THE DAUGHTER'S SEDUCTION

Feminism and Psychoanalysis

Jane Gallop

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First published 1982 by Cornell University Press
Second printing 1984

Published in Great Britain under the title *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: The Daughter's Seduction*

International Standard Book Number 0–8014–9235–1
Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 81–70709

Printed in the United States of America

The paper in this book is acid-free and meets the guidelines for permanence and durability of the Committee on Production Guidelines for Book Longevity of the Council on Library Resources.

For Peggy Kamuf

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Miami University and the Center for Twentieth Century Studies, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, for financial support for this book.

I would like to thank the following people for reading versions of chapters and offering valuable suggestions for revision: Richard Blau, Tom Conley, James Creech, Jesse Dickson, Britton Harwood, Stephen Heath, Neil Hertz, Peggy Kamuf and Naomi Schor.

Chapters 2, 3 and 6 are revised versions of articles originally published in, respectively, *Diacritics*, vol. 5, no. 4, *Diacritics*, vol. 6, no. 4 and *Sub-Stance*, no. 26.

Introduction

Feminism and Psychoanalysis: The Daughter's Seduction studies the relation between contemporary feminist theory and the psychoanalysis of Jacques Lacan. Through readings of the signal texts which stand at the intersection of French psychoanalysis and feminism, it enters into a network of problems: problems of sexual difference, of desire, of reading, of writing, of power, of family, of phallocentrism and of language. Thus, while working to produce an acquaintance with psychoanalytic and feminist thinking current in France, it is continually posing questions that are not specific to the exotic space of France, but which are equally nagging at any Anglophone site of this text: the sites of its writing as well as of the reading of it.

Although I have taken a constant care not to mystify the uninitiated by esoteric reference or jargon, this book is not intended to be simply an introduction to or a translation of an existent body of knowledge but rather a contribution to the sort of thinking it describes–that is, a contribution to French psychoanalytic feminist thought from the vantage-point of these English-speaking shores. Both French feminism and French psychoanalysis are fields of stubborn polemic between various exclusive little circles. The advantage of writing from here is the possibility of creating exchanges between the discourses of people who do not speak to each other.

In this book, the writer's viewpoint, the narrative voice, changes–from chapter to chapter, even within chapters. I consider this to be one of its strengths. In this context, strength is defined not in the polemic sense of ability to stand one's ground, but in the psychoanalytic sense of capacity for change, flexibility, ability to learn, to be touched and moved by contact with others.

The repeated gesture of the book is to set up what appears to be an opposition between two thinkers or terms, and then to move beyond the belligerence of opposition to an exchange between the terms. The most stubborn opposition is the continual constitution

of 'opposite sexes' which blocks the possibility of a relation between them. Another inevitable opposition in this network is that between psychoanalysis and feminism or, in other words, between psychoanalysis and politics. In all these cases the goal and the method of this book is to alter that relation from unyielding opposition into a contact between their specific differences–a contact that might yield some real change.

In its basic project, this book is the continual working of a dialectical tension between 'psychoanalysis' and 'feminism'. The book claims to *be* psychoanalytic and feminist. Yet I am not a psychoanalyst and others have questioned my right to the label 'feminist'. I would not endorse most of the traditional practices of either psychoanalysis or feminism, but hope that the encounter of the two can bring each to its most radical potential. Psychoanalysis, for instance, can unsettle feminism's tendency to accept a traditional, unified, rational, puritanical self–a self supposedly free from the violence of desire. In its turn, feminism can shake up psychoanalysis's tendency to think itself apolitical but in fact be conservative by encouraging people to adapt to an unjust social structure.

I do not consider this need of each for the other as a sign of some weakness. Rather that in order to exercise the strength of flexibility they must encounter each other, for in mutual exclusion they are liable to seek the strength of rigid defence. The radical potential in their marriage is not a mystical fusion obliterating all difference and conflict, but a provocative contact which opens each to what is not encompassed by the limits of its identity.

The question of identity poses itself in various fashions throughout. Both psychoanalysis and feminism can be seen as efforts to call into question a rigid identity that cramps and binds. But both also tend to want to produce a 'new identity', one that will now be adequate and authentic. I hold the Lacanian view that any identity will necessarily be alien and constraining. I do not believe in some 'new identity' which would be adequate and authentic. But I do not seek some sort of liberation from identity. That would lead only to another form of paralysis–the oceanic passivity of undifferentiation. Identity must be continually assumed and immediately called into question.

In a manner analogous to the dialogue between psychoanalysis and feminism, each chapter of the book stages the encounter between texts of at least two authors. This method is a way of

getting more out of the texts read, something that goes beyond the boundaries which an author might want to impose upon his or her work. The notions of integrity and closure in a text are like that of virginity in a body. They assume that if one does not respect the boundaries between inside and outside, one is 'breaking and entering', violating a property. As long as the fallacies of integrity and closure are upheld, a desire to penetrate becomes a desire for rape. I hope to engage in some intercourse with these textual bodies that has a different economy, one in which entry and interpenetration do not mean disrespect or violation because they are not based upon the myth of the book's or the self's or the body's virginal wholeness. But rather upon the belief that, if words there be or body there be, somewhere there is a desire for dialogue, intercourse, exchange.

Juliet Mitchell's *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*–echoed in my title–is the point of departure for our journey into French thought. Mitchell's effort pointed in the direction of Lacan, but did not finally depart from familiar Anglophone feminist grounds. I read Mitchell's book with a cognizance of the problems faced by a more thorough consideration of Lacanian theory.

In the second chapter Lacan meets Ernest Jones over the question of phallocentrism. Jones was one of the first to decry the phallocentrism of psychoanalytic theory, whereas Lacan declares the phallus 'the privileged signifier'. But feminism does not necessarily find its ally in the man who theorizes the relation between the sexes according to how, in all fairness, it ought to be.

Lacan is with a number of women in the third chapter, which is a reading of Lacan's twentieth seminar (on the question of 'What does Woman want?') along with issue 58 of the French intellectual review *L'Arc*, devoted to Lacan and written by women. The question of Lacan's relation to feminism is posed more pointedly in this chapter. This is the first moment when feminist criticism of and resistance to Lacan is represented.

The third chapter also introduces Luce Irigaray who plays the female lead, opposite Lacan, in this book. In Chapter 2, Michèle Montrelay is introduced to liven up the dialogue between Lacan and Jones. Although there is no chapter specifically devoted to a reading of Montrelay, she appears in three chapters, since her

presentation of a Lacanian view of female sexuality has been crucial for my understanding of it.

The fourth chapter returns to Lacan's twentieth seminar, this time reading it to the accompaniment of Stephen Heath's feminist critique. This meeting of two men around the Woman Question opens up issues of men's relation to feminism. A British reading of Lacan also reimposes notions of the gap between Anglo-American and French feminism. Across this gap jumps the spark of desire that ignites *Feminism and Psychoanalysis*.

The middle chapter of the book reads Irigaray with Freud on the relation between the daughter and the father. This is perhaps the central question in the book, a centrality reflected in the similarity between the book's subtitle and the title of this long, central chapter–'The Father's Seduction'. The roles of father and daughter are given to Lacan and Irigaray as well as to Psychoanalysis and Feminism. But because this father–daughter relation is a seduction, the roles become more complicated, more equivocal, more yielding.

The sixth chapter represents the struggle between Irigaray and Lacan. I introduce the Marquis de Sade into that meeting to play the truth-liberating role of the jester. Passing through Sade, who makes the incestuous seduction explicit, allows the book to move beyond its repeated confrontations and homages to Father Lacan.

Irigaray, in the next chapter, meets Eugénie Lemoine-Luccioni, a woman analyst who has remained loyal to Lacan. The encounter between these two women leads us to a crucial subject, the conflict between psychoanalysis and politics, and also poses some questions about the relation between the phallus and the penis. It ends by introducing the problem of motherhood.

The eighth chapter takes up the question of the mother in a reading of Julia Kristeva with Irigaray. Although throughout the book Irigaray has had the heroic role of the daughter, this position is now criticized in relation not to the father but to the mother. Here, Kristeva's assumption of the role of the mother presents a possible way through the daughter's dilemma.

The final chapter is a reading of Hélène Cixous's and Catherine Clément's book *La jeune née* along with Freud's Dora and Cixous's Dora. This unsettling encounter is already present in Clément's and Cixous's book, a book which is the very sort of dialogue which my book tries to stage. Neither Lacan nor Irigaray

appear in this final chapter, which moves beyond the closed circle of the family in an attempt to prod psychoanalysis out of its comfortable domain and into a more radical forum.

The book begins by calling into question certain feminist assumptions through the agency of Lacanian psychoanalysis. Its ends by calling into question certain psychoanalytic positions through the agency of feminist writing. The seduction that has taken place has been rather complex. Feminism (the daughter) has been seduced out of her resistance to psychoanalysis (the father). The father has been seduced out of his impassive self-mastery and into showing his desire. But the seduction has, I hoped, moved both out of the familial roles of father and daughter so that they will no longer be locked into their vicious circle. Perhaps the seduction of both is the introduction of heterogeneity (sexuality, violence, economic class conflict) into the closed circle of the family.

Psychoanalysis often considers revolutionary conflict along the parent–child model, thus reassimilating larger social issues into the familial domain. But feminism, too, often falls for a familial interpretation of power relations. For instance, when it complains about men in power, it endows them with the sort of unified, phallic sovereignty that characterizes an absolute monarch, and which little resembles actual power in our social, economic structures. This monarchic model of power reproduces the daughter's view of the father. Perhaps *The Daughter's Seduction*, the encounter between psychoanalysis and feminism, by dephallicizing the father, can avoid the pitfall of familial thinking in order to have greater effect upon the much more complex power relations that structure our world.

1 *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*

Juliet Mitchell's *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*[1] would seem to insert itself in a broad tradition of books in whose titles one finds 'and' tucked snugly between two powerful nouns. In such cases, the conjunction serves to indicate either the author's study of little- or well-known intersections between the two domains, or a projection of a possible, fruitful union. Within this tradition the most strenuous task allotted to 'and' might be to connect two substantives that are totally indifferent to each other. Yet, this is not the fate of Mitchell's 'and', which lies serenely on the cover in denial of the battle that is raging between psychoanalysis and feminism. This 'and' bridges the gap between two combatants; it runs back and forth holding its white flag as high as possible. Although, of the two, feminism has shown itself to be the most belligerent, psychoanalysis has not been known to come begging for forgiveness or reconciliation. The quiescent tradition of 'and' as mainstay for peaceful coexistence is belied by the assertiveness of Mitchell's step.

Her boldness stands in fullest relief in America, where feminists' views of Freud run the gamut from considering him an evil man, and one of women's greatest enemies, to seeing him as a brilliant dreamer, who was either blind to the conditions around him or did not look beyond those conditions. Following both the developments of psychoanalysis and the course of feminism peculiar to different countries, she sets up a 'descending scale of opposition by feminists to Freud' (p. 297) and finds the greatest opposition in America, most interest on the continent, with England in between. So it seems fitting that Mitchell, one of England's best-known feminists, should take on the project of importing the continental feminist interest in Freud, in an effort to combat the American opposition to psychoanalysis. Although, at one point, she mentions Scandinavian feminists (p. 297), she is, in fact,