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A Critique of Michèle Montrelay's Theorizations of Masculine and Feminine Sexuality: On Psychoanalysis, Queer Theory, and the "Queer" Signifier

Summary:

This article presents a critical reading and a reassessment of lesser-known psychoanalyst Michèle Montrelay's innovative theorizations of human sexuality, examining Montrelay's theorizations of masculine sexuality vis-à-vis the feminine and vice versa, and not in a particular hierarchical or gender-specific order. By following a psychoanalytical Freudian-Lacanian-Montrelayan framework while also incorporating elements from queer theory and (trans)gender studies that, at the same time, will be subjected to critical scrutiny in light of their potential limitations and inherent blind spots, I suggest that Montrelay's conceptualizations of masculine and feminine sexuality can function as productive springboards to a contemporary exploration of human sexuality, *jouissance* (enjoyment) and desire, and their consequent linguistic signification via what I term the "queer" signifier in the latter part of this article. Transcending the limitations of identity politics, this article brings thus the discourses of psychoanalysis (especially in its Lacanian, linguistically inflected orientation) and queer theory into a theoretical, conceptual, and practical dialogue that is neither binary and normative nor even non-binary and nonnormative but semiotically singular. Finally, the "queer" signifier and an accompanying, "queer" modality of *jouissance* will be theorized as structurally homologous to feminine *jouissance* and feminine writing (*écriture féminine*).

Women are in the process of finding "their" language. Should we not say, rather, that many, in ever-increasing numbers, are those who agree to let language arrive—a language that belongs to neither men nor women, a language where the Other femininity [*la féminité Autre*] resides, a language that escapes them?

—Michèle Montrelay (1977, *L'Ombre et le Nom* [*The Shadow and the Name*], p. 163)^[1]

In her landmark text, *Between Men*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1985), one of the founders of queer theory (especially in its American variation), coins "homosocial desire," defining it as "social bonds between persons of the same sex. ... It is applied to such activities as 'male bonding,' which may, as in our society, be characterized by intense homophobia, fear and hatred of homosexuality. To draw the 'homosocial' back into the orbit of 'desire' ... then, is to hypothesize the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual" (p. 1). In a statement that appears nearly a century before the emergence of queer theory as a critical research discipline, Sigmund Freud already anticipates and hones Sedgwick's claim

that male homosociality implies latent homosexuality: In a brief letter from October 17th, 1899, to friend and otolaryngologist Wilhelm Fliess, Freud links “male homosexuality (in both sexes)” to “the primitive form of sexual longing,” “the first sexual aim, analogous to the infantile one”.^[2] For Freud, homosexuality is precisely that which heterosexuality has repressed and replaced as the veiled substrate underlying the substance of manifest heterosexual symbolic economies. A century before the emergence of “pansexuality” as a contemporary and supposedly inclusive and all-encompassing sexual orientation category as well, Freud (1905) already provides a comprehensive theorization of “polymorphic perversity,” referring to an entire spectrum of sexual structures that exceed cisgender heterosexuality.^[3] What, therefore, are the possible and intellectually generative connections between psychoanalysis and queer theory (if at all)? How do sexuality, gender, and “queerness” relate to the distinctly human sphere of language, to speech, and to literary writing—and more specifically, to different modalities of writing such as feminine and masculine writing, and their potential parallelisms and points of intersection—vis-à-vis the split subject’s radically singular relation to the signifier? Can we outline a “queer” signifier that is distinct from, and presumably subverts, a “cisgender, heterosexual, patriarchal” signifier, doing so in psycho-linguistic terms? What are the potential psychic structure(s) and stylistic categories of the jouissance (enjoyment),^[4] desire, and lost blissful ecstasies of a “queer” subject who is both woman and man? More broadly and perhaps more significantly, is it possible to psychoanalytically theorize human sexualization, satisfaction, and Eros outside of or beyond a restrictive and reductive feminine/masculine binary categorization *and* a more progressive, non-binary categorization, and if so, how, and under which psycho-linguistic conditions and mode(s) of jouissance(s)?

This article presents a critical reading and a reassessment of lesser-known psychoanalyst Michèle Montrelay’s innovative theorizations of human sexuality, examining Montrelay’s theorizations of masculine sexuality vis-à-vis the feminine and vice versa, and not in a particular hierarchical or gender-specific order. By following a psychoanalytical Freudian-Lacanian-Montrelayan framework while also incorporating elements from queer theory and (trans)gender studies that, at the same time, will be subjected to critical scrutiny in light of their potential limitations and inherent blind spots, I suggest that Montrelay’s conceptualizations of masculine and feminine sexuality can function as productive springboards to a contemporary exploration of human sexuality, jouissance (enjoyment) and desire, and their consequent linguistic signification via what I term the “queer” signifier in the latter part of this article. Transcending the limitations of identity politics, this article brings thus the discourses of psychoanalysis (especially in its Lacanian, linguistically inflected orientation) and queer theory into a theoretical, conceptual, and practical dialogue that is neither binary and normative nor even non-binary and nonnormative but semiotically singular. Finally, the “queer” signifier and an accompanying, “queer” modality of jouissance will be theorized as structurally homologous to feminine jouissance and feminine writing (*écriture féminine*). Let us begin our inquiry into the nature of femininity, then, not by theorizing what femininity is but by what it is not, that is, we shall theorize femininity in negative terms vis-à-vis its seemingly binary opposite, masculinity.

Montrelay’s Theorizations of Masculine and Feminine Sexuality: A Critique

In the rarely discussed “*L’appareillage*,” Montrelay (1981) presents an inventive reading of the case of “Little Hans” presented by Freud (1909) in *Analyse der Phobie eines fünfjährigen Knaben* (*Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy*). Montrelay’s text can function as a productive launch pad for understanding and further nuancing masculinity and even more precisely masculinity *qua* femininity. This case entails, towards its end, an imaginative phantasmatic narrative of five-year-old Hans, whose involuntary erections function as the source of his phobia, as they are directly correlated with surplus jouissance that is “too much” for the subject’s psyche. The narrative recounts a visitation from a plumber, who dismantles and then re-constructs Hans’s genitals and anus in a manner akin to how he (the plumber) dismantles and re-constructs the bathroom’s faucets. Unlike Freud’s reading, however, Montrelay intimates that Hans’s source of unbearably enjoyable suffering that is inscribed into and by his body, and the plumber narrative he aligns with it, can also function as a rudimentary solution to his phobia, deriving from it the titular and

paradigmatic concept of the “*appareillage*”. She notes four interacting denotations that this word encompasses in French, all of which are considered in the psycho-grammatical structure of the masculine imaginary: (a) preparations for casting off; (b) the equipment required; (c) casting off (of a boat); (d) a set of devices, set up for a certain use, electrical, experimental, etc. (an apparatus) (Montrelay, 1981, pp. 36-37). Montrelay then writes the following:

Does not the masculine imaginary have the function of deploying and marking out a possible space so that ejaculation does not destroy the subject? Does it not posit the partner, their body, and orifices, as the limit of this space? Is it not preparatory for the ‘departure,’ that is, the launching of the semen? (p. 38)

Masculine sexuality, as Montrelay conceptualizes, entails an imaginary phantasmatic narrative in which an anatomical organ, the penis, can be detached and then re-constructed. Montrelay, it should be noted, builds on fellow psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan’s (1956-57) fourth seminar, *La relation d’objet* (*Object Relations*), and particularly on the seminar’s fifteenth lesson, in which Lacan conceptualizes the penis as perforable, removable, and mobilizable. Without this phantasmatic narrative, a man risks losing himself completely to the partner(s) during the sexual act, and his subjectivity might be psychically shattered into smatterings, into bits and pieces of the masculine body as expressed quite literally so in post-ejaculatory semen as the launching of the flotsam and jetsam of the masculine unconscious.^[5] In the context of theorizing masculinity and, shortly, femininity, it is worth comparing Montrelay’s conceptualization to that of Lacan (1972-73) in his influential twentieth seminar, *Encore*, as the former’s emphasis of the imaginary axis is not wholly in-line with the latter. Montrelay does emphasize the anatomy of those bodies that have been assigned male by the heteronormative Other at birth so that for her, the penis and the phallus are somewhat aligned. If the penis becomes—or rather *is*, in the ontological sense of the metaphoric copulative verb in particular and in the Western cultural imagination by and large—a synecdoche for the entire male body and its subjectivity, then we are presented with a somewhat reductive view of masculinity. For Lacan (1972), comparatively, masculine sexuation is isomorphic with the subject’s particular relation to *symbolic* castration, that is, the relation to the symbolic phallus and to being under its castrative function, either wholly or partially (p. 78).

Let us return then and further engage with Lacan’s (1972-73) formulation of masculinity and femininity in his table of sexuation. Lacan introduces the table in the seminar’s seventh lesson (pp. 78-79).^[6] The concept of “sexuation,” especially as distinguishable from the social and cultural discourses of “sexuality,” is in line with Lacan’s four shifting positions of sexuation as expressed via four propositional formulas: (there exists an x for which the function phi of x is negated) and (for all x the function phi of x is at work) as necessary and possible forms of sexuation, respectively, in the left side denoting masculine sexuation; and (there does not exist an x for which the function phi of x is negated) and (not all of x is under the function of phi of x) as contingent and im-possible forms of sexuation, respectively, in the right side denoting feminine sexuation. According to Lacan, the subject traverses feminine and masculine positions when undergoing analysis and/or when writing and speaking because they are consistently and painstakingly “in the position of inhabiting language” (p. 80). This position is determined not by social, cultural, and/or biological data but by the subject’s singular relation to surplus jouissance and to the symbolic phallus (ϕ) as a logical function of castration that necessitates structural loss (of an early, infantile, or even primordial experience of satisfaction).^[7] This subjective and radically singular sexuated relation is irrespective of any privileged organ *qua* master signifier (e.g. female/male genitals), and is also irrespective of one’s identification with or assignment of a specific gender, sex, and/or sexual orientation by the heteronormative or nonnormative Other at birth: Lacan states that “any speaking being whatsoever ... is allowed to inscribe itself in this part [the woman portion of speaking beings]” (p. 80). He provides, in this context, the example of Spanish mystic Saint John of the Cross who has been assigned male by the heteronormative Other at birth but who situated himself more on the feminine formula of the table (p. 76). The table, in other words, adheres not to limited and limiting sociocultural conceptualizations of gender and sexuality (even if those conceptualizations are non-procreative, non-binary, and nonnormative^[8]) but to predicate logic.

Most pertinent and productive for deciphering the enigma of feminine sexuality is the right side of the table, that is, of the feminine mode of sexuation in the body event, and all the more so the lower right formulation of feminine *jouissance* (also entitled supplementary or non-phallic *jouissance*, in contradistinction to masculine or phallic *jouissance*) as that which does not cease *not* being written precisely because it is situated beyond linguistic signification. It is, in other words, “a *jouissance* that is beyond” (Lacan, 1972-73, p. 76) the semiotic possibilities of the signifier. It “distinguishes,” as Lacanian psychoanalyst Marie-Hélène Brousse (2021) more recently elucidates in *Mode du jouir (The Feminine)*, “a logical space which is neither complementary to the side called masculine nor reciprocal to it,” (p. 43) discarding the culturally romanticized, cis-heteronormative female/male couple as supposedly perfect, harmonic sum in favor of a non-gendered economic satisfaction of the drive. Brousse follows and continues Lacan’s seminal and often misread and misrepresented declaration in his twentieth seminar, “*il n’y a pas de rapport sexuel* [there is no sexual relationship],” (p. 126) implying a lack of Aristophanic “wholeness” within human sexual, amatory, and affable relations. Instead of the clichés of romantic love (contemporary and ancient alike), in which a fusional bond unites woman and man into an imaginary and idealized Aristophanic single orb, Lacanian psychoanalysis unveils the fissures, failures, and disturbances inherent in every semiotically embedded encounter (amatory or otherwise) between two radically different subjects, even if both are women or men. Brousse (2021) adds that feminine *jouissance*, also entitled “Other *jouissance (JA)*,” is “without specific localization in any organ of the body,” expediting an “effect” that is “diffuse, de-localized” (p. 55). Feminine *jouissance* is experienced in the body in its total sum as a non-fragmented object of enjoyment because, unlike masculine *jouissance* and unlike the biologically reductive, normative model offered by genital intercourse, it does not privilege a specific erotogenic zone (e.g., female and/or male genitals) as preferred site of *jouissance*.

A similarity emerges nonetheless between Lacan and Montrelay, namely conceptualizing symbolic castration *via* the psychic necessity for structural loss. In the former’s theory this loss can be equated with the loss of the first oral object(s), the mother’s breast (or its substitutes), or alternatively/simultaneously, with other losses such as the loss of excrement as first anal object and/or the loss of the Other’s gaze/voice as first scopic/invocatory object(s). In the latter’s theory, loss is equated with the loss of an organ, specifically the penis, and the loss of semen. These losses are circumscribed by and through the partner’s (or, I would expand, partners’s) corporeality and its (or their) orifices, which, in their turn, limit feminine *jouissance* so that symbolic discourse and psychic reality could ensue, following Montrelay’s (1981) theorization of the psycho-grammatical structure underlying the masculine imaginary and masculinity by and large. The function that the partner’s (or partners’s) body perform(s) is theoretically and conceptually cogent not only because it posits a limit into a detachment phantasy which, as discussed, otherwise runs the risk of utter loss (of one’s subjectivity), but also because it enables a man to re-trace the archaic, omphalic, and Shadowy (*Ombragé*, following Montrelay’s titular term that is anagrammatically, sonically, psychically, and conceptually resonant with *nombri*, the French word for navel) relationship that materializes in feminine *jouissance*, the *jouissance* that is beyond the signifier, the phallus, and symbolic representation via language by and large (Montrelay, 1970, p. 366). This primordial relationship, whose rudimentary structure involves the separation/connection in utero via the umbilical and placental membranes and amniotic fluids, necessitates three psycho-linguistic components: the sexuated, split human subject, his copula, and the Other sex as linguistic complement. The interaction between the three has a twofold function. Never providing a mythic fusion but a re-encounter of the (M)Other, it activates and re-traces for a man the cut (*coupe*) from her body, and simultaneously retrieves to a man his veiled femininity. In other words, the penis is theorized, according to Montrelay, as nothing less than a remnant of *femininity* in the masculine body, a copula or a logical instrument that separates a man from, and also links him to, his feminine *jouissance* and his own repressed femininity more broadly (Montrelay, 1994, p. 221). If the penis is understood as an archaic trace capable of restoring the lost femininity latently present in the male body, as a signifier carried from (M)Other to son, then we can deduce that the male subject is structurally and inherently both male *and* female, if only partially and temporarily. This implies that male sexuality is contingent in its definition on femininity. Following Lacan and Montrelay’s formulations of masculinity to their logical contemporary conclusion, the psychic structure of male sexuality also implies that there exists a potential for a subject who

has been assigned male by the heteronormative Other at birth to simultaneously inhabit both feminine and masculine positions of sexuality while still being subjected to the castrative function of the symbolic phallus. Male sexuality, understood in joint Lacanian and Montrelayan terms, is thus rather queer and can therefore be re-conceptualized as “queer” sexuality or as “queerly” male, to be further substantiated in the latter part of this article as the isomorphism between “queer” and “feminine” jouissances.

Aside from the sheer creativity that I find in Montrelay’s re-conceptualization of the function of bio-logical body parts in the male body, her nuanced theorization also sheds critical light on the facileness that is oftentimes expressed in supposedly psychoanalytic, feminist discourse. This discourse purports to be theoretically and politically progressive, and to champion women’s writing as a means through which women can liberate themselves from the shackles of symbolic hetero-patriarchal economies, a claim that is evident in the writings of fellow, more-well-known French, woman-writers: Hélène Cixous (1975), who coined the terms “the New Woman” and “feminine writing” (“*écriture féminine*”) in “*Le rire de la méduse*,” (“The Laugh of the Medusa”)^[9] terms which have become ubiquitous since in feminist discourse; Luce Irigaray (1977), who coined “the phallogocratic order” and “*le parler femme*” (“The Woman’s speech”) in *Ce Sexe qui n’en est pas un* (*This Sex Which is Not One*); Sarah Kofman’s (1980) feminist, ideologically inclined analyses of Freud’s writings on women and femininity in *L’Énigme de la femme* (*The Enigma of Woman*); Antoinette Fouque’s (1995) counter-coining of “female libido” and “uterine envy” in *Il y a deux sexes* (*There Are Two Sexes*); and, to a lesser extent, Julia Kristeva’s (1974) theory regarding “the semiotic” in *Révolution du langage poétique* (*Revolution in Poetic Language*). This is explicitly addressed by Montrelay (1977) in the concluding chapter of *L’Ombre et le Nom* (*The Shadow and the Name*), entitled “*La dernière femme?*” (“The Last Woman?”) as a prospective and even anxiety inducing caution: “See what will happen if, by appropriating femininity, you make it impossible for a man to love you...” (p. 164). Femininity, in other words, does not belong (only) to subjects who have been assigned female by the heteronormative Other at birth just as masculinity does not belong only to subjects who have been assigned male by the heteronormative Other at birth. Psychoanalytic inquiry is privileged in Montrelay’s sentiment over ideologically driven writing, as the former emphasizes time and again that the subject’s relation to the sphere of language and to the signifier *per se* is not, and never will be, gender specific. “*La dernie?r femme?*” in this context, utilizes the title and plot of Marco Ferreri’s 1976 film, *La Dernière Femme* (*The Last Woman*) so as to discuss women’s relation to femininity and literary and artistic creation. The phantasmatic narrativization of Ferreri’s film revolves around a woman who leaves her husband due to “feminist” reasons. The film concludes with the husband literally castrating himself and becoming, if we follow Montrelay’s conceptualization of masculinity, devoid not of his masculinity but of his latent femininity. A more recent illustrative filmic example appears in Alejandro Jodorowsky’s (2016) *Poesía sin fin* (*Endless Poetry*), in which an immense sculpture shaped in the form of an upturned erect penis, is shattered. This large-scale shattering of a man’s unconscious femininity also manifests in a broader contemporary cultural phenomenon, that of subjects who have been assigned male by the heteronormative Other at birth and who wish to undergo penectomy (a surgical amputation of the penis). Conversely, in the opening of “*Le rire de la méduse*,” Cixous (1977) claims that women should re-appropriate the domain and act of writing so as to “liberate The New Woman from the Old,” (p. 878) doing so by performing the virtually untenable task of shattering the symbolic and its seemingly binary, phallogocentric structure. Unlike women, men, for Cixous, and those fellow writers previously mentioned, constitute *a biologically determined, fixed group*. For Lacan (1972-73, p. 78), however, building on predicate logic, men are those who belong to a group for all of whose members the function of castration is at work, as discussed. Discussing sexuality as a closed group with fixed categories (gender, sexual, or otherwise), is thus a violent, possessive act, and ergo Cixous’s (1977) representative theorization is posited in a phallic, masculine position, that of the radical “we—and *only* we—have X (in this case, X = femininity)” vis-à-vis gender and sexuality.

Returning to and further elaborating Montrelay’s more complex writing regarding the feminine vis-à-vis the masculine (and vice versa), in “*Textes à l’infini*,” (“Texts to Infinity,” in *L’Ombre et le Nom*) Montrelay (1977) discusses the relationship between male sexuality, the masculine imaginary, and literary writing:

A man adorns [*se pare*] himself with objects that carry something of the body. ... The penis is the privileged organ of this reduction. ... In the sexual act, the penis plunges into feminine jouissance ... It deviates from the same substance, the same feminine jouissance, but [this jouissance is] also articulated. ... In the end, it remains folded on its shadow [*ombre*], which reflects the non-sense of the Other. ... In writing, a man separates [*se sépare*] himself from the Other with words, with their feminine substance which he simultaneously ensures that a remainder of remains on paper. (pp. 151-152)

Perceptively utilizing the French equivocation “*se séparer*” (to separate) and “*parer*” (to adorn), a parallelism emerges here between male sexuality and literary writing: the latter can function as a substitution in effect for the sexual act for a man. Both enable a transportation not only into feminine jouissance but also mark a re-turn to the cut from the archaic (M)Other, as discussed, either by the penis’s rhythmic movements during sexual intercourse and its tumescence and detumescence or via the writing of one’s sex as a separating/connecting copula or signifier. Montrelay adds, in other words, that the materiality of the male body can be formally carried into and by the written literary text as psychic substrate and substance. This subjective process, I would specify, differs for every man, each potentially crafting his own *appareillage*, poetic corpus, and singular style(s) and accompanying mode(s) of enjoyment, living, and lettering. By comparison, in “Gender Asymmetry and Erotic Triangles” (pp. 21-27) in *Between Men*, Sedgwick (1985) claims that the male-male-female triangle so common in literary artworks is not symmetrical because of the introduction of a woman into the supposedly symmetrical, identical male-male bond. As such, she subscribes to the limited and limiting Irigarayan model of masculinity as the sex which is supposedly “one,” uniform. Pertinent here again is Lacan’s (1972-73) declaration that “*il n’y a pas de rapport sexuel* [there is no sexual relationship],” (p. 126) intimating a lack of symmetry or proportionality within the dis-harmonious realm of human relations, precisely because of the discussed encounter with radical alterity and sexual difference in the form of the Other. This encounter, in other words, denote the subject’s encounter with sexual alterity *per se*, regardless of sex, gender, and/or sexual orientation. A man, in other words, can be *like* a different man, *similar* to him, but never the same—not (only) because of potential, intersecting variations in social and cultural categories such as class, race, etc., but because of one’s singularity as a speaking subject embedded in the nexus of language, speech, and writing. Speaking of masculinity, it would be more productive in both theory and praxis to speak of an indefinite, lowercase *a* man instead of *The Man* in the imaginary (or idealized), universalizing, and homogenizing senses, like there is no “*The Woman*” in the discourse of Lacanian psychoanalysis (1972-73, pp. 72-73; original emphasis).^[10] There remains, however, the not-yet-solved, enigmatic relationship between the feminine mode of sexuation in the body event, feminine writing, and femininity by and large.

We can deduce thus that Montrelay (1977) distinguishes between two kinds of femininities, that of a man and that of a woman (p. 153); for the latter, the relation to the body is written differently. Unlike the discussed, veiled femininity of a man, Montrelay claims that in the act of feminine writing (not necessarily in the semantic field of the plot or the narrative), the interminable battle between mother and daughter materializes, all the while raising the carnal question of one’s symbolic ancestry (pp. 153-154). A text qualifies as feminine, in this regard, if it involves surplus jouissance as the psychic macrostructure governing feminine writing. This is Montrelay’s answer to idealizing and less nuanced feminist gyno-criticism that champions looking back at one’s literary “mothers” and “heroines” so as to re-discover and construct a distinct, matrilineal literary canon.^[11] Montrelay, on the other hand, appeals to the incestuous, autoerotic, and, I add, inherently lesbian mother-daughter dyad in utero, which is never a dyad in actuality, but a triad given the psychic presence of the phallus as a signifier of desire, situated in-between fetus and mother (Lacan, 1958-59, pp. 194-195).^[12] Examining women’s writing reveals, according to Montrelay, a cruel, suffocating struggle of the daughter to birth herself from the mother,^[13] not necessarily in the sense of the daughter ridding herself from her mother altogether, because that would imply a betrayal of her symbolic and linguistic ancestries, but in the sense of love and desire that are sufficiently limited and contained. The positioning of this limit can be performed by re-writing and re-signifying the linguistic debris from the mother’s form of jouissance, and weaving out of this debris a singular way of writing, of being a woman,

and of lettering, living, and loving, auto-poetically (re)creating herself, to be elaborated shortly. Paradoxically, without doing so, it suggests holding on to a potentially ravaging (*ravage*), ruinous relation to the mother. “The mother-daughter ravage” produces, according to Brousse’s (2021) *Mode de jouir (The Feminine)*, “a stumbling block,” (p. 11) a psychic impasse or dead-end that has been vividly dramatized in Alice Diop’s (2022) recent film, *Saint Omer*, namely as a contemporary retelling of the myth of Medea’s maternal filicide, carrying ravage and the matter of the maternal to its most radical conclusion.^[14] This is a continuation of Brousse’s (2021) previous line of thought, especially after her rather inventive aphorism of “emptying the sea, voiding the mother of the child she was carrying [*vider la mer, vider la mère*]” (p. 10). She builds here on the homophonous French equivocation between the words for “sea” and “mother,” that is, “*mer/mère*,” while “*vider*” means both “to empty” and “to void”. This “*vider la mèr(e)*,” Brousse suggests, can be activated by the analysand “moving the coordinates” (p. 11) in the analytic setting by speech. Perhaps it is more challenging to separate from the mother via words because words, the rudiments of speech, of language and hence of the symbolic economy, are an inheritance from the mother’s body, who morphologically and narcissistically approximates—and perhaps approximates *too much*—her daughter’s own body and biologically assigned sex.^[15] The separating object, typically the penis in masculine writing, as discussed, becomes “sucked up” into this vortex(t), this whirlpool of desire, loses its power, and renders separation as an ongoing and potentially infinite struggle.

Montrelay (1977) further precises that the body is firstly designated as the imaginary body (pp. 155-156). The imaginary body is equated with Lacan’s mirror stage so as to create a unity and consistency of otherwise fragmented bodily organs and partial drives. Enriching Lacan’s readily idealized theorizations on femininity, she writes that there is a specifically feminine imaginary that does *not*, in any case, belong (only) to those who have been assigned female by the heteronormative Other at birth. The imaginary, Montrelay teaches, is a more complex, elusive register, delineated as that which provides consistencies, limits, and contours to what would otherwise be a psychic wound of symbolic chiseling. Comparatively, in Lacan’s (1975-76) twenty third seminar on James Joyce, *Le sinthome (The Sinthome)*, the prominent register is no longer the symbolic but the real. The symbolic, Lacan says, is what produces a hole in the real (p. 22). The challenge in literary feminine writing, therefore, is to chisel and carve a hole very much like a sculptor operating by what Lacanian psychoanalyst and scholar Shirley Zisser (2022) has brilliantly synthesized from early modern art history as the Albertian and de Vincian *via di levare*, a mode of psychic writing/sculpting that proceeds by subtraction.^[16] In contradistinction from its inverse mode of psychic writing/sculpting, exemplified by a relief printing plate (the Hebrew *tavlit*) cast in a mold made from composed type or an original plate, this kind of writing (by subtraction) is performed not by embossing or by the reproduction of an effigy but by engraving, etching, or producing a cut. Multilingually, it intersects with the sonically, conceptually, psychically, and painterly *tak’hrit* in Hebrew, as both formulations of psychic writing or (im)printing harken back to Leon Battista Alberti and Leonardo da Vinci’s two styles of sculpting, that is, by subtraction (the Italian *levare*) or by addition (*porre*), a “putting on” that is a phallic, proto-Rivierian make-up or a mask of the homophonous *masculinity* or mask-ularity simultaneously reproducing a phallic or masculine woman whose inverse is an effeminate man.^[17] A woman confronting unconscious knowledge she does not want to confront regarding her maternal origin must, therefore, engrave, etch, and reproduce a cut that would enable this psychic wound to no longer be one so that “*parole de femme*” (a woman’s word), to borrow the title of one of Montrelay’s articles,^[18] desire, and life, would spring forth.

Montrelay (1977) distinguishes between two modes of writing: “texts-documents” and “texts-jouissance”. She writes the following:

Can a literary text exist not separated from its author? ... A double impasse is possible: either we work on language and thoughts as if we were a man. ... There, too, it is a miss. We obtain slices of life, texts-documents [*textes-documents*], which are interesting in their sincerity, but which do not create writing [*écriture*], because they do not live at their own rhythm. (152-153)

These “slices of life” are distinguished from “texts-jouissance [*textes-jouissance*],” which are conceptualized as a “perpetual extension” of the author’s body in written graphemic form (Montrelay, 1977, p. 153).

Building on and further elaborating Montrelay's lesser-known distinction between "texts-documents" and "texts-jouissance" as two modes of writing, we can situate "texts-documents" on the same psycho-semiotic axis in which the non-literary text is situated, whereas "texts-jouissance" are more in line with what can be distinguished as the literary text. While the latter significantly involves and foregrounds the eroticism of the body vis-à-vis its rhetorical organization in written, extended form, akin to Zisser's (2005) conceptualization of "rhetorical erotogenicity," it is distinct from the former's dry, phallic matter-of-factness. This matter-of-factness of "texts-documents" characterizes, for instance, regulations, manuals, legal documents, journalistic writing and investigative reporting that strive for virtual neutrality, and academic, scholarly writing. The way out of the whirlpool of femininity for a woman, therefore, is not by the penis's rhythmic movements during sexual intercourse and its tumescence and detumescence or via the writing of one's sex as a separating/connecting copula with a particular, privileged organ of the body, namely the erect penis and post-ejaculatory semen as the launching of the flotsam and jetsam of the masculine imaginary and masculine subjectivity, as Montrelay theorizes masculine literary writing. Nor is the exit for a woman marked by objects of the drive, of the body, and/or of a male phantasmatic veiling as its psychic signposts, but vis-à-vis an operation that can be affected *on* and *from* the body's substrate and substance of jouissance by the cut in the psychoanalytic sense. According to Zisser (2022), it implicates "an operation of a subtraction" (p. 84) from and by the feminine body, which functions as both source (or canvas) and outcome. Is this not precisely what ensues in the analytic scene as well, with the analyst functioning as a necessary editor to the medleyed utterances that are the analysand's text, punctuating, citing, and cutting them with little intervention and floating attention? The cut manifests perhaps most glaringly in the termination of the session not according to a fixed and arbitrary temporal indicator ("fifty minutes have elapsed" as the formulaic and limiting "solution" offered by contemporary psychotherapy) but when an organic master signifier emerges in the analysand's speech. The materiality of the feminine body, as Montrelay (1977) explains, can also be formally carried into and by the written literary text as the topological inverse of speech, an inverse that potentially functions as an ecstatically charged, sublimatory medium. This medium can be utilized as the space where "words circulate ... differently" and where there ensues a "separation from the thing [*la chose*] in way that is new" (1977, p. 39). This separation is marked by deploying a change of signification, re-writing the body and re-signifying its psycho-linguistic components (signifiers) so as to weave out of its building blocks—words, figures and tropes and their copulative, separating/linking verbs—a singular way of being a woman. Providing a slice of "the unconscious signifier," the literary text "brings jouissance into play while being able to limit it" (p. 39). This subjective process differs for every woman, each possibly crafting her own poetic prosthesis and her own "*parole de femme*".

Following Montrelay's (1970) conclusion to "*Recherches sur la féminité*" ("Inquiry into Femininity") as well, that is, that "feminine jouissance can be understood as writing (*écriture*)," (p. 371) the literary feminine text can be realized as the psycho-linguistic site in which excess and feminine jouissance alike are guaranteed, activated, hosted, and, finally, limited for its author. Reaching a psycho-rhetorical climax whose scope exceeds the mimetic boundaries of the page and the corporeal, biologically-assigned boundaries of the author, feminine writing also, I would add, has the potential to *not* fail or "overdo" itself and its mechanisms of autopoetic fashioning despite its dormant inherent superfluity. This is due to a writer's ability to achieve moderation *within* excess when employing stylistic figures (especially, but not only, asyndeton and hyperbole as the most prototypical figures of excess in rhetorical discourse). Is this not unlike what English author Henry Peacham (1593) has already theorized centuries before in his early modern rhetorical treatise, *The Garden of Eloquence*? Peacham (1593) notes the following:

[T]wo things especially are here to be noted and avoided, the one, that this figure [hyperbole] be not used to amplifie trifles, or diminish the estimation of good things... The other, that albeit matters require (and that worthily) to be amplified, that yet there be *not too great an excess* in the comparison: but that it may be discreetly moderated. (unpaginated; emphasis added).^[19]

Paradoxically, Peacham's second guiding principle regarding discreet moderation suggests a moderation *within* excess as the underlying logic of hyperbole, or, in other words, mapping a spectrum of excesses and

ecstatic jouissances within the literary feminine text wherein their allocation can be contained and limited, sharing a certain isomorphism with the dormant potential in feminine literary writing and in the excessively positive value attached to the object *plus-de-jour*, the object small *a* underlying the structure of feminine jouissance. And while jouissance has been primarily (if not only) articulated as “masculine” or “feminine” in psychoanalytic thought, it can also be articulated as “queer”. How, therefore, does queer theory, and especially what can now be elaborated as the “queer” signifier, come into play in the intersecting fields of gender, sexuality, jouissance, and desire, and what kind of joint psychic, semiotic, and rhetorical specificities do they potentially assume? More broadly and perhaps more significantly, how, and in what possible psycho-stylistic manners, do “queer” and “feminine” jouissances intersect, overlap, and parallelize, especially in relation to feminine writing (*écriture féminine*)?

The “Queer” Signifier: Towards a Modality of “Queer” Jouissance

Queer theory and (trans)gender studies, in their numerous albeit theoretically consistent variations, have broadly define queerness as a contemporary manifestation of a limited and limiting identity category, starting from what is typically regarded its point of origin in the 1970s until its modern theorization. In its French iteration, Guy Hocquenghem’s (1972) lesser-known political manifesto, *Le désir homosexuel* (*Homosexual Desire*) and Michel Foucault’s (1976) later and more well-known seminal historical study, *La volonté de savoir: Histoire de la sexualité, tome I* (*The History of Sexuality Volume I: The Will to Knowledge*), are considered two foundational texts in the field. They follow, and are at least an implicit outcome of, the students’s protests and the larger political and cultural climate surrounding the events of May 1968 in Paris and the subsequent emergence of the modern gay liberation movement in France, spearheaded by those who identified as lesbians and homosexuals in the *Front homosexuel d’action révolutionnaire* (FAHR),^[20] alongside (or even as a direct result of) the nearly concurrent 1969 Stonewall riots in the Greenwich Village neighborhood of New York City. The early formation of queer theory has also been inspired, at least in part and at least in its French formulation, by the political impetus of the French feminist movement, *Mouvement de libération des femmes* (MLF), led by the already mentioned Antoinette Fouque. In his genealogical study, Foucault in particular outlines the birth of “homosexuality” as an identity category after the shift from the previous and ever-elusive category of “sodomy” in late medieval and early modern times,^[21] whereas Hocquenghem provides a pseudo-psychoanalytical (mis)reading and (mis)representation of desire in the Marxist context of capitalist consumption and (re)production,^[22] inaugurating queer theory as a research discipline, a critical methodology, and a joint appeal for the practice of social change nearly two decades before what is typically considered the field’s inception, namely Judith Butler’s (1990) *Gender Trouble*. In terms of the American tradition of conceptualizing queerness, which flourished in 1990s academia, foundational texts include Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s (1985) already discussed *Between Men*, Michael Warner’s (1993) edited volume, *Fear of a Queer Planet*, in which “heteronormativity” is coined and discussed, and, more recently, Julia Serano’s (2007) *Whipping Girl* and Paul B. Preciado’s (2008) *Testo yonqui* (*Testo Junkie*), the latter two inventing and developing the modern-day category of “cisgenderism,” in contradistinction to “transgenderism” and “non-binary gender and sexuality”.^[23] The primary driving force of virtually every text mentioned, and of queer theory and (trans)gender studies by and large, has been—and will probably continue to be, to a significant extent—to perform nothing less than to liberate women, men, and nonbinary and transgender persons from the shackles of cisgender, hetero-patriarchal symbolical economies, doing so either by a subversion of social and cultural norms (mild and gratuitously phrased as this subversion may be), as the subtitle of Butler’s 1990 book also suggests (*Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*), or, in its more radical manifestation, by the psychically untenable staging of a “queer” and nearly anarchical revolution in academic circles and the broader social sphere.

In “Critically Queer” in particular (in *Bodies That Matter*), Butler (1993) elaborates on “queer” as an identificatory category that is paradoxically both inclusive and exclusive:

The assertion of “queer” will be necessary as a term of affiliation, but it will not fully describe those it purports to represent. As a result, it will be necessary to affirm the contingency of the term: to let it be vanquished by those who are excluded by the term but who justifiably expect representation by it, to let it take on meanings that cannot now be anticipated by a younger generation whose political vocabulary may well carry a very different set of investments. (p. 175)

Butler’s open-ended, crassly overgeneralized definition of “queer” is far from producing a satisfying answer to what constitutes “queer” as such for every subject embedded in the nexus of language, speech, and writing (even, or especially if, that subject identifies as gender non-binary and sexually nonnormative), let alone the term’s psycho-linguistic determinants. Subscribing to an historicist, Foucauldian critique of power like her fellow queer scholars, Butler offers an inadequate theorization that follows the path of identity (or identitarian) politics and its discontents par excellence, employing the language of an entire “generation” even if she purports to negate or expand its parochial communitarian value. It is the language of “affiliation,” of “representation” or more precisely of *misrepresentation*, and, consequently, of “exclu[sion]” as well. A similar insufficient overgeneralization that addresses and then perpetuates the very political aim that the author attempts to deflect is found in J. Halberstam’s (1998) call for “the production of new taxonomies” (p. 8) for identification in her queer account of masculinity in *Female Masculinity*. Halberstam’s (2011) “political project” continues, and is largely reiterated, in *The Queer Art of Failure*, in which the author similarly attempts to “explore alternatives and to look for a way out of the usual traps and impassés of binary formulations,” (p. 2) only to reproduce novel binary formulations, displacing the non-specific, universal master signifiers “woman” and “man” with the universality and homogeneity of “queer” or with the metonymically contiguous signifiers “gender nonbinary” or “transgender” and their signifying inverses, “heteronormative,” “male,” and “white”.

Queerness in queer theory is understood thus as a restrictive and reductive *indexical term* that directly and exclusively refers to its two broad, universalizing, and homogenizing dictionary denotations, namely as an odd or peculiar quality, and, more pertinently, as a pejorative term that denotes and is synonymous with homosexuality and, at the same time, encapsulates a broader gender and sexual nonconformity reclaimed and reappropriated by queer activists more recently.^[24] It is also in line with the sub-tradition that began in early twentieth century literature, carried until its flourishing in contemporary times, that is, the generic emergence of “queer literature” whose primary purpose is to “queer” literary and cultural artifacts so as to expose and undermine cisgender, heteronormative patterns expressed and reinforced by the culturally representative imagination of the literary domain. Consider, for instance, “queer” as a non-specific master signifier inundating virtually every page of Radclyffe Hall’s (1928) landmark lesbian fiction, *The Well of Loneliness*, as one of the first paradigmatic examples of “queerness” as a derogatory/reclaimed term. A later prototypical example in the American literary tradition manifests in Allen Ginsberg’s (1956) political poem, *America*, and more specifically in the concluding, counter-cultural sentiment of the first-person speaker, an imaginary, thinly veiled alter ego that mirrors, if only partially, Ginsberg’s larger political commitments vis-à-vis the political possibilities of the poetic: “America I’m putting my *queer* shoulder to the wheel” (line 74; emphasis added). In contemporary Lacanian psychoanalytic discourse, however, “queer” potentially assumes *a symbolical, or more precisely a metonymical, value*, one that is equally predicated on psychic particularity (or even singularity) and rhetorical propinquity, that is, the generalized governing and regulating master signifier “queer” is displaced unto another, contiguous, and particular signifier in every subject’s psycho-rhetorical chain (or network) of significations, and this “queer” signifier is far from being coeval with a broad and supposedly all-encompassing dictionary definition or any larger group identification.^[25]

Transcending the theoretical, conceptual, and practical boundaries of historicist and new historicist perspectives, the not very enlightening or novel conclusions offered by queer theory and (trans)gender studies, and the non-specific realm of Butlerian performativity, psychoanalytic discourse can articulate an alternative, more nuanced framework for understanding queerness, following the significance of Saussurean and Jakobsonian linguistics on contemporary Lacanian and Montrelayan psychoanalysis, especially vis-à-vis the realm of the signifier^[26] and rhetorical theory. In “*La signification du phallus*,” (“The Signification of the Phallus”) Lacan (1958) specifies that “this signifier [the phallus] is chosen as the most salient of what

can be grasped in sexual intercourse [*copulation*] as real, as well as the most symbolic ... since it is equivalent in intercourse to the (logical) copula” (p. 581; original emphasis). By linking the logic of rhetorical copulas and bodily copulations, and by cautioning from reducing the phallus to a simplistic, reproduction-oriented understanding in conservative feminist analyses, Lacanian psychoanalysis situates the phallus instead in the non-gender-specific sphere of Saussurean linguistics: “Still less [the phallus] is ... the organ—penis or clitoris—that it symbolizes. ... For the phallus is a signifier” (Lacan, 1958, p. 579). Unlike the arbitrariness that characterizes and underlines the Saussurian diagram of the sign, however (in which a privileged signified/meaning and a subordinate signifier/word-image do not share an inherent bond, with Saussure, and then Derridean poststructuralism, deconstructing the previously established link between a referent and a thing, that is, an object to which it has been inextricably tied^[27]), in Lacanian psychoanalysis, each unconscious signifier—let alone a master signifier governing and regulating an entire grid or network of unconscious signifiers in the subject’s psyche—is not random or inconsistent in essence but linked to the subject’s history and symbolic ancestry. Indeed, unconscious signifiers do not constantly manifest in everyday, prosaic speech/writing and may therefore surprise the split speaking subject when they do materialize in the slips of the session or of the pen. More significantly, however, the copulative interrelations operating in-between unconscious signifiers within a psycho-stylistic network are not, and cannot be, random as well, with one unconscious signifier (e.g. “queer”) leading to or “gliding,” as it were, unto another one based on preexisting links in the subject’s history, according to Freud and Lacan, and even their pre-history, as Montrelay teaches and adds, that is, in light of early, infantile experiences, in light of experiences in the womb and/or even prior, that is, in unconscious registrations of primordial or archaic experiences (that being said, access to remote, ancestral experiences is limited in scope and is often completely barred from knowledge), respectively. Unconscious signifiers are, as Lacan and Montrelay emphasize throughout their linguistically oriented, post-Saussurean/Jakobsonian theorizations (especially as they manifest in Montrelay’s [1986] “*Le double statut, flottant et fragmentaire de l’inconscient* [“The Floating and Fragmentary Status of the Unconscious”]) determined by one’s linguistic lineage, but this does not imply that they are *deterministically* determined or haphazard by nature, with the subject potentially re-arranging and recreating via a methodical psychoanalytical investigation new modes of lettering, living, and loving.

Comparatively, Montrelay (1977) postulates that “the ‘feminine’ position” is “the guardian of primary narcissism” (p. 39) because the logic underlying feminine *jouissance* (which Montrelay contributes to even before Lacan’s twentieth seminar^[28]), unlike that of masculinity and phallic *jouissance*, maintains an insatiable involvement with one’s entire body as a libidinally invested, non-fragmented object. The subjective, excessive, and non-gender-specific position of feminine *jouissance* is that of either “man or woman,” (Montrelay, 1977, p. 39) completely disregarding and not even addressing any heteronormative symbolic economies whatsoever by privileging the psychic sphere instead. Montrelay (1977) further elaborates this theorization, writing that femininity is the direct outcome of “those who agree to let language arrive” (p. 163) by and large, participating in, and simultaneously forming, a linguistic commune of one that is paradoxically dependent on the presence of the Other (of language). This language “belongs to neither men or women,” (Montrelay, 1977, p. 163) and, I would add, does not belong to (or is not the sole property of) queer, nonbinary and transgender persons, precisely because it is “a language where the Other femininity [*la féminité Autre*] resides, a language that escapes them” (Montrelay, 1977, p. 163). This language is catapulted by staging a joint subjective relation to the real and to the feminine, that is, to what is beyond or before semiotic representation or is psychically unthinkable and unconceptualizable because it is too unbearable to register and symbolize as such. A fragment of this “queer”/Other femininity can, however, be articulated by the one who unconsciously “enunciates” in the analytic chamber toward the blind, silent, and listening body of an analyst who functions as a surrogate Other (Montrelay, 1977 pp. 38-39), or, inversely, by the one who writes in the literary domain, as previously discussed vis-à-vis the sublimatory potentialities of masculine and feminine modes of literary writing.

A similar theorization of queerness as the linguistic and rhetorical offspring of the signifier is the staple claim of the recent and enlightening *La solution trans* (*The Trans Solution*) under the direction of

psychoanalyst Jacques-Alain Miller (2022). The book presents and discusses six analyses of subjects who identify (at least initially, before undergoing analysis) as queer, transgender, transsexual, transvestite, trans, and/or gender nonbinary.^[29] Instead of bespeaking and espousing the universal, homogeneous language of group identification and social modification, an alternative space is provided, guaranteed, and articulated for a conceptual shift in the book and on the analyst's couch, that is, a shift from a generalized master discourse of "queerness" and "transgenderism" to the singular speech and psycho-grammatical particularities that "queer" and "trans" respectively assume for every analysand. One intriguing example is "queer" as a structural traversal from phallic *jouissance* to "queer" *jouissance qua* feminine *jouissance vis-à-vis* the significance of the oral object (or its lack thereof) and especially the articulation of the master signifier "*une grand folle*," and an equal employment of the rhetorical figure of irony as the subject's mode of living and loving in the second case study, "*Soustraire au trop*" ("Subtracting from Excess," pp. 55-58). The process of trans-itioning by and large is understood in this paradigmatic case not in social and cultural terms, but as a process of, as its title suggests, a subtraction from excess, that of feminine *jouissance*, exemplified by a psycho-structural understanding of breast reduction and removal (otherwise known as "top surgery" in the contemporary medical discourse of transgenderism) as equivalent to the necessary psychic loss of object small *a*. Is this not unlike what Montrelay (1977, p. 145) has already theorized in a highly eloquent and logically precise manner as the coming-into-existence of her book's titular, palpitating *Nom* (Name),^[30] the renewed and rejuvenating birth of a master signifier (or, rather, multiple signifiers metaphorically and sonically condensed into one) occupying the privileged position of S_1 in a psycho-semiotic chain of significations that it governs and regulates and that an analysand re-signifies in speaking and/or writing so as to posit a limit to an otherwise unbearable psychic wound inscribed into and by the contours of the feminine body? Does this intersecting "queer"/"feminine" *jouissance* not share a structural similarity with the analysis that Lacan (1955-56) delivers in "On a Question Prior to Any Possible Treatment of Psychosis," that is, what Lacan presciently terms as "transsexualist *jouissance*" in the I schema (p. 476) in relation to Daniel Paul Schreber's delusional, cosmologically epic, phantasmatic narrative fictionalizing his feminization and transformation into a woman enthralled by God?^[31]

This kind of queer, trans-formative feminization also invites us to examine it in relation to Lacan's formulations of masculine and especially feminine *jouissance* and Montrelay's conceptualization of femininity. While in both "On a Question Preliminary" and in his twentieth seminar, Lacan theorizes *jouissance* in structural, mathematical, and/or topological terms, in "On a Question Preliminary," transsexualist *jouissance* is understood as that which is situated on the asymptomatic psycho-linguistic axis, that is, as approaching, approximating, and verging on the feminine, akin to what Lacanian psychoanalyst Agnès Aflalo (2018) has more recently developed as the "*poussée-vers-la-femme*" ("push-towards-the-Woman") in "*Pousse-à-la-femme, poussée-vers-la-femme, fuite-devant-la-femme*" ("Push-to-the-Woman, Push-toward-the-Woman, Flight-from-the-Woman"). Following the logic inherent to *Séminaire XX*, however, we can understand transsexualist or more comprehensively trans *jouissance* as a direct albeit implicit byproduct not of aspiring *toward* the feminine axis but as a psychic *crossing*, that is, from the masculine side in the table to the feminine side (and possibly vice versa), and even more specifically the traversal into and positioning of the subject in the lower right formulation, that of feminine *jouissance*. Building on and continuing Lacan's theorizations, is this not unlike what ensues in the psychically revealing myth of Tiresias, in which the psychic structure of the knowledgeable soothsayer's desire does not limit itself to one privileged slot in the table of sexuation?^[32] In his trans-formation into a "she" or a "her," Tiresias traverses the left side of the table so as to arrive in the lower right formulation of the right side, that is, of feminine *jouissance* as that formulation of enjoyment that does not cease *not* being written precisely because it cannot be encapsulated by the signifier. Tiresias then re-returns to his point of origin that is conjugated in the masculine. In Montrelay's (1970) theorization of femininity in her prescient "*Recherches sur la féminité*," ("Inquiry into Femininity," 1970) the feminine unconscious is structured by the paradoxical and incompatible coexistence of the concentric (or precocious, Jonesian) and phallogocentric (or symbolic, Freudian) economies. In Montrelayan terms, then, Tiresias cruises between the concentric economy of the real as that which is beyond semiosis and the phallogocentric economy of the symbolic, sense, and signification.

The Tiresian myth provides thus a productive semiotic launch pad to exploring this modality of “queer” jouissance *qua* the feminine, alongside other prominent, representative cultural examples that precede and hone psychoanalytic theory. Consider, for instance, Rosalind’s meta-similaic, apostroph(a)ic epilogue in William Shakespeare’s meta-rhetorical pastoral comedy, *As You Like It* (1623/2006), in which Rosalind exposes via her polymorphic language of similaic desire that she has been a prepubescent, effeminate boy actor all along play-acting and masquerading as a girl, which is in and of itself inspired by John Lyly’s (1588/2013) transgressive comedy, *Galatea*, wherein a magical sex trans-formation occurs not by surgical procedures or gender reassignments but by the discursive act of speaking, and by an earlier, inverted intertext/intersex(t), that of Iphis’s wedding in Book IX of Ovid’s (eighth century A.D./2009) similarly transformative narrative poem, *Metamorphoses*.^[33] Rosalind’s proto-Lacanian/Montrelayan epilogue also anticipates another gender subversion via the meta-rhetorical in another Shakespearean play, the hyperbolic, asyndetic, and cosmic *Antony and Cleopatra* (1623/1995), in which the boy actor portraying Cleopatra breaks character (a category that is in itself thoroughly semiotic, for what is character if not a combinatory sum of letters constantly prone to trans-formations and grammatical re-arrangements?) and turns a distorted, narcissistic cultural speculum upon the audience’s own expectations of sex and gender by a non-conventional employment of “boy” as a verb: “I shall see / Some squeaking Cleopatra *boy* my greatness / I’th’ posture of a whore” (Shakespeare, 1623/1995, 5.2.217-19; emphasis added). If we attempt to theorize human sexualization, jouissance, and desire in psychoanalytic terms that are situated outside of or beyond a feminine/masculine binary categorization *and* a non-binary categorization, we can articulate this “queer” and accompanying, contiguous “trans” modality of jouissance then not according to a generalized limited and limiting social discourse of “queerness” and “transgenderism,” but according to a singular set of psychic conditions written in *a structural, singular relation to the “queer” signifier*. We can also deduce that this signifier, and queerness by and large, are more in line with or can even be situated in a homologous position to the substrate and substance of feminine jouissance in particular and femininity more generally.

Queerness and gender and sexual nonconformity can be theorized thus in syntactical, linguistic, rhetorical, and more specifically stylistic, terms. Three centuries before Freud’s, Lacan’s, and Montrelay’s theorizations of hysteria, femininity, and the structure of the psyche at large, the vibrant tradition of rhetorical treatises from the early modern period associates the rhetorical figure of hysterologia (or hysteron proteron), for instance, with an inverted temporal, grammatical, and gendered logic, in which non-linear temporality, syntactical equivocations and linguistic ruptures, and phallic femininity are introduced, respectively. Renouncing cisgender, hetero-patriarchal symbolical economies, in other words, is equivalent to renouncing the linguistic conventions of grammar and syntax. English author Richard Sherry (1550/1961) defines hysterologia in his seminal rhetorical treatise, *A Treatise of Schemes and Tropes*,^[34] for example, as “*Prepostera loquutio* [preposterous speech],” one that manifests when what “is done afterwarde, is set in speaking in the former place, as: plucke of my bootes and spurres” (1550/1961, p. 31; original emphasis). Hysterologia in Sherry’s treatise is interchangeable not with the clinically outdated and historically misogynistic diagnosis of supposedly disordered women but with *a structural category*, as a form of hyperbaton, amongst other contiguous figures symbolically titled figures of “*transgressio* [transgression]” (p. 30; original emphasis). Peacham’s (1593/1977) *The Garden of Eloquence*, already discussed earlier in relation to the link between the figure of hyperbole and the figurality of the feminine, whose title collapses the biblical with the stylistic and the floral,^[35] outlines three orders of syntactical schemes. The third order, entitled “figures of permission,” includes at its ending not only hysterologia and its synonymous scheme, hysteron proteron, both as an interposition of a phrase between a preposition and its object and a disorder of time, but also other hyperbatons (an inversion of standard word order), namely anastrophe, tmesis, hypallage, and synchysis. Subversively, they are all delineated as “faultes of speech consisting in disorder and confusion” (Peacham, 1593/1977, unpaginated). They are lesser-known rhetorical forms that have been contracted and “lost” in contemporary rhetorical discourse^[36] but ones that contribute to syntactical equivocation, temporal fragmentation, and gender and sexual transgression nonetheless.

These “faults” are theorized in intersecting rhetorical, grammatical, gendered, sexual, and proto-psychoanalytic terms. Amphibologia, for instance, also entitled *ambiguitas* (ambiguity) in early modern

rhetorical treatises, is another subversive figure, one that is theorized in moralizing and normativizing terms but that subverts those terms and re-returns triumphantly by mere way of negation, definition, and inclusion, that is, as a vice of style in which syntactical and/or lexical ambiguity is produced whose contemporary equivalent is the psychically revealing category of the pun, condensing two or more signifiers unto one. The subversive psycho-grammatical and psycho-sexual logic of amphibologia is inscribed in its very name, that is, the prefixal “amphi-” as that which is simultaneously situated on both sides of “logos,” that is, speech, what can be understood in contemporary terminology as the rhetoric of bisexual, polyamorous economies. In Sherry’s (1550/1961) extended essay, for instance, amphibologia is defined as follows: “*Ambiguitas*, when thorow faute of ioynng the wordes, it is doutefull to whych [one] the verbe belongeth [Ambiguity, when, through the fault of joining the words, it is doubtful to which one the verb belongs]” (p. 33; original emphasis).^[37] Sherry constructs a direct, intimate link between sexual promiscuity (manifest by having multiple sexual partners and/or sexual orientations), bisexuality (and other sexual orientations whose psychic vector is geared towards multiplicity and plurality, such as the contemporary category of “pansexuality”), and grammatical and syntactical uncertainty. More significantly, instead of reproducing the “naturall [natural],” cis-heteronormative order of “men & women,” (Sherry, 1550/1961, p. 39) associated with another theorized figure—synthesis and its accompanying normative cultural logic, in which there ensues a privileging of a masculine, phallic signifier over a feminine one in a hierarchical psycho-semiotic chain of signification, that is, “puttynge [putting] a weaker word after a stronger” (p. 39)—what materializes is the second purpose of the figure of catacosmesis, defined in Peacham’s (1593/1977) illustrative biblical/stylistic rhetorical treatise not as ““when the worthiest word is set first, which order is naturall [natural], as when we say ... men and women” (unpaginated) but representing rather a “contrarie [contrary]” and “artificiall [artificial]” form “when the worthiest or weightiest word is set last,” (Peacham, 1593/1977, unpaginated) reversing a hetero-patriarchal semiotic structure. Far from providing descriptive, mimetic, or gender-neutral accounts of rhetorical forms, syntactic ambiguity and gender and sexual androgyny, in other words, intersect, overlap, and parallelize each other, becoming tied in one historically consistent psycho-rhetorical field that is understood first and foremost *in stylistic or elocutionary terms*, not identificatory, ideological, or socially contingent ones. Based on the early modern treatises’s culturally representative early modern imagination, which share vivid conceptual continuities with our own taxonomical understanding of gender and sexual categories, we can also conclude that a man otherwise occupying the privileged position of S_1 in an otherwise binary man–woman signifying sequence, that is, S_1 – S_2 , turned upside down in transgressive figures of speech such as hysterologia and amphibologia, is subsequently relegated into what is typically the subordinate feminine position, assuming the role of an effeminate, feminized, or “queer” man, whereas a woman assumes its inverse, phallic and masculine, and simultaneously “queer,” signifying function.

To conclude, and to further synthesize this article’s two sections, we can now understand the “queer” signifier, and a “queer” modality of jouissance by and large, as isomorphic to or in the position of literary writing, and more specifically feminine writing, re-defining what is otherwise termed in its immediately ideological sense as *écriture féminine*. Even more, the necessarily non-complementary sexual and amatory relations that ensue between a split sexuated subject and their own narcissistic partner(s)/body-text theorizes, conceptualizes, and applies queerness as singular elocutionary style (or a “lifestyle” and a “love style,” albeit not in their contemporary popular (mis)understanding) so as to re-construct its substrate and substance of jouissance in and by the sublimatory possibilities offered by the literary domain. A subject’s autopoietic recreation (in the double sense of the word “recreation”), that is, what can now be understood as the literary body-text that is vividly synecdochized in and nuanced by the subject’s writing as a mode of bodily jouissance that potentially alleviates and treats an otherwise unrepresentable, unknowable, and unconceptualizable real, regenerates, one umbilical point of signification after another, a new desire, a new mode of sexuation—or, in the words of Aflalo (2023), “neo-sexuation”^[38]—and a new manner of lettering, living, and loving. More specifically and precisely, this desire is not an idealized and idyllic desire that is equivalent to the anti-psychoanalytical conclusion of Cixous’s (1975) “*Le rire de la méduse*” (“The Laugh of the Medusa”). Nor does this desire follow the logic of group identification, normative procreation, or even nonnormative pleasure that queer theorists and activists are enamored with. Situated beyond or before one’s biologically, socially, and culturally assigned boundaries, “queer” desire is the desire of a body that cannot

be reduced, in other words, to a binary and not even to a non-binary model of gender (genderfluid/woman/man), sex (intersex/female/male), sexual orientation (pansexual/bisexual/homosexual/heterosexual), and gender expression (transgender/cisgender),^[39] and whose governing and regulating logic is not normative and not even nonnormative because it is semiotically singular. Even more specifically and even more precisely, “queer” desire does not subscribe to a metaphoric rhetorical logic as Montrelay (1970) claims in the biologically conservative conclusion to “*Recherches sur la féminité*,” (“Inquiry into Femininity”) or a metonymic rhetorical logic that characterizes the style and rhythms of hysterical speech and writing (Montrelay, 1977, p. 31). Like “feminine” desire, “queer” desire is an im-possible hysterological, amphibological elocutionary desire that raptures and ruptures symbolic language and phallogocentric economies alike.^[40] While not functioning as a panacea but as a possible psychic anodyne, “queer” desire repetitively rhetoricizes a split “queer” subject whose primary mode of jouissance is situated more on the supplementary, contingent, and “feminine” axis of sexuation, with the “queer” and the “feminine” becoming structurally homologous. A “queer” modality of jouissance, finally, does not belong (only) to subjects who identify as “queer”. A “queer” modality of jouissance belongs to every subject that is courageous enough to cruise between the arid position of the “masculine” and the ecstatic position of the “feminine”.

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Notes:

[1] Translations of Montrelay's texts are mine.

[2] Freud, S. (1985). Letter from Freud to Fliess, October 17, 1899. *The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess, 1887-1904*, Belknap Press, 380.

[3] Cf. the second essay from the *Drei Abhandlungen Zur Sexualtheorie (Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality)*, "Die Infantile Sexualität," ("Infantile Sexuality") in which Freud (1905, p. 191) theorizes that in the early stages of human life, various forms of sexuality can be detected, phrased "polymorphously perverse".

[4] "Jouissance" is a polysemic, homophonous, and multilingual signifier whose closest English equivalent is "enjoyment," which is distinguished from pleasure ("plaisir"). While the latter term is equivalent with biological homeostasis and a lowering of excitations to a minimum (or potentially a zero) vis-à-vis discharge, the former is equivalent with jouissance, with a thanatographical death drive that is situated beyond an ideal and idyllic Nirvana of the pleasure principle. The traditional Hebrew translation of the word jouissance, "hitangot," which is conjugated in the middle or reflexive voice by the sometimes-suitable example of Hebrew verbal conjugation "hitpa'el" (the English language had "lost" it; it is rather similar to the French reflexive pronoun "se") involves turning the operation of enjoyment unto oneself by the self, amalgamating the grammaticality of the active and the passive voices. Its psycho-grammatical structure significantly involves, therefore, an autoerotic form of enjoyment. "Jouissance" is also a homophony in French on the words "jouir" (to enjoy) and "sens," (to make sense) alluding to the enjoyment derived from hermeneutical interpretation, from making sense, amongst other meanings that the word encompasses, such as the ownership of property. Throughout this article I have decided to not italicize the word jouissance.

[5] Cf. Guy Hocquenghem's (1972) critique of "ejaculation [as] the touchstone of pleasure" (p. 95) in *Le désir homosexuel (Homosexual Desire)*.

[6] The top four formulas had already been presented in *Séminaire XVIII* (1971, eighth lesson) and in *Séminaire XIX* (1971-72, first lesson) as a part of Lacan's late teaching.

[7] E.g., the loss of the mother's breast or its substitutes as first oral object(s), the loss of excrement as first anal object, and/or the loss of the Other's gaze/voice as first scopic/invocatory object(s).

[8] Examples abound. See, for instance, Julia Kristeva's (1974) *Révolution du langage poétique (Revolution in Poetic Language)*, Hélène Cixous's (1975) "Le rire de la méduse," ("The Laugh of the Medusa") Luce Irigaray's (1977) *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un (This Sex Which is Not One)*, and Antoinette Fouque's (1995) *Il y a deux sexes (There Are Two Sexes)* as more conservative, binary, and normative conceptualizations of gender and sexuality; and Guy Hocquenghem's (1972) *Le désir homosexuel (Homosexual Desire)*, Michel Foucault's (1976) *La volonté de savoir: Histoire de la sexualité, tome I (The History of Sexuality Volume I:*

The Will to Knowledge), Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's (1985) *Between Men*, Judith Butler's (1990) *Gender Trouble*, Michael Warner's (1993) edited volume, *Fear of a Queer Planet*, Julia Serano's (2007) *Whipping Girl*, and Paul B. Preciado's (2008) *Testo yonqui (Testo Junkie)* as more progressive, non-binary, and nonnormative conceptualizations of gender and sexuality.

[9] Cixous's (1975) article concludes with an anti-psychoanalytical, phallic, idealized and idyllic desire, raising the utopian-turned-dystopian sentiment of "in one another we will never be lacking" (p. 893). Lack, however, is constitutive of psychic life.

[10] Cf. my (2023) recent discussion of masculine asymmetry in "Similaic Eroticism and Polymorphic Sexuality".

[11] Cf. Elaine Showalter's (1977) *A Literature of Their Own*, and Sandra M. Gilbert's and Susan Gubar's (1979) *The Madwoman in the Attic*.

[12] Not in the actual sense of incest between a mother and a fetus, but that of a highly intimate bond as evident in utero via the umbilical and placental membranes and the amniotic fluids.

[13] Montrelay refers to Jeanne Hyvrard's *Les prunes de Cythère* (1975) and *Mère la mort* (1976), and to Chantal Chawaf's *Retable*, *La rêverie* (1974) and *Cercœur* (1975), amongst other texts. Chawaf's first book in particular, *Retable*, *La rêverie*, was published by *Éditions des femmes*, the feminist press created by activists of the feminist movement, *Mouvement de libération des femmes (MLF)*, spearheaded by Antoinette Fouque and inaugurating what Hélène Cixous (1975) has coined as "*écriture féminine*" ("feminine writing") in "*Le rire de la méduse*" ("The Laugh of the Medusa").

[14] Also see psychoanalyst Jacques-Alain Miller's (2015) discussion of the relationship between motherhood and femininity, and the distinction between mother and wife, in "*Mèrefemme*".

[15] Also pertinent here is Lacan's (1975-76) insight in his twenty third seminar, *Le sinthome (The Sinthome)*, in relation to James Joyce's writing, specifically the homophonous, translingual "litter"/"letter" pair. This pair uncovers that letters can be understood as litters, remainders, slices of flesh torn and discarded from one's corporeality only insofar that they are re-constructed in written form (Lacan, 1971, pp. 327-328). "Literature," Lacan further explains, "involves cooking up leftovers" out of one's linguistic "debts," (p. 328) as an ancestral—and probably more maternal than paternal—inheritance, as language is not the sole property or creation of a supposedly omnipotent, Godlike writer. More recently, Brousse (2021) theorizes "the *motérialité* of the speaking body" as "the word [that is] grasped as matter that is deposited" (p. 6). "*Motérialisme*" is an equivocation that plays on the inherent, direct link between "mot" (word) and "materialism," between language and the flesh, and is in line with the inherent and potentially treacherous psycho-conceptual, sonic link between matter and maternity.

[16] My thinking on Montrelay's theorizations of masculinity and femininity in particular and on cultural artifacts by and large is heavily indebted to Zisser's extensive research, brilliant insights, and inspiring comments.

[17] Cf. psychoanalyst Joan Riviere's (1929) discussion of phallic make-up and the intersectionality of masculinity and masquerade, the gendered and the theatrical, in "Womanliness as a Masquerade".

[18] Cf. Montrelay's (1967b) "*Parole de femme*" ("A Woman's Word").

[19] In fellow early modern writer George Puttenham's (1589) extended rhetorical essay, *The Arte of English Poesie*, a similar, non-absolute logic governing the hyperbolic is presented, in which there can ensue "a more moderate lye" according to which the orator is permitted to "ouer-reach [overreach] a little *by way of comparison*," as long as "the lye [lie]" is "beyond credit" but "not ... beyond all measure," (p. 159; emphasis added) crafting a potential range or a gradatory scale within which the hyperbolic—and, by extension, the excessively feminine—operate.

[20] Although the *FAHR* did not have a single, "officially" appointed leader (or multiple leading political figures), Hocquenghem was often seen not only as one of the group's prominent members but also as its leader in effect.

[21] Especially pp. 42-43 in *The History of Sexuality Volume I*.

[22] Especially see "The Revolution of Desire," pp. 133-137, in a section entitled *The Homosexual Struggle*, in *Homosexual Desire*. Desire in the Lacanian sense, unlike its misrepresentation and misreading in queer theory, is conceptualized in mathematical terms, namely as "neither the appetite for satisfaction nor the demand for love, but the difference that results from the subtraction of the first from the second, the very phenomenon of their splitting (*Spaltung*)" (Lacan, 1958, p. 580). A portion of desire, in other words, is never fully fulfilled, de-idealizing and detaching itself from its connotation with the signifier "passion" in queer theory and popular discourse alike.

[23] Cisgenderism refers to a person whose gender expression matches their assigned sex at birth ("assigned female at birth" [AFAB] or "assigned male at birth" [AMAB]), in contradistinction from transgender or gender nonbinary persons (Julia Serano, 2007, pp. 164-165). Regarding "heteronormativity," in the introduction to *Fear of a Queer Planet*, Michael Warner (1993) writes that "Western political thought has taken the heterosexual couple to represent the principle of social union itself" (xxi). Heteronormativity and its direct associations with marriage, monogamy, procreation, capitalist consumption, and domestic bliss, becomes a naturalizing and normativizing worldview in which there exists two complementing genders (women and men) from which "natural" roles are assigned and dispersed, espousing the supposed naturalness of sex, gender, and sexual orientation in order to privilege heterosexuality over homosexuality, queerness, and other nonnormative forms of gender and sexuality.

[24] Cf. the *OED*'s definition of "queer" in the dictionary's online edition, www.oed.com/search/dictionary/?scope=Entries&q=queer.

[25] Cf. Freud's (1921) prescient *Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse* (*Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, 1921), especially "Identifizierung," ("Identification," pp. 105-110) and Lacanian psychoanalyst Marie-Hélène Brousse's (2023) recent discussion of group identification in contradistinction from the language(s) of individuality, particularity, and singularity in "Sur l'Un-dividualisme modern" ("On Modern One-dividualism").

[26] Cf. Ferdinand de Saussure's (1916) seminal *Cours de linguistique générale* (*Course in General Linguistics*), especially pp. 65-70, and Roman Jakobson's (1960) "Linguistics and Poetics," in which he discusses metaphor and metonymy as the two intersecting master axes governing and regulating poetic language.

[27] Cf. Saussure's (1916; 1986) *Cours de linguistique générale* (*Course in General Linguistics*), pp. 65-67.

[28] Montrelay's "Recherches sur la féminité" ("Inquiry into Femininity") was originally published in *Critique* in 1970, whereas Lacan conducted his twentieth seminar, in which he discusses feminine sexuation, between 1972 and 1973.

[29] Originally held in *La conversation clinique* organized by UFORCA (*Union pour la formation en clinique analytique*) held on June 18th, 2022, jointly in Paris and on Zoom under the direction of psychoanalyst Jacques Alain-Miller.

[30] Many of the concepts that Montrelay (1977) develops in *L'Ombre et le Nom* (*The Shadow and the Name*), which begins with a chapter on Duras's (1964) novel, *Le ravissement de Lol V. Stein* (*The Ravishing of Lol Stein*; and references to Duras's work continue to resonate throughout the book in its entirety and to be carried into Montrelay's (2009) final book, *La portée de l'ombre* [*The Scope of the Shadow*]), are borrowed, at least implicitly, from the psychically prescient language of *Le ravissement*, most prominently the titular, capitalized *Nom* (Name) and *Ombre* (Shadow).

[31] Cf. Freud's (1958) "Psycho-Analytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia".

[32] Mythologized in poetic form in Book III of Ovid's (eighth century A.D./2009) *Metamorphoses*, the plot of the Ovidian myth revolves around Tiresias, a man who changes gender and becomes a woman so as to determine whether women or men experience more pleasure during sexual intercourse, eventually retrieving his masculinity and reaching the conclusion that women enjoy seven times more intensely than men: "In

troth,' says he [Jupiter to Juno], and as he spoke he laugh'd, / 'The sense of pleasure in the male is far / More dull and dead, than what you females share'" (lines 6-8). Sometimes, depending on the myth's version, Tiresias concludes that women enjoy eight times more than men.

[33] Also see the concluding section of my (2023) recent "Similaic Eroticism and Polymorphic Sexuality," and Shirley Zisser's (1999) earlier discussion of the subversive erotica of the similaic *qua* feminine writing in "Wanting Word of Woman, Subversive Speech of Simile".

[34] The first systematic treatise of figures and tropes in the English vernacular.

[35] Elocution, eloquence, or style is one of the cornerstones of rhetoric (the others being the Ciceronian and Quintilian pillars of disposition, invention, memory, and delivery), and consists of figures (or schemes/schemas, dating back to the Greek *skh?ma* and not to be conflated with the latter understanding of scheme as narrative plot) and tropes (not in the contemporary sense of a theme in a literary work but in the sense of transporting a word from its "proper" semantic signification to one that is "improper," originating from the Greek *trepein*, to turn).

[36] Cf. Gérard Genette's (1970) discussion of the compression and subsequent "loss" of figures and tropes in the Western tradition of rhetorical elocution in "*La rhétorique restreinte*" ("Rhetoric Restrained").

[37] The original, early modern, non-standardized English spelling has been kept throughout, modernized in square brackets.

[38] Following Aflalo's (2023) lecture in a study day of the *GIEP* (*The Israeli Society for Psychoanalysis in the New Lacanian School*).

[39] Or any other potential gender and/or sexual variation that has not been invented and articulated as of now.

[40] Cf. Montrelay's (1967a) early article, "*Ruptures dans le symbolique*" ("Ruptures in the Symbolic").

Bio:

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