

CREATIVITY AND THE CHILDBIRTH METAPHOR

gender difference in literary discourse

380, linearity of progress?

Thus, great with child to speak, and helpless in my throes,
Biting my trewand pen, beating myself for spite,
"Fool," said my muse to me, "look in thy heart and write."

PHILIP SIDNEY (1591)

The poet is in labor. She has been told that it will not hurt but it has hurt so much that pain and struggle seem, just now, the only reality. But at the very moment when she feels she will die, or that she is already in hell, she hears the doctor saying, "Those are the shoulders you are feeling now"—and she knows the head is out then, and the child is pushing and sliding out of her, insistent, a poem.

DENISE LEVERTOV (1967)

The childbirth metaphor has yoked artistic creativity and human procreativity for centuries in writers as disparate as Philip Sidney and Erica Jong, William Shakespeare and Mary Shelley, Alexander Pope and Denise Levertov. Men as well as women have used the metaphor extensively, taking female anatomy as a model for human creativity in sharp contrast with the equally common phallic analogy, which uses male anatomy for its paradigm.¹ As Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have shown, the association of the pen and paintbrush with the phallus in metaphors of creativity has resulted in an "anxiety of authorship" for aspiring women writers: to wield a pen is a masculine act that puts the woman writer at war with her body and her culture.² In contrast to the phallic analogy that implicitly excludes women from creativity, the childbirth metaphor validates women's artistic effort by unifying their mental and physical labor into (pro)creativity.

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The childbirth metaphor is a controversial one that has been both celebrated and rejected by contemporary feminist theorists, critics, and writers. On the one hand, French theorists who promote the concept of *l'écriture féminine* insist on a poetic of the female body. As Hélène Cixous writes, "women must write through their bodies." Women, "never far from 'mother,'" write "in white ink." Using the birth metaphor itself, Cixous describes "the gestation drive" as "just like the desire to write: a desire to live self from within, a desire for a swollen belly, for

language, for blood."³ Similarly, American poet Stephanie Mines seeks "a language structured like my body," and Sharon Olds describes both the birth of her child and her poem as "this giving birth, this glistening verb" in a "language of blood."⁴ On the other hand, many feminists oppose modes of thought they consider biologically deterministic, essentialist, and regressive. Mary Ellmann's witty critique of all analogical thinking based on the body, whether phallic or ovarian, anticipates the more recent concerns of others.⁵ Simone de Beauvoir warns that this concept of writing from the body establishes a "counter-penis," and Elaine Showalter and Nina Auerbach fear that it represents the development of a regressive biologism. Showalter asks "if to write is metaphorically to give birth, from what organ can males generate texts?" "Anatomy is textuality" within a biological paradigm, Showalter argues. Biological analogies ultimately exclude one sex from the creative process, and in a patriarchal society it is women's creativity that is marginalized. Ann Rosalind Jones further suggests that the concept of *l'écriture féminine* posits an essential female sexuality that lies outside culture, an ahistorical assumption that particularly ignores the differences among women across cultures and through time. Poet Erica Jong states flatly that the comparison of "human gestation to human creativity" is "thoroughly inexact."⁶

Without attempting to resolve this debate, this essay will contribute to it by examining the ways in which women and men have encoded different concepts of creativity and procreativity into the metaphor itself. Highlighting how, in Elizabeth Abel's words, "gender informs and complicates both the writing and the reading of texts," the childbirth metaphor provides a concrete instance of genuine gender difference in literary discourse as constituted both by the readers and the writers of a given text.⁷ I will explore three aspects of the childbirth metaphor: first, the cultural resonance of the childbirth metaphor; second, gender difference in the metaphor's meaning as constructed in the process of reading; and third, gender difference as reflected in the process of writing. Examination of these aspects will reveal that women writers have often risked the metaphor's dangerous biologism in order to challenge fundamental binary oppositions of patriarchal ideology between word and flesh, creativity and procreativity, mind and body. Cixous's utopian call for women's writing from the body may lament that "with a few rare exceptions, there has not yet been any writing that inscribes femininity."⁸ But women's use of the childbirth metaphor demonstrates not only a "marked" discourse distinct from phallogocentric male use of the same metaphor but also a subversive inscription of women's (pro)creativity that has existed for centuries.

CULTURAL RESONANCE OF THE CHILDBIRTH METAPHOR

Contextual reverberations of the childbirth metaphor ensure that it can never be "dead," merely what Max Black calls "an expression that no longer has a pregnant metaphorical use."⁹ The childbirth metaphor has always been "pregnant" with resonance because childbirth itself is not neutral in literary discourse. Whether it appears as subject or vehicle of expression, childbirth has never achieved what Roland Barthes calls "writing degree zero," the language of "innocence," "freed from responsibility in relation to all possible context."¹⁰ The

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context of the childbirth metaphor is the institution of motherhood in the culture at large. Consequently, the meaning of the childbirth metaphor is overdetermined by psychological and ideological resonances evoked by, but independent of, the text. No doubt, there is variation in the intensity and kind of conscious and unconscious charge that any reader or writer brings to the metaphor. But because it relies on an event fundamental to the organization of culture and psyche, the birth metaphor remains "pregnant" with significance.

The paradox of the childbirth metaphor is that its contextual resonance is fundamentally at odds with the very comparison it makes. While the metaphor draws together mind and body, word and womb, it also evokes the sexual division of labor upon which Western patriarchy is founded. The vehicle of the metaphor (procreation) acts in opposition to the tenor it serves (creation) because it inevitably reminds the reader of the historical realities that contradict the comparison being made. Facing constant challenges to their creativity, women writers often find their dilemma expressed in terms of the opposition between books and babies. Ellen Glasgow, for example, recalled the advice of a literary man: "The best advice I can give you is to stop writing and go back to the South and have some babies. The greatest woman is not the woman who has written the finest book, but the woman who has had the finest babies."¹¹ Male paternity of texts has not precluded their paternity of children. But for both material and ideological reasons, maternity and creativity have appeared to be mutually exclusive to women writers.¹²

The historical separation evoked by the childbirth metaphor is so entangled with the language of creation and procreation that the metaphor's very words establish their own linguistic reverberation. Words about the production of babies and books abound with puns, common etymologies, and echoing sounds that simultaneously yoke and separate creativity and procreativity. This wordplay reveals not only currents of unconscious thought as Sigmund Freud has described but also the structures of patriarchy that have divided labor into men's production and women's reproduction. Underlying these words is the familiar dualism of mind and body, a key component of Western patriarchal ideology. Creation is the act of the mind that brings something new into existence. Procreation is the act of the body that reproduces the species. A man conceives an idea in his brain, while a woman conceives a baby in her womb, a difference highlighted by the post-industrial designation of the public sphere as man's domain and the private sphere as woman's place. The pregnant body is necessarily female; the pregnant mind is the mental province of genius, most frequently understood to be inherently masculine.¹³ Confinement of men suggests imprisonment—indignities to, not the fulfillment of manhood. Delivery from confinement suggests the restoration of men's autonomy, not its death. Confinement of women, in contrast, alludes to the final stages of pregnancy before delivery into the bonds of maternity, the very joy of which has suppressed their individuality in patriarchy.

These linguistically inscribed separations echo religious ones, which in turn resonate through the childbirth metaphor. God's punishment of Adam and Eve in Genesis has provided divine authority for the sexual division of labor. Adam's labor is to produce the goods of society by the "sweat of his brow," an idiom that collapses man's muscular and mental work. Eve's labor is to reproduce the species in pain and subservience to Adam. More importantly, the Christian tradition

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built on the masculine monotheism of Judaism by appropriating the power of the Word for a masculine deity and his son. In the worship of ancient near-Eastern goddesses such as Inanna, Isis, and Demeter, woman's physical capacity to give birth served as the paradigm of all origins. But where God the Father supplanted the Goddess as Mother, the mind became the symbolic womb of the universe. According to the gospel of John, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made." The power of the Word became the paradigm of male creativity, indeed the foundation of Western patriarchal ideology.¹⁴

This masculine appropriation of the creative Word attempts to reduce women to the processes of their body. As Friedrich Nietzsche's Zarathustra pronounces: "Everything concerning woman is a puzzle, and everything concerning woman has one solution: it is named pregnancy."¹⁵ This "solution" projects the concept of woman as being without thought, without speech, in the creation of culture. Before the discovery of the ovum, woman's womb was represented as the mere material vessel into which man dropped his divine seed. But even after women's active part in conception became understood, cultural representations of woman based in the mind-body split continued to separate the creation of man's mind from the procreation of woman's body. According to patriarchal definition, de Beauvoir writes, woman "has ovaries, a uterus; these peculiarities imprison her in her subjectivity, circumscribe her within the limits of her own nature. It is often said that she thinks with her glands."¹⁶ Julia Kristeva argues that phallogocentric hegemony makes woman "a specialist in the unconscious, a witch, a bacchanalian. . . . *A marginal speech*, with . . . regard to science, religion, and philosophy of the *polis* (witch, child, underdeveloped, not even a poet, at best a poet's accomplice). *A pregnancy.*"¹⁷

The linguistic, religious, and historical resonance of the childbirth metaphor contradicts the fundamental comparison the metaphor makes. Although its basic analogy validates women's participation in literary creativity, its contextual resonance calls that participation into question. Because contextual resonance comes alive in a given text through the agency of the reader, the reader has a key role to play in the constitution of the metaphor's meaning.

GENDER DIFFERENCE: READING THE CHILDBIRTH METAPHOR

Reader response theories emphasize the role of the reader to the construction meaning in any text.¹⁸ Situated differently in relationship to the issue of motherhood, female and male readers are most likely to hear the contextual resonance of the childbirth metaphor from their gendered perspectives. But I would like to focus on the presence of "the reader in the text" as it is established by the specific nature of metaphor. Contradiction is inherent in metaphor, which presents "an insight into likeness" seen "in spite of, and through, the different."¹⁹ The interaction of a metaphor's component parts—that is, the similar and the dissimilar—requires a reader to complete the process of reconciliation. Paradoxically, a literal falsehood becomes a figurative truth in the mind of the reader. The reader "conceives" the new truth by seeing the dynamic interaction between contradictory

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elements that move toward resolution. Karsten Harries identifies this interaction as a "semantic collision" that leads to "semantic collusion" as the reader becomes aware of the grounds of comparison.²⁰ Paul Ricoeur describes this process as a "transition from literal incongruence to metaphorical congruence," that nonetheless retains a "split reference." From this "semantic clash" a new meaning emerges, but it continues to evoke the "previous incompatibility and the new compatibility."²¹ For Paul de Man, this clash represents the inherently subversive nature of metaphor, which disrupts the logical discourse of the rational mind.²² Metaphor's dependence on the reader for an awareness of contradiction and resolution represents a linguistic "cultivation of intimacy," according to Ted Cohen. Like a joke, a metaphor presents a puzzle to the reader, one which results in a "sense of close community" and "shared awareness" once it has been resolved.²³

Levertov's extended narrative metaphor (see epigraph), which invites the reader to feel the exultant pain of giving birth to a poem, provides a good example for the role of the reader in the creation of meaning. The tension that gives this metaphor its potency is built upon the reader's awareness of both "incompatibility" and "compatibility." The first collision that the reader must overcome is the metaphor's literal falsehood: the equation of poem and baby. The poet's extreme effort to birth the head, the momentary hesitation at the baby's shoulders, and the final insistence of delivery are details so precisely tied to the last moments of childbirth that they heighten the dissimilarity of creativities at the same time that they intensify the comparison. The second collision exists specifically in the reader's mind as a result of the metaphor's historical resonance. Levertov's metaphor defies the cultural separation of creation and procreation by joining the functions and feelings of mind and body. To move this collision toward collusion, the reader must follow Levertov's subversion of historical forces.

The reader's sex and perspective on childbirth no doubt affect the resolution of Levertov's metaphor, a variation that I will not address in this essay. Instead, the gender difference in the reading of the metaphor that I will explore is the alteration of meaning that results from the reader's awareness of the sex of the metaphor's author. We seldom read any text without knowledge of the author's sex. The title page itself initiates a series of expectations that influence our reading throughout, expectations intensified by the overdetermined childbirth metaphor. The reader's knowledge that Levertov is a woman, potentially a mother, "informs and complicates" the reading of her metaphor. This knowledge changes the interaction process of the metaphor—its incongruity, its movement toward congruity, and its implied "community" of author and reader. Change the pronoun to "he" and the reader's construction of meaning would alter profoundly: "The poet is in labor. He has been told that it will not hurt but it has hurt so much. . . . The child is pushing out of him, insistent, a poem." This change introduces a new collision, one present to some degree in *all* metaphors featuring a parturient father. Confined to "headbirths," men *cannot* literally conceive and birth babies.²⁴ The reader's awareness of this biological collision contributes to a perpetual tension in the metaphor, one that threatens to overwhelm the movement toward resolution.

Levertov herself appears to have been sensitive to the impact of gender on the reader's completion of the metaphor's meaning. Immediately following her metaphor of the mother-poet is a metaphor of a father-poet who must watch from

a distance the birth of the poem he begat. Levertov deliberately avoids making the two metaphors precisely parallel: "The poet is a father. Into the air, into the fictional landscape of the delivery room, wholly man-made. . . . emerges . . . the remote consequence of a dream of his, acted out nine months before, the rhythm that became words."²⁵ Levertov's refusal to envision male creation of a poem in the concrete terms of female physiological delivery underlines the significance of the actor's biological capacity to the reading of the metaphor. Her evocative description of the impersonal, scrubbed delivery rooms of the fifties and sixties heightens the reader's awareness of historical context. The similar, yet dissimilar analogies further clarify the multilayered complexities of reading the birth metaphor. As a woman writer, Levertov has used the birth metaphor to describe both a female and a male act of creativity. In reading these metaphors, we are not only aware of her perspective as a woman, but also of how the shift in the actor's biological sex subtly alters the dynamics and meaning of the metaphor.

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By focusing on the reader's awareness of the author's (or actor's) sex, we can pinpoint the gender difference in male- and female-authored metaphors. A male childbirth metaphor has three collisions for the reader to overcome: the literally false equation of books and babies, the biological impossibility of men birthing both books and babies, and the cultural separation of creation and procreation. These collisions do more than provide effective tension for the metaphor. The metaphor's incongruity overshadows congruity; collision drowns out collusion. The metaphor's tenor (creativity) and vehicle (procreativity) are kept perpetually distinct. More than an interaction of sameness and difference, the male metaphor is an analogy at war with itself. History and biology combine to make it a form of literary *cowade*, male appropriation of procreative labor to which women have been confined. Man's womblike mind and phallic pen are undeniably contrasting images of creativity, but underlying both metaphors are resonating allusions to a brotherhood of artists. The "close community" to which Cohen refers is established through a "shared awareness" of male birthright and female confinement.

The impact on the reader of these heightened collisions in the male childbirth metaphor is evident in an eighteenth-century mock-heroic conceit about a self-indulgent poet: "He produced a couplet. When our friend is delivered of a couplet, with infinite labour, and pain, he takes to his bed, has straw laid down, the knocker tied up, and expects his friends to call and make inquiries."²⁶ The irony of this extended metaphor depends upon the reader's continuing awareness of the comparison's biological impossibility. The speaker, Reverend Sidney Smith, maintains the separation of tenor and vehicle in order to diminish the poet *manqué* for acting ridiculously like what he is not and could never be—a postpartum mother. Fusion of creation and procreation in the mind of the reader would destroy the metaphor's humor.

The way in which cultural as well as biological resonances intensify the contradictory core of the male birth metaphor is evident in James Joyce's more recent variations of the analogy in his letters and *Ulysses*. In a letter to his wife Nora on 21 August 1912, Joyce writes: "I went then into the backroom of the office and sitting at the table, thinking of the book I have written, the child which I have carried for years and years in the womb of the imagination as you carried in you

womb the children you love, and of how I had fed it day after day out of my brain and my memory."²⁷ Joyce's metaphor compares his mental production with Nora's pregnancies, an analogy that draws together the labor of women and men. But at the same time, Joyce evokes the distinctions between the mind and the body, between his wife's procreativity and his own creativity. His comparison replicates the sexual division of labor and reinforces the mind-body split permeating the patristic tradition that influenced his own Jesuit background. Joyce carried his childbirth metaphor to elaborate lengths in the planning and execution of "Oxen in the Sun," the episode in *Ulysses* in which Bloom visits the lying-in hospital where Mrs. Purefoy has been in labor for three days. As the tired woman labors to birth a baby, the exhausted narrator moves through the gestation of literary style from the earliest English alliterative poetics up to the "frightful jumble" of modern dialects. Mind and body, word and deed, man and woman, are simultaneously drawn together in analogy but separated irrevocably in function. Joyce's extensive plans for the chapter highlight this continuing separation. He charted the gestation of styles according to the nine months of pregnancy and assigned to each style images and motifs appropriate to the corresponding stages of fetal development. Like Nora, Mrs. Purefoy is delivered of a baby. Like Joyce himself, the narrator is delivered of the Word. The fact that Joyce partly envies the fecundity of female flesh and despairs at the sterility of male minds does not alter the fundamental sexual dualism of his complex birth metaphors: Joyce's women produce infants through the channel of flesh, while his men produce a brainchild through the agency of language.²⁸

Paradoxically, the childbirth metaphor that reinforces the separation of creation and procreation in a male text becomes its own opposite in a female text. Instead of contributing to the reification of Western culture, the female metaphor expresses a fundamental rebellion against it. It represents a defiance of historical realities and a symbolic reunion of mind and body, creation and procreation. The female metaphor establishes a matrix of creativities based on woman's double-birthing potential. As Amy Lowell asks in "The Sisters," her poem about the female poetic tradition: "Why are we/ Already mother-creatures, double bearing/ With matrices in body and brain?"²⁹ Within the matrices of body and brain, *both* creation and procreation become multifaceted events—physical and mental, rational and emotional, conscious and unconscious, public and private, personal and political.

The different meaning of the female childbirth metaphor results from the way the reader alters the interaction of incongruity and congruity in a woman's analogy. The metaphor's literal falsehood remains the same as it does in a male comparison. Babies are never books. But the reader's awareness that the metaphor features a woman changes how the biological and historical resonances work. First, the reader knows that the author has the biological capacity men lack to birth both books and babies. Second, the reader recognizes that the author's analogy defies the cultural prescription of separated creativities. The metaphor's historical resonance does not emphasize the division of creativity and procreativity, as it does in a male text. Rather, it makes the reader aware that the woman's reclamation of the pregnant Word is itself a transcendence of historical prescription, one that perfectly conjoins form and content. Consequently, the woman's authorship of the birth metaphor enhances the metaphor's movement

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toward a reconciliation of contradictory parts. The intensification of collusion and congruity in the female metaphor allows the tenor and vehicle to mingle and fuse, while the same elements in the male metaphor remain irrevocably distinct. This resolution, which relies on the reader's awareness of the author's sex, not only completes the metaphor but more fundamentally affirms woman's special access to creativity. In so doing, the woman's metaphor is genuinely subversive or "disruptive."³⁰ Rather than covertly excluding women from the community of artists as the male metaphor does, the woman's birth metaphor suggests that her procreative powers make her specially suited to her creative labors. God the Father is no longer the implicit model of creativity. Instead, the Goddess as Mother provides the paradigm for the (re)production of woman's speech.

A seventeenth-century poem by Katherine Philips, well-known in her day as "The Matchless Orinda," illustrates how the poet's double-birthing potential reduces the childbirth metaphor's collision and moves its contradiction swiftly toward resolution. The poem is an elegy for her infant who died forty days after birth.

Tears are my Muse and sorrow all my art,
So piercing groans must be thy elegy.

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An off'ring too for thy sad tomb I have,
Too just a tribute to thy early hearse,
Receive these gasping numbers to thy grave,
The last of thy unhappy mother's verse.³¹

Elegies conventionally move from the poet's grief to a consolation based on immortality achieved through art. Orinda's "tribute" to her baby is no exception. What makes her elegy different is the presence of the childbirth metaphor to affirm this immortality. The "piercing groans" of grief that produce the elegy recall the pain of childbirth. The poet's "gasping" labor with her verse, motivated by a new mother's grief, echoes her own labor in delivery forty days ago. Both labors result in a poem that (re)births her son in the permanent domain of literature. Tenor and vehicle reverberate back and forth, each describing the experience of the other in a poem whose subject is simultaneously the pains of creativity and procreativity saddened by death. The reader's awareness of Orinda's biological and artistic motherhood makes this fusion of creation and procreation into (pro)creation possible.

Anne Bradstreet's poem "The Author to Her Book," not only demonstrates the significance of biology, but it also illustrates how the reader's knowledge of female authorship changes the metaphor's historical resonance. Bradstreet's poem, found among her papers after her death, served as the preface to the posthumous second edition of her poems. Her brother-in-law had published the first edition without her knowledge. In a prefatory poem, he called the anonymous volume her "infant" and imagined how she would "complain 't is too unkind/ To force a woman's birth, provoke her pain,/ Expose her labors to the world's disdain."³² Like Orinda's birth metaphor, his comparison depends heavily on Bradstreet's biological maternity. Bradstreet answers and extends this childbirth metaphor for the entire twenty-five lines of poem, addressing her

book as "Thou ill-formed offspring of my feeble brain,/ Who after birth didst by my side remain/ Till snatched from thence by friends, less wise than true."³³ The self-deprecation of her metaphor may reflect the insecurity of the woman writer in the public domain of letters. But it also exhibits an entirely conventional modesty characteristic of seventeenth-century male tropes which frequently beg mercy from the critics for their brainchildren.³⁴

What makes Bradstreet's metaphor different from the birth metaphors of her time is the reader's awareness that her analogy defies the cultural prescription to procreativity. Like the male metaphor, her comparison of motherhood and authorship reminds the reader of their historical separation. But unlike the male metaphor, her analogy subverts that contextual resonance instead of reinforcing it. This defiance of history strengthens the comparison and promotes the resolution toward which all metaphors move. Where Joyce's tenor and vehicle remain distinct in "Oxen in the Sun," Bradstreet's metaphor unites motherhood and authorship into a new whole. Tenor and vehicle become indistinguishable as the poem becomes a definition of mothering children as well as books. Pride and modesty, joy and irritation, love and hate, represent the feelings she has as both mother and author toward the intertwined labors that fill her with ambivalence:

At thy return my blushing was not small,
My rambling brat (in print) should mother call,
I cast thee by as one unfit for light,
Thy visage was so irksome in my sight;
Yet being mine own, at length affection would
Thy blemishes amend, if so I could:
I washed thy face, but more defects I saw,
And rubbing off a spot still made a flaw.
I stretched thy joints to make thee even feet,
Yet still thou run'st more hobbling than is meet;
In better dress to trim thee was my mind,
But nought save homespun cloth i'th'house I find.
In this array 'mongst vulgars may'st thou roam.
In critic's hands beware thou dost not come.³⁵

The role of the reader in completing the birth metaphors of Reverend Smith and Philips, Joyce and Bradstreet, is crucial, so important, in fact, that it suggests a possible methodology for the broader attempt to identify gender difference or a feminine aesthetic in literary discourse or the visual arts. Such attempts usually posit gendered qualities independent of the reader residing in a given text's words, images, style, or technique. Virginia Woolf, for example, describes a feminine sentence, and Judy Chicago identifies circular forms in the visual arts as female imagery.³⁶ However useful in identifying gender-related tendencies, this approach is often imprecise at best and implicitly prescriptive at worst. Attempts to identify the sex of a writer or an artist without external clues often fail. Exceptions for either sex are problematic. How, for example, should we describe a male painter who uses core imagery or a woman who favors pointed shapes? The terms "feminine" and "masculine" as descriptions of qualities inherent in the image suggest that the man who uses "feminine" imagery and the woman who uses "masculine" imagery are not painting "through the body."

The case of the childbirth metaphor highlights such theoretical and methodological problems and illustrates the usefulness of a reader response approach to the identification of gender difference.³⁷ The distinction between female and male discourse lies not in the metaphor itself but rather in the way its final meaning is constituted in the process of reading. Without external contexts, it is often impossible to identify the sex of an author using a childbirth metaphor, especially because male use has been at least as common as female use. Take, for example, the extended metaphor of nineteenth-century writer:

To pass from conception to execution, to produce, to bring the idea to birth, to raise the child laboriously from infancy, to put it nightly to sleep surfeited, to kiss it in the mornings with the hungry heart of a mother, to clean it, to clothe it fifty times over in new garments which it tears and casts away, and yet not revolt against the trials of this agitated life—this unwearying maternal love, this habit of creation—this execution and its toil.

This loving description of literary parentage is less ambivalent and more sentimental than Bradstreet's, but it presents a similar emphasis on birth leading to a lifetime of maternal nurturance. A theoretical approach that identifies male or female discourse as a quality solely in the text would have difficulty explaining that this metaphor is Honoré de Balzac's description of the creative process.³⁸ An approach that focuses on the reader in the identification of gendered discourse is better equipped to deal with the revelation of authorship. The meaning of Balzac's metaphor changes with the reader's awareness of its generator's sex. As a male metaphor, this nineteenth-century passage expresses a biologically impossible and historically unlikely embrace of motherhood. As a female metaphor, this passage would express a defiant reunion of what patriarchal culture has kept mutually exclusive—"this unwearying maternal love, this habit of creation." This difference of meaning in the very same words exists in the mind of the reader because of how gender generates alternative readings of the childbirth metaphor.

GENDER DIFFERENCE: WRITING THE CHILDBIRTH METAPHOR

The significance of "the reader in the text" does not preclude a corresponding analysis of the writer in the text. Gender "informs and complicates" the writing as well as the reading of the childbirth metaphor. Any given birth metaphor exists within the artist's individual vision and specific formulation—the function it serves within the larger text and project of the artist. Sidney's metaphor (see epigraph), for example, serves the larger purpose of implicating poetic inspiration with desire and initiating the Renaissance love plot: Astrophel's love for Stella makes "great with child to speak." Balzac identifies with woman's lifetime labor and Joyce separates himself from it. Levertov's mother- and father-poets exist to make her point that the poet is "in the world," not separate from it. T. S. Eliot takes recourse to the metaphor to express the opposite, his theory of the text's autonomy: "he is oppressed by a burden which he must bring to birth in order to obtain relief. . . . And then he can say to the poem: 'Go away! Find a place for

interpretive theory: reader tries to determine author's sex, judge text accordingly. Often text + author have contradictory genders.

Doesn't that make interpretation fixed, unfair? man: divine woman: rebel

artist's gender informs context gives metaphor meaning

yourself in a book—and don't expect *me* to take any further interest in you.”³⁹ Jean Rhys uses the metaphor to decide when to let go of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Her publisher reported that “she wrote to tell me that she had been having a recurring dream in which, to her dismay, she was pregnant. Then it came again, only this time the baby had been born and she was looking at it in its cradle—‘such a puny weak thing. So the book must be finished, and that must be what I think about it really. I don't dream about it any more.’”⁴⁰ The pervasive use of the birth metaphor at Los Alamos to describe the creation of the first atomic bomb (known as “Oppenheimer's baby,” christened informally as “Little Boy,” and dropped from a plane named Enola Gay, after the pilot's mother) serves to obscure the bomb's destructiveness and implicate women in its birth.⁴¹ At first glance, individual variation appears more significant than the author's sex to the full meaning of the childbirth metaphor.

Nonetheless, without denying exceptions to generalization, we can broadly cluster formulations of the birth metaphor along gender lines. These gender differences in the *writing* of the metaphor originate in the contrasting perspectives toward childbirth that women and men bring to their individual formulations. For biological and historical reasons, childbirth is an event whose meaning is constituted differently by women and men. This difference informs why they use it and what they use it for. Men's use of the metaphor begins in distance from and attraction to the Other. Karen Horney, for example, asks if men's “impulse to create” is “due to their feeling of playing a relatively small part in the creation of living beings, which constantly impels them to an overcompensation in achievement.” Gershon Legman applies this theory specifically to the male birth metaphor, which he calls “a male motherhood of authorship,” an archetypal fantasy of great power and persistence determined by largely unconscious fear and envy of woman's sexual and reproductive powers. Elizabeth Sacks expands on this “womb envy” to say that the male metaphor serves as “an essential outlet for unconscious or repressed feminine elements in the masculine psyche.”⁴² Its use reflects the attempt to reabsorb into consciousness those repressed elements in themselves that culture has projected onto woman. Because of these psychological determinants, then, the male metaphor might be a covert, indeed, largely unconscious, tribute to woman's special generative power, a vestige from the worship of the primal goddess as paradigm of (pro)creativity. This “tribute” is deceptive, however. The male comparison of creativity with woman's procreativity equates the two as if both were valued equally, whereas they are not. This elevation of procreativity seemingly idealizes woman and thereby obscures woman's real lack of authority to create art as well as babies. As an appropriation of women's (pro)creativity, the male metaphor subtly helps to perpetuate the confinement of women to procreation.

On the whole, the function of male birth metaphors within the context of the writer's larger vision tends to reflect the dominant cultural representations of woman's nature current in a given historical era. Throughout the evolution of Judeo-Christian patriarchy, women have served as the symbol for qualities men desire and reject, revere and fear, envy and hate. Defined and controlled within an androcentric system of representation, the ideological concepts of women's sexual and reproductive powers have been the backbone of these ambivalent perspectives. This general representation stands behind the evolution of mean-

ing in the male birth metaphor described by Terry Castle. She notes, for example, that male birth metaphors were abundant both during the Enlightenment and the Romantic era—but with opposite meanings. Satirists like Pope and Dryden associated the human birth process with “deformed poetic productivity” and regularly deflected in onto the enemy poet. The bad poet was above all a “begetter” who breeds out of his own distempered fancy repulsive “offspring” because his lack of reason makes him like “the one who gives birth, who conceives and brings forth, [who] is nowhere in control, but rather is subject to a purely spontaneous animal function.” Castle argues that the equally abundant, but overwhelmingly positive uses of the birth metaphor in the Romantic period resulted from a fundamental change in poetics. The Romantics repeatedly used the metaphor not to condemn their enemies but to define the production of art as “a spontaneous process independent of intention, precept, or even consciousness.”⁴³ Women’s lack of control over pregnancy attracted the Romantics, who affirmed the “organic nature of poetic genius” that produces a poem effortlessly, without the painful struggle of the intellect. As Percy Shelley wrote in his *Defense of Poetry*, “a great statue or picture grows under the power of the artist as a child in the mother’s womb.”⁴⁴

What Castle did not note is that this shift from repulsion to idealization parallels a historical evolution in the representation of women. In both periods, the organic processes of human body were symbolically associated with women, along with emotion and intuition. However, the Enlightenment celebration of Reason incorporated a definition of the body as the inferior, “animal” aspect of human nature. Although the eighteenth century saw the dramatic rise of writing by and for women, disgust for sheer physicality or emotionalism often represented by woman was common among the Augustan satirists.⁴⁵ Consequently, eighteenth-century male birth metaphors embodied this intertwined disgust for woman and the human body she represented. In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, John Locke’s attack on all metaphor as a mode of knowledge illustrates this matrix of meaning. He calls metaphor a “monstrous birth,” a dangerous “changeling” of the rational mind, and further denounces it by likening it to woman, whose seductive power enslaves the masculine mind. As woman seduces man, so metaphor traps reason, and procreativity inhibits creativity.⁴⁶ Within such a gynophobic ethos, the childbirth metaphor becomes the ultimate insult to a male artist’s creativity.

The Romantic period’s embrace of intuition, emotion, organicism—all qualities associated with the feminine—transformed the birth metaphor into something positive. But whether rejected as repulsive or celebrated as creative, woman’s procreativity in both the Enlightenment and the Romantic periods was perceived through an androcentric lens as a mindless, unconscious, uncontrolled act of the body. Both the positive and negative manifestations of the male metaphor perpetuate the mind–body split it attempts to transcend through analogy. Both therefore reaffirm creativity as the province of men and procreativity as the primary destiny of women.

For women, as for men, use of the childbirth metaphor is psychologically charged and overdetermined. But while men’s use of the metaphor begins in a fascination for the Other, women’s use originates in conflict with themselves as Other. Unlike men, women using the metaphor necessarily confront the patriar-

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chally imposed, essential dilemma of their artistic identity: the binary system that conceives woman and writer, motherhood and authorhood, babies and books, as mutually exclusive. Women writers have faced childbirth with an ambivalence born of its association with their status in society. Consequently, their birth metaphors variously encode the very issues of their authorship as women and their womanhood as authors.

The childbirth metaphors of women and men differ not only in their psychological charge but also in their function within the larger work. While men's metaphors often reflect the ethos of their times, women's metaphors tend to be deeply personal statements about how they try to resolve their conflict with cultural prescription. Because of its affirmation of a unified (pro)creation, Levertov's birth metaphor is more like the birth metaphors of Bradstreet and Philips than it is like the ambivalent birth metaphors of some contemporary women writers. Not so predictably in tune with the times as male metaphors, female metaphors are often figurative expressions of the strategies by which their authors confront the double bind of the woman writer: how to be a woman and a writer within a discourse that has steadfastly separated the two. Consequently, where men's metaphors tend to perpetuate the separation of creativities, women's metaphors tend to deconstruct it.

In general, women's birth metaphors cover a wide spectrum of personal statement, reproducing the central debates over the relationship between poetics and the body. At one end of the continuum, women's birth metaphors express a fundamental acceptance of a masculinist aesthetic that separates creativity and procreativity. At the other end of the continuum is a defiant celebration of (pro)creation, a gynocentric aesthetic based on the body. At points along the spectrum are expressions of fear, ambivalence, and a dialectical search for transcendence of the binary system of creativity. Although any one of these metaphoric expressions might be found at different historical periods, the more widespread feminism has been at any given point in time, the more likely it has been for birth metaphors to cluster at the subversive end of the spectrum. In the twentieth century, the spread of feminism has combined with the greater freedom for discourses on sexuality to break the relative silence about the childbirth in literary discourse. Although childbirth has been central to women's experience, it has been at the periphery of literary representation until the last fifty years. As Muriel Rukeyser notes, "one is on the edge of the absurd the minute one tries to relate the experience of birth to the silence about it in poetry."⁴⁷ For a long time women have indirectly addressed this largely ignored, trivialized, distorted, or taboo subject by introducing their versions of the birth metaphor into literary discourse. Concurrent with the second wave of feminism from about 1965 to the present, there has been an explosion of women's writing about pregnancy, childbirth, nursing, and motherhood. Birth imagery to describe the self-creation of both woman and artist permeates contemporary women's writing. Nonetheless, women's birth metaphors still retain an individual stamp encoding each woman's negotiation of the conflict between creation and procreation. An exploration of women's writing at different points along the continuum will illustrate representative resolutions of this conflict, as well as the basic contrast with male birth metaphors.

The first point on the continuum of women's birth metaphors is the use of the

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denial 1) metaphor to confirm the patriarchal separation of creativities. Fanny Appleton Longfellow, for example, relies on the metaphor to explain her resignation from creative work to engage in procreative labor. She stopped writing her journal after the birth of her first baby and notes in her final entry: "With this day my journal ends, for I have now a living one to keep faithfully, more faithfully than this." Less Victorian than Mrs. Longfellow, Elinor Wylie nonetheless uses the metaphor to express her sense of failure as a woman after repeated miscarriages. She thinks of her poems as substitute children, born of a mother *manqué*. Margaret Mead, a writer, mother, and feminist, projects her anxiety about this rebellious combination onto her statement that "something very special happens to women when they know that they will not have a child—or any more children. . . . Suddenly, their whole creativity is released—they paint or write as never before."⁴⁸ These women from different historical periods nonetheless write into their analogies a belief that procreation and creation are mutually exclusive.

year 2) + desire The next point along the continuum is birth metaphors encoding a fear of combining creation and procreation. Given that the underside of fear is often desire, such metaphors contain a matrix of forbidden wish and guilt for trespass. Mary Shelley, daughter of feminist Mary Wollstonecraft, did not have her mother's inbred belief that women could fulfill the desire for both writing and mothering.⁴⁹ In *Frankenstein*, she relies on an elaborate narrative of the birth metaphor to express her essential fear that the patriarchal separation of creativities is necessary. The novel is a macabre reversal of the male Romantic metaphors of organic creativity. Shelley uses the metaphor negatively in both the narrative and her 1831 preface to a later edition. She refers to her book as "my hideous progeny," an "offspring" about a scientist who seeks to discover "the deepest mysteries of creation" by procreating life. Frankenstein's quest takes the form of doing with his brain what women do with their bodies, a point Shelley emphasizes with her pervasive analogies between his work and the stages of woman's "confinement" throughout the preface and the narrative.⁵⁰ The life he creates from the womb of his brain, however, is not the beautiful child of woman's production, but a hideous-looking monster who terrifies his "father" and "creator." Frankenstein rejects his creation, denies the monster's repeated requests for love, and thereby sets in motion the monster's revengeful destruction of Frankenstein's family. One approach to this multifaceted tale is to read it as an exploration of creativity ridden with anxiety and anger about gender, motherhood, and artistic creation. Look at what happens, Shelley seems to say, when men try to procreate. And what will happen when I try to create like a man?⁵¹

questioning: can the 3) are they each good? Mary Shelley's encoded ambivalence is not far on the spectrum from women's use of the metaphor to explore more directly their desire for and fear of possible fusion of literary and literal motherhood. Sylvia Plath's fascination with pregnancy and childbirth is evident in a number of pathbreaking poems about women's ambivalence toward the changes in their bodies and identity that pregnancy brings, works such as "Three Women: A Poem for Three Voices," "Metaphors," "Morning Song," "You're," "Heavy Women," and "Nick and the Candlestick." "I'm a riddle in nine syllables/ . . . / I've eaten a bag of green apples,/ Boarded the train there's no getting off," she writes in "Metaphors."⁵² Delighted with her experience of natural childbirth, what Adrienne Rich has called unalienated labor, Plath could write playfully about procreation as well.⁵³

But first as a "riddle in nine syllables" and later, a mother-poet who, in the last year of her life, had to write at four A.M. before her babies awoke, Plath's childbirth metaphors for creativity are ridden with self-loathing and fear of motherhood as biological entrapment. The "childless woman" in "Childless Woman" is a poet whose "womb/ Rattles its pod/. . . / Uttering nothing but blood." After the birth of her second child, she wrote a terrifying poem called "Barren Woman," in which her womb's emptiness is a metaphor for the emptiness of her creative mind.⁵⁴ In "Stillborn," the union of creation and procreation presages the silence of death.

These poems do not live: it's a sad diagnosis.
They grew their toes and fingers well enough

. . . .

They sit so nicely in the pickling fluid!
They smile and smile and smile and smile at me.

. . . .

But they are dead, and their mother near dead with distraction,
And they stupidly stare, and do not speak of her.⁵⁵

In contrast to Plath, Erica Jong lives in a time and place where feminism has made the combination of motherhood and authorhood more acceptable. Reflecting this historical change, her birth metaphors are less fearful than Plath's. Nonetheless, Jong's ambivalence leads her to embrace and then reject the metaphor, a wavering that suggests her awareness of the metaphor's double potential for regression and liberation. Poetry written before her own pregnancy uses metaphors of menstruation, pregnancy, and birth to test out the relationship between her body and her art. In "Dear Marys, Dear Mother, Dear Daughter," she recognizes that "Doctor Frankenstein/ was punished/ for his pride:/ the hubris of a man/ creating life."⁵⁶ In "Menstruation in May," Jong attempts to unite mind and body, creation and procreation.

I squeeze my breast
for the invisible ink of milk.
I bear down hard—
no baby's head appears.
The poems keep flowing monthly
like my blood.
The word is flesh, I say
still unconvinced.
The Flesh is flesh.
The word is on its own.⁵⁷

Jesus was the incarnate God, the Word made flesh. Can woman, Jong asks, unite her word with her flesh? She tries out the same metaphoric equation of milk and ink that Cixous uses, but her attempt to posit a single (pro)creative process leaves her "still unconvinced." In "Playing with the Boys," Jong expresses more confidence in a body-based aesthetic as she links her pen, menstruation, and potential to birth babies in the definition of her art.

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I am not part of their game.
 I have no penis.
 I have a pen, two eyes
 & I bleed monthly.

When the moon shines on the sea
 I see the babies
 riding on moonwaves
 asking to be born.⁵⁸

When Jong became pregnant, however, this wavering turned into outright hostility to the birth metaphor in her essay "Creativity vs. Generativity." "Only a man (or a woman who had never been pregnant)," she writes, "would compare creativity to maternity, pregnancy to the creation of a poem or novel."⁵⁹ Underlying her resistance to the metaphor is both anger and fear. She quotes Joyce's letter to his wife and hears a territorial hostility to women writers in the male metaphor: "Men have the feeling that women can create life in their bodies therefore, how dare they create art?"⁶⁰ Even more deeply, she fears that pregnancy will sabotage her creative drive: "I have dreaded pregnancy as a loss of control over my destiny, my body and my life. I had fantasies of death in childbirth, the death of my creativity during pregnancy, the alteration of my body into something monstrous, the loss of my intelligence through mysterious hormonal sabotage."⁶¹

While Jong oscillates between inviting, then banishing, the association of creation and procreation, H. D. used the birth metaphor to explore the process of moving from ambivalence toward motherhood to a celebration of its connection to authorship. She represents a further point on the continuum, the move to use the metaphor as a poetic for women's writing. In her *roman à clef*, *Asphodel*, for example, H. D. expresses the fear she felt during her first pregnancy that the attempt to combine speech and childbirth was a form of madness:

When her flaming mind beat up and she found she was caught, her mind not taking her as usual like a wild bird but her mind-wings beating, beating and her feet caught, her feet caught, glued like a wildbird in a bird lime. . . . No one had known this. No one would ever know it for there were no words to tell it in. . . . Women can't speak and clever women don't have children. So if a clever woman does speak, she must be mad. She is mad. She wouldn't have had a baby, if she hadn't been.⁶²

The image of a wild bird caught in bird lime is a metaphor for the tie between creation and procreation against which the poet struggles in fear. This pregnancy ends traumatically in stillbirth. But later in the novel, H. D. transforms that bondage into a powerful bond. With the flight of a wild swallow as omen, she decides not to abort her second pregnancy but to take the birth of her child as a symbol of a regenerated poetic identity. The experience of pregnancy itself doesn't hinder, but rather releases, her creative drive.⁶³ H. D. later encodes this resolution into the mythos of her complex epics of the forties and fifties. Incarnating the birth metaphor, the Lady in *Trilogy* and Isis in *Hermetic Definition* are goddesses whose procreative power can regenerate human life and inspire the

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poet. The Lady is the pregnant Word, but she appears to the poet without the Child, bearing instead the empty book of life which the poet must complete. Isis inspires the aging poet who feels silenced by men, either in their capacity as lovers or as fellow poets. The lover's double rejection of her writing and womanhood has been particularly devastating. The poet frees herself from his negative influence by writing a poem about him, a poem whose progress she charts as the trimesters of pregnancy. Her poem is the child; its birth signals her freedom from obsession. The poet-as-procreator fuses with the mother-as-poet in the metaphoric world of the poem.⁶⁴ H. D.'s Isis and Lady serve as Mother-Muses whose (pro)creative message implies an aesthetic based on the female body.

Like H. D., the experience of childbirth itself altered Muriel Rukeyser's poetics and led her to use the childbirth metaphor in "The Poem as Mask" to articulate her new sense of poetic identity and direction. Recalling the dismemberment of the archetypal poet Orpheus, the poet regards her earlier Orpheus poems as false masks that testify to her alienation. They were "myself, split open, unable to speak, in exile from myself." Childbirth, however, functions as her literal "dismemberment," one which allows her poet-self to incarnate the real Orpheus: "There is memory/ of my torn life, myself split open in sleep, the rescued child/ beside me among the doctors." No more are her poems "masks": "Now, for the first time, the god lifts his hand,/ the fragments join in me with their own music."⁶⁵ Attesting to the inspirational power of her new (pro)creative aesthetic, "Nine Poems for the Unborn Child" and *Body of Waking* weave meditations on pregnancy and art that insistently relate authorship and motherhood.

"Split open" in the stillbirth of her premature baby, Anaïs Nin similarly experiences a transformation, one that leads her to embrace (pro)creation as a self-conscious, prescriptive aesthetic. As the next point on the continuum, Nin uses the birth metaphor to advocate a feminine form of writing, one that proceeds from the body. Otto Rank, her analyst, sharply posed the tradition of separated creativities for her: "Perhaps," he told her, "you may discover now what you want—to be a woman or an artist." Later, he added that "to create it is necessary to destroy. Woman cannot destroy . . . that may be why she has rarely been a great artist."⁶⁶ While pregnant, Nin struggled to finish *Winter of Artifice* and repeatedly used the birth metaphor in her diary to describe her labor: "Writing now shows the pains of childbearing. . . . I yearn to be delivered of this book. It is devouring me."⁶⁷ Writing about the stillbirth in her diary and the short story "Birth" led Nin to counter Rank's phallic aesthetic with a body-based aesthetic of her own. "The art of woman," she writes, "must be torn in the womb-cells of the mind. . . . woman's creation far from being like man's must be exactly like her creation of children, that is it must come out of her own blood, englobed by her womb, nourished with her own milk."⁶⁸ As she pursues the meaning of a womb-based art, however, Nin becomes entangled in the regressive biologisms that concern Showlater, Auerbach, and de Beauvoir. "Woman does not forget she needs the fecundator," Nin muses, "she does not forget that everything that is born of her is planted in her. If she forgets this she is lost . . . a woman alone creating is not a beautiful spectacle. . . . The woman was born mother, mistress, wife, sister, she was born to represent union, communion, communication. . . . Woman was born to be the connecting link between man and his human self. . . . Woman's role in creation should be parallel to her role in life."⁶⁹ Nin's difficulty in

6) writing from the body
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but still caught up in biologic dualism so womb placed in service of men

separating the womb from woman's traditional role as man's support led her to create a birth metaphor that was itself a trap. Its determinism prescribed what women should write and how they must direct their creative energies toward the support of men, who are the necessary fecundators of women's writing.

Not all self-consciously formulated poetics of the female body have led women into prescriptive or deterministic entrapment, however. Representing the next point along the spectrum, Ntozake Shange uses the birth metaphor to chart the evolution of her poetics from the "universality" of male discourse to the specificity of female discourse. In "wow . . . yr just like a man," she tells of how she sought the approval of male poets by suppressing "alla this foolishness bout . . . bodies & blood & kids & what's really goin on at home/ well & that ain't poetry/ that's goo-ey gaw/ female stuff/ & she wasn't like that/ this woman they call a poet." The birth metaphor is sign and symptom of her transformation:

as a woman & a poet/ i've decided to wear my ovaries on my sleeve/ raise my poems on milk/ & count my days by the flow of my mensis/ the men who were poets were aghast/ they fled the scene in fear of becoming unclean . . . and she waz left with an arena of her own . . . where music & mensis/ are considered very personal/ & language a tool for exploring space.⁷⁰

Shange's recent volume of poetry celebrates this female poetic in an uproarious poem entitled "Oh, I'm 10 Months Pregnant," in which a weary, pregnant poet complains to her doctor about how "the baby was confused/ the baby doesn't know/ she's not another poem":

this baby wants to jump out of my mouth
at a reading someplace/
the baby's refusing to come out/down
she wants to come out a spoken word
& i have no way to reach her/she is
no mere choice of words/how can i convince her
to drop her head & take on the world like the
rest of us⁷¹

Shange's new female poetic, fed by her own disruptively "unclean" body, is written in black English, a linguistic act that implicitly characterizes her aesthetic not only as female but also as Afro-American. In her essay "One Child of One's Own," Alice Walker uses the childbirth metaphor to define even more directly the fusion of her womanhood and blackness in her writing. She makes black women's double-birthing powers the foundation of a (pro)creativity that defies both sexism and racism. White feminists, she writes, have ignored black women's motherhood of both books and babies—by leaving black women's writing out of their anthologies and critical books; by keeping black women's sexuality and mothering invisible, as in the nonvaginal design of the Sojourner Truth plate in Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party*. Walker's completion of her first novel three days before her daughter's birth reconstitutes the (pro)creativity that racism and sexism have suppressed: "I had changed forever. From a woman whose 'womb' had been in a sense, her head—that is to say, certain small seeds had gone in, rather different if not larger or better 'creations' had come out—to a woman who

birth
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feminine
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... had two wombs! No. To a woman who had written books, conceived in her head, and who had also engendered at least one human being in her body."⁷²

Lesbian writers have faced an even more severe cultural denial of their procreative womanhood in the homophobic belief that lesbianism and motherhood are mutually exclusive categories. Lesbians, many of whom are themselves mothers, use the childbirth metaphor to define a poetic of the body and affirm a vision of regenerated womanhood and world. In "Metamorphosis," Pat Parker describes how her love for a woman impregnated her with the vision central to her poetry: "fill me with you/ & I become/pregnant with love/ give birth/ to revolution."⁷³ Like Paula Gunn Allen's celebration of the Spider Creatrix of Southwest Indian religion in "Prologue" and in "Grandmother," Judy Grahn's hymn "She Who" envisions a multidimensioned birth that reenacts the primal power of woman's (pro)creativity.

the labor of She Who carries and bears is the first
labor all over the world
the waters are breaking everywhere
everywhere the waters are breaking
the labor of She Who carries and bears
and raises and rears is the first labor,
there is no other first labor.⁷⁴

Lucille Clifton's sequence of Kali poems serves as a fitting conclusion to the wide spectrum of uses to which women writers of all periods have put the birth metaphor. In brilliantly condensed form, Clifton fuses literary and biological childbirth in a way that incorporates experience and aesthetic, terror and joy, ambivalence and celebration, separation and transcendence, body and spirit, animal and divine, pain and exultation. "She Understands Me" is a central poem in the sequence about her muse, the terrifying force of creativity she names after the black Hindu Goddess Kali:

it is all blood and breaking
blood and breaking, the thing
drops out of its box squalling
into the light, they are both squalling,
animal and cage, her bars lie wet, open
and empty and she has made herself again
out of flesh out of dictionaries,
she is always emptying and it is all
the same wound the same blood the same breaking.⁷⁵

The line "out of flesh out of dictionaries" is key, invoking the familiar birth metaphor linking babies and words. But where the male poet's conceit necessarily reinforces the division of mind and body, Clifton creates an ambiguity of subject highlighted by the absence of space between sentences and the lack of capitalization. The poem is simultaneously about the birth of a child and a poem. It is a visceral, raw view of childbirth, one that stresses the animal-like power of a transrational force but not in the negative mode of the Enlightenment metaphors. Clifton forthrightly names the process of (pro)creativity: the preg-

nant mind-body empties herself, squalling and bloody. The title, which suggests that the muse and mother understand each other, unifies the two subjects of the poem so that creativity and procreativity are inseparably joined. Indeed, the poem suggests ultimately that the poet's pregnancy produces multiple births. "She has made herself again": she is her own mother as well as mother to squalling babies and poems. She is both word and flesh, by divine and poetic authority.

CONCLUSION

The childbirth metaphor for creativity illustrates how gender "informs and complicates the reading and writing of texts." The basic analogy of creation and procreation remains the same for both women and men. However, female and male metaphors mean differently and mean something different, indeed something opposite. Male metaphors intensify difference and collision, while female metaphors enhance sameness and collusion. In spite of individual variation, male metaphors often covertly affirm the traditional separation of creativity and procreativity. Female metaphors, in contrast, tend to defy those divisions and reconstitute woman's fragmented self into a (pro)creative whole uniting word and flesh, body and mind.

These gender differences in childbirth metaphors project contrasting concepts of creativity. The male childbirth metaphor paradoxically beckons woman toward the community of creative artists by focusing on what she alone can create, but then subtly excludes her as the historically resonant associations of the metaphor reinforce the separation of creativities into mind and body, man and woman. The female childbirth metaphor challenges this covert concept of creativity by proposing a genuine bond between creation and procreation and by suggesting a subversive community of artists who can literally and literarily (pro)create. This biologic poetic does indeed run the risk of biological determinism, as de Beauvoir and others have feared. It theoretically privileges motherhood as the basis of all creativity, a position that symbolically excludes women without children and all men. It also tends toward a prescriptive poetic that potentially narrows the range of language and experience open to women writers. But women's childbirth metaphors have also served for centuries as a linguistic reunion of what culture has sundered, a linguistic defense against confinement. Long before Cixous's utopian essay about the *future* inscription of femininity, women have subverted the regressive birth metaphor and transformed it into a sign representing their own delivery into speech through (pro)creativity. Emerging like women themselves from the confinement of patriarchal literary tradition, birth metaphors have celebrated women's birthright to creativity. Women's oppression begins with the control of the body, the fruits of labor. Consequently, many women writers have gone directly to the source of powerlessness to reclaim that control through the labor of the mind pregnant with the word.

NOTES

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1. For discussions of male childbirth metaphors, see Terry J. Castle, "La'bring Bards: Birth *Topoi* and English Poetics," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 78 (April 1979): 193-208; Mary Ellmann, *Thinking about Women* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968), 2-27; Elizabeth Sacks, *Shakespeare's Images of Pregnancy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980); Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Putnam, 1953), 131-34; Gershon Legman, *Rationale of the Dirty Joke: An Analysis of Sexual Humor* (New York: Grove Press, 1968), 592-96; John H. Smith's "Dialogic Midwifery in Kleist's *Marquise von O* and the Hermeneutics of Telling the Untold in Kant and Plato," *PMLA* 100 (March 1985): 203-18; and Patricia Yaeger's letter to Smith in *PMLA* 100 (October 1985): 812-13. For discussions of female birth metaphors, see Susan Gubar, "The Birth of the Artist as Heroine: (Re)production, the *Kunstlerroman* Tradition, and the Fiction of Katherine Mansfield," in *The Representation of Women in Fiction*, ed. Carolyn G. Heilbrun and Margaret R. Higonnet (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 19-59; Susan Gubar, "'The Blank Page' and the Issues of Female Creativity," *Critical Inquiry* 8 (Winter 1981): 243-64; and Sandra M. Gilbert, *Mother-Rites: Studies in Literature and Maternity*, a work in progress.

2. See Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 2-106, esp. 2-16; see also Ellmann, 2-27.

3. Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, in this volume and in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), 251, 256, 261. See also Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 23-33, 205-18; Carolyn Greenstein Burke, "Report from Paris: Women's Writing and the Women's Movement," *Signs* 3 (Summer 1978): 843-55; Ann Rosalind Jones, "Writing the Body: Toward and Understanding of *L'écriture féminine*," in this volume and in *Feminist Studies* 7 (Summer 1981): 247-63; and Susan Rubin Suleiman, "(Re)Writing the Body: The Politics and Poetics of Female Eroticism," in *The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Susan Rubin Suleiman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986): 7-29.

4. Stephanie Mines, "My Own Impression," in *Networks: An Anthology of San Francisco Bay Area Women Poets*, ed. Carol A. Simone (Palo Alto: Vortex, 1979), 118; Sharon Olds, "The Language of the Brag," *Ms. Magazine* (August 1980): 38.

5. Ellmann, *Thinking about Women*, 2-27.

6. Simone de Beauvoir, "Interview with Alice Schwarzer," *Der Spiegel* (April 1976): quoted in Silvia Bovenschen, "Is There a Feminine Aesthetic? *New German Critique* 10 (Winter 1977): 122; Elaine Showalter, "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness," *Critical Inquiry* 8 (Winter 1981): 187-88; Nina Auerbach, "Artists and Mothers: A False Alliance," *Women and Literature* 9 (Spring 1978): 3-5, and her review of *The Madwoman in the Attic*, by Gilbert and Gubar, *Victorian Studies* 23 (Summer 1980): 506; Jones, 61-63; Erica Jong, "Creativity vs. Generativity: The Unexamined Lie," *The New Republic* 180 (13 Jan. 1979): 27.

7. Elizabeth Abel, Editor's Introduction, *Critical Inquiry* 8 (Winter 1981): 173.

8. Cixous, 248. This view may do more to dismiss and trivialize the subversive achievement and survival of women writers against a hostile culture than the patriarchal

- canon itself. See Alicia Ostriker, "Comment on Margaret Homan's 'Her Very Own Howl': The Ambiguities of Representation in Recent Women's Fiction," *Signs* 10 (Spring 1985): 597-600.
9. Max Black, "More about Metaphor," in *Metaphor and Thought*, ed. Andrew Ortony (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 26.
10. Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill & Wang, 1976), 75-77. See also Catharine R. Stimpson's discussion of Barthes in "Zero Degree Deviancy: The Lesbian Novel in English," in this volume and in *Critical Inquiry* 8 (Winter 1981): 363-80. For discussions of contextual analysis of metaphors, see George Whalley, "Metaphor," in *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 494; and Wayne C. Booth, "Ten Literal 'Theses,'" in *On Metaphor*, ed. Sheldon Sacks (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 173-74.
11. Quoted in Tillie Olsen, *Silences* (New York: Delta, 1972), 199-200.
12. For discussions of the incompatibility of motherhood and authorship, see, for example, Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (1929; reprint, New York: Harcourt Brace & World, 1957), 20-24, 69-70; Olsen, 6-21; Lola Ridge, "Woman and the Creative Will" (1919), in *Michigan Occasional Papers* 18 (Spring 1981): 1-23; Catharine R. Stimpson, "Power, Presentations, and the Presentable," in *Issues in Feminism: A First Course in Women's Studies*, ed. Sheila Ruth (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980), 426-40; Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: Norton, 1976), 156-62; and the sharp exchange between George Sand and a male writer in Bovenschen, 114-15.
13. See, for example, the theories of female inferiority of intellect and creative genius by men such as Aristotle, Aquinas, Rousseau, Kant, Darwin, and Schopenhauer, excerpted in *History of Ideas on Women: A Source Book*, ed. Rosemary Agonito (New York: Putnam, 1977). See also critiques of scientific theories of female inferiority in Ruth Bleier, *Science and Gender: A Critique of Biology and Its Theories on Women* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1984); and James Hillman, *The Myth of Analysis: Three Essays in Archetypal Psychology* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), 215-99.
14. Gen. 3: 16-19, John, 1: 1-4. See also Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon, 1973); Gilbert; Diane Wolkstein and Samuel Noah Kramer, *Inanna: Queen of Heaven and Earth, Her Stories and Hymns for Sumer* (New York: Harper, 1983); J. A. Phillips, *Eve: The History of an Idea* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984); Merlin Stone, *When God Was a Woman* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978).
15. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (1883), trans. and selected by Agonito in her *History of Ideas on Women*, 268.
16. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (1949; reprint, New York: Bantam, 1968), xv.
17. Julia Kristeva, *About Chinese Women*, trans. Anita Barrows (New York: Urizen Books, 1974), 35-36.
18. See, for example, Susan R. Suleiman and Inge Crossman, eds., *The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).
19. Paul Ricoeur, "The Metaphorical Process as Cognition, Imagination, and Feeling," in *On Metaphor*, 146. For recent theoretical debates on metaphor, see, in addition to *On Metaphor*, Whalley; Ortony; and *Philosophical Perspectives on Metaphor*, ed. Mark Johnson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981). For a discussion of metaphor and speech act theory, see Ted Cohen, "Figurative Speech and Figurative Acts," in *Philosophical Perspectives on Metaphor*, 182-99.
20. Karsten Harries, "Metaphor and Transcendence," in *On Metaphor*, 71.
21. Ricoeur, in *On Metaphor*, 145-47, 151-54.
22. Paul de Man, "The Epistemology of Metaphor," in *On Metaphor*, 11-14, 28.

23. Ted Cohen, "Metaphor and the Cultivation of Intimacy," in *On Metaphor*, 6, 7.
24. The term "headbirth," a variation on the more common "brainchild," is featured in Günter Grass's novel *Headbirths, or the Germans Are Dying Out*, trans. Ralph Mannheim (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982). Advertisements for the novel show an embryo emerging from a male head, still attached to the brain by a twisting umbilical cord, a visual form that highlights the biological incongruity of the male birth metaphor.
25. Levertov, 107.
26. Lady Holland, *Memoir*, quoted in Legman, 593. Like Levertov's father-poet, this metaphor features a female author and male actor, a dissonance that contributes to the metaphor's wit as much as the actor's biological incapacity to give birth.
27. Richard Ellman, ed. *Selected Letters of James Joyce* (New York: Viking, 1975), 202-3. See also his *James Joyce: A Biography* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 306-9.
28. James Joyce, *Ulysses* (1922; rev. ed., New York: Random House, 1961), 383-428. See also Ellmann, ed., *Selected Letters*, 230, 251-52; and the discussion of "Oxen in the Sun" in Phillip F. Herring, *Joyce's Ulysses Notesheets in the British Museum* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1972), 30-37, 162-264. Joyce's envy of female procreation is evident in Bloom's hallucination of giving birth in the "Circe" episode of *Ulysses* (429-609) and in the irony that perpetually undercuts the products of men's minds in his works (such as the narrator's increasingly jumbled words in "Oxen in the Sun" and Stephen's sterility in both *Ulysses* and *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*).
29. Amy Lowell, "The Sisters," in *No More Masks! An Anthology of Poems by Women*, ed. Florence Howe and Ellen Bass (New York: Anchor, 1973), 40.
30. As Paul de Man describes all metaphors in *On Metaphor*, 11-14, 28.
31. Katherine Philips, "Upon the Death of Hector Philips," in *The World Split Open: Four Centuries of Women Poets*, ed. Louise Bernikow (New York: Random House, 1974), 59-60. For a discussion of women poet's re-vision of conventional elegy, see Celeste M. Schenck, "Feminism and Deconstruction: Re-Constructing the Elegy," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 5 (Spring 1986): 13-28.
32. John Woodbridge, "To My Dear Sister, The Author of These Poems," in *The Poems of Mrs. Anne Bradstreet*, with Introduction by Charles Eliot Norton (New York: The Duodecimos, 1897), 8.
33. Jeannine Hensley, ed., *The Works of Anne Bradstreet* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 221.
34. See, for example, James Smith, "Epistle Dedicatory, to the Reader" (1658), in which he writes: "Curteous Reader, I had not gone my full time when by a sudden fright, occasioned by the Beare and Wheel-barrow on the Bank-side, I fell in travaile, and therefore cannot call this a timely issue, but a Mischance, which I must put out to the world to nurse; hoping it will be fostered with the greater care, because of its own innocency," quoted in Sacks, *Shakespeare's Images of Pregnancy*, 6-7.
35. See *Works of Anne Bradstreet*, 221.
36. Woolf, 156-62. Judy Chicago, *Through the Flower: My Struggle As a Woman Artist* (1975; rev. ed. New York: Anchor Books, 1982), 141-44. See also Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro, "Female Imagery," *Womanspace Journal* 1 (Summer 1973): 11-14; Lucy R. Lippard, *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art* (New York: Dutton, 1978), 80-95; and Bovenschen.
37. Although beyond the scope of this essay, it would be fruitful to extend a reader response approach beyond the issue of the reader's awareness of the author's sex to the sex and perspective of the reader. A female reader, for example, might be more likely to hear the collisions in the male metaphor than a male reader. A woman who has experienced childbirth may be more likely to feel the reunion of creation and procreation in a female metaphor than a woman who cannot have or chooses not to have children. Women who resent the privilege that mothers in patriarchy have in relationship to women without chil-

dren may find the childbirth metaphor oppressive rather than subversive. Any discourse charged with gender issues will be differently understood by women and men and by individuals whose perspectives on those issues differ.

38. Quoted in Olsen, 12.

39. T. S. Eliot, *The Three Voices of Poetry* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1954), 29–30.

40. Diana Athill, *Smile Please: An Unfinished Biography* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 8–9.

41. I am indebted to Evelyn Fox Keller for sending her "Exposing Secrets," a Paper delivered at the conference "Feminist Studies: Reconstituting Knowledge," Milwaukee, April 1985, in which she quotes selected birth metaphors for the bomb collected by Brian Easlea in *Fathering the Unthinkable: Masculinity, Scientists, and the Nuclear Arms Race* (London: Pluto Press, 1983).

42. Karen Horney, *Feminine Psychology* (New York: Norton, 1967), 61; Legman, 592–96. Elizabeth Sacks, *Shakespeare's Images of Pregnancy*, 5.

43. Castle, 201–2, 205.

44. Percy Shelley, *Defence of Poetry*, in *Critical Theory Since Plato*, ed. Hazard Adams (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), 511. See Brewster Ghiselin's discussion of this organicism and the birth metaphor in his Introduction to *The Creative Process: A Symposium* (New York: Mentor, 1952), 21, and the examples of the birth metaphor in his selections from Thomas Wolfe, Allen Tate, Stephen Spender, Paul Valery, A. E. Houseman, and Amy Lowell. See also the repeated organic birth metaphors in Cary Nelson, *The Incarnate Word: Literature as Verbal Space* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973), 6, 22–23, 50–51, 126–27, 129–43, 161, 182–83, 196–97, 242.

45. See, for example, Susan Gubar, "The Female Monster in Augustan Satire," *Signs* 3 (Winter 1977): 380–94.

46. John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. John W. Yolton (New York, 1961), 2: 105–6, 115, 175. See de Man's discussion of Locke's fear of metaphor's disruptive discourse in *On Metaphor*, 11–28. See also Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957).

47. Muriel Rukeyser, "A Simple Theme," *Poetry* 74 (July 1949): 237. For a similar complaint, see E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (1927; reprint, New York: Harcourt Brace & World, 1974), 75. Women's private writings before the twentieth century are a much richer source for women's perspectives on childbirth than public discourse. See Judith Walzer Leavitt and Whitney Walton, "'Down to Death's Door': Women's Perceptions of Childbirth," in *Women and Health in America: Historical Essays*, ed. Judith Walzer Leavitt (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 155–65. For criticism on representations of childbirth in literature, see Gubar, "The Birch"; Rich, 164–67; Carol H. Poston, "Childbirth in Literature," *Feminist Studies* 4 (June 1978): 18–31; Madeleine Riley, *Brought to Bed* (New York: A. S. Barnes, 1968); Loralee MacPike, "The Social Values of Childbirth in the Nineteenth-Century Novel," *International Journal of Women's Studies* 3 (March–April 1980): 117–30; John Hawkins Miller, "'Temple and Sewer': Childbirth, Prudery, and Victoria Regina," in *The Victorian Family: Structure and Stresses*, ed. Anthony S. Wohl (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978); Irene Dash, "The Literature of Birth Abortion," *Regionalism and the Female Imagination* 3 (Spring 1977): 8–13; Rachel Blau DuPlessis, "Washing Blood," *Feminist Studies* 4 (June 1978): 1–12; Alicia Ostriker, "Body Language: Imagery of the Body in Women's Poetry," in *The State of Language*, ed. Leonard Michaels and Christopher Ricks (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 247–63.

48. Fanny Appleton Longfellow, *Mrs. Longfellow*, ed. Edward Wagenknecht (New York: Longmans, Green, 1956); Cheryl Walker, "The Experienced Woman Poet" (Paper delivered at the Modern Language Association Convention, December 1981); Margaret Mead, *Blackberry Winter: My Earlier Years* (New York: William Morrow, 1972), 246–47.

49. See Mary Poovey, "My Hideos Progeny": Mary Shelley and the Feminization of Romanticism," *PMLA* 95 (May 1980): 332-47.
50. Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein; or The Modern Prometheus* (1818; reprint, London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 10, 41, 48, 51-57, 99-109, 160, 222.
51. For different readings of Shelley's anxiety about motherhood, see Ellen Moers, *Literary Women: The Great Writers* (New York: Anchor, 1977), 138-51; Gilbert and Gubar, 213-47; Poovey; and Paul Sherwin, "Frankenstein: Creation or Catastrophe," *PMLA* 96 (October 1981): 883-903.
52. Sylvia Plath, *The Collected Poems*, ed. Ted Hughes (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), 116. For Plath's poems on pregnancy and birth as experience and/or metaphor, see 141-42, 157-58, 176-87, 240-42, 259, 272-73.
53. See, for example, "Metaphors," "You're," and "Heavy Women" in *Collected Poems*, 116, 141, 158. According to Ted Hughes, the birth of her first child was an exhilarating experience that contributed to the beginning of Plath's genuine poetic voice. See "Notes on the Chronological Order of Sylvia Plath's Poems," in *The Art of Sylvia Plath: A Symposium*, ed. Charles Newman (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1970), 193. For a discussion of the alienated and unalienated labors of childbirth, see Rich, 157-85.
54. Plath's *Collected Poems* 259, 157. See also Ostriker's discussion of Plath's negative body imagery in "Baby Language," 250-52.
55. Plath's *Collected Poems*, 142. Plath's friend Anne Sexton also used the metaphor of aborted birth to describe her feeling of artistic failure in "The Silence," in which "the words from my pen . . . leak out of it like a miscarriage." See *The Book of Folly* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972), 32-33.
56. Erica Jong, *Loveroot* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1975), 16-18.
57. Jong, *Loveroot*, 72-73.
58. Jong, *Loveroot*, 58-59.
59. Jong, "Creativity vs. Generativity," 27.
60. Jong, "Creativity vs. Generativity," 27, and Erica Jong, *Here Comes and Other Poems* (New York: Signet, 1975), 9.
61. Jong, "Creativity vs. Generativity," 28. See also "Penis Envy," in *Loveroot*, 81-82, and "Mother," in *Tangled Vines: A Collection of Mother & Daughter Poems*, ed. Lyn Lifson (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), 52. Since the birth of her child, Jong once again relates procreation and creation. See her letter in the *New York Times Book Review* (18 Dec. 1983): 30, which lists recent women's writing about childbirth, including her most recent volumes. *At the Edge of the Body*, published about the time of her child's birth, includes birth metaphors (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1979), 7-9, 24, 63.
62. H. D. (Hilda Doolittle), *Asphodel* (1921-22), 12. The unpublished manuscript is at Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. I am indebted to Beinecke Library and Perdita Schaffner (H. D.'s daughter and literary executor) for permission to quote from the manuscript.
63. For H. D.'s discussion of the creative "womb-brain," see her *Notes on Thought and Vision*, an essay on poetics written in 1919 shortly after the birth of her daughter (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1982), 19-22. For other accounts of childbirth reinforcing artistic creativity for women in the visual arts, see Tania Mourand in Lucy Lippard, "The Pains and Pleasures of Rebirth: Women's Body Art," *Art in America* 64 (May/June 1976): 79; Sandra Donaldson, "'Suddenly you've become somebody else': A Study of Pregnancy and the Creative Woman," an unpublished paper; Joelynn Snyder-Ott, *Women and Creativity* (Millbrae, Calif.: Les Femmes, 1978).
64. H. D., *Trilogy* (New York: New Directions, 1973), 89-105. H. D., *Hermetic Definition* (New York: New Directions, 1972). For related discussions of H. D., see Susan Stanford Friedman, *Psyche Reborn: The Emergence of H. D.* (Bloomington: Indiana University

Press, 1981), 45–55; Deborah Kelley Kloepfer, “Flesh Made Word: Maternal Inscription in H. D.,” *Sagetrieb* 3 (Spring 1984): 27–48; Vincent Quinn, “H. D.’s ‘Hermetic Definition’: The Poet as Archetypal Mother,” *Contemporary Literature* 18 (Winter 1977): 51–61.

65. Muriel Rukeyser, “The Poem as Mask,” *The Collected Poems* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978), 435. See also 148, 283–91, 303–10, 397–434.

66. Anaïs Nin, *The Diary, Volume One, 1931–1934*, ed. Gunther Stuhlmann (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1966), 309. See also 280–83, 290–94. Anaïs Nin, *The Diary, Volume Two, 1934–1939*, ed. Gunther Stuhlmann (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1967), 31. For a defense of Rank’s treatment of Nin, see Sharon Spencer, “Delivering the Woman Artist from the Silence of the Womb: Otto Rank’s Influence on Anaïs Nin,” *The Psychoanalytic Review* 69 (Spring 1982): 111–29.

67. Nin, *Diary, Volume One*, 314–15.

68. Nin, *Diary, Volume Two*, 233, 234. Anaïs Nin, “Birth,” in *Under a Glass Bell* (Chicago: Swallow Press, 1948), 96–101.

69. Nin, *Diary, Volume Two*, 233–34.

70. Ntozake Shange, *Nappy Edges* (New York: Bantam, 1978), 17.

71. Ntozake Shange, *A Daughter’s Geography* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1983), 31. See also “We Need a God Who Bleeds Now,” 51.

72. Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens: Womanist Prose* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), 361–83. Birth metaphors in the work of women of color and other minorities are especially common among contemporary writers. See also Audre Lorde, “Paperweight” and “Now That I Am Forever with Child” in *Networks*, 112–17; Sonia Sanchez, “Rebirth,” in *A Blues Book for Blue Black Magical Women* (Detroit: Broadside Press, 1974), 47; E. M. Broner, *Her Mothers* (Berkeley: Berkeley Medallion, 1975).

73. Pat Parker, *Movement in Black* (Oakland, Calif.: Diana Press, 1978), 132.

74. Paula Gunn Allen, “Prologue,” in *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows* (San Francisco: Spinsters, Ink, 1983), 1–2, and “Grandmother,” in *The Third Woman: Minority Women Writers of the United States*, ed. Dexter Fisher (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1982), 126. See “She Who,” in *The Work of a Common Woman: The Collected Poetry of Judy Grahn*, 1964–77 (Trumansburg, N.Y.: Crossing Press, 1978), 76–109. See also Radclyffe Hall’s central birth metaphor at the end of *The Well of Loneliness* (1928; reprint, New York: Pocket Books, 1950), 437.

75. Lucille Clifton, *An Ordinary Woman* (New York: Random House, 1974), 50. For the Kali sequence, see 47–62. Clifton writes extensively about motherhood in this volume and in her *Two-Headed Woman* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980).

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