

Fall 2013

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Recommended Citation

Kruse, Meridith M.. 2013. "Was That Ethical? Feminist Critics' Response to the "Queerness" of Modernist Women's Writing." *Journal of Feminist Scholarship* 5 (Fall): 31-53. <https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/jfs/vol5/iss5/4>

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Was That Ethical? Feminist Critics' Response to the "Queerness" of Modernist Women's Writing

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Abstract: This article employs insights from contemporary theories of ethical reading to conduct a case study of feminist critics' reaction to the queerness of modernist women's writing. My aim is to develop a set of practices and principles for ethically responding to queerness in literary texts and everyday life, as well as contribute feminist acumen to the current claim that the humanities are the best site to train students how to do justice to texts. The introduction utilizes theories of ethical reading set forth by Jane Gallop and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick to develop a preliminary framework of ethical response. The subsequent section provides a historical overview of feminist critics' reaction to the queerness of modernist women's literature. I then take my preliminary framework "into the field" to see what it can tell us about how Marianne DeKoven and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar react toward one type of queerness: Gertrude Stein's experimental language. In my conclusion, I employ the knowledge gained from this analysis along with my theoretical framework to offer feminist insights to the contemporary claim that the humanities are the optimal location to teach ethical reading.

Keywords: ethics of reading, feminist criticism, queer theory, modernist women's writing

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Introduction

In the past decade, scholars in the humanities have become increasingly interested in the question of what constitutes an ethical interpretation of a text. In April of 2012, a host of leading academics, including Judith Butler, Patricia Williams, and Homi Bhabha, gathered at Princeton University for the conference "The Ethics of Reading: The Humanities in the Public Sphere." The conference was not an isolated event at Princeton, but rather one part of a three-year series of seminars and lectures dedicated to exploring the theme of ethical reading at this leading university. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century there have also been a flurry of publications about this topic, prominent examples of which include Jane Gallop's "The Ethics of Reading: Close Encounters" (2000), Lawrence Buell's "What We Talk about When We Talk about Ethics" (2000), and Santiago Colás's "Toward an Ethics of Close Reading in the Age of Neoliberalism" (2007).

For some scholars, a focus on ethical reading has been paired with a desire to articulate the significance of the humanities at a time when this field is under threat. The humanities should be valued, some academics argue, because language and literature classes are among the few remaining sites where students still receive training in how to do justice to texts. Gallop has proposed, for example, that close reading is not only a form of ethical interpretation but also a way for the field of English to avoid "disciplinary suicide" (Gallop 2007, 184). While not everyone would agree with Gallop that close reading is a key way to ethically relate to texts (or save the humanities), there is a growing sense among many scholars of language and literature that their field is best situated to help students learn how to appreciate the complexity of texts—and that

this is one of the main reasons why the humanities should be valued by the larger university community and general public.

While I am sympathetic to the idea that the humanities are uniquely situated to provide training in ethical reading, I want to make sure that in making this argument we do not resurrect the limited, retrograde notion of ethics that was at the heart of New Critical ideology in the 1940s and 50s. The New Critics' call to attend to "the text itself" was often seen as a way to meet one's ethical obligation to properly appreciate the internal structure of a great work of art. In *The Well Wrought Urn* (1947), for example, Cleanth Brooks casts the critic's responsibility to textual form as an unavoidable ethical imperative when he asserts: "The question of form, of rhetorical structure, simply has to be faced ... it is the primary problem of the critic. If there is such a thing as poetry, we are compelled to deal with it" (1975, 222). In the 1960s, African-American, feminist, and other so-called politically motivated critics demonstrated, however, that New Criticism was also interlaced with racism and sexism. For most New Critics, the only literature worthy of attentive, ethical reading was the canonical work of white male authors such as Keats or Pound.¹ In retrospect, most scholars now agree the New Critical sense of ethics was actually a great source of injustice for women authors and writers of color whose work was largely ignored by this influential school of literary interpretation.

If, as scholars today increasingly assert, the humanities can train students how to do justice to texts, it is important to acknowledge our institutional history of unethical practices and take time to reflect on what, exactly, we mean by "ethical reading" in order to avoid repeating past mistakes. Numerous scholars working in feminist and queer theory, such as Gallop and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, have made recent contributions toward this project with their efforts to articulate an ethics of reading for the twenty-first century that is informed by feminist and queer insights. In the opening section of this paper, I will introduce Gallop's and Sedgwick's contemporary models of ethical reading. Although neither scholar explicitly links her work to a larger school of ethical philosophy, I will show how their ideas resonate with Emmanuel Levinas (in the case of Gallop) and Carol Gilligan (in the case of Sedgwick). I will then use Gallop's and Sedgwick's models as a flexible framework to assess the ethics of feminist critics' response to the queerness of modernist women's writing. Using Gallop's and Sedgwick's work to evaluate this response will give us a better appreciation for what it actually takes, in practice, to do justice to queerness in literary texts and daily life and, in turn, will help us articulate a more informed contemporary ethics of reading for the humanities.

Gallop's and Sedgwick's Models of Ethical Reading

Feminist theorist Jane Gallop is well known in the field as an exemplary close reader.² Gallop has employed close reading in all of her books and teaches this method in all of her classes, regardless of topic (Gallop 2000, 7). Despite her long-standing commitment to close reading, however, Gallop has only recently begun to theorize the ethical value of this method. One of the first places she takes up this project is "The Ethics of Reading: Close Encounters," where she draws on her experience as a teacher of multiculturalism to outline an ethics of reading that can help students hear what women authors and authors of color are "actually saying, rather than just confirming [their] preconceptions" (2000, 12). In this essay, Gallop constantly distinguishes between what an author is "actually saying" and a reader's "projection" of their words. Her main goal is to find a way for us to overcome our tendency to stereotype texts and people—especially those that challenge our preconceived notions—so we can see difference, learn, and be surprised. Interestingly, Gallop does not believe this mode of relating is a choice, but rather casts it as an "ethical obligation" and "duty" (12). She ultimately argues that close reading, which forces one to pay attention to what is actually

on the page, can be a tool to train students how to enact a more just response to literary texts and the people they encounter in everyday life.

While Gallop does not connect her sense of ethics in “The Ethics of Reading” to the work of the prominent twentieth-century French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, I would argue there are significant resonances between the two. In *Totality and Infinity* (1961), Levinas asserts that “the other,” which he also refers to as “the face of the other” or “the stranger, the widow, and the orphan” (Levinas 2011, 215), not only impels us to prioritize the needs of others ahead of our own but actually constitutes the self. Attempting to explain this enigmatic idea in his introduction to Levinas’s *Humanism of the Other* (1972), Richard Cohen writes:

One is not called on to “love thy neighbor as oneself,” according to the biblical precept, as if self-love preceded other-love and were the measure of other-love. Rather, the proper formulation of Levinas’s thought is more extreme ... to “love thy neighbor is oneself”.... Care for the other trumps care for the self, is care for the self. Nothing is more significant. (Cohen 2006, xxvii)

Here Cohen helps us see that Levinas’s idea of ethics includes a subject completely given over to the other, a subject whose care for the self *only* emerges through concern for the other. Interestingly, this echoes the world depicted in Gallop’s essay, where she evokes a reader who is obligated, or duty-bound, to respect the other (to hear what a text, or person, is “actually saying”) without any mention of the needs a particular subject might bring to the interpretive encounter. In Gallop’s essay, an ideal reader seems to be one who actually strives to eliminate personal thoughts (i.e., “preconceptions” or “stereotypes”) in order to better appreciate the specificity of the other. With this sole focus on a reader’s responsibilities to the other, Gallop’s sense of ethics seems to be a contemporary, practical example of Levinas’s philosophy.

The prominent queer theorist Eve Sedgwick outlines a different model of ethical reading in *Touching Feeling* (2003). In “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading,” the fourth chapter of her book, Sedgwick presents two types of reading, “paranoid” and “reparative,” and discusses the benefits and drawbacks of each.³ Sedgwick associates paranoid reading with a mistrust or suspicion of a text’s surface, a desire to expose hidden meanings, and a theory of negative affects (2003, 130). While she acknowledges there are benefits to paranoid reading, she also argues that, as a “mandatory injunction” (125) in American critical theory, it has unfairly overshadowed other ways of knowing better suited to appreciating many of the things she loves. She argues, for example, that the queer practice of camp is “seriously misrecognized when ... viewed ... through paranoid lenses” and calls for a reparative reading to “do better justice to many of the defining elements of classic camp performance” (149–50). Sedgwick’s goal in this chapter is to make a case for the value of reparative reading, which she associates with a trust in (and embrace of) a text’s surface, as well as with a theory of positive affects.

While Sedgwick is not as overt as Gallop in championing the ethical value of her preferred mode of interpretation, I would argue her language highlights the ethical worth of reparative reading. In “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading” Sedgwick writes, for example, that reparative reading can “do better justice” to the queer practice of camp and she also evokes ethical language to discuss the benefit of this approach *for readers*. “The desire of a reparative impulse,” she explains, “is additive and accretive. Its fear, a realistic one, is that the culture surrounding it is inadequate or inimical to its nurture; it wants to assemble and confer plenitude on an object that will then have resources to offer to an inchoate self” (2003, 149). Similarly, Sedgwick also argues that “the reparative reading position” can teach us “the many ways selves and communities succeed in extracting sustenance from the objects of a culture—even of a culture whose avowed desire has often been not to sustain them” (150–51). In these passages, Sedgwick casts a reparative impulse (and reading position) as ethically beneficial to culturally marginalized readers, since it allows

them to create fat objects out of thin ones and thus obtain, for themselves, the “sustenance” they need to survive.

Interestingly, this description of reparative reading in *Touching Feeling* echoes Sedgwick’s description of her own reading habits a decade earlier in *Tendencies* (1993):

For me, a kind of formalism, a visceral near-identification with the writing I cared for, at the level of sentence structure, metrical pattern, rhyme, was one way of trying to appropriate [the] ... power of the chosen object ... this strong formalist investment didn’t imply (as formalism is generally taken to imply) ... an evacuation of interest ... but quite the contrary: the need I brought to books and poems was hardly to be circumscribed, and I felt I knew I would have to struggle to wrest from them sustaining news of the world, ideas, myself (and in various senses) my kind. At any rate, becoming a perverse reader was never a matter of my condescension to texts, rather of the surplus charge of my trust in them to remain powerful. (1993, 4)

Similar to the passages from *Touching Feeling*, this account also depicts the ethical benefits of a reparative approach for a culturally marginalized (queer) reader—here for the benefit of Sedgwick herself. Paying attention to the formal features of texts allows Sedgwick to get the “sustaining news” she needs. Interestingly, this mode of reading, which I have been referring to as “ethical,” Sedgwick here calls “perverse” in the sense that it refuses to obey the New Critical (“formalist”) requirement of disinterested interpretation.

Unlike Gallop’s model of reading, then, Sedgwick’s reparative approach does not feature a subject completely given over to the other but rather a feisty reader attending carefully to texts to get what she needs to survive. If Levinas’s ethics can be summarized as “love thy neighbor *is* oneself,” Sedgwick’s might be encapsulated as “love thy neighbor *to sustain* oneself.” Sedgwick is advocating close reading here, but not as a form of “condescension” to the other. In this way, she seems to be able to employ close reading to both (1) do justice to texts and (2) obtain the nourishment she needs to survive. While Gallop casts a reader’s personal interests as something that can *inhibit* the interpretive process (in the form of “stereotypes” and “projections”), Sedgwick proposes a reader’s own needs may actually *facilitate* a more ethical treatment of oneself and texts.

While Sedgwick does not link her sense of ethics to the work of feminist scholar Carol Gilligan, I believe there are significant overlaps between the two. Gilligan is perhaps best known for her pioneering work of feminist scholarship, *In a Different Voice* (1982), which demonstrated the existence of a moral outlook distinct from the dominant idea in psychology that morality should derive from impartiality, rationality, and universal principles of justice.⁴ Gilligan called this alternative vision an “ethics of care” and found that women were more apt to enact it than men.⁵ Gilligan’s work in psychology ignited cross-disciplinary reexaminations of ethical philosophy and spurred numerous publications, such as Mary Jeanne Larrabee’s edited volume *An Ethic of Care: Feminist and Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (1993).

In “Beyond Caring,” a chapter in *An Ethic of Care*, Marilyn Friedman describes Gilligan’s “ethics of care” as moral voice that “eschews abstract rules and principles,” “derives moral judgments from the contextual details of situations grasped as specific and unique,” makes decisions based on “feelings of empathy and compassion,” and whose “moral imperatives center around caring, not hurting others and avoiding selfishness” (1993, 258–59). While many feminists critiqued Gilligan’s model for reinforcing the stereotype of selfless womanhood, in her “Reply to Critics” (1993) Gilligan rejected this view and argued that her concept included “a critical ethical perspective that calls into question the traditional equation of care with self-sacrifice” (209). For Gilligan, then, a concern for one’s own survival and personal well-being was not antithetical to an “ethics of care.”

With its focus on care for others, Gilligan’s framework clearly overlaps with Gallop’s sense of ethics.

Despite the obviousness of this overlapping, however, I would argue Gilligan's model is even closer to Sedgwick's way of reading for several reasons. Gilligan and Sedgwick both ground their sense of ethics in particular subjects (or readers) negotiating moral problems in a specific context. Gilligan derived her model, for example, from listening to individual women in the 1980s talk about solving actual moral dilemmas in their daily lives, while Sedgwick's sense of ethics emerged from her insights about queer readers' attempts to get sustenance in a hostile world (and her desire to do justice to resulting queer practices such as camp). In addition, both scholars see emotional attachment, or partiality, as a resource for ethical encounters rather than as a hindrance to such relations. Finally, both reserve a place for self-concern, or taking care of one's own needs, within their sense of ethics. In many ways, then, Sedgwick's reparative reading seems to be a contemporary *queer* example of Gilligan's "ethics of care."

As I stated in my introduction, in this paper I will use Gallop's and Sedgwick's models of ethical response to evaluate one particularly charged scene of interpretation: the reaction of some American feminist critics in the 1980s to the queerness of modernist women's writing.⁶ I describe this scene as "charged" in the sense that it took place in a hostile context (the patriarchal literary academy) where there was a lot at stake (for feminist critics and for the queerness of modernist women's writing). Feminist critics brought a range of urgent expectations to their interaction with modernist women at this time, such as a desire to establish a female tradition of writing as well as identify themes of female empowerment. At times, however, these important goals may have unwittingly inhibited them from being able to hear the queerness in modernist writing by women. The particular aim of this paper, then, is twofold: (1) to use Gallop's and Sedgwick's models of ethical reading to evaluate feminist critics' reaction to the queerness of modernist women's literature; and (2) to develop, from these observations, a grounded set of practices and principles for doing justice to queerness in literary texts and everyday life.

As a point of clarification, it is not my intent to generate one definitive model of ethical reading. Rather, I am employing Gallop's and Sedgwick's models, which themselves span multiple (sometimes conflicting) philosophies, as a flexible framework to begin to assess *the multiple ethics* of feminist critics' reaction to the queerness of modernist women's writing. I also want to acknowledge that the performance of an ethical response is often suffused with factors beyond an individual critic's control. As a result, when looking at feminist criticism I will strive to account for some of the social obstacles that may have made it difficult for a critic to enact an ethical reading. Some feminist critics, for example, may have foreclosed listening to the queerness of a text out of a repudiation of "lesbian" or "queer" identifications that would have been disempowering institutionally or personally. A sense of what it takes to ethically respond to queerness, *in practice*, would be incomplete without considering such social factors.

I will be using the term queerness in this paper to refer to one particular kind of "unexpected difference": the strangeness of experimental poetic writing. While queerness can signify many things in the field of queer theory, my use of this term emerges from the work of prominent queer theorist Michael Warner. In his 1993 book *Fear of a Queer Planet*, Warner characterizes "queer" as "resistance to regimes of the normal" (xxvi). The experimental language of Gertrude Stein is a form of queerness in the sense that it challenges "normal" discourse and works to resist the dominant linguistic "regime."

I want to acknowledge that my use of the contemporary notion of "queer" to describe early twentieth-century literature is anachronistic. But my project also draws on the meaning of this term in the modernist era itself, at which time it had yet to be explicitly linked to homosexuality. In *Queering the Moderns*, Anne Herrmann illustrates this last point when she writes: "In the modernist period queerness still means 'strange, odd, peculiar, eccentric, suspicious, dubious; not in a normal condition, out of sorts; bad, worthless'" (2000, 6). It is also possible, then, to view the experimental writing of modernist women (as

well as their creation of characters that move between identities) as “queer” in the modernist sense of this word, i.e., as something most people view as strange, suspicious, and not in a normal condition.

When emphasizing that Stein was a “woman,” I follow the move of feminist critics who worked to create space in the academy for “women’s literature” by drawing attention to the gender identity of the writers they read; a prominent example of such work is Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s three-volume series *No Man’s Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century*. A description of an author as a woman, however, coexists with the fact that many female modernist authors embodied (and wrote about) a transgression of the gender binary. Thus, my use of this term is not so much a reflection of Stein’s self-identification as an indication of the way she has been valued by feminist scholars in the academy. For feminist scholars, denominating writers as women has also been instrumental to locating them within specific regimes of power and normativity, regimes that addressed these writers as individuals, in part, through their socially identified gender.

My use of the term “response” to describe the act of reading signals my affiliation with the large, theoretically diverse field of scholarship known as reader-response criticism. This field gained prominence in the United States in the late 1970s and early 1980s and challenged the New Critical emphasis on “the text itself.” Scholars associated with reader-response criticism include Louise Rosenblatt, Wolfgang Iser, Stanley Fish, Wayne Booth, Jonathan Culler, and Roland Barthes. Like many of these authors, I also focus my attention on the interaction between critics and texts and believe that readers play a significant role in shaping a text’s meaning. But whereas some reader-response critics concentrate exclusively on the reader at the expense of the text, my project is focused precisely on the point of contact between the two. My use of the term “response” is also more specific than its connotation in the field of reader-response criticism, where it can encompass the wide range of thoughts and feelings that are sparked by one’s interaction with a text. In contrast, I am using the term to refer in particular to a critic’s reaction to queerness, understood here as the writer’s use of experimental poetic language.

Historical Context for Feminist Critics’ Response to Modernist Women’s Writing

American feminist literary criticism first began to show a significant interest in modernist women’s writing in the 1980s. Some prominent examples of feminist scholarship that concentrated on writers such as Stein, Willa Cather, Nella Larsen, and H.D. during this decade include Susan Stanford Friedman’s *Psyche Reborn: The Emergence of H.D.* (1981), Marianne DeKoven’s *A Different Language: Gertrude Stein’s Experimental Writing* (1983), Gloria Hull’s *Color, Sex, and Poetry: Three Women Writers of the Harlem Renaissance* (1987), and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s *No Man’s Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century* (1988).

With their criticism, these scholars further expanded the literary canon and developed strategies for giving care and attention to literature that was previously neglected. Friedman’s *Psyche Reborn*, for example, helped H.D.’s work gain acceptance in the literary canon, and DeKoven’s *A Different Language* used the method of close reading in the context of French feminist, poststructuralist, and psychoanalytic theory to engage elements in Stein’s writing that prior critics had overlooked. In their interaction with modernist women’s writing, many feminist readers also sought to raise awareness about forms of social difference in this writing that other critics had failed to acknowledge. Oftentimes this meant looking for the presence of “lesbian” or “female” themes, as in *Sexchanges*, where Gilbert and Gubar attempted to establish evidence of a “lesbian literary tradition” in the writing of H.D., Stein, and Djuna Barnes (1989, 215).

As they engaged with modernist women’s writing, however, feminist critics also encountered

characters who moved across sexualities and genders (such as Tommy in Cather's short story "Tommy the Unsentimental") or withheld their gender identity altogether (such as the narrator in Cather's prologue to *My Ántonia*). In addition, the experimental language of authors like H.D. and Stein frustrated many critics' search for feminist thematic content. These odd textual elements challenged feminist critics looking for identifiable lesbian and female themes by presenting *other* forms of difference than those the critics had anticipated.

Could these "troubling" aspects of modernist women's writing be one reason gynocritics largely avoided this genre of literature throughout the 1970s? Helen Carr and Mary Eagleton provide some insight on this in their respective contributions to *A History of Feminist Literary Criticism* (2007) on "A History of Women's Writing" and "Literary Representations of Women." According to Carr, in the 1970s gynocritics, influenced by the second wave of the women's movement in the United States, were eager to locate moments of "empowerment" and "liberation" in women's literature (125–26). In addition, they wanted to establish a particular kind of female tradition where, in contrast to Harold Bloom's "anxiety of influence," a critic "does not want to 'kill' [her precursors] but to sustain and learn from them" (Eagleton 2007, 110). Given these understandable desires, gynocritics often looked to women's literature for "signs of the 'heroic structure [of] the female voice'" and "to find evidence of women who *can* think, act, love or exert power" (110).

The experimental language of modernist writers such as Stein and H.D., as well as the characters that moved across genders in Cather's fiction, would not have easily satisfied these gynocritical longings. And whether intentionally or not, gynocritics did display a tendency to neglect the experimental literature of female modernists despite their ostensible focus on women's writing. This particular oversight is acknowledged, among other places, in the introduction to Ellen Friedman and Miriam Fuchs's *Breaking the Sequence: Women's Experimental Fiction* (1989):

Until recently, studies of women writers ... overlooked the experimentalists. Classic works such as Ellen Moers's *Literary Women* (1976) and Patricia Meyer Spack's *The Female Imagination* (1975) explore how social, economic, political, and psychological factors influence the way women write and the way their characters behave. Influential, pioneering studies such as Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) and Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) focus on women writers as a literary tradition separate from men, but for the most part, they do not concern themselves with experimentalism. (xi–xii)

While gynocriticism was able to win respect for women's writing, Friedman and Fuchs point out there were *forms of difference* in female-authored texts that this school of criticism failed to address. Black feminist critics and lesbian critics had already brought attention to a similar dynamic when they noted how gynocriticism failed to account for differences among women in terms of race and sexuality. Here, Friedman and Fuchs allude to another type of difference gynocritics overlooked: the "experimentalism" of modernist women's literature.

But how did modernist women's writing fare in the hands of lesbian critics? Weren't they able to embrace female modernists with open arms? Authors such as Stein, H.D., Virginia Woolf, and Barnes were certainly honored in the field of lesbian criticism as representatives of "Sapphic Modernism." And scholars in this field readily engaged with these authors' work to establish a tradition of lesbian literature and attend to what previous critics had ignored: "lesbian authors, lesbian texts, lesbian characters [and] lesbian images" (Gonda 2007, 171).

Except in a few instances, however, Stein's and H.D.'s experimental language was largely resistant to these critics' search for identifiable lesbian content. In addition, the characters that moved across genders and sexualities in Cather's fiction challenged many lesbian critics' idea of gender and sexuality as fixed, stable

identities. Like the gynocritics before them, then, lesbian critics also found certain aspects of modernist women's writing difficult and had a hard time responding to forms of difference they had not anticipated. As a result, lesbian critics were also inclined to avoid modernist women's experimental writing. Caroline Gonda highlights this tendency in "Lesbian Feminist Criticism":

Catherine Stimpson (1981) and Elizabeth Meese (1992) ... have bemoaned what they see as lesbian critics' comparative neglect of "difficult" or "experimental" literature; Bonnie Zimmerman notes the impact of lesbian fiction readers' desire for something "accessible, entertaining, and just 'correct' enough to be a bit bland." (Gonda 2007, 176)

Like gynocriticism, lesbian criticism can be seen as "ethical" in the sense that it also sought to honor forms of difference previous critics had unfairly ignored (i.e., "lesbian" writing, authors, and themes). Modernist women's experimental writing, however, appears to have repeatedly tested the ethical limits of both of these fields by asking gynocritics and lesbian literary scholars to respond to forms of difference they had not anticipated.

In "A History of Women's Writing," Carr suggests that feminist criticism's tendency to ignore the experimental work of female modernists changed with the emergence of French feminist theory in the 1980s (2007, 131). DeKoven's *A Different Language* (1983) is one example of American feminist criticism that began to use ideas drawn from French feminists such as Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva to engage Stein's experimental writing. In the 1980s and 90s, the fields of poststructuralism, psychoanalysis, queer theory, and postcolonial studies also gave feminist critics fresh tools to respond to modernist women's writing.⁸

Even with these additional theories, however, one thing has remained the same: engaging modernist women's writing is still no easy task. Feminist critics in the twenty-first century have continued to discuss the challenges they face in confronting the work of authors such as Barnes, H.D., Cather, and Stein.⁹ And in *A Vocabulary of Thinking* (2007), Deborah Mix contends that contemporary feminist critics still have a tendency to avoid experimental writing by authors such as Stein. In an attempt to understand why this trend persists, Mix turns to Carolyn Burke who, in *Halfway to Revolution* (1991), speculates that feminist critics' ongoing "difficulty hearing differently pitched ... speech ... produced by a writer known to be female" occurs because "our expectation about what constitutes a 'woman's voice' may put earmuffs on our capacity to hear" (quoted in Mix 2007, 11).

This ongoing "hearing impairment" is one reason why I believe that looking at how feminist critics respond to modernist women's writing will be particularly productive for developing a contemporary model of ethical reading. Modernist women's literature often presented feminist critics with *something different* than they expected to hear from a group of writers "known to be female." This genre of writing, then, can be regarded as a test case, so to speak, of feminist critics' ability to carry out one of their core ethical ideals: to do justice to forms of difference that others have unfairly neglected. A key question guiding the final section of this paper, then, will be: How did feminist critics treat unexpected forms of difference—such as queerness—when they encountered such elements in modernist women's literature?

Two Feminist Responses to the Queerness of Stein's Writing

In the remaining space of this paper, I will conduct a case study of three feminist critics' response to a specific type of queerness of modernist women's literature. In particular, I will look at how Marianne DeKoven (1983) and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (1989) react to Stein's experimental writing. I was drawn to

these two pieces of criticism because they offer opposing viewpoints on the meaning of Stein's work: in *A Different Language*, DeKoven concludes Stein's writing represents "a form of anti-patriarchal language" (1983, xviii), while in *Sexchanges* Gilbert and Gubar find it to be "a mode of mastery and masculinity" (1989, 247). Depending on which study one reads, Stein's writing is either the epitome or antithesis of feminist praxis. Given these widely divergent viewpoints about the same author's work, I became curious about *how* these critics had arrived at their conclusions.

My primary purpose in this section is not to determine which of these perspectives on Stein's writing is "accurate" or "correct." Many scholars have already debated the claims of *A Different Language* and *Sexchanges* and there is no need to repeat their work here. Rather, I will focus on how DeKoven and Gilbert and Gubar *respond* to Stein's experimental writing and I will assess the ethics of their approach. To be clear, however, my focus on methodology will lead me to discuss the validity of these studies in some way, in the sense that I will be evaluating the critics' capacity to hear what the queerness of Stein's writing is "actually saying," rather than merely projecting their own stereotypes onto it (and thus silencing its voice).

In the context of the 1980s American literary academy there was a lot at stake in these critics' assessment of Stein. As leading feminist scholars, DeKoven and Gilbert and Gubar were well positioned to influence the perception of Stein's writing across the academy. Their response to its queerness matters, then, not only as an isolated moment of ethical decision, but also as a significant event in the early stages of American feminist criticism that had the power to shape other scholars' view of Stein's work. How, then, did these feminist critics react when they encountered Stein's experimental language?

In the introduction to *A Different Language*, DeKoven writes about adjusting her methodology in response to the particularity of Stein's work. "The features of the writing," she explains, "*determine* the methods of reading I employ" (xvii; italics mine). Here DeKoven presents Stein's writing as a live actor of sorts, with the power to influence the critic's method. This passage lets us see that DeKoven is not only paying attention to Stein's writing but also allowing it to guide, or affect, her choices.

DeKoven continues to present Stein's writing as a powerful live actor when she asserts that it "violates grammatical convention, thereby preventing normal reading" (xiv). Here we learn that Stein's writing has the power to thwart "normal reading," which, according to DeKoven, is an attempt "to form coherent, single, whole, closed, ordered, finite, sensible meanings" (5) when interpreting a work. Since Stein's writing obstructs this approach, an alternative is needed: in particular, "a different kind of reading which opposes itself to the dominant patriarchal culture in definable ways" (5). In this way, Stein's writing could be said to demand a particularly *queer* approach, as it requires a method opposed to both "normal reading" and "the dominant patriarchal culture."

In her introduction to *A Different Language*, DeKoven also identifies Stein's writing as an exemplum of "experimental writing" and "anti-patriarchal language." As a form of "experimental writing," Stein's work "disrupts conventional modes of signification and provides alternatives to them" (xiii). In particular, Stein's writing replaces modes that are "linear, orderly, closed, hierarchical, sensible" with ones that are "incoherent, open-ended, anarchic, irreducibly multiple" (xiii). DeKoven also sees Stein's work as a form of "anti-patriarchal language" because it replaces "male" modes of signification with "female" ones.

DeKoven names two specific types of tools that she uses to engage Stein's work: those that are helpful for "distant looking" (i.e., "for standing back to get the larger picture") and those helpful for "closer looking" (i.e., "for taking a phrase, sentence, or paragraph and saying exactly where in it meaning resides") (xvi). She finds the terminology of "French feminist, poststructuralist, and psychoanalytic criticism" valuable for "distant looking" because it helps her "treat the large cultural and political implications of the subversions

which experimental writing enacts” (xvi). When it comes to “closer looking,” however, DeKoven finds “Anglo-American ‘close reading’ ... most helpful” (xvii).

Through close reading, DeKoven adopts a stance of openness toward Stein’s writing as she tries to hear what it is saying *in its own terms*. Unlike other critics who come to Stein in search of a particular theme, she allows herself to linger on the surface of Stein’s writing without immediately trying to ascertain its “deeper” significance. Speaking about this way of reading, DeKoven makes the bold claim: “To benefit by what Stein has to offer, we must accept the ‘militantly unintelligible’ surface without trying to find the ‘real meaning’ beneath it” (xxiv). I find this sentence striking because here DeKoven casts close reading as vital to obtaining sustenance from Stein’s work. In order to be able to use, or profit from, Stein’s anti-patriarchal language, one has to first “accept the ‘militantly unintelligible’ surface” of her texts.

DeKoven’s claim echoes Sedgwick’s description of reparative reading, where a reader attends closely to a difficult, powerful text to get sustenance to survive. It also echoes Gallop’s call for readers to focus on “what is actually on the page ... rather than some idea ‘behind the text’” (2000, 7). According to Gallop, this orientation helps one see what a text is actually saying and meet the ethical obligation to respect the other. For Sedgwick, reparative reading is ethical in the sense that it does justice to texts and allows culturally marginalized subjects to get the nourishment they need to persist. While DeKoven doesn’t call her approach ethical, it certainly resonates with both Sedgwick’s and Gallop’s senses of this term. As a result, I would argue it is an example of the deployment of these models in the field of critical practice.

But what obstacles may DeKoven have faced in the early 1980s that might have made it difficult for her to perform this kind of ethical response to queerness? DeKoven addresses this topic in the introduction to her book when reflecting on the tendencies of critics, to whom she again refers with the collective pronoun “we.” As she writes, “We are not used to talking about linguistic structure as political. We generally restrict political analysis of literature to thematic content, or to those elements of style clearly related to it” (xx). In this passage, DeKoven provides insight into the status quo of literary criticism circa 1980, when critics were more apt to think of linguistic structure in aesthetic rather than political terms, and when politically minded feminist critics were more apt to value the thematic content of women’s literature over its (merely aesthetic) linguistic structure. By reading Stein’s experimental structure for its political significance, DeKoven bucked the trend dominant among literary (and feminist) critics in the early 1980s. To enact an ethical reading of Stein’s text in the 1980s, then, may have required DeKoven to become a methodological renegade of sorts, countering the trend of most feminist literary criticism.

Since DeKoven was operating outside of the protocols for feminist literary criticism in the early 1980s, it is perhaps not surprising that other feminist critics would question her “unorthodox” approach. This occurs, for example, in Gilbert and Gubar’s *Sexchanges*, in a chapter on Stein entitled “‘She Meant What I Said’: Lesbian Double Talk.” About midway through this chapter, the authors turn to a discussion of Stein’s “Sonnets That Please,” “Brim Beauvais,” and “Susie Asado.” After discussing a few lines from each one of these poems, they assert:

If we acquiesce in the theories of Julia Kristeva, as Schmitz and DeKoven have, this sort of baby talk would read like a pre-Oedipal, pre-symbolic mode of playful, anarchic signification which calls into question the order, hierarchy, linearity, and mastery of patriarchal discourse. (1989, 247)

In this passage, Gilbert and Gubar seem to warn of a collective hypothetical future, of what could happen to us “if we acquiesce in the theories of Julia Kristeva, as Schmitz and DeKoven have.” The verb “acquiesce,” here, carries a negative connotation of weakness and defeat; according to the *American Heritage Dictionary*, it means “accepting something reluctantly, without protest.” DeKoven is thus presented (alongside

Neil Schmitz) in a negative light as having passively accepted “the theories of Kristeva,” which, in turn, acquire the aura of a pushy, coercive force. In this moment, Gilbert and Gubar are not directly challenging DeKoven’s ideas per se, but rather implying that she was unable to resist the pressure of French feminist theory. They also insinuate that being unduly influenced by a particular theoretical approach subverts the critical process. These suggestions are made to undercut the credibility of DeKoven’s work, as she is cast as a gullible dupe who does not possess the ability to decide (for herself) which theories to use.

So how do Gilbert and Gubar read Stein’s experimental writing in “Lesbian Double Talk”? To begin, unlike DeKoven, they do not focus on Stein’s work alone, but rather read it alongside the fiction of other modernist authors, as well as in relation to early twentieth-century historical events. Their chapter on Stein, for example, appears in *Sexchanges*, the second volume (of three) in their larger project, *No Man’s Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century*. In *Sexchanges*, Gilbert and Gubar investigate the way “sex roles” were reconceived at the turn of the twentieth century as a result of sociohistorical factors such as the crisis of masculinity that emerged after World War I, the opening of new economic and political opportunities for women, and the formation of visible lesbian communities in Europe and the United States. In their chapter on Stein, they focus, in particular, on “lesbian” modernists such as Radclyffe Hall, Renée Vivien, H.D., and Djuna Barnes, reading selected works by these authors for, among other themes, an indication of their views on the changing sex roles of the early twentieth century.¹⁰

But what, exactly, do Gilbert and Gubar mean by the “changing sex roles” of the early twentieth century? This phrase is related to their interest in the discourse of sexuality that was circulating in the first decades of the century as a result of the work of sexologists and writers such as Havelock Ellis, Magnus Hirschfeld, Richard von Krafft-Ebing, Edward Carpenter, and Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, who introduced new ideas and terminology about gender and sexuality into late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century culture. Gilbert and Gubar highlight, for example, Ulrichs’s concept of “Urnings,” which he defined as beings “belonging distinctly to one sex as far as their bodies are concerned [but] belong[ing] *mentally* and *emotionally* to the other” (quoted in Gilbert and Gubar 1989, 216; italics in the original). Ulrichs presented homosexuality as a form of gender inversion and suggested that a lesbian should be viewed as a “*male soul [trapped] in a female body*” (quoted in Gilbert and Gubar 1989, 216; italics in the original). In “Lesbian Double Talk,” then, when Gilbert and Gubar evoke the work of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century sexologists such as Ulrichs as a site of changing “sex roles,” they are referring to new ideas about gender *and* sexuality, not just revisions to gender ideology alone.

As a troubling side note, Gilbert and Gubar uncritically adopt the logic of Ulrichs’s (discredited) view of lesbianism as a form of gender inversion when speculating about the literary tradition of lesbian modernists. We see this when they wonder:

[W]hat literary tradition was there ... for the woman artist who felt her erotic destiny to be alien from the scripts culturally identified with her anatomy? What community could she find in which she could commune with others who, like her, *felt other than their bodies?*” (217; italics mine)

In this passage Gilbert and Gubar assume that *all* lesbian modernists were gender inverters who “felt other than their bodies.” This is, of course, the very assumption at work in Ulrichs’s definition of “Urnings” as beings “belonging distinctly to one sex as far as their bodies are concerned [but] belong[ing] *mentally* and *emotionally* to the other.” Thus, while Gilbert and Gubar express an interest in finding out how lesbian modernists themselves felt about the ideas of early sexologists, in this passage they seem more interested in using this “science” to make sense of modernist women writers. In doing so, they reenact the “knowing” stance of these physicians, as they too presume to understand how modernist authors felt about their

bodies. This, I would argue, is an unethical response to queerness, as it fails to listen to how modernist women themselves, in their lives and work, expressed alternative senses of gender and sexuality.

In *Sexchanges*, however, Gilbert and Gubar are not only interested in how lesbian modernists felt about changing sex roles but also in how they drew on lesbian literary tradition in their work. It is not surprising Gilbert and Gubar would want to trace the presence of a lesbian literary tradition in modernist women's writing, since one of the goals of gynocriticism itself throughout the 1970s was the establishment of a tradition of women's literature. As I have already mentioned, according to Mary Eagleton, Elaine Showalter envisioned gynocriticism as a place where "[r]eader, author, and character come together in ... a shared 'female subculture'" (Eagleton 2007, 108). Gilbert and Gubar's desire to locate the presence of a lesbian tradition, then, fits with an ideal of gynocriticism. I would simply note that this particular reading agenda presumes lesbian modernists shared one of the same goals as contemporary feminist critics. While here Gilbert and Gubar are on the lookout for a particular form of difference (the presence of a lesbian literary tradition), it will be interesting to see how they respond to a form of difference they don't seem to anticipate: the queerness of Stein's experimental writing.

Unlike DeKoven, Gilbert and Gubar repeatedly approach Stein's experimental writing with a particular set of questions in mind (i.e., How did Stein view the changing sex roles? When did she draw on literary predecessors?). Interestingly, these questions often lead Gilbert and Gubar to blur the distinction between Stein the author and her work, as Stein's writing is assumed to represent her personal beliefs. In contrast to DeKoven, they do not shift their method in response to the particularity of Stein's work, but rather employ a "one-size-fits-all" approach to engage a diverse range of modernist literature.

One place we see this approach is when Gilbert and Gubar endeavor to outline the presence of a lesbian literary tradition across a range of modernist women's writing. Whatever literary genre they encounter (whether it be Cather's fiction, H.D.'s poetry, Barnes's satire, or Stein's experimental writing), their method remains the same: they look for thematic content that indicates the authors' relation to the ancient Greek poet Sappho. By maintaining this focus, Gilbert and Gubar are able to identify similarities and differences in modernist women's view of Sappho. This is evident in comparative phrases such as "*Like Cather*, who especially admired Sappho's creation ... Reneé Vivien was fascinated with Sappho's lines" (226) and "For Lowell, *as for Vivien and H.D.*, Sappho embodies the elemental grandeur of a 'leaping fire'" (234; italics mine).

When they come to Stein's experimental writing, Gilbert and Gubar persist in their approach. But what they find in Stein's writing is different from before: unlike other lesbian modernists, "Stein refused all predecessors" (238). With this statement, Gilbert and Gubar present Stein as exception to other lesbian modernists (who, they claim, all had some relation to Sappho), as well as opposed to a key objective of gynocriticism itself (the establishment of a tradition of women's writing). As evidence of their claim, they quote the following passage from Stein's *Lectures in America* (1935): "If you write the way it has already been written ... then you are serving mammon, because you are living by something some one has already been earning or has earned" (quoted in Gilbert and Gubar 2007, 238). In regarding this excerpt of experimental writing as evidence that Stein "refused all literary predecessors," Gilbert and Gubar seem to engage in both the intentional fallacy and what DeKoven calls "normal reading" (i.e., an attempt to form a "coherent, single, whole, closed, ordered, finite, sensible meaning" when reading a work). In their own "normal reading," Gilbert and Gubar make the excerpt from Stein's *Lectures in America* mean one thing: evidence of Stein's rejection of a literary tradition.

While DeKoven argues that Stein's experimental writing proliferates meaning in a way that makes it impossible to restrict its significance to a single idea, Gilbert and Gubar repeatedly claim to know the

sole meaning of various aspects of Stein's work. They assert, for example, that "Stein's texts can ... *only* function as Rorschach tests" and "the *only* meaning ... [her] sentences ... establish is the point that, in Stein's words, 'Grammar is in our power'" (247; italics mine). In these passages, Gilbert and Gubar imply they have been able to determine the sole meaning of Stein's writing and consequently dissuade further critical investigation. Since the mystery has been solved, the case closed, we can all go home now as there is nothing else to see.

In addition to looking for the presence of a lesbian literary tradition, Gilbert and Gubar also read Stein's experimental writing for insight into the tension she felt by rejecting all literary predecessors while still relying on Alice Toklas. While engaged in this task, Gilbert and Gubar frequently use one excerpt from Stein's experimental writing to interpret another, which often involves using the first one to make the second *reveal* something about Stein's relation to Alice. In this way, Gilbert and Gubar seem to employ Stein's own words to erase the queerness of her writing (i.e., its identity as a form of experimental, not conventional, language). As they look across Stein's oeuvre to get a sense of how she treated Alice, for example, Gilbert and Gubar write passages such as this:

A fitting tribute to the woman [Alice Toklas] who would later compose a famous cookbook, "Lifting Belly" also illuminates Stein's chant in "Patriarchal Poetry" (1927):

I double you, of course you do. You double me, very likely to be. You double I double I double you double. I double you double me I double you you double me. (YGS 115)

The speaker's decision here "To be we to be to be we" is made possible by "the wife of my bosom" who "makes of her husband / A proud and happy man" (YGS 124). Like a character in her late novel *Ida* (1941), Stein was clearly "tired of being just one." (244)

In asserting that "Lifting Belly" (along with a character from *Ida*) "illuminates Stein's chant in 'Patriarchal Poetry,'" Gilbert and Gubar employ elements from two different works by Stein to shed light on a third. In the end, however, they use all of these textual elements to understand a fourth, more ephemeral "text": the personal dynamic between Gertrude and Alice.

After quoting the excerpt from "Patriarchal Poetry," Gilbert and Gubar use a line from "Lifting Belly"—"To be we to be to be we"—to signify the meaning of "the speaker's decision." They then employ two more lines from "Lifting Belly" ("the wife of my bosom" and "makes of her husband / A proud and happy man") to signify *who* has made this decision "possible." Up until this point, Gilbert and Gubar have not explicitly identified the speaker of "Patriarchal Poetry" as Stein herself, nor have they overtly named "Alice" as the one who makes the speaker's decision possible. But if there is any doubt about this, it is completely erased in the final sentence, as they assert: "Stein was clearly 'tired of being just one.'" All of the excerpts from Stein's writing are now tied to Stein herself, as Gilbert and Gubar encourage us to see this fictional writing as evidence of Stein's personal feelings of regret (for trying to go it alone) and newfound desire to collaborate with Alice. Here Gilbert and Gubar not only engage in the intentionally fallacy (as they blur all distinction between Stein and her writing), but they also fail to listen to the "voice" of Stein's experimental writing itself by forcing it to signify biographical facts.

It is interesting to note that Gilbert and Gubar's interpretation of this passage brings Stein closer to their view of other lesbian modernists and the ideology of gynocriticism. But whether or not this is "really" how Stein felt, I don't think we can find the answer to such a question in her texts. My main concern is that by regarding Stein's writing as if it were a representation of her personal ideas, Gilbert and Gubar silence the queerness of her experimental work. While they repeatedly look to Stein's work for insight into her

personal life, and often try to make excerpts of her writing mean one particular thing, I would argue (along with DeKoven) that Stein's work resists this type of "normal reading" and thus should be approached in an alternative, more ethical way.

What is it, then, that could have caused Gilbert and Gubar to so thoroughly ignore the queerness of Stein's experimental writing in this particular chapter? One of the answers might be that Stein (and her writing) represented to them some of the worst features of patriarchy, such as male mastery, violence, and theft. Toward the end of "Lesbian Double Talk," for example, Gilbert and Gubar assert that "a number of readers have felt *victimized* by Stein's impenetrable sentences," and propose that the writer was able to "turn her words into *weapons* [to] rob her readers of their ability to comprehend" (249; italics mine). In a passage with particularly heightened rhetoric, they also argue that by writing the *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, Stein committed "a kind of *cannibalism*, as Stein makes Alice into a character of her own devising" (251; italics mine).

In these passages, Stein and her work appear as violent, threatening forces, and Stein is cast as an abusive husband who harms Alice Toklas. Like DeKoven, then, Gilbert and Gubar are also worried about violence, but whereas DeKoven focuses on the way a critic can "violate" Stein's writing, Gilbert and Gubar are concerned with how Stein (and her work) can "victimize" a female reader or lover. This view of Stein's work seems to have made it difficult for Gilbert and Gubar to open up to Stein's writing and, as DeKoven insists on doing, "accept [its] 'militantly unintelligible' surface." How do you begin to trust something you fear? A desire to protect oneself against harm and ensure one's own well-being is a part of Gilligan's "ethics of care" and Sedgwick's reparative reading.

Gilbert and Gubar also imply that Stein's writing enabled her to acquire a masculine identity. We see this when they assert that her "unmaking is a form of composition that *confers masculinity*" and that "the unmaking of language ... remains for [Stein] *a mode of mastery and of masculinity*" (247; italics mine). They refer to Stein as "a female man" (250) and propose that she "exploit[ed] a strategy of male impersonation ... to appropriate male authority" (239). In these passages, Gilbert and Gubar cast Stein's desire to move across genders (from female to male) in a negative light. For them, in seeking masculinity, Stein only replicates the worst traits associated with men: a desire to dominate, silence, and control women.

In "Lesbian Double Talk," then, Gilbert and Gubar could be said to perpetuate the negative stereotype that female-to-male (FTM) individuals only acquire the worst traits of masculinity. This stereotype has caused a number of feminist critics to preemptively reject transgender scholarship and unfairly disregard the many FTM individuals who are striving to animate a pro-feminist identity in our culture today. Unfortunately, a feminist female masculinity did not seem to be a possibility in Gilbert and Gubar's work, where Stein's desire to "be a man" could only be associated with her threat to women readers, her female lover, and gynocriticism itself.

While I can understand why Gilbert and Gubar may have had a hard time listening to Stein's writing, I would still say their treatment of Stein's work in "Lesbian Double Talk" largely represents an unethical response to queerness since they never try to hear Stein's experimental writing on its own terms. Sedgwick may remind us, of course, that as culturally marginalized readers in the male-dominated literary academy of the 1980s, Gilbert and Gubar could have had ethical reasons for being unresponsive to Stein's work. But Gallop might point out that their frequent projections onto Stein's life and work inhibited them from meeting their ethical obligation to the other. In this vein, Sedgwick might add that by failing to wrestle with Stein's actual words—to attend closely to the particularity of these texts—Gilbert and Gubar missed the chance to not only do justice to Stein's work but also get sustaining resources for themselves, resources DeKoven seemed to be able to acquire (in the form of feminist insights) by staying attuned to the queer surface of Stein's writing.

Relevance for Contemporary Conversations on Ethical Reading

What relevance does this review of feminist criticism hold for the contemporary assertion that the humanities are best suited to teach ethical reading? If the humanities are to position themselves as such, they should not treat all readers as synonymous, but rather acknowledge that individuals occupy particular positions within systems of privilege and oppression and accept that these locations can impact the needs specific readers bring to an interpretive encounter. Sedgwick's reparative reading, for example, helps us see that a culturally marginalized reader's desire to get sustenance from texts can be part of an ethical interpretation. Gilligan's concept of an "ethics of care" is useful here, as it enables us to see that morality emanates not only from abstract principles but also from particular subjects who live in specific contexts. Gilligan and Sedgwick also remind us that a personal attachment to texts (and people) is not antithetical to an ethical response, but can facilitate a just treatment of others and oneself.

In addition, however, I think it is important to acknowledge how difficult it can be to respect others—especially those we perceive to be challenging or difficult. If ethically minded feminist critics found it hard to listen to the queerness of modernist women's writing, how can we expect such a response to be easy for students? When students are confronted with a type of writing (or identity) they do not immediately understand, what will they do? The humanities can be a place where students develop the capacity to respect others, and I agree with Gallop that close reading is an essential pedagogical tool for achieving this goal. Sedgwick also promotes the value of close reading, but for the double benefit of doing justice to texts *and* helping readers get what they need to survive. While close reading was once synonymous with New Criticism, I am hopeful it will acquire a new connotation as a feminist and queer tool for ethics. I say this because in order to help students do justice to texts we need to not only clarify what we mean by "ethical reading" but also identify strategies (like close reading) that can help them achieve this goal *in practice*. Gallop and Sedgwick help us see that it is possible to repurpose the New Critical tool of close reading for a twenty-first-century feminist and queer ethics—and this valuable insight should be more widely acknowledged in the humanities today.

Notes

1. It is important to note that the New Critics assumed close reading was best suited to a particular style of writing emblematic of the white male canon (a style that was difficult, dense, belletristic, and arcane) and appropriate for a very particular purpose: to grasp the coherent structure of a great work of art.

2. Marjorie Garber, for example, dedicated her latest book, *The Use and Abuse of Literature* (2012), "to Jane Gallop, a wonderful close reader."

3. For Sedgwick, these two types of reading are reflective of the "positions" Melanie Klein argues infants take up (and move between) in relation to part objects. Following Klein, Sedgwick maintains that most readers shift between these two mutually productive positions.

4. It is important to note that Gilligan was just one of many scholars contributing to the field of feminist ethical philosophy in the 1980s and 1990s. Other prominent contributions include Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (1984); Sarah Hoagland, *Lesbian Ethics* (1988); Alison Jaggar, *Living with Contradictions: Controversies in Feminist Social Ethics* (1994); and Claudia Card, *On Feminist Ethics and Politics* (1999).

5. While Gilligan's work was critiqued for perpetuating gender essentialism, I believe this was an unfair representation of her work. In "Reply to Critics" (1986), Gilligan deftly addresses this misreading by reminding readers: "The title of my book was deliberate; it reads, 'in a different voice,' not 'in a woman's voice'.... The care perspective in my rendition is neither biologically determined nor unique to women" (1993, 209).

6. I would like to thank the anonymous reviewer who pointed out that since I am reading literary criticism in this paper there is another scene of interpretation that could be analyzed here, in addition to the one between feminist critics and modernist women's writing: the one between myself and feminist criticism of the 1980s. I agree with the reviewer, as I am not only striving to articulate an idea of ethics but also working to carry it out *in practice*.

7. Since from now on I will be referring to groups of readers as "gynocritics" or "lesbian critics," it is important to note that I am not creating these categories myself but rather reiterating distinctions employed by Helen Carr and others in *A History of Feminist Literary Criticism* (2007) edited by Gill Plain and Susan Sellers.

8. While it would be impossible to list here the dozens of feminist scholars who used ideas from these fields to engage modern women's writing in the 1980s and 1990s, notable examples include Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's "Unmaking and Making in *To the Lighthouse*" (1980), Rachel Blau DuPlessis's "Woolfenstein" (1989), Susan Stanford Friedman's *Psyche Reborn: The Emergence of H.D.* (1981), Ellen Berry's *Curved Thought and Textual Wandering: Gertrude Stein's Postmodernism* (1992), Judith Butler's "Passing, Queering: Nella Larsen's Psychoanalytic Challenge" (1993), and Ann DuCille's *The Coupling Convention: Sex, Text, and Tradition in Black Women's Fiction* (1993).

9. Influential works of twenty-first-century feminist criticism that highlight the ongoing difficulty of engaging modernist women's writing include Adalaide Morris's *How to Live What to Do: H.D.'s Cultural Poetics* (2003), Heather K. Love's *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (2007), and Daniela Caselli's *Improper Modernism: Djuna Barnes's Bewildering Corpus* (2009). On Stein in particular, see Barbara Will's *Gertrude Stein: Modernism and the Problem of Genius* (2000), Juliana Spahr's *Everybody's Autonomy: Connective Reading and Collective Identity* (2001), and Deborah Mix's *A Vocabulary of Thinking: Gertrude Stein and Contemporary North American Women's Innovative Writing* (2007).

10. I have placed the word "lesbian" in quotes here to indicate that this is Gilbert and Gubar's term, not mine, and to acknowledge that there is considerable debate among scholars over the gender identity and sexuality of these authors. While I will not continue to place "lesbian" in quotes throughout this essay, it should be understood that I do not necessarily endorse this designation.

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