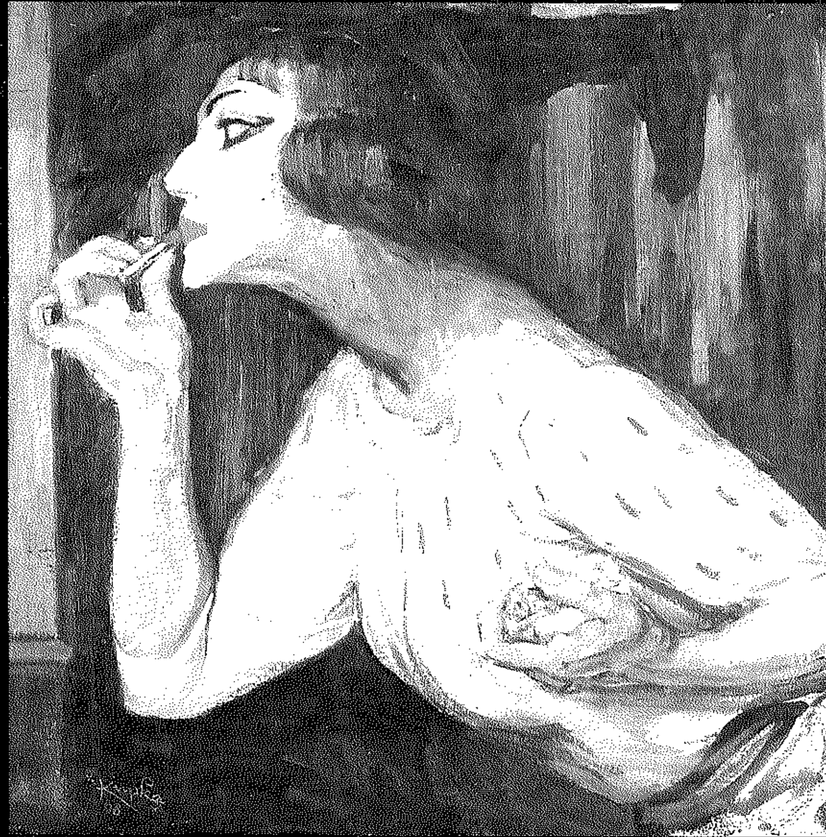
THE GENDER of MODERNITY



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The Gender *of* Modernity

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Harvard University Press
Cambridge, Massachusetts
London, England
1995

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Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Felski, Rita, 1956–
The gender of modernity / Rita Felski.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0-674-34193-7 (alk. paper)
ISBN 0-674-34194-5 (pbk. : alk. paper)
1. Feminist theory. 2. Civilization, Modern—19th century.
3. Civilization, Modern—20th century. 4. Women and literature.
5. Women in literature. 6. Feminist criticism. I. Title.
HQ1190.F417 1995
305.42′01—dc20
94-44329

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articles, "The Gender of Modernity," in *Political Gender: Texts and Contexts* ed. Sally Ledger et al. (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), and "Modernism and Modernity: Engendering Literary History," in *Rereading Modernism: New Directions in Feminist Criticism,* ed. Lisa Rado (New York: Garland Press, 1994). An early version of Chapter 4 was first published in *PMLA,* 106, 5 (1991).

Introduction: Myths of the Modern

What is the gender of modernity? How can anything as abstract as a historical period have a sex? In the context of the current interest in the "historicity of textuality and the textuality of history," the idea is not as strange as it may initially appear.[1] If our sense of the past is inevitably shaped by the explanatory logic of narrative, then the stories that we create in turn reveal the inescapable presence and power of gender symbolism. This saturation of cultural texts with metaphors of masculinity and femininity is nowhere more obvious than in the case of the modern, perhaps the most pervasive yet elusive of periodizing terms. Accounts of the modern age, whether academic or popular, typically achieve some kind of formal coherence by dramatizing and personifying historical processes; individual or collective human subjects are endowed with symbolic importance as exemplary bearers of temporal meaning. Whether these subjects are presumed to be male or female has important consequences for the kind of narrative that unfolds. Gender affects not just the factual content of historical knowledge—what is included and what gets left out—but also the philosophical assumptions underlying our interpretations of the nature and meaning of social processes. This question of the gendering of history, as well as the historicity of gender, will serve as a leitmotif for the following analysis.

Consider, for example, one influential recent account of the politics of development. In Marshall Berman's *All That Is Solid Melts into Air,* the author hails Goethe's Faust as the exemplary hero of the modern age. In the character of Faust, Berman argues, the contradictions of modernity are portrayed with penetrating clarity: on the one hand, an exhilarating sense of liberation resulting from the challenge to tradition and established forms of authority; on the other, a nascent bourgeois individualism which asserts itself

in the desire for uncontrollable growth and domination over nature. Thus Faust comes to stand for the adventures and horrors, the ambiguities and ironies of modern life, as exemplified in the creative destruction and constant transformation unleashed by the logic of capitalist development. And what, one might ask, of Gretchen, the young village girl who is seduced and abandoned by Faust in the course of his striving for new experiences and unlimited self-development? Berman notes that Faust is at first "enthralled by her childlike innocence, her small-town simplicity, her Christian humility," but gradually finds that her "ardor dissolves into hysteria, and it is more than he can handle."[2] "Drawn impatiently towards new realms of experience and action," Berman explains, Faust "has come to feel her needs and fears as more and more of a drag."[3] Although Berman is aware of some of the complexities of Gretchen's position, his sympathy clearly remains with Faust and his inevitable rejection of the closed, narrow world that Gretchen represents. Woman is aligned with the dead weight of tradition and conservatism that the active, newly autonomous, and self-defining subject must seek to transcend. Thus she functions as a sacrificial victim exemplifying the losses which underpin the ambiguous, but ultimately exhilarating and seductive logic of the modern.

From a reading of Berman's book, it would be tempting to conclude that the gender of modernity is indeed male. All the exemplary heroes of his text—Faust, Marx, Baudelaire—are of course symbols not just of modernity, but also of masculinity, historical markers of the emergence of new forms of bourgeois and working-class male subjectivity. Both in Berman's account of Faust and in his later evocation of Baudelaire's flâneur, the stroller who goes botanizing on the asphalt of the streets of Paris, the modern individual is assumed to be an autonomous male free of familial and communal ties. Here Berman's book fits comfortably into a long-standing tradition of writing that reads modernity as an Oedipal revolt against the tyranny of authority, drawing on metaphors of contestation and struggle grounded in an ideal of competitive masculinity. Feminism has in recent years developed an extensive critique of such idealized representations of the autonomous male subject, arguing that this ideal of freedom carries within it the seeds of domination in its desire to subjugate the other and its fear of a dependency aligned with the feminine.[4] From such a perspective, Berman's fascination with the ideal of restless, endless self-expansion embodied in the figure of Faust appears more problematic than he may originally have intended.

Yet Berman's equation of masculinity with modernity and of femininity with tradition is only one of various possible stories about the nature and meaning of the modern era. By contrast, a recent book by Gail Finney argues

the imaginative centrality of *female* psychology and sexuality to representations of modernity in the European fin de siècle. Through readings of some of the period's most memorable dramatic heroines—Hedda Gabler, Salomé, Lulu—Finney demonstrates the profound interconnections between femininity and modernity in the late-nineteenth-century social imaginary. The psychic and social conflicts embodied in these heroines differ markedly from those examined in Berman's exclusively masculine pantheon. Most noticeably, intimate relationships emerge as a central arena within which the contradictions of the modern are played out. Whereas Berman's text tends to replicate an established view of modernity in terms of a polarized opposition between individual and society, Finney points to the centrality of familial ties and identities—as mother, daughter, wife—in the construction of modern forms of subjectivity. The so-called private sphere, often portrayed as a domain where natural and timeless emotions hold sway, is shown to be radically implicated in patterns of modernization and processes of social change. The analysis of modern femininity brings with it a recognition of the profoundly historical nature of private feelings.

The figures of the feminist and the hysteric emerge in Finney's analysis as key symbols of the gender politics of modernity, apparently opposed yet closely related images that permeated the culture of the fin de siècle. Just as the feminist expressed a rebellious, emancipatory, and outer-directed response to the condition of female oppression, so, she argues, the hysteric exemplified a rejection of society that was passive, inner-directed, and ultimately self-destructive. Yet both figures are equally implicated in modern systems of thought and representation: the apparently private, irrational behavior of the hysteric was itself a socially determined phenomenon, an index of the nineteenth-century preoccupation with sexuality as the truth of the self that found expression in the emergent doctrines of psychiatry and psychoanalysis and their hysterization of the female body. Indeed, the distinction between the feminist and the hysteric was regularly blurred in much of the writing of the period, which constantly sought to reduce the political actions of suffragettes to the irrational outbursts of a group of deranged and dangerous women. Thus, Finney writes, "this double spectrum—of women's responses to their oppression (feminism and hysteria) and of men's reactions to these responses (feminism and hysterization)—produced a field of conflicting currents of thought which inevitably left their mark on dramatists of the day."[5] The figure of woman pervades the culture of the fin de siècle as a powerful symbol of both the dangers and the promises of the modern age.

It is enlightening in this context to contrast Berman's discussion of Faust—the modern Prometheus—with Finney's reading of Lulu—the

modern Pandora. First brought to life by the German dramatist Franz Wedekind, the seductive, demonic, yet childlike Lulu was to become well known to a wide public as a result of the success of G. W. Pabst's silent film *Pandora's Box.* Finney suggests in her reading of Wedekind's work that Lulu should be seen not just as a product of modern society but as a quintessential incorporation of its values. Actress, sex object, prostitute, performer, spectacle; all these identities render her the paradigmatic symbol of a culture increasingly structured around the erotics and aesthetics of the commodity. On the one hand, Lulu exemplifies the fin-de-siècle association of femininity with nature and the primal forces of the unconscious; yet on the other, she is also surface without substance, a creature of style and artifice whose identity is created through the various costumes and masks that she assumes. Here Wedekind's heroine joins an established repertoire of images of the prostitute and the actress, whose paradoxical combination of eros and artifice has frequently been seen as the quintessential manifestation of a feminized modernity.

Clearly, the versions of history proposed by these two texts are significantly affected by the gender of their exemplary subjects. In Berman's account, modernity is identified with dynamic activity, development, and the desire for unlimited growth; the autonomy of the newly liberated bourgeois subject is exemplified in the accelerating momentum of industrial production, rationalization, and domination over nature. Finney's text, by contrast, posits a modern individual who is both more passive and more indeterminate, a decentered nexus of textual influences, social roles, and inchoate psychic impulses. The purposefully striving masculinity of Faust is replaced by a fetishized, libidinized, and commodified femininity produced through the textually generated logics of modern forms of desire. In these contrasting visions of men's and women's modernity, Berman's primary reference point is Marx, whereas Finney's is Freud. One obvious explanation for this difference lies in the period of time separating the works of Goethe and Wedekind; clearly, the "modernity" of their texts is in many respects very different. Yet, as Berman's book makes clear, the Faustian myth retains significant currency as a symbolic articulation of the contradictions of the modern age, its resonances still powerful in our own time.[6] Indeed, the two stories I have just recounted can be seen as competing myths of modernity that recur across a range of both popular and academic, fictional and theoretical texts. For every account of the modern era which emphasizes the domination of masculine qualities of rationalization, productivity, and repression, one can find another text which points—whether approvingly or censoriously—to the feminization of Western society, as evidenced in the passive, hedonistic, and decentered nature of modern subjectivity.

Of course, these differing perspectives are by no means incompatible, and some writers have sought to bring them together into a single, overarching theory of modern development. One of the best known of such attempts is the *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's analysis of the self-destructive logic of Western society. Drawing on the work of Marx, Weber, and Nietzsche, Adorno and Horkheimer anticipate aspects of contemporary poststructuralist theory in their exposure of the fundamental irrationality of modern reason. The Greek myth of Odysseus and the sirens is read by the authors as a central text of European civilization and as an exemplary parable of the aporias of modernity. Ordering his sailors to bind him to the mast so that he cannot respond to the seductive song of the sirens, Odysseus epitomizes the disciplined male bourgeois individual, foreshadowing the repression of the body and the feminine that will determine the development of Western culture. As Douglas Kellner argues in a useful summary, "Homer's text is read as an allegorical journey in which Odysseus overcomes primitive natural forces (immersion in pleasure, sexuality, animal aggressivity and violence, brutal tribalism and so forth) and asserts his domination over the mythic/natural world. In his use of cunning and deceit, his drive toward self-preservation and refusal to accept mythic fate, his entrepreneurial control over his men and his patriarchal power over his wife and other women, Odysseus is presented as a prefiguration of bourgeois man who reveals the connections between self-preservation, the domination of nature and the entanglement of myth and enlightenment."[7]

This entanglement is exemplified in a central motto of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* the claim that "myth is already enlightenment; and enlightenment reverts to mythology."[8] Through the blind exercise of mastery over nature, reason is transformed into its opposite, as exemplified in the irrationality and barbarism of a modern capitalist society driven by the dual imperatives of instrumental reason and commodity fetishism. In an influential chapter on the politics of the culture industry, Adorno and Horkheimer argue that its mythological dreamworlds, seductive commodities, and promises of endless fun are one of the key means through which individuals are reconciled to the prospect of a totally administered society ruled by a logic of profit and standardization. The repressed feminine of aesthetic and libidinal forces returns in the form of the engulfing, regressive lures of modern mass culture and consumer society, which trades inauthentic pleasures and pseudo-happiness for acquiescence to the status quo. Thus for

Adorno and Horkheimer "masculine" rationalization and "feminine" pleasure are simply two sides of a single coin, the seamless logic of domination that constitutes modern subjectivity through processes of subjugation.

While Adorno and Horkheimer's thesis has been powerful and influential, particularly in Marxist circles, it has also been subject to criticism on a number of grounds. First of all, it can be argued that the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* espouses a highly pessimistic philosophy of history which conceives of modernity as an inexorable spiral of ever greater repression. Such an apocalyptic vision of history as domination denies the ambiguous and multidimensional aspects of modern development and allows little room for the possibility of contradiction, resistance, or emancipatory change within what is presented as a closed system. In particular, while ostensibly granting a key importance to the cultural domain, it ultimately reduces it to an essentially subsidiary role as a reflection of pre-existing economic, technological, and administrative logics. As a result, it does not make any allowances for the productive, interactive, and intersubjective dimensions of symbolic forms, the diverse and often contradictory constellations of discourses, stories, and images through which individuals interpret and make sense of their lives. By ignoring the hermeneutic agency of social subjects and the polysemic richness of cultural texts, Adorno and Horkheimer reproduce the very identity logic they claim to challenge through their representation of modern individuals as a passive, homogeneous, and alienated mass.

Second, the positioning of gender in Adorno and Horkheimer's thesis remains uneasy and ultimately unsatisfactory from a feminist perspective. On the one hand, their analysis emphasizes the fundamentally patriarchal basis of Western modernity, as exemplified in the tyranny of a logic of identity that requires a denial of autonomous difference. Here, as in more recent critiques of logocentrism emanating from French poststructuralist thought, the fantasm of the feminine plays a pivotal role, embodying a principle of resistance and a utopian alternative to the constraints of dominating reason. The exclusion of women from Western modernity thus allows them to function as a symbol of escape from all-pervasive systems of power.[9] On the other hand, this very critique risks the continuing identification of women with presymbolic otherness in its emphasis on the fundamental masculinity of the social. In particular, the reliance on a Freudian paradigm of repression reveals its limitations in encouraging a recurring equation of the feminine with a repressed and undifferentiated nature. Thus, as Patricia Mills notes in her critical engagement with *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* the female voice of the siren is linked with the song of the sensuous world of nature, the lure of the pleasure principle.[10] Mills goes on to argue that such an association of the

feminine with the nonrational and the asymbolic does not allow for any independent conception of female identity, agency, or desire. Woman is reduced to the libidinal, inexpressible, or aesthetic, the repressed Other of patriarchal reason. The possibility of exploring women's varied and complex relations to processes of social change is excluded by a sweeping vision of Enlightenment as emblematic of a totalizing logic of patriarchal domination.

Adorno and Horkheimer's text thus points to some of the difficulties which arise in the search for a single explanatory account of the underlying logic of Western history. While their analysis has the obvious merit of acknowledging the male-dominated nature of modern development, the resulting vision of male agency and female powerlessness precludes any consideration of women's distinctive roles within and active contributions to historical processes. Within the constraints of a single mythic narrative, it is inevitably man who assumes the role of collective subject of history, while woman can exist only as Other, as the object rather than the subject of historical narrative. One possible avenue of response to this logic of exclusion is to reverse the roles of man and woman by constructing a counter-myth of emblematic femininity; thus Mills goes on to offer a feminist reading of the story of Medea, whom she describes as the female Odysseus, as a powerful allegory of the problematic of female desire.[11] Yet, as she simultaneously acknowledges, any attempt to encapsulate women's distinctive relationships to modernity through a single alternative myth risks becoming a new form of "reifying universal" in its assumption that the history of women can be subsumed and symbolized by a single, all-encompassing image of femininity. Retaining a belief in the univocal meaning of both woman and modernity, such a strategy does not address the multiplicity and diversity of women's relations to historical processes.

For precisely this reason, my own analysis does not attempt to provide a grand philosophical summation of the gendered nature and logic of Western history. Rather than creating an overarching feminist myth of the modern, I have chosen a different approach, which aims to unravel the complexities of modernity's relationship to femininity through an analysis of its varied and competing representations. Interweaving cultural theory with cultural history, I address more general theoretical questions about the gender politics of the modern via a reading of a diverse range of late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century European texts. Through such an interpretive strategy I hope to analyze my topic from a variety of different vantage points, and to pay careful attention to the various genres and forms through which our sense of the modern has been constituted.

In opting for such a method, I do not wish to suggest that forms of

abstraction or totalization are in themselves reprehensible or unacceptable practices. A degree of generalization is inevitable in any argument that wishes to go beyond empiricism and the mere notation of particulars to the construction of meaningful structures, connections, and arguments. In this sense, as Horst Ruthrof argues, there is an ineradicable teleological dimension within any interpretive strategy; rather than disappearing from poststructuralist theory, teleology has simply shifted from the interpreted text to the tools of interpretation.[12] Thus though I question the belief that modernity can be reduced to a single meaning and historical logic, my own arguments are themselves beholden to the implied telos of feminist theory and politics. The difference is one of degree rather than kind, and my choice of a multi-perspectival approach to the cultural politics of modernity is itself driven by pragmatic rather than exclusively theoretical considerations. Abstract philosophical theories of the modern are of little *use* to a feminist analysis, insofar as they tend either to subsume women within a single unilinear logic of history or else to position them outside of modern discourses and institutions in a zone of ahistorical, asymbolic otherness. They are thus unable to illuminate women's complex and changing relationships to the diverse political, philosophical, and cultural legacies of modernity, a question, it need hardly be pointed out, that retains a continuing and urgent relevance in our time.

Furthermore, if there is any legitimacy at all to the claim that feminism constitutes a form of dialogical politics, this attentiveness to otherness surely needs to extend itself to a careful engagement with the voices of the past. Rather than simply subsuming the history of gender relations within an overarching meta-theory of modernity articulated from the vantage point of the present, feminist critics need to take seriously past women's and men's own understandings of their positioning within historical and social processes. It is here that cultural analysis comes into its own, as a means of approaching the history of the modern through an investigation of the diverse ways in which modernity has itself been represented. By examining some of the most significant and pervasive of these representations, I seek to elaborate the mobile and shifting meanings of the modern as a category of cultural consciousness. In this context it is by no means obvious, as is assumed by the more reckless claims within postmodern theory, that our present historical condition has freed us from those dogmas and blind spots that we typically project onto our modern past. Indeed, the modernity that is often caricatured as synonymous with a totalizing logic of identity reveals on closer examination a multiplicity of voices and perspectives that cannot be easily synthesized into a single, unified ideology or world-view. One of my aims is

thus to emphasize the complexities and ambiguities of the modern against the reductive treatment it has received from some postmodernist and some feminist theorists.

By focusing my discussion on a particular period (the fin de siècle) and a set of interconnected cultures (France, England, Germany), I hope to unravel some of these ambiguous dimensions of the modern as they shape a particular and limited set of contexts. Given my interest in such particularities, the question arises as to the continuing usefulness of the modern as an analytical category. There are two important reasons why I have chosen to retain and complicate, rather than simply abandon, the term. First of all, the idea of the modern, in spite of (or perhaps because of) its polysemic and indeterminate meanings, serves to draw our attention to long-term processes of social change, to the multidimensional yet often systematic interconnections between a variety of cultural, political, and economic structures. The investigation of such structures is, in my view, a central task for feminist theory, whose critique of universal history should not be confused with a mere celebration of plural identities or a fragmentation of the social into dispersed and isolated sites. Hence the continuing relevance of the category of the modern as a means of coming to grips with long-term processes of structural change and equally important, of assessing the differing, uneven, and often contradictory impact of such processes on particular social groups. The intersection of femininity and modernity plays itself out *differentially* across the specifics of sociohistorical context.

Second, the idea of the modern saturates the discourses, images, and narratives of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is an era profoundly shaped by logics of periodization, by the attempt to situate individual lives and experiences in relation to broader historical patterns and overarching narratives of innovation and decline. "Modernity" thus refers not simply to a substantive range of sociohistorical phenomena—capitalism, bureaucracy, technological development, and so on—but above all to particular (though often contradictory) experiences of temporality and historical consciousness. While the modern experience of historicity has for obvious reasons received significant attention from Marxist critics, it has been less systematically explored by feminists, whose explorations of nineteenth-century culture have been primarily organized around the spatial distinction of private versus public. By linking feminist theory to the analysis of different representations of temporality and history, then, I hope to elucidate some of the ways in which femininity and modernity have been brought into conjunction by both women and men. Gender, as my opening paragraph suggested, reveals itself to be a central organizing metaphor in the

construction of historical time. Indeed, many of the myths of modernity that pervade the last fin de siècle can be detected again in our own, suggesting that we may yet have to free ourselves from the seductive power of grand narratives.

The starting point of my analysis was thus a deceptively simple one: a desire to reread the modern through the lens of feminist theory. I began by asking myself the following questions: How would our understanding of modernity change if instead of taking male experience as paradigmatic, we were to look instead at texts written primarily by or about women? And what if feminine phenomena, often seen as having a secondary or marginal status, were given a central importance in the analysis of the culture of modernity? What *difference* would such a procedure make? The stories resulting from such an investigation would not, I surmised, be completely alien or unrecognizable ones, given the complex entanglement and mutual imbrication of men's and women's histories. But they might well throw some significant new light on that seemingly exhausted issue, the aesthetics and the politics of modernity.

1

Modernity and Feminism

> I prefer to study . . . the everyday, the so-called banal, the supposedly un-or non-experimental, asking not "why does it fall short of modernism?" but "how do classical theories of modernism fall short of women's modernity?"
>
> Meaghan Morris, "Things to Do with Shopping Centres"

Even the most cursory survey of the vast body of writing about the modern reveals a cacophony of different and often dissenting voices. Modernity arises out of a culture of "stability, coherence, discipline and world-mastery";[1] alternatively it points to a "discontinuous experience of time, space and causality as transitory, fleeting and fortuitous."[2] For some writers it is a "culture of rupture," marked by historical relativism and ambiguity;[3] for others it involves a "rational, autonomous subject" and an "absolutist, unitary conception of truth."[4] To be modern is to be on the side of progress, reason, and democracy or, by contrast to align oneself with "disorder, despair and anarchy."[5] Indeed, to be modern is often paradoxically to be antimodern, to define oneself in explicit opposition to the prevailing norms and values of one's own time.[6]

Clearly, there is no magical means of resolving this semantic confusion, which derives from the complicated and many-faceted aspects of modern development. Yet it is possible to identify certain key factors which contribute to this bewildering diversity of definitions. For example, the different understandings of the modern across national cultures and traditions lead to potential difficulties of translation when texts circulate within a global intellectual economy. Thus for Jürgen Habermas "die Moderne" comprises an irreversible historical process that includes not only the repressive forces of bureaucratic and capitalist domination but also the emergence of a potentially emancipatory, because self-critical, ethics of communicative reason.

modes of thought by challenging the authority of tradition, custom, and the status quo. Such historical events as the French Revolution are often identified as key moments in the articulation of distinctively modern notions of autonomy and equality, grounded in the belief that there exists no authority beyond that of a critical, and self-critical, human reason. On the other hand, the idea of the modern was deeply implicated from its beginnings with a project of domination over those seen to lack this capacity for reflective reasoning. In the discourses of colonialism, for example, the historical distinction between the modern present and the primitive past was mapped onto the spatial relations between Western and non-Western societies. Thus the technological advances of modern nation-states could be cited as a justification for imperialist invasion, as the traditions and customs of indigenous peoples were forced to give way to the inexorable path of historical progress.[14] Similarly, the modern brought with it an ideal of equality grounded in fraternity that effectively excluded women from many forms of political life. Thus Joan Landes comments that "from the standpoint of women and their interests, enlightenment looks suspiciously like counter-enlightenment and revolution like counterrevolution."[15] Tracing the history of women's roles in the French Revolution, Landes shows how the discourse of modern rights and republican virtues effectively served to silence women through a recurring identification of the human with the masculine.

Appeals to the modern and the new could, however, also be appropriated and articulated anew by dissident or disenfranchised groups to formulate their own resistance to the status quo. Thus in the early twentieth century the figure of the New Woman was to become a resonant symbol of emancipation, whose modernity signaled not an endorsement of an existing present but rather a bold imagining of an alternative future. In rather different ways, modernist and avant-garde movements sought to disrupt taken-for-granted assumptions and dogmatic complacencies, refashioning the idea of the modern to signify ambiguity, uncertainty, and crisis rather than an uncritical ascription to a teleology of Western progress and an ideal of reason. The "old new" of dominant bourgeois values was thus regularly challenged by diverse groups who defined themselves as "authentically new" and who drew on and revitalized the promise of innovation as liberating transformation implicit in the idea of the modern to forge an array of critical and oppositional identities.

Appeals to modernity have, in other words, been used to further a multifarious range of political and cultural interests. Rather than identifying a stable referent or set of attributes, "modern" acts as a mobile and shifting category of classification that serves to structure, legitimize, and valorize

varied and often competing perspectives. My analysis thus begins with the assumption that modernity embraces a multidimensional array of historical phenomena that cannot be prematurely synthesized into a unified Zeitgeist. Hence I am skeptical of those writings which equate the entire modern period with a particular and narrowly defined tradition of intellectual thought stretching from Kant to Marx (as if several centuries of history could be reduced to the writings of a handful of philosophers!) in order to celebrate the emergence of postmodern ambiguity and difference against modern homogeneity and rationality. Such a purported critique of totalization is itself vastly totalizing, doing interpretive violence to the complex and heterogeneous strands of modern culture, which cannot be reduced to exemplifications of a monolithic world-view in this way. Within the specific context of late-nineteenth-century Europe, for example, appeals to science, rationality, and material progress coexisted with Romantic invocations of emotion, intuition, and authenticity as well as alongside self-conscious explorations of the performative and artificial status of identity and the inescapable metaphoricity of language. Rather than inscribing a homogeneous cultural consensus, the discourses of modernity reveal multiple and conflicting responses to processes of social change.

My intent here is not to claim that modern and postmodern are interchangeable signifiers; clearly, our own fin de siècle differs in crucial and fundamental ways from its predecessor, even as it also reveals some intriguing parallels. (Thus many of the topoi and catchphrases often seen as quintessentially postmodern—simulation, pastiche, consumption, nostalgia, cyborgs, cross-dressing—are suggestively foreshadowed in a number of nineteenth-century texts.) Nevertheless, feminist theory surely needs to question rather than uncritically endorse an opposition between a repressive modernity and a subversive postmodernity which has become de rigeur in certain areas of contemporary theory. As Gianni Vattimo has emphasized, such a view of the postmodern typically repeats the gesture of overcoming and futurity that is fundamental to the modern, naively re-enacting the very logic of history as progress that it claims to renounce.[16]

My own analysis is motivated by the desire to question existing theories of literary and cultural history in order to reveal their blindness to issues of gender. In this sense, I am in sympathy with feminist critics who argue that theories of both the modern and the postmodern have been organized around a masculine norm and pay insuffiicent attention to the specificity of women's lives and experiences. Yet I do not seek to demonstrate the illusory nature of the modern in order to position women and feminist concerns outside its logic. Such acts of attempted demystification are necessarily problematic

because they fail to acknowledge their own inevitable enmeshment within the categories that they seek to transcend. Thus I hope to show that feminism, which has been highly critical of the concept of the modern, has also been deeply influenced by it, and that struggles for women's emancipation are complexly interwoven with processes of modernization. If women's interests cannot be unproblematically aligned with dominant conceptions of the modern, neither can they simply be placed outside of them.

"Heroines of Modernity"

The claim that most contemporary theories of the modern are male-centered will not, I imagine, come as a great surprise to most readers of this book. It is a constant feature that links together a range of otherwise very disparate texts. I have already cited Berman's richly textured, but in this sense frustratingly monological, account; within the area of literary and cultural studies alone one could easily list many other critical works which claim to offer a general theory of modernity but base themselves exclusively on writings by men and textual representations of masculinity. The issue is even more straightforward within the field of social and political theory, where the equation of modernity with particular public and institutional structures governed by men has led to an almost total elision of the lives, concerns, and perspectives of women.[17]

The identification of modernity with masculinity is not, of course, simply an invention of contemporary theorists. Many of the key symbols of the modern in the nineteenth century—the public sphere, the man of the crowd, the stranger, the dandy, the flâneur—were indeed explicitly gendered. There could for example, be no direct female equivalent of the flâneur, given that any woman who loitered in the streets of the nineteenth-century metropolis was likely to be taken for a prostitute.[18] Thus a recurring identification of the modern with the public was largely responsible for the belief that women were situated outside processes of history and social change. In the texts of early Romanticism one finds some of the most explicitly nostalgic representations of femininity as a redemptive refuge from the constraints of civilization. Seen to be less specialized and differentiated than man, located within the household and an intimate web of familial relations, more closely linked to nature through her reproductive capacity, woman embodied a sphere of atemporal authenticity seemingly untouched by the alienation and fragmentation of modern life.

This view of femininity has retained much of its rhetorical power, resurfacing in the work of numerous contemporary writers. Thus part of the

common sense of much mainstream feminist thought has been a belief that such phenomena as industry, consumerism, the modern city, the mass media, and technology are in some sense fundamentally masculine, and that feminine values of intimacy and authenticity remain outside the dehumanizing and alienating logic of modernity. These assumptions received explicit articulation in works of cultural feminism which embraced a Romantic ideal of femininity as an enclave of natural self-presence in the face of the tyrannical onslaught of technocratic rationality. More recent feminist work has drawn upon psychoanalytic and poststructuralist theory to pitch a broadly similar critique at a more abstract level, arguing that the founding concepts and structures of modern thought are by nature phallocentric. In a recent book, for example, Juliet MacCannell claims that modernity is predicated on the elimination of woman and sexual difference. According to MacCannell, modern society no longer exemplifies the law of the father, but rather represents the regime of the brother, as the traditional and unquestioned authority of the patriarchal God or king gives way to a modern Enlightenment logic of equality, fraternity, and identity. Yet for women, this historical development brings with it more oppressive, because concealed, regimes of domination; the modern is predicated on the absence of the Other and the erasure of feminine agency and desire.[19]

Aspects of MacCannell's thesis are suggestive, and her reading of the modern through the lens of psychoanalytic theory usefully destabilizes the rational/irrational dichotomy by exposing the fantasmic and narcissistic dimensions of Enlightenment thought. Yet the difficulty with all such theories of the modern lies in the relentless generality of their claims. It is one thing to argue that particular institutional and cultural phenomena arising out of processes of modernization have been historically structured around a male norm, as does Joan Landes in her careful discussion of the symbolic politics of the eighteenth-century public sphere or Griselda Pollock in her account of the sexual topography of the nineteenth-century city.[20] It is quite another to claim that an extended historical period can be reduced to the manifestation of a single, unified, masculine principle. Such an absolute critique fails to account for the contradictory and conflictual impulses shaping the logic—or rather logics—of modern development. It does not allow for the possibility that certain aspects of modernity may have been or could potentially be beneficial for women. Instead, it engenders a dichotomy between an alienated modern past and an authentic (postmodern?) feminine future which can provide no account of the possible mechanisms of transition from one condition to the other.[21] Furthermore, such a view of the essentially masculine nature of modernity effectively writes women out of

history by ignoring their active and varied negotiations with different aspects of their social environment. Accepting at face value an equation of the modern with certain abstract philosophical ideals and a male-dominated public life, it fails to consider the specific and distinctive features of women's modernity.

There also exists, however, a body of feminist work on the modern which has significantly influenced the arguments in this book. As well as drawing upon recent rewritings of the literary history of the fin de siècle by Elaine Showalter and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, I have found recent works by Elizabeth Wilson, Christine Buci-Glucksmann, Rachel Bowlby, Nancy Armstrong, Andreas Huyssen, and Patrice Petro to be enormously useful.[22] What these critics share is a self-conscious recognition of the complex intersections between woman and modernity, of the mutual imbrication as well as points of contradiction between these two categories. Rather than espousing either a progress narrative which assumes that modernization brought with it an unambiguous improvement in women's lives or else a counter-myth of nostalgia for an edenic, nonalienated, golden past, their writings offer a sustained engagement with the shifting complexities of the modern in relation to gender politics.

Thus on the one hand, as many feminist writers have noted, the nineteenth century saw the establishment of increasingly rigid boundaries between private and public selves, so that gender differences solidified into apparently natural and immutable traits. The distinction between a striving, competitive masculinity and a nurturant, domestic femininity, while a feasible ideal only for a minority of middle-class households, nevertheless became a guiding rubric within which various aspects of culture were subsumed. Mary Poovey notes that "the model of a binary opposition between the sexes, which was socially realized in separate but supposedly equal 'spheres,' underwrote an entire system of institutional practices and conventions at midcentury, ranging from a sexual division of labor to a sexual division of economic and political rights."[23] These material and institutional realities both shaped and were themselves shaped by dominant conceptions of women's relationship to history and progress, as spatial categories of private and public were mapped onto temporal distinctions between past and present. By being positioned outside the dehumanizing structures of the capitalist economy as well as the rigorous demands of public life, woman became a symbol of nonalienated, and hence nonmodern, identity. A proliferating body of scientific, literary, and philosophical texts sought to prove that women were less differentiated and less self-conscious than men and more rooted in an elemental unity. As a result, for a range of female as well as male thinkers, women could enter

modernity only by taking on the attributes that had been traditionally classified as masculine.

On the other hand, however, a close consideration of nineteenth-century texts suggests that the divisions between public and private, masculine and feminine, modern and antimodern were not as fixed as they may have appeared. Or rather, they were unmade and remade in new ways. Christine Buci-Glucksmann refers to a "symbolic redistribution of relations between feminine and masculine," which she sees as a prevailing countertendency within nineteenth-century urban life.[24] Thus the ideology of separate spheres was undercut by the movement of working-class women into mass production and industrial labor, causing numbers of writers to express their fears that the workplace would become sexualized through the dangerous proximity of male and female bodies. The expansion of consumerism in the latter half of the century further blurred public/private distinctions, as middle-class women moved out into the public spaces of the department store and the world of mass-produced goods in turn invaded the interiority of the home. Finally, late-nineteenth-century feminists and social reformers provided one of the most visible and overtly political challenges to existing gender hierarchies. Asserting their rights to political and legal equality with men, they simultaneously appealed to a distinctively feminine moral authority as a justification for their occupation of the public sphere. Increasingly, images of femininity were to play a central role in prevailing anxieties, fears, and hopeful imaginings about the distinctive features of the "modern age."

In this context a number of critics have commented upon the significance of the prostitute in the nineteenth-century social imaginary and her emblematic status in the literature and art of the period.[25] Both seller and commodity, the prostitute was the ultimate symbol of the commodification of eros, a disturbing example of the ambiguous boundaries separating economics and sexuality, the rational and irrational, the instrumental and the aesthetic. Her body yielded to a number of conflicting interpretations; seen by some contemporary writers to exemplify the tyranny of commerce and the universal domination of the cash nexus, it was read by others as representing the dark abyss of a dangerous female sexuality linked to contamination, disease, and the breakdown of social hierarchies in the modern city. Subjected to increasing forms of government regulation, documentation, and surveillance, the prostitute was an insistently visible reminder of the potential anonymity of women in the modern city and the loosening of sexuality from familial and communal bonds. Like the prostitute, the actress could also be seen as a "figure of public pleasure," whose deployment of cosmetics and costume bore witness to the artificial and commodified forms of contempo-

rary female sexuality.[26] This motif of the female performer easily lent itself to appropriation as a symptom of the pervasiveness of illusion and spectacle in the generation of modern forms of desire. Positioned on the margins of respectable society, yet graphically embodying its structuring logic of commodity aesthetics, the prostitute and the actress fascinated nineteenth-century cultural critics preoccupied with the decadent and artificial nature of modern life.

The changing status of women under conditions of urbanization and industrialization further expressed itself in a metaphorical linking of women with technology and mass production. No longer placed in simple opposition to the rationalizing logic of the modern, women were now also seen to be constructed through it. The image of the machine-woman is another recurring theme in the modern, explored in such texts as Philippe Auguste Villiers de L'Isle Adam's novel *Tomorrow's Eve*.[27] As Andreas Huyssen notes, this image comes to crystallize in condensed form a simultaneous fascination and revulsion with the powers of technology. Like the work of art, woman in the age of technological reproduction is deprived of her aura; the effects of industry and technology thus help to demystify the myth of femininity as a last remaining site of redemptive nature. In this sense modernity serves to denaturalize and hence to destabilize the notion of an essential, God-given, femaleness. Yet this figure of the woman as machine can also be read as the reaffirmation of a patriarchal desire for technological mastery over woman, expressed in the fantasy of a compliant female automaton and in the dream of creation without the mother through processes of artificial reproduction. There is a crucial ambiguity in the figure of the woman-as-machine—does she point to a subversion or rather a reinforcement of gender hierarchies?—which continues to mark her most recent reincarnation in Donna Haraway's cyborg manifesto.[28]

The prostitute, the actress, the mechanical woman—it is such *female* figures that crystallize the ambivalent responses to capitalism and technology which permeated nineteenth-century culture. The list can easily be extended. The figure of the lesbian, for example, came to serve as an evocative symbol of a feminized modernity in the work of a number of nineteenth-century male French writers who depicted her as an avatar of perversity and decadence, exemplifying the mobility and ambiguity of modern forms of desire. As Walter Benjamin notes in his discussion of Baudelaire, the lesbian's status as heroine of the modern derived from her perceived defiance of traditional gender roles through a subversion of "natural" heterosexuality and the imperatives of biological reproduction. Lilian Faderman and more recently Thais Morgan have explored some of the manifestations of this cult of lesbian

exoticism as it shaped the texts of the nineteenth-century male avant-garde. As Morgan notes, the figure of the lesbian came to function as an emblem of chic transgression, allowing artists and writers to explore an enlarged range of pleasures and subjectivities without necessarily challenging the traditional assumptions and privileges of masculinity.[29]

As this example indicates, many prevailing representations of modern feminity are shaped by the preoccupations of masculine fantasy and cannot simply be read as accurate representations of women's experience. Yet this is not to argue for a counter-realm of authentic femininity that awaits discovery outside such representations and the textual and institutional logics of the modern. On the contrary, I hope to show that the nostalgia for such a nonalienated plenitude is itself a product of modern dualistic schemas which positioned woman as an ineffable Other beyond the bounds of a masculine social and symbolic order. Rather than pursuing the chimera of an autonomous feminity, I wish to explore some of the different ways in which women drew upon, contested, or reformulated dominant representations of gender and modernity in making sense of their own positioning within society and history. Women's experience cannot be seen as a pre-given ontology that precedes its expression, but is constituted through a number of often contradictory, albeit connected strands, which are not simply reflected but are constructed through the "technologies of gender" of particular cultures and periods.[30] Such an understanding of history as *enactment* situates femininity in its multiple, diverse, but determinate articulations, which are themselves crisscrossed by other cultural logics and hierarchies of power. Gender is continually in process, an identity that is performed and actualized over time within given social constraints.

To acknowledge the social determination of femininity is not, therefore, to advocate a logic of identity which assumes that women's experiences of modernity can simply be assimilated to those of men. To be sure, women's lives have been radically transformed by such quintessentially modern phenomena as industrialization, urbanization, the advent of the nuclear family, new forms of time-space regulation, and the development of the mass media. In this sense, there can be no separate sphere of women's history outside the prevailing structures and logics of modernity. At the same time, women have experienced these changes in gender-specific ways that have been further fractured, not only by the oft-cited hierarchies of class, race, and sexuality but by their various and overlapping identities and practices as consumers, mothers, workers, artists, lovers, activists, readers, and so on. It is these distinctively feminine encounters with the various facets of the modern that have been largely ignored by cultural and social meta-theories oblivious to

the gendering of historical processes. Thus an approach to literary and cultural history which focuses on texts by and/or about women may result in a somewhat different set of perspectives on the nature and meaning of historical processes. Those dimensions of culture either ignored, trivialized, or seen as regressive rather than authentically modern—feelings, romantic novels, shopping, motherhood, fashion—gain dramatically in importance, whereas themes previously considered central to the sociocultural analysis of modernity become less significant or recede into the background. As a result, our sense of what counts as meaningful history is subtly yet profoundly altered as the landscape of the modern acquires a different, less familiar set of contours.

Yet the feminist critic also runs the risk of reinforcing gender stereotypes if she devotes all her attention to the uncovering of a distinctive "women's culture." Many nineteenth-century women sought to question such a notion by crossing traditional male/female boundaries, whether in overtly political or in more muted and less visible ways. It is equally important to acknowledge the female presence within those spheres often seen as the exclusive province of men, such as the realm of public politics or avant-garde art. By appropriating such traditionally masculine discourses, women helped to reveal the potential instability of traditional gender divides, even as their versions of these discourses often reveal suggestive and interesting differences. Rather than reading such strategies as pathological signs of women's subsumption into an all-embracing phallocentrism, I am interested in exploring the hybrid and often contradictory identities which ensued. If gender politics played a central role in shaping processes of modernization, these same processes in turn helped to initiate an ongoing refashioning and reimagining of gender.

Modernist Aesthetics and Women's Modernity

Among the various terms associated with the modern, modernism is the one that is most familiar within the field of literary studies. Unlike modernity, it can be situated in historical time with a relative degree of precision; most critics locate the high point of modernist literature and art between about 1890 and 1940, while agreeing that modernist features can be found in texts both preceding and following this period. The emergence of modernism in continental Europe is often linked to the appearance of symbolism in France and aestheticism in fin-de-siècle Vienna, whereas in England and America modernist tendencies are usually supposed to have manifested themselves somewhat later, from around the time of the First World War.

While modernist literature comprises a broad and heterogeneous range of

styles rather than a unified school, it is neverthless possible to list some of its most important identifying features. According to Eugene Lunn's useful summary, these include aesthetic self-consciousness; simultaneity, juxtaposition, and montage; paradox, ambiguity, and uncertainty; and the dehumanization of the subject.[31] These aesthetic features are conventionally explained with reference to the crisis of language, history, and the subject which shaped the birth of the twentieth century and left an indelible mark on the literature and art of the period. Thus Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane note that modernism "is the art consequent on the disestablishing of communal reality and conventional notions of causality, on the destruction of traditional notions of the wholeness of individual character, on the linguistic chaos that ensues when public notions of language have been discredited and when all realities have become subjective fictions."[32]

There is, however, much less agreement regarding the sociopolitical consequences of modernist innovation in the sphere of literature and art. Within such European countries as France, Germany, Italy, and Russia, the formal experimentation of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century artistic movements was frequently linked to an explicit social agenda by both practitioners and critics: radical aesthetics was intimately intertwined with avant-garde politics. A crucial notion here was that of *ostranenie*, or defamiliarization, used by the Russian Formalist school to describe literature's capacity to disrupt automatized perceptions and draw attention to the materiality of language as a set of signifiers. For a variety of avant-gardes, this defamiliarizing potential allowed artistic innovation to acquire an integral connection to social change. Modernism was the art most suited to challenging political complacencies and ideological dogmas by disrupting the mimetic illusions of realist and naturalist traditions and articulating through its very form the radical contradictions and ambiguities which characterized modern life.

Within the Anglo-American context, modernism has been read rather differently, a fact at least partly due to the lack of a substantive avant-garde tradition in England and America and the more openly conservative and quietist politics of many of its key practitioners. As a result, modernism has often been defined in opposition to sociopolitical concerns, as critics have invoked the subtleties of modernist experimentation to defend an ideal of the autonomous, self-referential art object. Thus an elective affinity established itself between the often rarefied aesthetic concerns of writers such as T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound and the formalist and antireferential emphasis of New Criticism as an institutional practice and technology of reading. Marianne

DeKoven writes that "the triumph of New-Critical Modernism has made it appear blunt, banal, even gauche to discuss modernist writing as a critique of twentieth-century culture—to approach it, in fact, as anything other than the altar of linguistic and intellectual complexity in search of transcendent formal unity."[33] DeKoven's perceived need to legitimate and defend her own socio-political interpretation of Joseph Conrad and Virginia Woolf underlines the entrenched nature of such assumptions and the marked differences in this respect between Anglo-American and European modernist traditions.

Both of these traditions, nevertheless, are united in their largely uncritical reproduction of a masculine—and often overtly masculinist—literary lineage that has come under scrutiny from feminist scholars. Some critics have drawn attention to a machismo aesthetic characterizing the work of male modernists that is predicated upon an exclusion of everything associated with the feminine. Here modernism's emphasis on a rigorously experimental, self-conscious, and ironic aesthetic is interpreted as embodying a hostile and defensive response to the seductive lures of emotion, desire, and the body. Other feminists have pursued a different line of argument, noting that many of the key features of modernist experimentation suggestively coincide with the feminist critique of phallogocentrism. Suzette Henke, for example, draws on the work of Julia Kristeva to read the work of James Joyce as a subversive challenge to the structures of phallocentric discourse, unleashing a plurality of signifiers that articulate the ambiguities of a libidinal desire aligned with the maternal body. The polysemic nature of modernist art is thus reappropriated for the feminist project through its radical unsettling of the fixity of gender hierarchy.[34]

Besides producing such revisionist readings of the male modernist canon, feminist critics are also bringing women to the fore as key practitioners and theorists of modernism. As well as rereading such well-known writers as Virginia Woolf and Gertrude Stein, they are beginning to recover a less well-known tradition of female modernists and hence to reshape and redefine the contours of literary history. Distancing itself from the more reductive, content-based analyses of early feminist criticism, this recent work is often at pains to acknowledge the subtleties and complexities of modernist writing through careful attention to its tropes, metaphors, wordplays, and textual rhythms.[35] Clearly, there are institutional grounds for such interventions and for attempting to bring more women into existing literary canons by drawing attention to the innovative and formally sophisticated nature of their art. Yet it is also evident that some of the women's texts discussed in such surveys are less informed by the credo of modernist experimentalism than by alternative literary traditions such as realism or melodrama. In this

context, Celeste Schenk advocates a "polemic for the dismantling of a monolithic 'Modernism' defined by its iconoclastic irreverence for convention and form, a difference which has contributed to the marginalization of women poets during the period."[36] Rather than simply arguing for the inclusion of a few more women in the modernist canon, Schenk suggests that a sustained challenge to the fetish of avant-gardism and an expansion of the term "modernism" to cover all the texts written within a given period might help to counteract the marginal status of women and open up the critical gaze to the variety of styles of writing circulating within a given historical era.

The issue at stake here is that of the benefits and dangers residing in particular forms of categorization. While I am in overall sympathy with Schenk's concerns, her suggestion that modernism be expanded to include "anything written between 1910 and 1940" seems unsatisfactory for obvious reasons. If modernism is no longer defined by any distinctive stylistic or formal features, the dates that she advocates in turn become completely arbitrary; why locate the inception of modernism in 1910, rather than 1880, or 1850, or 1830, all periods which saw themselves as "modern" in important ways? To dissolve the specificity of "modernism" in this way is to render an already vague term effectively useless by robbing it of any meaningful referent. It is surely more useful to retain the term as a designation for those texts which display the formally self-conscious, experimental, antimimetic features described earlier, while simultaneously questioning the assumption that such texts are necessarily the most important or representative works of the modern period. Modernism is only one aspect of the culture of women's modernity.

In other words, the feminist critique of literary history is best achieved not by denying the existence of formal and aesthetic distinctions between texts, but rather by questioning and rethinking the meanings that are frequently assigned to these distinctions. These range from the liberal humanist celebration of the great male modernist as the heroic spokesman of his time to the belief, shared by various poststructuralist, neo-Marxist, and feminist critics, that experimental art exemplifies the most authentically radical challenge to the authority of dominant ideological systems. This isolation of the modernist text as a privileged site of cultural radicalism relies upon certain taken-for-granted assumptions about the uniquely privileged status of literary discourse that have become increasingly tenuous in critical theory. The first of these positions can be loosely described as a form of mimeticism; while purportedly rejecting the reflectionist frame of a realist aesthetic, it nevertheless assumes that modernism in some sense offers a truthful representation of the radically indeterminate and fragmentary nature of the social.

In this sense, the modernist text becomes the privileged bearer of epistemological authority, crystallizing in its very structure the underlying fissures that the realist text glosses over. Modernism is elevated over realism paradoxically because it is a truer realism; going beyond the superficial stability of surface literary conventions, it reveals that reality *is* fluidity, fragmentation, indeterminacy.[37]

A psychologist position, by contrast, places greater emphasis on the proximity of the modernist text to the fragmented and incoherent workings of the unconscious. Here the fascination of many modernist writers with the subterranean workings of the psyche coincides with the renewed impact of psychoanalysis on recent literary theory. Thus feminist critics have drawn heavily upon psycholinguistic theories of meaning to interpret the fissures and contradictions within modernist texts as eruptions of a libidinal desire that threaten to disrupt the fixed structures of a phallocentric system. Modernism's disruption of hierarchical syntax and of linear time and plot, its decentering of the knowing and rational subject, its fascination with the aural and rhythmic qualities of language, are seen to provide the basis for a subversively other feminine aesthetic linked to the impulses of the unconscious.[38]

Both of these positions assume in different ways that the modernist work bears a privileged relationship to a nonlinguistic reality which forms the basis of its transgressive potential. Through its articulation of repressed truths, the fractured text in some sense challenges, undermines, or otherwise calls into question the mystificatory discourses of a bourgeois/patriarchal order. The modernist text thus becomes the ultimate expression of the real contradictions of modernity. Yet I have already noted that the question of what modernity *is* is by no means as self-evident as such theories sometimes assume. Whereas Marxist theorists, for example, have tended to emphasize the crisis-driven logics of capitalist production, other writers have pointed out that cultural practices do not necessarily harmonize with economic development in any straightforward way. Alain Corbin, for example, notes the relative stability of religion, custom, and traditional networks of kinship and affiliation in nineteenth-century Paris, suggesting that claims for the radical transformation of social life under capitalism are often exaggerated.[39] If one accepts the legitimacy of such critiques of totalizing models of periodization, it becomes less easy to identify a single kind of text, whether the realist or high modernist work of art, as embodying the truth of the modern Zeitgeist in a uniquely representative way. In fact, any attempt to specify a single work as an authoritative index of an entire culture problematic (modernity, women) is revealed as a methodologically fraught enterprise in its positing of an isomorphic relationship between a literary text and the real. Rather, the

idea of the modern fractures into a range of often contradictory, if connected, strands which were not simply reflected but were in part constructed through the different discourses of a particular period. Thus our own sense of the modern as a period of radical instability and constant change is itself at least partly indebted to the prominence of iconoclastic modernist artworks in received histories of twentieth-century culture; a reading of other kinds of texts may in turn engender a rather different view of the relationship between stability and change within the modern period.

The epistemological problems inherent in appeals to the essence of modernity bear directly on the textual politics of modernism, suggesting that generalized claims for the subversive nature of experimental forms need to be replaced by more contextually specific analyses of the relations between particular discourses and different axes of power. Much of the avant-garde art of the turn of the century, for example, expressed a profound antipathy toward dominant ideologies and world-views on the part of marginalized artistic and intellectual elites. In articulating this alienation at the level of artistic form, such avant-gardes espoused a critical and contestatory aesthetic that sought to explode the complacent certainties of bourgeois attitudes. Yet a feminist reading often reveals striking lines of continuity between dominant discourse and aesthetic counterdiscourse in terms of a shared valorization of Oedipal models of competitive masculinity and an overt disdain for the "womanly" sphere of emotion, sentiment, and feeling. As a result, the introduction of gender politics radically complicates an existing opposition between what Matei Calinescu has termed the "two modernities" of bourgeois rationalization and radical art, fracturing and reconfiguring existing lines of power.[40] A text which may appear subversive and destabilizing from one political perspective becomes a bearer of dominant ideologies when read in the context of another. In this context the anxious pursuit of the authentically transgressive text within recent literary and cultural theory is revealed as a singularly unproductive and uninteresting enterprise.

This argument in turn has significant implications for feminism's own choice of methodology, indicating the problems inherent in trying to encapsulate the essence of women's modernity through the close reading of one or two exemplary canonical texts. The works of Woolf or Stein, for example, may reveal much more about the specific context of the aristocratic-bohemian female subcultures of Bloomsbury and the Left Bank in the 1920s than about some repressed and exemplary Ur-femininity. Such writings offer us elegant and ironic explorations of the fragility of linguistic and sexual norms, articulating an intellectual and artistic world-view that was shaped by the impact of Freudianism and feminism, of linguistic philosophies and

artistic manifestoes. However, they tell us much less about those aspects of modernity that shaped the lives of other kinds of women: the modernity of department stores and factories, of popular romances and women's magazines, of mass political movements and bureaucratic constructions of femininity. Such concerns are not of course completely absent from modernism, but they are typically mediated and refracted through an aesthetic lens of irony, defamiliarization, and montage specific to an artistic and intellectual—though not necessarily political—elite of the period. The connection of such an aesthetic to the discourses, images, and representations of the modern shaping the lives of other classes and groups of women is by no means self-evident. As Martin Pumphrey notes, "Any adequate reading of the modern period . . . must take account of the fact that the debates over women's public freedom, over fashion and femininity, cosmetics and home cleaning were as essential to the fabrication of modernity as cubism, Dada or futurism, as symbolism, fragmented form or the stream-of-consciousness narrative."[41]

If epistemological claims for the truth of modernist writing may be in need of some modification, so too are political ones. Thus writers such as Gertrude Stein are often singled out for attention by feminist critics because of their defiance of linguistic and social conventions and their transgressive questioning of femininity. Such a reclamation of a female avant-garde tradition undoubtedly forms an important part of the feminist rewriting of literary history through its creation of a pantheon of major, inspiratory women artists. Yet it also often perpetuates an unfortunate dichotomy of literary and political value which identifies formal experimentation as the most authentically resistive practice, with a consequent stigma attached both to representational art forms and to the regressive, sentimental texts of mass culture. Such a future-oriented, progressivist rhetoric, I would suggest, may provide an insufficiently nuanced way of approaching the gender politics of cultural texts within the uneven histories of the modern. Thus a central aspect of feminist scholarship has been its concern with the everyday and the mundane, and its consequent recuperation of those areas of women's lives often dismissed as trivial or insignificant. In this context to equate modernity with modernism, to assume that experimental art is necessarily the privileged cultural vehicle of a gender politics, is surely to ignore the implications of the feminist critique not just for methods but for objects of analysis.

Here feminist scholarship enters into a productive relationship with semiotic theories, which have broken down rigid oppositions between art and society by demonstrating the sign-laden nature of the entire cultural domain. To argue that the world is textual in this sense is not to deny its political,

institutional, and power-determined realities, but to recognize that these realities are concretized through a diversity of semiotically complex artifacts and activities. Such an expanded understanding of the cultural text can contribute significantly toward retheorizing the modern by breaking down traditional distinctions between a radical avant-gardism (often codified as masculine) and a mass culture that has often been depicted as sentimental, feminine, and regressive. In particular, recent feminist work in the area of popular culture and cultural studies has paved the way for a rethinking of women's modernity that can include a consideration of the politics of experimental art but that can go beyond the isolated hypostatization of the modernist text.[42] Such a culturally based reading of modernity may usefully supplement and rearticulate the existing but somewhat moribund discourses of modernization and modernism within sociology and literary criticism, respectively.

The Politics of Method

I have thus chosen to approach the issue of gender and modernity via an array of texts that span the factual/fictional as well as the high/popular divide. The particular forms of writing examined in the following chapters are drawn from a spectrum of genres, including sociological theory, realist and naturalist novels, popular melodrama, political tracts and speeches, and works of early modernism. All of these forms articulate in different ways an awareness of and response to the problematic of the modern that is crucially intertwined with their representation of the feminine. By linking together forms of writing which are often kept apart, I wish to scrutinize the metaphorical and narrative dimensions of sociological and political writing while simultaneously situating the self-conscious literariness of early modernist experimentation within particular sociopolitical contexts. If the establishment of New Historicism has helped to pave the way for such cross-generic readings, my argument is equally indebted to cultural studies for having irrevocably problematized the opposition between a "high" literature assumed to be inherently ambiguous and self-critical and a mass culture equated with the reproduction of a monolithic ideological standpoint. The meanings of all texts, it has become increasingly clear, are produced through complex webs of intertextual relationships, and even the most conciliatory and apparently monological of texts may show evidence of dissonance, ambiguity, and contradiction rather than simply reinscribing conformism.

To displace oppositions, however, is not to argue for identities. While it is important to identify images and clusters of ideas that migrate across texts,

it is equally necessary to give careful consideration to the distinctive conventions and logics governing particular discourses and kinds of texts as well as to the specific contexts in which they operate. I thus wish, in Ludmilla Jordanova's words, "to draw attention to the intricate transformations and multiple meanings of fundamental ideas in our cultural traditions," to explore the various ways in which concepts and images are taken up and concretized within particular forms and genres of writing.[43] These "intricate transformations" are immediately apparent when one begins to track the figure of the feminine, whose meanings blur and change, sometimes dramatically, sometimes almost imperceptibly, as one moves across different regimes of discourse and traditions of representation. Gender, as Jordanova points out, contains many sedimented layers of meaning; it is a composite whose boundaries are unstable and constantly shifting, even as it also reveals significant elements of continuity across the differentials of period and context.

With one or two exceptions, my corpus of texts is drawn from the period 1880–1914. The fin de siècle was a period in which conflicting attitudes to the modern were staged with particular clarity, where invocations of decadence and malaise were regularly interspersed with the rhetoric of progress and the exhilarating sense of the birth of a new age. In this sense, of course, it is a time which invites inevitable parallels with our own. It was also a period which saw an increasing differentiation of discursive fields, as art became increasingly self-conscious and aware of its own status as art at the same time as such disciplines as sociology, psychology, and anthropology sought to establish themselves as autonomous disciplines and scientific accounts of reality. As a result, it was in the late nineteenth century that many competing accounts of the modern received their first systematic articulation. Caught between the still-powerful evolutionary and historicist models of the nineteenth century and the emergent crises of language and subjectivity which would shape the experimental art of the twentieth, the turn of the century provides a rich textual field for tracking the ambiguities of the modern.

The first half of the book is devoted to a detailed reading of some recurring representations of the gender of modernity as they manifest themselves in the texts of male writers of the fin de siècle. I begin by identifying what is still perhaps the most common view of woman as existing outside the modern, examining the ways in which this view is expressed and legitimated in early sociological theory through its equation of modernity with a masculine sphere of rationalization and production. In the following chapter, I analyze what appears to be an antithetical view, the association of modernity with the realm of irrationality, aesthetics, and libidinal excess, as exemplified in the

figure of the voracious female consumer. Why, I ask, are representations of modernity increasingly feminized and demonized, and what does this reveal about the relationship between the logics of capitalism and patriarchy in an emerging culture of consumption? Finally, I consider the migration of the trope of the feminine from the body of woman to avant-garde aesthetics, examining the emergence of a still-influential notion of literary modernity as linked to the feminization of (men's) writing. In these three ideational clusters, the metaphor of woman undergoes some striking transmutations as well as revealing significant continuities of emphasis.

The second half of the book, by contrast, centers upon women's own representation of the relationship between modernity and femininity, as manifested not simply in the content but in the styles and techniques of their writing. I ask: how did women position themselves in relation to the logics of temporality and the social, political, and aesthetic values associated with the modern? I begin with a discussion of the popular romance, a form often considered to be regressive and anachronistic but whose nostalgic yearning for an indeterminate "elsewhere" is, I suggest, a foundational trope within the modern itself. I follow this with an excavation of the philosophies of history evident in the speeches and tracts of first-wave feminists, focusing on their deployment of metaphors of evolution and revolution as markers of a particular experience of historical consciousness and sense of temporality. Finally, I contrast this politico-philosophical discourse of modernity with the literary modernity of the French decadent writer Rachilde (Marguerite Eymery), whose stylized explorations of the links between sexual perversion and the aestheticization of identity uncannily foreshadow some central concerns of contemporary cultural theory. By contrasting these very different genres—sentimental romance, political rhetoric, avant-garde aesthetics—I seek to highlight some of the very different imaginings of and responses to the modern among women writers of the fin de siècle.

My own analysis of these differing views makes certain claims to representativeness, as does any argument by definition. However, these claims do not rely on the presumed capacity of a single text to crystallize the underlying features of a social totality, to articulate the repressed feminine Other of the patriarchal logos or even to encapsulate *the* dominant ideology of the modern period. Rather, I aim to pinpoint and to analyze some of the most pervasive representations of women and modernity that recur within, and sometimes across, particular cultural boundaries and discursive fields, and whose traces extend well beyond the nineteenth century into our own. It is here that a comparative approach may prove useful, by highlighting different conceptualizations of the modern within particular cultural traditions, as well as

allowing for a recognition of affinities that cross national boundaries. I have tried to select texts which illuminate such recurring themes with particular clarity, though the present selection is by no means a necessary or inevitable one. Similar arguments could easily be developed in relation to very different materials, though with obvious differences of emphasis.

While my approach has clearly been influenced by the new forms of cultural history as well as the more traditional discipline of the history of ideas, it retains an explicitly feminist interest in establishing connections between discourses and ideas on the one hand and systems of power on the other. I remain committed to the analytical value of positing broad systemic logics (hence my continuing and unembarrassed use of terms such as patriarchy and capitalism), while also believing that modernity contains a number of such logics which may often work in contradiction as well as collusion. Here I have found Nancy Fraser's notion of "axes of power" enormously useful; it has the merit of avoiding totalizing and functionalist models of society by highlighting the interactions and potential contradictions between different power hierarchies without, however, dissolving and dispersing the notion of power completely.[44] Such a model in turn yields a specific understanding of the politics of texts; rather than simply existing either in the center or at the margins, individual texts may possess different and often contradictory meanings in relation to particular power axes. My argument assumes, in other words, that the political meanings of particular discourses, images, and clusters of representation are not given for all time, but may vary significantly depending on the conditions of enunciation and the contexts in which they appear.

The following discussion also distances itself from an epistemological dualism which assumes that men's writing must invariably distort female experience whereas women's writing provides true access to it. Instead, it presumes that all knowledge of female (or male) experience—however intimate or seemingly private—is mediated by intersubjective frameworks and systems of meaning, but that these frameworks are heterogeneous rather than unified, and often are in conflict. The relationship of such discourses to the empirical fact of an author's gender is complex and variable rather than constant; one cannot predict the potential truth value or otherwise of a specific text simply from a knowledge of the author's sex. Thus the representation of femininity in works such as *Nana* and *Madame Bovary*, for example, interconnects in suggestive ways with recent feminist discussions of performance, desire, and consumerism; it is for this reason that I draw on these novels in my critical discussion of the sexual politics of modernity. Yet other aspects of these novels are misogynistic and otherwise problematic,

invoking a critical rather than assenting response from this feminist reader. In other words, I am interested in pursuing the partial illuminations offered by particular texts rather than attributing to them a uniform essence of truth or falsehood grounded in authorial gender; these partial illuminations in turn derive from the points of correspondence and connection between the critical perspectives opened up by feminist theory and the ideologies operative within particular forms of nineteenth-century writing.

Such an oscillation between illumination and critique necessarily shapes my reading of texts by women as well as men; there is no unbroken substratum of communal identity which binds women together across history and culture. From the standpoint of the present, the texts of nineteenth-century women writers reveal their inevitable enmeshment within the ideologies and world-views of their time, so that their voices speak to us across a chasm of historical difference. This is true not only of self-identified conservatives such as the romance writer Marie Corelli, but also of those fin-de-siècle feminist writers and activists whose commitment to social change is deeply intertwined with what now seem anachronistic, and often overtly racist, Darwinian or Malthusian beliefs. The feminist desire to reclaim women's writing can surely only ground itself in a political commitment to recover the lost voices of women rather than in an epistemological claim for the necessary truth that is spoken by such voices. It is for this reason that my discussion retains a distinction between men's and women's texts—not because women's views of modernity are invariably more accurate than those of men, but because feminist criticism is in my view committed to giving at least equal weight to such views and to paying careful attention to the specific features of women's writing. This specificity, it should be emphasized, should not be seen as simply internal to a text; rather, it is fundamentally shaped by the particular meanings and effects which accrue to discourses publicly authored by women. The gender of authorship is a crucial factor influencing the circulation and reception of textual meaning.

I need only to conclude by noting my own investment in this project and the methodological implications of such an investment. I make no attempt to occupy a position of neutrality by limiting myself to a purely antiquarian recording of late-nineteenth-century discourses; rather, my analysis is an ideologically interested one which seeks to establish points of connection between the texts of the past and the feminist politics of the present. In this sense, it is a work of cultural theory as well as cultural history; if the value of "history" lies in drawing attention to the particularity of events, that of "theory" lies in the ability to make meaningful connections across these discrete particulars. From such a standpoint, the selective nature of inter-

pretation is not just inevitable but desirable, given that social processes can only be constituted as meaningful objects of analysis in relation to a particular viewpoint and set of concerns. I thus subscribe to a belief in the inevitable hermeneutic dimension of any act of writing and the necessary construction of the past from the standpoint of the present. At the same time, however, I have tried as far as possible to avoid the obvious anachronisms which may result from an unreflecting projection of present-day truths onto the texts of the past in order to find them lacking. Instead, my discussion aims to retain an awareness of the discursive possibilities that were available at a given historical moment and to assess the political implications of particular representations of women and modernity in that light. This historical tightrope of empathy and critique is a difficult one to negotiate skillfully: it remains for the reader to decide how successfully this negotiation has been achieved.

On Nostalgia: The Prehistoric Woman

> The prevailing motif of nostalgia is the erasure of the gap between nature and culture, and hence a return to the utopia of biology and symbol united within the walled city of the maternal. The nostalgic's utopia is prelapsarian, a genesis where lived and mediated experience are one, where authenticity and transcendence are both present and everywhere.
>
> Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*

The distance between the disciplines of literature and sociology remains surprisingly large. While the sociology of literature enjoys a certain, albeit modest, following, literary critics have for their part shown little interest in reading the "great masters" of sociological thought. Yet recent intellectual developments provide an opening for such interdisciplinary exchange by rendering the distinction between these two genres a much less stable one. Just as the most hermetic of literary works alludes, however elliptically, to the very social conditions that it strives to transcend, so too texts that claim to define the structure of social reality are themselves indebted to a range of narratives, metaphors, and figurative schemata. Sociological theory is an act of representation that draws upon a variety of descriptive vocabularies, classificatory systems, explanatory recipes, and enunciative rules.[1] My reading of such representational logics will seek to unravel the significance of allegories of gender, and specifically of a deeply nostalgic vision of femininity, in shaping the parameters of modern sociological and critical thought.

This question of the connection between literature and sociology was of great interest at the turn of the century, at a time when the latter was struggling to establish its own legitimacy as an area of distinctive intellectual inquiry. In his account of sociology's formation and development as an unstable hybrid of literary and scientific traditions, Wolf Lepenies notes that

transcend: "it is only possible for me to long for home if I know that I am without my home."[60] An idealized image of the feminine has historically functioned as a significant site of such nostalgic longing for home on the part of both men *and* women. It will perhaps continue to do so as long as women retain primary responsibility for the nurture and care of children and hence a privileged association with a fantasmatic and retrospectively imagined past.

Imagined Pleasures: The Erotics and Aesthetics of Consumption

> The cultural logic of modernity is not merely that of rationality as expressed in the activities of calculation and experiment; it is also that of passion, and the creative dreaming born of longing.
>
> Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism*

To view modernity from the standpoint of consumption rather than production is to effect a shift in perspective which causes taken-for-granted phenomena to appear in a new light. The grand narrative of rationalization becomes less persuasive as a comprehensive thesis of social change when it is counterposed to the dream worlds and exotic-fantasmic images of urban culture.[1] The belief that Western history has repressed erotic drives through a prevalent ethos of discipline and self-restraint is called into question by the central role of hedonistic desire and sexualized representations in the rise of modern consumerism. Above all, a view of modernity as driven by the logic of productive forces gives way to a recognition that consumer demand is not simply a passive reflection of economic interests, but is shaped by a variety of relatively independent cultural and ideological factors, of which gender is one of the most significant.

In the late nineteenth century, the consumer was frequently represented as a woman. In other words, the category of consumption situated femininity at the heart of the modern in a way that the discourses of production and rationalization examined previously did not. Thus consumption cut across the private/public distinction that was frequently evoked to assign women to a premodern sphere. Not only did the department store provide a new kind of urban public space which catered primarily to women, but modern industry and commerce encroached ever more insistently on the sanctity of

the private and domestic realm through the commodification of the household. Although the middle-class woman's responsibility for the purchase rather than the production of goods seemed to locate her outside of the dynamic of social change, in another sense her status as consumer gave her an intimate familiarity with the rapidly changing fashions and lifestyles that constituted an important part of the felt experience of being modern. The emergence of a culture of consumption helped to shape new forms of subjectivity for women, whose intimate needs, desires, and perceptions of self were mediated by public representations of commodities and the gratifications that they promised.

This feminization of modernity, however, is largely synonymous with its demonization. In the writings of many radical and conservative intellectuals from the mid-nineteenth century onward, the idea of the modern becomes aligned with a pessimistic vision of an unpredictable yet curiously passive femininity seduced by the glittering phantasmagoria of an emerging consumer culture. No longer equated with a progressive development toward a more rational society, modernity now comes to exemplify the growth of irrationalism, the return of repressed nature in the form of inchoate desire. As Rosalind Williams notes, "to a large extent the pejorative nature of the concept of consumption itself derives from its association with female submission to organic needs."[2] Women are portrayed as buying machines, driven by impulses beyond their control to squander money on the accumulation of ever more possessions. The familiar and still prevalent cliché of the insatiable female shopper epitomizes the close associations between economic and erotic excess in dominant images of femininity. Yet this irrationalism can simultaneously be seen as modern because it is a *managed* desire, manipulated by a logic of calculation and rationalization in the interests of the profit motive. Women's emotionality, passivity, and susceptibility to persuasion renders them ideal subjects of an ideology of consumption that pervades a society predicated on the commercialization of pleasure.

This current of thought continues to play an influential role in twentieth-century attitudes toward modernity and mass culture. Not only does woman remain the archetypal consumer, but an overt anxiety comes to the fore that men are in turn being feminized by the castrating effects of an ever more pervasive commodification. *Seduction* is a recurring term used in the writings of male intellectuals to describe the manipulation of the individual by marketing techniques, eloquently evoking the mixture of passivity, complicity, and pleasure seen to characterize the standpoint of the modern consumer. The subject is decentered, no longer in control of his or her desires, but prey to the beguiling forces of publicity and the image industry. Indictments of

twentieth-century consumerism regularly invoke a nostalgia for a robust sense of individual self that has been invaded and feminized by an omnipresent culture of glossy media simulations. In an intellectual tradition extending from the Frankfurt School to the recent work of Jean Baudrillard, the discourses on commodity fetishism and the tyranny of the sign reveal a persistently gendered subtext.

Feminist theorists have until recently adopted and intensified this dystopian perspective, pointing to a systematic convergence of capitalist and patriarchal interests in the construction of modern femininity. Women have been portrayed as victims of the ideology of consumerism, trapped in a web of objectified images which alienate them from their true identity. Any pleasure derived from fashion, cosmetics, women's magazines, or other distinctively feminized aspects of consumer culture has been read as merely another symptom of women's manipulation by institutionalized mechanisms of patriarchal control. More recent arguments within feminism and cultural studies have rejected this manipulation thesis, insisting that greater weight be given to the potential for active negotiation and recontextualization of meaning in the process of consumption. The traditional Left and feminist discomfort with consumer culture has been criticized for an excessive puritanism and asceticism, often moored in a nostalgic vision of a premodern authentic subject and an untenable, utilitarian definition of "real needs."[3]

My intention at this point is not to present a straightforward defense of consumption; if anything, the celebration of the resistive agency of the female consumer is currently in danger of becoming a new orthodoxy, which often pays scant attention to the limited alternatives available to many women as well as the economic, racial, and geopolitical constraints determining the nature and extent of their access to commodities.[4] Nevertheless, feminist theory clearly needs to remain skeptical of a production/consumption dichotomy which persistently devalues the latter as a passive and irrational activity. This dichotomy is my primary focus in this chapter, where I aim to investigate the history of the metaphorization of consumption as it shapes our understanding of both economic and textual transactions. Representations of shopping and representations of reading, I will argue, reveal some striking similarities in their vision of the voracious female consumer.

Commodities and Female Desire

Perhaps the most common economic metaphor which has been used to describe women's position within capitalist society is that of the commodity. As Mary Ann Doane points out, "woman's objectification, her susceptibility

to processes of fetishization, display, profit and loss, the production of surplus value, all situate her in a relation of resemblance to the commodity form."[5] Woman has been seen as an object exchanged between men in a capitalist economy, compelled to render herself as seductive as possible in order to attract the gaze of the male buyer. I have already noted the significance of the urban prostitute in this regard as the most graphic and literal embodiment of this phenomenon of female commodification. In nineteenth-century France in particular, the courtesan was to become *the* exemplary symbol of an eroticized modernity.

But if women could be seen as objects of consumption, some women were also becoming consuming subjects, as the advent of mass production and distinctively modern retailing strategies began to dramatically alter the everyday fabric of social relations between people and things. The introduction of the department store in the mid-nineteenth century was the most visible example of a burgeoning economy which would become increasingly oriented toward selling to women. Originally little more than a large draper's shop, the department store was to rapidly diversify its range of merchandise in order to cater to all the potential needs of the female consumer and her household, needs which it helped to create through its own enticing visual displays of commercial abundance. This transformation of the commodity into spectacle was further promoted by the late-nineteenth-century craze for great exhibitions, monuments of consumption that displayed exotic and disparate objects from around the world to the wondering visitor. Here again the figure of woman played an emblematic role; at the 1900 Paris exposition, for example, the monumental gateway was crowned by "the flying figure of a siren in a tight skirt, the symbolic ship of the City of Paris on her head, throwing back an evening coat of imitation ermine—La Parisienne."[6] Rosalind Williams notes that such symbols of feminized modernity coincided with an increased emphasis on pleasure and distraction rather than moral education as the legitimating function of the great exhibition. Finally, advertising at this time began to develop increasingly sophisticated marketing techniques, promoting repertoires of identities and lifestyles to which the consumer was encouraged to aspire. Given an extant gender division of labor which identified shopping as women's work, it was women above all who were interpellated in this way through mass-produced images of femininity, even as middle-class women's dependence upon the economic support of men required them to invest far more heavily in modes of fashionable adornment and self-display.

One of the most significant features of the expansion of consumption from a feminist standpoint is its preoccupation with women's pleasure. The discourse of consumerism is to a large extent the discourse of female desire. Whereas female sexuality remained a problematic notion throughout the century, its existence either denied or projected onto the deviant figure of the femme fatale, women's desire for commodities could be publicly acknowledged as a legitimate, if often trivialized, form of wanting. Late-nineteenth-century retailers and marketers eagerly sought to stimulate such desire through erotically saturated strategies of display and enticement, even as trade journals and newspaper articles spoke approvingly of women's inability to refuse commercial temptation and celebrated the inevitability of their seduction by the dazzling allures of new merchandise. Often depicted as an object in the domain of heterosexual relations, woman, it seemed, could only attain the status of an active subject in relation to other objects. The circuit of desire thus flowed from man to woman, from woman to the commodity.

But what if the female pleasure in shopping was not as harmless as it appeared? Perhaps, once awakened, this appetite would have disturbing and unforeseeable effects, reaching out to subvert the social fabric and to undermine patriarchal authority within the family. Thus fin-de-siècle responses to this new phenomenon of the consuming woman revealed conflictual and ambivalent attitudes. On the one hand, consumption was presented as a necessity, indeed as a familial and civic duty for the middle-class woman, even as retailers referred confidently among themselves to the docility of female shoppers, who would "follow like sheep in the path marked out for them by the softgoods merchant."[7] Such discourses framed women as the passive beneficiaries or victims, depending on one's viewpoint, of a new inexorable imperative of capitalist development. Yet on the other hand, the growth of consumerism was seen as engendering a revolution of morals, unleashing egotistic and envious drives among the lower orders and women, which could in turn affect the stability of existing social hierarchies. One American writer, for example, noted dangerous levels of self-indulgence in many women shoppers, citing "a certain lawlessness of disposition, an inherent dislike to live by rule, a breaking out of a wayward will at the point of least resistance."[8] The increasing influence of a new ethos of self-gratification could have problematic and unforeseen consequences for the natural relationship between the sexes.

The figure of the consuming woman was thus to become a semiotically dense site of cultural imaginings of the modern and its implications for the relations between women and men. The multifarious intensities of meaning accruing to this figure are clearly displayed in the texts which I discuss in this chapter, Emile Zola's *Au bonheur des dames* and *Nana* and Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary.*[9] The preoccupation of French writers, social critics, and

other intellectuals with the nature and significance of mass consumption arose almost inevitably out of the emblematic status of late-nineteenth-century Paris as a pre-eminent site of the modern "consumer revolution."[10] Their responses varied significantly according to ideological affiliation and cultural positioning; there was no univocal position on the nature and meaning of consumption per se. Nevertheless, a pervasive thread of anxiety about the social and moral implications of mass-produced luxury runs through many of these responses, which relates at numerous points to dominant conceptions of gender. The novels discussed in this chapter crystallize some of these contemporary uncertainties about the relationship between sex and capital, as evidenced in the circulation of contradictory assumptions about the female consumer. Depicted as the victim of modernity, she is also its privileged agent; epitomizing the subjection of women by the tyranny of capital, she simultaneously promotes the feminization of society through a burgeoning materialism and hedonistic excess.

These ambiguous meanings clustered around the female consumer suggest that the interrelations between patriarchal and capitalist structures may be more complicated than feminist theorists have often recognized. For if consumer culture simply reinforced women's objectified and powerless status, it becomes difficult to understand why the phenomenon was attacked so vehemently as a threat to men's traditional authority over women. If, as Gail Reekie has argued, "retailers, managers and marketing experts formed a fraternity, bound together by a bond *as men,* whose primary object was to reap profits from the compliance of the female customer," why did other men react so anxiously to mass consumption as a profoundly emasculating phenomenon?[11] Placing the question of femininity at the heart of the modern, the novels discussed in this chapter examine some of the complexities of consumer culture in the context of gender politics. In embedding middle-class women in circuits of desire and exchange, the growth of mass consumption threatened as much as it reinscribed established structures of masculine identity and authority.

Shopping and Sex

In Zola's novel *The Ladies' Paradise* (*Au bonheur des dames,* 1883), it is the department store named in the title and modeled on the well-known Parisian establishment Au Bon Marché, that remains in the reader's mind as the novel's most memorable character. Alternately described as an efficiently running machine and a fairy-tale palace of dreams, this emporium experiences a dynamic growth that drives the narrative momentum of the text.

Simultaneously destructive and seductive, this anthropomorphized "cathedral of modern commerce" ruins or drives to their deaths the small shopkeepers of the neighborhood even as it entices ever more female customers through its portals. In Zola's depiction of the department store as an ambiguous symbol of progress, the relationship between sex and capital is shown to lie at the very heart of modern social relations. The economic struggle for power is intertwined with and mediated by erotic relations between women and men and between women and commodities.

A number of contemporary writers have drawn attention to the importance of the department store in shaping the formation of cultural modernity.[12] The *grand magasin* brought about a number of significant innovations in merchandising: fixed prices, which made bargaining unnecessary; "free entry," which allowed customers to examine goods on display without any obligation to buy; and a dramatic expansion of the range and diversity of goods offered for sale under one roof. As a result, shopping came to be seen for the first time as a leisure activity; the department store offered an elaborate spectacle, providing enticing and elaborate displays of merchandise for the visual pleasure of shoppers and passers-by. It was to play a leading role in the aestheticization of the commodity and the marketing of lifestyles that simultaneously demarcated and blurred class distinctions, encouraging everyone to aspire to a middle-class way of life. The department store sold not just commodities but the very act of consumption, transforming the mundane activity of shopping into a sensuous and enjoyable experience for a bourgeois public.

It was this modernity of the department store which appealed to Zola, as an exemplary fictional site for exploring capitalism's impact on social and gender relations. His preparatory research for the novel included repeated, lengthy visits to various Parisian stores, interviews with retailers and managers, and the perusal of numerous journal and newspaper articles about shopping, marketing practices, and employees' working conditions. The preliminary note books for *Au bonheur des dames* were exhaustive; encompassing hundreds of pages, they contained excerpts from shopping catalogs, sketches of architectural features, and numerous other annotations on the mechanisms of retailing.[13] This voluminous documentation expresses itself in a novelistic form which enacts the very commodity fetishism it seeks to describe. *Au bonheur des dames* is a hymn to consumption, a novel dominated by the materiality of objects, given over to the exhaustive enunciation of the infinite multiplicity of modern consumer goods. Like the department store that it portrays, the novel displays commodities to readers/consumers, seducing or benumbing them through a monumental piling-up of wares.

Types of lace, colors and weights of silk, styles of carpets and rugs are enumerated in paragraphs of taxonomic description that simulate the precision and repetitiveness of a stock inventory. Even as it critically frames the irrational and impulsive excesses of the department store clientele, Zola's text reveals its own fascination with and seduction by the magical objects of consumer culture.

As the very title of Zola's novel suggests, the department store was a public space identified as distinctively feminine, offering the promise of indulgence, luxury, and fantasy to the middle-class woman. Not merely a place for making purchases, it allowed her to browse, to window-shop, to arrange a rendezvous with female friends, and to make use of the various facilities, such as libraries and tearooms, which it offered. Elizabeth Wilson suggests that "in a very real way the department store assisted the freeing of middle-class women from the shackles of the home. It became a place where women could meet their women friends in safety and comfort, unchaperoned, and to which they could repair for refreshment and rest."[14] In one sense, then, it provided a model of an egalitarian modern space that in principle, if not in practice, welcomed everyone through its open doors. At the same time, however, this public domain presented itself as an extension of the private sphere, providing the visitor with an experience of intimacy and pleasure intended to reflect, in magnified form, the comforts of the bourgeois home. Thus one writer observed, "it is necessary that she (the customer) consider the *grand magasin* as a second home, larger, more beautiful, more luxurious than the other."[15] As Zola's novel indicates, this feminization of the public domain brought with it an incorporation of distinctive architectural and decorative styles intended to put the female consumer at her ease. The feminine objects—laces, furs, dresses, lingerie—displayed within the department store, and soon disordered and rumpled by passing customers, helped to intensify this quality of boudoir-like intimacy. Thus the clientele of Au Bonheur des Dames, who use the store for both commercial transactions and romantic assignations, are indeed, as the owner, Octave Mouret, wryly acknowledges, very much at home.

The department store, then, was a paradigm of a new kind of urban public space linked not to an ideal of political community and rational debate but to the experience of sensuality and the commercialization of desire. Although the expansion of commerce was greeted by many as a mark of progress, benefiting the consumer and contributing to the economic health of the nation, it was also perceived to possess a darker side in its encouragement of pleasure-seeking and narcissistic self-gratification, a temptation to which women were particularly prone. The emergence of kleptomania, a disease

that was codified as both feminine and modern, was a striking instance of the sexual disorder that was seen to lie at the very heart of consumer culture. Most disturbingly, it afflicted respectable women from bourgeois backgrounds whose behavior was otherwise impeccable, disrupting conventional assumptions about the moral probity of middle-class women. Contemporary doctors and psychologists sought to make sense of this puzzling new phenomenon by linking femininity, hysteria, and the dangerous freedoms of the department store. Prevailing conceptions of shoplifting as a form of monomania, which were often accepted and expressed by shoplifters themselves, encouraged a view of middle-class women as helpless rather than criminal, driven by irrational impulses beyond their control. At the same time, the startling incidence of theft was also attributed to the new and dangerous availability of consumer goods in a deregulated and morally disintegrating modern world.[16]

A similar unease about the ultimate social consequences of modernization is expressed in Zola's novel in an opposition between the celebration of production and the pathologization of consumption. Although the text depicts some of the human costs of unchecked growth, the passionate commitment to economic expansion of the store owner, Octave Mouret, is presented as an admirable and rational ideal, an embodiment of the awesome, unstoppable progress unleashed by capitalist development. Yet the equally powerful compulsion to consume which motivates Mouret's female customers is not endowed with the same heroic stature and world-historical dignity. Rather than symbolizing progress, *they* represent the regressive dimension of modernity as exemplified in its unleashing of an infantile irrationalism of unchecked desire. The distinction between the deviant shoplifter and the respectable customer is blurred in their common capitulation to the lure of the commodity.

The erotically driven nature of female consumption provides the leitmotif in Zola's novel. References to temptation and seduction abound; the department store customers described in the text are permanently breathless and excited, flushed with desire as if preparing to receive a lover. In a condition of sensual delirium, dazzled by the allures of the commodities spread out before them, they abandon themselves to the pleasure of shopping, a pleasure explicitly depicted as a sublimated expression of sexual passion. Here, for example, is Zola's description of one of the store's regular customers standing at the lace counter with her daughter. "She dived her hands into this increasing mountain of lace, Malines, Valenciennes and Chantilly, her fingers trembling with desire, her face gradually warming with a sensual joy; whilst Blanche, close to her, agitated by the same passion, was very pale, her flesh

inflated and soft."[17] Consumption has here abandoned all pretense to being a rational transaction grounded in objective need, and is shown to be driven by the inchoate emotional and sensual impulses of the female customer. Usurping the role previously occupied by religion in women's lives, it encourages a euphoric loss of self through the surrender to an irrational cult of ideal feminine beauty.

While such scenes confirm a prevalent view of the instinctual and sexual nature of woman, this erotic euphoria is in turn channeled behind the scenes by the scientific marketing strategies of the retailer. Mouret's business success is attributed to his skill in arousing and orchestrating female desire. He introduces modern sales techniques—drastic reductions on selected items, the promise of immediate refunds to dissatisfied customers—which break down the resistance of even the most cautious consumers. He reorganizes the layout of the store in order to disorient his customers, so that, losing their way in the consumer labyrinth, they will be exposed to the temptations of ever more alluring goods. But it is above all the artistry of Mouret's displays which seduces his clientele. A Swiss chalet constructed entirely out of gloves, an elaborate display of opened umbrellas, an "Oriental" room of exotic carpets, waterfalls of dazzling white curtains, sheets and towels that reach as far as the eye can see—such lavish and quasi-surreal exhibits enrapture his customers. Everyday feminine objects are rendered strange and monumental through excessive quantity and bizarre juxtaposition. Modernist aesthetic techniques of defamiliarization and montage are pre-empted in these opulent displays, which anticipate the centrality of stylistic manipulation and aesthetic spectacle in twentieth-century consumer culture.

Visual pleasure thus emerges as a central stratagem in the incitement of female desire for consumer goods. If the flâneur was a masculine symbol of freedom of movement within the public spaces of the city, the department store, described by Benjamin as the flâneur's last haunt, gave women a space in which they could wander and observe in a similar manner. If the "flâneur embodies the gaze of modernity which is both covetous and erotic,"[18] then such a gaze was by no means limited to men, but emerged as a determining feature of women's voyeuristic relationship to the commodity. Yet the flâneur's aloof detachment was, perhaps, replaced by a more intimate relationship between surveyor and surveyed, a complex intermingling of active desire and surrender to the lures of images, objects, and lifestyles. Rachel Bowlby writes: "the boundaries of subject and object, active and passive, owner and owned, unique and general, break down in this endless reflexive interplay of consumer and consumed . . . Seducer and seduced, possessor and possessed of one another, women and commodities flaunt their images at one another in an amorous regard which both extends and reinforces the classic picture of the young girl gazing into the mirror in love with herself."[19]

At an economic level, Mouret's success in the management of this narcissistic female pleasure is unambiguous; he is a representative of the new type of capitalist entrepreneur whose daring innovations expose the limitations of traditional, hidebound forms of selling. Au Bonheur des Dames expands unchecked, swallowing up the buildings which surround it, until it finally employs over three thousand workers, a small microcosm of Parisian society ruled by its own hierarchies and struggles for power. This entrepreneurial mastery on the part of Mouret is in turn linked to his erotic mastery, to the seduction and domination of a crowd of compliant female subjects by a single man. Gazing down on the milling crowds of female shoppers from the vantage point of his office, Mouret is portrayed as master of all he surveys, confident of his ability to control the ebb and flow of female desire. His own superstitious fear of marriage derives from the fact that his primary erotic relationship is with his female clientele and his financial success is inseparable from his emotional investment in the control and manipulation of his customers. Rather than exemplifying a zone where abstract rationality and instrumental calculation hold sway, economic relations between producers and consumers are shown to be saturated with fantasies of sexual power and domination.

In one sense, the emergence of this distinctively new relationship between male capitalist and female consumer requires a relinquishing of traditional models of patriarchal authority. Thus Mouret is frequently described as an androgynous figure, "une homme-femme"; imaginatively anticipating and identifying with the desires of his customers, he takes on many of their qualities and becomes feminized in his turn. Success in modern commerce requires a new kind of subjectivity antithetical to old forms of rigid authoritarian masculinity, an identity mobile and sensitive enough to be able to respond quickly to the changing demands of an often fickle clientele. This feminization of male subjectivity will emerge as a key theme in late-nineteenth-century responses to capitalism's reconfiguration of gender roles. Yet Mouret's seductive flattery and his intuitive understanding of female taste is simply a strategy for exploiting women more efficiently. Empathy is combined with an underlying sadism, gallantry with a concealed contempt at the ease with which women allow themselves to be seduced. "Through the very gracefulness of his gallantry, Mouret thus allowed to appear the brutality of a Jew, selling woman by the pound. He raised a temple to her, had her covered with incense by a legion of shopmen, created the rite of a new religion, thinking of nothing but her, continually seeking to imagine more

powerful seductions; and, behind her back, when he had emptied her purse and shattered her nerves, he was full of the secret scorn of a man to whom a woman had just been stupid enough to yield herself."[20] Commerce's assiduous and exhaustive attentiveness to the fulfillment of every female whim gives women's interests a previously unimagined prominence in the public domain, while simultaneously obscuring the exploitive economic relations which underpin the modern cult of femininity.

Zola's novel thus suggests that "capitalism triumphant," the purported theme of the novel, is ultimately to be equated with patriarchy triumphant; the march of economic progress brings with it an increasing male sovereignty over female desire. Yet the text also suggests a more complicated view of power relations between the sexes than is encapsulated by such a summary. Thus the theme of female vengeance disrupts a unilinear narrative of male mastery; in Zola's own words, the novel describes "Octave exploiting woman, then conquered by woman."[21] The obvious vehicle for this theme is the novel's romance plot; the masterful Mouret is finally brought to his knees by his love for one of his own employees, a demure young woman from the provinces. Denise Baudu is thus shown as avenging her sisters by emotionally subjugating the man who has exploited them. According to the logic of such archetypal romance narratives, the hero is feminized by his love for the heroine, who thereby gains a certain, albeit limited, ascendancy and power over the male.[22] It is striking, however, that Zola's heroine, while a staunch supporter of commercial progress, is shown to be completely free of the compulsion to consume which affects almost all the other female characters. Young women who moved to the city in search of work were considered to be highly susceptible to promiscuity and ultimately prostitution, because their appetites for luxury, once awakened by their proximity to an alluring profusion of material goods, could only be satisfied by selling their bodies for financial gain. Numerous journal articles depicted female shop employees as particularly endangered in this regard, given their constant exposure to middle-class lifestyles and their ambiguous class status, which helped to encourage envy and dissatisfaction.[23] In other words, a desire for commodities was closely associated with moral laxity and the transgression of sexual mores. In this context, it is unsurprising that Zola's novel presents the good woman as the premodern woman, free of urban artifice and false allures, who retains the unassuming modesty, frugality, and innocence of her provincial origins.

By contrast, the consuming woman refutes this model of femininity as chaste self-denial, and exemplifies the potentially threatening and destructive consequences of unassuaged female desire. This threat becomes explicit in

the crowd scenes of Zola's novel, where the seething mass of female shoppers assumes a sinister, even demonic, quality. The manufacture of crowds is an essential part of Mouret's commercial stratagem, a means of turning the consumers themselves into spectacle and advertisement and thereby luring yet more customers through the doors of the department store. But Zola's descriptions also invoke the more sinister connotations of the urban crowd as explored by such contemporary sociologists and social psychologists as Gustave Le Bon and Gabriel Tarde. Bourgeois representations of the crowd in the nineteenth century, as present-day critics have often noted, typically resort to feminizing metaphors of fluidity and liquidity; the anonymity of the mass embodies a labile, chaotic, and undifferentiated force that threatens the boundaries of autonomous individuality.[24] A crowd of consuming women was thus the ultimate instance of uncontrolled irrationality, as evidenced by descriptions such as the following.

> The ladies, seized by the current, could not now go back. As streams attract themselves to the fugitive waters of a valley, so it seemed that the wave of customers, flowing into the vestibule, was absorbing the passers-by, drinking in the population from the four corners of Paris. They advanced but slowly, squeezed almost to death, kept upright by the shoulders and bellies around them, of which they felt the close heat; and their satisfied desire enjoyed the painful entrance which incited still further their curiosity. There was a pell-mell of ladies arrayed in silk, of poorly dressed middle-class women, and of bare-headed girls, all excited and carried away by the same passion. A few men buried beneath the overflow of bosoms were casting anxious glances around them.[25]

In this description of a busy sales day at Au Bonheur des Dames, an amorphous mass of feminine corporeality flows into the store, driven by an overriding and unstoppable desire to consume. The crowd exercises an irresistible attraction, enticing ever more women to attach themselves to it and allow themselves to be propelled forward by its inexorable momentum. Class distinctions are blurred by the women's shared instincts and passions, by the common bond of primordial, desiring femininity. Yet, if class difference is minimized in the promiscuity of the crowd, gender difference is accentuated; the nervous and isolated men squeezed among the compress of excited female bodies do not share, yet are unable to escape, the feverish delirium that envelops and threatens to suffocate them. Masculinity is hemmed in and restrained from all sides by female passion. Such representations of hordes of insatiable and excitable women evoke the possibility that the commercial incitation of desire may have unforeseen effects, subverting rather than

encouraging a proper relationship between the sexes. Once inflamed by the temptations of consumerism, women's animalistic impulses may express themselves in violent attempts to dominate the male. Like a band of furies or a horde of invading locusts, the crowd of women shoppers pour through the store, ravaging the merchandise and forcing the exhausted male clerks to obey their every whim. "And, at this last moment, amidst this over-warmed air, the women reigned supreme. They had taken the whole place by storm, camping there as in a conquered country, like an invading horde installed amongst the overhauling of the goods. The salesmen, deafened, knocked up, were now nothing but their slaves, of whom they disposed with a sovereign's tyranny."[26] The department store was the primary instance of a gendered public space in which many men were to feel insignificant, helpless, or out of place.

The All-Consuming Woman

This suggestion that the conjunction of women and consumerism may undermine rather than simply consolidate certain forms of male authority is reinforced in Zola's portrayal of Mme. Marty, one of the regular customers at the store. Unable to resist the temptations proffered by Mouret, she spends compulsively and recklessly, squandering her husband's meager earnings on the acquisition of ever more feminine luxuries. A weak and ineffectual figure, Marty can only stand by and watch helplessly as his wife gradually brings about his financial ruin; every new piece of lace brings closer the threat of impending economic disaster. The culture of consumerism reaches into and disrupts the sanctity of the private sphere, encouraging women to indulge their own desires in defiance of their husbands and of traditional forms of moral and religious authority. In other words, the promotion of hedonism brings significant economic benefits for the individual male capitalist, but its effects on intimate relations between the sexes and the structure of the patriarchal family are destabilizing and potentially destructive.[27]

In *Nana* this motif of the woman whose lust for commodities leads to her lovers' ruin is magnified in an apocalyptic vision of consumerism run rampant. Here, Zola paints a lurid picture of insatiable female greed as an agent of destruction. The crumbling of an established social fabric based upon frugality, decorum, and the accumulation of wealth is attributed to the contamination and corruption emanating outward from a desiring femininity. Nana, together with her aristocratic alter ego, the Comtesse Sabine de Muffat, symbolizes an emerging tide of reckless sensuality that is sweeping away the values and traditions of an earlier epoch. An ethos of scarcity and

self-denial recedes before the inexorable logic of materialism, abundance, and reckless excess that will embody the new spirit of consumer capitalism.

In his depiction of the rise of Nana from her origins in the Parisian slums to the status of celebrated courtesan and woman of fashion, Zola offers a complex exploration of the interrelations between femininity and modernity. Nana is above all a product of the city, her class mobility a function of changing social conditions that allow her to make use of the new erotic and aesthetic possibilities of urban culture for her own advancement. Rather than existing outside modernity, Nana is clearly revealed to be constructed through it; prostitute, actress, avid consumer, she is situated at the very heart of the cash nexus, her social and sexual identity shaped by fashion, image, and advertising, her perverse erotic desires linked to modern urban decadence. Nana first appears in the novel as an unknown actress making her debut, yet her name is already on everyone's lips, a titillating enigma generated through skillful publicity techniques. In the words of Peter Brooks, Nana is revealed as a "representation of a representation, a consciously created and self-creating sex object."[28] The same will hold true for her later career as courtesan and demimondaine, where her sexual magnetism cannot be separated from the public perception of her image and appearance. Constantly playing a role whether she is on or off the stage, Nana exists in a symbiotic relationship with her audience, her erotic aura a projection of the desire of the crowd.

As in *Au bonheur des dames,* public space is associated in *Nana* with a fear of contamination and disorder arising from a leveling of class distinctions. At the theater, the races, the balls, and the soirées depicted in the novel, the anonymity and promiscuity of the crowd subvert established social divisions; hierarchies are undermined in the public domain as disparate individuals rub shoulders in the common pursuit of pleasure. At one point, the text states that Nana's bedroom has also become a "veritable public place, so many boots were wiped on its threshold."[29] The metonymic identity of the bedroom and its inhabitant is explicit; Nana herself emerges as the ultimate threat to class difference, her body a private site of public intimacy, within which the seminal fluids of workers, bourgeois men, and aristocrats indiscriminately commingle. In Zola's novel, anxieties about the female body and the modern city merge indistinguishably, as twin zones of social instability which engender the risk of contamination, corruption, and the subversion of the law by the tyranny of desire. Indeed, in modernist culture the metropolis will increasingly come to be depicted as a woman, a demonic femme fatale whose seductive cruelty exemplifies the delights and horrors of urban life.[30]

Most critical discussions of *Nana* have focused on the theme of prostitu-

tion as the ultimate symbol of the moral corruption of France at the end of the Second Empire. However, equally crucial is Nana's status as consumer, her economic as well as her sexual profligacy. The aggressive dimensions of women's passion for commodities are exemplified in the boundless desire of Zola's heroine. Apart from its economic meaning, consumption retains an association with exhaustion, waste, and destruction, signaling a process oriented toward the negation of matter and death.[31] Such negative associations clearly color the representation of Nana's endless and insatiable spending.

> This was the period of her life when Nana lit up Paris with redoubled splendour. She rose higher than ever on the horizon of vice, dominating the city with her insolent display of luxury, and that contempt for money which made her openly squander fortunes. Her house had become a sort of glowing forge, where her continual desires burned fiercely and the slightest breath from her lips changed gold into fine ash which the wind swept away every hour. Nobody had ever seen such a passion for spending. The house seemed to have been built over an abyss in which men were swallowed up—their possessions, their bodies, their very names—without leaving even a trace of dust behind them.[32]

Such revealing descriptions of men being engulfed and annihilated by the ferocity of female desire point to a set of metaphorical linkages between money, sex, and death. Nana, whose constant spending in fact promotes the circulation of money, is nevertheless depicted as draining it out of the economy, as a bottomless pit into which capital endlessly disappears. It is hardly necessary to refer to the double meaning of the French term "consommation"—both economic consumption and erotic consummation—to detect in such references to engulfment and incorporation a manifest anxiety regarding the prospect of an unleashed female sexuality. Indeed, the economic and social implications of consumption as a monetary transaction here recede completely in the face of its psychic and sexual symbolism in Zola's quasi-mythic depiction of the struggle between the sexes. A fear of the "carnivorous vagina" can be glimpsed in the depiction of Nana's destructive orality;[33] she is a man-eater ("une mangeuse d'hommes"), consuming men one after another, cannibalistically devouring and destroying the very men who desire her. "In a few months, Nana gobbled them up, one after the other. The growing needs of her life of luxury sharpened her appetite, and she would clean a man out with one snap of her teeth."[34] Recurring references to mouths, hunger, and eating underscore the animalistic and instinctual nature of female appetite. In the novel, to consume is indeed literally to destroy—the voracious female passion for commodities not only undermines

the authority of the male but brings about his annihilation, and shakes the very foundations of the culture he represents.

In one sense, sex and money appear to exemplify antithetical principles in Zola's novel; the libidinal chaos identified with woman undermines the proper operations of the capitalist economy, as enshrined in principles of economic rationality, leading Nana's lovers to incautious speculation, bankruptcy, and even suicide. But sex and money are also subject to a process of metaphorical equation; as Bram Dijkstra notes, women's sexual hunger and their desire for gold were to become closely associated in the nineteenth-century social imaginary.[35] Psychoanalysis has drawn attention to the symbolic valency of money as a token of phallic power and authority, an interpretation that is echoed in Zola's depiction of Nana's cupidity as arising out of an unconscious desire to emasculate and destroy the male. Consumption is presented as an act of tacit female aggression; women's economic exploitation of their husbands and lovers not only allows them to indulge in hedonistic self-pleasuring but becomes their primary form of retaliation against male authority and their own lack of power in the public domain.

Yet if money possesses a latent psychic and sexual meaning, the opposite is also true; economic metaphors were frequently used to describe sexual activity in nineteenth-century texts.[36] Within the context of such a libidinal economy, Nana's promiscuous coupling exemplifies profligacy and waste, engendering an unstoppable flow of money, of semen, of desire—the text refers at one point to the river of gold running between her legs. According to a model of sexual energy shaped by imperatives of accumulation and conservation, any activity not geared toward production must be considered profoundly wasteful. Nana's one sickly child is an eloquent symbol of the separation of desire from reproduction and social utility and of the sterility of modern forms of sexuality. She thus crystallizes in her person the symbolic affinity between emerging sexological definitions of polymorphous perversity and the new focus on the pleasures and dangers of unrestrained consumption.

What is ultimately most disturbing about this female desire is that it lacks an object. Nana herself remains serenely indifferent to almost all the men who pursue her; it seems as if they serve merely as a means of gaining access to the money and the commodities that she craves. Yet it is soon apparent that Nana's contempt for commodities echoes her disdain for the men who provide them; she spends simply for the sake of spending, squandering money indiscriminately on luxurious furnishings and cheap knickknacks, soiling and destroying goods as soon as she has bought them. Her household is a "river of wastefulness"; Nana allows herself to be cheated by her servants,

buys food only in order to throw it away, clutters her house with useless objects which she buys on impulse, never to look at again. It is this indifference toward money and what it can buy that embodies her greatest offense against a traditional bourgeois ethos of respect for prosperity and the accumulation of wealth. The very materiality of the commodity is rendered unstable as it is swallowed up in a vortex of free-floating female desire that moves restlessly from one object to the next. Rather than worshiping at the shrine of the commodity, Nana takes delight in desecrating it. "It's funny how rich men fancy they can get anything with their money . . . Well, and what if I say no? . . . I don't give a damn for your presents . . . And as for money, you poor thing, I can get plenty of that when I want it! I don't give a damn for it! I spit on it!"[37] Her contempt for money is simultaneously an expression of disdain for the entire system of cultural values premised on the assumed authority and prestige of traditional symbols of masculinity.

Although this mobility of desire is at odds with bourgeois norms of thrift and self-restraint, it renders Nana an ideal subject of a society increasingly structured on the imperative to consume. As Colin Campbell points out, the spirit of modern consumerism is defined by an unfocused and insatiable longing which latches onto a succession of objects in a potentially endless sequence.[38] What is desired is not the object per se, but the imaginary gratifications with which it is invested by the fantasizing subject. The inevitable disjuncture between anticipated and experienced pleasure in turn generates a yearning for a new fantasy object and a rapid decathexis from the old. Within such a logic of desire, things in themselves are interchangeable and expendable; what is at issue is not the discrete particularity of the object, but the symbolic meanings and generalized aura of desirability with which the object-as-commodity is invested. Satisfaction is thus by definition impossible because there is no objective need that is being addressed; rather, the commodity comes to stand for an imaginary fulfillment that remains necessarily unattainable.

It is immediately apparent why such a consumerist ethic is a threat to the stability of traditional social and moral norms. Translated into the sphere of sexual relations, the yearning of the desiring woman manifests itself in an endless "consumption" of lovers, none of whom can satisfy her unfocused yearning for gratification and plenitude. For Nana, as for my next subject, Emma Bovary, economic and sexual profligacy derive from a logic of abstract equivalence, which renders each object of desire—whether lover or commodity—interchangeable with the next in the relentless pursuit of the unattainable. Nana's "perversity," as evidenced in her turn toward lesbian and sadomasochistic sexual practices, provides further confirmation of the triumph of an individualistic libertarian desire emancipated from any allegiance to moral and social imperatives. On the one hand, her insatiability is presented as a natural manifestation of an all-consuming primordial female desire; on the other, it simultaneously exemplifies the unnatural condition of the modern woman whose perverse cravings are stimulated by capitalist decadence.

To Read Is to Eat?

At one moment in the text, the narrator describes Nana's literary tastes in a manner clearly intended to provide an overt contrast to Zola's own aesthetic:

> During the day she had read a novel which was causing a sensation at the time. It was the story of a prostitute, and Nana inveighed against it, declaring that it was all untrue, and expressing an indignant revulsion against the sort of filthy literature which claimed to show life as it was—as if a writer could possibly describe everything, and as if novels weren't supposed to be written just to while away the time! On the subject of books and plays Nana had very decided opinions: she liked tender, high-minded works which would set her dreaming and uplift her soul.[39]

The irony here is palpable. Zola's own commitment to an unflinching exploration of the grim realities of modern urban life stands in explicit contrast to the platitudinous tastes of his heroine. Incapable of comprehending the aims and purposes of an uncompromising realism, Nana can appreciate only the kind of fiction that promises entertainment, escapism, and moral edification. As a literary heroine, she serves as an evocative symbol of modern immorality and decadence; yet as a reader of literature she takes refuge in the very romantic idealism that Zola professed to despise.

In this brief passage is encapsulated an entire ideology of women and reading. As Naomi Schor has noted, the devaluation of idealism in the late nineteenth century had the effect of pushing once celebrated female writers such as George Sand to the margins of the French literary canon.[40] Although the male intelligentsia disputed whether naturalist or modernist techniques were more suited to representing the complexities of the modern age, they were largely united in their disdain for an idealist aesthetic associated with an outmoded and cloying feminine sentimentality. The hegemonic status of realist representation during this period should not, of course, be exaggerated; as the trial of Flaubert in 1857 and of Vizetelly, Zola's English publisher, in 1888 made clear, many of the texts of French realism remained objects of public controversy and condemnation, their affinity with immoral topics

enough. Like Nana, she assigns a utopian and idealist significance to literature as a means of escape into a better world. Seeking exotic scenarios as far removed as possible from her own mundane existence as a provincial doctor's wife, she yearns for a romantic sublime, for exaggerated emotion and passionate excess. Flaubert offers a dry account of the books she reads as an adolescent girl. "They were all about love, lovers, sweethearts, persecuted ladies fainting in lonely pavilions, postilions killed at every relay, horses ridden to death on every page, sombre forests, heart-aches, vows, sobs, tears and kisses, little boatrides by moonlight, nightingales in shady groves, gentlemen brave as lions, gentle as lambs, virtuous as no one ever was, always well-dressed and weeping like fountains."[48]

Here the melodramatic excess of popular romance is treated ironically as seriality, conventionality, repetition; by turning narratives into lists, the narrator explicitly undermines and renders absurd the seductive lures of drama and plot. Rather than embodying a meaningful organic whole, texts fragment into a random juxtaposition of semantic units endlessly reiterated across multiple locations. These stereotypical images of exoticism and escape will form the basis of Emma's fantasies as an adult woman, as she seeks to render her experiences meaningful by translating them into the literary codes of romantic love. Yet she herself remains oblivious to their conventionality; for her, they embody an absolute, an ideal plenitude against which is exposed the paucity of the real. "And Emma tried to find out what one meant exactly in life by the words *bliss, passion, ecstasy,* that had seemed to her so beautiful in books."[49]

While some critics have taken as self-evident the debased nature of Emma's readings as precursors of modern mass-market romances, others view her behavior in a less judgmental light, perceiving a desire for transcendence which possesses no other outlet. Thus Bersani notes that Emma's reading is "the only spiritualizing impulse in her life," while Eric Gans points out that in Flaubert's universe of infinite banality "Emma's longings produce the only possible form of transcendence, the only possible religion."[50] Such statements link up to recent defenses of the utopian element in mass-culture texts which suggest that even the most hackneyed forms do not simply reinforce dominant ideological schemata but also express a moment of resistance through a refusal of the status quo and a longing for a better world.[51] Trapped within a sterile and narrow environment, her social options foreclosed by the fact of her sex, Emma can only voice her dissatisfaction through the texts that she reads.

As Rosemary Lloyd points out, these texts are in fact more varied than critics have often acknowledged, including diverse works by Balzac, Sir

Walter Scott, and Eugène Sue alongside unnamed works of popular romantic fiction, engravings, and women's magazines.[52] The crucial issue, however, is surely not what Emma reads, but *how* she reads; her consumption of texts is such as to effectively erase any meaningful aesthetic differences between them. In this sense, *Madame Bovary* is less about the corrupting effects of novels per se than about the dangers of particular ways of reading. As the previous quotation indicates, Emma distills fiction into a random array of tableaux, a chain of unconnected images and stereotypes that are both highly particular—lagoons, Swiss chalets, Scottish cottages—and infinitely suggestive. Her reading, as Carla Peterson notes, thereby involves an extended process of morcellation and fragmentation, whereby particular literary works are reduced to nothing more than isolated segments of plot and models for imitation.[53] In this ascription of semiotic density and mystical plenitude to decontextualized, free-floating images, Emma uncannily anticipates the modalities of twentieth-century forms of mass-media culture and lifestyle advertising as adumbrated in recent theories of "the society of the spectacle."

In other words, Emma does not read as Flaubert wishes his own novel to be read. If the author seeks to destabilize the reader's expectations through meticulous composition and a carefully wrought opacity of style, Emma in turn transforms style into content by denying the mediating authority of literary form. She reads literally, and out of pure self-interest, searching only for specular images with which she can identify. Aesthetic value is reduced to emotional use-value; literature serves merely as a means to stimulate sentimental and erotic fantasies. Desperate to escape the stultifying constraints of the provinces, Emma turns to writing for depictions of the glamor and romance which her own life conspicuously lacks. "She subscribed to 'la Corbeille,' a ladies' magazine, and the 'Sylphe des Salons.' She devoured, without skipping a word, all the accounts of first nights, races and soirées . . . In Eugène Sue she studied descriptions of furniture; she read Balzac and George Sand, seeking in them imaginary satisfactions for her own desires."[54]

Thus Emma's desire for aesthetic transcendence is itself relativized in the novel by its unmediated relationship to women's emotional and sensual impulses; her yearning for the sublime is sentimental rather than monumental. This motif is already evident in Emma's youthful interest in the trappings of religion, which is characterized by an inability to distinguish between the complexities of spiritual aspiration and the shallowness of sensual pleasure. "This nature," writes Flaubert, "that had loved the church for the sake of the flowers, and music for the words of the songs, and literature for the passions that it excites, rebelled against the mysteries of faith as it had rebelled against discipline, as something alien to her constitution."[55] The

instrumental appropriation of cultural forms as a means of gratifying immediate subjective need is presented as a hallmark of Emma's character: "she had to gain some personal profit from things and she rejected as useless whatever did not contribute to the immediate satisfaction of her heart's desires—being of a temperament more sentimental than artistic, looking for emotions, not landscapes."[56] Here Emma functions as an emblem not simply of "bourgeois sensibility," as Nathaniel Wing argues, but also of *feminine* sensibility, as suggested in the yoking of the vocabulary of profit and utility with that of affect and sentimentality.[57] As a result, her romanticism is depicted as being of a debased kind, rooted in immediate emotional cravings and corporeal desires, lacking any authentic impulse toward spirituality or self-transcendence. Just as Emma loves church as a young girl because of the flowers, so her pleasure in literature is based only on the "passions it excites."

The implicit norm being evoked here is a Kantian ideal of disinterestedness, which locates aesthetic judgment outside all utilitarian considerations and sensual impulses. The work of art is to be valued as an end in itself, separate from the contingent desires and needs of particular subjects. Something of this Kantian formulation can be glimpsed in Flaubert's own literary credo, his fetishization of *impassibilité,* clarity, and stylistic perfection, as expressed in his dream of creating "un livre sur rien." This notion of the strict separation of art and life has of course rarely remained uncontested, as artists and writers have sought to reclaim art for ethical and political ends. What is presented as distinctively feminine, however, is an aesthetics of use-value rooted in sensual rather than cognitive interests. The distinction between art and reality is collapsed not in order to achieve a better understanding of society and human nature (the usual justification of a realist aesthetic), but as a means of facilitating a loss of self in the pleasures of the text.

This feminine susceptibility to emotional identification and passionate abandonment is explored in the episode depicting Emma's visit to the opera at Rouen to see *Lucia di Lammermoor.* Immediately comparing the heroine's fate to her own, she is stimulated to melancholy reflections on the pathos and limitations of her own existence. Her attempts to retain a degree of critical detachment during the performance are rapidly swept away by the acting, and conflating the identity of the male lead with his role, she projects onto him all the romantic yearnings that her own lovers have been unable to fulfill. "She longed to run to his arms, to take refuge in his strength, as in the incarnation of love itself, and to say to him, to cry out, 'Take me away! carry me with you! let us leave! All my passion and all my dreams are yours!'"[58] Emma projects herself onto the text only in order to abandon herself to it, in

a yearning for oceanic merging that seeks to efface the very boundaries of identity. Her increasingly frenzied eroticism is portrayed as both sexual and textual, exemplifying an inchoate desire to merge and become one with both the real and the fictional other.[59]

Such episodes are indicative of the narcissism characterizing woman's response to art: woman is the archetypal naive reader who is unable to distinguish between texts and life. The ubiquity of this *idée reçu* among the French intelligentsia of the period is evidenced in statements such as the following, from the journal of the Goncourt brothers. "This evening the Princess said: 'I enjoy only those novels of which I should have liked to be the heroine.' A perfect illustration of the standard by which women judge novels."[60] Unable to make the imaginative and intellectual leap required to appreciate great literature, female readers use texts as mirrors in which they simultaneously discover and reconfirm their own subjectivity. In her confusion of the spheres of the real and the imaginary, Emma Bovary is the prototype of the modern reader who dreams of becoming the heroine of her own romance. Women's yearning for or identification with the object of representation thereby disrupts the distancing frame that characterizes the authentic modality of aesthetic contemplation.[61]

Of course, in interpreting *Madame Bovary* as symptomatic of a particular ideology of femininity, I leave myself open to the accusation of reading like Emma herself, of revealing either willful blindness or involuntary stupidity vis-à-vis the complexities and indeterminacies of the literary artifact. A number of critics have argued that Flaubert's novel may appear to condemn Emma's vulgarity and narcissism, but that in fact it contains numerous *mises en abîme* which undermine any ostensible claims it appears to be making. Flaubert's own ambivalent identification with the feminine, as exemplified both in his letters and in the frequent indeterminacy of narrative perspective within the novel, is further cited in support of such a position. Identification does not, however, automatically negate, but may in fact underpin, sadistic distantiation, as I demonstrate in more detail in the next chapter. And while empathy and irony do indeed coexist in Flaubert's novel, as Dominick LaCapra suggests,[62] a feminist reader may be more struck by its irony than its empathy, particularly at those moments in the text when the narrator offers a relatively unambiguous assessment of Emma's ways of reading.

Furthermore, such arguments are often about something other than the (unexceptionable) claim that texts contain multiple meanings. Rather, the repeated insistence that *Madame Bovary* resists recuperation in terms of any identifiable ideological position serves to reify the aura of the artwork in predictable ways. It is of course precisely this claim which *is* the novel's

aesthetic ideology, embodied in the distinction between the authentic modernity of Flaubert's writing and the naiveté of Emma's reading. Critics who claim that Flaubert's novel subverts this distinction by acknowledging its own complicity with its object of critique merely reinscribe the same opposition at a higher level; this very self-consciousness now becomes the marker of authentic literariness which distinguishes *Madame Bovary* from more dogmatic and univocal texts. Such debates, as Bruce Robbins suggests, are only partly about the text under discussion; they are also "a pious exercise in disciplinary self-corroboration, a demonstration that the discipline of literary criticism is justified in its distinctness and autonomy."[63] The repeated elevation of the signifier over the signified, of the complexities of form over the trivialities of (feminine) content, thereby enacts a defense of literary professionalization as both an established canon and a particular set of reading practices.

It is precisely this professionalized status of the literary which is negated by the specter of a feminized aesthetics of consumption. In using literature as a means to narcissistic gratification and loss of self, the female reader denies its autonomy, collapsing the distinction between subject and object, self and text. The text is consumed metaphorically by analogy with the literal consumption of objects such as food; it is used to satiate an appetite, incorporated, used up. This uncritical devouring of fiction is a disturbing and threatening phenomenon because it negates the autonomy of the literary artifact; lacking any reverence for the auratic status of the artwork, female desire collapses existing forms of cultural distinction and differentiation and hence negates the specificity and value of the aesthetic. Emma's reading practice thus threatens to undermine the very basis on which Flaubert's own personal and social identity is built.

This compulsive reading in turn engenders dissatisfaction with the real world; seduced by the words on the printed page, female readers become discontented with their own lives because they do not imitate the plot of the novels that they so eagerly consume. Thus critics have commented on the increasingly aggressive and "masculine" force of Emma's desire, as she seeks to transform her real lover, Leon, into the ideal hero of her dreams. Romantic fiction infuses women with exaggerated and unrealistic ideas which they may consequently seek to put into practice. Here again *Madame Bovary* ironizes yet also reinforces a long tradition of discourses about the dangerous effects of novels on women, whose French history has recently been surveyed by Jann Matlock. "The wife who becomes an 'addict' of the passion and drama of the novels of Balzac, Sue, Dumas, Soulié and Sand will be tormented by her desires—and she will torment the man who does not satisfy them. The

roman-feuilleton will make her bored, discontented with her duties and dreamy. She will become a *'folle du logis'* (crazywoman of the hearth), her mind twisted by the 'impassioned and romantic exaggerations of that evil literature.' Worse still, she will begin to live the novels she has read."[64]

This association of femininity with the drive toward dedifferentiation explains the association of woman with modern mass culture more generally. The purported inability of women to distinguish between art and life, their confusion of aesthetics and erotics, finds its counterpart in an expanding consumer culture which permeates and textualizes all aspects of everyday experience. Women's lack of aesthetic distancing, as exemplified in their voracious consumption of fiction, renders them particularly susceptible to the illusory promises and glamorous image repertoires disseminated by the marketplace. Finally, their propensity for romantic love renders them ideal subjects of a consumer culture propelled by indistinct longings and unsatisfied desires, by the constant striving to close the gap between real and imagined pleasures.

Thus though female desire is rooted in emotional and bodily needs, this desire is not viewed as an authentic space of libidinality outside social regulation. Rather, women's lack of distantiation and self-discipline merely intensifies their receptivity to the secondhand images circulating within the commodity culture; their very desire is inauthentic in its reproduction of the desire of the other. As the economic logic of modern consumption encourages emotional and erotic investment in the redemptive power of commodities, so in turn images of romantic love propagated within novels invoke and intensify the allure of glamorous and wealthy lifestyles. Thus the apparently distinct spheres of romance and money, feelings and economics, reveal themselves to be indissolubly connected in the female imagination. Flaubert writes of his heroine: "In her wistfulness, she confused the sensuous pleasures of luxury with the delights of the heart, elegance of manners with delicacy of sentiment."[65] *Madame Bovary* suggests that the scenario of a woman reading a book—a conventional representation of the private female self—in fact symbolizes the social production of desiring subjectivity within modernity. The romantic and sentimental longings ascribed to women, rather than being a remnant of a historically outmoded structure of feeling, emerge as the key element in the operation of modern consumer culture.

Complicating Consumption

In her critical engagement with entrenched attitudes toward fashion and consumption, Elizabeth Wilson describes their typical underlying tenets as follows. "Consumerism becomes a compulsive form of behaviour, over which

we have little conscious control. According to this puritanical view, we are squeezed between the imperatives of the market and the urges of an unconscious whose desires are warped and invalidated by the culture in which we live."[66] My discussion has explored some of the reasons why the image of the woman-as-consumer has been such a powerful presence in this dystopian vision of modernity. As a result of the gender division of labor, it was primarily women who were exposed to the "imperatives of the market," as exemplified in the selling techniques of advertisers and retailers. At the same time, women's long-standing association with nature and primordial desire helped to promote an identification of consumerism with feminine impulsiveness and irrationality. Given a prevalent equation of bourgeois masculinity with reason and self-restraint, it was above all through the representation of the consuming woman that writers criticized the vulgar materialism brought about by capitalist development.

Yet if the figure of woman provided a vehicle for expressing ambivalent responses to the social and economic transformations brought about by modernity, it is also true that the critique of capitalism provided an alibi for the expression of misogynistic attitudes toward women. The gendering of consumption, in other words, remains central to any assessment of its sociocultural significance. Whereas Marxism tends to interpret the consuming woman as simply the necessary by-product of a capitalist economy increasingly oriented toward the stimulation of consumer demand, such accounts fail to account for the particular and contradictory social meanings invested in *female* desire.[67] Yet to affirm such desire as authentically resistive of a symbolic order based on patriarchal repression is to ignore the ways in which consumer capitalism itself undermines such a logic of repression in its production of an endlessly desiring subject. Both functionalist accounts of cultural practices in terms of a unicausal economic model and feminist nostalgia for a space of pure resistance need to be replaced by reflection on points of contradiction as well as correspondence between capitalist and patriarchal logics.

The political implications of middle-class women's alignment with consumption are by no means straightforward in this regard. Some writers have argued that the rise of consumerism had a potentially democratizing effect in affirming the abstract equality of individuals in their status as consumers. Although it clearly failed to address, and indeed obscured, real economic inequalities between social groups, consumer culture nevertheless helped to break down fixed and seemingly natural hierarchies which assigned those groups a fixed place in the social order by sanctioning the legitimacy of individual desire.[68] This view relates to the Marxist understanding of capitalism as enacting a radical and potentially liberating dissolution of traditional and organic social bonds. The modern monetary economy exemplifies a logic of abstract equivalence within which inequality is increasingly seen to derive from quantitative degrees of wealth rather than from immutable and God-given hierarchical differences.

Such arguments are potentially useful in coming to grips with the phenomenon of female consumerism. Clearly, no neat, watertight distinction can be made between the desire for material goods and the desire for economic and political power, and the interpellation of middle-class women as consumers in the late nineteenth century undoubtedly bore a significant relationship to their rising expectations and their increasingly vocal political demands. Indeed, one can posit complex interdependences between the growth of a consumer economy and the development of women's public freedoms, even though nineteenth-century feminists themselves often challenged the image of femininity examined in this chapter by developing an alternative model of the rational female consumer.[69] William R. Leach, for example, observing the interconnections between early American feminism and the emergence of a culture of consumption, writes:

> In those early, nearly euphoric days of consumer capitalism, textured so much by the department store, many women thought they had discovered a more exciting, more appealing life, freedom remade within a consumer matrix. Their participation in consumer experience challenged and subverted that complex of qualities traditionally known as feminine—dependence, passivity, religious piety, domestic inwardness, sexual purity, and maternal nurture. Mass consumer culture presented to women a new definition of gender that carved out a space for individual expression similar to men's and that stood in tension with the older definition passed on to them.[70]

Such an account provides a useful corrective to traditional denunciations of consumerism by addressing its potentially liberating dimensions, albeit for a minority of women. Yet it also overemphasizes the equalizing logic of modernity and underestimates the influence and persistence of noneconomic forms of social differentiation, of which gender and race are the two most obvious examples.[71] The figure of the modern consumer, a disembodied and abstract category within the discourse of economic theorists of the time, was in fact layered with symbolic meanings which often renaturalized rather than denaturalized gender distinctions.

In this regard, the texts I have discussed possess an ambiguous significance from a feminist perspective. Foregrounding the aesthetic and erotic, as well

as economic, dimensions of consumption, these novels suggestively explore the complex interrelations between socioeconomic change and the emergence of new forms of gendered subjectivity. Commodities are revealed not simply as material objects but as complex symbolic artifacts whose social meanings derive from the unfocused dissatisfaction and indistinct longings characteristic of modern experience. Yet the literary representation of consuming femininity also enunciates the anxieties of an economically marginal intelligentsia confronted by an encroaching commercialism and materialism. The addressing of middle-class women as consumers leads to a new prominence of icons of femininity in the public domain, and a concomitant emphasis on sensuousness, luxury, and emotional gratification as features of modern life. Such a feminization of the public sphere was clearly threatening to bourgeois men, whose psychic and social identity had been formed through an ethos of self-restraint and a repudiation of womanly feelings and whose professional status was based on an at-best ambivalent relationship to the marketplace. Thus fears of an uncontrollable female desire converge with a pessimistic view of the hedonistic excess engendered by capitalist expansion to create a dystopian vision of the all-consuming woman.

Such an explanation may help to account for male discomfort with consumption without the assumption that such a feminization of modernity was liberating for women in any straightforward way. As I have indicated, the rise of consumerism was linked to growing public freedoms for middle-class women in the latter half of the nineteenth century; more generally, the "democratization of luxury" made available new kinds of experience, enjoyment, and material objects unimaginable for the vast majority of individuals in the premodern world. The individualization of desire promoted by capitalist consumerism thus made it possible for women to articulate needs and wants in defiance of traditional patriarchal prohibitions, even as the department store offered a new and intoxicating public space beyond the walls of the familial home. Yet this relative degree of empowerment also went hand in hand with the emergence of new constraining influences on gendered identity. Not only did consumer culture subject women to norms of eroticized femininity that encouraged constant practices of self-surveillance, but it provided a conduit through which heterogeneous forms of desire could often be deflected and channeled into the imperative to buy ever more commodities. Even as it exemplified the erosion of certain traditional constraints upon desiring femininity, the culture of modernity also brought with it new, if less visible, networks of social control.

4

Masking Masculinity: The Feminization of Writing

> Since femininity is associated with masquerade, masquerade—the figurative, textuality, etc.—comes to seem feminine. Femininity would thus appear to have lost its terrors, to have settled, like magic dust, over the terrain of culture generally, and in the process to have transformed masculinity itself.
>
> Tania Modleski, *Feminism without Women: Culture and Criticism in a "Postfeminist" Age*

Not all male artists and intellectuals were to react negatively to the prospect of an aestheticized and feminized modernity. On the contrary, for many of those alienated and disaffected from the dominant norms of middle-class masculinity, such a scenario offered the hope of a radical alternative to prevailing forces of positivism, progress ideology, and the sovereignty of the reality principle. Thus an imaginary identification with the feminine emerged as a key stratagem in the literary avant-garde's subversion of sexual and textual norms. This refusal of traditional models of masculinity took the form of a self-conscious textualism which defined itself in opposition to the prevailing conventions of realist representation, turning toward a decadent aesthetic of surface, style, and parody that was explicitly coded as both "feminine" and "modern." Loosening itself from the body of woman, femininity was to become a governing metaphor in the fin-de-siècle crisis of literary representation, linked to an aesthetic definition of modernity that emphasized, with Nietzsche, the undecidability and opacity of language and the omnipresence of desire.

Clearly, the extent of this crisis in masculinity should not be exaggerated. The transgressive gestures of the avant-garde were by definition limited to a small, if visible and influential, group that was by no means representative of writers as a whole, let alone of the broader cultivated public. By calling into question dominant ideals of manliness, however, this group aimed at the very

describes as a volkish trend within cultural criticism which seeks to construct an autonomous tradition of black history and identity grounded in an ideal of racial authenticity. Such antimodernist positions are themselves, he notes, deeply if often unconsciously indebted to nineteenth-century theories of nationalism shaped by the heritage of German Romanticism. Instead, Gilroy develops an alternative, transcultural, and transnational notion of the black Atlantic as a web of hybrid diasporic identities, a complex intermixture of African and European philosophical and cultural systems and ideas. Without denying the terrible legacy of modernity exemplified in its heritage of slavery and racism, he seeks to investigate the ways in which black individuals have themselves drawn selectively on the tradition of the modern through practices of both affirmation and critique. Black culture is for Gilroy thus a "counter-culture of modernity," even though the recognition of the centrality of race to the modern brings with it a need to reconceptualize many of the periodizing and theoretical categories through which the modern has been understood. Thus, Gilroy writes, the diaspora of the black Atlantic is constituted as "a non-traditional tradition, an irreducibly modern, ex-centric, unstable and asymmetrical cultural ensemble that cannot be apprehended through the manichean logic of binary coding."[7]

I would not wish to overstate the similarities between Gilroy's argument and my own; this would be to elide their distinct and diverging political agendas. Nor do I seek to appropriate his text in order to legitimate my own work, which must inevitably stand or fall on its own merits. Gilroy's subtle and complex argument, however, further intensifies my own conviction that the history of the modern needs to be rethought in terms of the various subaltern identities that have contributed to its formation. In expanding our understanding of the inescapable plurality of modern subjects, such a project involves a major fracturing and reshaping of established temporal schemata and periodizing structures. Received wisdoms about the aesthetics and politics of the modern will thereby be subjected to processes of contestation and revision, as the heterogeneous, often nonsynchronous, yet intersecting modernities of different social groups come into view. The history of the modern is thus not yet over; in a very real sense, it has yet to be written.

Notes

Introduction

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3. Charles Lemert, "Sociology: Prometheus among the Sciences of Man," *Boundary 2*, 2, 2/3 (1985): 84.

4. "Georg Simmel," in Lewis A. Coser, *Masters of Sociological Thought*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), pp. 194–196.

5. David Frisby, *Sociological Impressionism: A Reassessment of Georg Simmel's Social Theory* (London: Heinemann, 1981). See also David Frisby, *Simmel and Since: Essays on Georg Simmel's Social Theory* (London: Routledge, 1992).

6. For a comparison of Simmel and Jacques Derrida, see Green, *Literary Methods and Sociological Theory*. For a discussion of Simmel as postmodernist, see Deena Weinstein and Michael A. Weinstein, *Postmodern(ized) Simmel* (London: Routledge, 1993).

7. Lieteke van Vucht Tijssen, "Women and Objective Culture: Georg Simmel and Marianne Weber," *Theory, Culture, and Society*, 8, 3 (1991): 204. See also Suzanne Vromen, "Georg Simmel and the Cultural Dilemma of Women," *History of European Ideas*, 8, 4/5 (1987): 563–579; Klaus Lichtblau, "Eros and Culture: Gender Theory in Simmel, Tönnies, and Weber," *Telos*, 82 (1989): 89–110; Heinz-Jürgen Dahme, "Frauen- und Geschlechterfrage bei Herbert Spencer und Georg Simmel," *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, 38 (1986): 490–509; and Silvia Bovenschen, *Die imaginierte Weiblichkeit: Exemplarische Untersuchungen zu kulturgeschichtlichen und literarischen Präsentationsformen des Weiblichen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979),

46. "Der Mensch als Weib," in Lou Andreas-Salomé, *Die Erotik: Vier Aufsätze* (Munich: Ullstein, 1986), pp. 9–10. I quote here from Biddy Martin's translation in *Woman and Modernity*, p. 151.

47. Simmel, "The Problem of the Sexes," p. 128.

48. Anne McClintock, "The Return of Female Fetishism and the Fiction of the Phallus," *New Formations*, 19 (1993): 7–10.

49. Donald. N. Levine, *The Flight from Ambiguity: Essays in Social and Cultural Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 180, and Frank J. Sulloway, *Freud, Biologist of the Mind: Beyond the Psychoanalytical Legend* (London: Burnett, 1979), ch. 10.

50. Georg Stauth and Bryan S. Turner, *Nietzsche's Dance: Resentment, Reciprocity, and Resistance in Social Life* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), p. 32. See also Bryan S. Turner, "A Note on Nostalgia," *Theory, Culture, and Society*, 4, 1 (1987): 147–156, and Fritz Ringer, *The Decline of the German Mandarins: The German Academic Community, 1890–1933* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969).

51. Janet Wolff, "The Invisible Flâneuse: Women and the Literature of Modernity," *Theory, Culture, and Society*, 2, 3 (1985): 37–46.

52. Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Society* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1986). For a feminist critique of Durkheim, Marx, and Weber, see R. A. Sydie, *Natural Women, Cultured Men: A Feminist Perspective on Sociological Theory* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1987).

53. Robert A. Nisbet, *Social Change and History: Aspects of the Western Theory of Development* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 202–203. See also Levine, *The Flight from Ambiguity*, and Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

54. Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987); Jacques Donzelot, *The Policing of Families* (London: Hutchinson, 1980); Friedrich A. Kittler, *Discourse Networks, 1800/1900* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

55. See Bruce Mazlish, *A New Science: The Breakdown of Connections and the Birth of Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

56. Karen Horney, "The Flight from Womanhood: The Masculinity Complex in Women As Viewed by Men and by Women," in *Psychoanalysis and Women*, ed. Jean Baker Miller (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), pp. 5–20.

57. Ute Frevert, *Women in German History: From Bourgeois Emancipation to Sexual Liberation* (New York: Berg, 1989), p. 127. See also the brief discussion in Lieteke Van Vucht Tijssen, "Women between Modernity and Postmodernity," *Theories of Modernity and Postmodernity*, ed. Bryan S. Turner (London: Sage, 1990), and Harriet Anderson, *Utopian Feminism: Women's Movements in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

58. On critical nostalgia, see James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Allegory," in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p. 114. Clifford is paraphrasing Raymond Williams's discussion of pastoral in *The Country and the City* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1985).

59. Malcolm Chase and Christopher Shaw, "The Dimensions of Nostalgia," in *The Imagined Past: History and Nostalgia*, ed. Malcolm Chase and Christopher Shaw (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), p. 9.

60. Keith Tester, "Nostalgia," in his *The Life and Times of Post-Modernity* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 66.

3. Imagined Pleasures

Epigraph: Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), p. 227.

1. The phrase "dream worlds" is taken from Rosalind Williams, *Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth-Century France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982). The "dream world" is of course also central to Walter Benjamin's understanding of modernity as exemplifying a re-enchantment rather than demythification of the social. See Susan Buck-Morss, "Dream World of Mass Culture," *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989). Other recent attempts to rethink the history of modernity through the category of consumption include Grant McCracken, *Culture and Consumption: New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J. H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982); and Chandra Mukerji, *From Graven Images: Patterns of Modern Materialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

2. Williams, *Dream Worlds*, p. 308.

3. See, among others, Mica Nava, "Consumerism and Its Contradictions" and "Consumerism Reconsidered: Buying and Power," in Nava, *Changing Cultures: Feminism, Youth, and Consumerism* (London: Sage, 1992).

4. See, for example, Patricia Williams, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), ch. 3.

5. Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 22.

6. Paul Morand, quoted in Williams, *Dream Worlds*, p. 60. For discussions of the great exhibition in England and France, see Thomas Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and Spectacle, 1851–1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), and Deborah Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

7. Gail Reekie, *Temptations: Sex, Selling, and the Department Store* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1993), p. 16.

8. Elaine S. Abelson, *When Ladies Go A-Thieving: Middle-Class Shoplifters in the Victorian Department Store* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 61.

9. Citations are taken from the following translations: Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, ed. and trans. Paul de Man (New York: Norton, 1965); Emile Zola, *Nana*, trans. George Holden (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972); and Emile Zola, *The Ladies' Paradise* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

10. Williams, *Dream Worlds*, pp. 11–12.

11. Reekie, *Temptations*, p. xii.

12. Besides Reekie and Abelson, see Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); Rachel Bowlby, *Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing, and Zola* (New York: Methuen, 1985); Rémy G. Saisselin, *Bricabracomania: The Bourgeois and the Bibelot* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985); and William R. Leach, "Transformations in a Culture of Consumption: Women and Department Stores, 1890–1925," *The Journal of American History*, 71, 2 (1984): 319–342.

13. See the notes to the Livre de Poche edition of *Au bonheur des dames* (Paris: Fasquelle, 1984), p. 491.

14. Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams*, p. 150.

15. Paul Dubuisson, quoted in Michael Miller, *The Bon Marché: Bourgeois Culture and the Department Store, 1869–1920* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 229.

16. On shoplifting, see Abelson, *When Ladies Go A-Thieving*; Miller, *The Bon Marché*, pp. 197–205; Leslie Camhi, "Stealing Femininity: Department Store Kleptomania as Sexual Disorder," *Differences*, 5, 1 (1993): 26–50; and Ann-Louise Shapiro, "Disorderly Bodies / Disorderly Acts: Medical Discourse and the Female Criminal in Nineteenth-Century Paris," *Genders*, 4 (1989): 68–86.

17. Zola, *The Ladies' Paradise*, p. 98.

18. Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity, and the Histories of Art* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 67.

19. Bowlby, *Just Looking*, pp. 29–32.

20. Zola, *The Ladies' Paradise*, pp. 69–70.

21. As noted in Zola's preliminary sketch for the text, quoted in the commentary on *Au bonheur des dames*, p. 490.

22. See Tania Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women* (New York: Methuen, 1985), ch. 2, and Jan Cohn, *Romance and the Erotics of Property* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1988).

23. See Miller, *The Bon Marché*, pp. 194–198.

24. See, e.g., Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies, 1: Women, Floods, Bodies, History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987); for the French context, see Susanna Barrows, *Distorting Mirrors: Visions of the Crowd in Late Nineteenth-Century France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981); on Zola specifically, see Naomi Schor, *Zola's Crowds* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

25. Zola, *The Ladies' Paradise*, p. 214.

26. Ibid., p. 236.

27. Abelson, for example, refers to the endless journalistic discussions of women who ran up huge store bills and whose husbands refused to pay for their purchases. See *When Ladies Go A-Thieving*, p. 56.

28. Peter Brooks, "Storied Bodies, or Nana at Last Unveil'd," *Critical Inquiry*, 16, 1 (1989): 8.

29. Zola, *Nana*, p. 439.

30. See Patrice Petro, *Joyless Streets: Women and Melodramatic Representation in Weimar Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

31. For the English etymology of consumption, see Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana, 1983), and for the French, Rosalind Williams, *Dream Worlds*, pp. 5–7.

32. Zola, *Nana*, pp. 409–410.

33. See Charles Bernheimer, *Figures of Ill-Repute: Representing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 201.

34. Zola, *Nana*, p. 434.

35. Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 366.

36. See, e.g., G. J. Barker-Benfield, "The Spermatic Economy: A Nineteenth Century View of Sexuality," in *The American Family in Social-Historical Perspective*, ed. Michael Gordon (New York: St Martin's Press, 1978), and Lawrence Birken, *Consuming Desire: Sexual Science and the Emergence of a Culture of Abundance, 1871–1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), ch. 2.

37. Zola, *Nana*, p. 298.

38. Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), pp. 85–90. Campbell's book is a highly suggestive resource for feminist approaches to consumption, though the author does not begin to address the obvious gender implications of his own analysis until its closing pages.

39. Zola, *Nana*, p. 336.

40. Naomi Schor, "Idealism and the Novel: Recanonizing Sand," *Yale French Studies*, 75 (1988): 56–73.

41. On this point, see Dominick LaCapra, *Madame Bovary on Trial* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982).

42. Huyssen, "Mass Culture As Woman," p. 45.

43. Fredric Jameson, "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture," *Social Text*, 1 (1979): 130–148. For discussion of the deleterious effects of novel reading, see Peter de Bolla, *The Discourse of the Sublime: Readings in History, Aesthetics, and the Subject* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), pp. 252–278, and Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic*, pp. 26–27.

44. See Huyssen, "Mass Culture As Woman"; Kirsten Drotner, "Intensities of Feeling: Modernity, Melodrama, and Adolescence," *Theory, Culture, and Society*, 8, 1 (1991): 57–87; Terry Lovell, *Consuming Fiction* (London: Verso, 1987); Christine Gledhill, "The Melodramatic Field: An Investigation," in *Home Is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*, ed. Christine Gledhill (London: British Film Institute, 1987), p. 34.

45. Larry Riggs, "Bovarysme Reconsidered: Self-Promotion, Commercialized Print, and the Birth of a Consumer Culture," in *East Meets West: Homage to Edgar C. Knowlton, Jr.*, ed. Roger L. Hadlich and J. D. Ellsworth (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, Department of European Languages and Literature, 1988), p. 235.

46. Leo Bersani, *A Future for Astyanax: Character and Desire in Literature* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1976), p. 92.

47. Janice Radway, "Reading Is Not Eating: Mass-Produced Literature and the Theoretical, Methodological, and Political Consequences of a Metaphor," *Book Research Quarterly*, 2, 3 (1986): 10–11. See also James Strachey, "Some Unconscious Factors in Reading," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 11 (1930): 322–331.

48. Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, p. 26.

49. Ibid., p. 24.

50. Bersani, *A Future for Astyanax,* p. 93; Eric Gans, *Madame Bovary: The End of Romance* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1989), p. 44. For a negative assessment of Emma's reading, see Sarah Webster Goodwin, "Libraries, Kitsch, and Gender in *Madame Bovary,*" *L'Esprit Créateur,* 28, 1 (1988): 56–66.

51. Jameson, "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture."

52. Rosemary Lloyd, *Madame Bovary* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), p. 93.

53. Carla L. Peterson, "*Madame Bovary:* Dionysian Rituals," in *Emma Bovary,* ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1994), pp. 124–127.

54. Flaubert, *Madame Bovary,* p. 41.

55. Ibid., p. 28.

56. Ibid., p. 26.

57. Nathaniel Wing, "Emma's Stories: Narrative, Repetition, and Desire in *Madame Bovary,*" in Bloom, *Emma Bovary,* p. 140.

58. Flaubert, *Madame Bovary,* p. 163.

59. On Emma's narcissism, see Michal Peled Ginsburg, *Flaubert Writing: A Study in Narrative Strategies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986), ch. 3; on the motif of fusion, see Leo Bersani, "Flaubert and Madame Bovary: The Hazards of Literary Fusion," in *Gustave Flaubert's Madame Bovary,* ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1988).

60. *Pages from the Goncourt Journal,* ed. Robert Baldick (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), p. 136.

61. Clearly, this view is far from superseded in our own time. In relation to Woody Allen's 1985 film *The Purple Rose of Cairo,* for example, Mary Ann Doane writes: "There is a certain naiveté assigned to women in relation to systems of signification—a tendency to deny the processes of representation, to collapse the opposition between the sign (the image) and the real . . . Proximity rather than distance, passivity, overinvolvement and overidentification . . . these are the tropes which enable the women's assumption of the position of 'subject' of the gaze" (Doane, *The Desire to Desire,* pp. 1–2). In the case of the female reader, in other words, aesthetics is reduced to erotics, to an emotionally and sexually charged reponse to the text; she remains incapable of appreciating the formal and self-conscious qualities of the art work in their own terms.

My own favorite recent fictional example of this theme is Stephen King's horror novel *Misery.* See my "Kitsch, Romance Fiction, and Male Paranoia: Stephen King Meets the Frankfurt School," in *Feminist Cultural Studies,* ed. Terry Lovell (London: Edward Elgar, in press).

62. LaCapra, *Madame Bovary on Trial,* p. 59.

63. Bruce Robbins, "Modernism and Literary Realism: Response," in *Realism and Representation,* ed. George Levine (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), pp. 227–228. Jonathan Culler also notes that formalist readings of *Madame Bovary* have often been tied to misogynistic assumptions about the triviality of its content. See *Flaubert: The Uses of Uncertainty* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 236–237.

64. Jann Matlock, *Scenes of Seduction: Prostitution, Hysteria, and Reading Difference in Nineteenth-Century France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 252. Matlock is quoting the Catholic journalist Alfred Nettement.

65. Flaubert, *Madame Bovary,* p. 42.

66. Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams,* p. 245.

67. This is also true of more recent analyses, such as Walter Benn Michael's *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism: American Literature at the Turn of the Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

68. See Birken, *Consuming Desire,* ch. 6.

69. See, e.g., Williams, *Dream Worlds,* pp. 307–308, and Reekie, *Temptations,* ch. 7.

70. Leach, "Transformations in a Culture of Consumption," p. 342. See also Martin Pumphrey, "The Flapper, the Housewife, and the Making of Modernity," *Cultural Studies,* 1, 2 (1987): 179–194.

71. I do not mean that categories of race and gender do not have economic effects; I simply mean that their rationale and significance cannot be understood purely in such terms.

4. Masking Masculinity

Epigraph: Tania Modleski, *Feminism without Women: Culture and Criticism in a "Postfeminist" Age* (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 101.

1. See, e.g., Jacques Le Rider, *Modernité viennoise et crises de l'identité* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1990), and Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *La raison baroque: de Baudelaire à Benjamin* (Paris: Editions Galilée, 1984).

2. See Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1990), in particular chs. 1 and 9.

3. Texts are cited from the following editions: J. K. Huysmans, *Against the Grain* (New York: Dover, 1969); Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, *Venus in Furs,* in *Masochism* (New York: Zone Books, 1989); Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985).

4. Thus, as Carl Schorske notes, "the Austrian aesthetes were neither as alienated from their society as their French soul-mates nor as engaged in it as their English ones." See Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 304.

5. Such appropriations are numerous. See, e.g., Gaylyn Studlar, *In the Realm of Pleasure: Von Sternberg, Dietrich, and the Masochistic Aesthetic* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), and Kaja Silverman, "Masochism and Male Subjectivity," in her *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (New York: Routledge, 1992). For a critique, see Tania Modleski, *Feminism without Women: Culture and Criticism in a "Postfeminist" Age* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

6. For the origin of the term "counterdiscourse," see Richard Terdiman, *Discourse/Counter-Discourse: The Theory and Practice of Symbolic Resistance in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

7. As Christine Battersby notes, "the great artist is a *feminine male.*" See her *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetic* (London: Women's Press, 1989) for a discussion of interconnections between vocabularies of aesthetic praise and those of sexual difference. See also Alan Richardson, "Romanticism and the Colonization of the Feminine," in *Romanticism and Feminism,* ed. Anne K. Mellor (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).