and metaphysically. It is wild because it is so far imaginary, having not yet been brought to the representational system. There is a corresponding space of male consciousness, but since men have always had domination of culture and symbolic order, it can be known by way of, for example, legends. A woman's text will contain two plots, one from the dominant culture, and the other from the muted legacy. In short, women practice in a double-voiced discourse.

All these inquiries in relation to women's voice may be placed alongside with Bakhtin's theory, and have a fruitful cross-study. Bakhtin offers a sophisticated theory of voice on a socio-cultural level. His theory of language, centered on *heteroglossia* and dialogism, yields special interest to feminist scholars. Though he is not concerned with woman's discourse, his idea of language as heteroglot collection provides feminist critics with a lot of stimulation to think about their reasoning and footing.

Heteroglossia, the locus where centripetal and centrifugal forces in language collide, is mainly theorized in Bakhtin's essay "Discourse in the Novel." He critiques traditional linguistic studies, which take language as something fixed, formal, and unitary, transcending contradictions and differences. A systematic linguistics, he says, must always suppress the heterogeneous context in language. Since it neglects the social tone basic in language, the traditional stylistics is concerned with the study of composition of a text and its components, individual style, and style of a period, and cannot illuminate the fundamental nature of a genre. Bakhtin approaches the problem from the viewpoint of philosophy of language, and polemicizes the issue.

The traditional stylistics is governed by the norm of artistic discourse, in which poetry is the dominant genre. The uniqueness of the novel is reduced to nothing more than craftsmanship deduced from poetry. Both the novel and poetry are approached by the same rhetoric criteria, such as image and trope. To

remedy the imbalance in the literary studies, Bakhtin suggests that heteroglossia serves to demarcate the generic difference of the novelistic and poetic stylistics. By viewing the novel as a different linguistic practice, Bakhtin explores into the nature of the genre while disregarding its surface form.

The novel as a whole, Bakhtin holds, is a "phenomenon multiform in style and variform in speech and voice" (261), and this makes it a distinct genre of its own right. It orchestrates different themes into symphony as the author tries to bring into dialogue his language and all the other languages, the narrator's, the character's, particular and specific in each occasion and situation. In novelistic prose is found a microcosm of the macrocosm of social heteroglossia. Novelistic discourse, under this new understanding, challenges the presumption underlying the practice of one-styled approach, which inadequately focuses on authorial individuality.

The linguistic dialogism is an internal involvement modeled on actual dialogues. It enters even on the level of word. Every word is, on the one hand, oriented toward its object, but on its way is refracted by the social atmosphere of preexisting alien words, value judgments, and accents surrounding its destination. On the other hand, a dialogue directs toward an expected answer and response from another subject, and the dialogic process is thus diverted from the very beginning. The same dynamics happens on the level of discourse. A style is created inside and outside a text; it lives between the internal politics of how the textual elements are put together, and the external politics of how it interacts with alien discourses contextually.

In short, language is always in reality "languages." The official language, centralized, unified, and commonly used, is not naturally given but in essence posited; it is tamed and contained. Every utterance in its formation is, on the contrary, vibrant and volatile, filled with tension generated from dialogized social anonymity and individual concreteness. There are no neutral words and forms; they become "one's own" only when someone populates them with his own intention.

The pure poetic discourse is in the main made up of monologic utterances because it is imperative in the genre that the author subsumes all the "impure" elements, and salvage language from chaos and competing forces. Dialogism is superfluous in poetic discourse as it is functional in novelistic discourse. In every

way the poetic discourse in its narrow sense takes pains to rise above mutual interactions with, and any allusion to, alien discourses. It resists the boundedness, the historicity, and the social determinism of language, and strives for "Language," which admits no distance between the poet and his expression. The poet's intention prevails over all differences, and if he fails, his language falls to be prosaic. Doubts may remain in the subject matter, i.e., on the purely semantic level, but they must be purged out of the style. Language in poetic discourse is an obedient organ, and if there is dialogue, it appears as a thing, objectified on a different plane from the primary language of the work. The ideal of poetic discourse lies in where the poet's desire and will are singularly carried out without being intervened; it is a utopia of language.

Once we realize that language oscillates between our self and the other, we can learn to appreciate the polyglot consciousness dwelling in the extra- or "sub-" poetic genres. We can tease heteroglossia out of artistic monolithism, and accord it with proper value. This is why Bakhtin celebrates especially the carnivalesque novel because in it differences are intensified, and the authoritativeness, conservatism, and rigidity of the poetic discourse at its derogatory limit are broken. Heteroglossia has positive artistic significance in relation to socio-linguistic realities, and should be singled out for study within stylistics of the novel, as compared with social studies of literature from without. In short Bakhtin calls for the study of dialogic stylistics.

By this way we are made to be aware of the double-voice in writing and reading. Poetry is fundamentally double-voiced, by Bakhtin's definition of language. Only the poetic double-voice is not of a dialogic nature as is explained; otherwise poetry is prosified (328). In the novel, another meaning in another language is brought into the picture to make a full play of the genre. The other voice speaks a particular way of viewing the world with a set of ideologemes other than the author's convictions. All voices supposedly find a way in the dialogism of the novel.

To feminist critics' great disappointment, among diverse social realities Bakhtin seems to neglect that women, too, speak a different language as much as the peasant or the bureaucratic does. Bakhtin observes that any single national language can be stratified internally into social dialects, professional jargons, languages of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of the authorities, of various circles and of passing fashions, languages that serve

the specific sociopolitical purposes of the day, even of the hour (each day has its own slogan, its own vocabulary, its own emphases) . . . (262-3). Bakhtin takes into consideration minute specificity of verbal-ideologic living discourses by the hour; however, he misses a large domain of gender difference. Women do not deserve even a mention in his enumeration. This flagrant omission of women as social beings may well become an interesting inquiry of its own.

Apart from the gender issue, Bakhtin's theory is otherwise encouraging and appealing to feminist critics. For Bakhtin, language is by no means a prison house; it is capable of erupting itself as it is composed of all kinds of potentials, Dale Bauer notices in *Feminist Dialogics: A Theory of Failed Community*. She finds the idea of heteroglossia, dialogism, and the double-voice discourse congenial to feminist criticism, which attempts to subvert the normative discursive practices of patriarchal culture. These Bakhtinian linguistic traits, although gender-free in its postulation, can be borrowed to engage a dialogue about gender issues with the debating voices in the text. Bauer sees it possible to intersect the Bakhtinian carnivalized language with the gender-oriented investigation, and read the contradictory moments of representation of sexual difference. By this way feminist critics may reveal the polyphony of the novel can be sexually monologized by the gender politics of patriarchy.

In "Freedom of Interpretation: Bakhtin and the Challenge of Feminist Criticism," Wayne Booth takes feminist concerns into account. Booth has been the target of feminist critics for his utopian reading theory, which transcends sex and race. He turns for the time being to discuss the politics of interpretation, and begins his inquiry, not with freedom, but with power. He says that the suspension of freedom from the constraint of certain self-privileging interpretive strategies makes possible the freedom to production of certain knowledge. Likewise, present criticisms are also conditioned by previous ones in order to gain freedom from the previous errors. He then sees Bakhtin as a mediator between the two extremes of the modern aesthetic of art, one totally free from politics and the other downright ideological. Bakhtin hypothesizes a "dialogic imagination" at the heart of human life in all its forms by demonstrating that we are constituted by plural selves. For all Bakhtin's insights, Booth spots out Bakhtin's blindness in neglecting to incorporate women's voice into heteroglossia. Booth turns to Rabelais, Bakhtin's prime model of carnivalesque plurality, and analyzes Bakhtin's overlooking the verbal crime of misogyny in Rabelais's work.

Gargantua and Pantagruel is celebrated by Bakhtin as the representative of carnival genre, a liberating and democratic form against the totalizing authoritative voice. The comic eruption of the novel is, however, in a great proportion derived from ridiculing and humiliating women, their bodies, their mannerism, etc. Women's share in the utopia of the abbey is a passive role: it is men who can decide to leave when accomplishing their education, and take with them their suitable female companion. Women readers are particularly embarrassed by the fact that the story is told by men for men. The novel is not lacking in representing men's follies, but women readers do not find the novel as fun as their male counterparts for the males are included in the laughing party though they are also part of the laughing stock.

A great dialogic thinker as he is, Bakhtin does not transcend his own limitation. Rabelais wrote at the times when it was hard for him to be conscious of the injustice, and generations later Bakhtin accordingly celebrates all but women's discourse in a social polyphony. This verifies how deep ideology is rooted in our conception, how oppressively the dominant culture (in this case patriarchy) operates in our everyday life.

In response to Booth's critique on Bakhtin's blindness in both theory and practice, Bauer, nevertheless, vouches that in the Bakhtinian version of dialogic discourse of social power is the potential to revise the silenced voice of women (173). Bauer refashions Bakhtin's heteroglossia of stylistics, and proposes a feminist dialogics. Women are encouraged to articulate what is "unsaid" about themselves, and participate public discourses. By integrating gender consideration and female difference into Bakhtin's delineation of heteroglossia, women can be empowered by the theory, and engage in social dialogues.

Bakhtin's theory is rich for feminist appropriation. By appropriation I subscribe to Clive Thomson's caution that "feminist readings of Bakhtin are neither innocent nor neutral in a political sense" (146). Feminist critics cannot afford to repudiate him simply because he is a male critic, and his postulates are in appearance unconcerned about gender issues. Looking into his theory carefully, we will find that Bakhtin touches fundamental understandings of intertextuality of language, self, and society in a dialogic whole. It offers an opportunity for feminist critics to examine the prevailing assumptions underlying feminist theory and practice.

The recent few years have seen a greatly increasing number of books and articles on Bakhtin, and most of them are by Anglo-American feminist critics, who cite him substantially. Outside the Anglo-American scene, not many feminist critics exploit Bakhtin, Diaz-Diocaretz being one of the few (Thomson 143). In her critical review article "Mikhail Bakhtin and Contemporary Anglo-American Feminist Theory," Clive Thomson makes a research on application of Bakhtin's theory by feminist critics. Among all Bakhtin's books and essays, the most frequently cited reference goes to his "Discourse in the Novel," and somewhat less in number is *Rabelais and His World*. Anglo-American feminist critics ignore the authorship debate about some books allegedly written by Bakhtin; their interest lies in making use of Bakhtinian theory for their purpose.

For example, Joanne Frye studies how women writers tell new lives in old stories and outworn plots, and explores a feminist poetics. Two of Bakhtin's concepts are invoked for her investigation: resistance to dichotomies and the dialogic process of novelistic discourse (*Living Stories: Telling Lives*). Frye proposes in fictional representation "a new kind of mimeticism grounded in female experience," in which a gender poetics of opposition based on interaction takes the place of poetics of victimization (Thomson 148). Dale Bauer, as shown above, adds a political dimension of sexual difference to intersect Bakhtin's carnivalized language. She probes the problematic that power always intrudes into Bakhtin's utopia of linguistic free interplay and determines some voices louder than others (*Feminist Dialogics*). Patricia Yaeger studies bilingual (double-voiced) heroines, who consume the language designed to consume them. Anne Herrmann speculates on the specularized feminine subjectivity that always anticipates "an/other woman." Laurie Finke examines feminist theories and warns against a reified feminist monologism.

Thomson concludes that Bakhtin is perceived as "a sympathetic and hospitable ally," (158) who provides a theoretical and philosophical, as well as methodological, basis for feminist critics to think about their critical agenda. In constructing their theory, feminist critics find gender a worthy issue to fit into the dialogic arena. Power struggle is introduced to account for diversely privileged and suppressed voices in a model of linguistic free play.

In a comparative study of Bakhtin and feminist criticism, Myriam Diaz-Diocaretz sees in Bakhtin's philosophy of language a breakthrough of feminist

determinist theories ("Bakhtin, Discourse, and Feminism"). She is in favor of an interactive critical perspective over, say, the belief in *écriture féminine*, which does not allow social dynamics as does Bakhtin's theory. Bakhtin's "speaking subject" encompasses multiple differences mediating and interacting within language, and disposes of a closed, alienating linguistic system.

Feminist theory fights against patriarchal dominance, and makes critiques of androcentric structure in all areas. Among the critiques are studies of political implication of gender, the perception of the real, the construction of the imagined, and the nature of language in relation to women in society. Of the last category, linguistic determinism has been the predominant assumption underlying the inquiry into sexism in language. That language is inherently sexist is derived, illogically as Diaz-Diocaretz asserts, from the social fact that language is controlled by masculinist hegemony. Linguistic determinism leads to the reactive criticism of women's exclusion from the symbolic order, and neglects the rich resources, potential yet available, in language, with which women can create their own spaces. Diaz-Diocaretz maintains that "the limits are in the assumptions of what we understand language and the textual interactions to be," and "conditions of dominance are not fixed or static" (125 & 126). She maintains that an inclusive theory, rather than an excluding one, is a way out of the impasse.

Taking a feminist stance by way of crossing the dialogic imagination, Diaz-Diocaretz suggests utterance is ideological as language *per se* is not. To assume a difference in language is to assume "a specificity for the *word*" (130). The word is "a social sign open to the fulfillment of all kinds of ideological functions," and "the specific uses of discourse within the context" makes way for difference (130). Language is open to contestation of various opposing forces, among which are women's and patriarchy's voices. The re/structuring of discourse occurs in the use of language, and women should voice their experience rather than appeal to a "non-language."

For all the institutional and political impediments encountered, women's suppressed voice is not finalized, nor is the self-proclaimed authoritative word of patriarchy conclusive, Diaz-Diocaretz proclaims (131). Women cut across all levels of society, and are not taken for a community of their own by Bakhtin; nonetheless, Bakhtin's theory of discourse is not closed to women. Social conditioning effects through its use of language, and yet in the very nature of voice is included "other-voicedness." In the word are two elements, the reiterable

and the unique; either one cannot cancel the other. The former comes from the realm of the given, and the latter the created. On the one pole of the text is the individual's intention and world vision, though also derived through dialogism with all other discourses; on the other pole is the conventional system of signs, a reproducible discourse of a given community.

Heteroglossia, for Diaz-Diocaretz, contains "the traces of the historical dialogue of conflicting languages," and the diversification is at the base of any language system. Therefore, she argues that a feminist critique developed from a Bakhtinian bent will reject "the gender deterministic notion of woman as the other," and change it to "woman and the other" (136). She asserts that

a new field of inquiry lies ahead to study this "other" in discourse, and the "voices," forms, correlations and contexts of this "other" when the speaking and writing subject is a woman. (136)

She situates the project against the background of "a complex relativities of space and time," which is an inevitability for all human beings (136).

Thomson and Diaz-Diocaretz share the same apprehension about gender determinism, and resort to *heteroglossia* and dialogism for assistance. A further look at a more philosophical discussion of self and other by Paul de Man and Mathew Roberts is worthwhile to advance the investigation. Dialogism is sometimes treated as a formal criticism that breaks up formalism because Bakhtin introduces into language the elements of alterity from outside (de Man 109). Even though he challenges Bakhtin in a deconstructive reading of dialogism as to its possibility to lead to critical dialogue, de Man, nevertheless, agrees that Bakhtin's theory promises it. De Man argues that for the later Bakhtin heteroglossia is not only an image of language, an intra-linguistic picture (108). Dialogism develops to be a dialectic exchange without resolution to a synthesis, and thus sustains the heterogeneity of an exterior voice. Dialogism disprivileges the autotelic structure of form, and replaces the narcissism by "an assertion of the otherness of the other," even the recognition of the author's own otherness (109). Dialogism, a poetics of how a word/novel is generated by multifarious voices, helps us to recognize otherness in a text/context. The idea of "outsideness" leads us from "intralinguistic to intracultural relationships," and moves formal analysis into "the practical sphere of ethics and politics" (109).

In comparing Bakhtin's dialogics and de Man's deconstructionism, Mathew Roberts makes a very illuminating exegesis of Bakhtin's recurring concerns of self and other, text and reader, language and knowledge. The Bakhtinian self is "dynamic but inalienable." It is continually constituted between "I" and a world of Others in a dialogic way (116). Bakhtin demonstrates the inadequacy of the theoretical world, such as Saussurian linguistics, to govern or explain "the specific acts of actual human beings." He calls for modification of the abstract body of knowledge in the realm of "the singular, acting consciousness" (131). He makes a supplementary analysis of "the irrepeatable aspects of the utterance in its living, dialogic context" in addition to the systemic and codifiable aspects of language (131). The concrete-historical meaning is actualized from dialogizing the potentiality of the *langue*.

In view of real social conditions, Bakhtin's theory has imaginative limitations as well as strengths. We are forced to admit how idealized Bakhtin's notion of a full dialogue really is, and how unlikely are its chances of ever becoming realized anywhere except perhaps in the specialized discourse of art. It remains a model, but one that offers a much more positive outlook than deconstructionism does.

Theoretically speaking, the contradictions, ambivalence, and silences of the text are seen as part of its essentially dialogic nature, and in the aperture of the authoritative voice is located the most promising space for women's creativity. Women writers enter the creative scene as a self and as an other, making dialogue with the dominant patriarchal voices. Language is understood by Bakhtin as made up of multiple strata, of which women's voice is a part. In this sense women have access to the resource of language, and are equipped with the necessary given in order to make use of it. Aside from the reiterable given, in which sex does not play an important part, women's voice has had little chance to reach the authoritative status. The authoritative voice for women is almost equal to masculinist voice. Women's voice in history has been feeble and seldom heard, and is much hampered or distorted in the present actuality. In this sense women speak from the position of an other. As both a self and other, women's voice is not satisfied with being marginalized, and women make attempt to rise from the suppressed, and to call for attention, justice, and reorientation. Feminist project is in this way politically saturated. What feminist critics are doing is consciously historicizing and ideologizing literature, decentering it, shaking it up, as "the

other" is supposed to be doing in a discourse. A point of view other than that of the dominant male discourse is introduced to writing and reading. Excavating lost literary mothers, looking for communities made up of and made for women, all these endeavors are contributing to reinforcing women's voice. All these maneuvers mobilize women from other to self.

Meanwhile, feminist critics should not forget the Bakhtinian model of self is dialogically formed, and ideologically informed, and its relation to the other is constantly changing. Centrality of self is an illusion. Marginality and centrality are relational to each other. Bakhtin's theory from outside feminist discourse reminds feminist critics not to fall back to the homogeneous authoritative voice. The temptation may creep back in any disguise, even in the name of plurality, and turn the decentralizing project paradoxically into Feminism. Dialogism permits an internal persuasion and permeation of all sounds, the irrational as well as the rational, the female as well as the male. The novel is a privileged genre to carry out dialogism. Dialogism designates something outside the speaker's intention always lies within his utterance, and this is the heterogeneous nature of all languages. By inference, discourses like the novel can exploit dialogic resources to the fullest. The power of novelistic discourse is derived from its act of dramatizing the play of social voices and contexts. Virginia Woolf's opinion confirms that heteroglossia plays a fundamental role in the novel. In her essay "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" she reflects that novelists bring us to see things through characters; otherwise, they are poets, historians, or pamphleteers rather than novelists (326).

Both poetry and the novel are rich in making use of language, only in different ways. Poetry excels in its complexity of exploiting ambiguity and tropicality in the wealth of language, and subjugating heteroglossia in aiming at a final, absolute said. The novelistic prose exploits the complexity of the language of a "passing world" still "warm from its daily use" (Morson & Emerson 53). The novel draws on the tension within language while the tension of the poetry comes from the poetic struggle against the worldliness of language, though never fully succeeding in doing so. Bakhtin prefers the novel for the prosaic values it embodies, but does not mean to make hierarchy in the different genres.

In practice Bakhtin's theory sheds light on the phenomenon that the novel so far is the genre allowing most women's creative energy. It is in the novel, Bakhtin speculates, that true diversity is possible. De Man compares Bakhtin's

novelistic stylistics to Northrop Frye's low-mimetic mode in that it is "anti-romance, anti-epical, and anti-mythical" (108). Heteroglossia registers the antagonistic class structure and the crossing of social barrier. The novel is "the one genre that will not cease to develop, that will not purge itself of impropriety and questioning, that will continue to insist on the inappropriate and the 'dialogic imagination'" (Heilbrun & Higonnet xii).

Bakhtin's theory of the novel also goads us to speculate on why few women's novels can be classified as carnivalesque; at most they are satiric, ironic, or humorous. One possible reason is that the Rabelaisian novelists are still empowered by their gender as being masculine, and the masculine and authoritative discourse--they are not in every way overlapping with each other--paradoxically co-op as well as clash with each other to produce carnival scenes.

Poetry is another problem. How to justify women poets in Bakhtin's terms? Bakhtin's poetic discourse is modeled on an asexual poet. Women are not eventually excluded from the "Edenic Language" that Bakhtin proposes, I will argue, but so far the males have better advantage of carrying out that ideal as they are better assisted by a tradition of poetry mostly composed of by males. "Edenic Language" is not a prescriptive category, as I understand it; rather it describes the state that the poet overcomes the obstacles standing between his/her experience and language. No aesthetically creative discourse can ultimately do away with the "other logic of extralocality," Bakhtin concedes (Roberts's term); therefore, the ideal language of poetry is not the One Language, in which women poets speak the same way as male poets.

The prosaic liberation and the poetic personalization can be taken as two poles that women writers strive for. One is to mystify, and the other is to demystify. Those who stress a fair play in the public discourse incline to the prosaic discourse, and those who crave for a coterie and hermetic language incline to the poetic discourse. There is no denying that Cixous's and Irigaray's critical writings are resonant with the poetic overtone which they term *écriture feminine*, a language that witnesses, according to them, women's pulsation and energy overriding the socially phallic voice. The Kristevian semiotic order also directs toward the poetic pole.

In between the two poles all women writers have to labor like any other male writers to grapple with language. A woman poet has to find the Word for

what is disturbing in her mind and throbbing in her blood. We can expect a woman Shakespeare or a woman Milton in the long run, a different Shakespeare and Milton of another grandeur and splendor, if women keep on imagining and imagining hard enough till language in their hands turn "incandescent" (in Woolf's word, *A Room of One's Own*).

Woolf thinks that great poetry comes from an androgynous mind that is purged of all angers (*A Room of One's Own*). With inspiration from Bakhtinian poetics, which professes great poetry is achieved when nothing comes between the poet and his language, we may understand anger as an alien voice intruding from the social, and hinders the woman poet from reaching her language. It does not mean that woman should not feel anger; anger has as much right as any other subject matters to enter systems of representation. Anger is, though, a metaphorical way of staging an alien force that deprives the woman poet of her unequivocal voice. Woolf's dream of androgyny may be understood as a blissful allegory, in which a woman poet overcomes the distance between her and her unique language, between her and the singing of her myths. Androgyny does not indicate a mind that is sexless or free from sex, but a state not hampered by being sexual, culturally or biologically. "[P]oetic forms reflect lengthier social processes, . . . requiring centuries to unfold," Bakhtin observes the social significance of a transcending language (300). In a way I take these words as reflecting that a unique individual voice springs from the wealth of a long tradition of language using. If women ask for it hard enough, a woman poetic discourse in Bakhtin's sense will be expected to come out of the community of women's accumulated voices in the long run.

W. K. Wimsatt says "it is easy to challenge to revolt and even to change--these are commonplaces." But it is not easy to turn them into "wit and imagination" (quoted in Heilbrun, xiii).¹ While what he means by "wit and imagination" is not certain, we, nevertheless, welcome Wimsatt's challenge. Eventually we want a woman voice of many diversities, and in that voice we would like to hear a woman bard so inspired as to sing of women's myths out of her rapport with a nonalienating language.

Notes

1. Originally from W. K. Wimsatt, "Introduction," *Literary Criticism: Idea and Act* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1974).

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