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Cover Page Footnote

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Jack Ramey

What does it mean to speak as a woman? How does it mean to speak as a man? Why are so many of our cultural myths involving gender obsessed with extreme and often violent division? In Plato's *Symposium* the image of Zeus slicing through androgynes to create male and female reflects the way we have constructed ourselves internally and rhetorically. In Genesis Adam and Eve are driven from paradise by an angel's fiery sword. With such rancor at the heart of our creation myths, is it any wonder that we have constructed metaphors of war and opposition to explain gender?

In the creation myth of the Dogon, a West African people, two pairs of twins, male and female, are engendered within one egg. Through the slow, sensual gestation period they are meant to combine, recombine, and hatch themselves as androgynous beings, the perfect inheritors and inhabitants of the world. Something, of course, goes awry, and one of the twins prematurely bursts forth creating the division of the sexes and, by implication, the radical ferocity and imperfection of the world. The one who bursts forth, destroying paradise and peace on earth is the male, the breaker, the violence-bringer, he who brandishes the spear between his legs. By contrast, in Judaeo-Christian myth, his female counterpart defies the sky deity and causes, through her desire for knowledge, the imperfection of the human condition. What rawhide myths we whip our minds with.

We are all born of woman. I am born of womb(man)'s blood, an inescapable fact that I do not wish to escape from, but, in a larger sense, I have been transcribed by my (male) sex as the inheritor and progenitor of what Cixous (1976) calls "the false theatre of phallogocentric representationalism" (p. 884). How has a creature born of woman escaped from the egg to lord it over his creator? Plato's phallogocentric Cave, that great progenitor of Western (read male) logocentric thought, is not the Cave of Gilbert and Gubar (1979): "a female place, a womb-shaped enclosure, a house of earth, secret and often sacred. To this shrine the initiate comes to hear the voice of darkness, the wisdom of inwardness" (p. 93). In this cave the voice of the deity speaks through the priestess, the oracle whose mouth is mother and vagina, whose lips speak truth, the Sibyl whose prophecies one ignores at peril. The Great Mother mysteries and the ancient earth religion—whose only remnant is a tepid Virgin Mother myth—have been supplanted by the Name-of-the-Father so that discourse, according to Cixous,

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becomes "equivalent to masculine masturbation," and the woman who writes is forced to "cut herself out a paper penis" (p. 883).

The Nine Muses, the sources of inspiration for poetry, theatre, art, and music are all women. My own personal strength as a writer comes from tapping into the feminine aspect of my nature. Although Jung in *Man and His Symbols* (1964) spends far too much time dwelling on what he considers the negative aspects of the anima on the male psyche (pp. 178–180), as we know, he maintained that there is a feminine side to a masculine soul, and a masculine side to a feminine soul. A man has a woman within him. The anima is the deep cave where creativity spreads her wings, a river in the dark continent where poetry swims within the soul of a man. Most men never find it; indeed, are never even aware of it. Many men, through fear, kill the anima. Boot camp is designed to extinguish any trace of the soft, the gentle, the nurturing artist within a man, turning him into the ultimate killing machine, AndroMan with an M-16. Conversely, the animus, like the Dogon twin in the egg, is the powerful aspect of the female soul that has been locked, subjugated, and silenced throughout the history of Western civilization. Women have been forced to deny the richness of their creative selves, to deny the Amazonian power that lives in their psyche; they have been forced to write weak imitations of a phallogocentric prose. Cixous (1976) urges women to break their shackles: "To write and thus to forge for [themselves] the antilogos weapon" (p. 880).

Although Jung's notion of anima and animus has provided an increased awareness of the existence of our gendered Others, there is still something troubling at the root of its binary core: Male/female, man/woman, masculine/feminine may be dualities that no longer serve—if they ever did—any useful function. Perhaps a construction of the Postmodern Self is not so easily reduced to its opposition. The real question now may be: How can we best get beyond these socially constructed boundaries of gender? Cixous (1988) recognizes this dilemma and in her essay, "Extreme [F]idelity," addresses the problematic notion of masculine and feminine as cognitive constructs: "[W]hy distinguish between them? Why keep words which are so entirely treacherous, fearful, and war-mongering? This is where all the traps are set" (p. 15).

Perhaps a more useful way of looking at the twin aspects of the gendered self would be to adopt the Eastern notion of yin and yang. These constructs are not binary opposites, portrayed as diametrical extremes of the spectrum, eternally at war with one another. They are rather complementary, interlocking halves of an inseparable whole, independent, yet interdependent. Is it surprising that Taoist breathing exercises associate inhaling (literally inspiration) with yin, the feminine aspect, and exhaling with yang, the masculine? But these do not war with one another. They both exist in men and women in equal measure. The constant process of the breathing-in of yin and the breathing-out of yang begins, continues, and ends, from our first breath to our dying one, whether we are male or female. Like its pictographic representation, the yin/yang is liquid, two drops flowing into and around each other, each equal half linking and supporting its Other. The yin/yang pictogram exists on a two-dimensional plane. However, if we transpose it into the realm of the three-dimensional and perceive it as such, a deeper understanding of its true significance emerges. Beneath the black half is

the white and beneath the white is the black: they each have their foundations in their counterparts, each half folded into the other in a continuous sphere of inclusive others. The eyes within the drops—white on black and black on white—are perfect two-dimensional representations of a three-dimensional figure.

Once we challenge the either/or construct of male and female, yin and yang, and recognize the inclusiveness of both, then we as writing instructors can better help students free themselves of the socially constructed gender dichotomy. By embracing the concept of the fluidity of gender, we may be able to help them navigate the unfamiliar waters of their Other. In "The Rhetoric of Masculinity: Origins, Institutions and the Myth of the Self-Made Man," James V. Catano (1990) maintains that one of the chief goals of rhetorical pedagogy "is to free the writer to know and to experience a self that has been dormant, unknown, unformed, or simply unavailable" (p. 428). What Catano suggests is precisely what I urge: we must wake up the sleeping Other, the dormant female source of strength that lies unconscious within the anima-cave of males and the Amazonian-yin power laid low by masculine rhetoric. Catano points out how one of our most influential rhetoricians, Peter Elbow, while giving lip service to "mitiga[ing] the level of aggression in his writing style and model," uses a staggering array of "aggressive descriptions and metaphors of writing" (p. 430). Guns, battles, knives, blood, mastering, and power—phallogocentric metaphors of violence—proliferate, perhaps unconsciously, in his description of the writing process. These metaphors are clearly anti-feminine, nonnurturing, and counterproductive. It is important, therefore, to take care with the way in which writing is described, and with the language that frames the writing assignment itself so as not to valorize the masculine pen-as-phallus-as-weapon metaphor, further perpetuating an enslaved feminine rhetoric.

I am trying in my classroom to point out to male writers who use anti-feminine metaphors the basic falsity and betrayal implicit in their rhetorical stance of which, for the most part, they are unaware. Many men do not know that there is a powerful female anima chained-up to a wall in the caves of their unconsciousness. Even in biological terms, men are made up of countless generations of women, the X chromosome an inseparable part of their biochemical makeup. If men can open up to the feminine inside them, they are more likely to tap into a powerful source of creativity. I often invite men to pick a woman they admire—usually a mother, a sister, a grandmother—and to rewrite portions of personal narratives in the voice of this Other person. Men discover a voice they did not know they had, an opening-up (in Jungian terms) to the opposite mode of perception. I am not claiming any earth-shattering revelations; rather these are small but necessary steps toward a larger goal.

The problem for women writers, as I see it, is somewhat different in nature. Many of them have already learned how to master the basic elements of masculine discourse. For centuries they have been forced to deny their own mode of perception, to write with the stylus of the penis, often assuming masculine *noms de plume* to find outlets for their work. Among basic writers this often results in convoluted passive constructions that go to great lengths to exclude or deny the *I*. In my pedagogy I try to empower women students to find their own voices, their empowered female *I* identities, the feminine-*I* that they have been

forced to suppress.

But here we find ourselves, as composition teachers, caught between the horns of an age-old dilemma. We want to empower our students by helping them to tap into the well-springs of their fluid Selves, but, at the same time, we must prepare them to take part in an already firmly-entrenched, western, and more solidly masculine academic discourse. Foucault's (1982) methodological proposal of balancing the *I*, the Self, between the creative "Inclination" and the expectations of the academic "Institution" seems to be one sane and worthy approach that could be woven into classroom discussions of the writing process. The Self must be nurtured, but it must also be balanced between apparently conflicting poles: "Not infinitely open, not closed, permanent and self-consistent, discourse emerges instead from the eventful conflict between openness and closure, between what Foucault terms 'desire' and 'constraint'" (Spellmeyer, 1989, p. 717). Clearly, we need to investigate the ways we can (re)construct positive, nonlimiting images of Self, thereby tapping into the diverse aspects of personality.

Culture and society are also labile, and, as such, are constantly in a state of evolution, as are our notions of gender and the Self. We, as educators and thinkers working in the field today, are directly responsible for the ways in which the Self is to be constructed and viewed by the next generation. We need to realize that we have the capacity to influence and alter the flow of the future. What, then, comes after an awareness of the Other, a discovery of the fluid self? What lies beyond the realization and the negotiation of intertwined selves?

In *The Evolving Self: A Psychology for the Third Millennium*, psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1993) holds out hope for a new consciousness that celebrates the complexity of the Self, "a *transcender*, or a T-person" (p. 208). His analogies for this more spiritually cognizant person are drawn mostly from Asian cultures:

The Confucians called them sages, the Mahayana Buddhists called a person who attained the Ninth World a Bodhisattva, while the one who attained the final stage of Buddhahood (or *butsu* in Japanese) was given no fewer than ten titles, including Teacher of Gods and Humans. (p. 208)

Recognizing the need for a more complex vision of the Self is one matter; realizing that vision is more problematic. As a cultural construct, the gendered Self reflects centuries of inbred conceptions. We are still laboring under the assumptions of a Western masculine rhetoric that is a product of Apollo's usurping the role of the *Magna Mater*, turning the Muses (feminine creativity) into his handmaidens. We have been blinded by a Linnaean world view where nature is hierarchically categorized into separate kingdoms, phylum, species, genera. We are only now beginning to grasp the implications of the vast interconnectedness of existence. Only by adopting the holistic world view of an inseparable web of being can we then reconstruct ourselves as transcendent persons. Eastern rhetoric and the more holistic Eastern world-view is the product of a different history, based on entirely different and perhaps more fluent notions of Self and gender.

Fan Shen (1989) exemplifies these differences in his article, "The Class-

room and the Wider Culture: Identity as a Key to Learning English Composition,” pointing out the difficulties he faced in creating a new *English Self* as opposed to his *Chinese Self* (p. 462), so that he could compose successfully in English. The Chinese method of composition, *Ba Gu*, is a circular form, moving around a topic and “is like the peeling of an onion: layer after layer is removed until the reader finally arrives at the central point, the core” (p. 463). This method is radically different from the hard-hitting, straight-as-an-arrow masculine logic employed in Western discourse. *I* or ultimate Self is subsumed under the collective *we* in modern Chinese rhetoric. The stylistic use of *yijing*, an imagistic painting of mental pictures which is so typically Asian that Shen was forced to replace Chinese “pictorial logic” with Western “verbal logic” (p. 465).

The examples of Shen’s early literary criticism in English, before he *mastered* Western rhetoric, particularly his work on Wordsworth’s *Prelude*, read like poetry, charged with a hauntingly evocative purity. It’s a pity that he was compelled by the constraints of Western rhetoric to clip the wings of his natural, lyrical Self to conform to an authoritarian, hierarchical mode of expression.

There is a way, I feel, that East can meet West, and, by doing so, propel itself to new levels of sophistication. West can expand its notion of acceptable discourse beyond the Aristotelian-Apollonian-Linnaean scheme to embrace the holistic discourse of a connected experience. The Western academy, with its rational, linear orientation, is certainly not dead, but, I maintain, the pillars that have held it up for centuries are crumbling. The shape of discourse will change and is changing now. In the twenty-first century, rhetoric will have finally caught up with its past. For at least four thousand years we have been trying to force square pegs into round holes, to impose a phallogocentric way of understanding reality on what is biologically a nonlinear way of knowing it. As Carolyn Handa (1990) points out: “The world we learned to write in is not the world they [students today] will be living and writing in” (p. 182).

One pedagogical arena that is shaping this new discourse is computer-mediated composition instruction. Students who are linked to each other in a network of connected terminals are brought face to face daily with the very embodiment of the web of existence. Anonymous, online discussions are, indeed, linear. Nonetheless, they tend to erase gender cues, and, in many cases, empower traditionally marginalized students: women and ethnic minorities, in particular. Hypertext, with its open-endedness, its defusing of authority, its constantly shifting center, favors—like the Chinese rhetoric *Ba Gu*—a circular, nonrational, intuitive approach to apprehending truth and meaning. This multivalent discourse does not privilege one Self or form of expression over another. It gives rise to the free expression of multiple selves and subject positions.

The world is shrinking. The future is running to meet us. As boundaries melt, or *if* they are to melt, mutual acceptance and understanding of diverse Self-expression is vital. Then humans can swim as transcendent beings in the river that flows in all directions, and become, like the original twins in the Dogon myth, whole and healthy inhabitants of the earth. ☺

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