Feminist Theory, Women's Writing
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Wollstonecraft’s rejection of the cultural and religious authority of *Paradise Lost* returns me to the questions with which I began in Chapter 1 about the complex mechanisms by which societies historically reproduce and refashion themselves and their structures of authority. All the texts I have examined in the previous chapters have, at one time or another, been excluded from the “canons” of literature, religion, and philosophy; they have been devalued as cultural noise, as information that has not been a part of the “messages” about our culture “we” wish to preserve. In this final chapter, I would like to examine the processes by which cultures distinguish between those kinds of knowledge that are valued and those that are excluded as irrelevant noise, looking at the largely invisible network of social relations and institutions that create and deploy cultural value. These processes, I argue, are not static and unchanging but dynamic and shifting.

I would like to begin to describe these dynamics with an allegory of enculturation and resistance drawn from one of my own classes. A few years ago, two students (both women) in my Introduction to Shakespeare class chose to write final papers on a subject that had been of concern to them throughout the term—Shakespeare’s representations of gender and sexuality. After “sophisticated and insightful” analyses that demonstrated they had internalized the appropriate critical discourse (mine), both students arrived at strikingly negative conclusions about their responses to Shakespeare’s plays. The first student wrote:
Women are portrayed negatively [in the plays], which can only lead me to believe that Shakespeare was a misogynist and the views in the plays were related to his own personal views. Perhaps he couldn’t have been a staunch misogynist because he was married, but I’m sure his wife obeyed his every command if these plays reflect his views on women at all. I realize that I have only read a few of his plays, so perhaps it is narrow-minded of me to make these statements, but they are only based on these plays and what I have found in them, not conclusive ones.

The other concluded:

I am left with a sour impression from Shakespeare as he depicts gender relations only in the framework of perpetuating the traditional ideologies—maintaining the dominance of males while publicly denouncing the empowerment of women. But then these traditional gender ideologies seem to be presented in such an obnoxiously conspicuous manner that perhaps our friend Mr. Shakespeare is attempting a little subversive drama. I suppose we will never know.

These students’ awakening feminist thinking created a frustrating dilemma for me, one that I am sure is familiar to most feminist teachers of the canon: although their resistance to the cultural authority of the Shakespeare canon struck a familiar and indeed sympathetic chord in me, in both instances, my first impulse was to defend Shakespeare, while deploring the cultural values his plays are frequently made to serve. But because I was reluctant to attack their hard-won and fragile sense that this “great author” was not exempt from critical evaluation, I was stopped in midcomment. If these students’ desire to “blame” the individual writer—in this case Shakespeare—for the cultural representations that inhabit his plays strikes the English professor or cultural critic in me as naïve or unsophisticated, my feelings do not necessarily invalidate their responses or make them in some absolute sense “wrong.” It seemed to me at the time, and still does, that their responses might be probed as a means of posing some questions about how cultural values take shape and perpetuate themselves, more specifically
about how feminist literary critics articulate and pass on cultural and political values to their students. These students were acting out (as students often do) the role of Terry Eagleton’s “child-as-theorist,” who is forever asking “impossibly fundamental questions” that “interrogate the whole form of social life” (1986, 171), in this case the social life of literary criticism, which structures both the meanings and the values we find in Shakespeare’s plays. Questions of this nature create several dilemmas for feminists, who, while challenging traditional systems of value, must deal with the institutional authority conferred upon them as “custodians of a discourse” on values.¹

My students, of course, are not children and are not naïve. Both have some familiarity with the kinds of “language games”² required by both literary criticism and feminism, and both have, to some extent, internalized rhetorical strategies and analytic biases that they have learned from me and their other teachers. Indeed, the second student’s comment might serve as a possible response to the first student, who wants to see the playwright as a “bad man,” a misogynist. The second student, a senior English major, has more successfully internalized the language games of criticism. She realizes there are alternatives to questioning the poet’s individual motives, and she can rely, at least implicitly, on the intentional fallacy to buttress her argument. Her two “rationalizations” of Shakespeare’s misogyny are totally contradictory; yet she feels compelled, at least in the last paragraph, to include both possibilities. She first tries to see Shakespeare as perpetuating the “traditional ideologies” of his own time which disempower women, contrasting that unconscious bias with our own, more enlightened views. The poet is the victim of his own “false consciousness”; so his shortcomings result more from ignorance than from viciousness. Her second ploy is to recuperate Shakespeare for modern feminism by seeing his representations of gender relations as ironic: by presenting such distasteful gender relations so obvi-

¹Eagleton 1983, 201; see also Froula 1983, 322.

²The term is Wittgenstein’s way of describing how various categories of utterance (such as literary criticism) can be defined in terms of rules specifying their properties and the uses to which they can be put. In this regard, a language game is not much different from what Bakhtin calls a “speech genre.”
ously, Shakespeare is really subverting them. In short, the second student has internalized critical orthodoxies the first student is still resisting, to wit: the critical orthodoxies of the New Criticism, in particular the intentional fallacy and the primacy of irony. The second student knows that because the great masterworks of literature are the vehicles of our cultural ideals—the best that has been thought and said—they cannot be seen as promoting vicious doctrines such as sexism, racism, or anti-Semitism (all, by the way, beliefs Shakespeare has at one time or another been accused of promoting). Critics have conventionally disposed of the problems created by such skewed values in exactly the same somewhat contradictory and ahistorical way: either Shakespeare is the product of his own culture and could not have resisted such widely held cultural values, or he is the astute observer of the human condition who managed to remain aloof from—or even ironically to subvert—what we in the twentieth century regard as immoral prejudices.

Although feminist literary critics have for at least two decades been questioning the ways in which traditional histories of Western literature have created the canon—the “‘great tradition’ of the ‘national literature’” (Eagleton 1983) which constitutes the content of the syllabi and anthologies used in most literature courses and which therefore determines what our students learn about the Western humanist tradition—they have also been prone to the same kind of confusion about literary value which my students and I experienced in this instance. Attempting to negotiate divided loyalties to feminist politics and the humanistic and liberal values of literary criticism, they have more often than not tried to forge some sort of dialectical synthesis between these two often conflicting ideological positions. Elizabeth Meese’s remark in Crossing the Double-Cross seems paradigmatic in this respect: “Obviously, certain writers such as Chaucer and Shakespeare enjoy permanence [in the canon], but there are numerous others whose reputations remain in a state of flux, waxing and waning in accord with the prevailing interests of the critical moment” (1986, 6). If the canon

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3For a fascinating study of the ways in which college students begin to internalize the epistemologies of the disciplines they are studying, see Belenky et al. 1986, especially their chapter on procedural knowledge.
allows for some flexibility, some rise and fall of literary reputations, while maintaining a hierarchy of indubitably great writers, then there must be some values that transcend the local politics and fluctuations of reputation. But for Eagleton’s child and for my students, it is crucial to ask why it is obvious that Shakespeare and Chaucer enjoy permanent and unquestioned membership in the canon of Western literature. If Shakespeare and Chaucer cannot be questioned, does that mean that their work embodies fundamental and transhistorical aesthetic values that cannot be questioned? If we answer “yes” then we risk reducing the feminist critique of the canon to a debate over literary fashion, over who’s in and who’s out this year. The questions my students’ responses intuitively, if tentatively, raise are the same two questions I. A. Richards asked in 1925: “What gives the experience of reading a certain poem [today we would say text] its value? Why is one opinion about works of art not as good as another” (5–6). Any inquiry into the nature of literary value which begins with these two questions, however, must be structured around a historical understanding of the various social and political contexts in which these questions are asked and answered.

The feminist argument about literary value is by now familiar. The canon—the tradition of “great literature” which constitutes Western culture—has been an exclusive and almost entirely male club; it has also been predominantly white, first-world, European, and ruling-class, but this fact, if it is mentioned at all by feminists, usually rates only a parenthesis (at least until recently). The very few women who have been admitted to the club (Austen, Dickinson, Woolf) are often subjected to backhanded compliments and miniaturization, if not withering scorn. But this criticism leaves unchallenged the fundamental assumptions about value which have created this oppression because it does not, in itself, suggest a historically and politically based theory of value to replace traditional accounts.

Mark Twain’s dismissal of Jane Austen (“It seems a great pity they allowed her to die a natural death”) is among the most spectacular examples of the scorn heaped on canonical women writers, but it is by no means unique; see Gilbert and Gubar 1979a, 109. Mary Ellmann (1968) and Joanna Russ (1983) have also documented the ways in which male writers have belittled the accomplishments of writing women.
During the 1970s and 1980s, when feminist critics raised the issue of how women's texts might be evaluated—and valued—four responses dominated. Throughout the 1970s, most feminist critics argued for the inclusion of newly recovered female writers in the canon, usually on a case-by-case basis, claiming that their works meet the existing criteria of aesthetic excellence. In a 1976 review essay, Annette Kolodny criticized this approach as ineffective. By 1980 several critics, including Nina Baym (1981) and Kolodny (1980a), were calling for the canon to be expanded to accommodate a larger number of female voices. Both of these arguments reinforce the imperialistic pluralism of the canon: newly recovered works can be subsumed—even co-opted—by the humanistic values represented by the canon, but traditional notions of literary excellence remain unexamined. A third position, best represented by Gilbert and Gubar's 1985 Norton Anthology of Women's Literature, maintains that feminists should create a countercanon of women's texts, thus rejecting androcentric values for gynocentric ones. Only a few radical feminists suggest we altogether abandon the idea of a canon as outmoded and elitist, but without suggesting what might fill the void. All these responses tend to reproduce the dialectical circularity of traditional theories of value. Challenges to the canon issuing from both liberal and radical feminists have tended to fall back on simple dialectics—good versus bad literature and oppressive versus liberating values—instead of inquiring into the dialogic nature of utterances about value. While these arguments have been instrumental in what Showalter has called "gynocritics," the rediscovery and reevaluation of women writers, none directly examines the aesthetic or ideological judgments that underlie and legitimate the canon, and none makes explicit what standards of judgment are necessary to any "revision" of the canon. Both traditionalists and radicals assume that value is transparent, that aesthetics or the correct politics can speak for themselves. This reluctance to discuss the theoretical principles that govern canon—and value—formation reveals a fundamental uncertainty among both liberal and radical feminists about the relationship of feminist critiques of literature to both traditional theories of value and to the political agenda of feminism. Feminist critics have found it easier to write about their resistance to traditional canons of taste than to
“articulate what a radical feminist politics of literary judgment” would look like (Meese 1986, 5).

But “a radical poetics of judgment” is beginning to coalesce around yet another possible feminist approach to the canon, articulated in the work of such critics as Lillian Robinson (1983), Christine Froula (1983), and Jane Tompkins (1985). These critics contend that any feminist challenge to the canon must be rooted in an interrogation of the traditional aesthetic and cultural values that create the canon. Why, to cite only one example, are irony and complexity valued over sentimentality and simplicity? Feminist criticism must interrogate the processes through which such values are produced, given authority, and disseminated within a particular historical and social formation, and the “feedback mechanisms” through which those values help to reproduce the social formation that created them. This final chapter, then, examines the cultural work required to make value judgments seem natural, timeless, and self-evident through the suppression of cultural noise.

Value-For

Since 1987 the debate about literary value has become, if anything, more heated. Calls for reforming the canon have issued from several constituencies, only one of which is feminist, while the “institutional guardians of literature and the humanities” have called just as vehemently for a return to the “great books” of the Western tradition (Veeser 1989, ix). The stakes involved in canon revision are suggested by several salvos, including a special issue of Critical Inquiry published in 1987 titled “Politics and Poetic Values,” the solicitation of papers for a special issue of PMLA on the canon, and a response by Hazard Adams to the 1983 Critical Inquiry issue on the canon, not to mention popular jeremiads (by Allan Bloom, E. D. Hirsch, and William Bennett) that denounce our collective cultural illiteracy.5 As the urgency of these well-known arguments either for opening up or for maintaining the traditional

canon suggest, these debates go beyond intramural discussions about which writers to include in courses and textbooks. They demonstrate that canon formation and value formation are serious political debates about authority, about who decides what values—what political norms—we will teach our students.

But the debate, as it has been formulated, is simply unresolvable. Literary critics have usually thought of value as either an objective property of texts or a subjective projection of emotion, and the either/or nature of this kind of dialectical thinking has characteristically obscured other possible perspectives. Critics such as E. D. Hirsch (1976a, 1976b), Charles Altieri (1983), and Hazard Adams (1988), who have been concerned with establishing criteria to allow us to distinguish "good" literature from other forms of discourse, often simply conclude (albeit drawing upon philosophically dense arguments about aesthetics, "contrastive frameworks" [Altieri 1983, 47], and "antithetical criteria" [Adams 1988, 755]) that value is "intrinsic" or "essential" and that, in effect, "good" literature is canonical because it is good. Others, Northrop Frye, for instance, have dismissed evaluation as so much literary gossip, as subjective, emotive, and essentially personal: "This sort of thing cannot be part of any systematic study, for a systematic study can only progress: whatever dithers or vacillates or reacts is merely leisure-class gossip." But literary criticism, and feminist literary criticism in particular, does not need to invoke unexamined and circular notions of universality or timelessness or the transcendent and transhistorical qualities that all good literature supposedly shares as criteria of value. Nor does it need to abandon evaluation altogether as so much gossip. Just because we cannot make value judgments that are timeless and universal, just because we cannot invoke a single standard of taste, we do not have to abandon the study of literature to a kind of aesthetic quietism in which no value judgments can be made at all. If value is not an inherent property of objects, neither is it merely an "arbitrary projection of the subject." One might argue, as Barbara Herrnstein Smith has, that value is radically contingent, the product of cultural forces that are often dismissed as extrinsic to the text (1983, 11–19).

Frye derides "all the literary chit-chat which makes the reputations of poets boom and crash in an imaginary stock-exchange" (1957, 18).
Contingency is not the same thing as relativism, although some more traditional-minded critics would have us believe it is. Contingent, from the Latin con + tangere, “to touch together” (OED), means literally that a thing does not exist of itself but is dependent upon, “touches,” something else. If value is contingent, it is not intrinsic to an object (or text) but depends upon something else. The logical next step is to ask what value depends upon. As recent debates indicate, even those critics who argue that value is intrinsic evoke extraliterary ideals—culture, literacy, democracy, humanism, tradition—to buttress their claims that literary knowledge is significant. Any value judgment is an utterance, and as such, it is noniterable, unique (Volosinov 1976). But even though the value judgment as an utterance cannot be reiterated, it is not doomed to languish in complete isolation or relativity. Every value judgment exists in dialogue with other value judgments. Each value judgment responds to previous value judgments; it also anticipates a response, a dialogical antagonist. In this respect, every utterance about value forms part of a discourse on value, forming a class of judgments, a speech genre governed by rules that determine the authority (or lack thereof) of the speaker or the receiver and the particular historical, social, or institutional context in which an utterance is given force—the classroom, a book review, a literary journal, a conference.

Debates about the objective or subjective nature of literary value obscure a more fundamental uncertainty about what value is and the intellectual, social, and political agendas it embodies. The “canon,” as opposed to the single value judgment, is a collection of utterances, a speech genre or discourse about value, and the primary means by which we institutionalize literary value judgments. One way—the idealists’ way—of defining the canon is as “the unquestioned ‘great tradition’ of the ‘national literature’” (Eagleton 1983, 11), a “fixed body of literature whose greatness has been taken to be self-evident, whose meanings have been deemed timeless, and whose alleged cultural centrality has been used to marginalize other literature” (Zagarell 1986, 274). Here is the all too

7Adams, for instance, describes Smith’s position as “hardheaded relativism that once and for all rids us of what Smith regards as humanistic fantasies of transcendence, universality, endurance, and the like” (1988, 751).
familiar list of “great books.” But such traditional definitions imply that the canon can be defined dialectically—the ins versus the outs, great books versus “rubbish,” literature versus popular culture, the central versus the marginal. All these differential assumptions about literary value which the canon both confers and embodies are hierarchical; furthermore, they presuppose literary value instead of defining a means to investigate or assess it. Significantly, when theorists attempt to define what a “canon” might be, they favor abstract, even circular, rhetoric to finesse the problem of the political nature of both the canon and the values it supposedly transmits. Charles Altieri, for instance, maintains that “For a work to play canonical roles it must exhibit qualities which define it as a significant distinctive entity. Canonical works are expected to provide knowledge of the world represented, to exemplify powers for making representations that express possible attitudes or produce artistic models, and to articulate shared values in a past culture that influence the present or to clarify means of reading other works we have reason to care about” (1983, 54). It is safe to say that there is hardly a word in this statement whose meanings are not currently being contested. The abstract language enables Altieri to beg several highly political and volatile questions about what constitutes significance or distinction, about whose attitudes and whose values will be represented and articulated, and about what kind of knowledge and what kind of history canonical works will provide. What is missing from Altieri’s description is an account of exactly who is assessing and legislating value and what interests they might have. His disarming “we” glosses over the conflicts of interest that characterize any heterogeneous sociocultural group, the centrifugal energy of its heteroglossia and the centripetal powers of its cultural institutions, which order those interests hierarchically and decide what parts of our past “we have reason to care about.”

Any theory of the canon which presupposes a dialectical contest between the ins and outs, the canonical and noncanonical, is, I believe, doomed to engage in precisely this zero-sum game of power politics: new hierarchies can replace old hierarchies, the stock of individual authors can rise and fall, but the canon itself remains an imperialist construct that seeks to legitimate its
politics—its values—by conquering, subsuming, and disarming radical challenges to its hegemony. Women writers, black writers, Hispanic writers, third-world writers, lesbian writers can all be painlessly absorbed into the canon—co-opted—without fundamentally altering the cultural or institutional powers that direct the process of canon formation and whose interests are served by it.

As I demonstrated in the first chapter, such dialectical formulations of the “problem” of women’s literature and feminist theory lead to new forms of authority rather than an anti-authoritarian reformulation of the politics of value. Instead of a dialectical view of the canon, what I have in mind is a *dialogical* view of both the canon and canon formation. Rather than view the canon as an ideal, as critics from T. S. Eliot to Altieri and Nina Baym (1980) have done, we need to view the canon as a dialogical site of political contention which, given its very nature, can never be stabilized, depoliticized, or idealized. The question that we need to ask ourselves is not how to “open up” the canon to marginal groups of writers—women, blacks, and so on—but how to ensure that their works are not simply assimilated into “ideas and ideals” of the canon. A radical transformation of the canon depends on a radical questioning of the values by which literature has traditionally been defined.

This historical, contextual approach to value requires a frankly materialist definition of the canon, one that takes into account the material practices that create both literature and the canon. Consider, for example, Paul Lauter’s definition: “I mean by the ‘American literary canon’ that set of authors and works generally included in basic American literature college courses and textbooks, and those ordinarily discussed in standard volumes of literary history, bibliography or criticism.” 8 The canon is forged in the classroom, in syllabi, anthologies, textbooks, literary journals, and reviews in a process that seems decidedly circular. Literature, in this view, is what gets published, taught, written about, and kept in print. This definition is materialist precisely to the extent that it deals with the means of literature’s production and consumption, a process de-

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scribed by Richard Ohmann as "saturated with class values and interests, . . . inseparable from the broader struggle for position in our society, from the institutions that mediate that struggle, as well as from legitimation of and challenges to that social order" (1983, 200).

This shift toward describing the historical processes that create value and that valorize literary texts necessarily focuses attention on the conditions that create value. If, as I argued in Chapter 1, citing Lévi-Strauss, history is always "history-for," then value is always "value-for" because it is through selection, classification, and ordering (hierarchies) that we confer value upon objects. "Value-for" enables us to reevaluate objectivist theories of intrinsic value by requiring us to pose questions that in traditional terms are unposable "nonquestions." If value is value-for, then we must ask of any valued object, value for whom? under what circumstances and conditions? and for what purpose? These questions have the decided advantage of bringing the rather abstract language of value down to specific cases. Any value judgment, Smith argues, can be unpacked as a statement of value-for, that is, as "the evaluator's observation and/or estimate of how well that object, relative to others of the same implied category, has performed and/or is likely to perform certain particular (although taken for granted) functions of some particular (though only implicitly defined) set of subjects under some particular (unspecified but assumed) set or range of conditions" (1983, 20).

A dialogic theory of value ceases to take for granted those functions value is measuring. It explicitly defines the set of subjects for whom value functions. And finally, it specifies the range of conditions under which the value judgment applies. This kind of dialogical theory also enables feminists to describe a "dynamics of value" that goes beyond traditional concepts of the canon as a homogeneous, timeless, and static array of monuments. A dialogical conception of the canon allows us to see it as continuous interaction and debate, a field of intersecting and often conflicting interests, including those of writers, publishers, critics, readers, teachers, and students. It enables us to examine the roles institutions, particularly the university, play in shaping the desires and expectations of the readers and consumers of literature.
Any dialogic or dynamic theory of value must be able to describe the social processes by which a work negotiates the boundary between art and nonart, the ways in which both positive and negative value are conferred upon objects and texts. Classical descriptions of the coming into being of a work of art, such as the one T.S. Eliot offers in “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” frequently suppress the operations of negative valuation—the category of rubbish, nonart, or trash—in defining the work of art, just as they suppress the operations of agency, of value-for. According to Eliot, “The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervision of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new” (Davis and Finke 1989, 588–89). Eliot describes not so much a relationship between art and non-art as a boundary between what is art—a monument—and everything else, a boundary between durability and transience and a method by which transfers are made across that boundary. Note, however, that the transfer involves no agents. “Existing monuments” form the “ideal order” by some miraculous and unexplained mechanism that doesn’t require the intervention of mere mortals. A new work “arrives,” but where it arrives from or how is never hinted at. The passive voice dominates in Eliot’s description—order must be altered, values are readjusted—as indeed it must in this profoundly conservative world view in which “timeless” aesthetic value takes precedence over both human and social or cultural agency.

Eliot’s idealist theory of value is unable to explain transformations in the value of a literary text over time because he posits a blind evolution of value, a ceaseless movement without discernible cause or agents. Eliot might have explained this ceaseless movement in much the same way that Saussure, writing only a few years earlier in Course in General Linguistics, explains alterations in the sign; the tradition “is exposed to alteration because it perpetu-
ates itself” (1966,74). However stretched this comparison might seem, it does shed some light on the authoritarian ideologies of modernism as they asserted themselves at the turn of the century, as well as on the necessary invisibility of the power relationships that create both linguistic and literary authority. In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault declares that invisibility and mystification are essential to the operations of cultural authority: “Power is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms. . . . For it, secrecy is not in the nature of an abuse; it is indispensable to its operations” (Foucault 1978, 86). In “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” Eliot suppresses diachronic and historical transformations of value in favor of a synchronic stasis. He erases the network of transactions required to create the “monument,” setting up a local, contingent authority as universal.

Eliot’s account of value and canon formation has heavily influenced twentieth-century discussions of value and has helped suppress those very concepts of agency, function, and condition central to any dynamic theory of value. We might examine the repressed diachronic operations in Eliot’s account by looking at how literary and cultural institutions and agents shape the transformation of a text from nonart to art. We can then see how determinations about the “monuments” of great literature depend upon the construction of a complementary category that we might call rubbish.9 This discussion, however, cannot take place in a vacuum, outside a specific historical context, because such transformations are diachronic and so must take place within history. Our analysis requires that a time and place specify the situation within which any discourse about the value of a particular text will occur. An analysis of the movements of a specific text across Eliot’s hypothetical boundary requires that we specify the times and places in which such movements take place.

I have chosen as an example of this transfer Kate Chopin’s 1899 novel *The Awakening*. Although now recognized as an “American classic” as well as a feminist classic (according to the *Norton Anthology of Literature by Women* it is “a shadowy story about female erotic

9I am indebted to Michael Thompson and his writing on rubbish theory (1979) for this idea.
freedom and even about feminist emotional independence” [Gilbert and Gubar 1985a, 993])—this book was out of print for half a century following its highly controversial initial reception. I have set out side by side for comparison some excerpts from two contemporary reviews of the novel which demonstrate how the language of the “ideal order” is constructed out of complex and dynamic dialogues in which conflict, contradiction, and opposition, particularly in the social realm, are ultimately smoothed over as the text is “swallowed up” by the canon.

There may be many opinions touching other aspects of Mrs. Chopin’s novel “The Awakening,” but all must concede its flawless art. The delicacy of touch of rare skill in construction, the subtle understanding of motive, the searching vision into the recesses of the heart—these are known to the readers of “Bayou Folk” and “A Night in Acadie.” But in this new work power appears, power born of confidence. There is no uncertainty in the lines, so surely and firmly drawn. Complete mastery is apparent on every page. Nothing is wanting to make a complete artistic whole. In delicious English, quick with life, never a word too much, simple and pure, the story proceeds with classic severity through a labyrinth of doubt and temptation and dumb despair.

Miss Kate Chopin . . . has put her cleverness to a very bad use in writing “The Awakening.” The purport of the story can hardly be described in language fit for publication. We are fain to believe that Miss Chopin did not herself realize what she was doing when she wrote it. With a bald realism that fairly out Zolas Zola, she describes the result upon a married woman who lives amiably with her husband without caring for him, of a slowly growing admiration for another man. He is too honorable to speak and goes away; but her life is spoiled already, and she falls with a merely animal instinct into the arms of the first man she meets.

“The Awakening” is not for the young person; not because the young person would be harmed by reading it, but because the young person wouldn’t understand it, and everybody knows that the young person’s understanding should be scrupulously respected. It is for seasoned souls, for those who have lived, who have ripened under the gracious or ungracious sun of experience and learned that realities do not show themselves on the outside of things where they can be seen and heard, weighed, measured, and val-

The worst of such stories is that they will fall into the hands of youth, leading them to dwell on things that only matured persons can understand, and promoting unholy imaginations and unclean desires.
No the book is not for the young person, nor, indeed, for the old person who has no relish for unpleasant truths. For such there is much that is very improper in it, not to say positively unseemly. A fact, no matter how essential, which we have all agreed shall not be acknowledged, is as good as no fact at all. And it is disturbing— even indelicate—to mention it as something which, perhaps, does play an important part in the life behind the mask.

It is sad and mad and bad, but it is all consummate art. The theme is difficult, but it is handled with a cunning craft. The work is more than unusual. It is unique. The integrity of its art is that of well-knit individuality at one with itself, with nothing superfluous to weaken the impression of a perfect whole. (C. L. Deyo, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, May 20, 1899)

The value of Chopin’s novel, for each reviewer, is unequivocal. For C. L. Deyo, the novel is “flawless,” even “consummate art.” For the Providence Sunday Journal reviewer, the novel is garbage; it “can hardly be described in language fit for publication.” Deyo constructs the novel as art by drawing exclusively upon a positively charged set of literary and aesthetic criteria that stress the author’s control (her “complete mastery,” “cunning craft,” “delicacy of touch of rare skill in construction,” “searching vision,” and “subtle understanding”), the unity of the work (its “integrity of art,” it is a “perfect,” a “complete and artistic whole”), and its simplicity. The Providence Sunday Journal reviewer constructs his review out of a negatively charged language of disapprobation which draws almost instinctively on rubbish imagery. The novel is “nauseating,” “gilded dirt”; it can promote only “unholy imaginations and unclean desires.” His attack focuses on the presumed social effect of

10Both reviews, along with several others that demonstrate the controversy surrounding the reception of The Awakening, are reprinted in Margaret Culley’s edition of the novel (Chopin 1976, 147–50).
the novel, to the exclusion of its artistic form. These two reviews are diametrically opposed. Yet each writer is certain of his judgment. In both reviews, the indicative “is” dominates the verbal forms. There are no modal constructions—ought, should, might—to undercut the certainty of either judgment. This is particularly true for Deyo, who, after conceding the possibility of other “opinions” of the novel, uses the indicative construction “A is B” seventeen times in the three passages quoted. Both reviewers attempt to give their evaluation of the novel the status of ontological fact, to make it seem transparent, natural, inevitable. To reply glibly that one person’s art is another’s garbage is to beg the question, to ignore the certainty with which each reviewer evaluates the novel. How could the novel’s readers negotiate between two such radically opposed utterances about value, utterances that call attention to their own facticity?

To understand the dynamics of this conflict as more than just a difference of “opinion,” we must recognize the conventions of the review as a speech genre. The book review is an important part of the apparatus by which literary value (and with it the literary canon) is constructed. It is ideally (that is, within the framework of the assumptions T. S. Eliot offers) designed to give its readers enough information about a book, along with an evaluation of it, to enable them to make an informed judgment about whether or not to read it. Because the reviewer must speak with an authoritative voice, she must assume the right to speak objectively and dispassionately about literary value and to speak for some particular cultural community that shares her values. However authoritative or objective this process may seem, it is always, as Richard Ohmann has demonstrated, saturated with class values and interests, always part of a struggle to legitimate or to challenge the social, as well as the aesthetic, order (1983, 200–204). The reviewers of *The Awakening*, in this respect, write from specific sociohistorical and political positions, not from the Olympian vantage point that their rhetoric is meant to imply. Knowing that C. L. Deyo was a friend of Chopin’s might incline traditionalists to doubt the “objectivity” of

his review. Within any idealist theory of value, Deyo must appear the more “biased” reviewer, whose “objective” evaluation is tainted by “special interests,” by his friendship with Chopin and perhaps also by his regional biases since his review appeared in a St. Louis newspaper. But the second, anonymous reviewer is really no more “objective” because he did not know Chopin personally. Despite the disembodied anonymity which seems a mark of its authority, implying it speaks disinterestedly, presumably for “all” readers, the review appeared in a Providence, Rhode Island, newspaper, and one could argue that it speaks for an eastern literary and intellectual elite that largely controlled the apparatus by which value in literature and culture was conferred. Both reviews represent the communities for which they speak, and perhaps they embody, on a small scale, an ongoing conflict between a powerful and authoritative northeastern literary establishment and an emergent midwestern center of “provincial” culture.

One procedure for validating the community’s established taste is to co-opt and neutralize assumptions and values that differ from the hegemonic norm. The two reviews I have quoted are ostensibly about two different sets of issues, drawing upon very different criteria. Deyo praises the novel, calling for a judgment based solely upon what he sees as literary or aesthetic criteria—the novel’s “art.” The Providence reviewer condemns the impropriety of the novel’s subject matter. But this apparent form/content split is more illusory than real. Central to the strategy of each is the discrediting of alternative sets of assumptions and values by which the novel might be judged. Each anticipates and neutralizes the other’s point of view. Deyo admits that the novel contains “much that is very improper in it, not to say positively unseemly,” The Providence Sunday Journal review grudgingly allows the novel’s literariness: its “cleverness” and its “bald realism,” which “out Zolas Zola.”

Both reviewers, however, recognize at some level that the issues at stake in the novel are ideological. Deyo casts his approval in the language of aesthetic value; the anonymous reviewer his disapprobation in the language of moral value. But both ultimately collapse moral and aesthetic judgments into hegemonic assumptions about the socio-ideological function of art. Deyo, for instance, argues that the novel is only for “seasoned souls,” not for the young
or for those who have “no relish for unpleasant truths.” The assumption behind this polemical defense is that the novel is both artistic and moral because it is true; it reveals the complex intermixing of pleasant and unpleasant realities that are part of life. He attempts to neutralize opposition by arguing that those who cannot perceive the novel’s vision of morality cannot properly read it. But although Deyo briefly notes some of the novel’s ideological contradictions and conflicts—“Her children did not help her, for she was not a mother woman and didn’t feel that loving babies was the whole duty of a woman”—he trivializes them by treating them as aesthetic details, robbing Chopin of her awareness of sexual politics: “This [the preceding quotation] sounded clever because it was paradoxical, but she didn’t quite know what it meant” (148). The second reviewer is as astute a polemicist as the first. He recognizes and recoils in horror from the novel’s threat to late nineteenth-century patriarchal hegemony. He discusses more overtly what he perceives as the novel’s moral and ideological faults. But these social and moral criticisms edge over into the aesthetic when he argues that Chopin’s “bald” realism entails the uncovering of unpleasant realities that one expects to be “masked” in polite society. Chopin’s primary fault (one Deyo recognizes as well, but defends) is that she reveals “indelicate” things that good “taste” would have left unsaid.12 “Taste,” then, far from being a timeless, aesthetic quality, as Edmund Burke thought, or an arbitrary projection of idiosyncratic preferences, as I. A. Richards and Northrop Frye thought, is an ideological construct that conflates social, moral,

12The conflict between these two reviews provides an illuminating example of the problems inherent in what Harriett Hawkins (1983, 103–7) has called the “example theory” of literature. Since Plato, literary critics have assumed that literature must ultimately serve some moral agenda. Literature represents not only the good, beautiful, and true, but also the wicked, ugly, and cruel. And sometimes the latter manage to capture readers’ sympathies and imaginations more effectively than the former. To this dilemma, Hawkins notes two characteristic responses. The Platonic response, the basis of virtually all attempts to censor literature, argues that because literature often makes evil seem attractive, it ought to be somehow restrained, if not banned; most defenses of literature respond to this argument on its own terms, invoking the same assumption that literature will serve some moral agenda. They argue that literature can be recuperated for moral ends. Evil is as much a part of life as good and so must be represented, but as part of a larger vision in which good is ultimately rewarded and evil punished.
ethical, and ideological values while disguising the processes by which such values, painted as universal givens, are socially and historically constructed and negotiated within heterogeneous communities.

*The Awakening* was disturbing for its contemporary audiences not only in its portrayal of the socioeconomic condition of women at the turn of the century but also in its frank portrayal of female eroticism, which, at least according to most of the reviewers, threatened to destabilize conventional sexual roles. The novel’s aesthetic value for its original audience was inextricably tied up with the sociopolitical conditions that were part of its reception, in particular contemporary controversies over the position of women in society. Apparently neither “female erotic freedom” nor “feminist emotional independence” (the qualities of the novel praised by *The Norton Anthology of Women’s Literature*) was highly valued by readers at the turn of the century. Indeed these qualities were seen as a dangerous threat to sociopolitical order.

During the last decade of the nineteenth century social tensions within American life seem to have been particularly acute. According to one historian, “America in the late nineteenth century was a society without a core” (Wiebe 1967, 12–13). By the 1890s the structure of American industry was changing dramatically. Economic power was becoming centralized in a few large cities, and as a result, urban populations grew rapidly, fed by massive immigration as well as by migration from small towns and rural communities. Cities were unprepared to meet the growing number and complexity of social problems that accompanied urbanization, immigration, and industrialization. These included transportation of raw materials and workers, the delivery of educational and medical services, disease control, lighting and gas, police and fire protection, sewage disposal and water purification. Communication and transportation in many cities threatened to collapse under the

Another reviewer of the novel wrote, "A woman of twenty-eight, a wife and twice a mother who in pondering upon her relations to the world about her, fails to perceive that the relation of a mother to her children is far more important than the gratification of a passion which experience has taught her is, by its very nature, evanescent, can hardly be said to be fully awake" New Orleans *Times-Democrat*, June 18, 1899 (Chopin 1976, 150).
strain; there were labor riots; child mortality among the poor became alarming; disease was rampant. Alarm seemed to run particularly high among those economically defined as middle class. As historian Robert Wiebe notes, some of the anxiety that one reads in the documents from this period seem generated by the bourgeois fascination with and loathing of the city: "Once roused the sense of emergency was self-generating. Matters that previously would have been considered separate incidents or even ignored, were seized and fit into the framework of jeopardy, each reinforcing the other as a proof of imminent danger."¹⁴ The characteristic response of the bourgeoisie to this growing sense of alarm was, as I suggested in the last chapter, to place the blame for social disorder on the degeneration of the traditional nuclear family.

These anxieties and fears accentuated class divisions and strained traditional values, particularly those that centered on the family. Traditional gender roles that limited women primarily to the domestic sphere seemed to some in danger of disappearing altogether, while to others they seemed increasingly confining. During this time women could not vote (that right was still three decades away) and they had few legal rights. In some parts of the country—most notably in Louisiana, the setting of the novel—women could not sign contracts, initiate a lawsuit, hold office, or witness testaments. Upon marriage, a woman's property became her husband's, and her husband was legal guardian of any children they might have. In the event of a separation, the husband would be granted custody; the wife would have nothing, not even, technically, the clothes on her back.¹⁵

The "woman question" was much debated during the 1890s. On the one hand, there were repeated attempts to expand at least bourgeois women's public roles and to recognize their rights as citizens. There were demands for equality in education, employment, and wages. There were even demands for the vote. The movement of bourgeois women away from marriage and domes-


ticity was represented by the phenomenon of the “New Woman,” which Carroll Smith-Rosenberg describes as a specific sociological and educational “cohort” of women born between the late 1850s and 1900. They represented the trend among bourgeois women toward later marriages, college education, and often professional careers: “The New Women, rejecting conventional female roles and asserting their right to a career, to a public voice, to visible power, laid claim to the rights and privileges customarily accorded to bourgeois men” (1985, 176). The successes of the New Woman predictably resulted in reactionary calls for a return to traditional family values, which could be disregarded only at the risk of undermining the moral fabric of decent society. In the words of one physician, “The gradual disappearance of the home, which any thoughtful observer must deplore, is, to a large extent, the result of the discontentment of the educated woman with the duties and surroundings of wifehood and motherhood, and the thirst for concerts, theaters, pictures and parties, which keeps her in the public gaze, to the loss of her health and the ruin, very often, of her husband’s happiness.”16 The reaction to the threat of women’s growing independence, symbolized by the figure of the New Woman, was the creation and institutionalization of a medical discourse about sexuality which functioned as an agent of social control.

Debates about female sexuality were particularly acrimonious during the last decades of the nineteenth century, and these debates almost certainly fueled the controversy surrounding the reception of Chopin’s novel. The popular and scientific press was full of anxieties about the declining birthrate among bourgeois women. Part of this anxiety was no doubt racist and xenophobic in origin; the 1880s and 1890s saw a huge upsurge of immigration into this country.17 But part of it must also have been a response to changes in the power relations within the bourgeois family which resulted from social and economic change. The falling birthrate was attributed to the increased education of women, later marriages, and the availability of effective birth control (the mass production of vulcanized rubber in the 1870s added the condom to more primi-

tive forms of birth control such as coitus interruptus and abstinence) and of abortion before the 1880s. All these developments increased bourgeois women’s sexual freedom and their power within the family, at the same time as they highlighted their dangers.

The development of American sexology (a medicoscientific discipline dealing with sexual deviance) at the turn of the century is almost a textbook example of Foucault’s thesis in *History of Sexuality* that sexuality—discourses about sex—once institutionalized, unite power and knowledge in ways that enhance the social control and political aims of the dominant class, in this case the control of women and an increase in the birthrate among middle-class women to offset population increases from immigration. “Technologies of sex” led to the production of “docile bodies”—women’s bodies whose “normal” functioning emphatically required that women not use their minds. The discourses of American sexology as described by Smith-Rosenberg (1985) display all the technologies articulated by Foucault in *History of Sexuality*. The sexualization of women’s bodies was accomplished by defining the female body as its reproductive system. Women’s brains, wrote Havelock Ellis, are “to a certain extent in their wombs” (Smith-Rosenberg 1985, 278). In the words of one physician, “Not only does wifehood and motherhood not require an extraordinary development of the brain, but the latter is a decided barrier against the proper performance of those duties” (A. Lapthorne Smith, quoted in Newman 1985, 147).

Energy directed away from the reproductive organs, say, toward the mind, led to medically defined and carefully classified diseases—neurasthenia, hysteria, insanity, sterility, cancer. The control of procreation was accomplished by the criminalization of abortion, the medicalization of birth control, and the increasing hegemony of university-trained obstetricians and gynecologists over midwives and other medical practitioners. Finally, the creation of a psychology which defined anomalous sexual behavior as perversion was accomplished through the development of a scientific discourse on homosexuality and lesbianism in which taxonomy, measurement, classification, and control figured heavily.

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The foregoing data do not merely constitute “historical background” or “context” for Chopin’s novel. Reactions to the political and social instabilities of the late nineteenth century interpenetrate the “values” of both the reviewers and the readers of *The Awakening*. The fact that the position of woman became increasingly tied to her role within the family was clearly recognized on both sides of the debates about the novel. One reviewer of *The Awakening* wrote of the novel as a threat to the order of civilized society precisely because it undermined the traditional family: “In a civilized society the right of the individual to indulge all his caprices is, and must be, subject to many restrictive clauses, and it cannot for a moment be admitted that a woman who has willingly accepted the love and devotion of a man, even without an equal love on her part—who has become his wife and the mother of his children—has not incurred a moral obligation which peremptorily forbids her from wantonly severing her relations with him, and entering openly upon the independent existence of an unmarried woman” (New Orleans *Times-Democrat*, June 18, 1899, quoted in Chopin 1976, 150). On the other side, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, in the same year *The Awakening* was published, sardonically attacked the narrowness of this ideology of the traditional family in *Women and Economics*: “Since we hold that our home life, just as we have it, is the best thing on earth, and that our home life plainly demands one whole woman at the least to each home, and usually more, it follows that anything which offers to change the position of woman threatens to ‘undermine the home,’ ‘strikes at the root of the family,’ and we will none of it” (quoted in Chopin 1976, 135). Gilman’s “we,” here used ironically to distance her from the sentiments she is expressing, suggests her frustration with the resistance to proposals for changes in women’s social and economic position. Clearly, the 1890s had seen enough of a challenge to the rigid Victorian morality that kept women tied to the role of the “angel in the house” that such a novel as *The Awakening* could be written and that such a desire for female freedom could be conceived by Chopin and Gilman. But equally clearly, given the reception of the novel, there was not enough sentiment in favor of female sexual freedom for it to be deemed “acceptable” literature for a broad spectrum of readers.
The *Post-Dispatch* and *Sunday Journal* reviews of *The Awakening*, then, are not just “opinions.” They represent entire world views—political, social, cultural, and intellectual ways of viewing the world which exist in dialogical tension with one another. In them we can more closely view the workings of social authority because the two views can be negotiated only through a complex political dynamic of authority. There is nothing intrinsic to the text of the novel which can “choose” between these two positions. They exist in dialogue with each other and, as I have demonstrated, are mutually intelligible. What separates them is not a cognitive gap but a social one, in this case, beliefs about gender differences that have been given social meaning. A patriarchal and largely eastern literary elite was able to impose at least the illusion of temporary closure to the debate, so that its value judgments seemed neutral and self-evident, while others appeared politically motivated. It is to the advantage of the dominant cultural community to elide the kind of dialogue I have been describing and to impose a monologic sense of closure on debates that reveal the complicity of “high” culture in politics, sexism, and racism. In an idealist theory of value, both views can not become part of the novel’s history, and it is the group with the power to enforce and standardize “agreed-upon values” which has the power to write this history and marginalize competing viewpoints. Its evaluations have consequences, both for the subsequent history of *The Awakening* and for the history of American literature. Chopin languished in relative obscurity, marginalized as a “local colorist,” a provincial writer who may have illuminated the character of a region but who could hardly claim to have unfolded the great universals, which somehow seemed never to be found west of Philadelphia. Of course it was not entirely coincidental that *The Awakening* was denied “universality”; it is a “fact” of cultural hegemony, part of the logic of marginalization, that whatever group is constructed as the “other,” the marginal—local colorists, women writers, black writers, third-world writers—will always be perceived as writing about less universal themes than those of the culturally dominant group. This criterion is characteristically evoked as an aesthetic ideal, which can then be used to deny marginal groups representation in the canon. If Deyo’s point of view had endured—and it did not, at
least initially—the book would have been reprinted, kept in print, housed in libraries, and read compulsorily by schoolchildren or at the very least by college students and their professors. But because the Providence Sunday Journal reviewer's judgment of the novel (and several others like it) proved more durable, the book was condemned as trash. Like other trash it became disposable, the unwanted by-product of the consumption of popular literature, and was thrown away. In the aftermath of controversies over The Awakening, the novel was removed from libraries and remained out of print for nearly half a century before it was "rediscovered."

The processes by which the novel was "rediscovered," transformed from trash to art, are crucial to the formulation of a dialogic theory of value. The idealist who believes that value is intrinsic to a text might argue that the true classic must withstand the "test of time" and that Chopin, if she is good enough to be read today, must be either a "misunderstood genius" whose true value awaited a more perceptive audience or the darling of bra-burning, fire-breathing feminists whose demands for "women writers" to teach and write about threaten to contaminate the purity of aesthetics with their special-interest politics. Both of these views ignore the very mechanisms by which texts like The Awakening are preserved; the material practices by which they cross the boundary between transience and durability—publication, reprinting, library collections, and compulsory education—are largely created and controlled by a dominant cultural apparatus similar to the one that originally determined their value. The process is circular. Texts that stand the test of time do so because people and institutions with the power and means to keep them available deem them valuable enough to preserve and publicize; it is this very preservation and promotion that continues to confer value on these texts.

But the process is not nearly as seamless and inflexible as this description might make it sound; otherwise it would be impossible for a text like The Awakening to be rediscovered after fifty years of

\[19\] It is a curious sidelight to my discussion of rubbish or trash as a covert category for the construction of value that one critic who participated in its rediscovery expressed surprise that the novel had not "been picked up today by reprint houses long on lurid covers and short on new talent" (Kenneth Eble, quoted in Chopin 1976, 166).
neglect. The interests of the dominant cultural group—which is, after all, heterogeneous, not homogeneous—are always contradictory and conflicted; the dialogues that have been repressed are always threatening to reassert themselves. Nor are the dominant group's the only interests represented in the processes of cultural preservation. The canon cannot be construed simply as a list of books or, as Eliot saw it, an array of monuments, static and unchanging except for the addition of the occasional new classic. Rather, the canon, as the repository of literary value, is a dynamic process in which many material practices interact and in which the interests of different sociopolitical classes (including racial and gender classes) intersect and conflict. Even the briefest consideration of compulsory education—which constitutes only one of the practices that contributes to the perpetuation of literary value—suggests the complexity of the model required to describe this dynamic. What is compulsory reading for schoolchildren will not be the same as what is required of undergraduates at elite liberal arts colleges. Graduate students and their professors read and conduct research on a much larger array of valued texts, both major and minor, than either of these two groups, and the results of their research, in turn, contribute to the formation of value.

Still, a book that is out of print and not easily available in libraries cannot be read by anyone except perhaps the academic specialist reading in rare book collections that may have preserved a copy. *The Awakening* survived in obscurity during the first half of the twentieth century, although it was the subject of only sporadic academic interest, much of it negative (Percy Pollard made fun of it in his *Their Day in Court* [1909]) or concerned with it as an example of local color. In a 1932 biography, Daniel Rankin called Kate Chopin an “original genius” but still seemed somewhat shocked by a book he called “exotic in setting, morbid in theme, and erotic in motivation.” Only in the late 1960s did *The Awakening*, along with other “regional” works from the turn of the century, experience something of a revival. That decade produced a biography of Chopin, a complete edition of her works, and several critical reassessments of her novel. Kenneth Eble’s 1956 essay, aptly titled “A Forgotten Novel,” illustrates this transformation of value. He calls *The Awakening* a “first-rate novel” that “goes beyond the limitations
of regional material” and insists, “Having added to American literature a novel uncommon in its kind as in its excellence, [Chopin] deserves not to be forgotten. *The Awakening* deserves to be restored and to be given its place among novels worthy of preservation.”20 This is a version of the familiar idealist argument. Chopin, misunderstood in her own time and undeservedly neglected since, deserves to be resurrected from her oblivion because of her novel’s general “excellence.” As one might expect, given the date of his essay, Eble’s analysis of the novel is thoroughly New Critical in its insistent formalism, its privileging of aesthetic form over social content. His article deals almost exclusively with qualities of language and style, and relations of image and experience; he praises Chopin’s “complete command of structure” and her use of “unifying symbols.” He dismisses the content that earlier readers had found so shocking: “Quite frankly, the book is about sex.” Gone is the sense one feels in reading the early criticism of the novel that its contents were profoundly disturbing because they challenged and undermined existing social and sexual relations. It is replaced by a concern with establishing the novel’s pedigree, placing it in a direct line with the great “masters” of nineteenth-century realism—if not Flaubert, Zola, James, and Tolstoy, then Crane, Dreiser, and Norris. For the New Critic, the very specific and local problems of women’s oppression and sexual freedom articulated in *The Awakening* are replaced by more easily digested “universal” and philosophical platitudes about the limits of the individual’s freedom and the dangers of absolute freedom. The thornier issues of women’s oppression and the role of the family as a social institution in perpetuating that oppression would not be seen as central to the novel until the rise of academic feminism in the early seventies.21

The collision between the New Criticism and a newly emergent feminist literary criticism in the 1970s ensured the reputation of *The Awakening* as both an “American classic” and a “feminist classic,” highlighting the material practices that led to its resurrection, in particular the differences between publication and teaching as discourses on value. Although *The Awakening* suited New Critical as

20Quoted in Chopin 1976, 170.
well as feminist agendas, Chopin remained for critics and scholars of American literature a minor writer, the subject of mostly scholarly interest. It was the pedagogical needs of feminist criticism for women writers to teach in classes on Literature by Women which brought the novel into larger numbers of classrooms in the 1970s. Margaret Culley’s 1976 Norton Critical Edition of *The Awakening*, which provided an easily accessible teaching text as well as a history of its controversial reception and its then-favorable literary reputation, marked the novel’s final assimilation into the canon of American literature.

The new literary scholarship on women, increasingly prominent after 1975, required its own critical reevaluation of literary reputation, which served its own distinctive ends. As Smith has noted, any theory of value must take into account the “interactive relation” between classification of an entity and the function it is expected to perform (1983, 13). By locating a text within a particular category—literature as opposed to journalism or history, the novel as opposed to the epic or the travel narrative—we foreground certain possible functions, and the value of that text becomes contingent on its success in fulfilling those functions. If *The Awakening* is classified as an American realist novel, then what will be valued in the novel is the authenticity of its representation of “reality,” its expression of some peculiarly “American character” or some set of shared “American” values,\(^\text{22}\) and its satisfactory manipulation of the conventions we have come to expect from the genre we have called the novel. But the process also works in reverse. Sometimes under conditions that produce a new “need,” certain other functions and properties of a text may be foregrounded and both classification and value will change accordingly. *The Awakening* is a case in point. Feminist literary criticism created a need for new literary functions—women’s issues, women’s perspectives, women writers. *The Awakening* was able to serve all those ends; it could be appropriated for feminist purposes and become a major text in a new feminist canon. *The MLA International Bibliography* might serve as a kind of crude index of these interactive relations among literary reputation, classification, and value. Kate Chopin was not even

\(^{22}\)See Baym 1981.
listed in the MLA Bibliography until 1965. In 1965 she has one entry, an edition of The Awakening. By 1975 the scholarship on Chopin runs to twenty-one entries, including a bibliography and the Kate Chopin Newsletter. After 1975 the titles of the articles begin to change as well, reflecting the new feminist agenda that Chopin’s novel was being asked to serve. Such New Critical topic markers as “the tragic imperative,” “ironic vision,” “narrative stance,” and “ambiguity in art” give way to markers more identifiably feminist such as “sexuality,” the “woman question,” “female identity,” and “motherhood.”

It begins to look from this single example as if literary value, far from being intrinsic to the text or self-evident, and thus either static or progressive, is marked by radical discontinuity and rupture. This observation would seem to validate several recent historiographic theories of discontinuity, including the account of literary history propounded by Stanley Fish, who says that no reading of a literary text, “however outlandish it might appear, is inherently an impossible one” (1980, 347). For Fish, any function might be foregrounded in a reading of a text; therefore none is intrinsically necessary to the text’s value and none can be excluded on the grounds that it is unthinkable. At any given time, we may be unable to appreciate the value of certain functions because of our commitment to others; the revolutions projected by these readings have not yet occurred. Fish’s account may be useful, as far as it goes, in explaining such phenomena as the transformations in Chopin’s literary reputation in terms of crises or revolutions like the revolution in feminist literary criticism.

His explanation of the transformation of literary value in terms of discontinuity or breaks with the past, however, tends to mystify the process at work in such transformations. Fish cannot explain how such ruptures occur; he merely states that they “project a revolution.” As Robert Hodge and Gunther Kress have said, however, “To see periods of art or culture as monolithic blocks divided by deep fissures of incommensurability and incomprehension . . . repeats the hegemonic act whereby history is rewritten by a dominant group, which attempts to elide the very opposition which completes its meaning” (1988, 185). Fish’s problem is rather like that of the structural linguist who argues that languages inevitably
change but cannot explain the mechanism by which they change. Value judgments of literary texts change, Fish asserts, because the functions these texts serve change, but he can articulate no process that will describe how these changes occur, and so they appear to happen mysteriously, as “revolutions.” Fish sees both the literary text and its reader as complex but static sign systems, isolated from the larger “social text,” which creates the literary text and governs how it can be received by its readers. Even his notion of “interpretive communities,” which has the advantage of explaining how readings and judgments about literary texts are valued and authorized within the profession, still tends to treat these communities as operating in isolation from all other social and historical processes. Membership in interpretive communities remains for him largely a matter of individual taste and education. As such, interpretive communities alone cannot explain how transformations in value occur except through the somewhat mystifying agency of “revolutions.”

I have maintained that the elements of the New Critical appreciation of The Awakening were already present, if suppressed, in the dialogues, debates, and controversies surrounding the novel’s initial reception. So too, feminist reappraisals of the novel are intelligible only insofar as they respond to and, indeed, are dialogically anticipated in earlier evaluations of the novel. Feminist critics did not really create radically “new” readings of The Awakening; they only seemed to. What feminist criticism said about the novel was already present in the novel’s own history of production and reception, but it was present as “noise.” Feminist critics exposed The Awakening’s history of conflict, the dialogic interplay of voices which had been temporarily suppressed by the monologic account offered by the dominant (and predominantly male) high culture, by the “tradition.” Nor were previous discussions of the novel, particularly New Critical discussions, unintelligible to feminist literary critics. They did not abandon the vocabulary and methodologies of New Criticism or indeed of other critical paradigms that had gone before. If feminist critics distinguished themselves from the New Criticism that preceded them in terms of a major transformation, it is not because they did not understand what came before but because they did understand and repudiated its
major premises, just as feminist criticism was perfectly intelligible—if abhorrent—to traditional critics, who resisted it.

If the process I am describing sounds suspiciously like T. S. Eliot’s notion, articulated in “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” that “the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past,” I would maintain that my attempt to create a transformation within theories of value must be no less dialogic than the transformations I have dealt with in this chapter, no less rooted in the controversies and debates about value which have preceded it. I have attempted to transform Eliot’s account of value formation by restoring to it its own history of dialogue and conflict. Feminism, I would argue, entered literary criticism as a “work” enters the “tradition,” not as a rupture, a break with the past, and not mysteriously by some unknown agent but as a dialogue among various groups with conflicting and intersecting interests, a dialogue that can be recovered. This dialogue continues still and depends on mutual intelligibility, on a language shared by all the participants. Value is one site of this dialogue. A feminist dialogic theory of value will attempt to uncover opposition—the noise—and restore it to the debate, thereby adding a third set of terms to the dialectic between objectivity and subjectivity which has thus far limited discussions of literary value.

Shakespeare’s Weeds

In the previous section I concluded that a literary text designated a classic succeeds by effacing the dialogue that constitutes the history of its reception so that its artistic merit seems self-evident. My analysis of The Awakening examines some of the methods by which the dialogic activity of cultural exchange is replaced by monologic, “authoritative” pronouncements about value. This process, I would contend, corresponds to the oft-cited “test of time,” articulated by Samuel Johnson in the eighteenth century: “What has been longest known has been most considered, and what is most considered is best understood.” Once a great author has outlived his century, Johnson writes in Preface to Shakespeare,
Whatever advantages he might once derive from personal allusions, local customs, or temporary opinions, have for many years been lost. . . . The effects of favour and competition are at an end; the tradition of his friendships and his enemies has perished; his works support no opinion with arguments, nor supply any faction with invectives; they can neither indulge vanity nor gratify malignity; but are read without any other reason than the desire of pleasure, and are therefore praised only as pleasure is obtained; yet, thus unassisted by interest or passion, they have past through variations of taste and changes of manners, and, as they devolved from one generation to another, have received new honours at every transmission. (Davis and Finke 1989, 407)

For Johnson, time has the effect of transforming what is personal, local, and contingent, particularly "variations of taste" and "changes of manners," into the impersonal, universal, and permanent. That is, it represses history—for, conceived of as the record of the cultural activity that has preserved the text, in favor of self-justifying statements about the transhistorical nature of its value. But as Jane Tompkins has argued, value is not, as Johnson thought, "a natural fact; it is constantly being produced and maintained by cultural activity" (Tompkins 1985, 193), the very cultural activities that have been the subject of the other chapters in this book. In order to investigate this "cultural activity," it is necessary to interrogate the motives that lie behind Johnson's attempts to formulate an aesthetics in which all truths are general and value transcends culture. We must, in other words, uncover the history of sociopolitical conflict that underlies and the interests that buttress—and continue to legitimate—Johnson's claims that nothing restricted to specific circumstances of time and place can last as a work of art.

During the eighteenth century, literary criticism was one of several discourses that served as an arena for the conflicts between a landed and privileged aristocracy and a wealthy but politically marginalized middle class, of which Johnson was a member. Although the middle class grew increasingly powerful economically, political influence did not necessarily accompany that wealth. By midcentury criticism, no longer the preserve of the aristocrat, had become
one means by which middle-class writers and readers could claim to share cultural authority by asserting the moral superiority of notions of individualism and self-determined worth to aristocratic claims that value is solely a function of birth. But that cultural authority was not without its attendant anxieties for middle-class writers like Johnson. As Frederick Bogel has suggested, “The assumption of authority was both necessary and necessarily guilt-ridden . . . [and] he sought ways to assume and disclaim that authority in a single gesture.”

Middle-class claims to share power with the aristocracy rested on a network of ideological pronouncements about the benefits of middle-class industriousness, hard-working devotion to the enrichment of the country, prudence, moderation, common sense, temperance, stability, and virtue—in short, about the moral superiority of the middle class to the profligate aristocracy. This ideological argument underlies much of eighteenth-century literary criticism, including Johnson’s. Eighteenth-century criticism, in this regard, was primarily concerned not with formal questions of aesthetics but with the sociocultural implications of identifying the moral value of literature with class-based assumptions about virtue.

Johnson’s position on value was worked out within an intensely partisan political climate. His statement that a work of art transcends customs, manners, and politics is an attempt to translate his own political positions, and those of his class, into “timeless” assessments of what literature and taste should be, an attempt to insulate literature from politics by claiming the ideological high ground—a move that would later be repeated in different historical circumstances by his successors, from Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Arnold in the nineteenth century to T. S. Eliot and Cleanth Brooks in the twentieth century.

Frederick Bogel, “Johnson and the Role of Authority,” in Nussbaum and Brown 1987, 205. This discussion is also indebted to Eagleton 1984; Markley, “Sentimentality as Performance,” in Nussbaum and Brown 1987, 210–30; and Cannon 1984.

The third earl of Shaftesbury, Anthony Ashley Cooper, articulates some of these assumptions early in the eighteenth century when he writes, “To philosophize, in a just Signification, is but to carry Good-Breeding a step higher. For the Accomplishment of Breeding is, To learn whatever is decent in Company, or beautiful in the Arts: and the Sum of Philosophy is, To learn what is just in Society, and beautiful in Nature, and the Order of the World” Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times, quoted in Markley 1987, 147.
The Preface to Shakespeare, with its insistence on the “test of time” as a criterion of value, illustrates the process by which the monological impulse of the dominant culture—or, more accurately, the culture that would become dominant—can subsume and delegitimate dialogues about value which reveal the conflicting investments of various classes and cultural groups. This monologue helped to constitute the canon of statements about value. Certain ways of talking about value—certain statements—have been authorized by hegemonic practices and have been shaped into a “history” of literary criticism. Once this history is written and preserved, primarily through the cultural practices I described in the previous section—textbooks, anthologies, compulsory education—the conflicts, debates, and struggles that were part of its construction are marginalized and the statements stand alone as unassailable “facts” or “truths.” Alternative voices are lost, although not, as we shall see, irrecoverably.

Although feminist critics in the 1980s rediscovered previously “lost” female writers in almost every period of literary study, the history of literary criticism is one canon from which women remain almost totally excluded. In fact, Lawrence Lipking notes that the history of literary criticism, best represented by Hazard Adams’s standard anthology, Critical Theory since Plato, “does not find room for a single woman in its 1249 double-columned small-printed pages.” The implication is that presumably until the second half of the twentieth century women had nothing to say about the formation of the canons of taste by which literature has historically been valued. Furthermore, women’s exclusion from the history of literary criticism seems to have gone almost unnoticed by feminists. To my knowledge, the only study of the subject is Lipking’s 1983 essay “Aristotle’s Sister: A Poetics of Abandonment.” Lipking’s figure for the forgotten female literary critic is Aristotle’s sister, Aristemne, who was never allowed to record her thoughts about literature because she was never allowed to write. For Lipking, she stands for centuries of women’s silence on “theory,” a silence that, he argues, may not be a bad thing after all: “In another

25Lipking 1983, 61; Adams 1971. Lipking writes, “Adams assures me that any future edition of this anthology will contain at least one woman” (79 n. 2).
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respect the silence of Aristemne might be considered a rare piece of good fortune—at least for her later sisters. No dead hand of tradition grips feminist literary theory. Its time is the present. During the past decade more and better criticism has been written by women than in all previous history” (62). Lipking makes two assumptions here which merit examination. First, he assumes that feminist literary criticism has no “history” before the twentieth century. He has presumably never read or perceived as criticism the writing of Christine de Pizan, Mary Astell, Aphra Behn, Anne Finch, Eliza Haywood, Fanny Burney, Mary Wollstonecraft, and George Eliot, to name only a few. Second, he assumes that feminists are really better off without such a “tradition” because any such history would only stifle creativity by chaining feminism to a dead past. In one respect, Lipking may be right. The monologism of literary criticism in “the tradition” from Plato to Eliot has narrowly constrained what can allowably be said about literature. But Lipking assumes that any feminist history of theorizing by women would be equally monologic. He fails to consider that, rather than simply accept that women were historically silent on the subject of theory before the twentieth century, feminists might expose the processes by which women who did speak about value were silenced. They might challenge the monologism that marks the history of literary criticism, uncovering in particular the processes that marginalize challenges to cultural hegemony. This approach might restore to all literary criticism the history of its production along with its accompanying noise—its conflicts, contradictions, political debate, and turbulence. This history would certainly be messier than the one currently in fashion, but it would also be more interesting, less “dead.”

In 1986 I had the opportunity to fashion such a history when I agreed to collaborate with Robert Con Davis in compiling a new anthology that would cover the history of criticism from the Greeks to the present. I was somewhat reluctant to take on the task, primarily because the history of literary criticism had never seemed a particularly interesting subject. It always struck me as rather like an all-male Dinner Party. As I ran down the names in the table of contents of Charles Kaplan’s Criticism: The Major Statements—Plato, Aristotle, Horace, Sidney, Dryden, Pope, Johnson, Wordsworth,
Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, Arnold, Pater, Eliot, Brooks—I envisioned graybeards sitting around some cosmic table holding forth on metaphysics, the imitation of nature, and morality in poetry: all male and all representative of cultural privilege and authority.

But both of us were also intrigued by the possibility of rewriting the history of criticism and creating in that history some sense of the dialogues that had been suppressed, of the challenges to critical orthodoxies in every period. We wanted to create a dialogic history—for of criticism which would restore to “the tradition” (the major texts) the historical debates of which they were a part and which would not gloss over or erase our own cultural investments and biases. We soon discovered conflicts other than the ones we expected to find among literary critics of various theoretical persuasions—New Critics versus structuralists, deconstructors versus feminists, traditionalists versus oppositional critics—together with imagined conflicts between ourselves and a whole array of august and humanistically minded adversaries. There were also conflicts within our culturally constructed notions of what literary criticism is as a discipline, what its purposes are or should be. In our desire to rewrite history, we quickly found ourselves struggling with the economic necessity of producing a volume with enough familiar texts to make it marketable. Do we substitute George Eliot, or even William Morris, for Schlegel? Eliza Haywood for David Hume? Christine de Pizan for Scaliger? In what ways would the inclusion of Aristophanes’ *Frogs* change the ways in which we read Plato or Aristotle’s *Poetics*? Would the inclusion of Saint Augustine’s *De Doctrina Christiana* challenge how we read Derrida? How would these selections affect course adoptions and sales? How would they change—or fail to change—the history of literary criticism? Despite our high ideals, we found ourselves continually caught between our desire to rewrite history and the need to consider marketability, always within the constraints of a fixed number of pages.

At the same time, we were frequently surprised by the answers to our questions and in particular by the extent to which women had contributed to the history of literary criticism and by the importance of those contributions. We didn’t have to dig very hard to find substantive statements by women challenging the seemingly monologic discourse of critical canon formation. *Literary Criticism*
and Theory: The Greeks to the Present illustrates that women, far from being silent, have been voicing their thoughts on the nature of literary value all along. A careful scrutiny of the critical record left behind by women in literary theory before the twentieth century suggests that not only have women been writing about value, the stories they have to tell us about women writing and about the value of what is written force us to revise radically our histories of particular periods in literary criticism. It is not enough simply to position women within the field. The inclusion of women theorists in the history of criticism will require changes in our perspectives of what constitutes that history. In particular we need to rethink the comforting stories literary theorists since Plato have been telling themselves about literature’s transcendence of the petty squabbles of economic necessity and its efficacy as a transmitter of transcendent moral value.

One of the oldest statements in Western literary theory about the value of literature may be found in Horace’s Art of Poetry and it reminds us of the central orthodoxy of classical Greek and Roman thought on value: “The aim of the poet is to inform or delight, or to combine together in what he says, both pleasure and applicability to life” (Davis and Finke 1989, 99). This statement—that the purpose of literature is to delight and instruct (dulce et utilitate)—has been repeated so often in the history of Western criticism from the Middle Ages through the eighteenth century that it has come to be known as the Horatian platitude. It is called a platitude because it has attained the status of an unexamined axiom in the criticism of value. It seems so commonplace that one has to wonder if it has not been entirely emptied of meaning. Nothing struck me so forcibly in the history of criticism as the repeated assertion—from fifth-century Athens to late twentieth-century America, in writers as diverse as Chaucer, Boccaccio, Sidney, Dryden, Pope, and Johnson—that literature is somehow “good for us.” The question of a literary text’s aesthetic value all too frequently gets answered by assertions about its moral value, which, like aesthetic value, is conceived of as transcendent and universal. Indeed, versions of this argument are alive and well today in polemics like those of E. D. Hirsch and Allan Bloom as well as in recent theoretical texts bearing such titles as The Ethics of Criticism (Siebers 1989).

Commonplaces about the moral utility of literature obscure their
own complicity in defining what "morality" is and how it is deployed. It is worth noting that Horace was more forthright about the economic and material basis of his advice than most of his followers. In a less well known passage from the Art of Poetry, a few lines after the platitude, he writes that a book that both instructs and delights "is the sort of book that will make money for the publisher" (100). But it took a seventeenth-century British woman to expose the economic underpinnings of the seemingly simple and presumably inoffensive statement that literature should instruct and delight. In her "Epistle to the Reader" attached to her play The Dutch Lover, Aphra Behn takes on the dogma of poetry's moral utility as part of her "defense" of her writing: "I am myself well able to affirm that none of all our English Poets, and least the Dramatique (so I think you call them) can be justly charg'd with too great reformation of men's minds or manners, and for that I may appeal to general experiment, if those who are the most assiduous Disciples of the Stage, do not make the fondest and the lewdest Crew about this Town" (Davis and Finke 1989, 294–95). She continues, "I will have leave to say that in my judgement the increasing number of our latter Plays have not done much more towards the amending of men's Morals, or their Wit" (295). In this indictment of the men who hide behind the emptiness of the Horatian platitude rather than acknowledge their political interestedness, Behn exposes, with characteristic wit, the reliance of seventeenth-century criticism on the imitation and appropriation of received authorities, particularly the "master texts" of classical antiquity. These texts presented arguments about literature and morality which buttressed the ideologies of the educated and ruling elite, an elite from which Behn was excluded because of her sex and to which she desired access. Knowledge of Greek and Latin was a mark of membership in this class. As a woman and a socially marginal professional writer, Behn was barred from the classical education which would give her an investment in the Horatian argument about the moral utility of literature. She was, however, able to see the political purposes "instruction" could be made to serve and to expose the contradictions within its ideology.

Aphra Behn occupies a position within seventeenth-century society and theater that could best be described as ambiguously
Behn was the most outspoken of a new group of writers—women—who had traditionally been excluded from both literature and literary criticism, and she wrote vociferously against the unfairness of that exclusion. She was a “middle-class” woman forced to turn to writing professionally to support herself. As a result, she suffered from a tarnished reputation. A later generation of critics would refer to her as “a harlot who danced through uncleanness and dared others to follow” (Behn 1984, i). Although she was all her life a staunch royalist (she even spied for Charles II during the Dutch Wars) and politically conservative, much of her critical writing, particularly the prefaces to the plays written before the Exclusion Crisis (1678–1681), exposes the aristocratic and elitist ideologies underpinning the debate over poetry’s moral utility and the imitation of nature. As a successful playwright she had more than a little self-interest in the newly emerging avocation of criticism and the proliferation of critics, “whose Business it is to find Fault.” Her defense of The Dutch Lover undermines every commonplace of seventeenth-century criticism by setting her practical experience as a playwright against the “rules” of neoclassical orthodoxy. More than any other critic of the seventeenth century, Behn reveals the difficulties faced by a practicing dramatist in the Restoration theater, particularly one who must operate outside of “proper” society while striving to gain a place in it. Her essays are peopled by theater managers and licensors who threaten to suppress her plays, audiences who shout them down, directors who rewrite her lines, and actors who mangle them.

In Behn’s preface to The Dutch Lover, the theater emerges as a cultural activity, full of energy, conflict, collaboration, and even gossip. It is an agent of both social and cultural behavior, a producer of—as well as a production of—social meanings. Her depiction of the theater contrasts with the more static view of “dramatic poesy” articulated by her contemporaries, in whose work drama

26The term “(ambiguously) nonhegemonic” is used by Rachel Blau DuPlessis to describe women’s ambiguous participation in patriarchy. Women remain “outside of the dominant systems of meaning, value, and power.” Yet, because of the nature of hegemony, women are frequently internally oriented toward hegemonic norms in what DuPlessis calls a “painful double dance.” See “For the Etruscans: Sexual Difference and Artistic Production,” in Eisenstein and Jardine 1980, 148–49.
seems almost disembodied. Dryden in particular seems more concerned with such abstractions as the "imitation of nature" or the poet, conceived of as the lone producer of meanings in his poetry, struggling with the classical rules of the three unities. Value, for Dryden, is transcendent, a result of an author's successful negotiation of the rules of classical decorum. Although an astute observer of political and religious contention, an effective polemicist, and an accomplished satirist, he characteristically suppresses historical contingency in his accounts of literary value and the imitation of nature. Behn, by contrast, exposes the cultural work that enables and perpetuates values, work that is as much economic and political as it is artistic.

As a means of foregrounding perspectives on value which are most often marginalized as noise, I began this chapter with some comments about Shakespeare written by students in the context of a final exam. I would like to close with some more comments on Shakespeare from yet another marginalized perspective, comments from another woman of the theater, the eighteenth-century actress, essayist, and novelist Eliza Haywood. Writing in *The Female Spectator* (1745), Haywood maintains that "some of Shakespeare's comedies, and all his tragedies, have beauties in them almost inimitable; but then it must be confessed, that he sometimes gave a loose to the luxuriance of his fancy; so that his plays may be compared to fine gardens full of the most beautiful flowers, but choked up with weeds through the too great richness of the soil: those therefore which have had those weeds plucked up by the skillful hands of his successors, are much the most elegant entertainments" (Davis and Finke 1989, 360). Haywood's critical voice was effectively marginalized by Alexander Pope, who, in book 2 of his *Dunciad*, savagely depicts Haywood as the bovine, sluttish prize of a pissing contest among publishers he despised. But Haywood's metaphor of weeds in an untended garden reminds us of the cultural work that produces the literary text; she reminds us that weeds are not particular kinds of plants, but any plant that for some reason or another a gardener does not want around (Eagleton 1983, 9). In other words, value—whether in plants or in literary texts—is always value-for, for someone and for some purpose. Haywood's discussion of Shakespeare's faults and the correction of those faults
by such playwrights as Thomas Otway calls attention to what the “Shakespeare idolatry” has covered over. She continues:

I was a little surprized, when I heard that Mr. Cibber, junior, had revived the tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet*, as it was first acted; *Caius Marius* being the same play, only modernized, and cleared of some part of its rubbish, by Otway, appearing to so much more advantage, that it is not to be doubted, but that the admirable author, had he lived to see the alteration, would have been highly thankful and satisfied with it.

It were indeed to be wished, that the same kind corrector had been somewhat more severe, and lopped off not only some superfluous scenes, but whole characters, which rather serve to diminish than add to the piece. (Davis and Finke 1989, 360)

What twentieth-century audiences have been taught to value about Shakespeare is very different from what the eighteenth, or the seventeenth, or the nineteenth, century valued. To be sure, Haywood is repeating here late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century truisms about Shakespeare which can be found in Dryden, Johnson, Shaftesbury, and elsewhere. Critical debates about Shakespeare’s felicities and infelicities raged throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Even Johnson, who claimed in *Preface to Shakespeare* that his dramas were “the mirrour of life,” censured Shakespeare for sacrificing convenience to virtue, for being more careful to please than to instruct, and for indulging excessively in “quibbles.” But perhaps because Haywood has been so thoroughly reviled and silenced, her preferences strikingly reveal the complex relationship between aesthetic judgment and the political values it articulates. Such value judgments about Shakespeare’s language as the following may strike the modern reader as gratuitous, even funny on first reading:

Mr. Otway . . . has improved and heightened every beauty that could receive addition, and been extremely tender in preserving all those intire which are above the reach of amendment. . . . Some poets, perhaps, to show their own abilities, would have put a long soliloquy into the mouth of young Marius, when he finds Lavinia at her window . . . ; whereas this judicious emendator
leaves his author here as he found him. . . . Nor is the tenderness and innocence of Lavinia less conveyed to us, when in the fulness of her heart, and unsuspecting she was overheard by any body, she cries out,

O Marius! Marius! wherefore art thou Marius!
Renounce thy family, deny thy name,
And in exchange take all Lavinia.

(Davis and Finke 1989, 361)

But we need to consider what kinds of values Otway’s version of *Romeo and Juliet* encodes and what appeal those values might have had for Haywood not just as an eighteenth-century writer but as a woman who deserted her husband to become a writer. Haywood calls attention to the cultural work that has been required to create and perpetuate the Shakespeare we idolize today. She reminds us of the work done by nineteenth-century scholars to recover (or recreate) the texts of plays that had been rewritten throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It is not obvious from Haywood’s remarks or from this labor of recovery that Shakespeare’s plays exhibit some kind of fundamental and transhistorical aesthetic values. Rather, they demonstrate the hegemonic function of “canons,” which do not operate by fiat but which have to be continually renewed, recreated, defended, and modified, as well as resisted, limited, and challenged. They demonstrate that value is a site of dialogical contestation whether it is in *The Awakening* or *Romeo and Juliet*. 