AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Eva M. Payne for the degree of Master of Arts in English presented on May 16, 1997.
Title: Writing (Righting) the Silences: “Points of Perspective” for Texts and Students.

Abstract approved: Cheryl Glenn

The classroom practices discussed in this thesis come slowly and at a “slant” to feminism through critical reading of texts, a practice that I call a (re)presentation of the silent women in texts. Given our patriarchal western culture, making meaning, and especially making sense, of the role and representations of females offers a special challenge. Often, we readers discover that women are represented by “silence” or rendered according to the patriarchal value system, with little or no thought given to their actual cultural roles. My analysis and construction of a “point of perspective” for the silent or silenced females in male-authored canonical texts offers students a way to enrich their experience with a text and to enrich their abilities as critical readers.

Creating a fiction with the intent of having it appear transparently neutral may have been a common motive for both Geoffrey Chaucer and J. M. Coetzee as they created their silent women with their use of what Wayne Booth refers to as a distant narrator-agent. By distancing themselves as authors from their tales, Chaucer and Coetzee create the appearance that they are merely recording the words of others, but both authors make representations and speak for females. Kenneth Burke’s dramatistic approach to rhetorical analysis, including the analysis of literary discourse, anticipates the much later critical stance that writing never emerges completely unscathed by authorial motive and purpose.
Writing (Righting) the Silences: "Points of Perspective" for Texts and Students

by

Eva M. Payne

A THESIS

submitted to

Oregon State University

in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of

Master of Arts

Presented May 16, 1997
Commencement June 1997
Master of Arts thesis of Eva M. Payne presented on May 16, 1997

APPROVED:

Redacted for Privacy
Major Professor, representing English

Redacted for Privacy
Chair of Department of English

Redacted for Privacy
Dean of Graduate School

I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

Redacted for Privacy
Eva M. Payne, Author
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. TELLING IT LIKE IT ISN’T: (RE)PRESENTING SALES AND SILENCES
   - The Moment 1
   - Background 2
   - The Work of Feminism in the Classroom 4
   - The Problem 5
   - Solution to the Problem 7
   - Methodology 8
   - Overview of the Chapters 13

2. RHETORICAL MOTIVE IN THE “APPLIED LITERATURE” OF JUNK MAIL
   - Introduction 16
   - Context 17
   - Text 18
   - Process 19
   - Conclusion 23

3. A REDRESS OF AN INGRESS: (RE)PRESENTING MALYNE’S TALE
   - Introduction 27
   - Context 27
   - Text 29
   - Process 31
   - Conclusion 32

4. COETZEE’S SUSAN BARTON: (E)SENSUALLY FEMALE OR MERELY FEMININE?
   - Introduction 35
   - Context 36
   - Text 41
   - Process 43
   - Conclusion 44

5. WRITING (RIGHTING) THE WRONGS: (RE)PRESENTING SILENCES 49

WORKS CONSULTED AND CITED 52
Writing (Righting) the Silences: “Points of Perspectives” for Texts and Students

1. TELLING IT LIKE IT ISN’T: (RE)PRESENTING SALES AND SILENCES

Tell all the truth but tell it slant—
Success in Circuit lies
Too bright for our inform Delight
The Truth’s superb surprise
   Emily Dickinson

The Moment

In the vernacular of patriarchy, I was defending a lady’s honor the day I passionately offered a different perspective on “The Reeve’s Tale” from the one generated during our prior class meeting. No one in my Chaucer class, neither the students nor the professor, had mentioned that Malyne and her mother might have been raped. I kept waiting for someone to bring up the problematic representation of consensual sex, but no one, including me, had brought it to our discussion. It was a silence calling for my voice.

Much is unclear about what happened in the Miller’s bedroom according to the representation offered by Chaucer, but what is clear is that the women were never offered the option of refusing male sexual advances. Both the professor and the other students resisted my read of the story because they had accepted the narrator’s portrayal of the women as willing sex partners rather than victims. As an older-than-average student, I had grown accustomed to having a different read than many of my classmates. Despite the risk of being considered “not with it,” either a prude or a raving feminist who didn’t believe that women liked sex with men, I began my defense of Malyne and her mother.

For evidence, I brought a copy of Christine de Pizan’s The Book of the City of Ladies, written in 1420, just twenty years after Chaucer’s death. De Pizan addresses the
specific issue of women and rape by saying, "she [de Pizan] is troubled and grieved when men argue that many women want to be raped and that it does not bother them at all to be raped by men even when they verbally protest" (9). De Pizan’s words are also evidence that (re)presenting the role of women is significant and crucial work because some six-hundred years later, a classroom of literature students are still falling into line with a patriarchal reading of a tale which portrays women as liking to be raped. As a feminist, I want more progress than that.

Chaucer’s medieval tale read as consensual sex perpetuates the male myth that the best response for a woman being raped is to relax and enjoy it. The fabliau genre of “The Reeve’s Tale” has a contemporary equivalent in the farmer’s daughter jokes, which involve some kind of traveling salesman and a slow-witted farmer, and a sexpot daughter or wife. All these tales (or fabliaux) turn on two horrifying and unhappy representations of women: that women are available as dispensable pawns in disputes between men, and that women who are sexually assaulted and fail to resist “sufficiently” (whatever that might mean) enjoy being raped.

Background

Feminists, I believe rightly, don’t talk much about antiquated notions of “ladies” and “honor” these days. Both terms seem like masculine constructions which prescribe behavior for females in a culture. In fact, I am not much concerned about Malyne’s morality or “honor”; I am deeply concerned about the effects of her silence and how Chaucer’s representation allows her no voice or choice. As a student, I created my own
space in my Chaucer class to question the socially constructed myths surrounding the role of women in a patriarchal culture. Now as a community college instructor I am working toward a pedagogical approach that creates space for my students to locate, recognize and articulate their assumptions about the motives and silences in texts.

My concern about male-authored constructions of women, especially in the texts of canonical literature, has provided me with a focus for this thesis. As a graduate student, I sought feminist theories to help articulate my concerns about male-authored representations of females. I have learned that readers steeped in the discourse of patriarchal culture often resist making room for a new representation of the female experience. I faced resistance as a student when my peers tried to convince me that Malyne must have enjoyed the sex because she cried as Alayn left her bed. But couldn’t her crying have indicated a number of other emotions? I continue to feel that resistance as an instructor when many of my first-year students indicate they feel alienated from feminism, feminist readings, and by any perspective other than the most familiar.

As a feminist teacher, I am concerned about how to best educate students to (re)present the silences and involve them in an active dialogue with a text. The classroom practices discussed as part of this thesis come to feminism slowly and at a “slant” through examining the silences and representations of women in texts, a practice that I call a (re)presentation. Framing a discussion around and (re)presenting a silence, or offering another “truth” or “point of perspective,” is my way around the hostility some of my students feel toward what they believe feminism represents. Student resistance to feminism usually comes in two varieties in my classrooms. One form of resistance is the
blandant assumption some students make that women are, as the Bible indicates, inferior beings in need of supervision by men. A second form of resistance to feminism comes from students who believe that feminism is passé, little more than an historical issue, one that affected their mothers and grandmothers, but not something which is pertinent to their lives today. I disagree with both of these assumptions about feminism, and it is my intention in this thesis and in my classroom to demonstrate integration of feminism and critical reading.

The Work of Feminism in the Classroom

The work of feminism is not completed because the texts which traditionally supported patriarchal values in our culture are very much present in the literature classrooms on campuses across the country. The traditional western canon--although expanding and under siege from many fronts--is vehemently defended. For example, Howard Bloom's "An Elegy for the Canon" candidly asserts that "literary criticism as an art, always was and always will be an elitist phenomenon . . . and that it is a mistake to believe that literary criticism could become a basis for democratic education or for societal improvement" (17). Bloom is wrong on both counts: literary criticism is an art that is available to a wide spectrum of our population--including first-year college students--and literature has always been intimately involved in the cultural fabric of education and society. Our traditional canon is in no danger of being usurped from its prominent place in the required anthologies of world, western, English, and American literature for the large core classes of "Surveys of Literature" on my campus. Homer, Chaucer, Shakespeare,
Milton, Hawthorne, Melville, Twain, and their white literary brothers are in little danger from the attacks to change the canon. Therefore, it is neither within the scope of my thesis to speak of changing the canon, nor is it my purpose to argue for its demise.

My purpose, instead, is to argue for a new “point of perspective” from which students might approach the traditional canon of western literature. Traditional texts can be read and understood in ways which help us to explain our culture to ourselves. Students who can come to understand the belief systems underlying the production and reception of texts, systems which normalized the exclusion of the groups Bloom refers to as lacking the “elitist” quality of literary critics, can learn to recognize the textual representations of those arbitrarily constructed belief systems. Readers need the benefit of historical background of both the text, the author, and the reception of the text to gain perspective on how the socially constructed beliefs of an author’s historic moment might have influenced choices made in representing women. Teresa de Lauretis makes the assertion in “Upping the Anti (sic) in Feminist Theory” that “women take up a position, a point of perspective, from which to interpret or (re)construct values and meanings” (262). I believe that a “point of perspective” reading allows all students, male and female, to interrogate the silences of female representations and female roles in the traditional canonical texts.

The Problem

Linda Alcoff makes the claim that “Who is speaking to whom turns out to be as important for meaning and truth as what is said; in fact what is said turns out to change
according to who is speaking and who is listening” (12). My purpose in this thesis is to articulate a pedagogical strategy for critical reading in order to deal with problems of representation in texts and to present two models of how that (re)presentation of a silence might be accomplished. Who is being represented by a writer and what purposes that representation serves are critical questions answered by (re)presenting the silences in texts. I address these problems in my own critical reading of Chaucer and Coetzee.

(Re)presentation seems a particularly important aspect for a feminist critical reading of these two texts, as it is in most of canonical literature, because so many females are represented and so few have voices not authored by males. However, for such a strategy of critical reading to be successful, previously held notions about feminism, the integrity of texts, and belief systems present in a text must first be examined. Critical reading invites readers to consider that “meaning must be understood as plural and shifting, since a single text can engender diverse meanings given diverse contexts” (Alcoff 12). In the case of a feminist reading, the belief systems present in the representation of females as the weaker sex, facilitating the perpetuation of patriarchy, is called into question. The problem of overcoming resistance to feminism seems intertwined with bringing students to the point of investigating the belief systems of their own culture. Students frequently feel uncomfortable questioning their own belief systems and experiencing “meaning as shifting and plural,” which is, of course, the first step in being able to (re)present a silence in a text from a different “point of perspective.”
Solution to the Problem

I wish, in the words of Michel Foucault, to “locate the forms of power, the channels it takes, and the discourses it permeates in order to reach the most tenuous and individual modes of behavior” (11). I assert that literature is one form of discourse that influences “individual modes of behavior.” In order to change the “forms of power” that support a patriarchal discourse speaking for and of females, I propose (re)p resenting the silenced females in traditional canonical texts and questioning the belief systems that silenced them.

The problem of bringing resistant students to the point of (re)p resenting the silent females in a text, without first explicitly labeling critical reading as a component of feminism, is solved by approaching the issue of representation as being intertwined with motive. Rather than beginning with a pluralistic, postmodern feminist “point of perspective” reading, I begin by encouraging students to think about how rhetoric influences their lives. Kenneth Burke’s pentad of terms for examining rhetorical motive provides an entry into a text. Burke’s useful tool gives students a means of dismantling and examining “motive” and “purpose” entangled in discourse. If students learn to situate themselves in relation to their culture and to articulate the ways that relationship influences their reception of motives present in texts, positioning themselves as readers, then they may also learn to consider how culture has influenced both the “position” of the text and the “position” of an author. Thus, reader, writer, and text become “a politically assumed identity and one relative to [one’s] sociohistorical location” (de Lauretis 262). It is critical for a feminist reading to recognize that multiple “points of perspective” are possible and
that any particular “point of perspective” one assumes is motivated by the values present in one’s “social historical location.”

Methodology

I have found it useful as a student, and now also as an instructor, to take a two-step approach to (re)presenting a silence in texts. It was the same approach I found useful in my defense of Malyne when I asked what Chaucer’s motive might have been in portraying the women of “The Reeve’s Tale” as compliant. What is the motive of any misogynist literature? As I pointed out to my Chaucer classmates, even when it appears Malyne is speaking in “The Reeve’s Tale, it is really a male (re)presentation of a female’s response—what is the motive involved in the silencing of women?

I use a three-part approach to teach critical reading. First, I introduce the idea of ideology to my students. Burke cautions in *Counter-Statement* that “shifts in ideology [are] continuous, not only from age to age but from person to person,” and these shifts make discerning ideology in a text and a culture an inherently difficult task (146). However, Burke asserts, and I agree, that a shared ideology is what an author “can exploit for his effects” (161). Second, I ask students to begin determining what belief systems might be influencing the text and their reading of the text. I ask them to locate a “point of perspective” from which to view the text. Third, I ask students to apply that perspective to both the discourse of popular culture and to a selection of readings from the discourse of the traditional canonical works of western civilization.
In this thesis, I demonstrate how, as an instructor, I begin the process of looking for motives in a text. I discuss my own pedagogical strategy of bringing junk mail, what Burke’s *Counter-Statement* defines as “applied literature,” to my classrooms. Then using Burke’s pentad of agent, act, agency, scene, purpose, and motive as a theoretical tools for students to use in their exercise of identifying motive in a text, I begin the process of teaching how culturally inscribed motives influence production and reception of texts.

Locating my own feminist critical reading as a “point of perspective,” I also create two models of a “point of perspective” which (re)presents a silence. The two texts I work with are of the sort that Burke defines as “pure” literature: “The Reeve’s Tale” from Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* and J. M. Coetzee’s *Foe*. I have limited the focus of my discussion to the act of sexual intercourse between a male and a female, as told from a male “point of perspective,” in both texts.

By limiting my discussion to a male-authored representation of female sexuality, I am taking up the work, after a six hundred-year hiatus, of the medieval writer Christine de Pizan’s question, “why [are] so many different men . . . inclined to express both in speaking and their treatises and writings so many wicked insults about women?” (5). Chaucer’s medieval text portraying Malyne as a willing partner varies little from Coetzee’s contemporary text which portrays Barton, who realizes her choices are limited and submits to Cruso despite her obvious lack of sexual arousal. From a medieval text to a post-modern text, little changed for the women represented by male authors who distance themselves from the action. Chaucer and Coetzee both use elaborate framing devices. In each case, the “point of perspective” attributed to females has undergone several layers of
male representation before appearing in the text. Of course, even if the females were first-
person narrators speaking in the text, it would still be a manipulation of reality—a female
being constructed and represented fictionally by a male.

Chaucer and Coetzee take up the task of representing the female body in close
relation and interaction with the male body. Deconstructing the social and cultural belief
systems surrounding the representation of this male/female interaction in fiction is one
“point of perspective” from which to uncover the socially constructed “naturalness” of
patriarchal control of discourse and the socially constructed “naturalness” of the
patriarchal control of females. The effectiveness of fiction as a means of conveyance of
the belief systems which support the “natural” patriarchal hierarchy is attested to by
Hélène Cixous who claims that writing is the “locus where the repression of women has
been perpetuated.” Cixous goes on to warn readers that particularly insidious is the
writing that informs but “in a manner that is frightening since it’s often hidden or adorned
with the mystifying charms of fiction” (337).

Resisting the “mystifying charms of fiction” and determining one’s “point of
perspective” are subtle undertakings largely because of the invisible nature of ideology.
A reader must learn to resist the ideas that come most easily, most “naturally” and to
search for other possibilities. Anatole Broyard’s “The Price of Reading is Eternal
Vigilance,” describes critical reading as the process of learning to resist the temptation to
“project all of your hopes and illusions” onto the author (11). When a reader actively
engages in the process of determining the surrounding of the social, historical, and
cultural production of a text, creating a “fiction” of author and authorship, it becomes
possible to momentarily resist one's own cultural expectations, "hopes and illusions" and imagine, perhaps, that the cultural forces influencing the author's choices were quite different (Broyard 12).

The choices an author makes about what can be voiced in a text and what, or who, remains silent are often made from an entirely different "point of perspective" than that of readers. Thus critical readers are examining a process of what Burke in *Language as Symbolic Action* calls "selection and reflection," crucial steps in how humans, as "symbol-using entities" use words or symbols to "induce action in another" (45). Burke's image of a "terministic screen" is useful in locating a "point of perspective" and attending to how an author may have wished to "induce an action" in a reader. Burke states that "any given terminology is a reflection of reality, by its very nature as a terminology it must be a selection of reality; and to this extent it must function also as a deflection of reality" (45). Burke describes the role our "terministic screens" play in "directing the attention into some channels rather than others" (45). Becoming aware of how our attention is being directed as readers to consider certain things and not others is crucial in looking for motive behind those "reflections, deflections, and selections."

Critical reading involves some critical thinking about the motives revealed in the process of selection and reflection. Simply stated, critical reading involves looking for the "rhetorical motive [which] is often present where it is not usually recognized or thought to belong" (Burke 37). A good deal more caution and care is necessary, perhaps, in the reading of texts that are not overtly political if one is to become a fully literate critical reader. Burke asserts that "whenever you find a doctrine of 'nonpolitical' esthetics
affirmed with fervor, look for its politics" (28). The assumption that texts are imbued with "political fervor," and thus also imbued with motive, brings a critical reader to the point of making some assumptions about motives present in the choices contained within a text.

Learning to read critically is an idea that can be quite foreign to first-year college students because many of them are still "accept[ing] what [an author] says because a reader is still a child at heart and the author is an adult" (Broyard 11). College classrooms are appropriate places for students to begin the process of re-training: to recognize language used as a rhetorical construction and to begin the process of learning how to write rhetorically themselves. Burke defines rhetoric as writing which "has a 'you' and 'me' quality about [it]" (38). Critical reading is about looking for the motive hidden by the "you," the author, inserted rhetorically into the text and addressed to "me," the reader, in "endless variations . . . consciously or unconsciously," for the purpose of either "outwitting or cajoling of one another" (Burke 38).

Educating students to examine writing for rhetorical motive—and as Burke reminds us “there is an intrinsically rhetorical motive situated in the persuasive use of language [that] is rooted in an essential function of language itself”—is a difficult task (43). It is a task made all the more difficult because any use of language is intertwined with the belief systems that inform a culture’s ideology—which remains nearly invisible while simultaneously determining the boundaries of what is considered “normal” in a culture.
Overview of the Chapters

This thesis evolves in much the same manner as my own personal experience. I first articulate one pedagogical method that teaches students to look for motive in a project that is fairly gender neutral. I then move on to construct two models of a (re)presentation of silent females in a premodern and a postmodern text.

Chapter 1 provides a narration of my own interest as a student in (re)presentation of silences as the background. It also includes my own defining of the problems that I have encountered as an instructor in bringing feminist critical reading to texts to my classroom and my solution to that problem. I discuss the methodology I use both as an instructor and as a student in (re)presenting silences. I conclude that a pedagogical strategy for teaching how motive is present in writing is a necessary preliminary step to feminist critical reading.

Chapter 2 describes my pedagogical method of introducing critical reading in a classroom, using Kenneth Burke’s dramatistic pentad of terms to teach the rudiments of identifying rhetorically constructed appeals in the texts of junk mail. Junk mail lends itself to easy identifications of the motives implicit in the appeals, making critical reading for motive successful. What is often problematic for students in their analysis of junk mail is positioning their own “point of perspective” as readers and consumers. My goal for this exercise is to begin the process of educating students to look for motive in writing and to consider how the belief systems of a culture influence the “point of perspective” in both the production and reception of texts.
Chapter 3 is a model of (re)presentation. I create a “point of perspective” for Malyne through a resisting feminist reading of “The Reeve’s Tale.” Chaucer’s motive as an author in presenting the sexual intercourse in the Reeve’s tale as consensual sex rather than rape is, of course, unknowable. However, a change of “point of perspective” reveals that the representations of women in “The Reeve’s Tale” support the perpetuation of a patriarchal structure which enabled men to fictionalize women in ways that served to maintain hierarchal power arrangements, placing females in subjective positions to males. My “The Reeve’s Tale” (re)presentation emerges from what Judith Fetterly refers to as a “resisting read.”

Chapter 4 is my own gendered reading of the postmodern work of J. M. Coetzee’s *Foe*. I use the deconstruction of Jacques Derrida to reverse the hierarchal order between male and female, between masculine and feminine. My *Foe* (re)presentation receives a gendered reading involving a Derridian reversal and displacement of binary oppositions of male and female as a method of investigation. Coetzee’s fiction offers three views of the first person narrator-agent’s sexual encounters which work as a demonstration of a binary opposition, a reversal, and a displacement. My critique of representations, continued in this chapter, turns on a discussion of the silences of females and how Coetzee’s text works intra-textually and on a metanarrative level to demonstrate the reliance females must have on males to tell their stories for them.

Chapter 5 concludes that students, through the process of critical reading for motive in texts, can construct alternate “points of perspective” from those offered in the text. I also conclude that the when students think about motives and the belief systems
present in a text, they can also begin to examine their own motives and belief systems. By positioning both texts and themselves in their respective cultures, students can begin to construct their own alternate “points of perspective.” Through “point of perspective” and examination of belief systems, even students who are reluctant to participate in a feminist reading perform a similarly self-reflective and situated reading in the process of (re)presenting the silent voices of females in male-authored texts.
2. RHETORICAL MOTIVE AND CONSUMER SILENCE IN THE “APPLIED LITERATURE” OF JUNK MAIL

“Pure” literature has become “applied” literature, to the end of making people want these same commodities. For what is our advertising, what is our “success” fiction in the average commercial magazine, what are our cinematic representations of the “good life,” but a vast method of determining the criteria of a nation, and thus its conduct, by the assistance of art?

Kenneth Burke, *Counter-Statement* (1931)

Introduction

To become fully literate critical readers, students must learn to recognize the rhetorical constructions which conceal motive in writing. To become fully literate critical readers, students must learn to recognize the gaps in a text, discover what is silent in a text, and examine why those silences exist. In our patriarchal western culture, making meaning of the texts surrounding the formation of what constitutes the role of females in our culture offers a special challenge because one often finds that one is reading either a “silence” or a representation of females that serves the interests of the dominant discourse of a patriarchal hierarchy.

Students who question the construction of texts and their own reception of texts begin the process of becoming a critical readers. An integral part of critical reading involves situating both themselves as readers and situating the texts in the social and historical moment of their production. A comparison between the belief systems that seem to be informing the texts and their own belief systems is a means of examining the social construction--and how it changes over time--of belief systems which inform texts. Ultimately, an awareness of the cultural influences on their lives has the potential to allow
students to become readers of culture and readers of canonical texts and to begin to
examine the role and origin of motive in culturally transmitted beliefs.

Context

The value in becoming a critical reader is that this skill will provide readers with
more informed choices for their decision to either resist or adhere to the belief systems and
representations present in the discourses of their culture. Additionally, critical reading
facilitates a critical literacy which enables readers to examine the subjectivity of both the
texts they read and themselves as readers.

However, critical reading aimed at making cultural belief systems (including
patriarchy) visible is a hard sell that first day of class to the wide variety of students who
have not self-selected into my required writing class. I rely on the concrete and familiar
to make the abstract visible. Let me explain.

When I begin to teach critical reading to students, I am painfully aware that
making cultural belief systems visible to students is no easy task. Before we can describe
a cultural climate to ourselves, we first have to have some assurance that we can, as
members of a culture, and inextricably enmeshed in that culture, secure a place from which
to view our own subjectivity. I rely on both Burke and junk mail to help students visualize
and analyze one form cultural discourse.

Junk mail is a cultural text most of us feel all too familiar with, and as such, it
solves the common dilemma facing teachers from grade school through graduate school--
the task of connecting curriculum in a current and meaningful way to the lives of students.
I am particularly sensitive to this challenge since the first-year writing course I teach is a required course. Students have often expressed the feeling that the required writing course has some relevance to survival within the academic community but little to do with their lives in what they often refer to as the “real world.” Robert Scholes talks about bridging the gap between the “real world and the academy” in terms that help me articulate my using junk mail. Even when junk mail is spoken of as “direct mail,” it represents a class of discourse and texts that have traditionally been viewed as “non-literature,” or (“applied literature” by Burke), bringing the “literature” of popular culture into a classroom where canonical “literature” has traditionally been the text thought appropriate for discussion. In Textual Power: Literary Theory and The Teaching of English, Scholes asserts that “all texts have secret-hidden-deeper meanings,” and those partially hidden meanings are exactly what I intend to make visible to students in their examination of junk mail (8). Scholes asserts that “our students are in dire need of critical strength to resist the continuing assaults of all the media” (16). Resisting the lure of appeals may start with identifying those appeals. Thus junk mail serves the dual purpose of connecting the everyday “real world” experience of analyzing junk mail with the academic purpose of becoming a fully literate critical reader.

Text

Junk mail is a ubiquitous form of rhetoric in our current cultural and historical moment. We are all subject to this particular rhetoric which helps to support consumer capitalism in our culture. Solicitations to send in our winning sweepstakes numbers, offers
to sign up for an already approved 5.9% credit rate, opportunities for discounted
vacations in Jamaica, and free companion air tickets are just a few of the fine offers that
arrive uninvited in our mailboxes each week.

Process

As I distribute the mail that first day of class, I talk about the basic unchanging
elements appearing in all effective writing—appeals to logic (logos), appeals to emotion
(pathos), and a credible writer or source (ethos). I ask my students to write the words
logos, pathos, and ethos as the first notes they take in my class. The great efficacy of
using junk mail as an illustration of how to go about nosing around in a text for motive is
that the rhetorical appeals and motives are blatant enough for students to easily identify,
thus making this critical reading experience successful.

Students catch on fast to identifying the appeal of pathos when viewing graphic
photographs of starving Somalian children covered with flies included with requests for a
small donation to aid the children. Ed McMahon’s image on sweepstakes entries has been
viewed as a failed attempt at ethos. The clean-cut boy scout pictured on the front of a
brochure asking for a monetary gift for funding the “Friends of Scouting” was identified
by one student as an attempt to appeal to logos. It is just more financially practical, my
student asserted, to produce Boy Scouts than it is to produce juvenile delinquents.

Analysis of the discourse of junk mail is simple enough, and my small groups of
students have lively discussions over the implied meaning of the texts of the junk mail
samples. However, when the motives driving discourse become more subtle than the
lucrative capitalist enterprise of separating people from their money, a more complex approach is necessary to make ideology visible. And I believe keeping motive in the forefront is a useful approach for analysis of any piece of writing--whether it is junk mail or the western canon. It is at this point that I introduce Burke and his dramatistic approach to analysis of rhetoric, using his pentad of terms. I tell them that Burke’s ideas are a method to take the work of analysis of writing in hand--both the writing they produce as writers and the writing they consume as readers. I start my introduction of Burke by drawing a hand and labeling each of the five digits with Burke’s terms: agent, agency, scene, act, and purpose. I write “MOTIVE” across the palm of the hand outlined on the chalkboard and talk about the connections between the five separate terms and motive (Burke xxii). Students have no problem recognizing the motive of profit in the junk mail we have been reading. But, I ask them, what about motives that are more subtle? What if it isn’t just about money? What if you are being sold ideas? Lifestyles? Gender definitions? How do you make motives driving those discourses become visible to you as a reader? What if you are reading Chaucer instead of junk mail?

Analyzing junk mail for motive is a pedagogical method of that encourages students to situate themselves and the texts they encounter in their own social and cultural frame. I am opening up the possibility that they will consciously look for and determine “motive” lurking behind the sales pitches which make assumptions about them as possible purchasers and transfer that skill to other rhetorical texts they encounter--whether that rhetoric comes in the form of literature from the traditional canon or messages on the outside of yellow envelopes proclaiming that “you may already be a winner.” In addition,
I want student writers to examine their own motives and how they can best use those three tried and true appeals—pathos, logos and ethos—to either conceal or display their own motives as writers and speakers in their discourse. Often the trickiest part of this for students is articulating what their motives are—and I suspect it is because their motives are so closely tied to the nearly invisible system of beliefs which drive both the external and internal discourses of their lives.

I turn again to my students’ analysis of motive in junk mail to demonstrate how being able to identify the appeals of persuasive rhetoric empowers them to become fully literate, resisting readers rather than accepting readers of those texts. If students attempt that second step of starting to look for the possible ideologies driving that discourse, they are empowered to become critical resisting subjects to the discourse of consumer capitalism. (Those conservative congressmen are right—some of us at the university are attempting to subvert at least parts of our existing ideological systems.) Few students, however, are equally adept at articulating how belief systems which inform their culture both reflect the dominant discourse and can change and become visible over a period of time. I refer to this change, as many critics have done, as the formation of the “natural.”

Like a late night “info-mercial” star, I launch into my testimonials and examples about how the power of language influences our lives in ways that we may not recognize consciously. I try to draw a broad picture of ideology, culture, and language—attempting to make the social construction of what we believe as a culture visible to students. I believe this is most easily accomplished by demonstrating that what we as a culture consider naturally wrong and repugnant now was an accepted “natural” solution to
unwanted children at one time. The practice of exposing unwanted infants to die, considered “natural” and acceptable in some historical and cultural moments, is not considered natural or acceptable any by our own culture. For instance, Oedipus’s mother chose exposure as a means of death for her baby when she learned of that he was fated to kill his father and marry his mother. Jocasta, in the Sophocles version of the play, is never faulted for arranging the attempted exposure of her infant son. This sad practice has had wildly varying “naturalness” attached to it, depending on how it was situated in place and time.

Looking for motive in writing in junk mail is a stepping stone for students to begin the journey of becoming cognizant of how motive--often left unstated in the gaps of a text--informs our assumptions and beliefs. Scholes supposes that the “worst thing [instructors] can do is to foster in [students] an attitude of reverence before texts” (16). By starting with an analysis of junk mail, which is unlikely to foster reverence in any reader, students can gain practice in becoming critical readers who are looking for motives in discourse, and who are learning to recognize and perhaps begin to reverse or dismantle values which, when examined, no longer appear viable.

Obviously, I do not draw a boundary in my classroom between reading what Burke refers to as “pure literature” and “applied literature” because I view the texts of culture as integral parts of a whole system. Although there are critics aplenty who disagree with this stance, and Harold Bloom, ardent defender of the canon, might be one to lead the charge, I do not think it is enough for students to merely learn to function within the discourse of the academy. If readers are to attain a high degree of literacy, it is
appropriate for them to question their assumptions and to begin to articulate what those assumptions are. Appropriate to full critical literacy is the exploration of how our beliefs are acquired and how the beliefs we hold interact with those we encounter in texts. My definition of texts includes not only the traditional western canon but extends to include that which has traditionally not come under the purview of literature and writing classrooms.

Conclusion

Kenneth Burke’s pentad is useful for readers in identifying in texts the “basic stratagems which people employ, in endless variations, and consciously and unconsciously, for outwitting or cajoling one another” (xxii). However, Burke recognizes the subjectivity of readers; we are subject to the external discourses of our culture and subject to the internalized versions of that discourse. We become, as Burke puts it, “our own audience,” and then the “you” addressing the “me” is a case of the “I” talking to the “me” (Burke 38). Self-talk is a discourse which does not lend itself to the critical distance of an Archimedean view of the world. Burke affirms this by noting we internalize or “impose” rhetorical discourses on ourselves and that “only those voices from without . . . which can speak the language of the voice within” are successful in persuading us (39). Similarly, Mary Louise Pratt notes the effect of internalized discourse in authoethnographic writing of marginalized groups outside of the dominate discourse. I think a case can be made that some female writing qualifies as autoethnographic writing.
A sophisticated critical literacy is required to examine how external voices have become internalized voices. And being a feminist reader and teacher, I believe recognizing how the dominant discourse of our culture represents and perpetuates the interests of patriarchy becomes an exercise in self-reflection--a hallmark element of feminist literary criticism.

Where are we now? If we, in Burke’s words, “relax our gaze” for a moment and recapture the larger picture of bringing a social cultural method of reading to college classrooms, with the goal being to situate both students and texts in their respective social culture and historical moment, we can see what we have been doing is examining one aspect of that endeavor. We have been mulling over the ways in which cultural beliefs work--often without conscious effort on our part--to internalize the values and belief systems available to us in the discourses of our culture. Internalization of cultural mores contained in a dominant discourse becomes evident only when there is a change in the reception to the discourse.

The ability to become fully literate seems intertwined with the ability to situate ourselves as readers--to become self-reflective--and to begin the process of interpretation by first recognizing our subject positions within our culture and the dominant discourse. And integral to the ability to situate one’s self is the ability to examine one’s own assumptions and belief systems as well as the assumptions and belief systems surrounding the production and reception of a text. Educating students to examine writing for motive, and motive is present, as Burke notes, even where it is not expected--is a difficult task. It is a task made all the more difficult because any use of language is inextricably involved
with the belief systems that inform a culture’s ideology—which remains nearly invisible while simultaneously determining the boundaries of what is considered “normal” in a culture.

If the close relationship between language and belief is recognized, it enables students to become critical readers of the texts they encounter in literature classrooms, in their various specific disciplines, and in their lives. A critical reading which looks for motive in writing is an integral part of becoming a critical thinker as well. This, in my mind, is the function and goal of education. Not all students will eventually leave either my classroom or the university being critical thinkers aware of the implications of feminism as a “point of perspective” to examine western civilization and its accompanying texts, but I make a modest investment toward this goal when I teach students to be aware of motive hidden in writing. As a feminist, I also want to bring to my students an awareness that rhetorical motive, in a text of popular culture or in the traditional canon of western literature, can be examined for the way in which it either consciously or unconsciously represents females. It is true enough that other marginalized groups exist, and critical reading can reveal far more than just the issues surrounding how women are represented in the texts of western culture. The scope of this thesis, however, will deal only with how ideological beliefs contained in the rhetoric of junk mail represents the readers as consumers and how both Chaucer’s “Miller’s Tale” and Coetzee’s Foe represent females.

Miles Myers’s “Shifting Standards of Literacy--The Teacher’s Catch-22," asserts that the changing expectations of literacy in our culture have been driven by the economic
necessity of a body of workers to keep pace with the growing complexity of the job place. Additionally, Myers states that “the increasing complexity of citizenship in modern democracies” makes a high degree of literacy necessary and desirable because without it “the media could be used by despots to control populations, even a democracy” (Myers 29). Myers would do well to note that changing standards of how we engage with texts is part of the complexity facing both students and instructors. I also disagree in principle with Myers about the potential for a “despot to control populations” because I worry much more about the subtle control that the media discourse and the discourse of both popular culture and canonical literature exerts on our lives. We are always already influenced by the discourses of our cultures—even those cultures lacking a visible figurehead despot. The argument for acquiring the sophisticated sort of literacy in a classroom that enables one to read culture has to start with the realization of the influence of prevalent ideas. The “natural” assumptions of a culture are disseminated through words, and these words are not driven by the despots—they are driven by the discourses in which all of us participate every day—both within and without the academy.
3. A REDRESS OF AN INGRESS: (RE)PRESENTING MALYNE’S TALE

Who paintede the leon, tel me who?
By God, if wommen hadde written stories,
As clerkes han writtinee hire oratories,
Woulde han written men moore wikkednesse
And al the mark of Adam may redresse.

Geoffrey Chaucer, Canterbury Tales (1493)

Introduction

My assertion that the work of feminism as it appears in feminist critical reading is not all done relies partly on my own experience with canonical texts which supported patriarchal interests and values being very much present in the literature classes in the academy--and my experience as a student that many of them are being taught in a traditional text-based pedagogical style. In order to redress an old ingress in Geoffrey Chaucer’s “The Reeve’s Tale,” I have created a new “point of perspective” which moves the focus of the tale from the tale-telling Reeve to a (re)presentation of Malyne. From a different “point of perspective,” it seems entirely possible that the Reeve falsely “pantede the leon” when he describes the events taking place in the Miller’s busy bedroom the night the Oxford students stayed over (WBPro1 692).

Context

The most troubling part of this Tale for me is why Malyne is portrayed as such an eager participant in what appears to be a sexual assault. I suspect that the role of women in medieval culture is a partial answer. Let’s look at the facts the way The Reeve first reports them. Alayn “creeps” to “this wench” who “lay upright and faste slepte” and then
suddenly “they were aton” . . . . It was too late for [Malyne]” to cry” (RvT 4193-97). Malyne’s reasons for remaining silent when she finds Alayn already on top of her and her reasons for telling Alayn where to find the loaf made with his stolen grain remain unrepresented. Constructing an alternate “point of perspective” for Malyne exposes one misery resulting from the lack of representation of women in a patriarchal culture--the misery of having only the power men grant them. Females in medieval society were subordinate both by law and by custom to males. However, this must be qualified by acknowledging that both men and women living in medieval society were familiar with the restrictions of an ideological system which created a rigidly structured hierarchical society and organized the secular and spiritual lives of people through the “concept of estate” (Hallissy 3). The general divisions of society in the Middle Ages, and the ones apparent in Chaucer’s work, are those folks who work, those folks who fight, and those folks who pray. Margaret Hallissy discusses how females fit into those divisions and concluded that “behavior for women was defined by their relationship to men” (5). Consequently, a female was either a maid, a wife, a widow, or a nun--but never a fighter. Each of these “estates” of a female’s life had specific rules to govern her dress and behavior. “Legal rights were most limited when a woman was under protection--that is, in maidenhood and wifehood--and they expanded in widowhood” (Hallissy 17). Represented as a maiden, in Chaucer’s text, Malyne is positioned at one of those powerless points in her life under the control and protection of her father when Alayn crept into her bed.

If Malyne felt powerless, she may have remained silent for reasons other than sexual ardor. She may have felt incapable of resisting Alayn. As a daughter, she would
have known that “She was a piece of marketable property transmitted from one owner to another at the volition of others” (Hallissy 44). Perhaps by the time Malyne woke to discover Alayn had devalued her by taking her virginity, she may have felt it was far too late to cry out for help, and her best and most prudent course of action was to keep secret that she had just lost her worth on the marriage market. She was no longer a credit to her family--but a debit.

Text

The Reeve reports that Alayn “swyved” Malyne “thries” in one “shorte nyght” (RvT 4265-66). The Reeve also suggests Malyne was a willing participant because she remained silent when she woke to discover Alayn on top of her and did not cry out for help, and further implicates her as a willing lover, rather than a hapless victim, when he reports that Malyne says “God thee save and keepe!” / And with that word almoost she gan to wepe” as Alayn leaves her bed (RvT 4247-48). This textual “evidence” along with Malyne telling Alayn where the loaf is hidden that her father made with the grain is what my classmates and professor defended their reading of this incident as consensual sex rather than rape. However, as the Wife of Bath observes, if women were telling the story, they “wolde han writen of men moore wikkednesse” (WBPr 695). When I recast the telling of the tale from a different “point of perspective” the story might emerge which calls into question the telling of Malyne’s reaction.

Let’s examine the layers of male authorship involved in the telling of this tale. Geoffrey Chaucer, the man and author, often complimented by critics who attribute part of
the lasting value of his work to his apparent "objectivity" as he reports--without apparent
moral judgment--on the foibles of his fellow pilgrims in *Canterbury Tales*. Wayne Booth
defines a difference between the "author" and the "implied version of himself" who works
as the "official scribe . . . for the narrative" (71). In Chaucer’s "The Reeve’s Tale" there is
an additional layering as the Reeve acts as a "narrator-agent who produces some
measurable effect on the course of the events" in his telling of his tale to "qyte" the
Miller’s previously told tale (Booth 155). As often happens in a male-told tale, a woman,
in this case Malyne, functions only as cipher in an exchange between two males. Two of
the narrator-agents in Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, the Reeve and the Miller, engage in
this exchange. The Reeve, upset by the Miller’s unflattering portrayal of Reeves in "The
Miller’s Tale" does not seek revenge on the tale telling Miller in his tale but rather on the
Miller’s women--Malyne and her mother. Thus, both within the framework of the entire
*Canterbury Tales* and "The Miller’s Tale," the feminine role of man’s property is allotted
to females in a patriarchal culture: Malyne is a commodity subject to being exchanged as
property between males.

Chaucer, variously derided and celebrated for his treatment of females, presents a
problematic case in “The Reeves Tale.” If one believes just the text printed on the page,
consensual sex between willing partners is the perspective. If one shifts that perspective
to speculate about what Malyne may have thought, it becomes quite possible that the
portrayal of her compliance is a fictional act and evidence of a phallocentric construction
of reality.
Process

Learning how to read critically and respond to a text as a fully literate person involves more than close attention to the words on a page; it involves locating the gaps—the things left unsaid and the voices left out of a text. In this case it is Malyne’s representation of herself—a female view and “point of perspective” that this particular male tale lacks. Critical reading involves not only locating one’s self in a sociohistorical moment and locating one’s own political location, but it also involves doing the same for the text. Peering into another period in history, at other social traditions and cultural practices, enables readers to speculate about the “point of perspective” represented by the text. Determining a “point of perspective” is a particularly valuable tool for feminist readers in a culture whose texts, like Chaucer’s are often informed with a belief system that allows assumptions about female sexuality, perpetuating the role of women as submissive ciphers with no voice in a patriarchal society.

Alayn seeks redress from the Reeve’s theft of his grain by “swyving” the Miller’s daughter. Sexual intercourse with a man’s wife and daughter, in a culture that positions females as male property is a form of trespass. Thus, the Alayn’s motivation to violate the daughter of the Miller’s house was not as simple as mere lust motivated by the urge for sexual gratification. He sought some redress for the crime that the Miller had committed against him. The Miller’s daughter becomes central to this Tale as, “the vulnerable and forgettable pawn of men who use her for . . . revenge” (Delany 86).
Conclusion

Chaucer’s “Reeve’s Tale” is most probably a reflection of the popular genre of the fabliau, a misogynist satire of the Middle Ages—a genre familiar to Chaucer and apparent not only in “The Reeve’s Tale” of the Canterbury Tales, but also in “The Miller’s Tale” and “The Merchant’s Tale,” and “The Franklin’s Tale.” The fabliau relies on representing passive females as being sexually aroused whenever males “swyve” them. The Reeve’s representation of Malyne’s willingness to participate in the Oxford Clerk’s urge to revenge the “ill endying” of his flour and his urge to receive “som esement” at her expense is questionable. The further representation of mutual lust between the Clerk and the Miller’s daughter is a fiction with limited charm and less even less verisimilitude (RvT 4178-79). It is a fiction which provides a charming distraction to Alayn’s sordid motivation to rape Malyne in retaliation for a petty crime and a fiction which misrepresents any real response from Malyne.

Malyne, if (re)presented from a different “point of perspective,” may prove to have acquiesced to the sexual demands of Alayn because she did not feel she had the power to resist. In any case, the Reeve tells a tale which demonstrates patriarchal assumptions about the sexual complacency required of females. It is a male perspective. Perhaps, in the words of H. Marshall Leicester, it is also a tale about “a general [male] anxiety about female indifference to male desire” which is resolved by assuming desire is mutual (Leicester 286). The Reeve’s Tale perpetuates the myth of mutual desire in a rape by claiming Malyne felt a bond with Alayn when she wants to help him “stele a cake of half a busshel” (RvT 4244). The Reeve also reports that Malyne’s mother’s reaction, after
John’s trickery to get her in his bed, was to relish the “priketh harde and depe” having
“So myrie a fit ne hadde she not ful yoore” (RvT 4229-30). Such representations ignore
the real possibility that both Malyne and her mother are ciphers used for male revenge,
male domination, and male sexual gratification.

Obviously, Malyne remains silent and is unable to tell her side of this story--she is
merely a subject in a male tale. Lynn A. Higgins and Brenda R. Silver’s introduction in
Rape and Representation support the idea that the answer to the question “who is
speaking” makes all the difference when “confronting the entanglement of rape and
representation” (1). By “focusing on the tales told (or not told) by voices within the texts,
by authors . . . the complex intersections of rape and representation, reveal their
inseparability from questions of subjectivity, authority, meaning, power, and voice”
(Higgins and Silver 1).

Even in classrooms where students resist feminist criticism, issues of how females
in our culture are controlled by a physical fear of being raped strike familiar chords with
college students. Higgins and Silver assert that “rape and the threat of rape are a major
force in the subjugation of women” (1). The sexual interaction represented in “The
Reeve’s Tale,” when retold from a different “point of perspective” demonstrates the
problematic result of females being constructed in ways which do not offer them a voice
or a choice. Answering the question of who benefits from the silent females portrayed in
the traditional canon of western literature returns us to Burke. His helpful pentad can
offer an analysis tool for students to begin uncovering what purpose and motivation might
lay behind the representation of Malyne as eager partner. Contrasting the motives of
authorship which portray Malyne as eager partner with motives which would portray her as hapless victim begin to uncover some of what I, as a feminist reader and teacher, find problematic about not questioning the “point of perspective” represented by the patriarchal canonical texts in our literature classrooms.
4. COETZEE’S SUSAN BARTON: (E)SENSUALLY FEMALE
OR MERELY FEMININE?

By feminist, one understands a way of reading texts that points to the masks of truth with which phallocentrism hides its fictions. 
Peggy Kamuf, “Writing like a Woman”

Introduction

White Writing, J. M. Coetzee’s work on South African literature, defines what Richard Begam asserts resonates with Roland Barthes “écriture blanche,” a “transparently neutral language designed to register the world with clinical objectivity” (117). Creating a fiction with the intent of having it appear to be “transparently neutral” may have been a common motive for both Chaucer and Coetzee in their use of a distant narrator-agent. By distancing themselves as authors from their tales, they create the appearance that they are merely recording the words of others. Chaucer’s Reeve relates a tale as a narrator-agent in “The Miller’s Tale.” Susan Barton in Coetzee’s Foe acts as a first-person “self-conscious narrator cutting across the distinction between observer and narrator-agent . . . aware of [her]self as writer” (Booth 155), giving the appearance the tale is manipulated by her rather than by Coetzee.

However, contemporary literary theory has not recovered from the Derridian moment of undecidability and the realization that “white writing,” like all speech, is “nothing more than a myth, the nostalgic longing for an Adamic language” (Begam 117). Burke’s dramatistic approach to literature analysis with his pentad of terms anticipates the much later critical stance that writing never emerges completely unscathed by authorial motive and purpose.
Context

I assert that both Begam and Coetzee are overlooking a salient point in the fiction of *Foe*: an “ism” which appears in the nearly invisible gaps and silences in texts and is perhaps antecedent to racism, classism, and colonialism—sexism. Does a male author speaking from a female’s point of view necessarily have, in Burkean terms, the same range of selection and reflection apparent in his language as a female author who creates a female narrator? Is a male writer who creates a female narrator merely telling a story which is a masculine construction of women, selecting language that constructs his fictional female narrative in a manner that reflects his culturally inscribed masculine experience of females? Begam, and I believe rightly, entertains the problem of speaking for others when he asserts that Coetzee, “given his position within white writing, . . . can neither speak nor write for Friday” (127). The loss of Friday’s tongue renders him silent. Thus, Coetzee handily avoids having to construct a narrative for an ethnicity other than his own. Coetzee fails to avoid speaking in the voice of a woman in his fiction—which is just as problematic as a white man speaking for a black man. Biological sex differences—male and female—surely produce “points of perspective” as legitimately different as black writing is from white writing.

Linda Alcoff asserts that the problem of speaking for others and not assuming the dominant discourse is universal, authorized to speak for all and about all, is the premise for “the creation of women’s studies and African-American studies departments” (11). Alcoff also notes, “That both the study of and the advocacy for the oppressed must come to be done principally by the oppressed themselves” (7). Recognizing that the white male
experience is not universal presents a special problem in the context of college classrooms where the traditional canonical texts of our western culture reinforce the universality of the white male experience and marginalize what is exterior to that assumed universal experience. Again, let me assert that the scope of this thesis not to argue for abolishing the traditional canon. Rather, I am arguing for a consciously resisting critical reading of those texts which offer alternative “points of perspective.” Critical resisting reading is necessary also to uncover issues of motive and purpose, the rhetorically constructed ideological beliefs which filter into the language of representation and create the “point of perspective” of the dominant discourse.

The postmodern Derridian critique of language, which starts with the basis that any use of language being a pretense, can ease the task of critical resisting reading because the assumption can be made that if males are masquerading as female narrators, or if males are telling tales about females, it merely adds an additional layer of pretense to speech acts which are always already parasitic in nature (106). Derrida’s declaration that, “You cannot root-out the ‘parasite’ without rooting-out the ‘standard’ at the same time,” in the case of Coetzee’s *Foe*, would mean that it is impossible to trace the layers of pretense in *Foe* back to the point where a “standard” was represented. Simply stated, *Foe* is a construction of Coetzee’s and informed by his “dogma.” To Derrida, tale telling represents “dogma,” masquerading as “standard” (90-91). Derrida concludes that the “[standard] does not even derive from common sense, but merely from a restrictive interpretation of common sense which is implicit and never submitted to discussion” (90-91).
Let's reflect back a moment to Chapter 3, and apply Derrida’s principle to Chaucer’s tale. If we reconsider Malyne’s the “standard” which the “parasitic speech act” that her story is based on seems to be the “common sense” of patriarchy that enables males to represent and use females in ways that serve male interests. It does not, however, “derive from common sense” that Malyne would have been willing to submit to Alayn. It is from a “restrictive interpretation” of a male representation that Alayn’s sexual intercourse with Malyne is presented as a willing acquiescence rather than as a rape. A tale which reinforces the acquiescence of females is a reinforcement a cultural “dogma” maintained in the text.

If we apply this principle to Foe, it seems Coetzee employs his “dogma” and “interpretation of common sense” in the narration of his fiction. Coetzee’s narrator Barton says that the “lack” in her story is “the loss of Friday’s tongue” (Coetzee 45). If we are to view Friday’s missing tongue as a symbolic castration as well, it adds to his reasons for having to have Barton tell his story. However, Barton’s own lack of a penis apparently impedes her ability to tell her story in writing except through letters to a man. Barton must find a male to write her story. The “common sense” of the “standard” reflected in the “parasitic” fiction of Foe is that the lack of either a penis or a tongue is implicated in the loss of power to write one’s own story. Anything Friday thinks about the conditions of his life and his own history comes not directly from him, but rather it is constructed in the narrative through the voice and person of the white female Barton. Barton becomes a cross between the “narrator-agent,” as the Reeve is in Chaucer’s “Reeve’s Tale,” and a “self-conscious narrator” writing her story through letters in Foe.
Barton believes that she must tell her story through a male voice and not her own— that of Coetzee’s fictional author, Daniel Foe. Foe is to act as the male filter, “The booksellers will hire a man to set your story to rights” (writes?) through whom Barton’s own female history of being both a castaway and a survivor must be sieved in order to become public (Coetzee 40).

The tale itself is Barton’s legacy after Cruso’s death. And just like the tale, Friday passes from Cruso to Barton upon Cruso’s death. “Think what you may, it was I who shared Cruso’s bed and closed Cruso’s eyes, as it is I who have disposal of all that Cruso leaves behind, which is the story of his island” (Coetzee 45). Thus, the tale becomes her possession to dispose of as she wishes. Whether Friday’s story is to be told, whether he is to live in England or be shipped off, whether he is to weed gardens or be taught to read, is all at the discretion of Barton because he has no power to resist either the power of white writing or the power of white ownership.

Friday, feminized by his “lack,” becomes as much of a cipher as the Chaucer’s Miller’s daughter—property to be disposed of and represented in accordance to the will of the male telling the tale. Barton has a “lack” which it appears makes her unable to be anything other than the manipulated marionette of the fictional author Daniel Foe and the “flesh and blood” author, the twentieth century white African, J. M. Coetzee. Barton is unable to fulfill the same function as Chaucer’s Reeve without the help of a male. But in both cases, females are being spoken for and represented by a “point of perspective” that is masculine.
Daniel Defoe seems to have had no reservations in the original *Robinson Crusoe* about writing the narration of both the white Robinson Crusoe and the black Friday from his Euro-centric white male experience. This white male experience was the culturally approved “point of perspective” from which to record the history of western civilization. Coetzee’s Barton reinforces this dominant cultural view of who the proper recorders of history are when she relies on a male writer to tell her tale. Coetzee’s tale is scarcely just a reiteration of Defoe’s original speech act because Defoe is likely to have based his fiction, in part, on what he likely believed were historic nonpretended speech acts. Coetzee bases his fiction on a fiction, clearly a speech act that is parasitic to the original. And as such is not “simply external . . . but comes to live off the life of the body in which it resides” (Derrida 90).

One of the philosophical choices evident in Coetzee’s *Foe* and Chaucer’s “The Reeve’s Tale” seems to be an awareness of the patriarchal arrangements of western culture, that a male author’s narrator is authorized to represent and speak for a female, or in the case of Friday, a feminized man. On the other hand, another decision, made at that Derridian moment of undecidability which employs a feminist philosophy, might state that “feminist rewritings of literary history [reveal that] the adequacy of a masculine identity to represent the universal [is] radically in question” (Miller 114). A feminist questioning of Coetzee addresses yet another level of pretense, that of a male (Coetzee) representing the voice of a female (Barton). It is the same feminist questioning of that occurs when a male (Chaucer) represents the voice of a female (Malyne). However, Coetzee’s seems aware as a postmodern writer of the close parallels between the history of the telling of Barton’s
tale and the history of the nearly silent women in the canon of western civilization. For instance, Barton begins to tell her story in an epistolary form—a form of writing thought culturally proper for women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. But Barton is also quite aware that to tell her story she must enter the realm of male discourse, that she needs to exchange her letters for another narrative form, and she suspects that transformation can only be accomplished by a male who will “set right” her tale.

Barton’s need to participate in a traditionally male discourse in order to tell her tale is noted by Teresa Dovey, “Susan Barton, as a woman writer, is seeking a place from which to speak from within the masculine establishment” (355). Dovey asserts that Barton’s presence in Foe’s house is a metaphor for “the way in which women have been physically confined to men’s houses and metaphorically contained by men’s texts” (355). Coetzee’s tale of a female’s journey through the labyrinth of culturally inscribed spaces to find a voice within a male discourse starts with her slipping into the sea.

Text

The first view of Barton that confronts the reader is a description of her decision to act and abandon the raft and the dead captain with the pike in his eye rather than to remain passively floating in the current with him. This will to act rather than remain passive to the fate assigned to her by the men who had murdered the captain and then put her on the raft with his dead body can be viewed as a foreshadowing Barton’s will to evade the passive feminine role assigned her in a patriarchal culture. Just as she takes charge and leaves the dead captain behind, she also takes eventually takes charge of the
"righting" of her story. However, Barton’s first rejection of feminine passivity is brief and treacherous independence. As Peter E. Morgan notes, *Foe* “is a novel about marking out masculine space, defining its limits and defending its parameters; and it is a tale of the language of white Englishmen, as that language is used as an instrument of oppression” (84). Barton immediately finds herself again confined in a “masculine space” and under male control again, physically relying on a man again—this time Friday—as soon as she is out of the water. It seems the superior strength of the “primitive” male’s thick skin allows him the freedom of movement, at least on Cruso’s island, denied to the thin-skinned white female. It isn’t until Barton fashions herself an artificial skin to cover her feet, in this thorny male-dominated domain that she can have freedom of movement and avoid pricks.

However, Barton’s freedom is as artificial as the extra skin on her feet. Cruso is clearly the patriarch of the island. Barton’s position as a woman within the patriarchal hierarchy is, perhaps, most apparent in *Foe* during the three incidences of coital activity. The first of these scenes is the penultimate act of Barton’s serving Cruso as a nurse, nursing being an act of service and traditionally feminine. Barton relates that “I continued to hold Cruso and soothe him” (Coetzee 28). Her reward for this nurturing act appears to have been to provide a female body for Cruso’s sexual gratification. Barton initially resists when she feels “a hand on [her] body” (Coetzee 29). However, even at this early stage in his novel, Coetzee has presented his female narrator as a pragmatic person who is willing to view nonconsenting sexual intercourse as survival rather than rape. She appears accustomed to the role that the female body plays in the economic arrangements of a
patriarchal society. Barton submits to the sexual demands of Cruso. In exchange he continues to feed and shelter her.

Process

The voice of females who arrange for their survival by using their bodies as a means of economic exchange remains, of course, as silent in the fiction of *Foe* as the voice of Malyne in "The Reeve’s Tale." When with a male author is representing a female, he may paint that character in ways which are, indeed, useful to males. It is useful to a patriarchal power arrangement to create tales which support the belief that women are compliant in their service of males--perhaps even grateful for the protection and shelter--so grateful that they will submit to any demand may be made of them by men.

We have, in both Barton and Malyne, a male rendering of a female’s equanimous reaction to being used for the sensual gratification of a male. Blatantly and by inference both Chaucer and “Coetzee’s fiction repeatedly demonstrates that those who are silent, whether through choice or necessity, are subject to abuse and exploitation” (Gitzen 15). The dejected resignation Barton feels when she decides not to resist but to “let [Cruso] do as he wished” indicates her lack of power to make choices when she says, “in a world of chance, is there a better or worse?” (30). She is grateful that Friday seems not to have witnessed her submission, and as she settles near sparrows, away from the hut, she notes the birds are “unafraid, having known no harm from man since the beginning of time” (Coetzee 30). It seems that she, as a female, has known harm from males. But, according to Coetzee, Barton rationalizes acceptance of that harm because “eternal and inhuman
wakefulness” is the only method of avoiding such encounters. There is an air of resignation in her feeling that “what had passed between Cruso and [her]” merely reflects the inevitable vicissitudes of fortune and are the “cracks and chinks through which another voice, other voices, speak in [her life]” (Coetzee 30). Barton, as the fictional creation of Coetzee, has another voice speaking and ordering her life and thoughts. Barton’s submissive response to Cruso does reinforce the patriarchal notion that the proper role for females is to act as a “stance for the male” and “to express receptive subordination before . . . a god-like phallus” (Stimpson 179).

Conclusion

Coetzee’s fiction works particularly well to demonstrate what Derrida refers to as the “first” and “second” levels of pretense. It is possible to assert that Coetzee demonstrates the “first” pretense in Foe as that of a male-authored text which is parasitic and which “lives off the life of the body” of the fictionally constructed (pretended) host, a female-authored text. The fictional Daniel Foe’s story relies on a “second” level and is parasitic to Susan Barton’s tale. Coetzee seems to be playing with levels of pretense involved in the parasitic nature of discourse by reversing the patriarchal hierarchy of feminine dependence on masculine discourse.

To assume that writing has a gendered reality which is not parasitic to a social construction of gender would necessitate believing that some essential “reality” of a sexed body which is either specifically male or specifically female impacts discourse in specific ways. Any essentialist arguments about human biological differences that engender a
separate male and female experience and language necessarily falls back on a reliance that, at least some, qualities arising out of a sex difference are “essential qualities” which are true for all females and all males, in all places, and at all times. For Derrida who questioned the veracity of universal statements of all kinds, this would simply mean that when one deconstructs an “essential” quality, what one finds is a social construction of gender. The hierarchical arrangements which privilege one gender over another, according to Derrida, are the function of a choice of one philosophy over another rather than any “essential quality.” Thus, decisions about the construction and ordering of masculine and feminine in a culture exist because of the power of one philosophy over another, not on an “essential” reality.

Michel Foucault’s “The Archaeology of Knowledge” notes the power of discourse to “order objects”:

In analyzing discourses themselves, one sees the loosening of the embrace, apparently so tight, of words and things, and the emergence of a group of rules proper to discursive practice. These rules define not the dumb existence of a reality, nor the canonical use of a vocabulary, but the ordering of objects. (1157)

The ordering of submission and aggression in Coetzee’s portrayal of Barton’s next sexual act with Cruso is a reversal from the first. Foucault implies that it is just a “loosening of the embrace” of the discourse and reordering--it is not a redefinition of sexuality. Barton, again acting in the capacity as nurse, initiates her own sexual gratification with the seemingly comatose Cruso. Barton is nursing of Cruso “as if he
were a child” and saying that as Cruso was “conveyed farther from the kingdom he pined for” when she had the growing sense that “he was a prisoner” and that “she was his gaoler” (Coetzee 43). It is under these circumstances that Barton becomes the narrator of Cruso’s story. She lies next to Cruso, creating their future and recounting their past with her discourse. Cruso is silent. It is Barton who “stroke[s] his body with her thighs” and tells him that she is “swimming in [him]” (Coetzee 44). Cruso’s response is one of supplication; he “brings her hand to his lips, and weeps” (Coetzee 44).

Was Coetzee purposefully setting up a sympathetic and feminist Derridian reversal between subject and object? “Feminism, in so far as it can be described as a unified discursive field is characterized by women’s reactions to their being passively positioned as Other in relation to men” (Dovey 358). If Barton was object and “other” in her first copulation, the positions have reversed in the second when Cruso becomes object and “other,” both of her discourse and her sexual desire. However, reversal of a hierarchy which “posits ‘man’ and ‘woman’ as fixed poles of binary opposition” (Dovey 361) is only the first step in deconstructing the philosophy which creates the opposition. The second step is displacement of the oppositions.

Displacement of the opposition between the socially constructed gender expectations in Foe appears vividly in the dialogue surrounding the third of Barton’s sexual encounters reported in the text of Foe. This time Barton is with Foe. When she says, “But now I know better, The Muse is both goddess and begetter. I was intended not to be the mother of my story but to beget it,” she begins to conflate the discourse of males and the discourse of females (Coetzee 126). Foe, entrenched in his role as author, a
necessarily parasitical role from a Derridian perspective, says that he “prey[s] on the living.” He physically enacts the role of a parasite by biting Barton's lip and sucking the blood from it (Coetzee 139). However, Barton is no longer the passive receptacle she was on the island with Cruso. She rejects the supine position which Foe assigns her and claims the superior space as her own. She “fathers her offspring,” something the seedless Cruso could not accomplish on his island (Coetzee 140). But Barton seems not to displace entirely the female dependence on male support. Her cryptic assessment that Foe’s sixpence was “no great payment for a visit from the Muse” indicates the displacement was temporary and places her right back in that familiar female role in a patriarchal culture: the role meeting the demands of a male, including trading sex for survival.

Barton does make the connections between the females on the margins and the males in the center of the discourse painfully apparent. The power of the male discourse comes, in Foe’s case, from the story Barton has to tell. Foe is “logically dependent” on Barton and her tale. Barton believes she is “logically dependent” on Foe for the writing of her tale and her material existence. Thus, the displacement of their roles is not a static displacement. It is a moment of decision for Coetzee’s readers.

Derrida spoke of “a dream of the innumerable, . . . a desire to escape the combinatory . . . to invent incalculable choreographies” (Nicholson 143). Bordo translates this statement as being akin to “the view from nowhere and the dream of everywhere,” claiming that the postmodern model provides a “new imagination of disembodiment: a dream of being everywhere” (Bordo 142-143). Bordo’s assumptions
about postmodern refusal to "fix a knower in time and space" which would "therefore fix
and relativize perception and thought" resonates with Morgan’s assumption that Coetzee
may be attempting to "free the territory of female consciousness from male authority"
(Morgan 82). I think Coetzee may have been attempting to move one step further and
free consciousness from gender--at least in the amorphous double endings of *Foe*. The
"home of Friday" seems to be at the intersection of everywhere and nowhere. Does the
creation of the disembodied "I" create a way to overcome all of the "isms" and
"centrisms" inherent in the use of language? Or is this just another dream of "white
writing" in the useless search for a mythical universal and sexless tongue?
5. WRITING (RIGHTING) THE WRONGS: (RE)PRESENTING SILENCES

Hold still, we’re going to do your portrait so that you can begin looking like it right away.

Hélène Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa”

Conclusion

As a student I grew weary of “holding still” and being a passive reader of texts. I was particularly alarmed by any unquestioned reception to the portrayals of females in the literature we were reading which seemed to perpetuate the male notion of proper feminine behavior and portrayals which minimized the autonomy of females. The internalized cultural values which Jonathan Culler credits with the power to “[lead] women to identify with male characters, against their own best interests as women” are the ones I was struggling against when I went to my Chaucer class ready to question the representations of Malyne and her mother second day we talked about “The Reeve’s Tale” (514). I have known my from that day that my master’s thesis would explore some facet of male-authored representations of females.

What I did not realize in my role as a student was how difficult it is to bring an entire class to the point of being receptive to critical reading, especially feminist critical reading. It was not until I was teaching myself that I realized I needed to come at a “slant” to feminist critical reading--starting with looking for rhetorical motive and then moving gradually into examining texts for silences and gaps and questioning the possible motives causing those to occur. That is when students begin to realize, as I did, that “who payntede the leon”--and why--can make a significant difference.
My thesis is reflective of my own personal experience with (re)presentation. Chapter 2, my pedagogical approach to teaching students to read critically for motive is a result of two years of teaching first-year writing at Oregon State and my one year of teaching in the Human Resources Learning Community, a program integrating humanities courses, at Linn-Benton Community College. Chapters 3 and 4 of my thesis serve only as models—not necessarily as pedagogical strategies—of what a feminist “point of perspective” resisting reading might look like. As a community college instructor, it would be unrealistic for me to expect my students to have the extensive and specific theoretical knowledge to create a sophisticated a “point of perspective” of the caliber I wanted to include in my Master’s thesis. What is not unrealistic is that this is a technique which will enable them to be actively involved as readers of texts.

The construction of a “point of perspective” for the silent females in canonical texts who are presented in fiction as ventriloquists for male authors, often echoing motives and purposes traditionally supportive to patriarchal interests, offers students a way to enrich their experience with a text. The benefit for students in this approach is the pedagogical emphasis on their active role as producers of meaning. Students must understand what an author says, but even more than that they must also address what an author does not say. Although there are many theoretical tools available to accomplish this, the combination that I use, Burke’s pentad, de Lauretis’s “point of perspective,” and Derrida’s reversal and displacement of binary oppositions, at their most ingenuous level, share an efficacy for avoiding pretensions to a single immutable truth. The very invitation
to create “points of perspective” assures my students that I am expecting more than one reading of a textual silence.

The “points of perspective” I have created in Chapters 3 and 4, filling in a silence for both Malyne and Susan Barton, are not immutable truths. All that is accomplished by creating alternate “points of perspective” is that the “portrait” so carefully constructed by a male author of a female may become slightly blurred. Certainly the “points of perspective” I created for the Chaucer and Coetzee texts reflect my own “dogma” as a feminist reader. But (re)presenting silences with a new “point of perspective” is not an exclusively feminist project. Looking at the silence in junk mail gives a voice to the silent consumer/reader of that text with which to interrogate the message for motive. It is an adaptable method of interrogation that authorizes students to have a questioning voices rather than accepting silences as readers of texts. When students create a “point of perspective” they are bringing a new “slant” to a text. Broyard refers to this idea as “learning how to use resistance” (11). Creating new “points of perspective” and investigating silences has the potential to “turn reading into a profound experience” Broyard (11). I desire for my students and myself opportunities to create new visions of the old models by representing a silences, whether those representations are in texts delivered throughout our lifetimes by U.S. Postal Service or just one ten-week term in a community college classroom.

Creating new “parasitic” points of perspective which feed off the “standard” set before them, resisting readers in my classes can “use the author, just as he (sic) uses [them]” (Broyard 11). That is the task of writers (righters).
WORKS CONSULTED AND CITED


Culler, Jonathan. “Reading as a Woman.” *Warhol* 509-524.


Miller, Nancy K. “The Text’s Heroine.” Hirsch 114-120.


Showalter, Elaine. “A Female Tradition.” Warhol 168-188.
