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It is with the utmost pleasure that I present to you this double issue of Nebula. We have had considerable difficulty in ordering the table of contents below -- because we have thoroughly enjoyed and appreciated each and every contribution.
Theodoros Mitsios, Editor.

Contents

Cry Babies Challenging the Feminist Myths.

Ayse Naz Bulamur

I met the two angry women in Adrienne Rich's poem, "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law," when my girlfriends and I were "feminist" chicks desperately seeking for white knights who could cook, clean, and wash the dishes for us. The mother in Rich's poem woke us up from our dreams of finding a perfect guy, who should plausibly be wealthy, handsome, intellectual, and a great cook. We were in tears to read how the mother and her daughter-in-law were trapped in a kitchen "in the prime of their lives." But, of course, they were fictitious characters. So we were still holding on to our dreams of living a 'happily ever after' marriage, where the hierarchical binary of man/woman would not hold anymore. We were intellectual, smart, and ambitious M.A. students, eager to deconstruct traditional gender roles and help men internalize our feminist ideals. There was no way we could identify with Rich's characters full of suppressed anger and unfulfilled aspirations. Moved by their miserable story, we decided to help them out by introducing them to the feminist writers such as Charlotte Gilman, Luce Irigaray, Catherine Clement, and Helene Cixous. They were in the reading list of our Women Writers and Feminist Theory course and we were sure that they would rescue the mother and her daughter-in-law from the oppressions of patriarchy. Otherwise, why should they be in our reading list? But, before going on to our rescue plan, I will first tell you the story of the mother and her daughter-in law. If you are a lonely and sentimental reader like I am, you will need a lot of tissues to wipe your tears:

The story of the mother is tragic enough to be the subject matter of a Turkish arabesque movie. "Once a belle in Shreveport," the mother repressed all her fantasies, hopes, and expectations, in order to be a proper housewife, and a mother.

> Your mind now, moldering like wedding-cake,
> heavy with useless experience, rich
> with suspicion, rumor, fantasy,
> crumbling to pieces under the knife-edge
> of mere fact. In the prime of your life. (1)

We girls take pictures of the wedding cakes and wonder which song should be played when the cake is brought to our wedding ceremonies. True blue? I will always love you? Quanto Amore Sei? And so on. As sentimental readers, we do not want to disrupt the universal bond between the 'signifier' wedding-cake and its 'signifiers': unity, harmony and love. We are frustrated to see how the wedding-cake brought the mother mental instability and rottenness. [Do my friends and I really empathize with the sufferings of the mother while we are reading the poem? Or are we much more concerned with the possibility that our dreams of love may crumble to pieces as well? You never know what is really going on in the readers' minds. But that is another story.] All her dreams, expectations are "crumbling to pieces" because she wastes her life with "useless experience," dusting the cupboards, and "waiting for the iron to heat" (4). In order to escape from her futile life, the mother dresses up in the clothes of her past and lives with the "delicious recollections" of her youth, when she was the belle of a small Southern town.

The "wedding cake" has not brought happiness to the daughter-in-law either. Wiping the teaspoons, her "nervy" and "glowering" looks reveal her anger against the social pressures that imprison her in a kitchen. She protests against her duties as a housewife by "banging the coffee-pot into the sink." The sentimental voice in me asks how coffeepots and teaspoons, things that I used to play with as a little girl with my grandmother, can be treated so violently. I still keep them. They keep my memories of playing house with my grandmother alive. Enjoying the time I was spending with her, I had never thought she might also have wanted to 'bang the coffeepots' and stop performing the role of a dutiful and happy housewife both in her marriage and in her play with her granddaughter. How was she spending her life in a kitchen, taking care of her three sons and husband? Was she also losing herself in the sweet memories of her youth while looking at the beautiful Bosphorus view from her balcony? How cozy was the kitchen for my grandmother and the daughter-in-law, who was hurting herself deliberately?

> Sometimes she's let the tapstream scald her arm,
> a match burn to her thumbnail,
>
> or held her hand above the kettle's snout

> right in the woolly steam. They are probably angels,
> since nothing hurts her anymore, except
> each morning's grit blowing into her eyes. (2)

We, the studious M.A. students, use close reading to decipher what morning grit signifies in the poem. We believe that morning's grit wakes the daughter-in-law from her dreams (in which she is free from social restrictions), and brings her into the consciousness of her gender role. We conclude that it is not physical pain, but the social pressure is what she cannot bear. Reading the poem, we silently think about women with different cultural, racial, and religious backgrounds, who give up their hopes and desires to be the perfect housewives.

> Still, eyes inaccurately dream
> behind closed windows blankening with steam.
> Deliciously, all that we might have been,
> all that we were-fire, tears,
> wit, taste, martyred ambition
> stirs like the memory of refused adultery
> the drained and flagging bosom of our middle years. (8)

We think of women whose dreams, wishes, expectations from life vanish as they are trapped in a conventional marriage, housework, and child-care with no access to education or career development. They waste the "bosom" of their lives as they sacrifice their ambitions and desires to conform to the expectations of society. Once and for all, we sit down and cry for all women who give up their education, jobs, and love affairs to stay safe in their comfort zones. [Whether we are shedding tears for the desperate housewives or for the possibility that we may become the daughter-in-law cursing the morning grit blowing into her eyes is not clear. Empathy with the characters becomes problematic when the reader's future is at stake.] But my mother, the daughter-in-law, and I did not cry when my grandfather died. We were secretly happy that his death gave her the liberty to enjoy the rest of her life without any orders or restrictions. But had she ever wanted that freedom?

Well,

> there is too much suffering and crying going on here.

How do you think your old fashioned and new critical strategies of interpreting the text will save these miserable women from the oppressions of patriarchy? Do you think offering possible meanings of what morning grit is, will help the daughter-in-law stop burning herself and find better ways of liberating herself from her entrapment in the domestic sphere? Instead of waking the mother up from the dreams of her idealistic past, you girls are lost in your imaginary wedding ceremony with a cake and a love song. Didn't you learn anything from Iser, Fish, and Barthes what the role of a reader should be? They don't want passive, sentimental cry babies, as you are. Their implied reader is the one who actively participates in the construction of the meaning in the text, fills the gaps, and constantly challenges and reverses her own interpretations. You, as readers, should stop thinking about your own marriage plans and think about how you can actually change the destiny of these characters! You know that losing oneself in the recollections of the past or burning a thumbnail with a match will not rescue these women from their domestic duties. So don't sit back and watch them destroy their lives. As active readers, you have the responsibility to help the mother and her daughter-in-law find a more constructive way to rebel against their limited roles in patriarchal society. What are you waiting for? Jump into the text, and help these characters lead a happier life in Rich's poem.

The girls

are

baffled

with the author's intrusion.

They are so traumatized with the mother's, daughter-in-law's, and the grandmother's stories that they do not know how to respond to the author's accusations. They are thinking about why they should be obliged to play the role given by these literary critics. The dilemma of whether they should sit down and cry for hours or take the author's advice and be revolutionary readers, is too hard for the girls to handle. But they want to prove to the writer

that they know their reader-response and feminist theory. With that academic background, they have the potential to be activist girls and emancipate Rich's characters from the horrible kitchen. Who is this author anyway? Is it he or she? The girls cannot wait to solve the mystery of this author. But they decide that they have to wait. There are more serious issues going on other than discovering the name, gender, and cultural background of the author. Still, the gender of the author is haunting them. They are thinking "what if the author is the white knight in their dreams". It is fun to watch these girls struggling to shift from their dreams into the poem. They don't know, of course, that the author is just another sentimental graduate student, who is pretending to be smart enough to intrude in the lives of her characters. She is not the sexy guy, with dark hair and green eyes, who listens to Italian music in his car and cites poetry. She is not Ronald Sukenick's blonde, with "long legs showing under the shortest of miniskirts" either (76). She does not understand anything of poetry and this is very evident in her papers. Otherwise, why should she rely on her characters to make up stories about Rich's poem? Oh, uh! The girls look like the "thinking woman" in Rich's poem. They seem to be busy with coming up with innovative and fruitful ideas to help out Rich's characters. I see the aura of intelligence and creativity surrounding them. I guess the author's intrusion did work. They are about to make a rescue plan. Let's hear what they have to say:

Nana: Girls, we should read the poem more closely. Rich seems to be upset that only a few women have the courage to smash the system. She writes,

> For that, solitary confinement
> tear gas, attrition shelling.
> Few applicants for that honor. (9)

Even though the mother and the daughter-in-law are oppressed by their gender roles, they do nothing to liberate themselves from the social pressures. They remain silent and conform to their domestic roles by living with the illusion of the past or harming themselves with kitchen tools.

Nezire: Yes! The daughter-in-law "hears the angels chiding": "Have no patience," "Be insatiable," "Save yourself; others you cannot save." But she does not take the advice of the angels to save herself from the kitchen.

Neyla: So you are saying that Rich's characters and even Naz's grandmother

participate in their own domination!

Naz: Well, our discussion of the poem while having tiramisu and espresso do not contribute to the women's rights either. We are eating too much and babbling too much. Let's show the author and the sneaky narrator what we can do. Let's be the "applicants" who are willing to bring these women to their senses.

Neyla: But you girls don't really mean that we are going to be "applicants" to "tear gas, attrition shelling," do you? This plan sounds horrible. Even my waterproof mascara will not be able to resist the tears in my eyes due to gas. What if my nail polish gets messed up while carrying the guns and so on?

Nana: All right. We don't need gas and guns. This sounds too masculine and patriotic. Why don't we become this angry fury, the helicopter women at the end of Rich's poem? We can fly to various feminist texts written in different time periods and consult those writers about what we should do to free women from the restraints of patriarchy. Here is the androgynous, helicopter fury that we need to become…

Nezire: Can we at least finish our tiramisu before starting our flight?

Naz: You are gaining too much weight! What would Sukenick write about while looking at your enormous belly? Waking up from his dreams of the skinny blonde, he would probably have a heart attack!

Nana: Well, while she is finishing up her dessert, let's see how Rich defines these helicopter women so we know the role we will be playing in the rest of the author's paper.

> Well,
> she's long about her coming, who must be
> more merciless to herself than history.
> Her mind full to the wind, I see her plunge
> breasted and glancing through the currents,
> taking the light upon her
> at least as beautiful as any boy
> or helicopter,
> poised, still coming,
> her fine blades making the air wince […] (10)

Neyla: Fine blades sound good! I like the idea of being strong, powerful, and merciless.

But, we, girls, don't want to be "as beautiful as any boy." At least I don't! I think we should go to the hairdresser, put some make up on, shave our legs, and pick our sexiest clothes to take with us to our trip.

> *Dulce ridens, dulce loquens,*
> She shaves her legs until they gleam
> Like petrified mammoth-tusk. (5)

Nezire: Well, as readers of Rich's poem, we can make some changes in the helicopter figure. Can't we? Let's turn this androgynous fury into a sexy, beautiful, and "purely" feminine woman!

The girls

decide to take a break from their confidential meeting about their trip to the feminist texts written in the twentieth century. They all come to the consensus that they have to go the fitness center after they are done with packing and shopping. Otherwise, how can they have "fine blades making the air wince"? They have to pose as the strong, superwomen. They don't want the feminist writers to unravel their true identity: weak, silly graduate students discussing Rich's poem, whilst secretly desiring to watch the soap opera "The Bold and the Beautiful" instead. They have a mission now. They need to know the possible solutions that the feminist writers would offer them with which to liberate Rich's women from patriarchy. They trust Gilman, Irigaray, Clement, and Cixous. The girls remind me of my youth, with full hopes of being a social activist who would actually help the women suffering from poverty, sexual abuse, and their husbands' oppression. What have I done besides reading, studying, and writing papers? And how does presenting feminist papers in conferences help the "no name woman" in the kitchen, "banging the coffee-pot into the sink"? Apparently, reading Hannah Fosters' "The Coquette" in the light of Mikhail Bakthin's theories and theorizing about Salome's anger in Elizabeth Cary's play, "The Tragedy of Mariam", haven't helped the cleaning woman's conflict with her cheating husband. Thus, I turned out to be a "sneaky narrator", as the girls would say, in another ambitious but passive graduate student's paper. How will the author's attempts to use "critifiction" or to "do the multiple", bring any change to daughters-in-law around the world? Maybe I should quit my job as a narrator. But no, no! I don't dare to "disturb the universe" by challenging the author's decision to give me the role of

the narrator. I believe in these girls. Besides I have 'airsickness'. I suppose, "The second coming is at hand." Instead of "a shape with lion body and the head of a man," we have four feminist chicks, playing the role of Rich's fury, coming to liberate women from the injustices and inequalities of patriarchy. So far, the girls are fine with the helicopter and the blades. But they are still resisting being androgynous. They do not see why they need to be androgynous to fly to feminist texts and search for women's emancipation. Why need masculine traits to challenge patriarchy? They want to be as "feminine" as possible. Here, they are ready to take off! The journey is about to begin.

Nana: Okay girls. I will take attendance before we leave. Nezire?

Nezire: Here.

Nana: Naz?

Nezire: She is here but still sleeping.

Nana: I see… Neyla?

Neyla: Here I suppose.

Nana: Great! Everyone is here. Last night, I went over the texts we will be studying in our Women Writers and Feminist Theory course next semester. Reading list includes feminist writers such as Gilman, Irigaray, Clement and Cixous. We should start our journey with Gilman's *Herland*, a feminist utopia written in 1915. Perhaps the mother's recollections of her youth in Shreveport and Gilman's utopian visions will match! Then the mother and her daughter-in-law will desert Rich and continue to live in *Herland* happily ever after!

Nezire: Yeah! Then we won't have to play the role of helicopter woman for so long. These French women scare me.

Nana: Don't be a coward! If Gilman's utopia doesn't suit Rich's unhappy characters' needs, we will fly to Irigaray's '*This Sex Which Is Not One'* and to Cixous and Clement's '*The Newly Born Women'*. Since they are dealing with post-structuralism and Lacan, they should be smart enough to help us out.

Naz: I have airsickness. What if I throw up? Do you want me to tell you the stories of how I threw up on people's laps on the plane, taxi, bus…

NanaNezireNeyla: You are too gross to be a lady like we are!

Nana: Anyway. Are you girls ready? Set? G-

Neyla: Wait! Who is going to be the pilot?

Nana: (*getting ready to take off*) I will.

Neyla: But do you have a certificate or something? When did you learn to fly?

Nana: (*helicopter starts to move and it is about to fly*) I didn't.

NezireNeylaNaz: **WHATTTT???????**

"What?"

is not the question.

The question is whether these girls will be able to be "more merciless" to themselves than to the feminist writers. What do they know about women in the early twentieth century, to be able to understand Gilman's utopia? They are probably going to judge her in the light of their twenty-first century standards and will be more confused than ever as to what they should do with the mother and the daughter-in-law. I hope they will be wiser in their reading of Irigaray and Cixous. I hope they won't pick up two or three terms and use them to explain the whole texts. As they are judging these writers in the light of their incomplete knowledge of theory and history, how critical will they be able to be towards their own flight to these texts? How will they question their own interpretive strategies and be critical of their mission to rescue Rich's characters? The girls should not be left alone. They think they are all by themselves in this ambitious journey. I am on the back seat watching them silently…secretly… while trying so hard not to throw up on one of these girls.

As we are "glancing through the currents", we are trying to suppress our fear of flying to an unknown Herland. Skimming through the novel, we know that there are only women living in that matriarchal society. Will they be hospitable enough to welcome us with delicious food and diet coke? Or will they use us as prisoners to do housework for them? Good news is that since there are no men, we don't have to wear make up and dress up. Not the white knight but a bunch of women with short hair will be waiting for us there. We will save a lot of time by not thinking whether our shoes match with our

outfit. We will use that time for our investigations, to see whether Herland is a right place for the mother and her daughter-in-law to live in.

Now we are finally at Herland after a chaotic trip in the helicopter screaming and yelling at Nana to fly carefully, throwing up at each other, and wishing we were at home finishing up our tiramisus. The first thing we notice is that there is no dirt, smoke, or noise in Herland. Everything seems to be clean, ordered, pleasant, and beautiful. "Peace, Beauty, Order, Safety, Love, Wisdom, Justice, Patience" make their world go around! The women in Herland welcome us with great hospitality and let us stay in a cottage. After unpacking our suitcases, we sleep right away. But I can't sleep. I have this nightmare that I am transforming into a fictive existence in this paper or in Gilman's *Herland* and I am not sure what my true self is. Hearing the knock on the door, I wake up from my horrible dream to see that women in Herland are here in the cottage at 7:00 am. It is amazing to see that these women can't wait to listen to our stories. It has been a long journey into the night and I don't even remember the details of our trip. Why did we end up in Herland anyway? I was sleeping while my friends were planning the trip and when we were flying to Herland. We make up a story that will satisfy their curiosity. We briefly tell them how we decided to become the helicopter woman in Rich's poem and fly to feminist women writers' texts to find out how we could challenge the oppressions of the patriarchy that imprison the mother and her daughter-in-law in the kitchen. I am not sure whether they actually believe in our story or not. We also add that Herland is the first stop in our trip and that we have two more texts to visit.

The women in Herland seem to have the "evenest tempers, the most perfect patience" and "absence of irritability" (46). My girlfriends and I are thinking perhaps these good-natured women can help the daughter-in-law control her anger and stop hurting herself with kitchen tools. But the problem is that these women do not look "womanly" at all. We are wondering where "the real women," with long hair and fancy clothes are? How will the mother, "once a belle in Shreveport, / with henna-colored hair, skin like a peachbud," get along with the women who do not have "feminine charms"? The best part of not having men in the country is that women don't have to obey their husbands' orders, cook, clean, or do laundry for them! I wish my grandmother read Herland! I am assuming that she had never conceptualized a society where women did

not have to imprison themselves in a home. Women in Herland cannot even imagine how the mother and the daughter-in-law do not have a room of their own. Unlike Rich's characters, they have "the most delicate sense of personal privacy […]. They have, every one of them, the 'two rooms and a bath' theory realized" (125). They are horrified to learn from us that women in patriarchal societies have to change their maiden names for their husbands'.

So far, so good.

No patriarchy, no oppressive housekeeping duties.

Plus the women have room of their own.

The mother and her daughter-in-law will be so excited to hear this!

I wish we knew their names.☹

But, then, the women tell us the workings of matriarchy. They explain with "sweet seriousness" that Motherhood is "the highest social service" and "to be encouraged to bear more than one child is the very highest reward and honor in the power of the state" (69). You should see the puzzled and bewildered expressions on our faces. We are thinking how each woman has at least five children without having sex with men! How is this possible? We are not experts in biology but we read *Cosmopolitan* enough to know how things work! One of them explains how the women in Herland "developed this virgin birth capacity" (67).

> You see, before a child comes to one of us there is a period of utter exaltation—the whole being is uplifted and filled with a concentrated desire for that child. […] When that deep inner demand for a child began to be felt she would deliberately engage in the most active work, physical and mental; and even more important, would solace her longing by the direct care and service of the babies we already had. (70)

Even imagining the "period of utter exaltation" makes our faces grow pale and sad. We feel dizzy and are about to faint. Nezire thinks about the money she will spend, Neyla wonders how much weight she will gain, Nana knows how old she will look, and I lament for the sleepless nights after giving birth to five children. We also learn that there is no notion of family here. They consider themselves "all one 'family'" and they don't need to know "which child belongs to which mother" (74). It is too sad to think that children in Herland probably don't know whom they should call on Mother's Day. They

think "in terms of the community" and have no private emotions and feelings. We, girls, are "uplifted and filled with a concentrated desire" for shopping, traveling, watching movies, gossiping, dressing up, and falling in love. Even our desire for tiramisu exceeds our desire to have children. We conclude that the "drama of the country [is]—to our taste—rather flat. You see, they lacked the sex motive and with it, jealousy" (99). After listening to their story of how matriarchal society works, we go back to our rooms and have a meeting.

Naz: Okay girls, what are we going to do know? Do you want to stay here more or …

Nana: I miss my boyfriend!

Nezire: You don't have a boyfriend!

Nana: I wish I had though. What if we lose our sex motive by staying here longer? There is no courtship going on here. I want men in my utopia.

Neyla: And I want to be a professor not a mother. How am I going to write papers if I have a baby crying in the next room?

Nezire: What if we develop this virgin birth capacity and are pregnant before we even leave?

Naz: What if we lose our "essentially feminine" qualities and don't have the desire to put on nail polish anymore when we go back home?

NazNanaNezireNeyla: NO! NO! NO! WHAT HAVE WE DONE TO DESERVE THIS?

Nana: What kind of a "feminist" utopia is this? I have never imagined that matriarchy could be as oppressive as patriarchy!

Nezire: Do you think that we should talk about Herland to the mother and her daughter-in-law?

Neyla: Are you crazy? If we tell the daughter-in-law that she will have at least five children in Herland, she will probably throw the coffeepot and kettle to our heads!

Naz: Shall we go girls?

NanaNezireNeyla: Let's go!

Girls…

Stupid, silly, foolish girls!

It is hard to believe that they are M.A. students. Do you see how prejudiced they are against other cultures and centuries? Perhaps I should blame postmodernism for their surface level reading strategies. Well, I haven't forgotten Eliot and how I fell in love with his poems. I should teach these girls close reading and textual analysis. They pick the quotes and paragraphs that will support their conclusion that Gilman's notion of femininity is as oppressive as the one shaped by patriarchy. They even disrupt and subvert the quotes they are giving you. Dear Reader, please go back and read the quote on page 14. Do you see the gap, […], there? How would you fill in that gap? Let me tell you what Gilman writes in that gap, "Often young women, those to whom motherhood had not yet come, would voluntarily defer it" (70). This means that women have control over their bodies. They can defer pregnancy if they want to. They don't even need birth control pills! And the beauty of motherhood is that the women look after children collectively. They don't need to endure sleepless nights much. And I believe that they have an idea of "sex-love." Otherwise, why should Ellador leave Herland to be with Vandyck Jennings, a curious American male explorer in the country? But I want to leave with the girls too. I don't want to be surrounded with "sisterly love" in here. One wonders how sisterly that love is…

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We are back in the helicopter, hoping that Nana is now an expert pilot, who will be able to find her way from Herland to France. We are so excited that we will meet French men who will take us to fancy restaurants, the Moulin Rouge, and offer us wonderful red wine. The girls find the French language terribly sexy. I find it snobbish. I prefer Italian. Perhaps we can make men fall in love with us by telling our adventurous journey to rescue Rich's characters. We should make our story as believable and real as we can. Maybe they will volunteer to join us in our trip! But we shouldn't talk about Herland much. Otherwise, the attention will shift from us to that all-female society. And we don't want that to happen. Our next stop is Luce Irigaray's '*This Sex Which Is Not One'*. I hope Irigaray will be wise enough to offer us a "real" feminist manifesto. What was that natural instinct of motherhood about? Why should women want domesticity in their utopia? Patriarchy already assigns women the role of loving, caring, and emotional mother. Why does Gilman perpetuate motherhood? These are the questions we are

discussing on our way to Irigaray's text. To be honest, we are trying to sound intelligent with our academic discourse. The truth is that everyone is dreaming about the French white knight that they will meet accidentally on the Champs- Élysées.

This time, we find a luxurious hotel in the heart of Paris; after that terrible cottage we had to stay at in Herland. Our sweet and considerate dads send us money for our academic investigations. Otherwise, how can we have money to stay in Paris as poor graduate students? In the morning, we start our "flight" to Irigaray's text. From the first couple of chapters, we see that this French feminist writer knows what the mother and her daughter-in-law are suffering from. We carefully read and highlight the passages where she compares a marriage contract to a system of exchange, in which the bride is a commodity that passes from one procurer to another. She believes that a woman functions as the "currency of exchange" as she is transmitted from her father's hands to her husband's. Her "price" is established in terms of how well she performs her housekeeping duties. A woman does not have any identity other than being a daughter and a wife, who is subject to men's demands. Now we understand why there are no surnames, which indicate man's ownership of his family, in Gilman's utopia. We are thrilled to find a quote that is directly related to the mother and her daughter-in-law's lives: "fatherland, home, discourse, imprison us in enclosed spaces where we cannot keep on moving, living, as ourselves" (212). Now we have a perfect evidence to justify our argument that these women are unhappy in their marriages with unloving husbands and domestic duties. As Irigaray would say, Rich's characters live in the "zone of silence." They don't even share their unhappiness with each other but choose to escape from the enclosed spaces momentarily by daydreaming or hurting themselves. In the meantime, I notice that my friends' eyes also shift from the text to their dreams of going out and discovering this beautiful city. I wish we had time to go to Disneyland in Paris and take pictures with Minnie. I need to buy magnets, key chains, and a t-shirt of Minnie. But we have more work to do.

We find Irigaray's argument about marriage very smart. I think the mother and the daughter-in-love will file a divorce as soon as they find out that they are "currency of exchange" between men. But we are confused when she writes that woman is the "mother earth," "productive earth," "the guardian of nature" and the "material

substance." She writes that "the ruling power [man] is pretence, or a sham" that prohibits any return to red blood" (192). Even though she states that she seeks a possibility of non-hierarchical articulation of masculine-feminine, she eventually privileges nature, red blood over pretence and civilization. Then she goes on to claim that woman remains "in flux, never congealing and solidifying." The myth of "feminine essence" in Irigaray's text creates anger and discomfort among us.

Nana: Why do these feminist writers worship motherhood and nature that much? Are we still in *Herland* or in *This Sex Which Is Not One*? I am confused. Hasn't anything changed since 1915?

Nezire: I am confused too. I thought patriarchal ideology was the one to blame for assigning motherhood and childcare to women. I thought feminist writers should be the ones to challenge traditional gender roles.

Neyla: Yeah. Aren't these writers actually perpetuating patriarchy by sustaining women's roles in the domestic sphere? She excludes women from the social sphere by correlating femininity with nature and motherhood.

Naz: I hate nature. I don't even go to picnics. My friends forced me to go to a rain forest in San Juan to see a waterfall! And that was the worst time of my life.

Neyla: I don't want to be the fertile and nurturing mother figure either.

Nana: So who do you think Irigaray is referring to when she says "woman"? Clearly, not us! Is she referring to Chinese, Italian, American, African, or Turkish women?

Nezire: Nana, she is French. I don't think she has ever been to these countries. She probably has no idea of those women's experiences.

Naz: So, is she referring to French women?

Nezire: Come on, Naz. Look around you. Do you think these skinny, snobbish, and fashionable French women want to be the guardians of nature?

Neyla: And what if we don't want to be fluid and multiple? I don't even know what "fluid" means. I want order, structure and clear-cut truths in my life.

Nana: I think Irigaray should go to Herland. She will probably have at least ten children with this motherly instinct.

The girls

give one more chance to Irigaray.

They read through Rich's poem to see whether the mother and the daughter-in-law would happily perform the role of mother earth. Their interpretive strategies lead them to pick stanzas in the poem that will support their criticism of Irigaray. They find what they are looking for. Reading the following stanza, they conclude that Rich challenges the myth of bliss in childbirth, by turning the image of pregnant women into a "tragical machine".

> *Poised, trembling and unsatisfied, before*
> *an unlocked door, that cage of cages,*
> *tell us, you bird, you tragical machine-*
> *is this fertillisante douleur? Pinned down*
> *by love, for you the only natural action,*
> *are you edged more keen*
> *to prise the secrets of the vault? Has Nature shown*
> *her household books to you, daughter-in-law,*
> *that her sons never saw? (6)*

The girls don't see any fluidity and multiplicity but suffering and dolor in motherhood. Woman's role as the guardian of nature consumes her strength and leaves her "poised, trembling, and unsatisfied." The girls surely don't want to bring more pain and discomfort to the mother and daughter-in-law by sending them to Herland or assigning them the role of mother earth. As Rich implies at the end of that stanza, the girls believe that childbirth does not make women any closer to nature than men.

Frustrated

with Irigaray's definition femininity, the girls silently walk away from Champs-Élysées, towards the Jewish district, Marais. Walking through the narrow streets, N is thinking of the Jewish guy she once fell in love. N wants to go the Picasso museum in Marais. N is happy that they don't have to fly to the next, and the final text because Cixous is also French. N remembers the stingy Jewish guest she met when she was working at Hyatt Regency. And N considers the possibility that perhaps Federman and Derrida have also passed from those narrow streets. Here they are, sitting at a cozy cafe skimming through 'The Newly Born Women'. Unfortunately, they haven't found handsome French men to accompany them in their investigations.

Yes, we are lonely, dear narrator. We haven't met a single guy besides the ones we asked for direction. They insisted on speaking French. And we insisted on speaking Turkish, Chinese, or English. We are also losing all our hopes of finding a feminist writer that will actually liberate the mother and the daughter-in-law from their unhappy marriages. But you, dear narrator, are not better off than we are. What have you accomplished so far? You are just a passive voyeur, who judges our reading skills. Don't think that we are not aware of your hidden presence. You are all around us. We see you. Why don't you leave us alone and have our fun in Paris? Don't you have better things to do than just secretly watching us? Well, if the answer is no, then you are as desperate as Rich's characters and we.

We sit down in a café in Marais with our copy of '*The Newly Born Woman'*. On the back cover of the book we read that Helene Cixous and Catherine Clement's book "is a landmark text of the modern feminist movement." This remark refreshes our hopes of finding a feminist theory that we can put into practice to rescue Rich's characters. We also love the color of the book cover and we decide that we want an outfit in light purple. After ordering a coffee, we get serious and start reading the book. This is our last text to explore. Therefore, we really need to do close reading to find a strategy that we can use to liberate the mother and her daughter-in-law from their entrapment in marriage.

---. Stop! I can't stand reading Clement's essay "The Guilty One" anymore.

---. I don't want to use a dictionary or the Internet to understand what Clement is saying.

Imaginary Groups The Other The Hysteric The Sorceress The Real The Symbolic Jacques Lacan Fueros Marcel Mauss Levi-Strauss Madmen Deviants Neurotics Drifters Jugglers Michelet Attack Abreaction Expulsion Freud Guilt Tarantella Spider The Child The Savage Monstrous Jouissance Seduction

---. The new woman they are talking about cannot possibly emerge from Freud's, Lacan's, and Levi-Straus' patriarchal discourse.

---. What is Clement talking about? And how is her analysis of Freud significant in the mother and her daughter-in-law's lives?

---. She is not thinking of women who have no luxury to read psychoanalytic theory.

---. And how is all this fuss about Freud going to help our cleaning lady convince her husband not to cheat on her?

We decide we want to skip Clement's essay and move on to Cixous' hoping that having coffee in a Jewish district will help us empathize with her cultural and religious background. Reading a couple of pages, we see that Cixous is more in touch with the "real" world of women. She at least knows that the mother and her daughter-in-law are "nullified, kept out of the way, on the edge of the stage, on the kitchen side, the bedside" (69). And when she mentions that she reads Freud as fiction, we all want to scream in the café: "go Cixous go!" We are sick of reading Freud in Irigaray's and Clement's texts. Isn't it ironic that by circling around Freud's patients and theories, these women writers lock themselves in the "zone of silence"?

Cixous gets 12 points from us when she questions "nature" and the "essence" of women and argues that sexual differences are socially and historically constructed. We also notice that both Cixous' and the daughter-in-law's "anger is unmollified" (74). Would Rich's characters join Cixous' struggle to emancipate women from the "shadow" and "wake up among the dead" (64-7)? Can we make them see how they are "trapped within an ideological theater" of patriarchy and speak up for their rights? We are hoping that Cixous will encourage these women to fly away from their "enslavement" in marriage and domestic duties.

Thinking about how we can use Cixous' feminist theory as a wake up call for the mother and her daughter-in-law, we notice a postman entering the café and slowly approaching us. He hands us a letter, makes us sign a document, and then gets ready to leave.

Naz: Hey! Wait a minute! How did you find us in this café? We are absolutely sure that we didn't give any address and contact information to the post office in Paris.

Postman: Sorry. I don't understand Turkish. Bye girls.

Nezire: What is going on here?

Nana: Is this a joke? These weird things only happen in fiction and film.

Neyla: Just open the letter! Stop speculating about truth and fiction.

The girls

are about to read a letter that will change their lives. In the future, they will read this letter to their children over and over again, to lose themselves in the recollections of their journey to the feminist texts. They will modify the details of their story every time they get together and talk about their adventures in Herland and Paris.

Dear N,

My mother-in-law and I would like to thank you for all your efforts to save us from our unhappy marriages and limited lives in the domestic sphere. However, we think that there is a misunderstanding going on due to your misinterpretations of Rich's poem. You are flying from one text to another to search for help. "That is not what I meant at all; / That is not it, at all." I don't even listen to the angels chiding, "have no patience" and "save yourself." Then why should I listen to you? Please leave us alone. I want to spend my life in the kitchen wiping the teaspoons, banging the coffeepot, and letting the tap stream scald my arm. This is the way I cope with my misery. Where did you get the idea that we needed help? Do you think it is easy to divorce my husband and challenge my domestic duties? What other options do I have? How can I go on with my life without marriage, which provides me with financial security? What other alternatives does my mother-in-law have other than losing herself in her happy memories of the past? If those memories make her smile, then what is the point of waking her up from the "delicious recollections" of her past? Just let us be.

Best,

A Daughter-in-Law

The End

Good job girls!

This story will sell more than Danielle Steel's. Even the most sentimental reader will turn off the T. V. when the soap opera 'Passions' is on and read your miserable journey instead. Hey! Postman, you did a great job in arousing reader's curiosity at the end. I always believe that the ending should be tragic, mysterious, or dramatic. It always works.

Postman: Thanks. So how much are you going to pay me?

It depends on how much the story will sell.

Nana: So can I go home now? My children are waiting for me.

Naz: Yes. I also have to cook for my husband. He doesn't want to eat the same food two days in a row.

Nezire: And my house stinks. I need to wash the dishes and do some cleaning.

Neyla: Don't you girls enjoy the bliss of being a mother and caring wife? Now I understand how much I have missed my housekeeping duties.

Nana: Yes. Yes. We should be proud of ourselves for being ideal feminists who worship motherhood and nature. Reading, traveling, and especially flying, sound too masculine.

Nezire: Should we go?

Naz: Let's go.

Neyla: But wait! What are you going to write next?

I will probably write the miserable story of the foolish narrator who stayed in Paris to find a handsome and intellectual guy. Terrible things will happen to her. She will be raped, lose her sight, and live in poverty. But this time I am planning a happier ending. The white knight will come and save the narrator from her predicaments. And they will live happily ever after!

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