



# Women's Literary Creativity and the Female Body

EDITED BY DIANE LONG HOEVELER  
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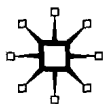


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## INTRODUCTION: WOMEN, CREATIVITY, AND THE FEMALE BODY

*Diane Long Hoeveler and  
Donna Decker Schuster*

Women. Body. Psyche. Creativity. These are large categories of meaning and even more amorphous terms to explore in a volume of essays written by diverse hands. This collection, however, attempts to place in convergence a few central questions: How has woman's experience of her body shaped her creativity? How do women exist in cultural contexts and, more importantly, how do they respond to cultural traditions that impose their conventions and contexts on women's identities? Does the experience of being a woman, or more specifically of giving birth, alter the creative process for women? How and in what ways are women's bodies conduits for ideological messages? How do women's literary works respond to the variety of different ideologies imposed upon them? How are the literary genres they use shaped by their responses to their cultural positions? Large questions, perhaps ultimately unanswerable, but these are the topics around which this volume revolves in its explorations of British, American, Spanish, and Canadian women artists as well as through the various genres in which they have written. The past twenty years has brought an explosion of cultural criticism and yet, explorations of women's writings across cultures are rare, only recently becoming a topic of critical inquiry. It is as if we are just beginning to understand the ways in which gender and creativity are performances imbued with their own cultural discourses. Moreover, literary and critical examinations of nationalism focus almost exclusively on the texts of men. As categories, "culture" and "nation" are extremely slippery; they carry within themselves both the hope of unity as well as the oppression of roles based on location, race, and gender. Our central questions for this collection, then, are, How do these external forces shape the creativity of women? How do creative women respond to these forces? What are the locations of women's creativity?

Creativity is a mystery. What exactly is it and why have human beings evolved in such a way that they can create abstract representations of their lived internal realities? Why are some people capable of creating art, literature, music, or dance, while other people are not only incapable, but even lack the capacity to appreciate such creations? Is creativity—along with its manifestation in language—the quality that separates human beings from all other forms of life and, if so, what does this mean? Is the human brain hardwired to create, or does a particular gene enhance one's ability to create? Is creativity the product of nature or nurture? Or is creativity ultimately a spiritual gift, a talent, a blessing that needs to be encouraged and supported in every human life? These are just some of the questions that have puzzled the numerous critics and theorists who have attempted to grapple with the issue of creativity over more than two millennia.

It is interesting to note that Terry Eagleton has claimed that whereas the Irish are not oppressed as Irish, women are oppressed as women (29). In the case of Ireland, the land itself provides geographical advantages for its colonial oppressor. In the case of women, cultural and national conventions marginalize them as a result of their bodily differences. In fact, Eagleton believes that women writers should not “[circumvent] the abstract universal equalizations of exchange value” within nationalism, but rather they enter into the “alienated logic” of nationalism “in order to turn it against itself” in order to break free of oppressive conventions that inhibit creativity (30–31). Creative women, then, have a unique relationship to their cultural contexts, as well as to the literary genre to which they respond. This volume is an exploration of how women artists respond to their cultural and national contexts when they engage their creativity: how they enter from the margins and create from their marginalized contexts. And although this collection offers no definitive answer, the volume does attempt to engage one aspect of this amorphous and mysterious topic: What does it mean for women to create within particular literary and cultural contexts? How is the female body written on textuality? In short, how is the female body analogous to the geographical space of land? How have women inhabited their bodies as people have lived in nation-states?

Traditionally, women's creativity has been bracketed by their reproductive bodies. That is, historically women have found (or been forced to find) their creative outlet by bearing and raising their children. Maternity has been valued as the highest form of creativity available for women (read: the valorization of the Virgin Mary with the infant Jesus in her arms). Such an icon has been literally

worshipped in Western civilization, while Japanese, Chinese, African, and Indian societies have fostered very much the same sort of iconography of and attitudes toward the mother-woman. The historical record makes it clear that there has been a persistent focus on the female body in all attempts to understand women as creative, which has led the female to be seen as the subject of creative efforts by men, rather than the agent of creativity herself. In fact, women's bodies, as Jane Garrity argues, valued for their ability to perpetuate the British race and as the central representation of British racial stability, were the primary symbols of nationalism and culture (1). Garrity's study is not only recent, but it is one of only a few studies that position women's creativity as a response to the nationalist codes that are inextricable from gender. The woman's body itself acts as a synecdoche for the nation and national identity. This volume proposes a similar objective: to examine the ways in which cultural and national conventions, which are inextricable from gender, shape and become the location for women artists to respond to and become agents of their own subjectivity. Breaking free of objectification and becoming a subject in one's own right has taken more years than many of us want to contemplate. It has been the exceptional woman—creative, supported, and driven—who has succeeded in creating art works that have endured and entered the canon. Thus, in terms of the body, creativity, and culture, as Eagleton suggests, this volume interrogates how women have entered into the alienated logic of their cultures and nations and used their creativity to turn that logic on itself.

## I. THE FEMALE BODY/VOICE

*It is because the female body has for so long been identified as an erotic object, canonized in the nudes of high art and the sex symbols of popular culture, that efforts to locate and describe alternative images became a paramount goal of the feminist movement and [therefore] of the culture at large.*

(Goldstein, vii–viii)

It is necessary to begin by tracing the complex intersections between masculinist ideologies and the female body, sometimes neatly theorized as “the male gaze,” or the notion that women in Western discourse systems can only be commodified, objectified, and positioned as objects of consumption for the aggressive masculine economy of capitalism. One of the ways that feminist critics have reacted to this theory is to posit the notion of gender as a “performance,” and to

trace how the performance of the “I,” as Judith Butler says, becomes a central focus for women’s creativity as these performances respond to male ideological constructions of the “female.” In her study *Feminist Perspectives on the Body*, Barbara Brook admits that the question of language and accessibility, especially as it relates to the questions of women and the body, and in our case women and creativity, is “always confronted with the inaccuracy and inadequacy of the terms already available: there may be no ‘clear’ and ‘transparent’ (commonsense) way of writing/talking through these thoughts.” However, it is also important to ensure that those theories and the new terms in which they develop themselves do not remain in isolation as an exclusive and hierarchical “body of knowledge” constituting what Meaghan Morris has called (speaking of the “idol-worship” of a whole stable of mainly French, mainly male, theorists) “a peculiar ‘doxa’ that constitutes a very single-minded, ponderous and phallogocentric conversation” (Brook, x; her emphasis). Thus, our theoretical boundaries in *Women’s Literary Creativity and the Female Body* reflect explorations of women’s creativity and the body as the location for inscribed culture. We discuss the ways in which women write from rhetorical locations on the margins of culture as sites of their creativity as they are bounced out of public discourse and convention by the patriarchal values imposed upon them. This difficult task is made more complex by the variety of feminism(s) used to examine the question of women and creativity. If we claim essentialist foundations, then surely our collection would be participating in an outdated and outmoded theoretical quest. Nevertheless, a study based on theories of feminism and the question of women and creativity, as more recent theorists such as Judith Butler, Vicki Kirby, Barbara Brook, and Jane Gallop suggest, must acknowledge its essentialist goal of examining the transformation of the lives of women—where they find their creativities, where they perform these acts, and the rhetorical qualities of these sites of performance and execution, as it were.

Recently, Rose Weitz has traced the history of attitudes toward women’s bodies in conjunction with their social and political status. In America, there was a counterreaction to the women’s movement, an influx of women workers during the Industrial Revolution, and growing numbers of women seeking education. Because of these factors, “new ‘scientific’ ideas with older definitions of women’s bodies as ill or fragile [began to suggest] that white middle-class women were unable to sustain the responsibilities of political power or the burdens of education or employment” (Weitz, 5–6). In England, much the same situation developed, this time buttressed by “Darwin’s theories



[which] meshed well with Victorian ideas about middle-class white women's sexuality, which depicted women as the objects of male desire, emphasized romance, downplayed female sexual desire, and reinforced a sexual double standard" (Weitz, 6).

Our collection deals with many American and British women artists, often middle or upper middle class, and educated, who reacted to the social, political, and cultural constructions of the female text. Weitz's history of perspectives is particularly useful for understanding the cultural and social shifts to which women artists were responding. Weitz claims that "with women's increasing entry into education and employment, ideas about the physical and emotional frailty of women—with their strong echoes of both Christian and Aristotelian disdain for women and their bodies—were adopted by nineteenth-century doctors as justifications for keeping women uneducated and unemployed" (6). Weitz cites a 1984 study done on women's health during the nineteenth century by Vera Bullough and Martha Voght in which they discuss physicians who in 1905 claimed that "hard [academic] study killed sexual desire in women, took away their beauty, and brought on hysteria, neurasthenia [a mental disorder], dyspepsia," and a variety of other disorders (Bullough and Voght in Weitz, 6). Moreover, Bullough and Voght write that the president of the Oregon State Medical Society, F. W. Van Dyke, argued that educated women "could not bear children with ease because study arrested the development of the pelvis at the same time it increased the size of the child's brain, and therefore its head. The result was extensive suffering in childbirth by educated women" (Weitz, 6). These social theories about educated and middle-class women defined by the medical profession bear more than a passing resemblance to the women artists discussed in this volume.

When we move from the historical situation of the female body in the nineteenth century to the twentieth, one would think that we would see a positive or liberatory evolution of attitudes, but such is not the case. Vicki Kirby's contemporary reading of poststructural and postmodern theorists asks, "How is it that the cultural context that surrounds a body can also come to inhabit it?" (4). Kirby explores the ways in which the poststructural and postmodern debate surrounding the sign and essentialism in feminist studies manifests itself in the female body and its corporeality: the "separation of nature from culture is rendered palpable in the actual object"; in other words, there can be no world outside of the text, or object—"pure representation can't have a body" (5). This representative bodilessness is a problem for feminism(s) because the word and idea of feminism itself assumes

an essentialism about what is female or what is not female. However, Kirby's study proves extremely valuable because in an analogous manner this collection also attempts to derive its cultural context from these feminist sites of exploration, which are the contextualized locations for debate—rhetorical sites, if you will. It is also in the location of the rhetorical site where we examine the forces of female creativity produced by a variety of creative women, never separating them from culture, margin, or mainstream. As Kirby notes, the “challenge is to realize the ways in which we are inextricably immersed within the strange weave of essentialism's identity, and to acknowledge that this bind is one that is not merely prohibitive, but also enabling” (72).

Instead of dismissing the body, we suggest, like Kirby, that often women's creativity comes from the culture as it is inscribed on the body. Kirby states, “What we take to be anatomy is just another moment in culture's refiguring of itself. In other words, anatomy is an illusion of sorts, albeit a very powerful one, and one that [Jane] Gallop imbues with a certain political efficacy” (Kirby, 75–76). Kirby's analysis of Jonathan Culler's theory of agency provides an apt transition from rhetorical theory to the cultural implications of female agency on creative production. Kirby explains how Culler reads Ferdinand Saussure in this matter by suggesting that the individual who emerges from a larger system as a “speaking subject articulates individuality” (Kirby, 39). This “actualization of identity” then “becomes the embodiment of concrete universality”—agency within culture. More telling is the conclusion that helps us situate *Women's Literary Creativity* as part of the complex web of female agency within culture and its inscriptions on their creativity. Kirby writes, “To insist that the individual has no creative influence over language is just as erroneous as its opposite assertion, namely, that the individual is the originary site that explains its metamorphosis” (39). That is to say, as a part of culture, nationalism provides an abstract system within which cultural ideology operates and out of which female agency emerges, even if from its margins. Fortunately, or unfortunately, this returns our volume and its rhetorical location to the issue of essentialism. What we discover and explore in this volume is also Kirby's conclusion, that female agency and women's creative explorations of identity lie in the play within “the very identity of essentialism—the immutability of its location and its separation from anti-essentialism” (Kirby, 40). *Women's Literary Creativity*, then, offers examinations of the way women created within and without this essential idea of feminism(s).

Other recent theorists have also addressed some of these same issues, notably Jeffrey Cohen and Gail Weiss, who offer two important

metaphors for our collection by following the leads of Gloria Anzaldúa and Hans-Georg Gadamer, although they do so from the perspective of the body as the site of exploration. They claim that Anzaldúa sees the body as a “space la frontera/the borderlands, a ‘place of contradictions,’” which mirrors our complex view of essentialism, while Gadamer offers a process of viewing the body’s borders as a “fusion of horizons” (Cohen and Weiss, 2). In both cases, this fusion, “wherein past and present comprise an ongoing dialect, ensuring that neither the past nor the present can be viewed as fixed” situates *Women’s Literary Creativity* in a fluid “borderland” (Cohen and Weiss, 2). This volume offers literary boundaries of exploration: the *canon* of American poetry, the *literary genre as rhetorical site*, and female *roles* of agency dependent upon the body from the Medusa to the Mother. Our collection is, then, in step with what Susan Bordo has called second-generation feminism, reflecting a postmodern sensibility that rejects “the ‘totalizing’ rhetoric that confidently speaks of female gender as a universal category (when gender is defined as the social organization of sexual difference)” (qtd. in Goldstein, viii).

## II. CREATIVITY

*When the social position of all human beings was believed to be set by natural law or was considered God-given, biology was irrelevant and women and men of different classes all had their assigned places. When scientists began to question the divine basis of social order and replaced faith with empirical knowledge, what they saw was that women were very different from men in that they had wombs and menstruated. Such anatomical differences destined them for an entirely different social life from men. In actuality, the basic bodily material is the same for females and males, and except for procreative hormones and organs, female and male human beings have similar bodies.*

(Lorber, 12)

Before examining the individual cases of female creativity in this volume, it is necessary to sketch an overview of the some of dominant approaches to how creativity has been understood in Western culture and how creativity intersects with cultural and nationalist ideologies as they relate to women. Plato believed that inspiration and “divine madness” were the roots of creativity, while Aristotle thought that creativity could be attained if one mastered the forms—the rules, so to speak—of an artistic product. Nietzsche synthesized these two different approaches by calling the first one “Dionysian” and the second

“Apollonian,” and claimed that the creative process actually requires both types of inspiration:

The Dionysian trance involves a destruction of boundaries between self and others and a loss of the self in the world, the loss of everyday rules and order, and primitive states of rapture and transport. Its analogue is intoxication and its guiding principle is unity as opposed to Apollonian separation and analysis. The Apollonian phase of creation is seen as involving individuation: a tendency to order and understand, to give form and structure.

(Martindale, 15).

The Apollonian/Dionysian approach to creativity—representing its power in the forms of two male gods—has been a particularly potent way of gendering creativity as male and excluding women by their very bodily reality. But this essentialist, gendered approach to the subject was challenged and perhaps partially displaced by the advent of psychoanalysis. Sigmund Freud made several attempts to explain creativity as a psychological process, most notably in his essay “The Relation of the Poet to Day-Dreaming” (1908). Here Freud notes that the literary artist “does the same as the child at play; he [*sic*] creates a world of phantasy which he [*sic*] takes very seriously; that is, he [*sic*] invests it with a great deal of affect, while separating it sharply from reality” (45). All of these “phantasies” concern “His Majesty the Ego, the hero of all daydreams and all novels” (51). Literature, for Freud, consists in recording fantasies of self-aggrandizement, with the creation of the male epic hero compensating for the frustrations of life through the creation of fantasies or fictions. When there are many characters with one omniscient narrator, Freud claims that the minor characters are split-off aspects of the dominant ego of the narrator (read: author). Further, he notes that the author “bribes” his reader with devices that produce aesthetic pleasure so that the reader will participate in the author’s fantasy without recognizing it as such (54). The three modes of fantasy that Freud discusses and the means by which an author compensates for the traumas they conceal will be discussed at length in Chapter 3.

Another psychological approach was proposed by Ernst Kris, who defined creativity as “regression in the service of the ego.” For Kris, this regression is similar to the type of thought found in dreaming or in psychosis. After immersion in this initial stage, the creator uses logical or learned types of thought in order to complete the artistic product, thereby employing both the Dionysian and Apollonian modes outlined so many centuries earlier by Plato and Aristotle (Halliwell, 79). Notice that in this approach creativity becomes linked to either the

unconscious mind or psychosis (madness). It is as if this internalized feature is regulated, for women, by the nationalist paradigm. The divinely possessed genius has always been sacred territory for the male; one searches the historical record in vain to locate an actual female divinely inspired creative genius. The most famous example of an imaginary female genius, of course, was Germaine de Stael's *Corinne*, heroine of the eponymous novel. But as all of her readers know, *Corinne* was punished for her genius, and her last act of creation was to make a performance piece of her own death, which highlights the centrality of the elegiac to women's literary creativity.

Even when one considers the genre of elegy, we are confronted with the fact that elegies as well as the term "melancholy" have both been read as the province of the male genius, inspired by nationalist and cultural ideals. In fact, Juliana Schiersari claims that death and melancholy have had a gendered reception (17). Whereas the male genius is inspired by melancholy, such as in Shelley's *Adonais* or Milton's *Lycidas*, women's melancholy is often read as melodramatic and sentimental. Male critics and artists often reject women's creativity on the same grounds that can valorize male genius. This volume asks, What happens when women writers rebel and refuse, adapt, experiment with, and contemplate these literary inequities in their art?

Yet another psychological approach to creativity can be found in *Art and the Artist* by Otto Rank. This work explored the psychological sources of creativity, which Rank claimed could be found in the productive use of childhood fears: "If 'play' is a mechanism which enables the child to cope with fear and ward off 'unpleasure,' then 'normal adults' can be seen to indulge in the same kind of play in 'day-dreaming' or 'phantasizing'" (49). If Freud stressed the fantasy component of the creative act, Rank emphasized the traumatic aspects of compensation instead. For Rank, artists reshape myths and legends in order to rid themselves of their own masochistic or sadistic feelings toward their parents, as well as others. There is no doubt that Rank was primarily writing about male artists, and there is no doubt that the highest form of art for Rank was the creation of dramas. The artist had the capacity to transform "infantile play" into "theatre play" or "egocentric day-dream into thrilling novel." But Rank most valued the theater for being "the most direct kind of presentation (in which there is no mediating narrator) because it comes nearest the dream form and even borders closely on the action of the hysterical attack" (49-55). Artistic creativity was particularly valued by Rank because it allowed the dramatic staging of unresolved conflict in artists, so that they could "steer a course between internal pressures (the release of psychic energy) and external

social and cultural forces which impinge upon his or her world" (Martindale, 80). These forces, cultural and social, are always already in play with creative production. Only recently have women's studies begun to explore them as such.

When we finally hear a woman talk about creativity we hear a somewhat different story. Our collection attempts to provide essays that reveal the inner creativity of women as responses to these external contexts. In her book *On Not Being Able to Paint*, Joanna Field (a.k.a. Marion Milner) says of the creative process: "It is surely through the arts that we deliberately restore the split and bring subject and object together into a particular kind of new unity" (13). "[T]he experience of the inner and the outer coinciding . . . is consciously brought about in the arts, through the conscious acceptance of the as-if-ness of the experience and the conscious manipulation of a malleable material" (13). Field's language smacks of Jungian categories as she stresses the need to bring together in balance what Jung refers to as the anima and animus. Field, like Jung before her, considers creativity to be both a temporarily transcendental process and a more enduringly therapeutic, personality-transforming activity. That is, creativity is an act of reparation, not a working out of fantasy or trauma, not a scream of pain or a shout of anger. It is a route *through*, as Eagleton claims, the external forces that thwart the agency of women.

Object-relations psychoanalysts like D. W. Winnicott, Melanie Klein, and Heinz Kohut agree and see creativity as a basic developmental end. By "creativity" they mean not only artistic creation, but also a wide range of experiences and activities (Kirschner, 189). Winnicott has stated that "either individuals live creatively and feel that life is worth living or else they cannot live creatively and are doubtful about the value of living" (83). Creativity for him is a necessary manifestation of being alive, but he also notes that one cannot create unless one's sense of self (what Freud labels the ego) is strong enough to allow such activity. One gains such strength only through the mother's nurturance and care:

This variable in human beings [creativity] is directly related to the quantity and quality of environmental provision at the beginning or in the early phases of each baby's living experience. Here at this point where creativity either comes into being or does not come into being (or alternatively is lost) the theoretician must take the environment into account, and no statement that concerns the individual as an isolate can touch this central problem of the source of creativity.

(83-84)

And so we are back again to the central fixation: the mother, the “good-enough” mother or the part-object mother, the breast, the woman as consoler, redeemer, subservient to and symbol of the pursuit of national unity. Suffice it to say that male artists have been privileged in a society that positions women as caretakers for masculine fantasies.

More recently, a critic like Camille Paglia has (notoriously) claimed that creativity is intrinsically male: “Man, the sexual conceptualizer and projector, has ruled art because art is his Apollonian response towards-and away from woman.” For her, women only create when their masculine side dominates (31). The female poets Paglia discusses—Emily Bronte and Emily Dickinson—are in her opinion psychically androgynous, in fact, much more masculine in their psyches than feminine. What is important in many of these theories of creativity is their very clear endorsement of the living conditions that either crush or enhance the development of human creativity. And for theorists like Paglia, these conditions are the same for men and women. But it hardly bears noting that if no access to education or training or practice is provided, a person’s innate talents will necessarily wither.

### III. WRITING ACROSS CULTURES

*Male taunts are attempts to undermine women’s political competence by tying it to artistic success.*

(Cucullu, 158)

In addition to the variety of theories about the female body/voice and women’s creativity that this volume attempts to engage, national identity and culture have to be foregrounded as explanatory categories. If women have been constructed by discourses that privilege their bodies, their essentialized “nature(s)” as nurturers and muses for men, then what influence does culture have on their writings? Garrity has recently observed that ideas of nation and empire have always been intertwined through “tropes of the female reproductive body” (1). Women have often been depicted in political propaganda worldwide as earning their citizen status by producing the next generation of soldiers, and so mourning and melancholia are implicit in women’s roles as citizens of nation-states. But if women have lacked political agency in their own rights, they have sought compensation in literary works. Virginia Woolf, for example, writes of the need to create “psychological geography” that women writers would explore: “Could [you] not sometimes turn around and, shading [your] eyes

in the manner of Robinson Crusoe on the desert island, look into the future and trace on its mist the faint lines of the land which some day perhaps we may reach?" (qtd. in Garrity, 2–3). The female body that emerges in much of the women writers we examine in this volume is often permeable and unstable as it responds to male frameworks for creativity. It is also, however, frequently associated with the civilizing process that nations undergo as they move toward secularization and modernism. Garrity cites Woolf in this regard as saying that in 1938 women were still "not full 'daughter[s] of England' because their civil and social rights [were] so curtailed in comparison to those of men" (qtd. in Garrity, 1).

*Women's Literary Creativity* seeks to address how women's creativity often derives from the margins of culture, revisioned as a reflection of the body under hegemonic rule, subject to culture and male theories about women's "nature." Like other collections, specifically *Rhetorical Women*, the chapters in this volume "consider gender in relation to other axes of difference, such as race . . . seeking connections between present-day practices and their historical precedents" in order to show "how masculinist values" (Miller and Bridwell-Bowles, 5) may have obfuscated, infiltrated, and otherwise influenced our readings of women and creativity. This volume attempts not to codify a "women's tradition" of creativity, but instead to locate acts of creativity at the margins of what we see as mainstream culture and nation-states. As such we have attempted to situate the theoretical foundation of our collection not just through mainstream culture, but through rhetorical theories and postmodern studies that expand the notion of female agency. Obviously, this volume cannot address all of the large issues in regard to women as writers in all nations, but it does attempt an overview by including works by women imbued with the national traditions of Britain, America, Canada, and Spain.

#### IV. THE CHAPTERS IN THIS COLLECTION

*Our attitudes toward the female body are likely to change in keeping with the artists' own self-conscious awareness of their hands-on status as makers. Contemporary artists are likely to use humor or anger to signify resistance to voyeurism, turning the erotic into a challenging joke.*

(Goldstein, x)

In assembling the chapters in this volume we have drawn on a variety of disciplines, although our focus is primarily on women as creators



of literary texts within three primary nationalistic traditions. As such, our volume differs from *Women, Creativity, and the Arts: Critical and Autobiographical Perspectives*, edited by Diane Apostolos-Cappadona and Lucinda Ebersole. Their collection provides the theoretical source materials—historical, cultural, social, and psychological—for many of the more specialized case studies of creativity in this book. In addition, their work gives a good deal of attention to women as visual artists, a different focus from the one this work pursues.

The first section of this volume, “Revisiting/Revising Genre and Gender,” contains five chapters that move from Bradstreet’s colonial America to the Spanish coastal narratives written by women in the 1920s. In addition, other chapters address the intersection of genre and gender by focusing on the gothic as a female trauma narrative and the elegy as a specifically female literary form. The first chapter in this section, Katarzyna Malecka’s “Anne Bradstreet’s Application of Modern Feminist Theory,” examines the poetry of Anne Bradstreet through the lenses of Lacanian and Kristevan theories of language. Contrasting Bradstreet’s poetry to the Puritan ethos in which she lived and wrote, Malecka highlights the rhetorical devices and strategies that Bradstreet used in order to emphasize the world of the senses over the spiritual in her works.

The second chapter in this section, Beth Jensen’s “Creative Tension: The Symbolic and Semiotic in Emily Dickinson’s ‘I heard a Fly buzz—when I died,’” also explores Kristeva’s and Lacan’s theories of the Symbolic and Semiotic and their role in the creative process. Jensen uses the revolutionary elements in Dickinson’s poetry as a springboard to explore the creative tension within Dickinson’s work as the poet both undermines traditional poetic form and underscores notions of identity. Recalling Judith Butler’s theory of the performative, this chapter evaluates Dickinson’s speaker as an identity subject to the male gaze, grappling with the I/eye sense of self. The creative tension is, for Dickinson, the ultimate tension between life and death.

As mentioned above, a variety of genres are interrogated in this section as examples of literary forms that both foster and constrict women’s literary creativity and productivity. The chapters in this section examine the ways in which women’s contributions to genre are gendered and what canonical readings of these genres and works may have contributed, missed, or misinterpreted. Historical interpretations of literary genres, symbols, and movements have not been exempt from the external forces of culture and the nation, thus, this section attempts to answer the question, How have women’s