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# Gendered Reading Communities: The Feminization of Reader Response Criticism and a Dialogics of Reading

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# GENDERED READING COMMUNITIES: THE FEMINIZATION OF READER RESPONSE CRITICISM AND A DIALOGICS OF READING

by

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# VITA

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1. "George Eliot: Mary Ann Evans's Subversive Tool in Middlemarch?", Studies in the Novel 18:3 (Fall 1986): 270-82.

2. "The Three Worlds of Love in Troilus and Criseyde," Proceedings of the Illinois Medieval Association 1986, Volume Three, DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois UP, 1987; 34-59.

3. "Gender Offender! Will the Epicene yet Save JAMA?" JAMA 259:12 (March 25, 1988): 1809 (Letter).

4. "Reply: Epicene Pronouns--Obliterate, Slash, or Pluralize?" JAMA 260:10 (September 9, 1988): 1407.

5. "Still More on Sex, Gender, and Language." (Review of Grammar and Gender, by Dennis Baron. New Haven: Yale UP, 1986). American Speech 63 (Summer 1988): 169-75.

6. "Mary St. Leger Kingsley Harrison, pseud. Lucas Malet, British Women Writers, Ed. Janet Todd, NY: Crossroad-/Ungar/Continuum, forthcoming in 1988.

7. "The Elusive Beowulf Poet Self-Represented in the I-Narrator and the Scops," Ball State University Forum, forthcoming in 1988.

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# CHAPTER I

## FEMINIZING READER-RESPONSE CRITICISM

### Myth

> Long afterward, Oedipus, old and blinded, walked the roads. He smelled a familiar smell. It was the Sphinx. Oedipus said, "I want to ask you one question. Why didn't I recognize my mother?" "You gave the wrong answer," said the Sphinx. "But that was what made everything possible," said Oedipus. "No," she said. "When I asked, What walks on four legs in the morning, two at noon, and three in the evening, you answered Man. You didn't say anything about women." "When you say Man," said Oedipus, "you include women too. Everyone knows that." She said, "That's what you think." Muriel Rukeyser

### Introduction: The Author, The Text, The Reader, Meaning, and Gender

In recent years, scrutiny of how literary texts produce meaning has challenged conventional assumptions about what constitutes the author, the text, and the reader, as well as how they interrelate. Many critics now accept that attitudes or intentions of the actual, historical author are extremely difficult to fix through analysis of his or her texts or biography,[1] although psychobiographical approaches

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[1] Most literary critics have adopted this post-Romantic notion of the inaccessibility of the author. See for example Jonathan Culler's "Prolegomena to a Theory of Reading":

> ". . . the assumptions of writers are of difficult access and their statements about their own works are motivated by such varied factors that one is

often suggest what we suppose are responsible conclusions about authorial attitudes in a given text.[2] Research into authorship invites such theoretical formulations as Wayne Booth's "implied author" and Roland Barthes's insistence on the theoretical death of the actual author.[3] As the locus of meaning has shifted from author to reader, the unity of the text has become increasingly suspect as multiple readers deny its objective meaning or its claims to "truth" and seek validity elsewhere.

Most recently, in a movement from a positive hermeneutics that posits valid interpretations in meaningful texts toward a negative one that calls into question the very

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> continually led astray if one tries to infer from them the conventions assumed. . . . " (51)

2 Such approaches are common in feminist criticism that searches out women's experience. Two notable examples are Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's pioneer study, The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination, and Ann Robinson Taylor's Male Novelists and Their Female Voices: Literary Masquerades. See also Allan Gardner Lloyd Smith's Eve Tempted: Writing and Sexuality in Hawthorne's Fiction for a study that is both psychobiographical and Iserian reader-response in approach.

3 In his Rhetoric of Fiction, Booth has attempted to locate an authorial entity whose values and norms are represented in the text. Roland Barthes, on the other hand, denies the validity of a textual message from an "author-God" and proclaims the "birth of the reader . . . at the cost of the death of the author" (Image, Music, Text 148). See also Michel Foucault's "author function": the attitudes we ascribe to "the author" are "projections, in terms always more or less psychological, of our way of handling texts: in the comparisons we make, the traits we extract as pertinent, the continuities we assign, or the exclusions we practice" (127).

possibility of reading and interpreting as such,[4] many critical theorists have privileged the reader of a text as its most important if not only determinant. As Barthes phrases it in S/Z, dans le texte, seule parle le lecteur ("in the text, only the reader speaks"). This shifting focus has engendered a bewildering typology of readers, from Walker Gibson's "mock" reader to Wolfgang Iser's "implied" one, from Umberto Eco's "model," "critical," and "naive" readers to Stanley Fish's "informed" ones, from Erwin Wolff's "intended reader" to Michael Riffaterre's "super-reader," Louise Rosenblatt's "common" reader-critic, and Peter Rabinowitz's narrative (narrator's), authorial (author's), and actual audiences. Even the possibility of the unified reader, the essential self who reads always the same, has been called into question by poststructuralism, leading to what Barthes calls the "decentred reader" (S/Z). As Joseph Harris reads Barthes's S/Z,

> one idea of the self is being exchanged for another. Rather than viewing it as a kind of impenetrable core, Barthes sees the self as a network of relations so complex as to be irreducible. . . . [T]he self is seen not merely as a single simple essence, but as an incredibly rich and layered

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[4] See Susan R. Suleiman's "Introduction to Varieties of Audience-Oriented Criticism" for a succinct discussion of these two primary theoretical categories, the traditional and the poststructural.

> tapestry of languages we constantly weave and reweave. (162)[5]

A real paradox prevails here. Even though critical theorists may accept, however reluctantly, the concepts of the absent author, the ambiguous text, and the plural reader, as readers of texts we all tend to limit meaning in them. Our drive to control the texts, to understand what we experience, compels us to identify meanings and to limit them to a manageable number as we read. So we produce interpretations, often through a dialectical synthesis of perspectives into one or a few limited interpretations or meanings that fit our particular belief systems. We find ourselves in what Naomi Schor has called the "hermeneutic double bind": "the absolute necessity to interpret [that] goes hand in hand with the total impossibility to validate interpretation" ("Fiction as Interpretation" 177). And pedagogical practice (as well as private reading) often belies the theoretical basis of our literary pursuits: as readers we still seek "a" meaning. Even when "the" meaning changes with each reading, we may still resist allowing incompatible readings to stand together. Thus we find

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[5] See Bakhtin's discussion of the polyvocal self as multiple. See also Karen Chase, Eros & Psyche: The Representation of Personality in Charlotte Brontë, Charles Dickens, and George Eliot (especially 190); Robert Holub, Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction (especially 153-54), Mary Louise Pratt, "Interpretive Strategies/Strategic Interpretations"; and Susan Suleiman, "Introduction to the Varieties of Reader-Response Criticism" for recent discussions of the myriad reading subject.

ourselves caught between the whirlpool of Scylla and the smooth sheer rock of Charybdis, between theoretical acceptance of indeterminacy and resistance to the concept in practical meaning-making and self-assertion activities.

Increasingly aware that the meaning of the text is problematic at best and that "reader" too is a complex theoretical construct marked by ambiguity, some contemporary theorists have turned, therefore, to analyzing the complex relationships that authors create between narrators and inscribed readers as methods of both shaping and limiting the range of meanings in the text. This study analyzes the communal relationships between fictive narrators and fictive readers inscribed in the novels of Charlotte Brontë and Joseph Conrad as a model for describing how actual communities of readers interpret texts. The study draws on the theory and practice of reader-response critics, who study the ways readers, historical and theoretical, try to make meaning of the plural text in a work.[6] Yet the study departs from current response theory in two significant ways: it incorporates both Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of dialogics and feminist inquiry's central concern, the impact of gender on the shaping of meaning.

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[6] "The difference [between a work and a text] is as follows: the work is concrete, occupying a portion of book space (in a library, for example); the Text, on the other hand, is a methodological field. . . . The Text is plural" (Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text" 74, 76).

I have selected the novels of two authors who depict that special category of "pilgrim"[7] first-person narrators. Such narrators demonstrate the struggle for selfhood. The narrators' epistemological dilemmas are resolved as they narrate their past experiences to internally constructed communities of readers. Although their consciousnesses are fictional constructs of their authors, "pilgrim" I-narrators[8] create the illusion of delivering their "real" inner, subjective lives, not mediated by a third-person narrator but directly to the actual reader. Such first-person texts, more than third-person narratives, invite the actual reader to accept the teller's proffered pact of intimacy and confidentiality, to become a receptive reader.[9]

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[7] I borrow the term from Thomas Mallon, who in A Book of One's Own designates "pilgrims" as

> those who set out in their books to discover who they really are. These are generally very serious people, more in the way of pilgrims, with inward destinations, than mere travelers. Some of them are after the sight of God; others are out to realize their full "potential," spiritual and otherwise; and some of them are carrying burdens of suffering they are unsure they can shoulder. . . . Some of them succeed in getting where they want; others talk themselves into believing - they've done that; and some clearly, if honestly, fail (75).

[8] I prefer this term to the more common "first-person narrator" because "I" better characterizes the personification of the narrator into an individualized character in the text than does the abstract term "first-person."

[9] Charlotte Brontë's contemporary, critic William George Clark, describes this close involvement of the reader with the narrator:

Texts that construct "pilgrim" I-narrators and internal listeners and readers demonstrate the narrators' struggle to form a receptive community of readers that will justify the selves they create as they reconstruct their accounts.[10] First-person narration in these texts examines the struggle to communicate meaning through a retrospective narrative that thematizes a subjective epistemology. In such narratives the reader may recognize the narrator's search for a community of like selves.

I would suggest further that these searches for a receptive community are gender-driven, and that the author's choice of first-person narrator provides fertile ground not only for the reception theorist but also for the feminist critic. For example, narrators who seek a homogeneous community of like minds are generally the ones who enjoy a privileged status in the dominant community and believe their own norms and values belong to all. Charlie Marlow

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> We took up Jane Eyre one winter's evening, somewhat piqued at the extravagant commendations we had heard, and sternly resolved to be as critical as Croker. But as we read on we forgot both commendations and criticism, identified ourselves with Jane in all her troubles, and finally married Mr. Rochester about four in the morning (review in Fraser's (Dec 1849): 692, qtd in Tillotson, 19ff).

Why a male critic such as Clark felt he could identify with Jane's struggles is a question I will explore in a subsequent chapter.

10 See Dorrit Cohn's Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction on the distinction between the narrating self versus the experiencing self, an idea that she credits to Leo Spitzer.

and his cohort of readers inscribed in the novels of Joseph Conrad exemplify such a community. Traditionally, the dominant members of the community have been men, or at least men and women taught to think in the masculinist, or patriarchal, perspective; in other words, those gendered as men. In contrast, those who find themselves at odds in that community of like minds, those who resist the norms and values of that community, are most likely to be among a subordinated group who recognize that they do not always think like the others in it; in a patriarchal tradition, they include those gendered as women. As I will demonstrate, such resistance to the universality of dominant norms abounds in the narrator-reader relationships in the novels of Charlotte Brontë.

The challenge to the universality of norms and beliefs is the focus of literary theories derived from philosophical considerations of the social construction of belief. This critical movement denies the existence of universal foundations and a universal language with which to express foundational truths. Such theories derive from the work of Thomas Kuhn, Richard Rorty, Clifford Geertz, Mikhail Bakhtin, and others. In social constructionist theory, knowledge is generated through the social justification of belief (Bruffee 777).[11] Knowledge or belief communities can be

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[11] See Thomas Kuhn, Structure of Scientific Revolutions; Richard Rorty, Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature; Clifford Geertz, Local Knowledge; for Bakhtin's

based on the synthesized authority of consensus of the dominant groups in a society or on the interplay of conflicting perspectives with none dominating. The patriarchal project--as well as some recent feminist revisionism that replaces a patriarchal interpretation with a single-perspective feminist one--imposes the authority of consensus. A consensual community would tend to recognize only the perspective in a text that conforms to the group's own dominant perspective. And, as Jane Tompkins has said, "When discourse is responsible for reality and not merely a reflection of it, then whose discourse prevails makes all the difference" ("Introduction to Reader-Response Criticism" xxv). Such a community is most readily identified with response critic Stanley Fish's concept of interpretive community. The conflictual community, on the other hand, engages in an ongoing dialogue among multiple voices, whether in a text or in its diverse community of readers. Mikhail Bakhtin's conceptualization of the nature of the novel as social and "heteroglossic" (comprised of multiple

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dialogics, see M. Baxtin, Voprosy literatury i èstetiki: Issledovanija raznyx let, Ed. S. Lejbovic (Moscow, 1975), Ed. Michael Holquist, Tr. Caryl Emerson and Holquist (Austin, Tex., 1981) as The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin; for a very recent critique of social constructionism, see Kenneth Bruffee, "Social Construction, Language, and the Authority of Knowledge: A Bibliographic Essay." See also Joanne Frye, "Consensus or Community: Women Writers and the Locus of Narrative Authority," for a discussion of the tension between the tendency toward communities based on the authority of consensus and the striving toward a Bakhtinian heteroglossic one of the interaction of an array of perspectives.

cultural voices in a dialogue of conflict) describes those voices as interacting in a conflictual community.

Yet neither Fish, nor most other reader-response critics, nor Bakhtin, has addressed feminist concerns about gender ideologies at work in the making of texts or in the shaping of meaning in them. This study will proceed from an examination of reader-response criticism to ways that Bakhtin's theory of multiple voices interacting in conflict alters Fish's concept of interpretive community and lends itself to a feminist approach to reading texts. The method entails reading in a Bakhtinian dialogic imagination, experiencing the heteroglossic multiplicity of perspectives in a text without trying to effect their synthesis into a univocal work. An approach that combines feminist, dialogical, and reader-response models--what I would call a dialogically feminist approach--permits the actual reader to enter into a conflictual community with authors comparable to the heteroglossia in texts.

The paradigmatic texts for this study, the four Charlie Marlow novels of Joseph Conrad and the four mature novels of Charlotte Brontë, demonstrate, respectively, consensual and conflictual communal interaction. Conrad is often considered a writer for men because he crafted complex narrative frameworks for a male narrator in an all-male community of "listeners" who are the story's narratees (those to whom Marlow relates his experience). Conrad's

Charlie Marlow clings tenaciously to his fictive communities of narratees, often explaining to them that the character whose tale he relates shares their norms, is "one of us." And those qualifying as "us" are always male members of Marlow's cohort. Conrad constructs an artifically homogeneous and monovocal interpretive community of tellers and listeners, narrators and narratees, for Marlow's cohort. The narratees share not only Marlow's sex but his background.

In contrast, the relationships between Brontë's narrators and internal readers are more complex and more conflicted than they are in Conrad's novels. Brontë provides three types of narrators to study. She is a female author who writes under an androgynous pseudonym, first in the voice of a male narrator, then of a female narrator, then in an androgynous voice, and finally as a female narrator again. In addition, each novel addresses various kinds of internal "readers" (narratees), sympathetic and critical, male and female. Such a multiplicity of narrators and narratees in community demonstrates conflictual heterogeneity rather than consensual homogeneity and elicits differing responses from actual readers, depending on their own reading strategies at any given time.

Conrad's homogeneous and consensual male fictive world provides a benchmark against which to test the complexities of the conflictual narrative voices in the polyvocal fictive

communities of Charlotte Brontë. I hope to demonstrate that a reception-based feminist critique elucidates the gender-related conflicts built into the narrative structures of texts and empowers readers to enter into a Bakhtinian dialogic exploration of hidden perspectives rather than be controlled by the surface meaning in a text.

The study implements the central purpose of feminist criticism: to examine the differences sex and its related gender ideologies produce.[12] When gender-related assumptions seem to hinder entry into a heteroglossic interpretive community, the reader needs to bring both an historically and an ideologically aware critique, a dialogically feminist

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[12] As I have argued elsewhere ("Gender Offender! Will the Epicene Yet Save JAMA?"), sex and gender are commonly used as synonyms, but I will distinguish between the biological characteristics of the male and female sexes, and the cultural aspects of gender issues. Thus I disagree for political reasons with Barrie Thorne, Cheris Kramarae and Nancy Henley, who conclude that the ambiguity of the two terms renders them interchangeable:

> While sex technically refers to biological phenomena, such as hormones and chromosomes, and gender to cultural phenomena, the two words are often used interchangeably, and given the complex interactions of biology and culture, that ambiguity doesn't seem problematic. The term sex and gender also usefully suggests that sexuality is intricately related to gender. (n 20-21)

The ambiguity is problematic. The term sex and gender does connote the interrelatedness of the two single terms. But when gender is used instead of sex, the usage legitimizes the patriarchal view that women are gendered feminine because of biology rather than because of patriarchal socialization as feminine. Using the words interchangeably mutes the feminist objection to how women have been gendered in a masculinist society.

critique, to bear within the interstices of his or her "general" reader's responses to the text. Feminist dialogics seeks to discover not only how that hindrance disrupts the reading, but also why it is there at all. Becoming alert to the impact of sexual differences and gender ideologies on the shaping of meaning in texts and readers will help us as a dialogic community of readers to better understand the multiplicity of reading relationships possible not only to Conrad and Brontë and their texts but to other literary texts as well.

## Response Theory: Iser, Prince, Fish and Community

Although they suppress--or at least ignore--the gender issue, reception theorists Wolfgang Iser, Gerald Prince, and Stanley Fish have contributed significantly to analyzing relationships between texts and readers' responses. These critics provide a theoretical base for this project because they focus on questions of the narrator's closeness to the reader and the need for a community of listeners.[13] Iser has argued that readers engage with a text in a creative and

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[13] See especially Iser's Der Akt Des Lesens. Theorie asthetischer Wirkung trans. as The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response, in The Implied Reader: Patterns in Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett, and "Interaction Between Text and Reader"; Prince's "Introduction à l'etude du narrataire" trans. as "Introduction to the Study of the Narratee," "The Narratee Revisited," and "Notes on the Text as Reader"; and Fish's "Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics," "Interpreting the Variorum," and Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretative Communities.

participatory process that lets their imaginations fill the inevitable gaps in a text to "realize" it:

> one text is potentially capable of several different realizations, and no reading can ever exhaust the full potential, for each reader will fill in the gaps in his own way, thereby excluding the various other possibilities; as he reads, he will make his own decision as to how the gap is to be filled. (55)

Iser's stress on the dialectical relationship between text and reader has elevated the reader to a level of importance previously afforded the author alone. His work analyzes how the reader makes sense of the text's multiple perspectives, both on the surface and in the gaps or silences.

Iser's is an important model, yet his resolution of the reading process into a dialectical synthesis produces monadic closure of the multiplicities in texts, a single dominant perspective in effect silencing marginalized ones. His work seems plural in theory but is monistic in his practical criticism. Yet Iser argues: we all delimit meanings of texts as a method to manage an understanding of the reading experience.[14] It takes a conscious effort to

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[14] See Jonathan Culler, On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism, for a critique of what he calls Iser's "monism of theory and dualism of narrative" (68-78, esp. 75). See also Robert Holub, Reception Theory, A Critical Introduction, who says,

> at some level, . . . [Iser calls] upon a determinate text (or sub-text) to prevent what threatens to be a totally subjective and arbitrary reader response. . . . If we ultimately have recourse to features of a knowable text, then the suspicion can easily arise that reception theory has frequently changed only the critical vocabulary, not

read dialogically and to avoid the tendency to seek closure; Iser does not avoid closure, but the dialogically feminist reader must. A dialogically feminist reading requires the reader to embrace simultaneously the myriad perspectives in a text and to avoid premature closure; in other words, to read dialogically, admitting the plurality of texts, and, by extension, of selves.

I use Gerald Prince's terminology to differentiate among the narrator (the speaker), the narratee (the "you" inscribed in the text), the addressee (the implied or mock reader suggested in the "you"), and the receiver, (the actual reader) ("Revisited" 302). I do so to avoid adding to the plethora of terms already coined in this field and to stress the importance of the distinctions Prince makes among participants in narratives. Prince emphasizes both the diversity and the importance of narratees, pointing out that famous narrator Scheherezade, for example, depended for her very life on her narratee's good humor and her capability as a storyteller ("Introduction" 8).

Prince's fundamental distinction is that the narratee in a text should not be confused with the actual reader.

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> the way in which we analyze literature. . . . [I]n lieu of the ambiguity and irony in the text, we read about gaps and indeterminacies[,] . . . merely displacing determinacy from one textual level to another" (150).

Suleiman also has noted Iser's theoretical indeterminacy and practical determinacy (23).

Identification of the reader with the narratee is an exception. Nor should the narratee be confused with what Prince calls the "virtual reader," the one imagined by the author to be the reader, nor the "ideal reader," the one who would understand and approve the author's text entirely (9). For Prince, the narratee is the relay between the narrator and the reader and helps to characterize the narrator, emphasize themes, and develop the plot. The narratee, according to Prince, becomes the "spokesman" for the moral of the work (23).

Prince plants his roots firmly in determinate soil in his assertion that the inscribed reader or narratee knows the denotations but not the connotations of all the signs that particularize any narratee. Therefore, Prince avers, the narratee cannot unscramble the codes in the text (10, 300). The problem here is that if belief is socially constructed through an arbitrary language, there cannot be denotations, only connotations.[15]

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[15] See Suleiman 19 on Barthes's S/Z, and 13, 14 for her critique of Prince. She uses Barthes's concept of the "structurating" reader as one who can interpret the value of the action in the text. Barthes's work is problematic, however. As Suleiman has already noted, Barthes' work in S/Z could be either quite structuralist in mode or an anti-structuralist critique, depending on the reader's experiential approach to it. See also Jane Tompkins, Reader-Response Criticism from Formalism to Post-Structuralism, xii-xiii; and Mary Louise Pratt, "Interpretive Strategies/Strategic Interpretations," 35-37, on Prince's formalist adherence to the determinate text.

Prince's typological distinctions, however, are helpful in analyzing texts in which gender plays a significant role in the communicative interaction among author, narratees, and readers. I will demonstrate these gendered interactions in later chapters that analyze narrator/reader community relationships in the fiction of Joseph Conrad and Charlotte Brontë. But, for discussion of the kinds of communities such texts form, the impact of gender on their formation, and the reader's response as a plural reading subject to them, we must turn to Stanley Fish, for whom the actual reader plays a more active role in realizing the text than Prince's New Critical approach allows.

Stanley Fish has qualified Prince's model by positing different ways readers respond to a text depending on their membership in particular interpretive communities. Fish's earlier work describes his "informed reader" as one "identified by a matrix of political, cultural, and literary determinants" ("Literature in the Reader" 86) which can therefore respond fully to the text. Later, he introduces the concept of interpretive communities as the entity to which informed readers who share interpretive strategies belong ("Interpreting the Variorum"). According to Fish, "These strategies exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read" ("Interpreting the Variorum" 182). Different communities of readers account for differing readings of the same text. Fish boldly states,

> The only "proof" of membership is fellowship, the nod of recognition from someone in the same community, someone who says to you what neither of us could ever prove to a third party: "we know." I say it to you now, knowing full well that you will agree with me (that is, understand) only if you already agree with me. (183) [16]

As Fish would have it, communities cannot effectively influence one another.

Fish is a thoroughly negative hermeneutician and social constructionist. Kenneth Bruffee describes a spectrum of social constructionists with those on the left believing that a dialogic exchange among knowledge communities can result in reacculturation and those on the right denying the possibility; Fish is far right-wing on this spectrum (Bruffee, "Letter to Editor" 216). The problem with Fish's concept of interpretive community is that interaction between textual perspectives and between texts and actual readers generates a discourse of power, not a single-perspective work or a homogeneous community of like-minded Fishian readers, as Pratt, Tompkins, Culler, and others have

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[16] See also Frank Kermode's discussion in The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative of the hermeneutical interpretation of texts (here, the parables) in which he says, "Outsiders must content themselves with the manifest, and pay a supreme penalty for doing so. Only those who already know the mysteries - what the stories really mean - can discover what the stories really mean" (1). Kermode, however, believes in the validity of texts, unlike Fish, and therefore qualifies as a positive hermeneutician.

also recognized.[17] Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of dialogics gives us a way to successfully challenge Fish's concept of the interpretive community as one that precludes conflict and change.

## Bakhtin's Dialogics and Conflictual Communities

Bakhtinian dialogics demonstrates that conflicts inherent in communities and between belief communities generate change, whether radical or evolutionary. Bakhtin recognizes this power of both the heteroglossic text and the polyvocal community to generate change, as he speaks here of novelistic discourse:

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[17] See especially Mary Louise Pratt, "Interpretive Strategies/Strategic Interpretations" 45-52, and Jane Tompkins, "The Reader in History: The Changing Shape of Literary Response." Pratt says, "By treating signifying practices as the joyous and spontaneous deployment of unchallengeably held beliefs, Fish achieves a kind of innocence for interpretation. . . " (52). And for a similar commentary from another discipline, see Octavio Paz, "Edith Piaf Among the Pygmies"; Paz describes how the Papuan Indians and the Dutch explorers-ethnologists have diametrically opposed reactions to hearing Edith Piaf over the radio:

> Once again, a conclusion I am reluctant to accept suggests itself: neither moral and aesthetic meanings nor scientific and magical ones are wholly translatable from one society to another. For the Papuans to understand modern science, they must abandon their beliefs. For us really to understand the Papuan world, we too must change. In both cases this change ought not to imply the abandonment of our former personality and the culture into which we were born. The understanding of others is a contradictory ideal: it asks that we change without changing, that we be other without ceasing to be ourselves. . . (20).

> A sealed-off interest group, caste or class, existing within an internally unitary and unchanging core of its own, cannot serve as socially productive soil . . . unless it becomes riddled with decay or shifted somehow from its state of internal balance and self-sufficiency. . . . The heteroglossia that rages beyond the boundaries of such a sealed-off cultural universe, a universe having its own literary language, is capable of sending into the lower genres only purely reified, unintentional speech images, word-things that lack any novelistic-prose potential. It is necessary that heteroglossia wash over a culture's awareness of itself and its language, penetrate to its core, relativize the primary language system underlying its ideology and literature and deprive it of its naive absence of conflict. (Dialogic Imagination 368)

In her influential discussion of feminism's place in the realm of contemporary critical discourse, Elizabeth Meese seems, like Fish, to overlook this power of interpretive communities to generate change through conflict. She correctly takes Fish and his concept of community to task for perhaps "inadvertently" helping

> us to see clearly the construction of a stronger insider-outsider dynamic, a gender-based literary tribalism, that comes into play as a means of control. . . . This idea of membership, of belonging to the "insider's club," is attractive to mainstream critics; it is similarly appealing to many feminist critics and might in fact be a human desire--neither to be locked out nor locked in, as Woolf puts it. The club preserves and affirms control while offering the illusion of admissability to the powerless. . . . Radical critics understand that the "interpretive community" is really the "authoritative community." (7-8)

But the interpretive community does not have to be authoritative. Although Meese insists that "the hierarchies within our critical communities will continue to resist criticism by feminists [and others] . . . as long as the power/know-

ledge configurations upon which the establishment rests remain undisturbed" (15), she does not acknowledge that a feminist definition of power based on effective interaction countermands power models based on domination and control, as Nancy Hartsock in "Political Change: Two Perspectives on Power" has observed. Conflicts manifested by polyvocal (heteroglossic) discourses from those marginalized groups may interdict the continued domination by the power group in the community, whether in texts or in interpretive communities of actual readers. Change in institutions can occur through this kind of interactive power found in heteroglossic communities, which are not the monovocal entities that Fish seems to attest to and Meese to deplore.

Fish's insistence that interpretations have validity only within the confines of a particular community of those with "identical political, cultural, and literary determinants" who create the entire work denies the power of the heteroglossic text to change the reader and the power of reading communities to change themselves through discovery of their conflicts and contradictions.[18] Fish's approach to texts is problematic, not only because his definition of the interpretive community is false, but also because he deposits all literary value solely within the reading ex-

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[18] Note that although he is consistently anti-textual in theory, Fish like Iser engages in thoroughly detailed interpretations of texts (Holub 150-51) at the same time that he denies the authority of any one interpretation over another.

perience. The approach leaves the reading process itself devoid of any value or meaning and denies the power of interpretive communities to learn from the experience. Yet his theory of interpretive communities is important for analyzing the conflicted interrelationships of narrators, inscribed readers or narratees, and other readers. As Robert Crosman has noted ("Do Readers Make Meaning?" 161), readers decide when they've found "the" meaning of the text, the one they believe the author meant; in other words, the one that best fits what readers want from the text. Readers employ Fishian interpretive strategies to manage the reading experience of the author's text.

Bakhtinian dialogics injects conflict into the interpretive community framework. Bakhtin has theorized that all language--as well as the literary expression of it--is comprised of many prior cultures in conflict with, rather than in agreement with, the current one. Bakhtin posits that

> At any given moment of its historical existence, language is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles, and so forth. . . . These "languages" of heteroglossia intersect each other in a variety of ways, forming new socially typifying "languages." (Dialogic Imagination 291)

This heteroglossic concept of language has its fullest expression, according to Bakhtin, in the novel:

> The novel is the expression of a Galilean perception of language, one that denies the absolution of a single and unitary language--that is, that refuses to acknowledge its own language as the sole verbal and semantic center of the ideological world. It is a perception that has been made conscious of the vast plenitude of national and, more to the point, social languages--all of which are equally capable of being "languages of truth," but since such is the case, all of which are equally relative, reified, and limited, as they are merely the language of social groups, professions and other cross-sections of everyday life. (Dialogic Imagination 366-67)

As Bakhtin has shown us, it is the dialogic interaction of these individual languages that causes them to combine together as the heteroglossic community of the novel. For Bakhtin all language, as well as the forms in which it is expressed, is social and comprised of competing social interests.

Just as the novel is constituted by multiple voices, so too are communities of readers. Thus, Bakhtin's work is applicable to critical discussions of readers' interactions with texts that result in other texts in response. In his later work, he does discuss the "dialogic relationships among texts and within the text" ("The Problem of the Text. . . " 105). He writes here of the nature of research in the human sciences, but what he says applies to response literary criticism as well:

> The transcription of thinking in the human sciences is always transcription of a special kind of dialogue: the complex interrelations between the text (the object of study and reflection) and the created, framing context (questioning, reflecting, and so forth). . . . Research becomes inquiry and

> conversation, that is, dialogue. . . . ("Methodology for the Human Sciences" 104, 106)

The text itself is dialogic in this sense:

> All characters and their speech are objects of an authorial attitude. . . . But the planes of the characters' speech and that of the authorial speech can intersect, that is, dialogic relations are possible between them. ("The Problem of the Text" 114, 116)

Yet an expanded heteroglossia is achieved when texts are in dialogue together, just as when different cultures are in dialogic conflict within one language. For Bakhtin, this dialogue between texts is one between the original text and the response to it, "the framing context" (104).

As there can be a dialogue between language groups and between the text and the author, so too can there be a dialogue between the reader and the text, between the reader and the authorial voice. As Bakhtin says in his late notes,

> Any understanding is a correlation of a given text with other texts. Commentary. . . . The text lives only by coming into contact with another text (with context). . . . We emphasize that this contact is a dialogic contact between texts . . . . Behind this contact is a contact of personalities and not of things. ("Methodology for the Human Sciences" 162)

The "personalities" that produce texts in response to another text (that create the "framing context" for the other text) are responding readers. Bakhtin's sense of the reader is not an implied or "ideal listener [who] is essentially a mirror image of the author who replicates him. . . . There can be no interaction between the author and this kind of listener. . . for these are not voices but abstract voices"

("Methodology for the Human Sciences" 165). Rather, the text is in dialogue with the actual reader. It is a dialogue in which one voice does not, finally, silence the other or become a synthesized third perspective, but one in which "one's own and another word" (two perspectives) generate "[u]nderstanding as the transformation of the other's into 'one's own/another's'" ("Methodology for the Human Sciences" 168).

Bakhtin stresses that the interactions are dialogic rather than dialectic:

> If we transform dialogue into one continuous text, that is, erase the divisions between voices (changes of speaking subjects), which is possible at the extreme (Hegel's monological dialectic), then the deep-seated (infinite) contextual meaning disappears (we hit the bottom, reach a standstill). . . . ("Methodology for the Human Sciences 162")

Yet not all dialogue is the "intense interaction and struggle" described in The Dialogic Imagination (354). There Bakhtin urges "creative misreading" (346); he urges the reader to take the text "into new contexts, attach it to new material, put it into new situations, in order to wrest new answers from it, new insights into its meaning" (346-47, 354). In his late notes, he incorporates a less conflictual "understanding" as another voice in the dialogue. Criticizing the "narrow understanding of dialogism as argument, polemics, or parody," he calls them "crude forms of dialogism" ("The Problem of the Text" 119). He stresses the need for understanding:

> Confidence in another's word, . . . layering of meaning upon meaning, voice upon voice, strengthening through merging (but not identification) the combinations of many voices . . . augments understanding . . . . [T]he viewpoint of a third person is revealed in the dialogue. . . . The person who understands . . . becomes a participant in the dialogue . . . [T]here can be . . . . an unlimited number of participants in the dialogue being understood . . . . ("The Problem of the Text" 121, 125)

Bakhtinian dialogics stresses that texts--and reading communities--can be more or less conflictual, and they can be more or less heteroglossic. As Gary Saul Morson has pointed out, Bakhtin applies the concept of dialogue in two senses: first, that all language is dialogic, the product of polyglot culture; second, that monologic situations can be forcibly structured to prevent dialogic interaction on ideological grounds (Morson 83-84). In the novels by Joseph Conrad in which Charlie Marlow narrates, for example, the result is a forced monovocal, consensual interaction of perspectives. Marlow's cohort is artificially monologic and the Marlow novels only minimally heteroglossic. So are many other texts and many critical communities. Bakhtin's recognition of the inherent heteroglossia of discourse is a major reason Bakhtinian dialogics has become important for many feminist critics despite the lack of evidence that he himself ever addressed feminist concerns. Realizing that the dominant critical discourse is not the only one, feminist critics feel empowered to engage in more or less conflictual dialogue with more or less heteroglossic interpretive com-

munities of critics who have marginalized feminist critical discourse.

## The Feminist Literary Project

Unfortunately, most reader-response critics, as well as Bakhtin, ignore--or suppress--the issue of gender-driven responses to texts.[19] Feminist critics distinguish among the masculinist (or patriarchal) perspective; its subset, the feminine; and the feminist perspective that exposes conflicts related to sex and gender ideologies. I follow Toril Moi in using "feminine" to signify:

> social constructs (patterns of sexuality and behaviour imposed by cultural and social norms), and . . . reserve 'female' and 'male' for the purely biological aspects of sexual difference. Thus 'feminine' represents nurture and 'female' nature in this usage. 'Femininity' is a cultural construct: one isn't born a woman, one becomes one, as Simone de Beauvoir puts it (65).

This distinction is of utmost importance for feminist criticism, because, as Moi goes on to argue,

> Seen in this perspective, patriarchal oppression consists of imposing certain social standards of femininity on all biological women, in order precisely to make us believe that the chosen standards for 'femininity' are natural.. . . It is in the patriarchal interest that these two terms

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[19] For example, Wayne Booth's states that even Bakhtin, with his concept of the social construction of selfhood as polyvocal and heteroglot, does not address the impact of sexual differences: "Is it not remarkable to discover no hint . . . that women now talk or have ever talked in ways different from men's? The omission may seem strange . . . in the light of Western literary criticism . . . . But surely it is strange discovered in a Bakhtin" (154). See Patricia Yaeger for an extension of Bakhtin's dialogic imagination into the work of Eudora Welty.

> (femininity and femaleness) stay thoroughly confused. Feminists, on the contrary, have to disentangle this confusion, and must therefore always insist that though women undoubtedly are female, this in no way guarantees that they will be feminine. This is equally true whether one defines femininity in the old patriarchal ways or in a new feminist way. (65)

Thus, in this sense, men and women both may write masculinist or feminist texts, and they may read them from masculinist or feminist perspectives.

Reading the criticism of response critics is itself a problematic effort. Most response critics still implicitly exclude women from membership in their own interpretive community or at the least relegate women to its margins by their insistence on using the non-generic "generic" masculine pronoun. There is no such thing as a "generic" masculine pronoun; universalizing such a belief serves only to exclude half the human race from entering fully into the discussion. Women who do feel included are simply submitting to the dominant discourse. As practical research has shown, so-called "generic" language has been interpreted differently by men and women. Mary Crawford and Roger Chaffin suggest:

> When both men and women read the word he, a male interpretation (the default value) initially predominates. But if women are not to exclude themselves from what they read, they must do additional mental processing to transform the initial literal interpretation into one that includes them. Thus, they suppress male imagery associated with he and avoid its generic use (and the necessity for the transformation process) when writing. ("The Reader's Construction of Meaning:

Cognitive Research on Gender and Comprehension" 20).

Sadly, most critics still comply with this masculinist custom, years after our collective consciousness has been raised against such use.[20] Mary Louise Pratt singles out Peter Rabinowitz as the only response-oriented critic she has located who uses "sexually neutral language": "It is rather amazing that a body of criticism supposedly taking recognition of the constitutive power of language and the social construction of reality should consent to retain the myth of the 'impersonal he'" (35).

Feminist literary theory, unlike supposedly gender-free response theory, holds that issues of gender are of paramount importance in literary studies because the way everyone has been socialized by gender affects the way he or she writes and reads texts. Working dialogically in the interstices of both response-oriented and feminist literary theories should lead to a feminist response theory for gendered interpretive communities of readers/critics. The project requires critiquing current response and feminist theory by addressing the following issues: how does the reader's gender ideology affect or determine membership in an interpretive community (what Shoshana Felman calls "the double question of the reading of sexual difference and the

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[20] See my "Gender Offender! Will the Epicene Yet Save JAMA?". Even a female critic like Robyn Warhol, "[i]n referring to the reader, [uses] 'him' as shorthand for 'him or her'" (Letters n 9).

intervention of sexual difference in the very act of reading")? What happens when the author, the narrator, and the communities of narratees, addressees, and actual readers do not share gender, and in this case does the reader automatically resist the text on the basis of gender ideology? Are the silences, the gaps, the ambiguities, in the text then read differently? If a particular reader does not readily identify with the author's or the narrator's cultural, political, or literary determinants, does the reader have difficulty understanding, or, as Iser would say, "realizing" the text with that author?

Feminist literary criticism has a long history of feminist critiques that have challenged patriarchal readings of male- and female-authored texts and feminist studies of women writers and their texts. The study of women's texts has proceeded in two stages: first reading women's texts for their similarities with male-authored texts in an effort to justify their inclusion in the masculinist male-constructed canon, and second for their dissimilarities, for their sex and gender differences. Elaine Showalter terms the final stage "gynocritics," the study of women as writers ("Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness"). But Showalter's "gynocritics," in which women critics study only women's works, remains gynocentric. This gynocentric (or as Patricia Yaeger prefers, "feminocentric") stage may be subsumed into a broader activity, in which both men's and

women's texts are read dialogically for their multiple perspectives, without obliterating traditional readings and without permitting closure that shortcircuits the vital interplay of multiple masculinized and feminized perspectives: text's, author's, reader's.

We feminist critics need to transcend Showalter's gynocentricity, just as we need to transcend the androcentricity of prevailing masculinist attitudes. I suggest adding to Showalter's typology the Dialogically Feminist stage: the open-ended interplay of masculinist and feminist perspectives in texts. In this stage, feminist readers[21] would recognize but not replace conventional masculinist interpretations generated in the reading experience. Dialogically feminist readers would instead re-read, resisting the patriarchal plot a masculinist reading reifies, and would offer new feminist readings to stand alongside the traditional ones that seek closure through a single perspective.

Judith Fetterley first demonstrated how to resist masculinist reading, but this model takes the reader beyond Fetterley's, which risks replacing one closed perspective with another, equally closed, feminist one. Dialogically feminist re-reading for multiple perspectives would not lead to rampant pluralism but involves Bakhtinian reading strat-

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[21] Elizabeth Langland coins the "affeminate reader" to describe the male reader who credits "the woman storyteller and the woman's story" ("Pop, Goes the Canon" 27).

egies that search a text for the muted discourses behind the dominant one. According to Bakhtin, discourse "lives, as it were, on the boundary between its own contexts and another alien context" (Dialogic Imagination 282). Patricia Yaeger astutely identifies this "alien context" (as it pertains to women writers but that I argue is equally representative of both female and male feminized readers)

> with women's excluded heteroglossia--a "muted" discourse that also "rages beyond the boundaries" [DI 368] of the dominant cultural universe. The best feminocentric writing [and, finally, feminized reading] will not only be in conflict but also in dialogue with the dominant ideologies it is trying to dislodge. . . . (858-59)

Acknowledging the heteroglossic, polyvocal, nature of the reading experience encourages readers to interact fully with all perspectives in a text in a conflictual way that generates change in the belief structures of the reading community without shutting out any single voice. And if the text lacks the perspectives, feminist readers creatively misread it to incorporate the broader perspective.

Jonathan Culler, like Showalter, describes the stages of feminist literary critical efforts as "moments" in history. The first moment focuses on critiques of phallocentric assumptions in texts from the perspective of the female critic's own experience as a woman; the second moment is the ongoing effort of both male and female readers to

learn to "read as woman."[22] Culler's hypothesis encompasses both male and female readers changing their apprehension of a text, questioning its assumptions. As he describes the strategy of the second moment,

> to read as woman is to avoid reading as man, to identify the specific defenses and distortions of male readings and provide correctives . . . . to provide leverage for displacing the dominant male critical vision and revealing its misprisions . . . to produce a comprehensive perspective. . . . (54-58)

The comprehensive perspective is impossible; psychoanalytic theory has shown us that we can never fully understand our own motives, and recent hermeneutic theory has shown us that we cannot understand even our own perspective fully (Moi 43). I trust that Culler is referring here to a more comprehensive rather than a fully comprehensive perspective. Of course, the movement from criticism based on women's own experience as women to a hypothetical assumption of womanhood allows male critics such as Culler to enter into the feminist critical discourse with his female counterparts. Female feminists will not be unduly threatened by the admission of male critics to the feminist critical community unless they are strict constructionists who deny the possibility of one belief community learning from another. Culler himself states,

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[22] See also Mary Crawford and Roger Chaffin, "The Reader's Construction of Meaning: Cognitive Research on Gender and Comprehension," for a recent discussion on how women have adopted the dominant idiom, the masculine one, resulting in masculine readings by both men and women.

> . . . feminist criticism is the name that should be applied to all criticism alert to the critical ramifications of sexual oppression, just as in politics "women's issues" is the name now applied to many fundamental questions of personal freedom and social justice. (55).

In Culler's nascient third moment, the feminist critic "reading as a woman" and not "as a man" questions the very framework of choice among so-called rational perspectives and the affiliations of critical and theoretical categories. This moment appeals to the experience of the reader to undo phallocentric philosophical systems that are in complicity with male interests, such as relegating the feminine to the subordinate (Luce Irigaray, Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un) and privileging the paternality of authorship (Gilbert and Gubar, Madwoman in the Attic) and the legitimacy of certain meanings over others. As I see it, this third moment parallels my proposed stage in which multivocal, heteroglossic, communities of feminized critics read texts dialogically for their pluralities so as not to exclude any heretofore marginalized voices in the text or among readers of it.

## Feminizing Reader-Response Criticism

Within these overlapping stages, feminist critics have moved from pioneering work in describing how to resist male texts, as Judith Fetterley's "immasculated" reader and Adrienne Rich's "revisioning" reader must learn; to how to recognize gender-driven conflicts female authors suffer, as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have shown us; to how such

conflicts are embedded in dominant and muted ways in female-authored texts, as Elaine Showalter's double-voiced discourse discloses. Their feminist searches for meaning in hitherto hidden space coincide nicely with the reader-response concept of finding meaning in the gaps in the text. The concept of silences and gaps in women's texts derives from feminist beliefs that women writers either have hidden their message within a masculinist text that only members of their interpretive community can decipher, or have no language with which to express themselves.

Meaning is managed in these texts by bringing new perspectives to them, reading between the lines and into the silences, misreading if necessary. And although we know that none of these strategies can result in "the" meaning of a text, nevertheless all readers limit meaning. For the feminist reader, meaning-making takes the form that Shoshana Felman suggests: the feminine inhabiting the masculine as otherness disrupting male readings by taking them beyond their stated questions ("Rereading Femininity"). Or, as Mary Jacobus would have it, women's writing works to deconstruct "male" discourse: to write what cannot be written (Reading Woman). That silences in a text can constitute its meaning is elaborated by Isak Dinesen's internal narrator of "The Blank Page":

> "Where the story has been betrayed, silence is but emptiness. But we, the faithful, when we have spoken our last word, will hear the voice of silence. . . . Who then. . . tells a finer tale

> than any of us? Silence does. And where does one read a deeper tale than upon the most perfectly printed page of the most precious book? Upon the blank page. . . . We, . . . the old women who tell stories, we know the story of the blank page. But we are somewhat averse to telling it, for it might well, among the uninitiated, weaken our own credit. . . . " (100)

A significant shift in the history of the development of contemporary feminist criticism is the change in focus from furtherance of androgynous elements in men's and women's writing and reading to the study (and privileging) of sexual and gendered differences. Few feminist critics currently advocate androgynous reading strategies. Indeed, their studies focus on locating how women's writing and reading differ from men's. Collections written or edited by Mary Jacobus, Elaine Showalter, Elizabeth Abel, and Elizabeth Flynn and Patrocinio Schweickart are just a few of these. One of the most provocative statements about sexual differences is that of Julia Penelope (Stanley) and Susan Wolfe in Thorne's collection:

> Patriarchal expressive modes reflect an epistemology that perceives the world in terms of categories, dichotomies, roles, stasis, and causation, while female expressive modes reflect an epistemology that perceives the world in terms of ambiguities, pluralities, processes, continuities, and complex relationships. . . . (126)

Yet the basic tenet of current theory--that women are different--is dangerous as a literary, critical, and political strategy. Women's writing may indeed be different, but this difference is more culturally and socially determined than innate. Women are acculturated and socialized differently

from men; their forms of expression, their writing, would highlight these differences. The importance of such studies focusing on women's differences is that they make these differences more visible to both women and men. What troubles me is any suggestion that such differences are innate and immutable.[23] We must not lose sight of what we have in dominant or muted cultural frameworks: the continued subjection and inferiorization of women.

However feminist literary critics strive to form a gynocentric feminist poetics, we must also continue our efforts to uncover androcentricity in the "traditional" literary canon even as we open up the canon. We must practice dialogically feminist reading. In subsequent chapters, I hope to demonstrate this practice in the fiction of Joseph Conrad and Charlotte Brontë. In doing so, I will necessarily offer interpretations of my own in an unavoidable effort to limit meanings. But by interacting with the multiple perspectives in the texts without trying to synthesize them into one "correct" interpretation, I hope to encourage other readers to interact in a multivocal, heteroglossic interpretive community that threatens few and heeds many voices. This reading practice does not lead to relativism, as some might fear; rather it opens up dialogue as it precludes

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[23] See Elizabeth Meese's chapter five, "Crossing the Double-Cross: The Concept of 'Difference' in Feminist Literary Criticism," 69-87, for a superb summary of the myriad positions on this topic.

dogmatism. As Bakhtin has argued, "It should be noted that both relativism and dogmatism equally exclude all argumentation, all authentic dialogue, by making it either unnecessary (relativism) or impossible (dogmatism)" (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 69).

The way for both women and men to read female triumph alongside stories of thwarted development and female submission in Charlotte Brontë's Villette, or for that matter, Kate Chopin's The Awakening, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's The Yellow Wallpaper, and Isak Dinesen's "The Blank Page," is to re-read: to offer alternative readings alongside the masculinist ones produced by male-dominated contextualizing. Such alternative interpretations will help individual students and critics of literature understand the assumptions underlying their earlier culturebound readings deriving from life in a marginalized group. Herein lies the contradiction betweem the theories we support and the practice we adopt pedagogically. Men as well as women can be made to see feminist interpretations as legitimate and important and will render such interpretations once they are shown how. Men can more readily become feminists if they are not themselves arbitrarily excluded from a culture designated women's. Grounding theories on innate sexual differences risks building separatist prisons of misunderstanding for men and women both--hostile, uncommunicative, articulating no attitudinal or cultural differences. Dialogical reading

strategies resist the dialectic synthesis of the male-female paradigm in favor of the unending struggle between male and female differences and samenesses: a dialogic exploration that simultaneously admits male and female, masculine and feminine writing and reading selves.

To be sure, the process is risky, as Naomi Schor cautions:

> To read beyond difference is inescapably to run the risk of reinforcing the canon and its founding sexual hierarchies and exclusions, while to read for difference is to risk relapsing into essentialism and its inevitable consequences, marginalization. Reading double presents, of course, its own dangers. . . . ambiguity and equivocation. But . . . it offers a possible way out of the current impasse, by suggesting a way of reconceptualizing the problematics of sexual difference. ("Reading Double" 250)

Schor advocates practicing "female fetishism," a

> simultaneous assertion and denial of sexual difference . . . two reading strategies, reading for specificity with the assumption of at least a fictive difference (the writer's, the protagonist's, the reader's) or beyond difference . . . . (249-50)

We need to develop a feminist way of reading: not one that manages the text by obliterating masculine, incomplete readings of our plural reading selves but one that privileges rather than represses ambiguity, division, difference, and sameness.

Dialogic reading differs in an important way from theories of pluralism. Dialogics, and specifically feminized dialogics, breaks down the duality of dichotomies such as power/powerlessness, centrality/marginality, same/other,

and men/women by eliciting all the discourses in a text. As Laurie Finke has recently pointed out,

> Pluralism serves as the philosophic legitimization of the center/margin dichotomy, keeping mainstream discourse, whether androcentric or middle-class feminist, firmly in the center. It "allows" marginal or subversive systems of thought, such as Marxism, radical feminism, or black feminist criticism, but does not require that we take them seriously. . . . Pluralism . . . often simply reasserts . . . orthodox positions and ideas. New Critical pluralism might serve as a cautionary example. It effectively pre-empted feminist literary criticism for years by defining male experience as "universal truth" and female experience as "special pleading." (257)

A feminist dialogics requires subversion of central positions and dualities, through creative misreading (Dialogic Imagination 342-46) to gain new insights and, as Finke phrases it, to call "attention to the ideological basis of both identity (women's identity) and representation (the representation of women)" (268). Such a dialogics utilizes the strategies of a theory of deconstruction but with the interests of feminism in mind. Paradoxically, feminist rereading strategies must work to subvert traditional hierarchies even as they, in Joanne Frye's words,

> claim the "truths" of women's experience without re-embracing the structures of gender we are criticizing. It requires that we resist complicity with the languages and "truths" of patriarchal thought, even as we actively politicize literature and the study of literature. . . . We can only reach new knowledge about gender if we use "women" as a category of analysis while we continue to complicate and alter that category. . . . ("The Politics of Reading . . . " 2)

In her provocative exploration of feminism's need to become "more self-consciously polyvocal and destabilizing" and deconstruction's "to be more radically political" (x), Elizabeth Meese describes a "positive deconstruction and reconstruction of woman through the efforts of feminist practitioners" (17) in which the "successful deconstruction displaces the original opposition. Despite overturning and reinscription, the same is never the same, and, by extension, the other is never the same other" (84). She continues:

> Through a strategy of displacement, the assertion of disruptions and the admission of multivoiced contra/dictions, we can hope to protect the interests of all feminist critics. It requires work in consort rather than in opposition, but unlike pluralism, this de-centering criticism constantly takes itself apart as it takes others into itself. A commitment to such a strategy guards against the romantic illusion of sameness achieved through synthesis at the expense of denying material differences. It also prevents us from prematurely privileging one feminist theory or method over another and instituting yet another political and therefore critical hegemony that is just as fiercely exclusive by virtue of its codification as what we have struggled to destroy . . . . There will never be a <u>theory</u> of feminist criticism; rather, feminist criticism will be a theorizing process, guided perhaps by an ethical dream of relationships between the others. (147, 150)

While Meese never addresses the dialogics of feminized reading, her feminization of deconstruction and her insistence that feminist criticism--indeed all criticism--is a progressively decentering process provide strategies compatible with a dialogic feminization of reader-response criti-

cism that responds to, resists, and reconstructs literature.[24]

## Feminizing and Dialogizing Interpretive Communities

One way to develop a feminist way of reading is to analyze the narrator/narratee relationship and the nature of community formation in the context of this relationship in fiction. Such a model refutes traditional notions that "we" readers all think alike or automatically belong to the same interpretive community. For example, my primary interpretive community is that of feminist. My experience as a feminist reader, one gendered a woman as well as in fact a woman, causes me to bring attitudes to a text different from those of another reader gendered as a man. When I read, I first find myself engaged, entangled to use Iser's term, in a dialectical process with the author whose presentation causes my imaginative input to make sense of the various perspectives in traditional ways. If I cannot accept the author's or the narrator's cultural, political, or literary determinants quickly because my particular perspective will not permit me to adopt readily a particular belief system, I cannot fully realize the text with that author. I resist the values and norms I find in the texts. I trust my emo-

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[24] Jonathan Culler seems to suggest a similar effort in his resistance to the study only of women's texts, saying that feminist criticism should work on two fronts at once: privileging the feminine (texts) and deconstruction of sexual opposition as the only way to reconcile the two disparate projects (see 172 ff).

tional reaction that compels me to re-interpret my experience with the text.[25] In such texts I necessarily re-read to bring a more dialogic approach, a feminist critique, to bear within the interstices of my "traditional" reader's responses to the text. Re-reading texts invariably brings fuller realization to the reader; re-reading texts from a feminist perspective can radically transform their meaning for the reader, male or female, who interacts with the texts' perspectives and fills in its gaps differently than does a masculinist reader. When the reader's perspective is no longer managed by a masculinist point of view, the reader has progressed to a feminized stage of reading skill.

This study, then, combines a feminist theory of dialogics with reader-response approaches to analyzing texts. The study constitutes meaning in texts by Joseph Conrad and Charlotte Brontë, through a dialogical examination. In this area, little has been done so far. Robyn Warhol's recent work on "engaging narrators" and Brenda Silver's on "reflecting readers" are among the few. Patrocinio Schweickart and Elizabeth Flynn edited a useful but disparate collection of essays on gender and reading; it may be the first of its kind.

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[25] See Jean E. Kennard's descripton of the "willingness to trust emotional response in opposition to accepted critical opinion [as] the act of faith which leads to the feminist conversion. . . . " (143)

Robin Warhol's is a very recent narratological work that does acknowledge the probable impact of gender on theory. In acknowledgement of the difficulty of construing the implied reader in any text, she follows Susan Suleiman, who first called for a moratorium on the implied reader in favor of more attention to the relationships between narratees and actual readers. In her study, Warhol departs from Prince's idea that narratees assume a distance from their narrators and readers. She describes "engaging" narrators she first discovered in women's texts (and, in her later work, in texts by men gendered as women). According to Warhol, engaging narrators are those who try to close the gaps between the narratee, the addressee, and the receiver--and, indeed, between the narrator and the author--in contrast to "distancing" narrators, those who try to distance themselves from a well-defined narratee within the text. Warhol describes earnest narrative interventions in the work of Gaskell, Stowe, and Eliot that are designed to "evoke recognition and identification in the person who holds the book and reads, even if the 'you' in the text resembles that person only slightly or not at all" (811). She distinguishes them from distancing commentary like Fielding's, for example, that is designed to disengage the narrator from the narratee, addressee, or actual reader. According to Warhol, engaging narrators avoid naming the narratee or ascribe names that refer to large classes of potential actual read-

ers, referring to the reader more often as "you" than as "reader." The narrator usually assumes he or she has the sympathy of the narratees, and even if the narrator implies that the narratees comprehend imperfectly, they can rise to the challenge. An engaging narrator often overjustifies assertions, but only in the spirit of converting the already favorably disposed narratee to a particular point of view, and insists that the characters are as "real" as the narrator and the narratee, thus identifying them with the actual reader and the actual author. These narrators intrude in their stories to remind their narratees (who should be identified with the actual readers) that the fictions reflect real-life social conditions which the actual reader should try to improve.

Warhol suggests that the engaging narrators she has found in female-gendered texts may not have been studied earlier by narrative theorists in silent "dismissal of the techniques and goals of women's writing" that is referential, positioned as these critics are in a critical world that wants texts to be self-referential (817). Further, Warhol questions whether this omission may be gender-based, whether the authors creating engaging narrators represent historical examples of nineteenth-century women speaking out in their texts in the absence of a public forum, rather than a technique used by both male and female authors. Her call for studies of both male and female texts for engaging

narrators is an important one and has already generated response.[26] Warhol studies narrators who identify with their narratees and their actual readers; I would add that the actual reader's ability or inability to identify with the narratee often has been gender-dependent, as I hope to demonstrate in subsequent chapters.

In another recent study that sheds light on the relationship between narrators and narratees and applies the concepts to the search for formation of community, Brenda Silver isolates the "reflecting" reader, one who is "part critic, part confidante, part sounding board - whose willingness to enter [the narrator's] world . . . and interpret [the narrator's] text will provide the recognition denied to women who do not follow traditional paths of development" (92). As Silver sees it, some texts--Villette for example--have two readers at the beginning: one a critic, a conventional or socialized reader of an artifically plausible narrative (Genette's "culture-free" narrative that must be justified as such through authorial commentary), and the other a sympathetic listener, a rebellious or unsocialized reader of an arbitrary narrative (Genette's "culture-free" and unjustified narrative).[27] According to Silver, as the

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[26] See Cynthia Bernstein's and Lilian R. Furst's letters to the editor in PMLA in response to Warhol's article in the same journal.

[27] It is important to note Nancy Miller's response to Genette's typology in "Emphasis Added: Plots and Plausibilities in Women's Fiction" which cautions that "arbitrary"

story progresses, the arbitrary narrative gradually becomes the dominant one as [the narrator] takes control of the narrative by creating a community of readers, and as the inscribed critical reader merges into the sympathetic reader. I find this framework especially helpful and trace similar patterns in the fiction of Joseph Conrad and Charlotte Brontë. Although Silver does not differentiate among types of readers as do Prince, Fish, and Warhol, I understand the "reflecting reader" she analyzes in Villette to be the one inscribed within the text, which Prince calls narratee.

Warhol's engaging narrator and Silver's reflecting reader have affinities for one another and the two may be studied in concert. Neither critic, however, addresses both the narratee/narrator relationship and community formation in the context of these relationships that I find most important in the feminist effort to politicize and refute the patriarchal notion that "we" are collective thinkers accepting the same social belief constructs. As readers read, they need to discover with whom they can and cannot identify.

I would suggest that reflecting readers are found only in texts in which the narrator, the narratee (the "you"), the addressee (the reader suggested in the "you"),

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may simply be "inaudible to the dominant mode of reception" (39).

and most actual readers belong to a kind of monovocal interpretive community, as exists, for instance, when Conrad's Marlow stories are read by male-gendered readers. I would suggest that such an interpretive community has been gender-dependent in the past and is still gender-related. I hope to demonstrate that Warhol's distancing narrator has a critical narratee when the two do not adhere to the same communal belief systems, which is often, at least for the nineteenth-century bourgeois reader, gender-based. Examples of this relationship abound in the fiction of Charlotte Brontë.

The narrator seems engaging and has a sympathetic reflecting narratee when both belong to the same belief community, as Warhol has shown with Gaskell and Eliot, for example. In such texts the narrator works to convert an inscribed reader already disposed to agree. The addressee (the reader suggested in the "you") may or may not be the actual reader; the addressee would identify with either the narrator or the narratee, depending on the narrator's thrust, because the narrator is always aiming at the addressee, whether agreeably or disagreeably. The actual reader may find himself or herself identifying with only the narrator or the narratee or the addressee when the situation is disengaging and critical and all involved do not belong to the same belief community. But the actual reader should identify with all the others in this narrativization if they

all belong to the same community. Gender complicates the study of readers inside and outside texts; so does the concept of the plural reading subject, an issue these critics have not addressed but I feel we must.

Elizabeth Flynn and Patrocinio Schweickart's Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers, Texts, and Contexts is one of the first collections of essays by critics working in the interstices of both feminist and reader-response criticism.[28] The editors claim that

> gender is a significant determinant of the interaction between text and reader. . . . [Gender differences] are a function of the social, cultural, and political structures that form the context of reading and writing, and they interact with other differences, in particular, those grounded on class, race, and sexual orientation. (xxviii)

They realize that gender is a social construct that can be modified by deliberate social action.

Flynn and Schweickart offer us three distinctive features of a feminist theory of reading: gender itself, privileging the experience and interests of women readers, and a consciousness of political dimensions of reading and writing and of the issue of gender. They see the "feminist

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[28] This collection answers Flynn's call for a feminist reader-response criticism that

> would look at the responses of real readers in real contexts in an attempt to link those responses to the social and political matrices which constitute them. . . . The results . . . should yield valuable information about literature, about reading, and about ourselves. ("Women as Reader-Response Critics" 25)

story" as having two chapters: women reading men's writing, and women reading women's writing (xiii and 48-49). In the first chapter, male texts, control is in the phallocentric text and the woman reader is "immasculated," (to use Judith Fetterley's term). Only when the woman reader critically analyzes the reading process does she gain the power to structure the text - without her, the text is nothing; she can read the text as it was not meant to be read, read it against itself (49-50). The problem here is that the essential male and female text and reader cannot be defined; only the gendered has definable characteristics. We therefore must speak in terms of gendered texts and readers, even as politically we need the construct of sexual difference to disrupt masculinist hegemony.

These critics go beyond Iser's ideas to Fish's theory of reader response, to interpretive communities. But they also acknowledge the impact of gender on formation of those communities. Flynn and Schweickart suggest that the communities themselves are androcentric; their androcentricity is deeply engrained in all readers, male and female alike, so feminist readers must re-read in a therapeutically analytical way to break from socially imposed constrictions. In the second "chapter," the woman reader and the woman writer enter into a dialogic process, what Schweickart calls a "dialectic of communication" (50-53). She says,

> . . . to read a text and then to write about it is to seek to connect not only with the author of the

> original text, but also with a community of readers. To the extent that she succeeds and to the extent that the community is potentially all-embracing, her interpretation has that degree of validity. Feminist reading and writing alike are grounded in the interest of producing a community of feminist readers and writers, and in the hope that ultimately this community will expand to include everyone. ("Reading Ourselves: Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading" 56)

Schweickart's belief in the accessibility of the actual author notwithstanding,[29] her interest in creating a universal gendered community may seem utopian in an age when "feminist" seems to connote to many a radical separatist movement, but I believe the universal yet heteroglossic and beneficially conflictual community is an achievable objective, at least as it pertains to gender, if not to class, race and other social categories. I have had the urge throughout my study to refer to "male" readers or "female" readers, because attitudes toward women have for so long fallen on either side of a gendered line of demarcation. But really these long-enduring patriarchal attitudes are either masculine or feminine, not male or female, and as such are social constructs that feminist writers and readers can convert, albeit with difficulty, to universally femin-

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[29] Note Susan Squier's insistence that Schweickart "risks replacing one control-based model with another, so closing off fruitful paths of inquiry [by] . . . concentrating on the text as incarnation of its author's voice and experience." Squier recognizes that gender identity is not unified but conflictual, a characteristic that shows in textual language and style ("Encountering the Text"). See also John Schilb's important critique of Schweickart's article as one from the critical school that posits the existence of an essential authorial self.

ized attitudes that no longer force women to remain in the silences, the gaps, of their texts, their communities, or their lives. When that happens, Showalter's Wild Side, that crescent of the muted culture's (woman's) sphere lying outside the dominant culture's (male's) sphere, should become accessible as a text for all feminist readers, male and female alike.

Carolyn Allen cautions feminist critics:

> We might think more productively about feminist readers than about women readers. Clearly all feminists don't make meaning in the same way either; individual, personal, political, and cultural differences are central. Yet by assuming, however broadly, an ideological base, then specifying its parameters, we can learn something about politics and reader response and perhaps also more about feminism and feminist criticism. (302)

With her caution about the plural reading subject in mind, I proceed now to analyze how interpretive communities are formed in the novels of Joseph Conrad and Charlotte Brontë: how gendered readers like me interact with the myriad perspectives generated by the I-narrators and the multiple readers inscribed in the texts.

# CHAPTER II

## THE I-NARRATOR AND THE SEARCH FOR COMMUNITY

### The Dialogical Double Discourse Between I-Narrator and Reader, Reader and Author

A dialogically feminist model for reading can develop from analyses of the narrator/narratee relationship and the formation of community within a fictive text to discover the text's multiple perspectives. A powerful demonstration of such narrative relationships appears in texts in which first-person narrators purport to talk directly to the actual reader. In these, as well as in those in which a first-person narrator creates an internal reader, the very communality of literature, its politics and its reflections of life, are thematized. If the problem with reader-response criticism in the past has been its approach to the act of reading as one performed by a generalized reader, perhaps the problem can be overcome by studying the relationships that authors create among I-narrators of their own stories of struggles, the narratees to whom these narrators seem to appeal, and actual readers who enter into a dyadic relationship with the narrators in quest of textual meaning.

Literary texts present readers with a variety of narrators. This study analyzes texts that dramatize first-person narrators struggling to tell their tales, whose

epistemological dilemmas seem to resolve as they relate their experiences to their constructed communities of listeners and readers (what Genette would call "intradiegetic" narrators: those in their own narratives). Although the texts eventually make it clear that the narrators' accounts are reconstructed and more or less imperceptive, narrators from Defoe's Robinson Crusoe, Moll Flanders, and Roxana, through Brontë's William Crimsworth, Jane Eyre, and Lucy Snowe, to Conrad's Marlow, to the plethora of twentieth-century "I"s have narrated their life experiences to their narratees and through them to us the actual readers. I-narration has the quality of drawing us as readers directly into the narrator's experience; the narrator seems to invite readers into a community of shared experience. It is the search, flawed though it may be, for the individualized self in a community of like selves.

First-person narration, unclouded as it is by an impersonal narrator's perspective, offers the reader the most direct access to such fictive self-exploration and ample opportunity for responding to that search. This thesis implies that each reader responds differently to any text, yet these differences may be related to various race, class, and gender concerns and ideologies. As Wolfgang Iser and many feminist critical theorists have agreed, the reader accepts the author's invitation to engage with each text in a way that may cause readers with varying experience, back-

ground, and genderization to realize these texts differently. Iser explains that any text may be capable of different interpretations and that each reader will make a "decision as to how the gap [in the text] is to be filled . . . thereby excluding the various other possibilities . . . " (55). Additionally, the narrator becomes a reader of his own story in a community of readers. As Henry James says,

> The teller of a story is primarily, none the less, the listener to it, the reader of it, too; and having needed thus to make it out, distinctly, on the crabbed page of life, to disengage it from the rude human character and the more or less Gothic text in which it has been packed away, the very essence of his affair has been the imputing of intelligence. (Preface to The Princess Cassimassima, Art of the Novel 63)

Thus in the optimum reading experience both actual reader and author share in the reading of the narration. The actual reader measures the events of the text against the narrator's understanding of the experience he or she retells in the text. In doing so, the actual reader first engages in dialogue with the narrator, then with the text and its author.

The tendency when we read is to seek closure. We synthesize perspectives into one or a few manageable interpretations we can feel less bewildered among. The task, rather, is to dialogize these readings rather than replace one perspective with another, so that readers are actually involved in the changes wrought by the conflict of perspectives. Third-person narration generally encourages the

reader to adopt the perspective of the so-called "omniscient" narrator. First-person narration, on the other hand, is a prime vehicle for dialogic reading strategies because it forces the reader to inject gender considerations into the search for other perspectives to validate or invalidate the only one presented--that of the I-narrator.

In subsequent chapters I will analyze Joseph Conrad's and Charlotte Brontë's novels for the narrative demonstration of fictive narrators as seekers of and participants in community interaction. The analysis will stress the dialogic nature of interactions both inside the text and between text and reader outside the text. The novel constructs a fictional experience which the narrator re-tells from his or her limited perspective, developing relationships with readers both inside and outside the text in the struggle to comprehend experience and realize selfhood. The dialogic model of reading in this study privileges the multiplicity of perspectives in any text, especially as they are gender-driven. Further study may well demonstrate the model's suitability for privileging class- and race-driven voices.

Paul Jay has described the therapeutic experience an autobiographer undergoes in relating his or her search for coherence of experience as autobiographical reconstructions (24-36). The narrator/narratee/addressee relationships in the fictive narratives I study resemble the kind of inter-

mixed "narrative confession and discursive self-analysis" entailed in a Freudian talking cure, "a discursive formulation of the meaning of past events identified in the process of analysis" that Jay describes (Jay 24-25). Jay, following Freud, recognizes that the past is necessarily a construct imagined by the narrativizing speaker; that is, it is partly fictive:

> Since the discourse [recollection] is a contemporary historicization, it is manifestly created and hence, in part fictive. Thus the recuperative power of the narrative resides not in its factualness but rather in the creative capacity of language itself. . . . The psychoanalytic process turns on the subject's formulation of his past into a narrative, not on the past itself, which really has no existence outside that formulation. (26)

The stories that fictive narrators purport to be accurate reconstructions are doubly fictional reconceptions of their experience: these narrators create a fiction within the fiction of which they are a part. The narratee and actual reader must re-read this experience for the perspectives hidden behind the narrator's dominating one that believes in a coherent self.[1]

Feminism's reading strategies often revolve around the doubleness of reading. Elaine Showalter describes a "double discourse" of "dominant" and "muted" stories. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar term these "palimpsests," with one story written over another. Naomi Schor's "double reading"

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[1] See Jay 36 on texts that "structurally retain the conviction that a self has a coherent biography."

consists of reading both beyond and for sexual difference. Shoshana Felman analyzes the "double question of reading of sexual difference and the intervention of sexual difference in the very act of reading." Their work has influenced me as I developed strategies for approaching the dialogical double discourse between the I-narrator and the reader. And by engaging in the dialogical double discourse between the I-narrator and the reader, we may more easily enter into one between reader and author. As Patricia Meyer Spacks in Imagining a Self: Autobiography and Novel in Eighteenth-Century England says, "to tell a story of the self is . . . to create a fiction" (311). And as Barbara Hardy has demonstrated in Tellers and Listeners, real-life people generate narrative to explain life to their social communities, and fictional narrators do the same.

Novelists study narrators and narratives in fictive communities to discover how they each shape real life. Joining the narratives of life with the narratives of novels releases the energy that creates meaning--in life and in novels: for the narrators, for the authors, for the communities of readers all managing meaning together in communal interaction. Far from being erased from the novel, the novelist is, in Goldknopf's words,

> in the novel because the novel is in life. We needn't become bemused, at this point, with the mystique or rhetoric of "artistic creation." The novelist is implicated in his subject matter in a quite different way than other artists because the

> novel is about the dilemmas and processes of human consciousness. (204)

## The Case for I-Narrators

First-person narration as a rhetorical strategy has had a mixed press. Henry James, for example, eschewed the practice:

> Suffice it, to be brief, that the first person, in the long piece, is a form foredoomed to looseness, and that looseness, never much my affair, had never been so little so as on this particular occasion.. . . The first person . . . is addressed by the author directly to ourselves, his possible readers, whom he has to reckon with, at the best, by our English tradition, so loosely and vaguely after all, so little respectfully. . . . (Preface to The Ambassadors, Art of the Novel 320-321)

Announcing his abandonment of the "terrible fluidity of self-revelation" (although not as briefly nor as tightly as he suggests), James formulated his system of centers of consciousness and reflectors within a third-person narrative structure. Yet James never completely gave up the use of first person: he routinely intruded in his stories as "the author" or "we" or "I" or in describing "our friend," constantly reminding the reader that the controlling consciousness derived from the creative power behind the characters.[2] And, of course, James wrote several novellas in the first person, one of which, The Turn of the Screw, is an unset-

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[2] James's style became less intrusive in his later works, but never lost its quality of author-controlling presence. See Louis Rubin, The Teller in the Tale, for a good discussion of Jame's use of the I-narrator within a third-person framework.

tling depiction of a female narrator by a masculinist author.

More recently, Wayne Booth made light of the distinction between first- and third-person:

> Perhaps the most overworked distinction is that of person. To say that a story is told in the first or the third person will tell us nothing of importance unless we become more precise and describe how the particular qualities of the narrators relate to specific effects. (Rhetoric of Fiction 150)

In his first edition, Booth seemed to deny any special effects to first-person, but he retracts his statements in the second edition (412) and refers the reader to the insights developed by David Goldknopf. Although third-person dramatized narrators function similarly to I-narrators in terms of presenting limited points of view, they cannot fully participate with the reader as do I-narrators. James's The Ambassadors and Jane Austen's Emma are notable examples of this center-of-consciousness technique, commonly attributed to James but, interestingly, developed first by Austen. In novels such as these, the reader experiences one or two centers of consciousness which may seem like being in the mind of the speaker. Despite these artful devices for presenting consciousness in the third person, I stress that only the words of a speaker can fully present his or her own consciousness. And in a study of the narrator-reader dyadic enterprise, it is the conscious interaction that must be privileged over the unconscious. No matter how well-con-

structed the third-person artifice, the reader knows that third-person presentation is deflected or reflected or valorized. As Wallace Martin summarizes,

> We cannot question the reliability of third-person narrators, who posit beyond doubt or credulity the characters and situations they create. . . . Any first-person narrative, on the other hand, may prove unreliable because it issues from a speaking or writing self addressing someone. This is the condition of discourse, in which, as we know, the possibility of speaking the truth creates the possibility of misunderstanding, misperceiving, and lying. (142)

David Goldknopf argues effectively for the communicative power of first-person narrators, citing, for example, the opening "Call me Ishmael" as a much more powerful entre into the world of Moby Dick than "He was called Ishmael" (30). The first sets a distinctive tone and draws the reader into direct communication with the narrator and elicits immediate response from the reader; the second is a mere statement of fact from an omniscient narrator whom we have no reason to challenge. Goldknopf challenges Booth's refusal to ascribe importance to person. He cites Melville's use of the subjective narrator Ishmael to completely psychologize the narration, which, he argues, forces the reader "to acknowledge what third-person narration would merely encourage us to surmise: the role of the interpretive consciousness in the drama before us" (31). This interpretive consciousness "grab[s] us by the sleeve, so to speak, and haul[s] us immediately into the narrative situation . . . . or intervene[s] between us and the narrative

situation, forcing us always to evaluate the latter through him. . . " (38).

In novels of self-seeking, then, it is essential to the reader's experience for the reader to get as deeply as possible into the dramatized narrator's completely subjective mind. Even though the narrator's consciousness is a fictional construct of the author, the text presents first-person as an aesthetic medium for communicating meaning to the actual reader through the consciousness of a gendered narrator communicating with a fictive reader, and we should consider the importance of that strategy.

As tellers of personal experience, I-narrators best exemplify those fictive characters searching for self-realization through experience because of the following shared characteristics: their complete subjectivity, their relative distance from the author,[3] their corresponding closeness to the reader, their need for an audience, and their goal of self-realization--or sabotage--of self.

Texts with I-narrators generate significant reader response to the problem of their reliability. The narrators' subjective involvement in the narrated experience cautions

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[3] I do not here discount Booth's distinctions among the implied author whose values and norms are represented in a text, the historical personage who created both the implied author and its text, and the narrator whose attitudes may differ greatly from both author's and text's; I appreciate the difficulty in if not impossibility of discovering the author's intentions and in trusting too much even to his or her conscious intentions.

the reader immediately to question their ability to present that experience with any degree of objectivity.[4] We all often shade positively what we reveal about ourselves or completely withhold unflattering details as ego-protecting devices. Fictive I-narrators are no exception, notwithstanding any overarching motives an author may have for withholding details of a narrator's character from the reader. Fictive I-narrators demonstrating the struggle to understand their experience and themselves are characterized by the same sort of psychic self-protection that real people practice. Readers risk falling into the trap of identifying the narrator with a reliable author, as Alexander Jones, for instance, seems to have done in his discussion of The Turn of the Screw: ". . . the basic convention of first-person fiction is necessarily a confidence in the narrator . . . Unless James has violated the basic rules of his craft, the governess cannot be a pathological liar" (122). Riggan states,

> first-person narration . . .carries with it an inherent quality of realism and conviction based on a claim to first-hand experience or to a source of such first-hand experience and knowledge,. . . [that] imparts a tangible reality to the narrative situation and a substantial veracity to the account. . . . [But f]irst-person narration is . . . always at least potentially unreliable, in that

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[4] See David Goldknopf for an excellent discussion of the reader's initial reservation about the narrator's reliability. As Goldknopf says, "We know about 'I' only what he chooses to tell us, but if what he tells us seems to have as its motive self-objectivication, he may aggravate our doubts as to his reliability" (28).

> the narrator, within ... human limitations of perception and memory and assessment, may easily have missed, forgotten, or misconstrued certain incidents, words, or motives. (18-20)

We cannot automatically grant the narrator reliability, and if the author has effaced her- or himself sufficiently from the work, we may never be certain that our narrator represents the norms of the implied author sufficiently to be termed, by Booth's definition, reliable (Rhetoric of Fiction 158). All I-narrators are subjective and to some extent wear masks.

The dialogically feminist reader's task in I-narrated stories is to engage the text's and narrator's perspectives, as well as any others' lurking in the margins of the discourse, to elicit the polyvocality of the work, resisting the power of any dominant perspective to prevail. The dialogic exploration of first-person narration rejects the absolute authority of the narrator's voice and places that voice in dialogue with others--the text's and the reader's--thereby creating a platform for shared authority. As Joanne Frye has argued in Living Stories (49-76),

> Grounded in an exploration of subjectivity itself, the first-person voice opens onto an alternative understanding of authority; as is suggested by the feminist slogan, "the personal is political," private experience participates in broader political patterns, and subjective perception can initiate shared awareness and therefore political change. . . . (M/MLA Presentation November 1986, 2)

I-narrators actually provide the most efficient means for effacing the author from the work. Doing so seems to be

a basic strategy of modern novels, but may in fact date to the first novels; I think primarily of Defoe, who on occasion has been critically reviled because he is identified closely with the I-narrators he creates in Robinson Crusoe, Moll Flanders, and Roxana.[5] Indeed, the gap between Defoe and his narrators may be extensive, so effectively has he effaced himself from the works. An I-narrator, the reader must never forget, is not the author, or even the implied author; he or she is a dramatized character created by the author to dramatize--or refute--the norms of the implied author. When a single I-narrator tells the story, with no intrusion by the so-called omniscient narrator nor opposition by any other I-narrators, that perspective may or may not be originally authorial but is certainly authoritative rather than dialogic. The feminist reader searches the spaces beyond the narrator's presentation for the text's marginalized perspectives; if perspectives are excluded, the reader creatively mis-reads to include them. I-narrators, then, are most distanced from their creators, even though they structure the texts as direct communication from the actual teller of the experience.[6]

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[5] Ian Watt in his authoritative Rise of the Novel has been among the most prominent critics of Defoe, and Booth would undoubtedly accuse Defoe of providing his readers with insufficient notice that irony is at work in Defoe's novels.

[6] See also Booth, especially 273; for ways in which the authors efface themselves from novels or control emotional distance from the reader and the work by creating isolated narrators. Hetty Clews sees the monologuist as the

Another characteristic of the technique is that authors create the illusion of direct communication between author and reader by reproducing the forms of direct communication between narrator and reader; the reader may be addressed directly by the narrator, may overhear dialogue, may intercept someone else's letters and diaries, or may undergo the gymnastic exercise of deciphering the narrator's internal monologue. The narrator needs to communicate past experience to an audience, not only for self-understanding but to ground his or her illusions of selfhood in the certainty or reality represented by a community of peers. Goldknopf considers the I-narrator, who resides inside the life of the novel but insists on talking to someone outside the novel, unique among characters and narrators (33). I-narration dramatizes the basic human need for a nurturing social environment. Fictive I-narrators, like real people, seem with few exceptions[7] to have a driving need to understand and to be understood; hence, Charlie Marlow's frame audiences that form Marlow's homogeneous and consensual communal cohort and Jane Eyre's insistent addresses to heteroglossic and conflictual communities of readers. And an I-narrator in the depths of self-searching has an even greater need to be grounded safely on that communal plane of understanding.

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"only truly effective disguise possible" (33).

7 For example, Satan in The Screwtape Letters.

The final characteristic of I-narrators, the goal of self-realization, may be the driving force behind narrations in such fictions of development. The narrator's creation of an experiencing "other" constitutes a reading of the "I" of the past that resolves into an interpretation of that other as self (the narrating I reading the past I).[8] The narrator then tests this interpretation of the self by narrating the experience to the community he or she establishes within the text and outside it, thereby involving the community in the experience. It is only at the level of a fictive re-experiencing through narration that the narrator can hope to validate his or her transformation from other to self. The re-experience as retrospective narrative endeavors to close the gap between initial, uncomprehending experience and subsequent understanding. The actual reader construes meaning, in Iserian and feminist critical terms, from the gap between the narrator's understanding of the narrated experience and the reader's understanding of the other textual

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[8] See Riggan 24, Scholes 240, 256-57, and Chase 51 for discussion of the distance between the narrator then and the narrator now, or, as Riggan puts it, the "narrator as narrator and the narrator as protagonist." In a novel of fictional self-development, especially, the now-narrator must show evidence of having learned from his or her experience to demonstrate growth. Riggan describes chronological distance, distances in level of maturity and intellect, and distance between levels of understanding of consequences. Scholes calls this the ironic gap between narrator and self as participant in narrated events.

perspectives.[9] Yet any interpretation designed to determine the meaning of a text invariably marginalizes or excludes some as yet unexamined perspective, so the feminized reader's task is to always dialogize the work to discover the heteroglossic text.

If the experiencing self is not validated at the narrative level of communication, the self must be masked or destroyed in order for the narrator to make sense of the self-asserting experience. Alternatively, the values of the community of peers rejecting the narrator's self may be subverted. If needed, the narrating self assumes yet another self. Notwithstanding their own status as fictions of their authors, fictive narrators, just like real people narrating their life stories, replay the past specifically to make sense of their experience and to understand it in the context of a communal experience, to join, in fact, a community. The process resembles a description of real-life experience, showing how the lines between fictive and real life tend to blur, with one reflecting the other and the other influencing the one. Literature both reflects and affects life. Yet this interdependence of art and life, author/narrator and fictive I-narrator, fictive I-narrator

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[9] See Clews, for instance, who, following Iser, describes the reader's participation with the writer in creating the other and fashioning a self, with both reader and writer ending up with a heightened sense of self (199). Also see Goldknopf for the reader's involvement in the experiencing activity (95).

and narratee, author and reader, remains subjective, socially constructed and conflictual.

One study juxtaposing reader-response concepts and characteristics of first-person narrators, although silent on gender implications, is that of Hetty Clews on I-narrator, or monologue, novels. Clews concerns herself with twentieth-century novels in which a dramatized speaker is in a different relationship to an audience from that of the author (12), "through whom also an ironic gap between 'speaker' and writer emerges for the delectation of the reader" (12). She believes that monologue novels most effectively represent the modern novelist's wish to invite the reader to participate in the act of creating the text, thus shifting authority from writer to reader (13). The retrospective nature of monologues opens up a gap between the "I" then and now for the reader to interpret (18). Clews states that we respond subjectively to subjective disclosures by the narrator:

> Though the way he sees himself may not always be the way we see him, it is the self that occupies us rather than the story he tells, because he is, after all, his own subject, and his words are, in the terms of phenomenology, "gestures" by which he expresses the world of his meanings. (130)

Clews is helpful also on the relationships between narrators and readers. She says,

> Autobiographical monologues offer the reader access to a personality whose discernible characteristics are very different from any that might ascribe to his creator. . . . As the writer's first and main concern is the figure of his monol-

> oguist, so the reader's lasting impression is also that of the figure as a speaking presence. . . . The monologue poses questions that only the individual reader can answer, and requires of him the twin acts of 'listening' as he reads, and of visualizing and thus concretizing the figure of the speaker to whom he listens, as he listens. Other fictive forms, of course, may make similar requirements, but in no other form is so much freedom offered the reader to imagine, and thence to create, as he engages in that subjective relationship with the speaker which is made possible by the monologue form. (192-193)

As Clews see it, those drawn to reader-response theory are also drawn to the monologue novel because of the special opportunity it offers the reader to collaborate with the writer in a creative act to discover textual perspectives other than the I-narrator's (195). Indeed, I for one am. Citing Iser and the first reader-response critic, Tristam Shandy, Clews describes the literary text as a "dynamic continuum of realization between the poles of the artistic (the text created by the author), and the aesthetic (the concretization accomplished by the reader)" (197). She also draws on communication theory from Martin Buber's I and Thou, Gabriel Marcel's The Mystery of Being, and Paul Tillich's The Courage to Be, in which the

> writer of a monologue novel starts from an other which he creates, and in seeking to participate fully in that self he invites the reader to create and participate with him. His act is a complex combination of involvement and self-consciousness which requires a similar empathetic identification from the reader as listener. . . . a reader's fullest and deepest engagement as the respondent in such a communication may well bring to him also a heightened sense of self. Many important kinds of involvement require, in literature as in life,

> a combined sense of self and a recognition that the other is not-me . . . (198-199).

Finally, Clews cites Roland Barthes's dans le texte, seule parle le lecteur (S/Z), in acknowledgement that the reader "structurates" the text, producing rather than consuming it (202). This fits with the contention of Iser and others that the reader chooses between conflicting readings of the text by realizing only one, and Fish's idea that different interpretive communities construe different meanings from the same text by being different readers to plural narrative stances.

A dialogically feminist reading strategy goes beyond the strategies Clews describes through Iser and Barthes. A dialogically feminist reader understands that, even as a reader "structurates" the text, the text's polyvocality works on the reader to open up the text and somehow alter both text and reader as a result of the conflictual communality of the perspectives discovered during the reading experience.[10]

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[10] See Elizabeth Flynn's model in which she describes readers who dominate the text and remain unchanged by the reading experience, those who are instead dominated by the text, and those who learn to interact with the text to learn from the experience "without losing critical distance; reader and text interact with a degree of mutuality [to] create a kind of dialogue" (267).

## The Reading Communities of the I-Narrators in the Novels of Conrad and Brontë

The notion of the reader takes on double meaning in the work of Joseph Conrad and Charlotte Brontë: the communities of readers constructed in the texts and the audience, the actual readers of the texts. In Conrad's Marlow novels, the inscribed readers are characterized as listeners of his tales. In Brontë's novels, the inscribed readers are those the narrator speaks to and calls "reader" as she narrates. Although listeners and readers may understand narration differently, in these texts Conrad's listeners and Brontë's "readers" function similarly.

Charlie Marlow may be the most famous I-narrator struggling to interpret experience for himself and his listeners in light of others' experiences. Conrad grants only limited understanding and selfhood for his dramatized narrator of Youth, Heart of Darkness, Lord Jim, and Chance, and only within the narrow confines of internal homogeneous communities of listeners that Marlow seeks out to hear his strange tales, much as the Ancient Mariner does. And, much like the Wedding Guest, Marlow's internal listeners barely respond; they seem, in Iserian terms (64), not entangled enough in Marlow's experience. Marlow and his cohort of listeners are all intradiagetic (Genette's term to define those in their own narratives). As Robyn Warhol has pointed out, "When both narrator and narratee are intradiegetic, the

reader observes their discourse from the outside. . . " (Diss. 3). Thus, such a structure emphasizes the fictionality of the text. External readers scrutinizing Conrad's Marlow within his select community necessarily struggle to realize Conrad's dramatization of Marlow's self-realization despite Marlow's limited comprehension of his and others' selves. The Marlovian self asserts itself only because it is one willing to live within the confines of a community of limited comprehenders. Each of his peers shares Marlow's constraints--each is "one of us." Marlow fulfills his elemental need to realize a self by establishing a homogeneous and consensual community, one that excludes or marginalizes other voices, especially those of women. Conrad resolved Marlow's struggle to understand his experience by creating a small community of peers for him to achieve limited self-satisfaction in a subjective world. The texts, however, dramatize an epistemological skepticism about selfhood and self-understanding as Marlow surrounds himself with those he can call "one of us": those who, like Marlow, can be satisfied with limited self-understanding.

In Brontë's novels, on the other hand, the narrators speak to narratees/readers that are less identifiable as characters than are Marlow's narratees/listeners. Here the reader must evaluate whether the "reader" in the text resembles the reader of the text, whether the readers are critical or reflecting (to use Silver's term), or the narrator

engaging (in Warhol's sense). If the actual reader identifies with the intradiegetic reader/narratee, the narrator seems to be engaging in direct conversation with the actual reader (see Warhol's discussion of engaging narrators). If the actual reader does not readily identify with the internal narratee, he or she views the interaction a step removed from it. As Warhol has noted,

> The reader may or may not be interested in how closely the narrative "I" resembles the actual author; readers can only speculate about such a resemblance, which--even if it exists--would have no bearing on the rhetorical effect of the text. But one can know whether or not the narrative "you" resembles oneself, and the way one experiences the fiction is affected by how personally one can take its addresses to "you." (812)

Brontë's narrators try sometimes to engage their narratees and sometimes to distance themselves from those they think are critical narratees. Jane Eyre, Lucy Snowe, and the androgynous narrator of Shirley especially spend much time addressing masculinist readers in defense of themselves, trying to shame the narratee/reader's prejudices and broaden the perspective of the reading community. The nature of the communities that narrators in Brontë's novels form--or try to form--differs markedly from the homogeneous ones that Marlow fashions in Conrad's novels. Although both authors' narrators demonstrate subjective approaches, Brontë's narrators, unlike Conrad's, rarely qualify as engaging. Even when Brontë narrator Jane Eyre seems most engaging, in her "dear Reader" passages, she seems as much

in defiance of a critical reader as in league with a sympathetic one. Marlow forms a homogeneous interpretive community whose dominant norms a reader may or may not resist depending on one's gender ideologies. Brontë's narrators engage in frantic searches for community, but the actual reader must ultimately participate in the formation of their communities. The novels elicit complex and differing readers' responses.

The interactions of narrators and inscribed readers, or narratees, in the novels of Conrad and Brontë illustrate the expressive modes Julia Penelope (Stanley) and Susan Wolfe have identified in their analysis of the feminist aesthetic: Conrad's Marlow uses what they describe generically as "Patriarchal expressive modes [that] reflect an epistemology that perceives the world in terms of categories, dichotomies, roles, stasis, and causation. . . " (26), while Bronte's more conflicted narrator-narratee interactions illustrate their description of "female expressive modes [that] reflect an epistemology that perceives the world in terms of ambiguities, pluralities, processes, continuities, and complex relationships. . . " (26).

# CHAPTER III

## AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL DILEMMA:

## CONRAD AND MARLOW'S CONSENSUAL INTERPRETING COMMUNITY

> "'They--the women--are out of it--should be out of it.'" (Charlie Marlow, Heart of Darkness)

Although singling out the fiction of Joseph Conrad as that which most excludes or marginalizes the voices and perspectives of women and other subordinated groups would be unfair, Conrad's Marlow novels are paradigmatic of such texts that constrain actual readers' efforts to read them dialogically. They offer, rather, case studies of enforced monovocality in the interactions of Charlie Marlow and his consensual interpreting community. The four Marlow novels--Youth, Heart of Darkness, Lord Jim, and Chance--enact a myth similar to that Jonathan Culler describes as a "paradise of male camaraderie" in his analysis of Dawn Lander's "Eve Among the Indians":

> Appealing to the authority first of her own experience and then of others' experiences, she reads the myth of women's hatred of the frontier as an attempt by men to make the frontier an escape from everything women represent to them: an escape from renunciation to a paradise of male camaraderie where sexuality can be an aggressive, forbidden commerce with non-white women. Here the experience of women [those who lived and thrived in the frontier] provides leverage for exposing this literary topos as a self-serving male view of the female view. (Culler, "Reading. . . " 45)

Collectively, the Marlow novels move from a masculinist view of the male view in Youth, Heart of Darkness, and Lord Jim, to a masculinist view of the female view in Chance. This dominant masculinist view in each novel is elaborated in an arbitrarily constructed male narrator-narratee consensual cohort that obliterates the voices of women and denies the dialogic nature of ordinary novelistic discourse.[1]

Conrad's Marlow novels enact a myth of men at sea in solidarity in a community of like selves, an understanding community in which Marlow can try to relate and apprehend his experience and his self. The effect is to resolve Marlow's epistemological dilemma into a sort of epistemic self-preservation for Marlow, a self-privileging that simultaneously and artificially allows Marlow--and possibly Conrad--to escape having to represent other perspectives.[2] Only by a conscious refusal to be managed by Marlow's monological perspective that excludes, silences, or marginalizes these other voices can the feminist reader avoid what

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[1] Note that Bakhtin in The Dialogic Imagination applies the concept of dialogue in two senses: first, that all language is dialogic, the product of polyglot culture; second, that monologic situations can be forcibly structured to prevent dialogic interaction on ideological grounds. See Gary Saul Morson, "Dialogue, Monologue, and the Social: A Reply to Ken Hirschkop," in Bakhtin: Essays and Dialogues on His Work, for a succinct clarification of the dual nature of dialogue.

[2] Barbara Hernsteinn Smith at the SAMLA conference in November 1987 used the phrase "epistemic self-preservation" to describe a kind of narrow-mindedness that ignores other perspectives in order to protect the sense of self one has constructed.

Fetterley calls immasculation. Fetterley's caution to resist the partriarchal reading has encouraged the replacement of masculinist interpretations with new, feminist ones; yet these interpretations tend to be as single-perspective as their patriarchal counterparts. The concept of dialogically feminist re-reading adds to Fetterley's concept of resistant reading an additional resistance: the resistance to closure on any one meaning in a text. In this model, the reader rejects the marginalization of any perspectives. In the Marlow novels, then, the dialogic reader searches for the other stories beyond Marlow's masculinist narration. Dialogically feminist reading that acknowledges masculinist and feminist perspectives alike concentrates on the background and experience a gendered reader brings to a text in order to question the assumptions underlying earlier readings that tend to be controlled by the dominant perspective. Dialogically feminist reading points up the complexities of both text and experience that Marlow and many readers try to deny.

How do the women's voices in Marlow's narratives--and the feminist readers of these narratives--escape his control? By testing the hypothesis of woman as that which "subverts the ideological distinction between man and woman" (Culler, On Deconstruction 174); by exploring, as Shoshana Felman suggests, that "double question of the reading of sexual difference and the intervention of sexual difference

in the very act of reading." Marlow does not read sexual difference--he tries to obliterate it; his gender prejudice interferes with his own reading of his stories so that he denies the importance of women as characters, excludes their voices in his narrations, and does not count women among his understanding listeners/readers. So too does Conrad effectively count female actual readers out. By looking for the absences of women or their silences in Marlow's tales, the reader can hear those silences resound with the voices of the marginalized or excluded group(s). The dialogically feminist reader can, without marginalizing the masculinist perspective as happens with some single-perspective feminist reading, complicate the reading of Conrad's novels by re-reading them, by disrupting Marlow's monologue and going beyond what seems to be the primary concern in Conrad's Marlow novels--the I-narrator's epistemological dilemma and struggle for self-realization. Dialogic re-reading attempts to uncover/discover a broader concern--the forced monovocality of Marlow's interpretive community that denies the heteroglossia inherent in novelistic discourse through which alien voices interact conflictually. Re-reading dialogically frees those voices from the margins of Conrad's Marlow texts and enhances the reading experience of the feminist reader within a conflictual and heteroglossic interpretive community. Politically, the dialogic reading experience changes the social community through conflictual

interaction: the masculinist perspective is broadened by including feminist ones.

## Marlow's Epistemological Dilemma

Joseph Conrad's complicated I-narrator tales demonstrate simultaneously the virtual impossibility of understanding one's own life experience and the elemental need for relating it to someone, however imperfectly, to establish solidarity with a community of like selves and to realize a coherent self. Youth, Heart of Darkness, Lord Jim, and Chance illustrate the paradoxical need to communicate through a narrative framework what one cannot understand. Charlie Marlow renders incomplete and confused perspectives as he narrates his experiences to a select audience of men, constructing both a reality and a self as he narrates.[3] Hardly a woman is to be found in three of these texts, and when women are present their voices are absent or filtered through a male narrator and their stories squelched. The narrators, the narratees, and the addressees are all men. The texts seem, inevitably yet artificially, directed to a male audience, and female readers must adopt a masculinist perspective, one in tune with patriarchal norms,

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[3] Citations for Youth and Heart of Darkness are taken from the Perennial Classic Edition of The Great Short Works of Joseph Conrad; for Lord Jim, from the Signet Classic Edition, New American Library; for Chance, from the Bantam Books Edition.

to "read" the text Marlow constructs as well as to read beyond it.

Interpretations of the tales abound. Readers cannot agree even on how much Marlow--or Conrad--believes anyone can understand about another or about oneself. Some say the works illustrate only the difficulty of communicating one's experience; others see Conrad's work as much more pessimistic, even nihilistic, an opinion derived largely from Conrad's correspondence. Too few readers maximize the importance of the narrative structure of the texts, which thematizes an epistemology that centers around a belief in the very impossibility of understanding experience, much less communicating what one thinks one knows or understands. This dilemma may be the primary Conradian theme in the Marlow novels and still draws even feminist readers such as myself to them.

Critics and biographers often cite Conrad's correspondence to suggest his frame of mind and join it with his fiction in an effort to get to the heart of Conrad's work. Studying Conrad's letters and reminiscences as fiction and his fiction as autobiography, Edward Said describes Conrad's "consciousness of himself in the struggle toward the equilibrium of character" and Marlow's dilemma of letting himself "vanish into 'native obscurity' or, equally oppressive, undertaking to save [himself] by the compromising deceit of egoism: nothing on one side or shameful pride on the other"

(Autobiography 12-13). In an insightful essay, Said stresses the "pressure . . . which urges Marlow and Conrad toward inconclusive experiences that reveal less to the reader than any reader is prepared to expect." Said considers the dominating factor

> not narrative energy but a fatalistic desire to behold the self passively as an object told about, mused on, puzzled over, marveled at fully, in utterance. That is, having everywhere conceded that one can neither completely realize one's own nor fully grasp someone else's life experience, Marlow and Conrad are left with a desire to fashion verbally and approximately their individual experience in the terms unique to each one. Since invariably this experience is either long past or by definition almost impossible, no image can capture this, just as finally no sentence can. ("Conrad: . . . Narrative" 103)

Said recognizes the centrality to Conrad's work of this difficulty of understanding life and communicating experience.

In his discussion of the Marlow works, Peter Glassman describes Heart of Darkness as autobiography of the self and Lord Jim as a work in which Conrad's own personality is finally defined. So also does Tzvetan Todorov in his "Connaissance du Vide" approve Conrad's choice of storytelling methods, the framed narrative with a confused narrator, which demonstrates thematically a man's inability, despite his desire, to relate an experience fully within the context of a human community.

Other readers/critics disagree. Ian Watt, for example, insists that, while the subjective and inconclusive

way in which Heart of Darkness is related has led others such as Todorov to absolute conclusions, he is convinced that the story is not even mainly

> self-referential--its sepulchral city and its Africa are seen through Marlow's eyes, but they are places of real horrors. . . . Conrad convinces us of the essential reality of everything that Marlow sees and feels at each stage of his journey. (Watt 252)

Frederick Karl also feels strongly that Conrad believed "in absolutes, and by no means threw his lot in with the philosophical relativists, or those who argued for halfway measures because they assumed that every form of behavior has its elements of truth." Karl sees in Jim a struggle between absolutes and a "shifting sense of reality which demands compromise and revocability." But, adopting a stance I think is impossible to justify in that he insists Conrad managed to avoid ideologies, Karl describes Conrad as adhering instead to "larger metaphysical questions of being and becoming. He was interested in values, not movements; in questions of integrity and sincerity, not belief. . ." (Karl 28-9). Both Karl and Watt describe Conrad as believing that knowledge, while difficult, is possible to achieve as a series of impressions.

Other critics, such as Adam Gillon, skirt to varying degrees the issue of whether one can know another or oneself. Gillon seems to suggest that Conrad fails in his effort to render objective reality through a subjective vision of his narrator. Gillon states that the authorial

shifting of focus and the defiance of a regular chronological sequence leave the reader with a sense of incompleteness, of ambiguity, of hidden truth (Gillon 56).

Conrad's letters, our texts of Conrad's most personalized and subjective narration of his life, deny the possibility of knowing another or oneself. His letters abound in expressions of skepticism about the essential nature of his self and his universe. Even after discounting any tendency Conrad may have had for minimizing or exaggerating his honest feelings within his correspondence, I am convinced that his letters reflect a belief that knowledge and self-knowledge alike are socially constructed and justified rather than based on universal foundations.[4] His skepticism is demonstrated in a letter he wrote to Edward Garnett on the day before his marriage:

> When once the truth is grasped that one's own personality is only a ridiculous and aimless masquerade of something hopelessly unknown the attainment of serenity is not very far off. Then there remains nothing but the surrender to one's impulses, the fidelity to passing emotions which is perhaps a nearer approach to truth than any other philosophy of life. And why not? If we are "ever becoming--never being" then I would be a fool if I tried to become this thing rather than that; for I know well that I never will be anything. I would rather grasp the solid satisfaction of my wrong-headedness and shake my fist at the idiotic mystery of Heaven (March 23, 1896; Garnett 46).

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[4] Said (Autobiography 60) cautions us that after 1902, Conrad "deliberately spun a protective web over himself," especially in his autobiographical works, A Mirror of the Sea and A Personal Record; Watt also discusses Conrad's tendency to rewrite his life romantically, 13-14.

According to Karl, this skeptical philosophy is partly Darwinian, partly Schopenhauerean, and partly a product of Conrad's years at sea, when he realized how small man is in comparison to the ship, the sky, and the sea (Karl 368). A few months later, Conrad again wrote Garnett, doubting his ability to know his universe:

> Other writers have some starting point. Something to catch hold of. . . . They know something to begin with--while I don't. I have had some impressions and sensations of common things. And its [sic] all faded--my very being seems faded and thin like the ghost of a blonde and sentimental woman, haunting romantic ruins pervaded by rats. I am exceedingly miserable. My task appears to be as sensible as lifting the world without that fulcrum which even that conceited ass, Archimedes, admitted to be necessary (June 19, 1896; Garnett 59).

A very strong statement on unknowability and a reliance on belief appears in a letter Conrad wrote in 1897 to Cunninghame Graham criticizing Kipling with some contempt:

> Mr Kipling has the wisdom of the passing generations--and holds it in perfect sincerity. Some of his work is of impeccable form and because of that little thing he shall sojourn in Hell only a very short while. He squints with the rest of his excellent sort. It is a beautiful squint; it is a useful squint. And--after all--perhaps he sees around the corner. And suppose Truth is just around the corner like the elusive and useless loafer it is? I can't tell. No one can tell. It is impossible to know. It is impossible to know anything tho' it is possible to believe a thing or two. (Watts 45)

Extreme pessimism pervades an 1897 letter to Graham concerning the futility of reform measures:

> The mysteries of a universe made of drops of fire and clods of mud do not concern us in the least.

> . . . Life knows us not and we do not know life--we don't know even our own thoughts. Half the words we use have no meaning whatever and the other half each man understands each word after the fashion of his own folly and conceit. Faith is a myth and beliefs shift like mists on the shore; thoughts vanish; words, once pronounced, die; and the memory of yesterday is as shadowy as the hope of tomorrow--only the string of my platitudes seems to have no end. (Karl 400-401)

These letters demonstrating Conrad's own epistemic skepticism were written just prior to his composing the Marlow novels, stories in which the framed I-narrator Marlow tries to remember subjective impressions and relate excruciatingly minute details from years before--and pretends to succeed both at communication and at affirming selfhood even as the textual strategies belie that success. The complicated narrative frameworks devised by Conrad thematize a belief in the virtual impossibility of communicating experience despite the compelling need to do so. Simultaneously, they set up artificially receptive environs to overcome the inability to communicate experience.

In all four Marlow works, Conrad creates outer and inner narrative frameworks, with an external narrator setting up Marlow as an oral storyteller spinning his yarns to a small listening audience. Constructing cozy groups of teller and listeners in each novel fulfills an elemental need for human community, for a sense of solidarity among humans in a social environment. But the homogeneity of the group also signifies that the I-narrator of each tale and his audience can only understand the meaning of the experi-

ence insofar as they share the same values, belong to the same consensual interpretive community, find selfhood through the narrative process.[5] These tales are related, not to the unlimited, heterogeneous or heteroglossic community of actual readers of the novels, but to a select group of middle-class urban business and law professionals who as former seamen friends of Marlow are most likely to understand what he is trying to communicate about his own life experience. Actual readers who do not share in the belief system--including its gender ideology--of such a conscribed community of narratees may find themselves resisting the dominant (masculinist) perspective within the text. Feminist readers can instead misread the text to demarginalize the alien and excluded voices, to construct stories compatible with their own construction of reality. Meaning lies in the interaction of these perspectives.

Both Youth and Heart of Darkness begin and end with Marlow narrating his story in the company of four male friends whose careers are symbolic: a lawyer, an accountant, a Director of Companies, and an unnamed I-narrator of the external frame. All have had experience at sea and share a love for it and a fear of it. In Youth, they sit somewhere in England around a mahogany table sipping claret

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[5] See Peter Glassman who extends this self-making process to Conrad himself, demonstrating how Conrad attaches himself to Marlow as Marlow does to Jim in a communion of selves (272).

and swapping yarns. Marlow often interrupts himself to say, "'Pass the bottle'" (Y185, 188, 193), a constant reminder to the actual reader of the outer framework of the tale. Heart of Darkness is a tale told on the deck of the cruising yawl Nellie, moored on the River Thames.

In Lord Jim, a third-person narrator presents the first four chapters, then introduces Marlow as one who often would willingly tell Jim's story after dinner to a small group (again they are men familiar with the sea) on some veranda or other. Marlow's narrative is occasionally interrupted by the external frame's third-person narrator inserting some unimportant detail or other to remind the actual reader that Marlow tells the tale to a small group of male listeners. For example: "Marlow paused to put new life into his expiring cheroot, seemed to forget all about the story, and abruptly began again" (LJ 74). Some ten chapters from the end of the novel, Marlow abruptly stops, and the third-person narrator describes how the audience of men silently breaks up and drifts away (LJ 249). Only one "privileged man" learns the end of Jim's story in a letter from Marlow some two years later. The narrative strategy effectively narrows the audience to that one man who best can understand Jim's and thus Marlow's experience, if in fact anyone can.

In Chance, the narrative framework opens with Marlow already dining with his friend, the unnamed I-narrator, when

he meets the yachtsman Powell. Marlow only begins telling his tale after Powell has told one of his own, Marlow building on the relationships introduced in Powell's narration. After the I-narrator has set up the frame, most of Chance is related by Powell to Marlow and the I-narrator, or by Marlow alone to the I-narrator, who interrupts both men's tales repeatedly so that the actual readers of Chance cannot forget that they are overhearing a series of conversations between close male friends over a period of time.

Despite narrative strategies that demonstrate carefully crafted monovocal and consensual communities of friends with shared values in the Marlow novels, real communication of meaning, of substance, seems hardly to take place. Conrad employs a verbal mode for Marlow which is based on the skaz (Russian) or gaçeda (Polish) oral narrative (a loose informal yarn told as reminiscence with little attention to chronology and with many digressions that only gradually become coherent [Karl 39, 440]). Its effect is to stress the nebulous nature of the tale. The listeners have no written record to consult for clarification of the myriad details Marlow offers; they must instead stay alert in an effort to grasp the import of what Marlow so imperfectly relates, and all this typically after full dinners and several glasses of claret.[6] Yet Marlow thinks he is commun-

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[6] See Randall Craig, "Swapping Yarns," for a thorough discussion of the oral mode and Conrad's belief that truth is never certain.

icating, and the actual reader is invited, possibly even tempted, to agree, following, as it were, the path of least resistance by adopting the dominant, masculinist, stance. By resisting such a stance, by locating the silenced and marginalized perspectives, a feminist reader can sense a gap between Marlow's understanding and others, thereby giving voice to the conflictual perspectives inherent in novelistic discourse, and, finally, dialogizing those perspectives into a meaningful framework.

With such convoluted narrative structures, Marlow's reliability becomes problematic. In Youth, the I-narrator in the external frame sets the uncertain tone by saying, "Marlow (at least I think that is how he spelt his name) told the story" (Y 179). The event itself is twenty-two years past, so any reasonable narratee might question Marlow's ability to so clearly recall what occurred then. At one point in the tale, Marlow anxiously addresses his narratees/listeners: "'You understand this?'" (Y 196). When the tale ends, the narratees/listeners in the external frame are nodding, but the actual reader cannot be sure that they do so in agreement with Marlow. The inscribed readers, despite their similarity to Marlow, may not know how to respond to Marlow's confusing perceptions without challenging Marlow's ability to remember so far back. They maintain a polite silence that reassures Marlow.

At the end of Marlow's tale in Heart of Darkness, nobody moves "for a time," until the Director of Companies suddenly begins to talk, not of the disturbing story Marlow has been relating and the "Truths" within it, but about the ebb tide. No comment is made upon the tale itself, perhaps because not even this radically homogenized a community can make complete sense of it. The silence seems to represent consensus, or at least assent to an ineffable quality of experience. But the audience may also be musing or simply exhausted. The degree of understanding remains an open question despite the narrative's quality of forced monovocality.

At one point in Lord Jim, Marlow's listeners seem "startled out of their torpor" by an abrupt movement he makes while he talks (LJ 237), causing the actual reader to question the effectiveness of the oral mode. Marlow may have recognized his failure to communicate an experience neither he nor anyone yet understands by severely limiting his audience to that one reader most similar to him, the one most likely to appreciate Marlow's struggle to understand his life experience. Marlow's narration in Lord Jim ends abruptly with no comment from his inscribed audience of male narratees, and Marlow seeks out only one "privileged" man for the written conclusion of Jim's story.[7]

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[7] See Linda M. Shires for a cogent discussion of the function of the privileged man as representative of the implied author's and Marlow's effort to govern their emotion

In Chance, the I-narrator openly challenges some of Marlow's perceptions, offering readers their first, if temporary, instance of disrupted monovocality in the Marlovian novels (C 188, 190). The I-narrator cautions Marlow about Powell's limitations (C 188,196), thereby further undercutting the actual reader's confidence in Marlow's reliability to relate "Truth." Marlow again doubts his own ability to communicate: "Marlow paused for quite a long time. He seemed uncertain as though he had advanced something beyond my grasp. Purposely I made no sign. 'You understand?' he asked. 'Perfectly,' I said" (C 224). But does he? The actual reader cannot even be certain at the end of Chance that it has ended; the narrative framework remains open-ended. Powell may or may not have asked his question of Flora; Marlow and the I-narrator pause in anticipation; neither the conversation, nor the tale, nor the novel closes.

If readers who readily identify with Marlow's cohort have difficulty understanding, then the reader who feels excluded from Marlow's monovocal discourse community has even more difficulty. The excluded reader retains at the end of each Marlow novel a sense of incompleteness and confusion at best, doubting the validity of perceived "Truths." And if we are to believe Conrad's own statement about the endings of his novels in a letter he wrote to

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and rely on their ethical norms.

Blackwood while working on Lord Jim, we cannot attribute the inconclusiveness to authorial carelessness: "I shall not hurry myself since the end of a story is a very important and difficult part; the most difficult for me to execute--that is. It is always thought out before the story is begun" (qtd in Said 42).

In addition to problems of communication expressed in Marlow's choice of community groups and his mode of story-telling, the difficulty of understanding is thematized through framed tales that take place in exotic locations. Social and cultural mores in these places differ sharply from those of the relatively homogeneous and consensual community groups of narratees/listeners and Westernized actual readers that make up Conrad's audience. Youth quickly departs from the cozy atmosphere of a London drawing room for the insecurity of a leaking ship on the high seas, something the novel's homogeneous community of listening seamen (but not most readers) can appreciate to its fearful fullest. Heart of Darkness forces both narratees and actual readers to evaluate the morality of an English missionary's behavior in a savage and remote jungle environment none of the listeners or actual readers could ever have experienced. Lord Jim takes place in the most extravagant and romantic environment of all, Patusan, inaccessible to all the Western world save Stein, Jim, Jewel, and a few other refugees. Only Chance takes place in surroundings familiar to the

narratees, which may explain Conrad's heavy use of Socratic-like dialogic argumentation[8] between the two main narrators in Chance--Marlow and the I-narrator--to emphasize the difficulty of communicating even on shared ground in a consensual interpretive community.

Important evidence that Conrad's narrative structure primarily thematizes a belief in the inability to narrate one's experience into a coherent sense of self lies in the multiple layers of narrative framing in each of the novels. Conrad has created a complex series of embedded tales framed in an external narrative structure. In Lord Jim and Chance, the narrative frames and embedded tales become increasingly more complex. Reliability of the narrators must be questioned in such elaborately devised, convoluted structures,

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[8] See Booth's Rhetoric of Fiction for a discussion of those authors who think of themselves

> as in some way rivaling the philosopher and scientists, "bringing to light the truth," though it is never described as a truth that could be stated discursively. . . . All of them bear a closer resemblance to a philosophical dialogue like The Symposium, or to allegories like Pilgrim's Progress. . . . in all of them the reader's own concern for the truth is made to play a heavy role. There is, of course, a radical difference of effect, depending on whether the reader is made to feel from the beginning that he sees the truth toward which the character is stumbling, or is forced to cast off his own moorings and travel on uncharted seas toward an "unknown harbor" (286).

[Note that irritating non-generic pronoun again.]

even if the narrator's dominant perspective prevails in the end.

Although Wayne Booth finds in Marlow a "reliable reflector of the clarities and ambiguities of the implied author" (Booth 154), an actual reader trying to unravel story lines may feel more as if he or she has embarked on an unending quest, "having been forced to cast off his [or her] own moorings and travel on uncharted seas toward an unknown harbor" (Booth 286) with an uncertain and unreliable pilot--Marlow--only to become bogged down in that quagmire of subjective impression.

Like almost every critical evaluation to be made about Conrad's works, opinion varies on the reliability of Marlow. Paul Bruss summarizes the polar viewpoints of Marlow as a character and posits a growth in Marlow's vision that relies on Marlow's movement from certainty in his moral judgment of Jim to doubt about himself and his ability to communicate the futility of human action. Marlow's growth becomes an ability to be more flexible about differing perspectives, about what he cannot know, a maturation Bruss--but not I--can term "spectacular" (Bruss 13-26 passim). Alan Friedman also comments on Marlow's reliability and his moral progression: "Marlow, his masks of sarcasm and human sympathy simultaneously in place, becomes a curious Janus-faced guide whom we trust at our peril" (23). "Marlow's rites of passage from 'Youth' to Lord Jim expand parameters and deepen

vision, but Chance depicts a narrowing, a domestication, as Marlow shifts from morally involved participant to fussily detached busybody making banal pronouncements" (37). I would suggest that the "fussily detached busybody" tone reflects my feminist sense of Marlow's discomfort in relating an experience having to do with the domestic life of a woman rather than with the adventurous life of a man of the sea. Rather than having the woman reader join vicariously in the grand sea adventure, Conrad plunges Marlow uncomfortably into the middle of a domestic tragicomedy. This "domestication" of Marlow, seen from a dialogic perspective, represents a broadening rather than a "narrowing" of Marlow's and Conrad's range. For the first time, in Chance, women's voices and perspectives move toward the center, at least temporarily, despite Marlow's--and Conrad's--remarginalization of them.

Friedman is one of the very few critics who open their discussion with the stressed reminder that the tales are not what they seem. Indeed, in Youth it takes a perceptive reader to notice Marlow's comment to the I-narrator just before he begins the embedded tale:

> "You fellows know there are those voyages that seem ordered for the illustration of life, that might stand for a symbol of existence. You fight, work, sweat, nearly kill yourself, sometimes do kill yourself, trying to accomplish something--and you can't. Not from any fault of yours. You simply can do nothing, neither great nor little--not a thing in the world. . . ." (Y 179)

While the tale purports to tell of the triumph of youth over adversity, it is all, after all, futile. The tale seems celebratory; one must re-read to pick up Marlow's increasingly uncertain language as the outcome of his fate becomes more uncertain, even though his outward demeanor remains calm and confident in keeping with his youth. "'As I lifted the lid a visible breath, something like a thin fog, a puff of faint haze, rose from the opening'" (Y 190); "'I seemed somehow to be in the air. I heard all round me like a pent-up breath released--as if a thousand giants simultaneously had said Phoo!'" (Y 193); "'One would have thought the old man wanted to take as much as he could of his first command with him'" (Y 193, emphases mine). The language suggests uncertainty.

In Heart of Darkness, the I-narrator demonstrates his tentative attitude by looking off into the waterway that "seemed to lead into the heart of an immense darkness" (HD 292, emphasis mine), as though questioning the validity of Marlow's tale. Jerome Meckier rightly reminds us that Heart of Darkness is "about the night the unnamed speaker heard of Kurtz from Marlow during a marathon storytelling session on the deck of the Nellie" (Meckier 373) and is far from straightforward.

Lord Jim is another marathon storytelling session at which Marlow tries to sort out "Truths" from the jumble of information he gets from a seaman who abandoned his ship in

a crisis and eventually escaped to a false heroism in a romantic and improbable land. Even Marlow's written conclusion, which would seem to answer the objections I raised earlier to the oral mode, becomes the most problematic of all. In it, Marlow assumes the role of someone who witnessed the events firsthand, although he admittedly did not (LJ 253). Actual readers can easily forget this fact as they are caught up in the drama of the events. In fact, the privileged man gets the story from Marlow, who got it in fragments; some of it from Stein, who got it from Tamb'Itam and the angry Jewel, and the rest of it from the villainous Gentleman Brown on his deathbed.

Even though Lord Jim has an ostensibly objective third-person external narrator, he cannot be trusted either. Friedman calls this third-person narrator in Lord Jim sarcastic and multifarious, borrowing a term from Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg to denote a narrator who cannot be omniscient in the sense that "even the most objective narrators move from one mind or vantage point to another, not like God, everywhere at once" (Kellogg and Scholes, qtd in Friedman 272-73). The narrator, like Marlow, judges Jim's actions as they are narrated.

In Chance, the I-narrator retells a story he once heard from Marlow, who got some of it from his own involvement with the Fynes but most of it from Powell. For instance, Marlow tells the I-narrator about Flora's abuse by

her guardian's wife and two daughters, an experience much like Cinderella's (C I Ch 6). The I-narrator gets the story from Marlow, who heard it from Mrs. Fyne, who got it from Flora. Later in the novel, even the I-narrator challenges Marlow, asking him how he could possibly have known something. The answer? The shipkeeper told First Mate Franklin, who told Powell, who told Marlow, who told the I-narrator, who now relates to the actual readers what Marlow told him (C II, Ch 1).

Neither Marlow nor the external narrators in Youth, Lord Jim, Heart of Darkness, and Chance can be relied upon to communicate life experience or moral truths objectively despite their elaborately constructed consensual and artificially monovocal interpretive communities. Rather, the communities demonstrate the subjectivity of truth. Certainly the structural frameworks in themselves dramatize the mediated nature of reported knowledge. Few novels so effectively undermine the actual reader's reliance on the "Truths" of the novel: in Conrad's work, everybody's version is qualified; the narrators, external and internal, are situated within characterizations, even to the one privileged man in Lord Jim. No one is presented as objective enough to fully understand the events; everyone's understanding is subjective. No one can communicate experience effectively because no one can understand the moral truths contained in that experience. Anybody can merely collect a

set of subjective impressions and try to make some sense of them and of him- or herself. C. B. Cox says:

> For temperamental and ideological reasons [using an omniscient narrator did not satisfy Conrad.] He wanted to suggest his own uncertainties about the meaning of events, his own deep-rooted scepticism, his belief that illusion and reality are inextricably intertwined. This is achieved by making Marlow responsible for the story. The new indirect method means that we can never be sure how much Marlow understands, how far events are transmuted by being reflected through his consciousness. (14)

Marlow himself sums up the dilemma surrounding the need to communicate despite the difficulty of doing so. Even as Marlow struggles to tell his tale in Heart of Darkness, he lapses into silence, groping with the problem of how to tell his listening cohort what he has yet to understand, needing desperately to establish himself in a community but unable to do so:

> "It seems to me I am trying to tell you a dream--making a vain attempt, because no relation of a dream can convey the dream-sensation, that commingling of absurdity, surprise, and bewilderment in a tremor of struggling revolt, that notion of being captured by the incredible which is of the very essence of dreams. . . ."
>
> He was silent for a while.
>
> ". . . No, it is impossible; it is impossible to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of one's existence--that which makes its truth, its meaning,--its subtle and penetrating essence. It is impossible. We live, as we dream--alone. . .." (HD 237, elipses Marlow's)

Marlow's fear of living alone--and of dreaming rather than living--and his inarticulate struggle with his experience demonstrates an epistemological dilemma dramatized in the

narrative structures of the Marlovian novels, a struggle that Marlow attempts to resolve by constructing an arbitrarily monovocal community of men.

In Lord Jim, this kind of consensual community reaches its apex as Marlow narrows the definition of "one of us" more and more, from seaman to right-feeling people, to the privileged man most qualified to "read" Marlow. Women's voices--and their stories--are excluded or mediated through Marlow's. In Chance, Marlow's narratee, the unnamed I-narrator, becomes the "privileged man." So like Marlow as to be almost undifferentiated from him, the relationship between I and Marlow is that of reflecting reader and engaging narrator (to use Warhol's and Silver's terms). That relationship is constructed as consensual and monovocal. It obliterates sexual difference and constrains feminist readers from discovering their own perspectives in the experience of the novel.

## Dialogic Reading Strategies for the Marlow Novels

Marlow's solution to his epistemological dilemma is to devise a homogeneous interpretive community for himself to increase his chances of being understood in a world he believes has no foundation in knowable truth. Any actual reader reasonably would read the Marlow efforts--at the least--as attempts to relate mystifying tales of men at sea to men who used to be at sea and to lovers of such tales beyond the sea-faring and sea-weary groups of prominent men

in the novels. The novels depict the human condition universalized to all of us outside the fictions, especially to readers precluded by cultural restrictions from experiencing such an adventurous life. I have long participated in Conrad's Marlovian fictions as an appreciative though necessarily distanced and curiously disengaged reader. Yet I keep returning to the absence of women's voices, and those of other marginalized groups, such as the natives, in the Marlow novels. Novelistic discourse, as Bakhtin has taught us, is heteroglossic and conflictual, not homogeneous and consensual, as Conrad has tried to make it in the Marlow novels. As a reader gendered as a woman, I find myself often resisting the Marlovian perspective that seems so readily accepted by Marlow's cohort. That community excludes me and does not represent my perspective; as a feminist reader I seek other voices that better reflect my own perspective. The dialogic task in Marlow's tales is to disrupt his enforced monovocality and force the hidden or excluded perspectives toward the center of the narrative, letting them interact in conflictual fashion with Marlow's. Finding these hidden voices and perspectives in the Marlow novels requires a willingness to secede from the predominant masculine perspective (that passive path of least resistance again).[9] Feminist dialogics politicizes the reading process

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[9] For an example in which the critic treats the audience of actual readers as a monolithic entity rather than the polyvocal community it is, see Hetty Clews's

by retraining readers to read from a broadened perspective--to emphasize women's voices and stories and take them beyond their masculinist (mis)representations. Dialogically feminist re-reading moves women's voices more toward the center to interact with masculinist discourse, both inside and outside the novel.

As early as 1914, a reader of Conrad commented on his treatment of women as "the passive factor." Because of the relative inaccessibility of this old article, with the reader's indulgence I quote Grace Isabel Colbron at length:

> The women are there, of course; but they are always the passive factor, never the active or positive force. It is not <u>their</u> development, <u>their</u> psychology, which matters. . . . They are there just as one more, possibly often the most potent, force of nature, acting on and influencing the development of the male protagonist--never because of themselves or of what may happen to them. . . . What they do, or what they are . . . does not matter of itself. It counts only in its effect on the men into whose lives they come. . . . The men come and go, finding the women of each place, each in her place, just as the line of sea forest and sky is complete and allied to each place, part of the memory of it in aftertime. . . . Mr. Conrad's women do not reason. . . . Like passing pictures thrown on a mirror are the fleeting glimpses of . . . women. . . . There is a delicious old Malay Queen in <u>Lord Jim</u>; motherly Mrs. Beard, seen for a moment in <u>Youth</u> as she mends the clothes of the crew . . . ; the two knitting women in the office of the Company in <u>Heart of Darkness</u>. . . . [T]hese and many another seen but for a moment, still linger long into the

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description of how the reader voluntarily joins into Marlow's audience: ". . . Jim's tragic story has a double meaning to the audience--to whom the reader voluntarily belongs. It has its own intrinsic enigma and pathos, and it has Marlow's probing, synthesizing attempts to discover the truth for himself by discovering it to others" (132).

> memory when one has closed the book. . . . a striking picture of a woman glimpsed as the steamer passes bearing the dying Kurtz from the forest. . . . Like a shade from another world the picture of this savage woman flashes into Marlow's mind as he sits in the shaded drawing room in the sleepy Continental city, bringing Kurtz's last message to the "girl at home." The sheltered woman of Occidental civilization, and the woman who was the soul of the savage jungle, meet in the bond of primitive womanhood, which is the one phase of woman's life that seems to hold and interest Mr. Conrad, the one phase that calls out Conrad's best work. (476-79)

That readers have noticed Conrad's constricted treatment of women not only in their representation but in the virtual absence of the voices of the women represented--and the marginalization of both men and women of color who also are voiceless--testifies to the multiplicities of response possible in this and other work and the impact of the reader's genderization and race on his or her readings. Readers may read beyond sexual difference to elicit Marlow's epistemology, but they must read for sexual difference to demarginalize the women whose very presence is underscored by their exclusion or silence. Reading for different perspectives based on sexual differences and gender ideologies exposes the artificiality of Marlow's discourse communities and the intervention of sexual difference and gender ideology in Marlow's own readings of the tales.

The dialogic reading strategy involves analyzing not only the representation of women in the Marlow novels but concurrently searching for evidence of their individualization through distinctive voices that Marlow may or may not

give them. Other critics have studied the representation of women in Conrad, but feminist dialogics searches specifically for their voices and the implications of their voicelessness. Most critics treat Conrad's women characters as negative examples, and most use psychobiographical strategies to bolster their character analyses. Joyce Carol Oates, for example, finds Conrad's women stereotypical, a reaction which while typical seems greatly oversimplified. Others find them sentimentalized and shallow romantic heroines or destroyers of men. These conclusions have been refuted, most notably in Alison Morley Wilson's study of forty-two female characters in the fiction of Conrad. She finds Conrad chivalrous rather than hostile toward women and his female characters worthy of men's respect and admiration. This might be a backhanded compliment; chivalry itself is permeated with sexist attitudes toward women, making it an insidious form of control. Conrad's attitudes notwithstanding, Marlow certainly grants little depth or respect to his women characters; certainly he excludes their voices as often as he can.[10]

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[10] I am grateful to my colleagues Jane Cocalis and Judith Arcana for sharing their research on this topic with me. More recent readers in search of women in Conrad include Randy M. Brooks, "Blindfolded Woman Carrying A Torch: The Nature of Conrad's Female Characters"; Yvonne Buczkowski, "Female Characters in Conrad's Novels and Short Stories: A Bibliographical Note"; Susan Dora Lundvall, "Joseph Conrad: The Feminine Perspective"; Charles Rose, "Romance and the Maiden"; Elizabeth Brody Tenenbaum, "'And the Woman is Dead Now': A Reconsideration of Conrad's Stein"; Gordon W. Thompson, "Conrad's Women"; Allison

When Conrad's male narrators repeatedly define those whom they approve as "one of us," readers gendered as women know they can never qualify for membership in that club; indeed, "one of us" is defined more and more narrowly from seaman to right-feeling people (LJ 166) to that most eligible "one of us," the privileged man revealed as a romantic and a racist with prophetic powers who wouldn't admit that Jim had mastered his fate. Readers who resist identifying with this privileged perspective must work to give voice to those silenced perspectives. Those voices conflicting with Marlow's and his privileged few engender a more meaningful dialogical discourse in a heteroglossic novel.

The search for the women and their voices yields surprising numbers of women but few voices to conflict with Marlow's. The feminized reader must also contend with the conspiracy of sexism between storyteller and listeners when attempting to discover other voices and create dialogic conflict in that seemingly consensual community. The four Marlovian novels depict the women primarily as silent, silenced by the men; but the silences convey information to a reader alert to feminist dialogics.

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Morley Wilson, "Dolls and Angels: A Study of Joseph Conrad's Female Characters"; Edward Geary, "An Ashy Halo: Woman as Symbol of The Heart of Darkness"; Addison Bross, "The Unextinguishable Light of Belief: Conrad's Attitude Toward Women"; Joyce Carol Oates, "The Immense Indifference of Things: The Tragedy of Nostromo"; Jan Verleun, "Conrad's Heart of Darkness: Marlow and the Intended."

Youth excludes women readers from participating in the experience from the opening sentence as first the external narrator and then Marlow speak of men in ways that go far beyond the bounds of the so-called generic use of men:

> This could have occurred nowhere but in England, where men and sea interpenetrate, so to speak--the sea entering into the life of most men, and the men knowing something or everything about the sea, in the way of amusement, of travel, or of bread-winning. . . . Between the five of us [sitting around the mahogany table] was the strong bond of the sea, and also the fellowship of the craft. (Y 179)

As Marlow takes over the narration, he addresses the "fellows" and works to engage the actual readers as ones who share his belief that sometimes "you" just cannot accomplish something, "'not even marry an old maid, or get a wretched 600-ton cargo of coal to its port of destination.'" By pointedly addressing the tale to narratees and actual readers who could "marry" an old maid," Marlow distances women readers through insult.

Marlow's fear of women as a dichotomous danger to men is dramatized in his description of the ship in Youth. The mother/ship Judea protects the seamen to whom "'it seemed as though we had been born in her, reared in her, had lived in her for ages, had never known any other ship'" (Y 189), even as she forces them to fight for their lives in her as her womb/hold erupts in flame: "'It was our fate to pump in that ship, to pump out of her, to pump into her; and after keeping water out of her to save ourselves from being drowned,

we frantically poured water into her to save ourselves from being burnt'" up in her (Y 189). The womanship, characterized as the mother of them all, both gives life and destroys it. She drowns silently yet wreaks a kind of revenge on the men by depriving them of her womb.

The only female character Marlow describes in Youth is the captain's wife, Mrs. Beard, who lives on board The Judea a short while and mends the sailors' socks:

> "Mrs. Beard was an old woman, with a face all wrinkled and ruddy like a winter apple, and the figure of a young girl. . . . Mrs. Beard is dead, and youth, strength, genius thoughts, achievements, simple hearts--all dies. . . . No matter." (Y 182)

We are not told what she thinks but are told that she mends socks because she is "'glad of something to do,'" presumably because she is barred from doing the man's work of the sailor. She departs as silently as she arrives yet shouts her boredom to the dialogized reader looking for another perspective. Marlow disapproves of her being on board despite her solicitous interest in him and the other sailors: "'A sailor has no business with a wife. . . '" (182).

Marlow, having established that women do not belong on ships and that sailors have no business with wives, encourages his listeners and, by extension, his actual readers, to agree with him:

> "But you here--you all had something out of life: money, love--whatever one gets on shore--and, tell me, wasn't that the best time, that time when we were young at sea; young and had nothing, on the sea that gives nothing, except hard knocks--and

> sometimes a chance to feel your strength--that only--that you all regret?"
>
> And we all nodded at him: the man of finance, the man of accounts, the man of law, we all nodded at him over the polished table. . . our weary eyes looking always, looking anxiously for something out of life that. . . is already gone . . . together with the youth, with the strength, with the romance of illusions. (Y 206)

Although it is with "'the silence of the East'" that Marlow ends his narrative in Youth, with the "'men of the East'" looking at him "'and the tired men from the West sleeping. . . . The East look[ing] at them without a sound. . . . '" (Y 204), my attention as a feminist re-reader is riveted on the not-so-sub-text that valorizes the life of the young man of the sea and vehemently excludes women from participation in that life. In the same way, the consensus that the two narrators and Marlow's listeners in this story achieve precludes my involvement as a participating reader and sets me apart instead as a resisting reader who must oppose the masculinist perspective dominating the tale by reading alongside it the story of the Mrs. Beards of the sea, working silently and stoically, serving their men.

Heart of Darkness, a longer and more complicated text, begins with the I-narrator introducing his cohort: the Director of Companies, captain of the Nellie and the host, who "resembled a pilot, which to a seaman is trustworthiness personified. . . . Between us there was, as I have already said somewhere, the bond of the sea. . . . the lawyer, the best of old fellows. . . . the accountant . . . Marlow . . .

the director . . ." (HD 211). The consensual community established, Marlow narrates his adventure to the heart of the Congo, the heart of darkness. Incredulous even at the distance of the retelling that he had to resort to being helped by a woman, a misogynistic Marlow describes how he got the job:

> "I have a lot of relations living on the continent. . . . I began to worry them. . . . The men said, 'My dear fellow,' and did nothing. Then--would you believe it?--I tried the women. I, Charlie Marlow, set the women to work--to get a job. . . . [His nameless aunt,] a dear enthusiastic soul . . . was determined to make no end of fuss to get me appointed skipper of a river steamboat." (HD 216)

The aunt's voice is suppressed by Marlow, effectively marginalizing her as unimportant; yet without her and her power to find him work, we would have no tale of the Congo for Marlow to retell. Marlow's masculinist pride, and a fear of female power, causes him to minimize the importance of his aunt's help.

In the office where the no-name aunt sends him, Marlow is disconcerted by the modern version of the Fates, silent though they are:

> "Two women, one fat and the other slim, sat . . . knitting black wool. The slim one['s] . . . dress was as plain as an umbrella cover, and she turned round without a word and preceded me into a waiting room. . . . The old one sat on her chair . .. and a cat reposed on her lap. She wore a starched white affair on her head, had a wart on one cheek, and silver-rimmed spectacles hung on the top of her nose. . . . The swift and indifferent placidity of [her] look troubled me. . . . She seemed to know all about . . . me, too. An eery feeling came over me. She seemed uncanny and fateful. . .

> guarding the door of darkness, knitting black wool as for a warm pall. . . . Ave! Old knitter of black wool. Morituri te salutant." (HD 218-19)

For Marlow, these women are the sinister personifications of man's fate. Marlow is clearly unnerved by their silent symbolic power over his own fate. In turn, he denies them the power to speak in his tale and with it the identity he forges for himself through his own speech.

Having gotten the job through his aunt's good offices, Marlow describes to his listeners his frustrating farewell meeting with her:

> "She talked about 'weaning those ignorant millions from their horrid ways, 'till, upon my word, she made me quite uncomfortable. . . . It's queer how out of touch with truth women are. They live in a world of their own, and there had never been anything like it, and never can be. It is too beautiful altogether, and if they were to set it up it would go to pieces before the first sunset. Some confounded fact we men have been living contentedly with ever since the day of creation would start up and knock the whole thing over. After this I got embraced, told to wear flannel, be sure to write often, and so on--and I left." (HD 220)

The image of the mother figure "weaning" the babies and clothing the departing child grows sinister under Marlow's sarcasm as the woman/aunt/mother transmogrifies into the representation of ignorant womanhood when managed by Marlow's perspective. But the dialogic reader can introduce another perspective by mis-reading Marlow, by "reading" the aunt's power. Without negating the power of Marlow to convince listeners and readers to adopt his own perspective, the dialogic reader sets other perspectives in conflict with

it, recognizing that Marlow represses female voices to repress his fear of their power over him. Yet Marlow's smug confidence that his listeners would agree with his perspective is unchallenged in the text. Conrad could not have seriously considered that actual readers might be offended by this portrayal of women ("out of it" as he and Marlow deem us).

The next woman in the tale, also silent, is a portrait painted by Kurtz years earlier, which Marlow describes as "'representing a woman, draped and blindfolded, carrying a lighted torch. The background was somber--almost black. The movement of the woman was stately, and the effect of the torchlight on the face was sinister'" (233). Although we have only Marlow's word that the effect was indeed sinister, the feminist reader recognizes that Marlow's--and possibly Kurtz's--Justice, while female, draped and blindfolded according to tradition, somehow also seems dangerous to these men.

Perhaps the danger is that the woman Justice carries the torch for Kurtz, himself a very dangerous man, just as both the native woman and the Intended do. Marlow's misogyny is sustained. He sees female Justice as sinister, the primitive woman as "'savage and superb'" (HD 273) and "'tragic'" (HD 273, 281), yet "'full of charms'" (HD 291). The Intended, on the other hand, is a sort of floating angel to Marlow, with "'an ashy halo'" (HD 289), who, according to

Marlow, worries that the world know "'"I have been worthy of him"'" (HD 289). The vignette with Marlow and the portrait foreshadows the scenes presenting Kurtz's two women and sets up the reader's expectation that Kurtz's woman, be she the Savage or the Intended, signifies Woman as simultaneously Demon/Angel.

The Savage's story is in dumb show, the Intended's a patriarchal melodrama. The Savage first stands defiantly on the shore in "'dumb pain,'" her bare arms, like Justice's, thrown "'up rigid above her head'" as Marlow arrives to take Kurtz away (HD 274). When the boat departs, she rushes to the shore, stretches her bare arms "'tragically'" after it and shouts "'something'" (HD 281). She does not speak in Marlow's narration, but her silent and tragic stance is mirrored by the Intended who, Marlow tells us,

> "put her arms as if after a retreating figure, stretching them black and with clasped pale hands across the fading and narrow sheen of the window, . . . a tragic and familiar Shade, resembling in this gesture another one, tragic also, and bedecked with powerless charms, stretching bare brown arms over the glitter of the infernal stream, the stream of darkness." (291)

The Intended too shouts, "'an exulting and terrible cry, the cry of inconceivable triumph and of unspeakable pain'" (292) as Marlow, lying, tells her that Kurtz's last word was her name. Marlow silences the Demon side of woman, allows the angel side to speak only insofar as she seeks acknowledgment of her worthiness for Kurtz, and lies to the angel under the guise of paternalistic protection. The Savage and the

Intended are denied individuation by Marlow's universalizing narrativization, but feminist actual readers are nevertheless attuned to their importance in the text. The two women, echoing Justice, speak in a dialogue with the reader despite Marlow. They are alike in their suffering yet in conflict together, and the dialogized reader incorporates their stories into Marlow's.

The women in Heart of Darkness are presented as eerie, unpleasant, mostly voiceless, and dangerous bodies. The male protagonists, one the other hand, are presented as bodiless and thus God-like voices. The I-narrator compares Marlow to a voice:

> It had become so pitch dark that we listeners could hardly see one another. For a long time already he, sitting apart, had been no more to us than a voice. There was not a word from anybody. . . . I listened . . . to the . . . narrative that seemed to shape itself without human lips in the heavy night air of the river . . . . (HD 237)

And Marlow compares Kurtz to a voice:

> "The man presented himself as a voice. . . . of all his gifts the one that stood out pre-eminently, that carried with it a sense of real presence, was his ability to talk, his words--the gift of expression ,the bewildering, the illuminating, the most exalted and the most contemptible, the pulsating stream of light, or the deceitful flow from the heart of an impenetrable darkness. . . . A voice. He was little more than a voice. And I heard him--it--this voice--other voices--all of them were so little more than voices--and the memory of that time itself lingers around me, impalpable, like a dying vibration of one immense jabber, silly, atrocious, sordid, savage, or simply mean, without any kind of sense. Voices, voices--even the girl herself--now--."
>
> He was silent a long time. . . .

> "Girl! . . . Did I mention a girl? Ah, she is out of it--completely. They--the women I mean--are out of it--should be out of it. We must help them to stay in that beautiful world of their own, lest ours gets worse." (HD 258-260)

A reflecting Marlow hears many voices, even women's voices, but he moves quickly to squelch the memory of those voices, so that he can interact only with those that are not in conflict. Dialogic readers give voice to these women, reading their stories of love and abandonment and suffering alongside Marlow's narrated story.

Unaware of his own misogyny, Marlow deplores Kurtz's: "'You should have heard him say, "My ivory. . . . My Intended, my ivory, my station, my river, my --" everything belonged to him'" (HD 260). Yet Marlow too disposes of the Intended as one more bit of Kurtz's property:

> "All that had been Kurtz's had passed out of my hands: his soul, his body, his station, his plans, his ivory, his career. There remained only his memory and his Intended--and I wanted to give that up, too, to the past, in a way--to surrender personally all that remained of him with me to that oblivion which is the last word of our common fate." (HD 287)

Marlow's misogynist voice becomes less dominant only when the feminist reader refuses to be managed by his perspective. What should trouble feminist readers about this, as well as the other Marlow novels, is that the texts provide neither corrective nor balance to Marlow's perspective; they do not confront the anti-woman bias in them. By practicing dialogics, the feminist reader confronts that bias, dis-

covering meaning in those corrective, conflicting perspectives or misreading the text to create them if they are excluded. The result is a new, open-ended, text in dialogic conflict with its readers.

In the June 1917 edition of Lord Jim, Conrad uncovers then dismisses another perspective in a prefatory note that regretted a woman reader's response to his novel:

> A friend of mine returning from Italy had talked with a lady there who did not like the book. I regretted that, of course, but what surprised me was the ground of her dislike. "You know," she said, "it is all so morbid."
>
> The pronouncement gave me food for an hour's anxious thought. Finally I arrived at the conclusion that, making due allowances for the subject itself being rather foreign to women's normal sensibilities, the lady could not have been an Italian. I wonder whether she was European at all? In any case, no Latin temperament would have perceived anything morbid in the acute consciousness of lost honour. (LJ v)

This pertinent statement from Conrad demonstrates an indifference to the understanding of women readers for his work, a surprising indifference in view of the largely female audience for novels during this time. Deciding first that women in general were unlikely to appreciate his subject, then that this particular woman lacked even a European sensibility (the broadest interpretive community Conrad presumably considered), and taking a mere hour to solve the puzzle, Conrad apparently dismissed this "other's" view of his novel and took refuge in his own artificially consensual community. He concludes his preface with an insistence that

he once saw a "Jim" in an "Eastern roadstead" and echoes the refrain of Lord Jim: "He was 'one of us'" (LJ vii). Clearly, the actual woman reader in Italy and others like her do not qualify.

In Lord Jim, once again, the woman reader is immediately excluded from joining the novel's inscribed community of listeners. The unnamed narrator of the first few chapters addresses the first paragraph to "you," who "can get everything to make [a ship] seaworthy and beautiful" in a ship-chandler's shop where a "commander is received like a brother by a ship-chandler he has never seen before. . . . a warmth of welcome that melts the salt of a three month's passage out of a seaman's heart" (LJ 9). Marlow speaks to "'you fellows'" (LJ 37, 169) about Jim, who came

> "from the right place; he was one of us. He stood there for all the parentage of his kind, for men and women by no means clever or amusing, but whose very existence is based upon honest faith, and upon the instinct of courage." (38)

Note that at the beginning of the novel Marlow acknowledges the role of women at least in parenting those who qualify for membership in this elite community which is more and more narrowly defined.

Among those excluded from Marlow's community are readers who may resemble the tourists invading the dining room where Marlow dines with Jim, who Marlow reiterates is "of the right sort; he was one of us'" (LJ 63). Marlow is

especially vitriolic in his representations of the women, I think:

> "An outward-bound mail-boat had come in that afternoon, and the big dining-room of the hotel was more than half full of people with a hundred pounds round-the-world tickets in their pockets. There were married couples looking domesticated and bored with each other. . .; there were small parties and large parties, and lone individuals dining solemnly or feasting boisterously, but all thinking, conversing, joking, or scowling as was their wont at home; and just as intelligently receptive of new impressions as their trunks upstairs. . . . [N]ow and then a girl's laugh would be heard, as innocent and empty as her mind. . . . Two nomadic old maids, dressed up to kill, worked acrimoniously through the bill of fare, whispering to each other with faded lips, wooden-faced and bizarre, like two sumptuous scarecrows." (LJ 62)

Marlow's narratees are "'a lot of men too indolent for whist'" (LJ 75) who share in "'the fellowship of the craft'" (LJ 100), "'the solidarity of the craft'" (LJ 101), who listen silently and, I assume, approvingly, until Marlow breaks off and the exclusively male audience breaks up:

> Men drifted off the verandah in pairs or alone without loss of time, without offering a remark, as if the last image of that incomplete story, its incompleteness itself, and the very tone of the speaker, had made discussion vain and comment impossible. Each of them seemed to carry away his own impression, to carry it away with him, like a secret; but there was only one man of all these listeners who was ever to hear the last word of the story . . . in a thick packet . . . (LJ 249)

in which Marlow describes Jim's demise in ignominy or triumph, depending on the interpreter's perspective. As for Marlow, he concludes with the highest compliment to Jim:

"'He is one of us . . .'" (LJ 305). Marlow, I suggest, sees triumph in Jim.

That women are not included among the inscribed listeners in the Marlow novels discourages actual readers from participating in the interpretive experience unless they adapt to and let themselves be controlled by the masculinist perspective sanctioned in the texts. Feminist readers need to work to dislodge this dominant perspective and create a dialogic community of heteroglossic readers. Analyzing the way women characters are (mis-)represented and the way their voices are muted or deflected to deny their perspectives in Lord Jim can give readers insight into how gender ideologies can disrupt both Marlow's telling and the readers' reading. A more comprehensive interpretation of the texts is engendered through the conflict of the multiple perspectives.

Lord Jim is not just the story of Jim and Marlow and Stein and Marlow's narratees, as Marlow would have us believe. Embedded within are the strange, eerie, stories of nameless, mostly voiceless women. The novel portrays many women, all of them in the background, most of them silent. There is the lady's maid who refuses to be saved from the burning ship by Little Bob Stanton, who, Marlow says, went

> "completely crazy--wouldn't leave the ship--held to the rail like grim death. . . . It was for all the world . . . like a naughty youngster fighting with his mother. . . . Poor Bob's spell of shore-life had been one of the complications of a love affair, I believe." (LJ 114)

And the long-suffering wife of Marlow's jealous chief mate of whom Marlow once had a glimpse: "'. . . and, honestly, I couldn't conceive a man abandoned enough to plunge into sin for the sake of such an unattractive person. . . . The marital relations of seamen would make an interesting subject . . .'"(LJ 119).

Among the Patusan women, the chief ruler of Wajo States was, Stein has told Marlow, "'a fat, wrinkled woman (very free in her speech, Stein said), reclining on a high couch under a canopy,'" the peacemaker whose death generates bloody factions (LJ 154). Stein marries a princess, "'the Malay girl he called "My wife, the princess" or, more rarely in moments of expansion, "the mother of my Emma"'" (LJ 164), who dies of fever without the actual reader having known her. Stein alludes mysteriously to another woman, Marlow says:

> "Who was the woman he had mentioned in connection with Patusan I can't say; but from his allusions I understand she had been an educated and very good-looking Dutch-Malay girl, with a tragic or perhaps a pitiful history, whose most painful part no doubt was her marriage with a Malacca Portuguese [Cornelius]. . . It was solely for his [Cornelius's] wife's sake that Stein had appointed him manager of Stein & Co.'s trading post in Patusan . . . . Now the woman had died." (LJ 164)

Stein abandons Jewel's mother to Cornelius on Patusan, and, we are told, she dies weeping. Although he hints that Stein may indeed be Jewel's father, Marlow has too much masculine delicacy to expose "one of us" to any of us "others." Jim,

continuing the tradition, robs Jewel of her real name and abandons her for death.

Doramin's noble old wife, also nameless and voiceless except among her own women,

> "had a round, nut-brown, soft face, all fine wrinkles, large, bright red lips (she chewed betel assiduously), and screwed up, winking, benevolent eyes. . . . It was generally believed [Doramin] consulted his wife as to public affairs; but nobody .. . . had ever heard them exchange a single word. . . . They were wonderfully contrasted: she, light, delicate, spare, quick, a little witch-like, with a touch of motherly fussiness in her repose; he, facing her, immense and heavy, like a figure of a man roughly fashioned of stone. . . ." (LJ 191-94)

Although the actual reader knows all too well what Doramin's response is to the death of his son Dain Waris, Marlow never says what the mother's reaction is to the death of her only son. Yet her silence must echo in the dialogized reader's ears. We read the grieving stories of mothers in this novel only by forcibly centering them. We hear all about Jim's relationship with his father and Jim's four brothers (LJ 11), but Jim's mother is conspicuous by her absence. So too is Dain Waris's mother by her silence. Marlow is concerned more with the father/son bond than with mother/child bonds. But dialogically feminist readers can retell the stories of all the grieving nameless and voiceless mothers: Jewel's, Dain Waris's, even Jim's and the little princess Emma's.

Marlow is consistent about the dichotomous danger women represent. In Lord Jim, woman is still dichotomous, still silent, still motherly though witch-like, still truth-

ful, still abandoned yet protected paternalistically by man, commodities to be sold, as Cornelius points out to Marlow when he says he is "'entitled to some money in exchange for [Jewel] . . . when the time came for the gentleman [Jim] to go home . . . . Every gentleman made a provision when the time came to go home. . . '" (LJ 243). There is, of course, a racial slur embedded in this scenario of the European gentlemen leaving behind the part-Malay women.

There are women in Lord Jim who are even more marginalized than those I have already discussed. For example, there is the wife of the villager who wants a divorce because she has lent her husband's brass pots to her sister's son's wife (LJ 199); we are never told what she thinks or how she feels or what she says. We do know that her husband "'beat her a little--not much--just a little, when she was young. Had to--for the sake of his honour'" (LJ 199). Jim pacifies "'everyone'" by getting him "'the infernal pots back.'" No word about what becomes of the poor wife or what her perspective may have been. To Marlow her voice is unimportant, or, possibly, at odds with his own.

There are Gentleman Brown's silent Siamese woman, '"with big bare legs and a stupid coarse face [who] sat in a dark corner chewing betel stolidly'" and silently (LJ 255); and a missionary woman, the love of Brown's life, who, running away from her husband to be with Brown, dies, again in silence, as soon as she gets on board Brown's ship (LJ

284). And finally there is the "'old hag who did the casual cooking of [Jim's] household, though she was so decrepit as to be hardly able to understand human speech [and] hobbled behind them, mumbling toothlessly'" (LJ 220).

All these women characters, no matter how small or how significant their part in Marlow's narrative, remain nameless, faceless and voiceless--except for Jewel, whose voice is filtered, through Jim who teaches her English and thus controls her language and through Marlow who controls the dissemination of her story. Jewel's story, as narrated by Marlow, is one of fear of losing the man she loves. Jewel fears she will die abandoned and weeping as her mother had. Marlow describes Jewel's voice as an "'urgent monotone'" (LJ 220), a "'murmur,'" and a "'whisper'" (LJ 221). We rarely hear her voice because Marlow mostly paraphrases Jewel. Yet it is her voice that saves Jim the night he is attacked:

> "'Wait till you hear my voice,' she said, and torch in hand, ran lightly round the corner. [Jim] remained alone in the darkness. . . . He heard a high-pitched almost screaming call from the girl. 'Now! Push!' . . . She had thrust the light through the bars of the window. He saw her bare round arm extended and rigid, holding up the torch with the steadiness of an iron bracket...." (222)

Jewel's shout and her torchlight flush the assassins. She saves Jim's life.

Jewel's only fear was her belief, Marlow tells us, that Marlow

> "could with a word whisk Jim away out of her very arms. . . . [T]here is no word that on my lips

> could render the effect of the headlong and vehement whisper, of the soft, passionate tones, of the sudden breathless pause and the appealing movement of the white arms extended swiftly. They fell; the ghostly figure swayed like a slender tree in the wind, the pale oval of the face drooped; it was impossible to distinguish her features, the darkness of the eyes was unfathomable; two wide sleeves uprose in the dark like unfolding wings, and she stood silent, holding her head in her hands." (LJ 228-29)

Jewel's agony, like that of Justice, the Savage, and the Intended alike in Heart of Darkness, extends through her outstretched arms. Her whispered fear that "'"They always leave us,"'" produces her longest speech:

> "'You all remember something! You all go back to it. What is it? You tell me! What is this thing? Is it alive?--is it dead? I hate it. It is cruel. Has it got a face and a voice--this calamity? Will he see it--will he hear it? In his sleep perhaps when he cannot see me--and then arise and go. Ah! I shall never forgive him. My mother had forgiven--but I, never! Will it be a sign--a call?'" (LJ 233)

Marlow is unnerved by Jewel's passionate whisper. He silences it in his retelling by paraphrasing her story, and by rendering her incapable of understanding her experience: "'To discover that she had a voice at all was enough to strike awe into the heart. Had a spurned stone cried out in pain it could not have appeared a greater and more pitiful miracle. . . . It was impossible to make her understand" (LJ 236). Marlow swears that Jim will never leave Jewel; but her response--"'"You lie!"'"--causes Marlow to cut off the dialogue, to slip "'away without another word. . . . '" (LJ 236).

When Marlow sees her after Jim's death, Jewel tells him that even Jim was deaf to her voice:

> "'He has left me, . . . you always leave us--for your own ends. . . . He would not! It was like a blindness--and yet it was I who was speaking to him; it was I who stood before his eyes; it was at me that he looked all the time! Ah! you are hard, treacherous, without truth, without compassion. What makes you so wicked? Or is it that you are all mad?'" (LJ 257).

But, Marlow assures his cohort, "'She could not grasp the real sense of what she was telling me. . . . I was glad to escape'" (LJ 257-58). By the time Marlow refashions Jewel's story, just as Jim has refashioned her name and her life, Jewel, "'the poor girl,'" "'is leading a sort of soundless, inert life in Stein's house'" (LJ 307) and Marlow has escaped the power of her voice.

Jewel's real name remains a mystery; yet in Lord Jim every male character worth Marlow's mention has a name, even Jim's native servant Tamb'Itam. That Marlow marginalizes women's perspectives is irrefutable. The reader must decide whether Conrad too does so; certainly the dearth of dialogue with women characters in the Marlow novels and a seeming indifference to women actual readers of them suggest it.

Conrad's Marlow in Chance is a problem of a different sort; Chance is a domestic novel filled with named women, some of whose voices and consciousnesses the reader is allowed to hear and to penetrate. Yet the tightly constructed coterie of male narrators and listeners again silences these women and effectively excludes actual readers gendered

as women. This exclusion is most curious in a domestic novel whose readership would be largely women. It is as though Conrad/Marlow feared he could trust his version of these stories only to a male cohort that would agree with him as he attempts this time to read for sexual difference but cannot get beyond his gender ideologies.

The narrative framework in Chance parallels that of the first three Marlow novels. Marlow 's narration, framed by an unidentified male friend's I-narration, interposes with that of the yachtsman Powell's, and they begin as usual with stories of their seafaring life. Readers gendered as women are excluded from full participation in this life except as they can experience it vicariously, but they can directly identify with the subject of these narrators' stories. The tales narrate first the strange love story of Captain Roderick Anthony and Flora de Barral (alias Miss Smith) and then the even stranger and more indirect love story of Flora de Barral Anthony and co-narrator Charles Powell. The sea life intersects these stories more as background than as primary tale. The new approach helped Chance, Conrad's eighth novel, to become Conrad's first commercial success (Karl C ix). The frequent disagreements between Marlow and the I-narrator encourage the actual reader too to challenge Marlow's single-minded perspective, thus opening up Marlow's--and Conrad's--interpretive community, however briefly, for the first time to heteroglossic

interaction, both inside the text and outside it. Hearing the actual voices of Flora de Barral and Zoe Fyne, however framed by a hostile narrative and filtered through Powell, Marlow, and the I-narrator they are, encourages actual readers gendered as women to engage with the text more readily than they can with Youth, Heart of Darkness, and Lord Jim. Readers do not have to fill silences to disrupt Marlow's dominant, masculinist, perspective as they must in the other Marlow novels.

Marlow retains his misogynistic stance in Chance, portraying a variety of unpleasant women. His diatribes about feminists (C 43-48) and stereotypic insults about women[11] repeatedly punctuate his narrative and produce the resistance of the feminist reader, male or female, to the narrative. Mrs Fyne, who writes a feminist tract, is ridiculed by Marlow (C 46, 112). Marlow squelches her in his narration and does not even reveal her first name (Zoe)

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[11] See, for example C 98, 104, 105, 108, 110, 113, 123, 202-3, and 204. The most blatant is this:

> "For myself it's towards women that I feel vindictive mostly, in my small way. . . . . Mainly I resent that pretence of winding us round their dear little fingers, as of right. Not that the result ever amounts to much generally. . . . You ["I"] needn't stare as though I were breathing fire and smoke out of my nostrils. I am not a women-devouring monster. I am not even what is technically called 'a brute.' . . . You don't suppose I should be afraid of getting married? That supposition would be offensive. . . . " (108-09)

Here again the reader recognizes Marlow's fear of female power.

until page 175. Flora's mother's death "'suddenly of neglect'" goes almost without comment (C 52). Flora's governess, whom Marlow gives only a first name, Eliza, is completely corrupt and tries to corrupt Flora by marrying her off to her "'nephew'"/lover Charlie (C 70). The woman in the German family Flora works for denounces Flora when the woman's husband makes "'subtle passes'" at her (C 128-33). Flora herself is repeatedly denied the comfort of community in the narrative and is rendered completely passive, just as Jewel is rendered "'inert'" in Lord Jim.

Marlow's discussion of Zoe Fyne's feminist ideas at first promises a perspective distinctly different from Marlow's, but Marlow manipulates the telling of her ideas so ruthlessly that he invites his listeners/readers to reject them even without having heard them:

> "I learned the true nature of Mrs. Fyne's feminist doctrine. It was not political, it was not social. It was a knock-me-down doctrine--a practical individualistic doctrine. You would not thank me for expounding it to you at large. Indeed I think that she herself did not enlighten me fully. There must have been things not fit for a man to hear. But shortly, and as far as my bewilderment allowed me to grasp its naive atrociousness, it was something like this: that no consideration, no delicacy, no tenderness, no scruples should stand in the way of a woman (who by the mere fact of her sex as the predestined victim of conditions created by men's selfish passions, their vices and their abominable tyranny) from taking the shortest cut towards securing herself the easiest possible existence. . . . I wondered--and wondering, I doubted--whether she really understood herself the theory she had propounded to me. . . . [She] published a little book. . . . It was a sort of handbook for women with grievances. . . . It made you laugh at its transparent simplicity. . . . I

> marvelled to myself at her complete ignorance of the world, of her own sex, and of the other kind of sinners. . . ." (C 43-48)

Professing his appreciation of women ("'Perhaps if I had had a helpful women at my elbow, a dear, flattering, acute, devoted woman. . . . There are in life moments when one positively regrets not being married'" [C 98]) and his rejection of feminism ("'I am not a feminist'" [C 105]), Marlow manages the narrative to undermine Mrs. Fyne by divorcing her from true womanhood: "'It is true that Mrs. Fyne did not want women to be women. Her theory was that they should turn themselves into unscrupulous sexless nuisances. An offended theorist dwelt in her bosom somewhere'" (C 137). The effect is to reassure masculinist readers that Marlow's anti-feminist perspective is correct because explicit and to enforce monovocality on the text.

In the only section of the novel in which Mrs. Fyne is permitted to debate with Marlow, thus providing the opportunity to dramatize the power of conflictual interaction to engender changed attitudes, the debate is over the elopement of Flora with Mrs. Fyne's brother Anthony, not her feminist doctrine. Even in this section (C 105-117), Marlow mostly reports what she said, editorializing along the way. Her few statements are replete with interruptions by Marlow and Fyne, and the I-narrator challenging Marlow. Marlow chastises Mrs. Fyne:

> I said: "You want absolutely to interfere...?" Mrs. Fyne nodded just perceptively . . . . "Well--

> for my part . . . but I don't really know how matters stand at the present time. You have had a letter from Miss de Barral. What does that letter say?"
>
> "'She asks for her valise to be sent to her town address,' Mrs. Fyne uttered reluctantly and stopped. I waited a bit--then exploded."
>
> "'Well! What's the matter? Where's the difficulty? Does your husband object to that? You don't mean to say that he wants you to appropriate the girl's clothes?'"
>
> "'Mr. Marlow!'"
>
> . . . .
>
> "'There is no engagement--not yet,' she said decisively. 'That letter, Mr. Marlow, is couched in very vague terms. That is why--'"
>
> "I interrupted her without ceremony. . . ." (C 116) (Elipses Marlow's)

When Marlow exclaims to his inscribed readers, "I was within an ace of drifting into a downright quarrel with a lady" (C 114), actual readers know that Mrs. Fyne will again lose her voice in the text as Marlow's perspective obliterates hers. He dismisses her with scorn: "'She held, I suppose, that a woman holds an absolute right--or possesses a perfect excuse--to escape in her own way from a man-mismanaged world'" (C 132).

Flora's voice too is filtered through Marlow as he shapes her into his version of the helpless woman. The masculinist reader is invited to share Marlow's delight in Flora's helplessness and appreciate with her the paternalistic power of Captain Anthony in saving her from jumping off a cliff not once but twice (C 153, 169). Note here that

Marlow admits he has difficulty understanding Flora (C 153), but he does appreciate her sense of shame over her plight (C 169). When Captain Anthony brings his bride aboard his ship--to protect her and her father from the world (C 234)--the old hands resent her presence (196), continuing Marlow's consistent stance that women and sailors do not mix. Flora herself resigns herself to her misery: "'"Well, I am here. I am here without any nonsense. It is not my fault that I am a mere worthless object of pity"'" (C 246). Even years later, after she and Captain Anthony have discovered their love for each other, after he has gone down with his ship and she rekindles her friendship with Powell, she still cannot value herself highly. Witness her final short dialogue with Marlow, about Powell's interest in her:

> "'Do you think it possible that he should care for me?'"
>
> "'Just ask him yourself. . . . For if you don't you will be wronging that patient man cruelly.'"
>
> "I departed, leaving her dumb. Next day, seeing Powell making preparations to go ashore, I asked him to give my regards to Mrs. Anthony. he promised he would." (C 321)

Marlow leaves Flora speechless, and the novel ends with Marlow expecting "'to hear at any moment'". . . . [He is] not afraid to go to church with a friend'" (C 322). Flora, the novel suggests, will now marry Powell, having been managed by Marlow's perspective.

There are characters in Chance whose voices are muted as well: the criminal poet de Barral, a male character who

seems almost feminine in the way he is rendered powerless through his criminal ordeal and its aftermath; Eliza, the governess; and, strangely, Captain Anthony. Is he also rendered feminine and powerless by narrators who interpret him as weakened by his love for Flora? Anthony's powerlessness, however, is illusory. While Conrad's own section divisions, "The Damsel," and "The Knight," fit the depiction of Flora as the damsel in distress and Anthony as the strong knight in shining armor, which Karl concludes ensured the popularity of the novel (C xviii), the entire chivalric tradition has associations for feminist readers that render the symbols offensive. Captain Anthony controls Flora's fate, just as the knight controls the damsel. For the feminist reader, Flora becomes yet another victim of patriarchy, no matter how well-meaning Captain Anthony, Marlow, or Powell seems. For most of the novel she is isolated on the ship Ferndale for her own "protection" from a hostile world. The parallel here to Jane Eyre's fate, which I will discuss in the next chapter, is striking. Both women are seemingly triumphant in having men to love and protect them, yet both have had to give up the greater world for isolation in a mythical garden of Eden: Flora on the Ferndale, Jane at Ferndean.

The feminist reader of the Marlow novels may feel less excluded from Chance than from the other three Marlow novels. But he or she also retains a sense that the monovocal

consensual community represented by Marlow and his cohort of narrators and narratees marginalizess the perspectives of women, discourages the participation of actual readers gendered as women, and precludes the kind of dialogic conflictual interaction needed to disrupt Marlow's--and possibly Conrad's--"one of us" elitism and misogyny. Marlow overvalues the masculinist perspective in order to marginalize all others in an effort to achieve epistemic self-preservation. Conrad's Marlow novels are dominated by the masculinist perspective, which constricts the heteroglossia of communal interaction inherent in novelistic discourse--and in life. Charlotte Brontë's novels, on the other hand, embrace heteroglossia. I turn now to the novels of Charlotte Brontë to analyze her dialogic heteroglossic communities of narrators, narratees, addressees, and actual readers in search of community.

# CHAPTER IV

## CHARLOTTE BRONTE'S CONFLICTED COMMUNITIES OF PILGRIM NARRATORS AND READERS

> Men and women never struggle so hard as when they struggle alone, without witness, counsellor, or confidant; unencouraged, unadvised, and unpitied. (I-Narrator, Shirley, Ch 11, 200)

> Come near, by all means, reader; do not be shy: stoop over his shoulders fearlessly, and read as he scribbles. (I-Narrator, Shirley, Ch 29, 486)

> "The first speech was the difficulty, it revealed to me this fact, that it was not the crowd I feared as much as my own voice. . . . " (Lucy Snowe, Villette 125)

> "Why is Villette so disagreeable? . . . Because the writer's mind contains nothing but hunger, rebellion and rage, and therefore that is all she can, in fact put into her book." (Matthew Arnold to Mrs. Foster, April 14, 1853; rpt in Miriam Allott, The Brontës: The Critical Heritage 201)

### The Dialogic Search for Community in Charlotte Brontë's Novels

Telling the tale of search for selfhood in a meaningful world is difficult enough when both author and narrator belong to the same consensual interpretive community as the readers. Such is the case with Joseph Conrad's Marlow novels. The narrativization can become even more complex, however, when gender ideology and sex differences among the principles disrupt the communal consensus and

produce conflicted transmission from author to narrator, to narratee, to addressee or other actual reader. Charlotte Brontë's fictional depiction of four very different I-narrators--William Crimsworth in The Professor, Jane Eyre in Jane Eyre, the androgynous "I" in Shirley, and Lucy Snowe in Villette--along with their various conflictual communities of narratees and addressees (those actual readers whom the author is trying to reach), are fine cases in point. In the only four novels Brontë completed after abandoning her juvenile tales of Angria, she engages with her audience through the subjective mediation of first-person narrators.[1]

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[1] In her juvenile "Tales of Angria," Brontë often cross-dressed as the male persona/narrator and spoke directly to the reader. See, for example, Elaine Showalter's A Literature of Their Own, which lists some dozen male alter egos for the Brontë children and several for Charlotte alone who, Showalter suggests, may have identified action with maleness and passivity with femaleness. And in her "Farewell to Angria," she admits that she leaves the tales and their burning emotion behind with considerable reluctance:

> Yet do not urge me too fast, reader: it is not easy to dismiss from my imagination the images which have filled it so long; . . . When I depart from these I feel almost as if I stood on the threshold of a home and were bidding farewell to its inmates. When I [try] to conjure up new inmates I feel as if I had got into a distant country where every face was unknown and the character of all the population an enigma which it would take much study to comprehend and much talent to expound. Still, I long to quit for awhile that burning clime where we have sojourned too long--its skies flame-- . . . the mind would cease from excitement and turn now to a cooler region where the dawn breaks grey and sober, and the coming day for a time at least is subdued by clouds. (rpt. in Dunn's Norton edition of Jane Eyre 438)

Her first-written (although last-published) novel, The Professor, explores self-discovery from a cross-sexed and masculinist male narrator's perspective. The second, Jane Eyre, does the same from a female but masculinist narrator's point of view. The third, Shirley, experiments with an unnamed but characterized androgynous narrator who describes the experiences of two women and often enters the consciousness of one of them. Brontë's final novel, Villette, returns to the female reconstructer of experience, but this time she is feminized. In addition, each novel addresses various kinds of readers, sympathetic and critical, male and female, in an unending search for community.

Why such complex interrelationships, when a third-person narration could have claimed authorial omniscience about her subject? Why the subjective stance? Why the multiple addresses to the Reader--to the many readers? And above all, why the adoption of a self the actual author Brontë could never be, a man? The most common answer to the last question is that women writers of the nineteenth-century recognized that their work, should they get it pub-

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Even here the reader can sense the I-narrator's (in this case Brontë's but not unlike Marlow's) simultaneous need for and yet dread of finding a community of like souls in which to explore selfhood. Joan Ellen Piurek, in The Female Self in the Novels of Charlotte Brontë: The Dynamics of Change, suggests that Brontë abandons the Angrian Tales with their largely male-narrated "portraits of male sovereignty . . . and female submission" as "too confining and melodramatic to convey the truth of female experience" for a "struggle to find a more authentic voice than that which the earlier work had afforded her" (39)

lished at all, would at best be taken less seriously, at worst ridiculed if it appeared under their identifiably female names.[2]

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[2] As I have noted elsewhere ("George Eliot: Mary Ann Evans's Subversive Tool"), along with other critics, women writers of the nineteenth century recognized the dangers of publishing under their own names and often adopted pseudonyms to protect them from unfair criticism based on the sexual politics and gender ideologies of their time. Very recently, Joyce Carol Oates reminded us,

> . . . . For a woman to write under a male or a male-sounding pseudonym--"Currer Bell," for instance, instead of Charlotte Brontë . . . --may be a decision based upon practical expediency in a male-dominated culture; but it may also stimulate the imagination in unanticipated ways. . . . When Jane Eyre appeared in 1847 it was an immediate success . . . and much speculation raged concerning the probable sex of the author. The intelligence, vigor and passion of the work argued for its having been written by a man, commentators noted; at the same time, its sensitivity, and, of course, its point of view . . . , argued for its having been written by a woman. Harriet Martineau shrewdly saw that the author must be a woman because of the way Grace Poole . . . is depicted sewing rings into curtains. When it was revealed that "Currer Bell" was in fact a woman, the tone of criticism changed and became more pejorative. Now the (female author), was charged with "coarseness" and an "unseemly knowledge of passion" . . . . (12, 14)

And, in their new volume of their series on women writers, No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century. Vol 1: The War of the Words, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar describe some of the anxiety and antagonism male writers express in the ongoing "battle of the sexes" with their female colleagues. They remind us, for example, of Bret Harte's parody of Jane Eyre in "Miss Mix by Ch-l-tte Br-nte" in 1867,

> that the American humorist reinterprets as a muddled and melodramatic farce in which the smugly virtuous heroine leaves her childhood home at "Minerva Cottage" forever to enter the service (and the arms) of "Mr. Rawjester," the polygamous

The other questions demand more complex answers--or, more accurately, theories. The Charlotte Brontë novels, taken collectively, seem paradigmatic of Bakhtinian polyvocality, a dialogic process of heteroglossic and conflictual community interaction that [to use Joanne Frye's phrase] "disrupt[s] the complacency of a 'general consciousness'. . . . without imposing a forced consensus" ("Consensus or Community . . . " 5, 8). The Marlow novels, on the other hand, seem paradigmatic of monovocality in its most elitist and exclusionary form. Novels and discourse communities are heteroglossic by degrees, as Bakhtin argues; Conrad's Marlow novels are minimally heteroglossic.[3]

Marlow avoids the risk of otherness; Jane, Lucy, even Rochester and M. Paul, seek otherness with their constant masquerading and cross-dressing. The most notable cross-sex dresser is Edward Rochester, who has his most honest and direct discourse with Jane while he is disguised as an old

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> master of "Blunderbore Hall," who bears a remarkable likeness to a gorilla. (144)

Emmeline Grangerford is Mark Twain's parody in Huckleberry Finn of the female poet. Gilbert and Gubar see such "lighthearted caricatures . . . [as] comparable to the sexual hostility recorded by Hawthorne [who objected to that 'damned mob of scribbling women'] and James" (145).

3 Not all Conrad's novels constrict the heteroglossic nature of the narrative. See Bruce Henricksen, "The Construction of the Narrator in "The Nigger of the "Narcissus," for an analysis of this multi-voiced novel with its distinctive "I," "we," and "they" narration.

gypsy woman.[4] Lucy Snowe dons the dress of a man over her woman's dress, refusing to discard her woman's attire while she performs in the play as a man. Jane Eyre masquerades as Jane Elliott; Genevre's suitor as the elusive spirit of the buried nun; Bertha Rochester, silently, as the bride Jane. The Brontean community of narrators and readers becomes a macroscopic manifestation of Bakhtin's description of community interaction at the microscopic level of the words of its discourse:

> [A]ny concrete discourse (utterance) finds the object at which it was directed already as it were overlain with qualifications, open to dispute, charged with value, already enveloped in an obscuring mist--or, on the contrary, by the "light" of alien words that have already been spoken about it. It is entangled, shot through with shared thoughts, points of view, alien value judgments and accents. The word, directed toward its object, enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgments, and accents, weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with yet a third group: and all this may crucially shape discourse, may leave a trace in all its semantic layers, may complicate its expression and influence its entire stylistic profile. (Dialogic Imagination 276).

According to Bakhtin, dialogism is the study of subjectivity through intersubjectivity, through the many voices of the varied groups in an open community. Feminist dialogics inserts the question of how gender impacts that intersubjective discourse, in a critical process that feminizes Bakhtin

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[4] See Gail B. Griffin's cogent discussion of this scene in "The Humanization of Edward Rochester," 118-129 in Men by Women, edited by Janet Todd.

and frees the muted voices important to feminist inquiry. The Brontë novels demonstrate searches for selfhood in a Bakhtinian atmosphere, with the narrators--and Brontë--trying on one self after another in relation to the otherness of those around them, not submitting to the dominant other but rather searching for a non-subordinate and vocal position within the discourse community.[5]

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[5] I am grateful for the insights I have gained from the work of scholars of literary dialogics, especially Joanne Frye and Don Bialostosky, including the following quotation I hope I have transcibed accurately from Bialostosky's oral response at a session on dialogics at the MLA meeting in San Francisco, 1987:

> The self turning from one other to another as social self coming into being in a world of others is in a relation to otherness, not submitting to the voice of the dominant other.

And, as George Dillon says in "My Words of an Other,"

> Finding one's voice is . . . not just an emptying and purifying oneself of other's words, of the perverted commas [a Joycean term], an askesis, but also an admitting, an adopting, an embracing of filiations, communities, and discourses.
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> It is very hard when pursuing a Bakhtinian or developmental line of thought to avoid the implication that what one finds or forges is one's personal self or speech even when we explicitly remind ourselves that the self in question is one oriented toward an other and is usually accommodating itself to the other. (71)

A new study by Dale M. Bauer, Feminist Dialogics: A Theory of Failed Community, offers new insights into feminist literary dialogics; it applies Bakhtinian theory in a feminist framework to an examination of the structure of four American novels--The Blithedale Romance, The Golden Bowl, The House of Mirth, and The Awakening-- for representations of women's efforts to construct a self dialogically in a Bakhtinian "carnival" to disrupt the dominant monologic social voices.

An analysis of the increasingly complex intersubjective relationships among Brontë, her narrators, and their narratees and addressees demonstrates that Charlotte Brontë's four novels explore as a primary theme and in a dialogic way whether selfhood in any lasting heteroglossic community is possible for her dramatized narrators, or, indeed, for other women in her cultural and social milieu. Her texts seem to demonstrate that only the narrator who is already part of the dominant social structure, the male narrator, receives, and smugly accepts, societal communal support. The female narrators, on the other hand, endure varying degrees of isolation, losing rather than gaining community, while the androgynous narrator relates a tale of renunciation of self for the two female protagonists.

Taken together, the four novels illustrate narrative attempts to fashion fictional transformations of each of the narrators from an other into a self in heteroglossic conflictual community through the very act of the retrospective narration of earlier experience to an audience. In a similar way, the texts that Brontë creates seem like other selves that she tries on, to test their fit and either to accept a self as her own or to reject or sabotage it to try on another more suitable to the perception of herself that she wants to communicate to her audience. In the same way that the narrator tries to connect dialogically with in-

scribed readers, the actual readers try to connect dialogically with a text that can be read.[6]

In any narrative, the relationships, the communities, are complex and interrelated but are even more so in first-person narratives, because of the added difficulty of dis-

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[6] See Hetty Clews, The Only Teller: Readings in the Monologue Novel, for an articulate discussion of this concept, drawing on Martin Buber's I and Thou, Gabriel Marcel's The Mystery of Being, Paul Tillich's The Courage to Be (199-200). She talks of writers, but the concept applies equally to narrators as writers of their own stories:

> [T]he writer of a monologue novel starts from an other which he creates, and in seeking to participate fully in that self he invites the reader to create and participate with him. His act is a complex combination of involvement and self-consciousness which requires a similar empathetic identification from the reader as listener. Indeed, I suspect that a reader's fullest and deepest engagement as the respondent in such a communication may well bring to him also a heightened sense of self. Many important kinds of involvement require, in literature as in life, a combined sense of self and a recognition that the other is not-me. . . . (199)

Judith Kegan Gardiner relates this concept to the female author:

> I suggest that women writers and readers tend to approach texts differently from men. . . . [W]e can approach a text with the hypothesis that its female author is engaged in a process of testing and defining various aspects of identity chosen from many imaginative possibilities. That is, the woman writer uses her text, particularly one centering on a female hero, as part of a continuing process involving her own self-definition and her empathic identification with her character. . . . This can be a positive, therapeutic relationship, like learning to be a mother, that is, learning to experience oneself as one's own care-for child and as one's own caring mother while simultaneously learning to experience one's creation as other, as separate from the self. (187)

covering a text's polyvocality, of deriving other perspectives from subjective dramatized narrators' stances. These relationships include those between the actual reader and the author, in this study Jozef Korzeniowski or Charlotte Brontë; between the actual reader and the author's persona, in this case the male pseudonym Joseph Conrad and the androgynous Currer Bell; between the actual reader and the narrator; between the actual reader and the narratees in the text; between the mock or implied reader, or the addressee, and the narrator; between the internally inscribed readers, or narratees, and the narrator.

The actual reader can only infer the author Charlotte Brontë's attitudes toward community through her texts, from which she has distanced herself not only through the device of a first-person narrator, but also by adopting a male or at least an androgynous persona in her pseudonym Currer Bell. In The Professor, a woman writer is masked as a male writer disguised as a male teacher reconstructing his experience. In Jane Eyre and Villette we have one less layer to worry about, but we are faced with making sense of what critics have long accepted as the female author's own autobiography disguised as fiction by a male or androgynous Currer Bell disguised as autobiography by female narrators Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe. In Shirley, the female author assumes the male persona to meld the two together into an androgynous I-narrator whose addressees take on all shapes

as she/he searches for an understanding community who can interpret her/his story. Such complex narrative stances produce multiple polyvocal and conflictual communities of internal readers with which to share the struggle to "read" the narratives.

Trying to get back through the text to the actual author through this multi-masked and yet intercommunicative maze is difficult, speculation at best. Is Currer a male or a female? The persona's sexual identity is left ambiguous, unlike the heralded maleness of the author, the narrators, the characters, and the inscribed readers in Conrad's Marlow novels. I concentrate instead on the relationships I establish with the narrator, the narratees, and the addressees and from there infer Charlotte Brontë's attitudes toward the possibility of communicating experience and the possibility of joining in a lasting community for her narrators.

## The Brontean Search for Community

What kinds of readers do the narrators appeal to in their search for--or rejection of--community for themselves? Do I belong to any of the interpretive communities Brontë creates? In other words, do I identify with Brontë's narrator's narratees or addressees or must I reject hers in favor of creating my own from the gaps in the text as part of the reading process? Central to all these questions is the impact of gender on my responses, mine as well as that of the fictive characters and their author.

As I indicated in chapter one, the recent studies by Robyn Warhol and Brenda Silver contribute to our critical understanding of narrators and their readers. Warhol distinguishes engaging narrators, those who encourage identification of the actual reader with the narratees in the novels of Gaskell, Stowe, and Eliot, and, indeed, of the narrator with the author, from distancing narrators, those who discourage the actual reader's identification with the narratee and the narrator with the author. Warhol points out that the better defined the narratee, the greater the distance between the actual reader and the "you" inscribed in the text, a characteristic she defines as distancing. But the engaging narrator tries to eliminate differences between the narratee, the addressee, and the actual reader. Such a narrator avoids naming the narratee or ascribes names that refer to large classes of potential actual readers. The engaging narrator refers to the reader more often as "you" than as "reader."

Warhol's engaging narrator usually assumes he or she has the sympathy of the narratees, and even if the narrator implies that the narratees comprehend imperfectly, they can rise to the challenge. An engaging narrator often overjustifies assertions but only in the spirit of converting the already favorably disposed narratee to a particular point of view. An engaging narrator insists that the characters are as "real" as the narrator and the narratee, very

like the actual reader and the actual author. These narrators intrude in their stories to remind their narratees (who should be identified with the actual readers) that the fictions reflect real-life social conditions which the actual reader should act to improve. Finally, Warhol suggests that the referential nature of women's texts with engaging narrators may be gender-based, with women speaking out in their texts through their narrator in the absence of a public forum. Warhol concentrates on gender-identification between narrator and author. But the implications extend to the narrator-reader relationships also. To her hypothesis I would add that the actual reader's ability or inability to identify with the narratee may also be gender-driven. I will return to Warhol's typology shortly to discuss how Brontë's narrators fit within it.

Warhol categorizes narrators; Brenda Silver identifies [in Villette] the "reflecting reader," one who is "part critic, part confidante, part sounding board - whose willingness to enter [the narrator's] world and interpret her text will provide the recognition denied to women who do not follow traditional paths of development" (92). According to Silver, as the story progresses the narrator takes control of the narrative by creating a community of readers, and as the critical reader merges into the sympathetic (reflecting) reader. Although Silver does not differentiate between types of readers, her theory applies equally well to the

narratees, the readers the narrator inscribes within the text, for analysis of Brontë's other novels to discover Silver's reflecting readers in them.

I would suggest that reflecting readers are found only in texts in which the narrator, the narratee, the addressee, and the actual reader belong to the same monovocal and consensual interpretive community; in Conrad's Marlow novels, such a community is gendered as male. On the other hand, the distancing narrator, such as Lucy Snowe, has a critical narratee who the narrator suspects does not adhere in the same belief system; often such a narratee is male. The actual reader may find himself or herself identifying with only the narrator or only the narratee or the addressee when the situation is disengaging and critical and all involved do not belong to the same gendered community. But the actual reader should identify with all the other players in this narrativization if they all belong to a monovocal and consensual community gendered as the same sex as the actual reader.

In The Professor, for example, the male narrator William Crimsworth generally addresses a male narratee and, I believe, a male addressee. Yet I, the actual reader, am put off by the narrator, whom I find smug, self-satisfied, and a cruel "master" to his student turned wife Frances Henri. I believe my response is gender related.

By Charlotte Brontë's standards, The Professor contains few direct addresses to the reader. William Crimsworth first introduces himself by reproducing a letter that he had written to his "Eton chum Charles," but since he had received no answer in a year's time he decided to narrate his story in his "leisure time" to the "public" (ch 1, 1). The narrator eschews a supposedly close male friend who would have shared consensually his community values in favor of the general public, which could, of course, include all of us within an engaging narrator's opening stance.

The narrator soon jeopardizes his initial engaging stance when he becomes coy with the reader, withholding details.[7] For example, in describing his friend Hunsden, Crimsworth says, ". . . though just now, as I am not disposed to paint his portrait in detail, the reader must be content with the silhouette I have just thrown off" (ch 3, 15). Here the reader could be both addressee and any actual reader, and the narrator is clearly distancing himself from all of us. The same general reader is addressed before and after Crimsworth describes Belgium: "Reader, perhaps you were never in Belgium? . . . this is Belgium, reader" (ch 7, 37-38). While implicating the general reader's ignorance,

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[7] In the narrativization of Lucy Snowe, this coyness is raised to its heights. See Karen Chase, Eros & Psyche: The Representation of Personality in Charlotte Brontë, Charles Dickens, and George Eliot for a good discussion of the "subtle" evasive strategies employed by the first-person narrators in Brontë's novels.

the narrator does not completely alienate us because he informs us about the country rather than ridicules us for our limited travel experience, much in the manner of one of Warhol's engaging narrators.

Soon, though, the narrator begins to address a reader that I take to be gendered as male or masculinist because of the implicit sexist complicity I read into the narrator-narratee relationship. In this instance, Crimsworth chides the reader for misreading his relationship with Mdlle. Reuter as having an amorous element: "Do not mistake me, reader, it was no amorous influence she wished to gain - at that time it was only the power of the politician to which she aspired; . . she wanted to know where her mind was superior to mine" (ch 10, 58). Feminist readers read nothing in the text to suggest that this was an amorous interaction; masculinist readers might stereotypically think this way. This becomes, then, an example of the narrator engaging the narratee and probably the addressee but disengaging a particular type of actual reader, a feminist reader who corrects the masculinist reading.

This masculinist complicity that acts to exclude or marginalize women's perspectives becomes even more pronounced a little later when Crimsworth admonishes the reader for daring to think that he would ogle or otherwise be swayed by his students' "female charms": "Know, O incredulous reader! . . . to the tutor, female youth, female

charms, are like tapestry hangings, of which the wrong side is continually turned towards him . . . so no one should marvel that he can 'moderate his conduct' toward fair pupils" (ch 14, 87). The narrator would be unlikely to direct such a comment to a female reader, or any reader who might consider a tutor ogling his students an aberration rather than the common-place event the narrator implies it is. Again, I see this as the work of a narrator distancing himself from at least one group of readers, male feminist readers as well as women, while engaging himself communally with the addressee, a male cohort. Like Marlow, this narrator excludes through insult.

In a typically patriarchal labeling of the temptor as female, Crimsworth personifies his Imagination and berates her for being a temptress to him as he pines for Frances (ch 22, 149-150). A feminist contemporary reader would resist the illusory power of woman as temptress, although Brontë's contemporaries would not necessarily find the stereotype offensive, and a masculinist addressee might even appreciate it. In The Professor, Brontë genders the abstraction Imagination as female. In Lord Jim, however, Charlie Marlow genders Imagination as male:

> "The danger, when not seen, has the imperfect vagueness of human thought. The fear grows shadowy; and Imagination, the enemy of men, the father of all terrors, unstimulated, sinks to rest in the dulness of exhausted emotion. . . . " (LJ 15)

That Brontë's Imagination is woman and Conrad's is man reflects the literary stereotype that creative acts are fathered or mothered depending on the sex of the author.[8] In this case the narrator is male and the author female, causing a disruption of the dominant perspective.

Another example of masculinist narrator/narratee consensual complicity is when the narrator describes the end of his nine days of hypochondria and sense of mortality to the reader as something he rejected like "a dreaded and ghastly concubine" (ch 23, 174). Calling one's concubine dreaded and ghastly suppresses the man's complicity in making her so; this is, again, a comment unlikely to endear feminist readers to the narrator.

This was the last direct address to the reader in The Professor. Once William Crimsworth has married Frances Henri, the inscribed reader or narratee disappears, almost as though the bachelor party is over and Crimsworth settles down to complacent married life in a consensual community, until he writes his memoirs to the "public" and takes a break from his writing for tea with his family and Hunsden. And complacent he is, indeed smug.

Yet feminist readers can respond in a sympathetic way to this novel because we take the author's treatment of the narrator as distancing, as a critique of conventional mascu-

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[8] See especially the work of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar for discussion of literary fatherhood and motherhood.

linist communal attitudes. By reading in a dialogically feminist way, by filling in the gaps between what the narrator says to his narratees and to his addressees and what is demonstrated at the level of the plot and especially in the compelling voice of the female character Frances, we can go beyond Crimsworth's voice and his consensual concept of community. I enter into a more dialogic one which can place Crimsworth's smugness into better perspective for me. Only by re-reading dialogically can I make sense of Crimsworth's ability to gain my sympathy in the beginning of his tale. He demonstrates for me his ability to make something of himself in an honorable way after struggling through youth as a poor orphan, voluntarily isolating himself from one side of his family, abused by the other, and rejecting them all as unworthy. He, unlike Marlow, has no epistemological dilemma. He tells his story and shapes an unequivocal self living in a socially constructed reality.

The problem is that he starts out as a sympathetic character and turns into a patriarchal bully to his wife, who is by far the most endearing character in this novel. She speaks for a woman's (or, at least, an alternative) point of view, especially in her insistence on a woman's need for an independent financial existence and her criticisms of women staying in bad marriages as slaves. The narrator says that Frances Henri blossoms into life under his tutelage (ch 18, 110), but instead the novel demon-

strates her struggle for the right to speak at all and to maintain her own independent livelihood after their marriage. When "the professor" tutors Frances and scolds her, so agitated is she by being dominated and marginalized that she chips away at her pencil with a penknife, "defending herself by monosyllables" (ch 19). Frances, unlike Marlow's women, struggles to be heard, refuses to be silenced. Yet when she marries her tutor/professor, Frances actually has to split herself into two wives: the elegant, superior directress of her husband's school by day, and his "own little lace-mender magically restored to my arms" by night (192).

Crimsworth, like Marlow, dichotomizes and marginalizes women. He prides himself on his ability to subdue Frances's spirit when she vexes him: he simply grabs her arm and she becomes submissive (193). He is insensitive to her, especially her sensitivity to Hunsden's continual offensiveness. At the end of the novel, he sits in his library writing his memoirs to "us" (a group which is not likely to include feminist readers who feel as excluded from this group as they do from Marlow's elitist "us" community). While writing, Crimsworth neglects his family, who must beg him to break for tea. He seems not to realize that Frances has contributed equally to his financial success and is an integral part of his story, perhaps the most interesting part. His overt project is to become a social success and

to define a self, and his covert project is to subjugate Frances. In this novel, my sympathy and empathy is with Frances, not with her misogynist husband. As a dialogically feminist reader, I have focused on a perspective that cannot control me, one that subverts Crimsworth's.

Unlike Marlow's reticent women, however, Frances has a voice, no matter how marginalized Crimsworth tries to make it. I "read" the voice that traces her development across concurrent hierarchies of master/pupil and master/wife. This voice assures Frances's husband that she would endure a bad husband as much as she could, then leave the "'slavery'" of her "'torturer suddenly and silently'" for a "'freedom'" she considered "'indispensible'" to life (195). This voice describes the miniature of Hunsden's mysterious but rejected beloved, Lucia, as the face of a woman who "'once wore [social] chains and broke them [in] a successful and triumphant effort to wrest some vigorous and valued faculty from insupportable constraint'" (200). Frances has a voice that invites the responses of feminist readers.

Charlotte Brontë's distancing or ironic portrayal of a patriarchal male narrator and his community of masculinist narratees and addressees seems awkward at best.[9] It effectively disengages the narrator from me, a feminist actual

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[9] See Ann Robinson Taylor for a cogent discussion of the tone in The Professor: "That book is afflicted . . . with an almost painfully awkward tone. It would seem that for a woman to imagine herself a young, heroic male presents complex, rarely attempted difficulties" (6).

reader, preventing me from entering into a sympathetic community with them. Crimsworth constructs a social community for himself and the characters in his story, and an interpretive one for himself and his narratee and addressee. But as a feminist actual reader going beyond Crimsworth's stated questions in The Professor, I detect an implied criticism of the narrator himself, the marriage structure of the time, and the economic status of women and young male orphans. I, like Frances Henri, join with an interpretive community that is more heteroglossic and conflictual than Crimsworth's to escape being dominated by his single perspective.

There are no reflecting readers in this novel. The engagement of the dialogically feminist reader is instead with an author who, having cross-dressed as the male and adopted a masculinist voice to present a "culture-bound" "plausible" (Genette) narrative of a woman's story from a dominant male's perspective, subverts her own narrator in the process by exposing his foolish smugness. Crimsworth's reconstruction is not so much one of a struggle to place himself in a community of peers as it is to show his power over "his" woman in the world he constructs for her. He gains community. Frances remains marginalized by Crimsworth except through rigorous dialogic re-reading of her story

that gives weight to her voice, one in conflictual interaction with Crimsworth's perspective.[10]

Yet it is important to note that Brontë dramatizes Crimsworth as achieving a community and a selfhood, and a financially secure one at that. He is part of the dominant social structure and engages in the dominant social discourse that alienates and thus excludes part of his actual readership. Isolating him as Brontë later did her female narrators would have been unrealistic. In Charlotte Brontë's other three novels, however, the narrators are unable to tell such "culture-bound" "plausible" narratives, because, I suspect, Brontë is dramatizing women positioned

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[10] Terry Eagleton says that Crimsworth is "a character whose very prosaicness equips himself for survival and success" (78); I, however, would suggest that his maleness equipped him for his survival and success. Eagleton says, "The Professor is loud with the human truths it smothers; it is the very unshakeability of Crimsworth's composure, its sustained, uncrackable contrivance, which persuades us of the fundamental anxiety lurking unconfessed behind it" (78), but I would suggest these "truths" are exposed at a level other than the narrative voice and that Brontë's female character, Frances Henri, exposes him in a very subtle way. Conflating the narrator with the author, Eagleton attributes the failure to the novel rather than to Crimsworth: "The novel's apparently crass insensitivity to its hero's complacency - to the fact that he is, unknown to himself or (it appears) the novel, a thoroughly unlikeable character" (78-79). Saying the novel is neither unironic nor ironic, he complains, "the novel seems instead to inhabit some third, less easily definable category. . . . the novel grimly refuses to render him personable" (80). To which I say, of course! The irony is that we here have a female author masked as a man exposing a smug patriarch for the insensitive and unlikeable character he is. I agree with Eagleton that Crimsworth is a "manifestly untrustworthy narrator," but a dialogically feminized reading exposes him as such; it disrupts Crimsworth's narrative and refuses to be dominated by his perspective.

outside the dominant sphere.[11] These female narrators use their narratees in a variety of ways, not only to distance themselves from certain types of masculinist narratees and addressees, but also to justify, indeed overjustify, their "arbitrary" or "implausible" narratives to those sympathetic reflecting narratees, addressees, and actual readers they try so hard to cultivate in their search for a comforting community and self-realization.[12]

Jane Eyre's narrative community is dialogic, polyvocal, and conflictual. She constructs a few critical narratees, deflecting their adverse judgments of her in an effort to justify the selfhood she needs desperately to develop through her narration. Her first direct address in the novel is to critical narratee Mrs. Reed, as she retrospec-

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[11] Shirley and Edwin Ardener suggest that women have simultaneously a muted culture and take part in the dominant male culture as well. Women's muted cultural beliefs are accessible through their expression in ritual and art to both sexes willing "to make the effort to perceive beyond the screens of the dominant structure" (qtd in Elaine Showalter 262). As Showalter interprets it, the Ardener theory positions women in the "Wild Side," in that crescent of woman's sphere lying outside the dominant male sphere. The crescent is inaccessible to men, but, "In terms of cultural anthropology, women know what the male crescent is like, even if they have never seen it, because it becomes the subject of legend (like the wilderness). But men do not know what is in the wild" ("Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" 262).

[12] Note that Nancy Miller points out that "plausible" narratives devolve from judgments made within a dominant cultural ideology and that "implausible" narratives may simply be unheard by that dominant ideology (39).

tively criticizes (in Christ's words) the treatment she met as a child at the elder woman's hands:

> Yes, Mrs Reed, to you I owe some fearful pangs of mental suffering. But I ought to forgive you, for you knew not what you did: while rending my heart-strings, you thought you were only uprooting my bad propensities. (52)

The retrospective Jane is able to view the trauma with measure of forgiveness, thereby rendering her sympathetic to the generalized (androgynized?) actual reader even as she castigates her narratee Mrs. Reed. Jane's distancing from Mrs. Reed reflects her refusal, then and now, to be silenced, imprisoned, or marginalized by Mrs. Reed, who functions as the first of several otherwise male representatives of the patriarchal culture that tries so diligently to exclude Jane.[13] This is a case of the narrator criticizing the narratee who has been critical of her, thus distancing herself from her critical narratee as she engages with actual readers who can identify with her childhood plight without ever having suffered it themselves.

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[13] Others extend from John Reed at Gateshead to St. John Rivers at the Marsh and include Mr. Brocklehurst at Lowood and Rochester at Thornfield, all of whom attempt to isolate, silence, or imprison Jane in one way or another. St. John actually manages to wrest the narration away from Jane when he tells her he has discovered her background:

> "I find the matter will be better managed by my assuming the narrator's part, and converting you into a listener. Before commencing, it is but fair to warn you that the story will sound somewhat hackneyed in your ears; but stale details often regain a degree of freshness when they pass through new lips. For the rest, whether truth or novel, it is short" (405).

Other instances in which Jane deflects potential criticism from an unsympathetic narratee include her distancing herself from "persons who entertain solemn doctrines about the angelic nature of children, and the duty of those charged with their education to conceive for them an idolatrous devotion" (140). Jane effectively disengages from those who would try to "flatter parental egotism, to echo cant, or prop up humbug; I am merely telling the truth" (140). Also, she clearly is demarginalizing herself as she attacks those actual readers who share the dominant patriarchal attitudes by complaining about those who would "blame" her for yearning for a wider world than Thornfield:

> Who blames me? Many, no doubt; and I shall be called discontented. I could not help it; the restlessness was in my nature. . . . human beings . . . must have action. . . . women feel just as much as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; . . . and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex. (140-141)[14]

Here the indirect narratee is the patriarch and the addressee is anyone who would sympathize with her yearning. Jane demonstrates a ready willingness during her search for community to engage dialogically with other perspectives,

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[14] Note that she reconstructs this yearning even as she sits isolated in Ferndean, a detail we do not learn from Jane until much later in her narrativization and can comment on only during a dialogic re-reading.

and her addresses to the reader illustrate the conflictual nature of the polyvocal interpretive community to which dialogically feminist readers belong.

Yet Jane, like all narrators searching for community, appeals mostly to readers who are most likely to reach consensus with her. I interpret the majority of the narratees whom Jane addresses as "Reader" to be sympathetic reflecting readers as Silver would define them. Although the first "reader" she directly addresses is male ("Let the reader add, to complete the picture, refined features, a complexion, pale, clear; and a stately air and carriage, and he will have at least as clearly as words can give it, a correct idea of the exterior of Miss Temple"), I believe the narrator is striving to create a community of narratees, addressees, and actual readers who are largely sympathetic, probably female, certainly feminist. She yearns, like Marlow, for a consensual community. But unlike the Marlow texts, Brontë's text demonstrates that the consensual community is but a constructed illusion.

In the other direct addresses to narratees, Jane concentrates on winning the resisting reader to her cause, justifying herself when she anticipates a particular narratee's disapproval of her actions, trying to form a community in which her constructed world view could be understood and appreciated rather than marginalized. For example, explaining why she seemed to abandon Helen Burns and her superior

intellect for an inferior conversationalist, Mary Ann Wilson, she says, "True, reader, I knew and felt this; and though I am a defective being, with many faults and few redeeming points, yet I never tired of Helen Burns . . ." (109); she was, Jane explains, dying.

Jane often encourages the reader to feel sympathy for her in her social isolation. When she arrives at Millcote on her way to Thornfield, she emphasizes again her isolation in life in an effort to engage the reader:

> . . . when I draw up the curtain this time, reader - you must fancy you see a room in the George Inn at Millcote . . .. Reader, though I look comfortably accommodated, I am not very tranquil in my mind. . . . It is a very strange sensation to inexperienced youth to feel itself quite alone in the world, cut adrift from every connection, uncertain whether the part to which it is bound can be reached and prevented by many impediments from returning to that it has quitted. (125)

In another instance, while showing Rochester her portfolio, she displays her modesty about her own artistic capability: "While he is so occupied, I will tell you, reader, what they are: and first, I must premise that they are nothing wonderful . . ." (156).

Trying to gain sympathy by justifying her attraction to Rochester, who is by all accounts an immoral man, she rationalizes:

> And was Mr Rochester now ugly in my eyes? No, reader: gratitude and many associations, all pleasurable and genial, made his face the object I best liked to see; his presence in a room was more cheering than the brightest fire. Yet I had not forgotten his faults. . . . But I believed that his moodiness, his harshness, and his former

> faults of morality (I say former, for now he seemed corrected of them) had their source in some cruel cross of fate. I believed he was naturally a man of better tendencies, higher principles, and purer tastes than such as circumstances had developed, education instilled, or destiny encouraged. (178)

At another time, Jane, trying to deflect potential criticism from a generally sympathetic and reflecting narratee/reader, says, "You are not to suppose, reader, that Adele has all this time been sitting motionless on the stool at my feet" (202).

At one point, Jane identifies her narratee as someone who is intimately acquainted with--and agreeable to--Jane's thoughts: "the reader knows I had wrought hard to extirpate from my soul the germs of love there detected . . . He made me love him without looking at me" (204); and with the Thornfield area: "The church, as the reader knows, was but just beyond the gates; . . " (315).

Other instances of sympathetic identification with the narratee/reader include her astounding forgiveness of Rochester's attempt to turn her into a mistress:

> Reader, I forgave him at the moment and on the spot. There was such deep remorse in his eye, such true pity in his tone, such manly energy in his manner; and besides, there was such unchanged love in his whole look and mien - I forgave him all: yet not in words, not outwardly; only at my heart's core. (326)

Here the narrator is willing to share her heart's core with her trusted narratee while at the same time eliciting approval of that same narratee for having the fortitude to not

share it with the erring Rochester. She appeals to the reader's sympathy again when she returns to the room after walking out on him: "I had already gained the door; but, reader, I walked back - walked back as determinedly as I had retreated. . .," prefacing this by calling the reader's attention to the anguished, "deep, strong sob" which drew her back in utmost sympathy with the aggrieved man (345). Jane wants the reader's approval and she is willing to manipulate the reader's responses to gain it. Jane understands the price of acceptance into a community and struggles for consensus with her readers.

Jane recounts her agony after she flees Thornfield in an elliptical way, appealing to the reader to spare her the reliving:

> Gentle reader, may you never feel what I then felt! May your eyes never shed such stormy, scalding, heart-wrung tears as poured from mine. May you never appeal to Heaven in prayers so hopeless and so agonized as in that hour left my lips; for never may you, like me, dread to be the instrument of evil to what you wholly love. . . . Reader, it is not pleasant to dwell on these details. Some say, there is enjoyment in looking back to painful experience past; but at this day I can scarcely bear to review the times to which I allude. . . . Let me condense now. I am sick of the subject. . . . Do not ask me, reader, to give a minute account of that day. (348, 355)

And so it goes on throughout the rest of Jane's narrativization of her experiences, until the supernatural voice sends her reeling back to Rochester and she can announce to all of us, "Reader, I married him" (474). Jane assiduously cultivates her narratee's sympathy for her struggles, her

terrors, her joy in her avowed happiness with Rochester. She gains it with her actual reader. This narrator, unlike the narrator in The Professor, can enter into an interpretive community with me, both an addressee and a feminist actual reader, just as she works to achieve one with her narratee, "Reader."[15] A feminist reader, male or female,

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[15] Just as Terry Eagleton seems to have missed the irony in the female author's depiction of her male narrator William Crimsworth because his own gender ideologies seem to hinder him, so Sylvere Monod seems unable to join the community of reflecting readers and addressees that the narrator of Jane Eyre constructs for the edification of those actual readers who can identify with them. Monod clearly cannot; he seethes over the seeming affronts the narrator commits against the reader in the direct address passages. For example, he interprets the narrator/narratee statements as addresses to "many fools, cowards, and Pharisees" (498), "in constant need of being taken by the hand and helped along. Even the apparently flattering phrase 'as the reader knows' is in fact a reproach. . . . The phrase actually means, 'as the reader, by this time, ought to know, but has all too probably forgotten'" (498-499). He cites only one case in which the actual reader is "apparently allowed freedom of judgment. . . I say apparently, for it is clear that our judgment can in no way influence the narrator's conviction and that in fact we are invited, not so much to judge freely as to judge well, that is, to judge like Jane" (499).

Monod has much more to say against the narrator/reader relationship, clearly feeling that the narrator masculinizes the narratee and disengages herself from the actual reader. Not until well into the article does a feminized reader begin to sense why this critic has interpreted these passages so drastically: a feminist reader is able to identify with, to engage with, this narrator and her narratees; Monod is a man who refuses to enter into this communal relationship, to become feminized, and is instead operating out of nationalistic French consensual community in objection to the anti-French (and anti-Catholic) bias that pervades Brontë's novels. He resents her writing as a man and addressing herself to male readers:

> . . . the creature we have just been looking at

can hear her discourse and respond to her voice in conflict with other voices.

Yet I am disturbed at the end of Jane Eyre, because I sense a gap between Jane's narration and what I detect as an authorial voice in conflict with Jane's and in dialogue with the actual reader. Jane Eyre reconstructs for us her early life in a number of social communities. She is outside or marginalized in all of them, yet refuses to be mastered by any of the dominant members of those communities, trying to

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> through Jane's eyes, this contemptible being, conventional, silly, cowardly, ignorant, and vain, coincides at every point with the image which the Brontë girls pictured to themselves of the average male. . . . . The tone which Charlotte uses to address the reader, being herself shielded by her male or equivocal pen-name, is what she fancies to be the tone of a conversation between men.. . . . It may be out of masculine vanity that I believe them to be mistaken about those strange animals, because they know very little about them. (504-05).

This seems an especially good example of the impact of the reader's genderization on the reading. George Henry Lewes and Virginia Woolf, on the other hand, are among the many readers of Jane Eyre whose readings were not disrupted in the way Monod's seems to be, suggesting that they took no cultural offense at Jane's comments. Elizabeth Rigby, Lady Eastlake, however, took umbrage on religious and moral grounds. A masculinist reader, Lady Eastlake condemns Jane as "the personification of an unregenerate and undisciplined spirit [with] a heathen mind that is a law unto itself" (450). (In other words, Jane doesn't accept God's will and man's domination.) Her contemporary, John Eagles, a masculinist of a different ilk, glides over Rochester's "great faults" to applaud the novel's depiction of virtue: "And yet so singular is the fatality of love, that it would be impossible to find two characters so necessary to exhibit true virtues, and make the happiness of each" (473-4). See Janet Freeman, "Speech and Silence in Jane Eyre," for a recent discussion of the compelling nature of Jane's addresses to the reader.

escape them and the isolation-within-the-group that they inflict on her. She repeatedly yearns for a wider world:

> I tired of the routine of eight years in one afternoon. I desired liberty; for liberty I gasped; for liberty I uttered a prayer; it seemed scattered on the wind then faintly blowing. I abandoned it and framed a humbler supplication. For change, stimulus. That petition, too, seemed swept off into vague space. "Then," I cried, half desperate, "grant me at least a new servitude." (117)

When she gains it, at Thornfield, she still feels isolated:

> Anybody may blame me who likes, when I add further, that, now and then, when I took a walk by myself. . . . [I would] "look out afar" [toward] worlds, towns, regions full of life I had heard of but never seen; that then I desired more of practical experience than I possessed. . . . It is in vain to say human beings ought to be satisfied with tranquility: they must have action; and they will make it if they cannot find it. (140-141)

She then goes on to decry the plight of women who are not satisfied with knitting, quoted earlier. She says, "I was weary of an existence all passive" (147). When she finds her first real home on the Moor with St. John Rivers and his sisters, she yearns to be "active: as active as I can" (423). Both Rochester and St. John Rivers try to control Jane into passivity, and Rochester succeeds. Jane, like Conrad's Flora de Barral Anthony, becomes re-marginalized.

By the end of her reconstructed narrative, she has "chosen"--and she emphasizes this in her narration, protesting a little too much--the smallest of communities, composed only of herself and her husband, and she is sequestered at Ferndean, in complete seclusion from the very world for

which she had yearned years earlier. She rarely sees her new-found family, Diane and Mary Rivers, whom she claims to love so much. She has sent Adele away to a school because she was too much to handle in light of the complete care that Rochester in his maimed state required of her. She speaks, finally, in a patriarchal monologic voice, as a clinging vine to Rochester's "mighty oak."[16]

None of this rings quite right with me, and I read it as a subversion or disruption of Jane's narrative, an authorial or reader's critique of Jane's arbitrarily constructed consensual community. Although Jane is often thought of as triumphant because she achieves a sexual bond with Rochester, however contextualized in patriarchy it is, the text does not demonstrate the joy that Jane purports to have in her final situation in life. At the level of the plot, Jane is deprived of the fully conflictual yet supportive community she needs. She is forced to play out her role not as superior to Rochester whom she has finally subdued but as diminished to his level, clinging hard to her only friends, the consensual community of readers she constructs in her desperate isolation.[17] Her final words may well have been

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[16] I am grateful to Susan Jaret McKinstry for suggesting this connection to me.

[17] For a supporting view, see Maurianne Adams, "Jane Eyre: Woman's Estate," The Authority of Experience: Essays in Feminist Criticism:

> Rereading Jane Eyre, I am led inevitably to feminist issues, by which I mean the status and econom-

the ones she spoke earlier: "Alas, this isolation - this banishment from my kind!" (361). Jane consents to marginalization, but the dialogically feminist reader reads across Jane's voice to the Brontean disruption of that perspective to inject a conflicting perspective into the communal discourse.

In Charlotte Brontë's third novel, Shirley, she departs from the genderized narrator, from the single male and female protagonists, and from the relatively limited number of narratees that we have seen in The Professor and Jane Eyre. Brontë seems to have pulled out all the stops in her

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> ics of female dependence in marriage, the limited options available to Jane as an outlet for her education and energies, her need to love and be loved, to be of service, and be needed. These aspirations, the ambivalence expressed by the narrator toward them and the conflicts among them, are all issues raised by the novel itself. (140)

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have described Jane's development as distinctively female bildungsroman in which Jane achieves equality to Rochester and triumphs. Although they discuss the strain that develops in the essentially unequal relationship, saying "Rochester's loving tyranny recalls John Reed's unloving despotism, and the erratic nature of Rochester's favors . . . recalls Brocklehurst's hypocrisy," they believe that Jane achieves both her maturity and an equality with Rochester that insures their success. ". . . [U]ntil she reaches the goal of her pilgrimage--maturity, independence, true equality with Rochester (and therefore in a sense with the rest of the world)--she is doomed to carry her orphaned alter ego everywhere" (Madwoman in the Attic 338-39, 357).

See also Karen Chase's discussion of Jane's growth as a negative example of a bildungsroman, in that those around her become diminished or die in order to remove their threat to her (77-78). Chase also reads Shirley as a negative example: "Shirley reminds us that Brontë is no more a prophet of freedom than she is a priestess of love" (80-81).

search for an interpretive community in which her narrator--and, by association, she--can interact dialogically rather than submit to the dominant discourse. This time she gives us her least gendered narrator, an androgynous I-narrator who is only dramatized for a while at the beginning and at the very end of the novel. This "I" tries to conflate all interpretive communities into one large androgynous one.

> We are going back to the beginning of this century. . . . You shall see them [the curates], reader. Step into this neat garden-house . . , walk forward into the little parlour - there they are at dinner. Allow me to introduce them to you. . . . You and I will join the party, see what is to be seen, and hear what is to be heard. At present, however, they are only eating; and while they eat we will talk aside. . . ." (39-40)

The narrator invites her/his friend, the reader, to participate in this scene and in several others throughout the novel. A little after this first scene, though, the narrator describes one of the curates as though the reader has not accompanied him/her from this scene to the next (59), and shortly afterwards acknowledges that she/he is writing rather than speaking; the participating narratee has become the reader/narratee (61). This shifting narrative stance is one that I call the retrospective present: the narrator tells of past events but often does so as though they are happening "to the moment," to borrow Richardson's phrase. It occurs in Jane Eyre, notably in the scenes in which Jane is extremely agitated, such as the orchard scene when Rochester follows her and asks her to marry him, but in

Shirley it occurs frequently. The effect is to demonstrate the urgency of enfolding us directly in her community, no matter how much conflict our differing perspectives may cause.

This novel is significant for its doubling of romantic couples as well as for its backgrounded I-narrator. The community enlarges, this time with equal numbers of men and women, so there are no apparently dominant and controlling voices. Here there are two Brontëan women, Caroline Helstone and Shirley Keeldar (who, curiously, appears two hundred pages into the novel), and two brothers, Robert Moore and Louis Gerard, to play the morally inferior male counterparts. We are often in the consciousness of Caroline, and it is she who most resembles the poor orphaned and silent woman archetype who appears in all four novels.

In this dialogic novel, the I-narrator's direct addresses to critical narratees abound. She/he quickly disengages from them; here, the "parson-hater":

> I am aware, reader, and you need not remind me, that it is a dreadful thing for a parson to be warlike: I am aware that he should be a man of peace. I have some faint outline of an idea of what a clergyman's mission is amongst mankind, and I remember distinctly whose servant he is; whose message he delivers, whose example he should follow; yet, with all this, if you are a parson-hater, you need not expect me to go along with you every step of your dismal, downward-tending, unchristian road; you need not expect me to join in your deep anathemas, at once so narrow and so sweeping - in your poisonous rancour so intense and so absurd, against "the cloth"; . . . .the evil simply was - he had missed his vocation; he should have been a soldier. . . . It seems to me,

> reader, that you cannot always cut men to fit their profession, and that you ought not to curse them because that profession sometimes hangs on them ungracefully. . . . (ch 3, 67-68)

The narrator here anticipates criticism of her/his portrayal of the parson and carries out a brutal preemptive strike, so that any reader who realizes he or she is thinking ill of the parson will immediately feel sheepish. The reader who even thinks of challenging the description of Mr. Yorke provided by the narrator earns this: "If you expect to be treated to a Perfection, reader, or even to a benevolent philanthropic old gentleman in him, you are mistaken. . . . you are not . . . to conclude that he always spoke and thought justly and kindly" (ch 3, 76). Yet the narrator softens, a little, with,

> . . . though I describe imperfect characters (every character in this book will be found to be more or less imperfect, my pen refusing to draw anything in the model line), I have not undertaken to handle degraded or utterly infamous ones. Child-torturers, slave masters and drivers, I consign to the hands of jailers; the novelist may be excused from sullying his page with the record of their deeds. . . . I am happy to be able to inform [the reader] that neither Mr. Moore nor his overlooker ever struck a child. . . . (ch 5, 90)

About Moore's sister, she says, "You will think I have depicted a remarkable slattern, reader; - not at all. Hortense Moore . . . was a very orderly, economical person. . . " (ch 5, 92). In each of these cases, "I" paints a negative picture of a character and then accuses the reader of reading it that way; such manipulation of the reader ensures a certain amount of distance from the narrator no

matter how heteroglossic the interpretive community he or she inhabits.

The first instance that suggests identification of the narrator with the narratee, and in my case, with a female actual reader, is when she discusses in a long passage how "we" feel about being eighteen, like Caroline, with our "fairy land" behind and "reality" before us, the "School of Experience" (gendered as female) alone guiding "men and women on a safe track" (ch 7, 127). Here is a narrator gendered more female than male, as well as the female author, identifying with her favorite character and inviting the narratee, addressee, and the feminist actual reader to engage with her in the communal process.

In the same passage, "I" lectures the "lover feminine," cautioning her against voicing her pain in a world whose dominant discourse marginalizes her:

> A lover masculine so disappointed can speak and urge explanations; a lover feminine can say nothing: if she did, the result would be shame and anguish, inward remorse for self-treachery. Nature would brand such demonstration as a rebellion against her instincts, and would vindictively repay it afterwards by the thunderbolt of self-contempt smiting suddenly in secret. Take the matter as you find it: ask no questions: utter no remonstrances: it is your best wisdom. . . . For the whole remnant of your life, if you survive the test--some, it is said, die under it--you will be stronger, wiser, less sensitive. . . . (ch 7, 128)

Yet even this reader's expectations are disrupted when "I" quickly adds that all this does not apply to Caroline, because Robert has not invited her love (129). In extreme

dialogic fashion, the narrator engages, then disengages with the narratee and the reader. Here the narrator seems more female than androgynous as she/he speaks from a woman's point of view to shape the discourse of a community of readers.

Yet in another instance in which the narrator invites the narratee into a scene, "I" distances from the narratee, whom she/he identifies with a Southern England reader who could not have seen such a scene:

> We are privileged to enter that front-door, and to penetrate to the domestic sanctum . . . This is the usual sitting room of an evening. . . . The fire illuminating this room, reader, is such as, if you be a southern, you do not often see burning on the hearth of a private apartment; it is a clear, hot, coal fire heaped high in the ample chimney. . . . (ch 9, 165)

In the same passage, "I" directly addresses Mr. Yorke and invites him to look into a magic mirror to know the futures of his children who play there. This is a very interesting use of time: the narrator invites the reader back in time to look forward in time through a visionary device, and we learn what Mr. Yorke cannot know in this "retrospective present." The effect is to appeal not only directly to Mr. Yorke but directly to the actual reader as well, to engage the actual reader as a sympathetic, reflecting reader.

But the narrator continues to distance from some readers and engage others, in an ongoing dialogue. In yet another address, the narrator manages to distance one group of readers and engage another comprised mostly of women:

> Mr. and Miss Helstone were ushered into a parlour: of course, as was to be expected in such a gothic old barrack, this parlour was lined with oak: fine dark, glossy panels compassed the walls gloomily and grandly. Very handsome, reader, these shining, brown panels are: very mellow in colouring and tasteful in effect, but--if you know what a "spring-clean" is--very execrable and inhuman. (ch 11, 208)

The passage evokes an image of a richly appointed manor house, necessarily property of a patriarch, that the reader should appreciate. But the image is violently replaced with one of the drudgery involved in maintaining the manor home, necessarily the work of the subordinated class, probably women.

In several engagements with the general narratee/-reader, "I" aligns with the narratee to ridicule Mr. Donne: ". . . (you must excuse Mr. Donne's pronunciation, reader; it was very choice; he considered it genteel and prided himself on his southern accent; northern ears received with singular sensations his utterance of certain words) . . . " (ch 15, 286); "Walk on, Mr. Donne! You have undergone scrutiny. You think you look well - whether the white and purple figures watching you from yonder hill think so, is another question" (ch 16, 293). Yet in the final "Winding Up" chapter, the narrator reverses our expectations once again, this time on the fate of the foolish Mr. Donne: "Advance, Mr. Donne. This gentleman turned out admirably: far better than either you or I could possibly have expected, reader . . . " (ch 37, 588). To identify "you" so closely with the

narrator's own expectations for Mr. Donne is extremely engaging. Yet this passage, one of several in which the narrator voices her/his preference for the Yorkshire accent, manners, and people over those in Southern England, effectively distances the narrator from the southerners (335, 346). It is an example of attempted marginalization of the South Englanders by the narrator--and, possibly, by the author.

The latter part of the novel has few addresses to particular readers, the narrator preferring to address "you," trying to identify with a sympathetic androgynous reader rather than to distance from other gendered readers. In this scene, the narrator draws the reader closely by to look over Louis Moore's shoulder as he writes his own story, one of love for Shirley:

> Does the vision Moore has tracked occupy that chair? You would think so, could you see him standing before it. . . . His next movement was to take from his pocket a small, thick book of black paper; to produce a pencil; and to begin to write in a cramped, compact hand. Come near, by all means, reader; do not be shy; stoop over his shoulder fearlessly, and read as he scribbles. (Ch 29, 486-487)

The narrator involves the reader directly in the experience, engaging the reader as a friend. When the accommodating narrator invites the reader to take another look at Moore's notebook, she/he seems to address a heteroglossic community of male and female readers who could sympathize and empathize with Moore: "Yet again, a passage from the black book;

if you like, reader; if you don't like it, pass it over: - " (ch 34, 580). It is in these "notebook" chapters that Brontë indulges herself one more time in adopting the male voice, that of Moore pouring out his love for Shirley, to engage both sympathetic narratee and reflecting reader.

In her/his "Winding Up" chapter, the narrator mixes up praise for the general reader and scorn for special narratees, like the "Men of Manchester," who receive heavy criticism for their scorning of Wellington. But now, as the narrator "settles accounts with the reader," she/he finally holds forth the olive branch for all: "But come, friends, whether Quakers or Cotton-printers, let us hold a Peace-Congress, and let out our venom quietly" (ch 37, 591). The quotation may be seen, I think, as a succinct elucidation of dialogism. The narrator appeals to a diverse group as friends who can interact in beneficial conflict to change their social conditions.

At the end of the novel, the narrator once again enters the foreground to report a dialogue she/he herself had with a character in the novel:

> The other day I passed up the Hollow, which tradition says was once green, and . . . there I saw the manufacturer's [Moore's] day-dreams embodied in substantial stone and brick and ashes . . . I told my old housekeeper when I came home where I had been. . . ." (599)

The narrator validates the truth of the tale by introducing Martha, the very old housekeeper who lived during the time this story took place, long before the Hollow became an

industrial town. The final reported dialogue with the old woman, representing simultaneously truth and experience, functions as verification of "I's" story at the same time as it injects the narrator directly into the experience of the tale.

The I-narrator signs off with a challenge to a narratee: "The story is told. I think I now see the judicious reader putting on his spectacles to look for the moral. It would be an insult to his sagacity to offer directions. I only say, God speed him in the quest!" (599). Resistant to join any interpretive community in which the male pronoun predominates, the feminist reader feels disengaged from this address to the "sagacious" reader who seems to need the moral pointed out for "him." Again the feminist reader creates a dialogue with the authorial voice, suggesting that the masculinist reader cannot understand the point of the world view the narrator has just reconstituted, because "he" excludes such views from "his" consensual community.

I think the point is this: Shirley tells a culture-bound "plausible" story. Yet the story is also arbitrary: it says, Women, subjugate yourselves. The story is of two women, one a poor orphan who wants only to marry the man she loves and spends most of the novel pining for him, and the other a rich beauty who dreads the very idea of marriage and the loss of her freedom. The rich one is vibrant, has a man's name, Shirley, calls herself Esquire, runs her own

finances, does as she pleases, and ends up losing all her luster as she slowly dwindles into marriage, subdued, listless, and suddenly incapable of running her business affairs, which she listlessly turns over to Louis once she agrees to marry him. She succumbs to a silenced life in the dominant patriarchal community.

A feminist reader is left dissatisfied with the novel's pat resolution, even though the androgynous narrator has managed to engage that reader in the narrative in a heteroglossic, conflictual interpretive community. Feminist readers recognize that communal interactions, conflictual as they are, can produce social change not only in the novel but also in the world at large. The problem in Shirley is that the novel's resolution offers nothing for the reader who anticipates that Shirley will sustain her vibrant life and will enjoy independence in marriage. Once again Brontë subverts the narrative at the level of the plot. The dialogically feminist reader discovers the silenced perspective in the gap between the narrator's tidy denouement and the resistance a feminist reader feels at the end of the novel. What Brontë shows through this perspective is the harsh truth as she sees it: that marriage and independence are not possible combinations for Shirley, or for others.

Brontë indulges herself through her androgynous narrator and her androgynous persona by attacking those communities from which she wishes to disengage herself while trying

to form an androgynous--a heteroglossic--community, a polyvocal community of actual readers. Yet, as Terry Eagleton puts it, "the author betrays a private urge to savage by caricature those who oppose her values: fat Dissenters, mutinous workers, vulgar clerics" (86). Brontë does more: she engages with, even if she ultimately distances herself from, many more readers than she had in her first two novels, almost as though her search for a way to share her world as she constructed it in a dialogic community was reaching a frantic stage. Frantic efforts must subside, and Brontë's do, in Villette, her last novel.

In Villette, Brontë presents a female narrator, addresses few narratees, and retells the tale of an isolated heroine that began with her own life, saw its first manifestation in The Professor, its best recounting in Jane Eyre, and its most desolate rendition in this, her final attempt to join with a community of actual readers through one comprised of a pseudonymic persona, a female I-narrator, sympathetic narratees, and non-judgmental addressees. Lucy Snowe is a complex narrator, and her relationship with her readers is equally complex. Her story of herself as an orphaned, voiceless victim isolated in a hostile environment is belied by the power of her narrative voice and by her manipulation of the reader as she reconstructs her story, withholding details of her narration to keep the reader guessing. Lucy seems deliberately to appear unreliable as a

narrator yet ultimately is not because she eventually calls attention to the very details she has previously withheld.[18]

Recognizing that she needs an understanding audience, Lucy simultaneously elicits sympathy from and alienates the reader as she struggles to define herself and her readers in the context of a heteroglossic community. Note, for example, Lucy's challenge to a number of narratees:

> Religious reader, you will preach to me a long sermon about what I have just written, and so will you, moralist, and you, stern sage; you stoic, will frown; you cynic, sneer; you epicure, laugh. Well, each and all, take it your own way. (228)

This complex and paradoxical narrator/narratee/reader relationship is often studied. Brenda Silver in "The Reflecting Reader in Villette" demonstrates Lucy Snowe's "use of silence and revelation" to project readers into the novel to validate "her own emerging self" (90) and establish a "community of readers whose recognition and acceptance provide the context necessary for an individual's growth to maturity . . . " (90). As the narrative progresses, Lucy constantly shifts between self-justification and silence, forming a new audience in which the critical reader, the

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[18] See Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz, "'Faithful Narrator' or 'Partial Eulogist': First-Person Narration in Brontë's Villette," who engages this debate with Robert Martin (The Accents of Persuasion, NY: Norton, 1966). Rabinowitz describes the power Lucy gains by withholding information, by remaining in the dark and keeping silent. Lucy breaks "a series of gender, class, and narrative conventions" and emphasizes her authority as a teller who gains power by controlling the telling even though she cannot control her existence (247) and, significantly, resists the conventional happy ending requested by her own patriarch.

conventionally socialized reader, gives way to the sympathetic, "reflecting" listener, the one Silver portrays as rebellious or unsocialized and who "will provide the recognition denied to women who do not follow traditional paths of development" (92, 95).[19]

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[19] For another view, see Gregory O'Dea's "Narrator and Reader in Charlotte Brontë's Villette," which attempts to resolve the oppositions in Lucy's character--aggression and passivity, distance and familiarity, antipathy and sympathy--into a "harmony of paradox" in which the "logical center" of the paradox becomes the manifestation in Lucy of one of Brontë's "greatest" themes: the "depth and singularity of the human psyche" (55). While O'Dea offers insights into the complexities of the narrative stance in Villette, his need to resolve the oppositions in the novel into a harmonious whole reflects yet another attempt to synthesize conflict into consensus, a project I do not believe is demonstrated in Brontë's texts.

See also Susan Gorsky, "The Gentle Doubters: Images of Women in Englishwomen's Novels," who analyzes Lucy Snowe as one of the few complex characters to reach beyond the usual stereotypes of women as angels, romantic ingenues, independent women, and/or demons. Barbara Hardy, in Tellers and Listeners: The Narrative Imagination, recognizes Lucy as bereft of "rescue or companionship [with] only a professional success and self-reliance both admirable and sour" (27). Marjorie Farrell, in Finding a Voice: Feminine Adulthood in Women's Fiction concludes that Brontë's novels "convey only the truth that it is almost impossible for a woman to accommodate [the] two impulses [for independence and love] which psychosexual conditioning and social reality place in extreme conflict" (76). Robert Bledsoe, in "Snow Beneath Snowe: A Reconsideration of the Virgin of Villette," denies, on the other hand, that Brontë intends the reader to see Lucy as triumphant; rather, her "final self-fulfillment has to be a stagnant fantasy . . . of isolated 'independence'" (218). Bledsoe takes on Kate Millett's conclusion that Brontë "is hard-minded enough to know that there was no man in Lucy's society with whom she could have lived and still be free . . . As there is no remedy to sexual politics in marriage, Lucy very logically doesn't marry" (146). Bledsoe, in an amazingly phallacious/fallacious leap that I believe is gender-related, offers Brontë's life as a corrective to Lucy's position:

Because Lucy becomes isolated, she is denied the social discourse necessary to affirm her selfhood and instead projects a non-judgmental actual reader who works as her accomplice in her story to read the silences in her text. The problem for Lucy is that she is trapped within herself, within her social structure, within her isolation. As Silver says,

> Lucy's public stance and private dialogue with her reader are deliberate responses to what is perhaps the most potentially destructive aspect of her solitude: the isolation of vision that excludes her from the social discourse necessary for an ontological affirmation of self. (102)

In the end, the only community that Lucy Snowe has is the sympathetic reader she has constructed within her own narrative to relieve her isolation.

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> Brontë's marriage to Nichols the year after Villette showed her one possible alternative to Snowe's independence, one that she willingly (though at first fearfully) undertook. . . . The course of that marriage confirmed for her what in writing Villette she assumed-- that the unglamorous daily reality of married love is more important than the glorious adolescent infatuation of a Brussels classroom. Lucy Snowe is the quintessential gothic passive-sentimental protagonist: infinitely pitiable, but not lovable, not mature, and not triumphant, except to a reader who shares her own sentimental orientation towards nostalgic stagnation. Unlike her main character, Brontë was in the process of moving on. (220)

Christina Crosby, in "Charlotte Brontë's Haunted Text," discusses Lucy's story as one "of a journey toward enlightenment and consciousness, and, at the same time, a play of opposites without resolutions, of antitheses without syntheses" (702) and discusses the displacements in the story which challenge the traditional distinction between self and other, and deconstructs the sexual antithesis.

It was necessary for M. Paul to not return, however ambiguously phrased his demise is. Lucy Snowe is not subjected to the same fate as Brontë's other female characters: marginalization in a masculinist social community. Lucy maintains her voice and her independence. And Brontë resists the conventional closure, creating an ongoing dialogue among readers over that very ending, a non-ending. The open-endedness of Villette is a primary feature of dialogism. The dialogue between the narrator and her constructed community of readers continues as a dialogue between Brontë's text and the community of actual readers.

Charlotte Brontë's dialogue with readers crosses over multiple perspectives of gender, class, and retrospection, to explore in Villette, Shirley, Jane Eyre, and The Professor the possibilities for her women to reside in some community. The dialogically feminized reader re-reads the Brontean myth as one depriving women of an understanding community. Only Brontë's male narrator William Crimsworth finds a community in which he can be complacent; it is a consensual and monovocal one. In a similar sense, Brontë may be said to have overcome her own female silence and social isolation in The Professor, both by assuming a male voice and by creating in desperation a communal relationship between her own self and the actual readers who can interpret her subversive treatment of her narrator and apprehend her subversion of Crimsworth's patriarchal community.

But Brontë's female characters and narrators do not fare so well. Jane Eyre ends up isolated with a man clearly unworthy of her, protesting too much about her happiness in this isolated life she never planned and professed to abhor before she capitulated to it. Caroline Helstone, the character in Shirley in whose consciousness the I-narrator often resides, adopts a silent life, as does her vibrant alter ego, Shirley Keeldar, marginalized shadows in their husbands' fraternal, consensual community. Lucy Snowe moves from one community to another, only to end up in complete isolation for the three "happiest years" of her life, alone in a crowd of inscribed readers. Lucy calls the reader's attention to the paradox here, but I wonder if we can understand the nature of that paradox. Charlotte Brontë, through the experience of her character Lucy Snowe, demonstrates that at least in the mid-nineteenth century the woman who would be independent of male physical, emotional, and financial domination necessarily isolates herself from the only community available to her. This community is one dominated by the patriarchal perspective that marginalizes women like Hawthorne's Zenobia and Chopin's Edna Pontellier, who, Judith Fryer reminds us, swerve "from the path laid down for her by tradition" (207). In their volume on The Representation of Women in Fiction, Carolyn Heilbrun and Margaret Higonnet describe women writers of the past who

> have projected culturally repressed values onto "outside" female characters in order to criticize

> the established order. Such writers may represent a woman simultaneously as part of the social code, her position determined by set roles, and as a disrupter of norms who unmasks their teleology and their limits. The sympathetic, even tragic treatment of many fictional heroines testifies to their authors' recognition of the social and personal cost of defying the social order. . . . The social exclusion of rebellious women, their relegation to the margins of society, that we find recorded in such fiction reminds us how central in our lives are the patriarchal, hierarchic values and structures; the silencing and absence of those women bespeaks a presence. (xviii-xix)

No wonder that Matthew Arnold felt Brontë's "hunger, rebellion, and rage": these emotions pervade Brontë's work. Each of the Brontean narrators desperately seeks selfhood among fictive narratees and actual readers with whom they can interact among a multiplicity of perspectives, in rejection of the traditional consensual community. They reject even those comprised solely of women.[20] Their sympathetic narratees are the only friends they have, until dialogically feminist actual readers enter temporarily into their fictional communities. Only by re-reading for conflict among perspectives, by searching out muted voices, can dialogic readers hear the multiple voices that comprise the text-reader community. Dialogically feminist readers allow each narrator's world to emerge as part of a re-constructed conflictual community. It is in the dialogic disruption of

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[20] See Nina Auerbach, Communities of Women, for an interesting discussion of whether Lucy drifts toward solitude or into a community of women. My interpretation is that she shuns them, notably that of Madame Beck at the school.

the consensual world view of the narrators that a new, dialogic, world view begins to reconstruct as a heteroglossic interpretive community.

## Other Voices in Brontë's Novels

As the Brontë narrators search for self in community, the reader hears myriad voices, many more than we encounter in the Marlow novels. In Brontë's novels, in contrast to Conrad's, the narrator recreates dialogue between characters, both male and female. Thus in The Professor we hear the words of not only the I-narrator William Crimsworth but those also of Frances Henri and Madame Zoraide/Zenobie Reuter, both of whom are more compelling characters than the narrator himself. In Jane Eyre, Rochester speaks--passionately--for himself, as do Miss Temple, St. John Rivers, Mary and Diana Rivers. In Shirley, both Shirley Keeldar's and Caroline Helstone's perspectives are set in conflict with those of Mr. Helstone, Robert Moore, Louis Gerard and others. In Villette, Lucy reconstructs the discourse of M. Paul Emmanuel, Madame Beck, Genevre, and John Graham Bretton as well as her own.

Brontë's novels elicit multiple perspectives and demonstrate extreme dialogic heteroglossia, in contrast to the Marlow novels. Conrad's Marlow novels generally involve Marlow's summary of the few dialogues he needs to report involving his women characters, filtering their discourse through his monologue, usually excluding their voices. The

dialogically feminist reader can more readily discover the polyvocal discourse of the Brontë novels than he or she can the monadic voices of Marlow and Conrad, because she or he is more likely to be represented in at least one or more of the perspectives articulated in the Brontëan novels.

Yet, as I suggested in chapter one, in any community, some perspectives are always excluded or marginalized. Although Brontë's search for her own community leads her to interact with many more voices than does Conrad, she too excludes more than one significant voice from her narratives. It is possible for the dialogically feminist re-reader to discover these voices through creative misreading. Certainly the most significant of these silent voices is that of Bertha, Rochester's mad wife and Jane's silenced double. Bertha, demonized and bestialized by Jane's narrativization, is permitted only a "demoniac laugh. . . goblin laughter" (Ch 15, 180) and a short spurt of recollected threat repeated by a momentarily confused Rochester: "'"You like Thornfield? . . . Like it if you can! Like it if you dare!". . . she said'" (Ch 15, 174). A grotesquely misshapen shadow, Bertha's story is distorted rather than told, first through Rochester's lens, then through Jane's own clouded lens as she struggles to purify Rochester in her own eyes and for her own sake.

A feminist reader can engage the silences in Brontë's text, can struggle to uncover Bertha's story, with limited

success. Clues to her mistreatment can be gleaned from recognition of the brutal nature lying beneath Jane's portrait of her beloved. When he arrives at Thornfield, Jane grudgingly tells us, Rochester is grim and nasty (ch 13). When he reveals his decade-long dissipation, she assures us that she "believed he was naturally a man of better tendencies, higher principles, and purer tastes than such as circumstances had developed, education instilled, or destiny encouraged" (CH 15, 178). When his attempt at bigamy, itself a deceptive and horridly devious act, fails, he becomes physically violent with Jane, barring her way (Ch 27). She must resort to subtle games-playing to calm him down and escape the room and, finally, the house in which Bertha will lose her struggle to escape.

The dialogically feminist reader discovers that Rochester is less tragic and more sinister than Jane acknowledges him. More significantly, Bertha is more tragic and less sinister than Jane portrays her. The dialogized reader must go beyond Jane's and Rochester's versions of Bertha's situation; neither of them is disinterested. Bertha may indeed be insane, driven to insanity by her imprisonment if not by her genes. Yet at some level she is lucid, and sanity becomes a matter of perspective. She attacks only those men who have directly contributed to her imprisonment: her brother Richard Mason and her husband Edward Rochester. She does not harm her female companion/jailor Grace Poole,

and she does not harm Jane when she has the chance. Yet despite these clues, many readers are swayed by Jane's judgment, listening to a voice that compels them to be sympathetic of Rochester and horrified by the silent Bertha.[21]

Not until 1966, when Jean Rhys's Wide Sargasso Sea was published, could we hear Bertha's voice clearly. Jean Rhys adds to the dialogic complexity of Jane Eyre through a creative misreading of the novel that disrupts Jane's narration and demarginalizes Bertha. Rhys, a dialogically feminist re-reader of Jane Eyre, brings her own background as a West Indian and a feminist woman to bear as she redresses the marginalization of Bertha, or, as Rhys names her, Antoinette Cosway Mason. Her Wide Sargasso Sea becomes a Bakhtinian "framing context" for Brontë's Jane Eyre.

Rhys's dialogic novel, narrated first by Antoinette, then by Rochester with Antoinette breaking in occasionally, briefly by Grace Poole in a letter to a friend, and finally (significantly) by Antoinette at the end, graphically exposes Antoinette's victimization by Rochester and the pat-

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[21] I am grateful to my colleague Brother Christopher Lambert who first alerted me to the gender-driven responses of Jane Eyre critics: male critics invariably are sympathetic to Rochester and female critics invariably attack him. Such an observation reflects my own experience in classrooms in which so many readers have identified readily with characters who reflect their own genderization and sexual politics and not at all readily with those who reflect other standards. Generally but not always these opposing groups break into male/female camps of readers.

riarchal communal system, and her descent into madness as the conventional world would define it. Antoinette describes how she was excluded from her own social community even as a child. Rochester describes how he was sold to Antoinette, but he, of course, ends up with all her considerable wealth and she with nothing but unhappiness. When he takes even her name and calls her Bertha instead, she rages and goes mad, understandably so in Rhys's version. In both versions Bertha is unfaithful, but in Rhys's Rochester is blatantly so and first. Bertha is punished for it in both versions, but only in Jane's narrativization are excuses made for Rochester's dissipation, reflecting a long-held patriarchal notion that such male dissipation is but a natural manifestation of the notorious double standard.

Jean Rhys's re-reading of Jane Eyre reveals her own rage at Bertha's silencing and marginalization in Charlotte Brontë's text, just as Jane's rage at the treatment she received as a marginalized character in her drama of life and struggle for self is revealed through her narrativization. She is isolated by Rochester, but she seizes her voice back by creating her own fictive community in which to tell her story of self. Charlotte Brontë too demarginalizes herself by seizing the pen, by writing Jane Eyre and her other texts, telling over and over again her own story of the struggle for centrality in community. Rhys the reader becomes Rhys the author to reveal the expanded heteroglossia

beyond Jane's own limited one and Brontë's own cultural construction of meaning. Dialogically feminist re-readers learn to participate in making these stories, to re-read and mis-read them, to center their conflicts, to fight against re-marginalizing any of the stories' perspectives, whether in novels or in our own lives.

# CHAPTER V

## GENDERED READING COMMUNITIES: IMPLICATIONS OF A DIALOGICS OF READING

Novelistic discourse is inherently conflictual and demands that the actual reader actively participate in meaning making and meaning management. The four Conrad novels, in which Charlie Marlow searches for a sense of self among a hand-picked community of male narratees startlingly like himself, dramatize the power of an interpretive community with a socially enforced singleness of perspective to control the telling of the tale. Conrad's narrative communities in these novels are monovocal and consensual and firmly in control of the story. In contrast, Charlotte Brontë's four novels, in which male and female narrators search for a sense of self in diverse narrative communities of hostile and sympathetic narratees, dramatize the power of multiple perspectives interacting to preclude the dominant perspective from controlling the meaning of the story. Brontë's narrative communities are polyvocal and rely on the conflictual interaction of perspectives to generate meaning for the actual reader. Conrad's novels resist interaction with alternative perspectives while Brontë's embrace them, complicating the actual reader's reading of them.

Brontë's and Conrad's novels reflect the epistemology of their historical periods. Brontë, a Victorian writer,

would have expected many readers to understand her. The Victorian novel examined the idea that humans are properly understood in the context of their social conditions. Conrad, writing at the turn of the century, is pivotal in the movement from the Romantic and Victorian epistemic notion that truth and knowledge are universal to the Modern notion that knowledge is subjective and socially constructed. For Brontë both communication and community were not only possible but natural; for Conrad construction of community becomes an act of desperation in the struggle to communicate subjective experience.

Yet important differences between Conrad's and Brontë's narrative presentations are gender-driven and reflect interpretive stances in gendered communities of actual readers. These novels by Conrad and Brontë are paradigmatic of two models of reading: reading to reinforce a homogeneous belief community and reading to gain new knowledge in a heterogeneous interpretive community. Homogeneous communities appeal to those who want to qualify as "one of us," as members of the club; heterogeneous communities appeal to those who value multiple perspectives as a corrective to enforced silence by the dominant perspective in a homogenized community. In the novels of Conrad, the dominant homogenized community is gendered as male; only the heterogeneous narrative communities in Brontë's novels reject subordination to open up the community to those gendered as

female. Brontë's interpretive communities demonstrate the power of multi-voiced discourse to create an androgynous community, one gendered by a continuum of perspectives from masculinist to feminist.

Polyvocality, or, as Bakhtin prefers, heteroglossia, takes many forms and is present by degrees. In the novels I have studied here, dramatized first-person narrators stipulate narratees in each text and interact with them. The dialogic actual reader analyzes the relationship between the narrator and the inscribed narratees as a way to shape and limit the range of meanings in the text and to discover the nature of community formation. Dialogic reading strategies are by no means limited to first-person texts, but they do provide a good model for feminist studies because the narrator too is a gendered character. In analyzing texts dialogically, the actual reader joins with other readers in a community of interpreters who interact critically with the text and with each other, re-reading it and re-writing it in an ongoing effort to make sense of it. Actual readers learn to "re-read" their own interpretive community to see how speakers and hearers, readers and critics, limit interpretations and marginalize otherness, thereby limiting formation of self instead of expanding it. The multiple layers of interpretation both inside and outside the texts generate a continuum of dialogic interaction among texts and readers sliding back and forth along that continuum, reconstructing

what they read and what they believe into a way of living that both reflects and affects those beliefs.

Literature is political, as Judith Fetterley reminded us more than a decade ago; it both reflects and affects the way we live. The politics of the way we live influences how we will give voice to the silences in what we read as well as how we will recognize that such silent gaps are there at all. As Carolyn Allen reminds us, reading is a critical process; we read as personal fiction, or as social construct. Dialogics energizes the text as the dialogic reader moves subordinated voices toward the center. The dialogically feminist reader focuses primarily on gender as an important textual determinant, but the set of strategies in a dialogically feminist model of reading is applicable to searching out all subordinated perspectives, whether based on race, class or gender ideologies. A dialogic reading strategy would reintroduce those marginalized perspectives and would try to elicit a broadened interpretation of the text that does not suppress the conflict inherent in multivoiced interpretations. With feminist dialogics the interpreting community may be considered genderized. The more genderized our reading community, the more likely that readers will recognize heteroglossia. Readers will be more able to analyze texts in a meaningful way without suppressing the conflict and contradition that causes beneficial change in the social community as well. The social and

ethical implications of a genderized reading theory are immense.

An epilogue to a study of Conrad's and Bronte's narrative communities should demonstrate ongoing analysis of how the makeup of a textual, critical, or social community changes as a result of converting the consensually constructed knowledge community, both inside a text and outside it, into a more conflictual Bakhtinian one that enlarges our critical and social lives through open-ended dialogue. Dialogically feminist readers would continue to work on many fronts at once: re-reading male texts, re-introducing and re-reading female texts, and re-reading and re-writing the critical community's dialogue about them from a broadened perspective.

Yet not all value the broadened perspective. Just as Marlow clings to his homogenized community, so too do many actual readers in real-life interpretive communities cling to what they think they know, what comforts them socially, intellectually. Pedagogically, this tendency to cling to what we comfortably know, to cling to a sort of epistemic self-presentation and self-preservation, is illustrated in a practical study of actual readers' responses in the classroom reported by Elizabeth Flynn. She describes three types of readers: one, the judgmental and detached reader who resists the text, dominates it, silences it, remains bored and unchanged by it; two, the reader who is overwhelmed by

the power of the "alien other," too sympathetic and involved and thus dominated by the text; and three, the reader who interacts with the text as self and other, maintaining a critical distance yet participating, constructing meaning in the intersection of past experience and the new experience of the text ("Gender and Reading"). In my own classroom I have encountered each of these three reader types. Some students are unwilling to enter into any multi-voiced discourse, any dialogic double discourse between narrative and reader, between reader and author, or between student/reader and teacher/reader if their own masculinist perspective would not prevail. Their gender ideology makes them unwilling to generate and manage meaning together with the other members of the class.

The pattern analyzed in the monovocal communities structured by Conrad and Marlow repeats itself in the interpretive community of the classroom: students find safety only in numbers of like selves. These students, not always male, represent an entire range of masculinist readers interested only in re-reading male texts and reifying their masculinist perspectives. Feminist readers in the classroom, even those who do not yet realize they are feminized, are willing to take what Jane Marcus would call the "unsafe route." Marcus demonstrates the difference in the way the Ramseys read in To the Lighthouse: Mrs. Ramsey can read the minds of the other characters from their points of view, but

Mr. Ramsey, the masculinist, re-reads the patriarchal plot that a feminist reader resists. As Marcus argues, "Mr. Ramsay, Mrs. Ramsay and the reader are united in this chapter, in that we are all re-reading": she Jacobean poetry and the mind of her husband, he Sir Walter Scott, we the Ramseys and To the Lighthouse (42). A feminist reader takes the unsafe route, practices unsafe reading that resists the confines of limited experience as readers.[1]

Dialogic readers re-read to make better sense of what they've read in the context of their own experience, to expand the range of meanings possible in a text. We need to keep studying the re-read and re-written texts of others that center previously marginalized perspectives to refine our own dialogic skills. For example, Charlotte Brontë re-reads her juvenile tale "Caroline Vernon" (1839) as Jane Eyre, centering Jane. Jean Rhys in turn re-reads Jane Eyre and re-writes it as Wide Sargasso Sea, giving voice to and centering Bertha. In the juvenile "Caroline Vernon," Caroline's mother is mad and tries to knife and to poison the Duke of Zamorna, who has married and imprisoned her daughter, Caroline's sister. By story's end, Zamorna has

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[1] See also Judith Fetterley's extension of the concept of reading for reinforcement to the male literary establishment, which, she argues, reads primarily to reinforce identity and the perspective the male teacher brings to the text and thus excludes whenever possible women's texts, thereby denying women the experience it ensures for men: validation of one's reality. ("Reading about Reading . . .," Gender and Reading)

sequestered Caroline in a "little retreat" where "nobody will ever reach it to disturb" Caroline. He calls it his "'treasure house'" where what he deposits "'there has always hitherto been safe--at least . . . from human vigilance and living force.'" Caroline, mother, and sister are all imprisoned as his property. In Jane Eyre, it is Bertha who is the mad would-be murderer silenced and imprisoned by Rochester's actions and Jane's narration. Wide Sargasso Sea frees her voice if not her self. Charlotte Brontë re-reads herself, Jean Rhys re-reads Brontë, and we re-read both, expanding ourselves as we go.

Dialogic reading strategies can expand our perspective in many ways. For example, Joseph Conrad's texts silence the voice of the East, making the East a backdrop for a westernized limited perspective. A dialogically feminist re-reader in a gendered reading community, given the experience and knowledge of Eastern beliefs, can recognize and cut through racial exclusion based on racial ideologies and prejudice just as he or she can uncover exclusions based on gender ideologies. More studies that center previously marginalized perspectives need to be performed, both for literary and for sociopolitical reasons.[2]

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[2] My colleague Sister Beatina Mary, for example, is studying the distortion of the Eastern perspective in the work of Forster and its corrective in the novels Indian English writers such as R. K. Narayan.

Re-reading a text dialogically invokes the text's polyvocality in a way that works on the reader to open up the text and alter both text and reader as a result of the conflictual communality of perspectives discovered in the reading experience. The process is repeated in life. Difficult as it may be for a feminist, especially a female feminist, to incorporate a masculinist perspective into her thinking, it is equally difficult to resist in such a culture. When perspectives are no longer excluded or marginalized, everyone in the community gains. Political and social enmities fade as heterogeneity increases members' knowledge of and tolerance for otherness. Literature is political and social and must be so as long as there are writers writing and readers reading and re-reading and re-writing their lives in polyvocal and heteroglossic communities. As Bakhtin has cautioned,

> A sealed-off interest group, caste, or class, existing within an internally unitary and unchanging core of its own, cannot serve as socially productive soil.... It is necessary that heteroglossia wash over a culture's awareness of itself and its language, penetrate to its core, relativize the primary language system underlying its ideology and literature and deprive it of its naive absence of conflict. (Dialogic Imagination 368)

Dialogically feminist reading and dialogically feminist living alike constitute first a theorizing process that recognizes that sex, race, and gender ideologies attempt to monologize our writing and reading and living, and then a politicizing process that disrupts those attempts to control

the texts that are our lives. The power engendered by these theorizing and politicizing processes enables us to rewrite both the text at hand and the text of the self as dialogical conflict that esteems the multiplicity of both self and other, the feminist goal.

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The final copies have been examined by the director of the dissertation and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the dissertation is now given final approval by the Committee with reference to content and form.

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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