

PERSONAL VOICE / FEMINIST VOICE

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When the three-year colloquium on “The Personal Voice in Classical Scholarship” that generated this volume was announced at the American Philological Association, I was very pleased because it coincided with my desire to find a different way to write.¹ I was tired of both the formal mode and the limited audience for classical scholarship; it was especially exciting to be part of such a panel at the American Philological Association, which is very much a bastion of conventional style and where empiricism is still the preferred methodology. In the Modern Language Association, however, the personal voice has been easily audible since the 1980s. As Nancy K. Miller points out, it is a widespread phenomenon; she asks a number of provocative questions about why that is so: “Why personal criticism now? Is it another form of ‘Anti-Theory’? Is it a new stage of theory? Is it gendered? Only for women and gay men? Is it bourgeois? postmodern? A product of Late Capitalism? Reaganomics? Post-feminism . . . what if what seems new and provocative just turned out to be an academic fashion, another ‘congealed’ genre . . . What if everyone started doing it?” (1991.3). Miller suggests that there might simply be a midlife crisis in literary studies; certainly my desire for a new way of writing is related to questions I have resulting from my long history in the academy.

Just what is a personal voice? Or, to put it somewhat differently, what counts as personal? For the most part, it seems to connote that which is “private,” things you only get to ask in a game like “truth or dare.” For instance, we recognize the personal note when Patricia Williams describes

1 Thanks to the organizers of the original panel, Judy Hallett and Tom Van Nortwick, for including me as a respondent and encouraging me to write this essay.

herself as still in her bathrobe while she writes *The Alchemy of Race* (1993.3–4); or when Jane Tompkins tells her readers that she is “not going to the bathroom” as she writes “Me and My Shadow” (1989); or when Nancy K. Miller breaks all academic taboos and discusses her father’s penis in the essay “My Father’s Penis” (1991). All of these topics are related to the body and its functions, topics we usually ignore in our professional capacity. We don the suit or academic robe in lieu of the bathrobe, and hardly admit that we have bodily needs. The “coffee break” is at least partly a euphemism, as you can tell from the long lines at the women’s room.

This use of “personal” then maps onto a form of the public/private dichotomy; there are other dimensions to the term, however, that are more significant from my point of view. Within the professional mode, we can adopt a more or less formal voice depending on the occasion, whether we are speaking or writing, or which field we are working in. As we all know, some academic oral performances are no different from written ones, but there can be distinctions between them; for instance, my oral style is more informal. In it, I allow myself to joke, to make asides, to be ironic; it seems more personal since these traits are typically excised from academic writing. Thus, it is personal though not confessional.

More importantly still, there is an aspect of the personal that is political; personal voice scholarship is related to feminism in at least two ways. First, the professional voice is associated with masculinity, if not necessarily and essentially, then in the ways it has been performed and by whom. Thus it seems like a form of costume for women. As Nancy Owen Nelson puts it in her Introduction to *Private Voices, Public Lives: Women Speak on the Literary Life*, there is a desire to “break out of masculinist modes of communication, and in breaking free, to explore the deepest parts of ourselves as we relate to the texts which have shaped our lives” (1995.xvii). The personal voice appears to derive from the speaker’s “deep” experience; it both depends on and confers a form of authenticity. In calling the academic language or style masculine, the claim is made that women, in particular, feel the need expressed by Tompkins to get out of the straitjacket of formal scholarly language (1989.121–39). Olivia Frey praises Tompkins’s work as “revolutionary. It is Tompkins’s brave experiment in writing literary criticism in her own personal voice. Like many feminist writers these days, she is struggling to find ‘(m)other tongues,’ a new feminist language that is not derivative of male language, a new language that is accessible, concrete, real, an embodiment of the feminine” (Frey 1993.41).

This claim, like any totalizing distinction between masculine and

feminine, is problematic: men can also use accessible and “real” language, and women have for generations used the professional voice as well. My allusion to costume was calculated to evoke staginess; no clothing is natural, but some is more comfortable than others. Academic comportment is learned behavior for both men and women, and while the style of argument was male and adapted by women as we entered the profession, it is only historically gender specific. What makes any voice “authentic”? At a 1992 conference on “Feminism and Classics,” Marilyn Skinner named the personal voice as one voice among several (traditional, positional, personal) that you could choose to adopt; her commentator was shocked at the perceived “inauthenticity” of her position, which seemed to imply that you could simply turn yourself into something else (Gruen 1992). The point of Skinner’s talk, however, was that “being personal” is not so much an expression of some essence as a style one could choose to employ.

Feminism is also related to the use of a personal voice through the philosophical underpinnings that ground them both. Contemporary feminism is rooted in a theory of knowledge based on “positionality” and “relationality,” which assumes that knowledge is partial and interested.² Much classical scholarship has in fact been interested, but it has not acknowledged that partisanship. For instance, in the debate over the status of women in antiquity, men made comparisons to the treatment of women in their own era and geographical location; thus, in defending Greece, Kitto and Gomme were defending themselves.³ Similarly, political interests arguably shaped scholarship about slavery in antiquity. What about the relationship between Platonic studies and nineteenth-century male homoeroticism?⁴ Feminist theory and postmodern theory in general hold that to acknowledge one’s position and the consequences of that position for one’s reading or interpretation is responsible behavior, not self-indulgence. Scholars may not be able to speak some universal truth, but if we expose our biases, the reader can at least beware.

Both personal voice theory and feminist theory share the related belief that one’s politics and one’s theory are shaped by one’s position(s), albeit in complicated ways. In the first stages of the current women’s movement in the U.S., one revolutionary cry was “the personal is political,”

2 E.g., Hartsock 1998.111–15, Lawrence-Lightfoot 1997.85–86.

3 Gomme 1925.25; cf. Kitto 1951.219–31, McManus 1997.7–14.

4 On this topic, see Dowling 1994.

and, as Bella Vivante remarks above, that slogan has recently been rephrased as “the personal is the theoretical.” The traditional notion of what constituted a scholar was constructed in a way that excluded women—and especially black women.⁵ To make a place for themselves in the academy, women had to undo the paradigm of the disembodied scholar. Although feminist theory has strongly challenged the notion that biology is destiny, it is also true that women’s lives have differed from men’s, in part, because we inhabit different bodies; women’s lives have also differed from one another. That is, there is not one woman’s way of knowing, not one woman’s voice, but an underlying assumption of feminist theory has been that, because women live different lives, we will notice different things. If we are free to theorize and interpret on the basis of those experiences, the knowledge produced will be more varied and richer. When you pursue traditional “objective” or “scientific” scholarship, you don’t have to question your own investment in that research. Both personal voice and feminist theory are distinguished from such “value-neutral” research and require self-reflexivity.

Throughout my professional life, I have sought to integrate teaching, research, and activism: the split between personal and professional is comparable to one I have experienced between teaching and research. I teach in an undergraduate comparative literature department where I usually offer courses in nineteenth- and twentieth-century fiction and drama with an emphasis on feminist theory. I participate in a women’s studies program that has dedicated itself to integrating work on race and sexuality into its courses. This latter work, in particular, is overtly politicized and “personal” in that people are invested in it. My research, on the other hand, has centered around classics, specifically Euripides. It is feminist criticism but, for the most part, written in a formal style. My teaching and research are then divided between immediate and remote, engaged and scholarly, but also between modern and ancient literature. Each of these fields imposes discursive constraints, for we are indeed disciplined, whipped into shape, by our disciplines—by the requirements for certain kinds of footnotes or scholarly apparatus in the traditional classical journals. Feminist criticism, however, imposes its own standards. Thus I had barely expressed my relief at the perceived liberation offered by writing for this volume when I found myself rushing out to read critics like Nancy Miller (1991), Susan Suleiman (1994), and Jane Tompkins (1996), who were already writing in a personal voice, so

5 Haley 1993, McManus 1997.

that I could cite them. You could say that mothers have not displaced fathers as authorities, but have joined them.

You can also see that I perceive these terms to be congruent with another pair, also oftentimes in conflict, that is, feminism and classics.⁶ Classics claims to be without a point of view (though it is not [above, p. 193]), while feminism is avowedly political (Rabinowitz 1993.3). The demands of feminism as activism have brought with them a style as well; as a classical scholar who is also committed to feminist practices, I have maintained a traditional research methodology, but I have struck the personal note even if only in the introductory paragraphs of essays or chapters. That, like the citation of feminist critics, is a sign that feminism has *authority* and can make itself felt as such. We need to be conscious of the control exerted by progressive movements when they become successful.

There are dangers in this way of writing and speaking. Skinner postulates (1992) a speaker choosing between voices with relative equanimity; like Judith Butler's theory of gender as performance,⁷ her notion seems to me to be naive about the constraints on us. There are power imbalances that lead to a reluctance to adopt the personal voice because it might make you seem "not serious." As Frey says later in her essay cited above: "Most of us want to write. Many of us want to have our work published. We also yearn to take the risks that Jane Tompkins or Rachel Blau DuPlessis does. But we play it safe. Otherwise our writing might not be published" (1993.42). Thus you don't escape academic discourse by adopting a personal voice; rather, power and status condition the personal voice. In fact, the women who launched this style of discourse in the Modern Language Association were not only tenured but big names. Consequently, their personal voice was not "just" personal—it was also public in a significant way even though rhetorically sounding a private note. They had little or nothing to lose. Moreover, people were interested in their personal lives and even gossiped about them. Second, some identities can be claimed with impunity, some are still suspect, depending on the context. The price we pay may be great if speaking personally means, for instance, coming out as lesbian in a homophobic setting or as a Jew in anti-Semitic surroundings or even as Christian in a secular setting. These are issues of power. The Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual Caucus of the American Philological Association (although not the Modern

6 On this pairing, see Skinner 1985, 1992.

7 Butler 1990, 1993.

Language Association) might think twice about sponsoring a personal voice panel for its members; just how many classicists are out about their sexuality? Can a graduate student in classics or any other field lay claim to this discourse, or is it, like swearing, reserved for “grownups,” those who are more fully members of the academy? (Zajko 1997.62). Like any other rhetoric, the personal voice can become a straitjacket if it becomes obligatory. Crucially, feminism as a discourse can impose its own constraints and may “subject” its practitioners even as it provides a new subjectivity from which to speak. While claiming to resist the dominant codes, we must be wary of a tendency for the new style to become normative. There is not, then, a repressive discourse and a liberating one, but two forms of discursive power that simultaneously constrain and liberate. The risks are a sign that something important is at stake, but it is not the personal as private and scatological. What we gain from acknowledging the personal dimension in our work is political; by emphasizing the connection to feminism I mean to emphasize the progressive implications of a situated scholarship. What we need is not gratuitous intimate detail but work that makes the connection between the particular and the general.

Those feminist authors who most successfully argue from a personal point of view are typically making a simultaneous claim that their lives are revealing about some larger, if not universal, truths. I think here of the women of color—for instance, Cherríe Moraga, Audre Lorde, Gloria Anzaldúa—who have shed light on the interconnectedness of racism, homophobia, and sexism by analyzing their own experiences. Writing this essay, I wonder if my life has a similar ability to illuminate. I am white and a woman and of a certain class and Jewish. How interesting are those “personal” details? When I first mentioned my Jewishness in print (in one of those introductory paragraphs that strike the personal note), I was criticized for bringing it up at all, or for not saying more once I had brought it up. I wasn’t sure at the time how significant a factor it was—in reflecting about the impact of one’s position on one’s thinking, you don’t really know which parts were inoperative at any given time or which parts were operative but not noticed. Both were true for me writing in 1993. In the early eighties, when the women of color within the National Women’s Studies Association were challenging the racism of second-stage feminism, Jewish feminists began to focus on anti-Semitism within feminism as well as the sexism of Judaism. I did not identify as a Jew, did not join the Jewish caucus, did not teach Elly Bulkin’s essay in *Yours in Struggle* (Bulkin, Pratt, and Smith 1984), which took a Jewish perspective; I taught instead Barbara Smith’s

and Minnie Bruce Pratt's pieces in that same volume. The troubled and recent history of Jews in the profession was not apparent to me when I chose Greek at City College. After all, my high school Latin teacher was Irving Kizner; Moses Hadas was around the corner at Columbia; two of my teachers were named Drabkin and Stern! Most of my models of classicists were Jewish; as a result, I was not aware of how recently classics had accepted Jews into the profession,⁸ and was not aware of the place these people occupied in the class hierarchy of higher education in classics. I certainly did not think that my doing Greek had anything to do with being Jewish. In retrospect, I find it interesting that I did not even consider studying Hebrew, although it was taught in the same department. Clearly, identification is a political act; it is not an automatic consequence of birth or unproblematic "identity."

As I write and revise this essay, I think that I was ignoring the significance of being Jewish. My choices now strike me as significant. To say more about being Jewish, however, immediately plunges me into doubt, ambivalence. Who am I to speak as a Jew? My parents did not go to synagogue; I insisted on going to Sunday School (Reform), but it was mostly for social reasons (my friends were all going). Thus my topic precipitates the question, "What does it mean to be Jewish?" The definition changes with time; it means something different to me now (having raised children in an almost entirely Gentile community in upstate New York) than it did when I was growing up in a world in which most of the white people I knew were also Jewish. School was closed on Jewish holidays; as a result, I did not have to choose between staying home and going to school and flaunting my agnosticism. So I ask myself, who am I to talk about being a Jewish classicist?

One could argue that there were and are reasons why people outside the elite would study elite canonical texts, as Bella Vivante (above) and Shelley Haley (1993) have observed. My Jewishness did not seem to make me study Greek, nor did it seem to exclude me from western civilization; rather, like other children or grandchildren of immigrants, I appropriated western culture and accepted its values as a measure of my success. Being a woman was similarly taken for granted; of course I identified with Odysseus and not Penelope when I read the *Odyssey* as a universal story of

8 See McManus 1997.26 n. 8, Calder 1992.167.

homecoming, and the *Oresteia* spoke to me in very deep ways, providing a continuing focus through my doctorate and first scholarly articles. In my dissertation, I studied the *Oresteia* as a creation myth and argued that Aeschylus represented Clytemnestra as a dragon in order to make Orestes' murder of her heroic. I didn't object in any way to this proceeding, although I did notice that I was endlessly crocheting a red shawl, or was it a tapestry? If I jokingly identified with Clytemnestra, I kept it to myself. Rather, I identified with Orestes, who was bringing order out of chaos, and named the problem I was having in finishing my dissertation a problem in taming chaos.

By the time I was in graduate school, I had begun to think about the significance of gender for character in my modern literature classes; I particularly remember the seminar in which I burst out (in answer to an innocuous question about the ending of *Middlemarch*), "But Dorothea is a woman." Feminism changed things for me and a lot of other women my age in the U.S. As a critic, my intellectual autobiography has followed the developments in feminist theory rather closely. The women's movement made me conscious that "one is not born but becomes a woman." At first, that was the limit of my awareness. In the 1970s, many of us were discovering that we were women and noticing what we had in common with one another. We did not focus on the differences between us. That changed in the eighties; thus feminism has also changed the way I think about race and class.

For instance, reading Minnie Bruce Pratt's essay in *Yours In Struggle* (Bulkin, Pratt, and Smith 1984), led me to question my idea that being Jewish was irrelevant to my pursuit of classics. Pratt moves through various important times and places in her life and analyzes the knowledge that she gained at each location. In retrospect, I see that my whiteness and my Jewishness *were* factors in my social class, and therefore in my education, and thus in my study of Latin and Greek. As a bright, white Jewish girl growing up in New York in the fifties, I was tracked into classes for "Intellectually Gifted Children" (IGC); everybody in them was white, and most were Jewish. I sometimes ask my students to imitate Pratt's strategy, and I have used it to analyze my own past. When I look back on my childhood, I see that, though my family did not have a lot of money, I lived in a building with an elevator and a door man; sure, many of my friends lived at more prestigious addresses, but some also lived in walk-up apartments. I became most sharply aware of our lack of money when it came time to apply to college: I went to the City College of New York because it was free.

Nonetheless, my decision-making was based on privilege: it was not a question of whether I would go to college but of where. Moreover, City College was also one of the best colleges within the system of city schools; before open admissions, very few students of color attended this school in the middle of Harlem. In terms of social class, I may have had to have a campus job, but this was also based on privilege—I worked for the Classics Department, in part, because I had attended a selective high school that taught Latin—and that job conferred a benefit when I became interested in studying Greek. And all these aspects of my choices were related to being white and Jewish in New York City at that particular time, even though I did not know it. Being Jewish in New York City in the fifties and sixties, then, meant being a majority minority; I was protected from anti-Semitism and received certain benefits.

Despite all these connections I can make now, I would still say that my Jewish identity is related not so much to my being a classicist *per se* as to my being a feminist classicist, for there is a strong social justice tradition in Judaism, an obligation to leave the world better than you find it. Like Susan Gubar (1996), Bonnie Zimmerman (1996), and Nancy K. Miller (1996), Jewish women who have written on this subject, I am Jewish and a feminist, though I would not call myself a Jewish feminist. McCarthyism was also a factor in my growing up, although my parents protected me from clear knowledge of its effects. Alicia Ostriker (1989), Judith Plaskow (1990), and Letty Pogrebin (1991) make a connection between the socialist union organizing of their families and their own feminism, as do I. But this linkage is too simplistic, for it suggests that all Jews are progressive. I have to admit that I could have been Jewish and turned out differently. Bonnie Zimmerman sums up the complexities this way: "This is how I learned what it means to be Jewish. To resist, to be a fighter, to stake one's claim for social justice. To support the underdog, the victim, the oppressed. And to be racist, closed-minded, bourgeois, conservative. To turn your back on FDR and Adlai Stevenson and embrace Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan" (1996.205). Identity politics and identity theory have tremendous importance, but there are difficulties with them. If your identity is the basis for theory, are you limited to that identity for intellectual sustenance? Obviously not: all Jewish scholars do not have to teach Jewish studies, and lesbians, lesbian theory, etc. We are not restricted to the identities we are born into, but can make an act of identification or engage in serious study. The question is, as Susan Suleiman asks, "how to get away from the negative consequences of identity politics without simply returning to notions of universalism, reason, and the

unified subject” (1994.237). When I identify myself as Jewish in class, it is in order to make a point, often about what is left out by assuming a Christian frame of reference. I relate being Jewish to being a feminist, that is, to the way in which I approach a text; it is a political, strategic, identification, not a reference to a timeless essence.

Feminism, then, has opened up the space for the personal voice in scholarship; it has also pushed white feminists, in particular, to get beyond focusing on asserted similarities between women, to change our courses and our research to reflect the diversity of women’s experiences. From feminism’s initial emphasis on women as women, we have moved to working on approaches that recognize the multiracial, multicultural nature of women’s existence. Given these developments in women’s studies, I often find myself asking what I am doing as a progressive in such a traditional field as classics. As I said, my personal agenda has been to find ways to relate teaching, scholarship, and activism; by using the insights of feminism, I have managed to integrate these elements more or less successfully at different times and in different projects.

I started teaching myth and tragedy at a women’s college where I had also been hired to teach women’s studies or, as we called it then, images of women. The humanities division sought to cover both the traditional (classics) and the innovative (women’s studies) with the same position. In 1974, this literature program considered both the old and the new important and did not see them as separate. Neither did I: I employed a feminist perspective in all my classes and was encouraged to do so by the women in my courses. From the discussions we had about Greek tragedy, it was abundantly clear that classics was relevant. As feminists, we can bring current concerns to these texts not necessarily because they are great and therefore timeless in their appeal, but because we can find something in them that resonates with our present.

However, that was 1974. The women’s college went out of existence in 1978 and the unproblematical union of nascent feminism, teaching, and scholarship was interrupted. There was a silver lining to this loss, however; in reaction to the awful reality (the men’s college that had founded the women’s institution decided to absorb it—like Zeus and Metis), we formed a women’s caucus. That activist group provided both moral and intellectual support. We educated ourselves in feminist theory, and my research was never the same again. I saw everything from “the woman’s” point of view. Devoted to a feminist approach to ancient texts, I continued working on tragedy, but I moved on to Euripides because of his vexed

reputation on the subject of women: Aristophanes' characters called him a misogynist, but modern feminists have tried to reclaim him as a proto-feminist. I analyzed the plays of Euripides, considering them as examples of what Teresa de Lauretis (1987) calls "technologies of gender," that is, technologies that constitute gender. If, as Simone de Beauvoir and Monique Wittig have observed, one is not born a woman (and I would add, or a man), then we can look at cultural artifacts as evidence for the production of men and women.⁹

Practically everything I read in my feminist theory reading group was useful for the book I was writing on Euripides: film theory was a way of considering theater; Freudian theory was an analysis of male desire. The thesis of *Anxiety Veiled* (my editor asked me whose anxiety it was, and, of course, it was/is mine; thus the book *was* in a sense written in a personal voice) was complex; drawing on theories about the exchange of women (that culture is constituted by men giving and receiving women in marriage) and compulsory heterosexuality, I argued that Euripidean tragedy depends upon a pattern of asymmetrical compulsory heterosexuality, meaning that women are kept from other women and placed in primary relationships to men, but that the same is not true for the men. I maintained that the representation of the plays' heroines supported this end: self-sacrificing women are praised; murderous women are punished or made to punish themselves; men's primary loyalties remain to other men.

I was happy working on Euripides because it seemed necessary to unsettle this canonical author. To the extent that I could reveal the ways in which the representation of women in tragedy continues to shape a modern ideology of gender, I felt confident that this was important work. Yet since humanities in general and classics in particular have lost their status as gatekeepers, to undo tragedy's claims to self-evident greatness and universality seems less obviously pressing. I have often wondered how much difference my work makes. How does it advance a feminist struggle to make the world a better place? This question is in part related to an old debate about theory and activism: how political is anything that we do in the academy? Intellectual work, understanding the way in which symbolic systems are political, seems sufficiently significant to me, but it is increasingly difficult to make that case about classics.

9 de Beauvoir 1974.301, Wittig 1992.9–20.

Feminism's third wave has challenged the assumption that "woman" is a meaningful category of analysis without attention to sexuality, race, and class, as well as a host of other differences, such as age, ability, and religion. How can classics respond to those critiques? Let me take my scholarly work as an example. The primary framework for *Anxiety Veiled* was gender, even though it used the paradigm of compulsory heterosexuality and even though lesbian theory was prominent in early feminist activity (white lesbian feminists like Adrienne Rich and Marilyn Frye were crucial voices from the beginning of the second wave). And Lorde, Moraga, and Anzaldúa were writing explicitly as lesbian theorists. But, aside from Rich's "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" (1983) and Luce Irigaray's observations about traffic (1985), these authors did not play a significant role in my writing.

My teaching outside of classics, however, did emphasize sexual difference and not simply the difference between men and women. In my feminist criticism course, I often assign a group project as part of the semester's work; one term students came up with a syllabus for a lesbian criticism course, which they thought ought to be a class taught by and for lesbians. This insistence on identity politics in education gave me pause; I did not teach lesbian theory at the time, though I have since offered a course in queer theory. I do this work as a committed ally, convinced that teaching is political, that critical thinking about our lives can make a difference. Close attention to the observations of lesbian feminists helped me to realize the importance of oppression based on sexual orientation as well as gender and encouraged me to focus on sexuality. Rich's essay not only reveals the invisibility of lesbian existence even in much feminist scholarship, but opens up a way for heterosexual women to recognize the importance of women to other women through her concept of a double life. Such material led me to stress not only that lesbians are oppressed differently from putatively heterosexual women, but that all women are oppressed by homophobia insofar as it works to keep women from relationships, both sexual and nonsexual, with other women. Homophobia keeps straight people from experimenting with sexual acts that might seem to brand them queer; in political terms, it keeps women from banding together.

Since making this change in my teaching, I have taken seriously the challenge of lesbian theory and queer theory and have changed the focus of my research as well. For instance, I have begun working on women's relationships to women in antiquity: the fact that women were pressed into marriage does not mean that they dropped all their relationships to women.

With this in mind, I am looking in particular at vase painting to see what evidence I can find about the nature and quality of those relationships that I now hypothesize existed. Is this work in a personal voice? Is it related to my identity? Obviously the answer is both yes and no. Nothing in classics is “personal” since it is very far away in time and space, but this study corresponds to the personal truth that, although I am married, women are very important to me and take up much of my time and energy (we read together, walk and talk together, support one another, and feed one another). Why should I believe that Greek women enjoyed none of those things? Following the trajectory of feminist theory and, increasingly, queer theory, I simultaneously assume the significance of the category “woman,” and assume that there are significant differences between past and present.

What about the other variables of race and class? Feminist inquiry in other fields has gone far beyond that in classics, a discipline historically dominated by elite white men. If we focus on what classicists have accomplished on the subject of women, it is easy to see gains in the field,¹⁰ but there is much more to be done. My participation in women’s studies has not only made me sensitive to race and class differences in tragedy, but also to ethnicity and social class as they construct the professoriate. At the 1997 conference on “Feminism and the Classics: Framing the Research Agenda,” I presented a workshop on “Queer Theory and Classics.” The bibliography that my colleague and I handed out contained no writings by women of color, but we were satisfied because it was meant to be a bibliography of queer theory *and* classics. But was that really sufficient? My colleague Shelley Haley asked that question and prompted further reflection; while I don’t want to flagellate myself, that challenge made me realize that our list accepted a definition of a certain kind of high theory as “queer theory,” which then makes the default position white (and male). Audre Lorde in *Sister/Outsider* (1984) refers to the warriors of ancient Dahomey; Gloria Anzaldúa in *Borderlands* (1987) discusses ancient Mayan culture. Thus if we had cast our net more broadly, we might have had a very different list.

Finally, the adoption of the personal voice is inevitably related to the cultural politics of education.¹¹ As many have noted, recent curricular debates are connected to liberation movements from the sixties. The civil

10 See particularly McManus 1997.

11 Thanks to the anonymous reviewer who suggested that I expand this section.

rights movement led to the creation of black studies programs or African-American studies in the U.S., as feminism led to the creation of women's studies, and gay liberation to queer studies. As Catharine Stimpson puts it: "To deal with diversity and its difficult tensions, the academy has supported curricular change" (1993.125). Is all of this thinking just a holdover, the last gasp of the seventies, a luxury of a liberal arts curriculum? Surely students less and less think that they need classics or humanities in order to be educated, even though they may need a course or two in order to get a degree if their college has requirements.

As a classicist and a feminist, I find myself in a tight spot. The right wing in this U.S. debate has staked out the claim to Europe (though perhaps not high culture), asserting that American history is appropriately European. In that scheme, the classics occupy a central place—or at least certain canonical texts and authors (Homer and Euripides, Plato and Aristotle) do. The critics of canonical education have called for a multicultural curriculum, asserting that colleges and universities have always served the democracy and should do so now, only in a broader sense (Botstein 1993.74). The dominant ideology of the U.S. is undergoing a change from the melting pot to cultural democracy (Stimpson 1993); can we educate, produce new citizens for the nation, on the basis of that ideology? Arthur Schlesinger argues that, "The point of America was not to preserve old cultures, but to forge a new *American one*" (1992.13). He fears that, "The multiethnic dogma abandons historic purposes, replacing assimilation by fragmentation, integration by separatism." As he goes on to say, "Our public schools in particular have been the great instrument of assimilation and the great means of forming an American identity. What students are taught in schools affects the way they will thereafter see and treat other Americans, the way they will thereafter conceive the purposes of the republic. The debate about the curriculum is a debate about what it means to be an American" (1992.16–17). I would agree, but what does it mean to be an American in 2001? There are many immigrant groups; how long will they be considered foreigners just because they have an accent? A new model of education and democracy would embrace them all as they are, without insisting on their changing and assimilating.

Even if the western tradition were appropriate as the sole focus of education in the past, which is debatable given the multiracial history of this country, what should the role of the classics be, given a changing student population? One argument is that education should be about the students and hold up a mirror to them. Many colleges (including my own) would subscribe in part to this statement from the Executive Summary from

California State University, Long Beach: "All members have equal opportunity; respect, mutual regard for cultural and gender differences, and full democratic participation and partnership are the norm" (Beckwith 1993.73). How do you put that philosophy into practice? Does it mean that everybody should be able to study about "their" people? The Foreword to Molefi Asante's *Afrocentricity* makes his position clear: "The eyes of the African-American must be on his own center, one that reflects and resembles him and speaks to him in his own language" (1988.viii).

But what is the student's center, "his" language? The families of many of my African-American students have been in this country longer than my family has. Moreover, people occupy multiple positions at once and over time. While the past of the multicultural studies movement ties it to issues of identity and politics based on identity, these formations are continually being re-examined and recast. There is no simple "who we are" for most of us: there are many ways of identifying, and these change with time. Todd Gitlin puts it this way: "The purity of 'subject positions' exists only in the geometry of theorists. We are not only but also. Then is the freedom to choose from among one's identities, to develop new ones, to combine and recombine them as one likes, a privilege of straight whites whose identities are not punishable by bigots?" (1993.207). The answer, of course, is yes. Identity is not self-generated, and if others can not only determine who you are but act on it, freedom is definitely a relative quantity.¹²

The significance of western thought does not, however, depend on the ethnic origin of the individual student, all of whom are remote from Plato and Aristotle; it is precisely a way of thinking available to anyone; and "western" is not really even geographic any more (Mohanty 1991b). Those of us advocating curricular change are embarked on "changing the subject,"¹³ a phrase that can refer to the one who studies as well as the subject studied. Do we need to get rid of the study of antiquity? Fanny Coppin, Anna Julia Cooper, and Mary Church Terrell, like many non-Anglo whites, found the classical curriculum empowering. I would argue that classics played that role because of its standing as gatekeeper, but classics no longer has that status. What can we do to attract a more diverse student body to courses in the classics? We can make classics relevant in many different ways: we can expand the field to take in a study of its tradition; we can expand the field to

12 Mohanty 1991a and 1991b, S. Mohanty 1989, Friedman 1993, 1996.

13 Howe 1993.136; cf. Miller 1988.

take in Africa and the Near East; we can study the class divisions of antiquity instead of presenting it unproblematically as the source of democracy. I am unwilling to drop Aristotle from my course on tragedy, or the course itself. I consider these texts important in themselves and for their role in at least one literary tradition. I am looking for a middle course. Given the whiteness of most classicists, it is unlikely that analysis of race in classics will come on the basis of their identity. It will have to come on the basis of political identification: this is not a matter of pandering to a trend, rather, it is a pressing need.

It would be disingenuous, however, to say that our Black, Latin, or Asian students have the same relation to canonical texts as students of European extraction, for, in the U. S., the *idealization* of (secular and scientific) western thought has been tied to racism, ethnocentrism, colonialism, and a devaluing of non-western cultures. The defense of that tradition, if not the tradition itself, has arguably been sexist and racist. The best-selling text by Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, cites feminism as killing off the "Great Books" by calling attention to their sexism, and he implies that the only reason to teach "the black experience" is so that black students can be comfortable (1987.95). The vituperation heaped on the reforms made in American colleges and universities is almost always linked with attacks on affirmative action and the students of color admitted; Allan Bloom calls them "manifestly unqualified and unprepared" (1987.94). The traditionalists assume that there has been affirmative action on the level of the student body, on the level of the faculty, and on the level of the curriculum. One of the foremost spokesmen for the status quo, Dinesh D'Souza, says: "As these examples suggest, an academic and cultural revolution is under way at American universities. It is revising the rules by which students are admitted to college, and by which they pay for college. It is changing what students learn in the classroom, and how they are taught. It is altering the structure of life on the campus, including the habits and attitudes of the students in residence" (1991.13).

Those of us accustomed to a position in the opposition continue to feel marginalized, even though we may wield considerable power; teaching at a small liberal arts college, I am not convinced that there has been any revolution at all, but believe it is yet to come. What will the future bring? Attacks on affirmative action, defunding of the arts and humanities, and emphasis on the tie between education and employment do not augur well for the continuation of this revolution in education. Indeed, the odds against

it seem enormous; change will require great personal effort. Therefore, the personal voice must be characterized as one committed to social change, not as the individualistic self-expression it is often taken to be.

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