Female Subjectivity in Women's Writing

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For Gülseren Yurttaş

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ABBREVIATIONS

Speculum: *Speculum of the Other Woman*
Thinking: Thinking the Difference for a Peaceful Revolution
The Way: The Way of Love
This Sex: This Sex Which Is Not One
An Ethics: An Ethich of Sexual Difference
NC: Nights at the Circus
BA: The Blind Assassin
ME: Morpho Eugenia

INTRODUCTION

The human subject has come to occupy a central role in recent literary criticism and this concern owes a lot to feminism which has initiated the awareness that the subject is not a natural, biologically determined, apolitical, or neutral entity but it is a socially constructed political being. Until the twentieth century, the subject was a trustworthy and dependable source of the knowledge of the world and itself. With the rise of psychoanalysis and deconstruction, it lost its position as the objective, self-conscious source of epistemology. Freud's conception of the subject under the control of unconscious drives and processes opens up a wide spectrum of views of how this subject comes to be. Lacan's fundamental contribution to the understanding of the subject with language as constitutive of its formation and initiation into society with a specific gender has attracted profound attention from feminist critics who embark on explaining how the individual comes to attain gender in hierarchical relations. Derrida's work on Western thought hinging on binary oppositions that create the illusion of a uniform, stable subject is closely linked to psychoanalysis' focus on the constitution of the subject.

Luce Irigaray is one of the important critics in this stream who provides a critical reading of these two approaches, namely Jacques Lacan's theory of the formation of the subject and Jacques Derrida's criticism of Western philosophy in order to analyse how gender is constructed in language and how the production of meaning is related to this construction. Inasmuch as theory is produced in language, Irigaray investigates how historical factors shape theory widening the scope of theory so as to discuss women's position in language, literature, philosophy, and in society. In this study, I will offer a reading of three postmodern works of fiction, whose writers have occupied a large space in postmodern theories and feminisms. I will read Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus*, Margaret Atwood's *The Blind Assassin*, and A.S. Byatt's **"**Morpho Eugenia" in the light of Irigaray's criticism of patriarchy that focuses on the formation of subjectivity in language and theory. My aim is to analyse

how these women writers respond and contribute to Irigaray's call for a language that can express sexual difference.

Angela Carter, Margaret Atwood, and A. S. Byatt's concern with the problem of representation and woman's position as a subject in literature manifests itself in the intertextuality and the choice of subject matter in their novels. It is not only that they choose women as main characters in these , but also and more significantly, the fact that they depict these characters as writers reflects their need to reassess, consider, negotiate, or change their position as women writers in literature. The intricate intertextuality that includes the frequent direct and indirect allusions to other works and placing inner texts contributed by different characters in the novels in *Nights at the Circus*, *The Blind Assassin*, and **"**Morpho Eugenia" demonstrates the woman writer's discomfort within genre boundaries. In *Female Stories, Female Bodies*, Lidia Curti argues that a link between genre and gender can be established in order to understand the particularity of intertextual writings of contemporary woman writers. She argues that women's struggle to transgress gender constraints have accompanied experiments with crossing genre boundaries as well. The attempt to reveal the artificiality and social construction of gender and the part genre plays in constructing gender in order to articulate sexual difference finds its expression in what she calls "genre contamination" (Curtie 1998, 48). The revisions of the literary canon and genres serve to give voice to women and female experience: "Genre is traversed by the discourse of sexual difference as if the vicinity of the two English words- genre and gender, divided by 'd' (for difference?)—recalled coincidence and dislocation, obedience and transgression at one and the same time" (Curtie 1998, 53). From this point of view, I will argue that the intertextuality in *Nights at the Circus*, *The Blind Assassin*, and **"**Morpho Eugenia" poses a critical stance towards both genre and gender construction in genre. By choosing a female protagonist in the picaresque structure in *Nights at the Circus*, Carter calls attention to the fact that in picaresque novels it is men who are the searching subjects -searching for women, knowledge, maturity, etc., and women are depicted either as the object of their search or their partners. Carter does not only make the female the searching subject in her novel, but she also designates female subjective identity as the object of the quest. As a *bildungsroman,* again, it

is not the education of a man to fit into the social order with a marriage, but it is the education of woman in order to learn how woman is constructed in patriarchal order and how to survive in the male dominated society.

In *The Blind Assassin*, autobiographical writing helps Atwood reveal the fact that language has boundaries and these limits inhibit the representation of female identity and experience. Atwood also poses a bold challenge to the genre by altering the traditional endings of the novel which is marriage. Instead of marriage or *the union of lovers*, *The Blind Assassin* offers writing and producing an alternative identity in language for the ending of the novel. For example, she implies a different ending for *Pride and Prejudice*, which, as Bouson notes, is similar to *The Blind Assassin* with the two sisters and two suitors structure (Bouson 2003). Similarly, she offers divorce and a single life to Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre* by presenting Iris who, like Bertha Mason, drinks and has sex outside the marriage institution, but who fights back and survives by writing whereas Bertha Mason is locked in the attic by her husband (Bronte 1994). While Bertha Mason never appears as the subject in *Jane Eyre*, Atwood frees woman from being defined as mad in male discourse by turning her into the subject of her own discourse and truth. With another allusion by choosing the name Aimee for a girl whose paternal ancestry is suspicious in *The Blind Assassin*, Atwood seems to send her compliments to Carter who states that "'father' is a hypothesis but 'mother' is a fact" alongside her warning to Daniel Defoe who deprives woman of her maternal heritage in *Roxana* (qtd. in Curti 1998, 103).

In **"**Morpho Eugenia" Byatt makes use of fairy-tale, *bildungsroman* and gothic genres but she disrupts the expectations from these genres. She employs fairy-tale structure for the purpose of giving voice to suppressed women like Matilda and Miss Mead, however, these voices are overshadowed by Adamson's search which dominates the female's, Matilda's search. Also, the woman or the woman writer subjects her desire to the male desire. In view of the fact that Matilda's writing serves to bring about enlightenment to Adamson's life in addition to her need for confirmation from Adamson, I will argue that in **"**Morpho Eugenia" male discourse prevails over woman's language.

As the intertextuality of *Nights at the Circus*, *The Blind Assassin*, and "Morpho Eugenia" indicates, Carter, Atwood, and Byatt deal with the problem of representation and female subjectivity. It is at the junction of female subjectivity and language in these writings that Irigaray's criticism of language as the source of gender construction becomes relevant to these writings. Before moving to the particularity of each work in their approach to language and gender, I would like to discuss Irigaray's critique of language and of patriarchal culture in the following part.

I. Psychoanalysis: Female subjectivity

Simon de Beauvoir's famous statement "One is not born woman but becomes a woman" in *The Second Sex* that was published in 1949 started an era in which the philosophy of subjectivity, language, and epistemology has had to confront the question of gender in view of the historical, cultural, sociological determinants linked to the structure of language and production of truth (Beauvoir 1993, 249). The second half of the twentieth century has witnessed a proliferation on theoretical debates on gender, which has reflected on literature since literature has become both the convict of representation as such and the domain of the prospect of producing a language that can disrupt the phallocentric gender representation. Irigaray's *Speculum of the Other Woman***,** published in 1974 in French, has introduced a comprehensive reading of psychoanalytic theory and philosophy that demonstrates how language and the production of truth are determined by the male economy of desire. *Speculum* has contributed to debates on sexual difference especially after its translation into English by a strong argument on the significance of the mother-daughter relationship in the formation of female subjectivity and of the relation between desire and language.

Although Irigaray's theory is a critique of deconstruction and psychoanalysis, what she does is apply psychoanalysis and deconstruction on these theories, which means psychoanalyzing Lacan and deconstructing Derrida. Her reading aims to show that sexual difference which psychoanalysis attempts to explain determines psychoanalytic theory itself and deconstruction does not recognize sexual difference. For an understanding of Irigaray's argument for the need of a female subjective identity, a

summary of her reading of Freud and Lacan is necessary first as she performs in the first section of *Speculum* titled "The Blind Spot of an Old Dream of Symmetry" and in *This Sex Which Is Not One.* I will discuss this before I turn to her criticism of deconstruction which is based on her criticism of psychoanalysis, especially on her attempt to introduce sexual difference into language and society as an alternative way to deconstruct the male-subject.

According to Freud, sexual difference, that is acquiring the position of man or woman occurs at the oedipal stage and before this stage, there is only one libido. In the anal stage, both the girl and the boy show the same aggressive impulses, and in the phallic stage, they continue to be theorized as little men; the boy has the penis and the girl has the clitoris as the equivalent of the penis for deriving sexual pleasure from. In masturbation, the vagina for sexual pleasure is not discovered and the clitoris is the only erogenous organ for the girl. The desire is for the phallic mother whom the baby wishes to get with a child. The differentiation of sexes occurs in the oedipal stage through the castration complex that is initiated by the sight of the opposite sex's genitals, but the effect of this sight works differently for the girl and the boy. Having seen the penis and deciding that it is better and bigger than her own inferior penis-clitoris, the girl ends up with acquiring penis-envy attributing the responsibility of her lack of the penis to her mother. Upon this recognition, the girl achieves womanhood by developing an antagonism towards her mother for not possessing one or not providing the girl with one, and this disappointment induces the girl into desiring her father in the hope that he may give her one and into an expectation that her clitoris may grow to be a penis one day. Hopefully, if she becomes a mother of a son in the future, she will substitute her child with the longed- for penis. For the boy, on the other hand, the sight of the vagina, the lack of a penis will work as a threat upon which he will terminate his masturbatory activities but not his desire for his mother because he will identify with the father and take a wife to substitute his desire for the mother in the future.

Lacan introduces the real, the imaginary, and the symbolic dimension into the psyche; the real being inaccessible in language, the imaginary is the phase when the baby attaches itself to an image that reflects a unity on the scattered mental process of the child. The mirror

offers the baby a specular "I" that it identifies itself with, but since this image is a fictive totality, the subject will always be in a struggle to fit into this imaginary "I." The symbolic dimension introduces the child into the social order through language in which the phallus as the main signifier forbids the child and the mother from any fulfilment of desire. The phallus signifies the lack in the mother and thus, it orders the subjects in the economy of sexuality (Lacan 1982, 83-84).

Lacan emphasizes the role of language as the indispensable component of the castration complex. For Lacan, sexual difference occurs through entry into language whereby the phallus as the main signifier produces the subjects in language by the criteria of having the phallus or lacking it. Phallus, the male sex comes to mirror the appropriate form in the emergence of sexual difference by producing the male subject whose desire is initiated by lack symbolized by the mother. By entering into the symbolic or language through the reference of the phallus, the male emerges as the subject of desire, having *it* while woman occupies the position of the other, the "not-all," the zero, the object (Lacan 1982, 144). The transition from the imaginary (pre-oedipal) phase into the symbolic order through the forbidding law of the phallus causes a phantasy of unity with the mother in the imaginary stage, which is an imaginary one and the effect of the split that the subject emerges as sexually different. Woman maintains this phantasy of unity, fulfilment functioning as the cause of his desire, the lost object, *object a.* Thus, Lacan solves the enigma of feminity: The woman does not exist (Lacan 1982, 144).[1] Woman occupies the place of the Other, and this place also refers to the place of God and unconscious. Besides securing man's unity, this place also stands for the truth but since there is no other of the other, not only the Other but also truth is phantasy as well (Rose 1982, 48 -50).

The mother, thus, provides a shelter for the signifying system by holding the absence end of signification as phantasy since woman enters the symbolic as absent. Woman comes about as the guarantor of the male presence by her exclusion from the symbolic and is thus impossible for the reason that she is constituted by and in this very exclusion from language.

[1] Whereas for Freud, for an understanding of feminity "turn to the poets, or wait until science can give you deeper and more coherent information" (qtd in *Speculum*, 129).

According to Lacan, what makes the speech of woman impossible is that the category of man and woman are subject to language that places the woman to the position of lack. Therefore, by definition in discourse, desire is itself what bars the fulfilment of desire of either woman or man. Unlike Freud who devises a possibility for the satisfaction of desire, which is achieved by taking a wife for man and by reproducing for woman, Lacan claims that the fact that the phallus signifies the lack in the mother relinquishes any logic for sexual desire to be fulfilled; the law forbids the mother and the child from satisfaction. The gendered subject that emerges as the result of this split seeks satisfaction for the very reason that satisfaction does not exist. Sexual pleasure being conditioned on the lack of the female in discourse, it becomes an impossible pleasure, the pleasure doomed to be pursued after because it is impossible. In this order, the only possibility of a relationship between the sexes is courtly love since any relation between the sexes is barred in discourse (Lacan 1982, 141). So man offers his love to an absence (in language) that assures his identity and presence. It is not a woman that he desires but the lack that remained out of discourse; his other that includes all women as his mother who are in return assumed to seek for pleasure in mothering men.

Irigaray's main objection is against the assumption of the masculinity of the libido in the pre-oedipal stage, which assumes that there is only one body, that of the boy's. The belief that the girl does not discover her vagina in the pre-oedipal phases of infantile sexuality takes into account only the penis as the paradigm of sexual desire. Also, since the mother is described as the phallic mother and the girl is a man, the desire is between two phalluses, which projects a male homosexual economy on the mother-daughter relationship (*Speculum,* 31 -32). The theory of castration complex again takes the penis as the standard sexual organ and the appropriate form and relegates the female sexual organ to absence. In this economy, woman is neither acknowledged to have a value in and for herself nor represented as an entity – she is the negative term in subjectivity: man who does not have a penis, not man but aspiring to be a man. The girl's desire for her mother, specificity of her body, her sexuality, her instincts, and her relation to her mother remain unexplained, repressed by the economy governed by the phallus. In this paradigm, the phallus is represented as the guarantor of sexual difference and pleasure,

yet, since woman, the other sex, her sexual organs are defined in terms of possessing or lacking the phallus, what happens is not the articulation or theory of sexual difference but the assertion of the value of the phallus. The phallus governs the logic of subjectivity, which Irigaray calls phallomorphism.

This is a one sex configuration in which the theory assumes that there is only one sex attributing to this one sex the only truth and means to realize his desire. Despite the claim of psychoanalysis to explain how woman and man come about, it does not actually take into account the specificity of the female sex by offering the male as the only sex without considering the historical determinants of the social order and theory itself. Psychoanalysis is itself determined by the patriarchal culture which takes the male sexuality as the norm and negates the female sex. What this theory offers as the economy of sexuality is the perfect model needed for the perpetuation of male dominance which requires women to abdicate their mother and thereby their own sexuality to uphold the paternal line. In this theory, for woman to fit into the social structure, she has to renounce and despise her sexual organs, her mother, and her desire for the mother, and replace her desire with the penis-envy whereas the boy's oedipal stage ensures the value of his sexuality through constructing the female as his other that lacks and envies what he has. Woman's invisible sexual organ supports the value of the phallus; the woman who is *really castrated*, without the phallus and conducive to its value by being envious of it.

Woman's repression is evident in the contradictions of this theory: in this scheme, the development of the boy into a normal man is easier and less complicated than that of the girl's. The boy only transfers his desire for the mother to another woman or, in other words, he transfers his desire for the mother into the idea of the mother, and his erogenous zones remain the same throughout his life. On the other hand, the girl is assumed to go through an impossible process in which she changes her object of desire, despises her mother, and desires her father while she has to give up clitoral masturbation and turn to vaginal pleasure. The fact that how the girl accomplishes these changes is not explained shows that woman's instincts and desires are repressed in theory as well as in society.

Desire for the mother is covered up by inscribing the male, the possessor of the phallus as a subject of desire and the only satisfaction left

to women is to be the object of male desire. In this phallic appropriation of sexuality, the woman then mime a feminity imposed on her by male desire in order to enter the symbolic (*Speculum*, 59 - 60). She will act as if she had a penis, or in the Lacanian scheme, she will act as if she can satisfy the male and get fulfilment in this way. Having no law, representation, or acknowledgement of her sex and her relationship to her mother, fixes her in the role of the mother and prevents her from relating to other women as different individuals. Represented as the absence in language, language stands in her way as the impasse to an access to subjectivity. As a not man/deficient man, woman lacks an "I" to love herself, other women and men while she constitutes the maternal body on which the male erects his civilization loving his own sex and himself. For the son, since the loss involved in castration is not a real loss but a phantasy of a loss that woman represents in her body, castration complex does not hinder the male from masturbation and the boy perseveres to desire the mother only transferring this desire to a desire for the maternal function (*Speculum*, 81 -82). Therefore, this representation of sexuality that underlies the social order shows that both men and women remain attached to the mother, the maternal body in the symbolic order.

Patriarchal culture based on this economy of desire provides man with the satisfaction of his incestuous desire for the mother by representing all women as mothers while the incest taboo keeps this desire hidden by the pretense of taboo. Similarly, the taboo on virginity makes the incestuous satisfaction possible since the hymen makes men think the virgin as different from the mother while at the same time the violation of the hymen fulfills the male desire to enter the maternal body. The taboo on virginity and incest maintains the exchange of women among men. These taboos veil the rules that govern the society.

Placing theory and psychoanalysis in the historical, social context, Irigaray suggests that the theory of the castration complex soothes the anguish of man (Freud, for instance) in the sight of the vagina, the difference, "a nothing to see," that is not a penis that raises horror and fear in the male who invests his being, truth, and theory on the value of the phallus. The male subject feels ""wounded," threatened by "castration," by anything he cannot see directly, anything he cannot perceive as like himself" and thereby rejects the existence of difference (*Speculum*, 138). If

this envy is not imputed on woman and the mother is recognized as woman, man would have to recognize the difference of the other and confront woman as different from himself, which would postulate another economy of desire and therefore another conceptualization of truth as well. Penis-envy functions as a remedy to man's castration anxiety by representing the fear of losing his penis in the female genitals.

Phallocentric psychoanalytic theory reveals that the condition of the continuation of patriarchal order is to secure the name of the father which requires the father-son relationship as the model. The mother-daughter relationship is violated for the sake of the father-son relationship and, thus, men can own women to support the value of the phallus and fulfill their incestuous desire for the mother. Woman has value as long as she sustains the value of the phallus; as the guardian of the phallus, she becomes a commodity to be exchanged among men who need her body, the maternal body for the support of their own identity. In "Women on the Market," Irigaray applies Marx's analysis of commodity on women's status in society and demonstrates that the quality of commodity and women's position are no different. Women are circulated in society among men like commodities that do not speak or claim value on their own, that do not relate to each other except for a relation of contrast in terms of value for men.

As commodities, women have two levels of value: use value that is reproduction, and exchange value that is determined in its relation to an external standard—the phallus. The external standard—gold or currency—permits the comparison of a commodity to another commodity, and the two commodities' relation lies in their relation to the third term. The immanent value of a commodity does not affect their exchange value; it is the phallus as the third term that determines their exchange value. This exchange is indispensable for the maintenance of the economic, social, and cultural order since other exchanges (of money, property, knowledge, etc.) are predicated on exchanging and owning women. The exchange of women forms the model that other exchanges are based on. Accumulating women—the more women the more valuable the phallus is—is the basic model for ownership and accumulation of wealth.

In this economy, women enter society as either mother, virgin or prostitute, none of which allows women their pleasure. The violation of

the hymen transmits the virgin who represents the exchange value into use value as mother who is thus excluded from the exchange in order to (re)produce under the name of man (*This Sex*, 185-187). Since in this order men exchange women, commodities, language among themselves, Irigaray states that homosexuality is the basic principle in this society:

> "Heterosexuality is nothing but the assignment of economic roles: there are producer subjects and agents of exchange (male) on the one hand, productive earth and commodities (female) on the other."
>
> The reason for the prejudice against homosexuality is that this order has to keep the rules hidden. Interpreting the rules governing the society openly puts the order in jeopardy so the prejudice against homosexulity among men veils over the hom(m)osexual structure of the order (*This Sex*, 192).

This society based on the father-son relation and on the love and value of the phallus is a man-to-man society where women occupy the position of a commodity. It is in this sense that Irigaray describes patriarchal society as a hommo-sexual society. Woman does not have a subject position to value itself and other women as their only relation is the relation of a commodity to another commodity, which is competition. After Irigaray's critique of psychoanalytic theory of sexuality, now we turn to her reading of deconstruction to see how deconstruction sustains patriarchal culture for Irigaray.

II. De or Re Construction of the Subject

As Irigaray's argument on sexual difference and on the lack of female subjectivity already implies, she has a critical stance towards Derrida's deconstruction of the subject for the reason that it does not bear any concern for the female subject. Deconstruction assumes that deconstruction of the subject eliminates the hierarchy between the male and the female automatically, so the lack of the representation of sexual difference is not actually discussed in Derrida's theory despite the fact that he is indebted to feminism which has initiated the questioning of the universality of the subject by insisting on the social construction of identity. The twentieth century marks the male subject's crisis. However,

for women the problem must be put differently since they already lacked this subjectivity and this is because sexual difference is not articulated. In her discussion on the differences and common points between Irigaray and Derrida in *Philosophy in the Feminine*, Whitford argues that deconstruction maintains the same-sex economy of representation making use of the female voice in order to produce multiplicity whereby the woman becomes a *différance* for the male subject to achieve his multiple subject without producing any change in the place of the woman as subject (Whitford 1991, 127-128). Derrida's reported response to a question on the woman's place in the deconstruction of the subject in "Women in the Beehive: A Seminar with Jacques Derrida" illuminates this point:

> The side of the woman is the side from which you start to dismantle the structure. So you can put undecidability and all of the other concepts which go with it on the side of feminity, writing and so on […] Starting with deconstruction of phallogocentrism, and using the feminine force, so to speak, in this move and then –and this would be the second stage or second level- to give up the opposition between men and women.
>
> […]
>
> Once you have succeeded, the word "woman" does not have the same meaning. Perhaps we could not even speak of "woman" anymore (Derrida 1989, 194-195).

On the other hand, Irigaray does not only speak of woman, she also says that it is necessary that woman and women should speak as well if the purpose is to deconstruct the (male) subject. Reading the underlying imaginary of deconstruction, Irigaray proposes that this deconstructive process uses women as constitutive of the now deconstructed (male) subject by posing the female as the negative of the male; the dark, chaotic, irrational side again (*Speculum*, 133- 137). The male subject colonizes the female subject by turning her into his negative again while denying her entry into the subject position, which means that deconstruction does not change anything for woman or women. The result is that the female supports the male in his deconstruction as she does in his construction of subjectivity and meaning. Deconstruction draws its strength from the model of the same sex. Irigaray explains the deconstruction of the male subject as follows:

> The "subject" henceforth will be multiple, plural, sometimes di-formed, but it will still postulate itself as the cause of all the mirages that can be enumerated endlessly and therefore put back together as one. A fantastic, phantasmatic fragmentation. A destruct(tura)tion in which the "subject" is shattered, scuttled, while still claiming surreptitiously that she is the reason for it all (*Speculum*, 135).

The male subject claims the right that only he can speak like a woman to undo himself whereas women remain in silence when the male subject is deconstructing himself. Whitford points out the injustice that is apparent in the different reception of Derrida's claim to speak like a woman and feminists' claim to speak as women. While Derrida can adopt the position of the woman, to write like a woman to prevent from falling back on metaphysics, feminists, especially Irigaray since she has been charged with essentialism, who talk of an identity for woman are assumed to fall back on phallocentricism by speaking like men (Whitford 1991, 132- 134). Whitford explains that "to speak mimetically like a man is not to be a man speaking like a man; it does not elicit the same reactions or produce the same effects" (Whitford 1991, 129). The problem, then, is that, for Derrida, in the domain of writing if women claim a subjectivity, they are phallocentric, and this domain does not have to deal with the social dimension in which women are excluded as subjects again. This means that like all truth, non-truth, the female voice and speaking like a woman is also the privilege of the male subject. Thus, he ends up where he started, the male subject speaking, and the female subject silent, and why he walked all this way to deconstruct the male subject is a question. Woman becomes a place in language that only the male can make use of and thus, Derrida avoids the problem of sexual difference, which leads again to using the female in the maternal function to support his presence/theory.

Deconstruction, then, is not far from the male hom(m)osexual culture in which male subjects exchange and negotiate, and, here, deconstruct the subject; it excludes the female subject who has not posed her question yet. Her question is where her desire, sexuality, sexual organs are placed in this symbolic and how they are constructed in deconstruction. The deconstructionist project's answer to feminism is similar to that of Marx's in the presumption that the proletariat state will

automatically abolish women's slavery and their subjection to men, which does not take into account the particularity of women's experience and the male domination. Deconstruction is one of the tools that Irigaray adopts but it is not her project, which becomes clear when she asserts that woman as the subject of her desire and truth must come to existence and deconstruction can only be a step towards this end rather than being an end in itself. Irigaray regards the subjection of the female to the male desire as the foundation of capitalist, destructive society, and of the metaphysics of presence. Therefore, any struggle and deconstruction has to first acknowledge woman as not the Other, hear the silence of female desire, and represent the non-represented woman.

For Irigaray, the aim is to bring about a change in both language and society—she sees change in language indispensable for creating a different social order (*Thinking*). This means that the deconstruction of the subject is possible with the entry of the female subject into language since the male subject is constructed on the absence of woman as a subject. Therefore, the logic of identity, truth, and thought that results from the inclusion of the female subjectivity in language cannot be placed in metaphysics of presence. The entry of the female subject into language is what turns this metaphysics upside down because if woman does not subtend the signification, the production of truth, and the logic of identity is not based on the oneness of the form (of the phallus) or the sameness (of the male), a new language and a new configuration of subjectivity will have to emerge. The charge of essentialism in arguing for a subjective identity for woman stems from the inability to conceive that the female subject as the subject of her desire and truth and liberated from the male desire already subverts the subject definition. In Irigaray's words "[w]hat seems difficult or even impossible to imagine is that there could be some other mode of exchange(s) that might not obey the same logic" (*This Sex*, 158). Hence, for Irigaray, the position of woman needs to change from the position of a commodity in exchange among men.

Though Irigaray's speaking of woman as not one and Derrida's aim of achieving a multiplicity in the subject are similar and share the same stance towards phallocentrism, Irigaray differs from Derrida in that she does not abandon "speaking (as) woman" (*This Sex*, 136). The multiplicity of the female that Irigaray talks about has two aspects; first, in

the existent logic of identity that is based on the unity and *oneness* of the form of the phallus, woman is what is left as the excess of the unique male subjectivity. Irigaray states that "The rejection, the exclusion of a female imaginary undoubtedly places woman in a position where she can experience herself only fragmentarily as waste or as excess in the little structured margins of a dominant ideology" (*This Sex,* 30). This is not a celebration of fragmentation. This is the result of the lack of symbolization, representation of female sexual instincts. But also, her access to language and identity would again be multiple; she would not be defined by the logic of phallologism since "woman does not have a sex. She has at least two of them, but they cannot be identified as ones" (*This Sex*, 28). The specificity of the female sex cannot be thought of in the logic of the phallus. Through the allusion to the female sexual organ, the multiplicity of women's erogenous zones, Irigaray states that the identity that woman can have access to should not be perceived from the point of male identity. It should be in accord with the multiplicity of the female pleasure. Criticizing Irigaray for falling back on phallocentrism means assuming that when Irigaray speaks about female subjectivity, she applies the logic of identity to the female subjectivity but Irigaray offers a different conceptualization of subjectivity; one that does not obey the law of phallomorphism. Irigaray does not oppose a female truth or identity against the male subject; she suggests a different conceptualization of truth, representation, and subjectivity.

Now, the question is how can woman speak in a subject position in this symbolic which does not acknowledge woman and her desire? As Whitford puts it, mimicry comes to play an important role in the abeyance that the female finds herself in language (Whitford 1991, 70- 71). Although language is the locus of her repression, women need to use this very language in order to accede to subjective identity. This is what Irigaray does in the magnificent language of *Speculum*. Here, she subverts its logic by displaying, revealing, parodying, unveiling it through abundant repetitions—for instance, "the little girl is a little man," "the dark continent," "magma" and "hysteria," with the expressions that she borrows from Freud. These obliterate the meaning of the repeated expressions, phrases by exposing their logic. Adopting the feminine role deliberately functions as *a technique* for both enabling woman to speak and to overturn

the representations, symbols, images that block her way to speech and subjectivity. Irigaray says that:

> One must assume the feminine role deliberately. Which means already to convert a form of subordination into affirmation, and thus to begin to thwart it. […] To play with mimesis is thus, for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it (*This Sex*, 76).

As there is no way out of the symbolic, language, women have to use the (male) language, mimic in order to expose its mechanism that allocates woman to silence or the role of the other. This does not mean submission to the logic of sameness but it is a strategy to effect a change in the symbolic. Whitford suggests that "[t]he tactic of mimesis can be seen as a kind of deliberate hysteria" (Whitford 1991, 71). That is to say, mimicry can be used as a tool to expose the artificiality of the imposed feminine role. Repressing female sexuality in society or in representation does not erase the female desire in language. Irigaray proposes that what is left out of the law/love of the father does not simply vanish but finds ways of resistance and makes itself heard in the silences and gaps in language. In Irigaray's words, language bears "those *blanks* in discourse which recall the places of her exclusion and which, by their *silent plasticity*, ensure the cohesion, the articulation, the coherent expansion of established forms" (*Speculum*, 142, italics in the original). Revealing these blanks and the condition of the coherence of texts opens up a path for a different system of representation in which sexual difference can be articulated. What is needed is "questioning words as the wrappings with which the "subject," modestly, clothes the "female" (*Speculum*, 142). It is necessary to expose the governing imaginary of the syntax and logic of meaning construction in language in order to disrupt the logic of sameness and rationality as defined by the male imaginary.

In *Thinking the Difference*, Irigaray argues that the forgotten, forbidden, silenced mother-daughter relationship needs to enter our culture through religious, cultural, mythical, and social representations so that the desire for/of the mother and women can subvert the language that is essential for a change in the social order. For Irigaray, the question of female subjectivity lies in the logic of discourse that excludes any

articulation of female desire, sexual difference, and a subject position for women to participate in any exchange in society. The fact that the production of meaning and representation exploits women by accruing the negativity, the otherness, silence, or lack on woman urges women to reevaluate, challenge, and interpret their position in language in order to express their desire. This accounts for the increasing interest on the part of women in literature both as writers and as critics since the 1970s when gender and representation emerged as the main stake in feminism. Adopting mimicry as a strategy, women have interpreted their subjection to male discourse and literature in order to effect a change in language and representation. Women writers' endeavor to give voice to the silences in language and the exposition of the logic of male discourse has contributed to devising strategies to cope with the impasses of language and literary forms for women.

Having summed up Irigaray's approach to female subjectivity related to language, I will now turn to Atwood, Carter, and Byatt and show how they, as women writers, deal with the problem of women's place in language and literature, and I will discuss how their writing responds to Irigaray's criticism of patriarchal culture and language.

III. Women Writing About Women Writing About Women

Irigaray's criticism of language and the argument for a female subjectivity are more compatible with the themes that are elaborated in the writings of Angela Carter and Margaret Atwood while Byatt presents a different approach to subjectivity in "Morpho Eugenia". As women writers, they all show their concern with female subjectivity by both choosing women characters and by writing on the issue of writing as a woman in the realm of literature that obliges any gender-conscious woman to struggle, discuss, and negotiate with its history. Besides, their use of experimental narrative techniques, allusions to literary criticism, and their use of intertextuality demonstrate the woman writer's uncomfortable and problematic position within literature and language. Atwood and Carter aim at producing a female subjective identity following Irigaray's argument. On the other hand, Byatt differs from Atwood and Carter in that

although binary oppositions and the authority of the male subject are the target of criticism in "Morpho Eugenia," the deconstruction is in the Derridean fashion. Woman remains as the other of the male subject and the problem of sexual difference is overshadowed by class and race discrimination.

Angela Carter presents Fevvers as the *New Woman* of the twentieth century who starts her adventures by learning and practicing mimicry and ends up with hysteria that bears the potential for a female subjective identity in *Nights at the Circus*. Without abandoning the law that assigns woman the object position, Fevvers turns her object position into an advantage without disrupting the subject-object dichotomy. Yet, she displays her body in the object position in such an excessive way that this object position becomes a parody of the subject-object dichotomy. What Carter achieves in the characterization of Fevvers is to expose how woman is represented in the discursive logic based on sameness; as the other, a "not all," an anomaly, the excess, the deviant from the logic of identity. The exposition of the construction and vulnerability of subjectivity in language and the subversive power of fiction as observed in Fevvers' creating herself propounds the work on language in order to diverge from phallocentric ideology of identity.

Irigaray's criticism of patriarchy and language reveals itself best in Atwood's presentation of the destructive patriarchal culture and the consequences of the non-representation of mother-daughter relationships. Atwood discloses how language and fiction confine women in the role of maternity and "the world of male drives, a world where she has become invisible and blind to herself, her mother, other women, and even men" (*Thinking*, 112). While language and fiction are exposed as constitutive of subjectivity in male dominated culture, intertextuality and meta-narration investigates a way to engender a female subjectivity. By shifting the subject-object positions in art—the subject of art and art object—and obliterating the borders between the reader and the writer, Atwood overturns the logic of discourse and literature in order to examine the woman writer's problematic position in literature and language. In the conjunction of this disruption of the discursive logic in the frame story and the suspicious paternal heritage against the safe maternal ancestry (of Sabrina) the suggestion of a different conceptualization of female

subjectivity arises. Atwood suggests that this new subjectivity recognizes the desire of/for the mother and it will be configured in language in concomitant with the change in the social order which requires the recognition of the maternal line for determining identity.[2]

Byatt poses a stance that is closer to Derrida rather than Irigaray. In "Morpho Eugenia" she deconstructs the subject and the idea of a natural order through the use of metaphor and analogy in Derridean fashion. Yet, the question of female subjectivity and women's exploitation in patriarchal culture is assimilated in the criticism of socio-economic exploitation. Therefore, the rebellion against, or rather, the escape from the socio-economic structure in Bredely Hall that is represented in Adamson and Matilda's setting off for the Amazons at the end of the novella, is not promising in terms of female subjectivity. With this ending, the change in the here and now that Irigaray calls for is postponed to a future in an Eden-like-world. The female, Matilda as a woman writer, acts the role of Eve, the maternal body when she accompanies the son of Adam in his search for the garden of Eden.

It is obvious that without an understanding of the relation to the mother, the desire of/for the mother, and the link between the production of truth in language and the construction of the male and the female, a different subjectivity cannot be achieved. The deconstruction in "Morpho Eugenia" demonstrates that if the unraveling of the authority of the male subject is not accompanied by a configuration of a female subjective identity, woman and man continue to occupy the same places in the symbolic, which makes it impossible to imagine a different concept of truth or language. In this sense, "Morpho Eugenia" occupies a different place in this discussion of female identity, and this is why I will place the chapter on "Morpho Eugenia" published in 1992, at the end although the chronological order requires it to be placed after *Nights at the Circus*, published in 1984, and before *The Blind Assassin*, published in 2001.

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[2] See Hatice Yurttaş's "Reading The Penelopiad through Irigaray: Rewriting Female Subjectivity" for a similar reading of Irigaray's critique of the representation of female characters in terms of mother-daughter relationships in Atwood's another writing, The Penelopiad and "Desire in *Middlemarch"* (Yurttas 2017a; Yurttaş 2017b).

CHAPTER ONE

NIGHTS AT THE CIRCUS

1.1. *Ludic Mimicry*[3]

Nights at the Circus[4] is a picaresque novel that starts with the "civil" world of London and ends in a primitive village in the tundras of Siberia. With this picaresque structure, Carter presents a quest for female subjective identity concomitant with a way to restructure the male subjectivity that can produce a different epistemology. The narration starts with a review of the ideas and the institutions that these ideas produced in the nineteenth century that jeopardize female identity through the life story of Fevvers, and advances towards the twentieth century to examine the perils the female subject encounters. Meanwhile, Fevvers moves from mimicry to hysteria in her quest.

In the characterization of Fevvers, Carter exposes how woman, sexual difference is represented in the phallocentric logic of identity: a monster, an excess, an object of the gaze, a freak. Fevvers' education on and profession of displaying her body and identity as an art object elaborates on mimicry that Irigaray describes as an imposed feminity on women in phallocentric discourse in which female sexual instincts have no expression, representation or symbols. However, the deliberate and excessive display of Fevvers' identity exposes the artificiality of her construction as woman and expresses the desire of woman for a different subjectivity. This brings her performance closer to hysteria. Irigaray's following remarks on hysteria applies to Fevvers' performance:

> hysteria holds in reserve, in suspension/suffering, something in common with the mime that is a sine qua non of sexual pleasure. The problem is that the ludic mimicry, the fiction, the "make believe," the "let's

[3] This phrase is adopted from Irigaray (*Speculum*, 60).
[4] It will be referred to as *NC* hereafter.