Once and Twice Upon a Time…Making, Unmaking, and Remaking Stories of Women in the Academy

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A version of this paper was given as a talk at the *Susan Gotsch Symposium on Women and Work: Finding Common Ground* in October 2003, a symposium honoring the work of Susan Gotsch - and especially her tenure as Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean at Hartwick College. I have taken as my subject a particular kind of story enacted by women in the academy over the last three decades. The narratives I have chosen demonstrate that, while situations and characters differ over time, the stories share essential (even archetypal) structural features. Such unsettling repetitions raise questions about both the nature of narrative and the fate of the histories embedded in such narratives; indeed, such repetitions suggest how difficult it is to find the common ground that gives this symposium its title. My essay is in three parts: Part I, A Fairy Tale ("The Age of Gold"); Part II, Stories from Academic Feminism; and Part III, Where Do We Go from Here?

PART I: A FAIRY TALE, "THE AGE OF GOLD"

Once upon a time in New England, when the woods were still dark and deep, the early people made a road, cut back a clearing, and built a spacious white house with a tall tower climbing to the sky. The doors of the house were narrow, and the windows narrower still, but the tower was fashioned of glass and the sun shone through the panes with a glittering intensity. The white house was a place of learning, a place to talk and write about the great books of literature, science, history, and philosophy. Somber men with stooping backs, their foreheads crumpled with the pressure of great thoughts, entered through the narrow door and took up residence within, spreading their books in dusty piles and gathering around them groups of younger fellows. People in the nearby villages rarely entered the building and never opened the heavy books of scholarship published by the men of sober mien, but they knew the white house was a place of learning and from time to time they saw the light flashing on the tower that rose above the trees.

Time passed in the way of tales: trees lost green to mold in the circle of seasons; villages grew to towns; and books multiplied in the white house. Then came the middle of a century, the fifties, a large round golden time. This was the age of gold and those in the white house knew it then and they spoke of it afterwards with a deep nostalgia and a longing to return. In those days, the older, venerable men—professors they were called, from their manner of professing Grand Truths—stood on platforms in the large lecture halls of the

white house, waving their arms and declaiming from books. The younger people—students they were called, from their love of studying the Grand Truths— sat in rising rows before them, their heads bent, their hands scribbling notes so as to cherish every phrase their teachers uttered.

These professors spoke in sonorous tones and had musical names that trilled and bloomed on their students' lips. Later, these professors would be told their own numbers lacked diversity and they shook their heads in wonder. Who could ask for more diversity? They looked at themselves and at one another and saw that some were tall and others short, some portly, others lean to the bone, some bearded, others shiny bald, some old and bent, others young and spry. Oh, who could deny that variety was theirs? True, most of them peered at their books through thick spectacles and donned ancient tweed jackets with leather elbows they had used to jostle through the narrow doors and elbow others out of the way; and true, all of them smoked pipes. But anyone could see they wore such items of their uniform in ways that revealed the dramatic differences of their characters and minds: some, for example, wore horn-rimmed spectacles, donned jackets of exclusive English cut, and purchased pipes with elegantly curved stems; others slouched and stuffed their pockets with yellowing note cards and smoked pipes with drooping bowls; and still others sported natty button-down shirts and, like jaunty sailors, stuck out their pipes at horizontal attention.

Oh, who would dare to say they were not a diverse crew? Indeed, they often battled viciously among themselves, their elbows sore from nudging and pushing as they questioned (one another's theory, equation, translation, or interpretation). And when, again later, they were accused of teaching all the same books, they protested violently. A few figures outlasted all the wrangles, but who could claim they did not fight to the floor about exactly which books and writers in the grand male tradition they would teach and write about? Sometimes, they introduced writers from another country, and, yes, sometimes they even dared to include a living male writer, one on whom the verdict was not yet in, and they exclaimed and strutted at their boldness and their daring. And these living writers (unlike the critics) always had strong virile names like Mailerson, Rothman, and McDickey; and the one named Mailerson said that great books could only be written by writers with small round protuberances concealed below their belts and never by writers with large round protuberances displayed above their belts. And the critics in the white house clamped down hard on their pipes, flapped their elbows, and frantically penned their books and articles.

For the most part, the students were young males, earnest, anxious to please, eager to ascend in their turn to the professor's dais. Few had black or

dark brown faces, though sometime you could see those faces of color outside the window, their eyes wide against the glass. A sprinkling of women had places in the room, and they too were earnest, hungry for approval, but the professors rarely looked at them in the large rooms where they waved their arms and covered the boards with strange diagrams and quoted long passages from heavy books. But some of the professors saw those young women in their small offices and there they looked at them intently, sometimes stroking hair or cheek or holding their soft hands in order to make a special point. For those professors were knights and lords and spiritual pastors—and they had obligations to such pliant maidens.

On rare occasions, a female professor struggled through the narrow doors, but she had to be much brighter and better than her colleagues, hold to higher standards, write thicker books, assemble more footnotes, and fight harder than anyone to uphold the orthodoxies of her profession. Some days, her brow was so broken into creases, her shoulders so stooped with the weight she carried, that her colleagues nodded, shook their heads, and sighed about whether women really had the stamina and the toughness for such very large responsibilities.

At night, when the white house was deserted, other women came in to dust and sweep and polish while the students went to their halls of rest, and the professors went home to find their meals cooked and waiting for them, their children ready to be kissed goodnight, and their wives willing to look up a reference or type the books that were destined to beat back the boundaries of ignorance. Oh, this was a golden time, indeed, and the men of the white house looked back on it later with a deep nostalgia and a longing to return. And they wrote books that celebrated that golden age and showed its superiority to the age of tin.

And that was an age when everyone knew that great writers transcended the politics of their time and wrote books of universal appeal with universal themes, where all the interesting characters were white and male and where women were madonnas or whores. And the critics were always disinterested and took dispassionate account of the aesthetic pleasures afforded by the literature of white men; and they contemplated ideas not ideology, philosophy not politics, and they loved to exclaim over the ambiguities of theme, the tensions of form, and to quote long, resonant passages of prose. And this was a lovely world with everything in its place, and every person in her place, and all the categories fixed. Oh, this is not to say they did not fight, father against son, son against father, but that was all in the order of things, and the order of things was important.

Sometimes one by one, sometimes in groups, the professors would ascend to the glass tower where they said they could read more easily. But when they looked up from their books, the arrows of the sun pierced their eyes

and they were nearly blind and they could see nothing of the clearing beyond the tower and the world beyond the clearing. On special occasions, one of the more gifted of the students would be invited to the tower, and there the student and his professor would struggle bitterly as to who wrote and read the deeper Truth. They called this battle the Anxiety of Influence, and all the most talented students knew they must suffer the Anxiety. Sometimes the student prevailed, sometimes the professor; in the world of the glass tower, it did not matter who won because the fact of the struggle initiated the student into the life of letters. No woman professor or woman student was allowed into the tower. It was said that the light would blind her eyes and that the struggles were too unseemly.

But then came a bad time, a time indeed of unseemly battles outside the windows of the stately white house. Groups of black and brown students formed angry knots and pressed hard against the windows and the doors, pushing to get in. And later still, the silence of the clearing was broken by reports of the sounds of guns. The politicians and the army generals wanted to take the fresh-faced young men and push them into war in a far away land. The young men did not want to fight this war and they gathered in groups and shouted obscenities in the name of peace. They smashed the windows of the tower and pushed through the narrow doors and barred them closed; some of them went into the small rooms where the professors kept their files and emptied those files on the floor and stamped on them and urinated on books and set fire to precious papers. Those who ran the white house from large offices with the narrowest windows of all wrung their hands and paced the floor and decided to take counsel in distant cities far from the fires and screams and broken glass.

Young women wanted to help organize these struggles for black liberation and for peace, but they were told that the only position for women was prone. And so they stood upright in defiance and formed their own groups and established national organizations and wrote books about the experiences of women. And the men in the white house shook their heads and beat their breasts and mourned the loss of the diffident, deferent girls of the golden age who bent and bobbed for their approval and looked nothing like these Amazons who wore pants and stiff boots and even smoked small pipes. And these women wanted to change the way courses were taught and change the books in those courses, and draw up unnecessary regulations for recruiting new professors and legislate wrong-headed rules against the tender romance of a student and her professor. They even wanted to violate the sacred language.

The men in the white house muttered dark words about the end of civilization and the desecration of standards and declaimed that the golden aesthetic values were being trampled down by people waving political banners and speaking in tinny slogans. And the men in the white house loathed this time of what they called political correctness and they preached about the golden age when there were no politics and everyone stayed in her place, and the place was

appropriate, and only the Transcendent Truth mattered. And they were wracked with sorrow and a deep nostalgia and a longing to return. But the women knew that they were making a new golden age and that it was an age for everyone (white, black, brown; rich, poor; straight, gay) and that, while the old men looked back, they, together with young men, looked forward to living happily ever after on common ground.

And all of this was once upon a time in New England.

Before moving on to Part II of this essay, I want to touch briefly on some obvious aspects of this fairy tale. Most important, it is shaped by sharp conflict between justice and injustice, right and wrong: the heroes and villains are clearly marked. Each group is unable to see the perspective of the other. The story's tone reveals that the teller of the tale is positioned to advocate for one group and attack the other.

PART II: STORIES FROM ACADEMIC FEMINISM

In this next section, I have chosen three passages from different phases of this second-stage women's movement. Each passage enacts a story.

The first is from *Sisterhood Is Powerful*, an anthology edited by Robin Morgan, published in 1970, and representing a particular historical moment when the women's movement was gathering force. Here is the first paragraph of Morgan's introduction:

> This book is an action. It was conceived, written, edited, copy-edited, proofread, designed, and illustrated by women. . . . During the year that it took to collectively create this anthology, we women involved had to face specific and very concrete examples of our oppression, with regard to the book itself, that simply would not have occurred in putting together any other kind of collection. Because of the growing consciousness of women's liberation, and, in some cases, because of articles that women wrote for the book, there were not a few "reprisals": five personal relationships were severed, two couples were divorced and one separated, one woman was forced to withdraw her article, by the man she lived with; another's husband kept rewriting the piece until it was unrecognizable as her own; many of the articles were late, and the deadline kept being pushed further ahead, because the authors had so many other pressures on them—from housework to child care to jobs. More than one woman had trouble finishing her piece because it was so personally painful to commit her gut feelings to paper. We were

> also delayed by occurrences that would not have been of even peripheral importance to an anthology written by men: three pregnancies, one miscarriage, and one birth—plus one abortion and one hysterectomy. Speaking from my own experience, which is what we learn to be unashamed of doing in women's liberation, during the past year I twice survived the almost-dissolution of my marriage, was fired from my job (for trying to organize a union and for being in women's liberation), gave birth to a child, worked on a women's newspaper, marched and picketed, breast-fed the baby, was arrested on a militant women's liberation action, spent some time in jail, stopped wearing makeup and shaving my legs, started learning Karate, and changed my politics completely. That is, I became, somewhere along the way, a "feminist" committed to a Women's Revolution. (xiii)

Morgan's plot, the difference between men and women, reveals itself immediately. A men's anthology would not have been delayed by pregnancy, childbirth, miscarriage, hysterectomy; indeed, women's bodies (breasts, wombs, hairy legs) invade almost every sentence of this passage. A woman cannot escape from her body; the demands upon it, the requirements of it, cannot be ignored while she deals with the rest of her life. Note the maternal verbal sandwich: "marched and picketed, breast-fed the baby, was arrested." The personal is political; the body is political.

But men and women are not only different, they are in conflict—especially over the matter of women's liberation. Writing the articles for this anthology resulted in "reprisals": relationships dissolved, marriages broken. And, in a few cases, men tried forcibly to prevent an article from appearing or sought to revise it out of existence, make it invisible. Men have power over women, expect to be consulted about what women are writing, expect to have rights over that writing. It takes strength to resist such power; writing these articles causes pain to the writer and may inflict pain on the reader who in turn acts upon the information she is given. The power struggle manifests itself mentally, emotionally, physically; women must put their bodies on the line and it is not an accident, I think, that our author takes up Karate by the end of the paragraph.

Like the fairy tale, this narrative has an ancient structure. There is conflict between clearly marked heroes and villains; the heroes fight for social justice, the villains stand in willful opposition. The teller of the tale is angry, her words polemical. She contends that women are as qualified as men; that women can do the same work, and that they are entitled to the same rights. This writer has no time for metaphor or fancy phrasing; the pace is urgent, the language colloquial ("gut feelings"), and verbs tumble over one another to prove that the

stakes are high and action must be taken now.

This story certainly spoke to those of us in academia at that historical moment. We saw no female presidents or deans in our institutions, scarcely a head of department, hardly a full professor, and rarely even a tenured woman. Women graduate students were underestimated, underemployed and frequently harassed. Secretaries and support staff were patronized and underpaid. The curriculum was built on great books written by white males or great discoveries made by white males or great theories invented by white males or great wars fought by white males. In classrooms, women students were called on less often than men and suffered what Roberta Hall and Bernice Sandler were to call a "chilly climate." By the late 60s and early 70s, women in the academy were tired of being invisible, of defining themselves in relation to men, of having their perspective suppressed. Women in the academy were ready for a women's movement and for a call to arms by activists like Robin Morgan.

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We are time travelling now to the 1980s, a darker and more difficult time. Let me set the scene. By the early 1980s, feminist theory had transformed virtually every academic discipline; indeed, Jane Gallop in her book, *Around 1981*, could speak of what she called the "institutionalization of feminist criticism"(4). The early advocates of the women's movement had argued for women's rights and abilities, protested against separate spheres for men and women, uncovered forgotten women writers and thinkers, and exhumed women's history. But what was the next step for academic feminism?

Critic Elaine Showalter pointed to the next direction, arguing in an influential essay, "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness," that feminist criticism must abandon its dependence on male theories and "find its own subject, its own system, its own theory, and its own voice"(247). But just when Showalter was asking feminists to focus on "*the difference* of women's writing" (248, italics in original), that is to say, the difference from men's writing, questions about differences *among* women gathered momentum. Just when feminists in the academy were debating the existence of a female tradition, a female style, a female culture, powerful questions that had gathered momentum during the 70s gnawed away at the very premise of such an enterprise. Nancy Miller puts it well: feminists in the 1970s had contested "the regime of the universal [male] subject . . . . But the 1980s revealed that the universal female subject could be just as oppressive as her male counterpart and under accusations of first-world imperialism and essentialism her reign was quickly dismantled"(17). Those who were excluded from this construction of a (white, middle-class, and straight) female subject mounted assaults: Adrienne Rich challenged what she called compulsory heterosexuality; scholars like Lillian Robinson asked tough questions

about class; and, increasingly, feminists of color like Gloria Anzaldúa and Barbara Smith were clamoring to be heard.

And so to my second series of quotations. These, too, are from an influential anthology, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* edited by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa and published in 1981. The passages are from Audre Lorde's famous essay "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House " (remarks first made at the 1979 "Second Sex Conference"):

> It is a particular academic arrogance to assume any discussion of feminist theory in this time and in this place without examining our many differences, and without a significant input from poor women, black and third-world women, and lesbians. And yet, I stand here as a black lesbian feminist, having been invited to comment within the only panel at this conference where the input of black feminists and lesbians is represented. . . . And what does it mean in personal and political terms when even the two black women who did present here were literally found at the last hour? What does it mean when the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy? It means that only the most narrow perimeters of change are possible and allowable.
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> Those of us who stand outside the circle of this society's definition of acceptable women; those of us who have been forged in the crucibles of difference; those of us who are poor, who are lesbians, who are black, who are older, know that *survival is not an academic skill*. It is learning how to stand alone, unpopular and sometimes reviled, and how to make common cause with those other identified as outside the structures, in order to define and seek a world in which we can all flourish. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. *For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house*. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master's house as their only source of support.
>
> If white American feminist theory need not deal with the differences between us, and the resulting difference in aspects of our oppressions, then what do you do with the fact that the

> women who clean your houses and tend your children while you attend conferences on feminist theory are, for the most part, poor and third world women? What is the theory behind racist feminism?
>
> Women of today are still being called upon to stretch across the gap of male ignorance, and to educate men as to our existence and our needs. This is an old and primary tool of all oppressors to keep the oppressed occupied with the master's concerns. Now we hear that it is the task of black and third world women to educate white women, in the face of tremendous resistance, as to our existence, our differences, our relative roles in our joint survival. This is a diversion of energies and a tragic repetition of racist patriarchal thought. (98, 99, 100)

Lorde's conference address also expresses sharp and emphatic conflict. She is not marking the common features and interests women might have (there is no universal female subject) but the differences among them. Female bodies are on the line again—but not united by their similarities (breasts, wombs, hairy legs) but by their differences: skin color, wrinkles, sexual preference. Lorde especially asserts the difference between academic women (primarily privileged white women) and those outside the circle. The metaphor of the house (not the domestic female space but the patriarchal master's house) invokes the ways white women have played the game to get a cushy albeit subservient place in the master's house at the expense of those who must be excluded or included only to wipe it clean.

Lorde's method is dramatic confrontation. The "we" of her speech accuses the "you" in her audience of racism. But note further that Lorde's "we" stands in angry opposition to Morgan's "we"; for Morgan's "we" has ironically become Lorde's "you." Meant to be spoken, Lorde's words have the force and the sonorous rhythms of a sermon. The compelling repetitions, the forceful cumulative sentences, the use of balance and opposition ("you" attend, "we" tend), the strategic use of question and answer drive home her critique. But even as we remark the rhetorical accomplishment of Lorde's prose, must we not see that Lorde herself has not rejected the master's tools. Is not the story she tells, the very structure of it, the old master's story?

Once again we have our heroes and villains; once again the story differentiates justice and injustice, right and wrong. One side tries to suppress and make invisible the truths told by the other; one side is unable to see the perspective of the other. The teller of the tale is clearly positioned, angry.

This criticism cut deep; the oppressed of the 70s were transformed into the oppressors of the 80s. The common ground for women (the phrase of our

conference) that Robin Morgan and others thought they were clearing, the high moral ground, was mined, exploded. Don't misunderstand me: we needed to hear this critique, we needed to respond to it. We needed to examine our minds and our practice. But the focus on diversity and difference made finding common cause (as Audre Lorde urged us to do) much more difficult. From a strategic point of view, we did not establish from difference a common ground on which to build.

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And so, a little older, a little wearier, we press on to the 90s. By now, women have made their way into university administrations: they are chairs of departments, deans, and vice-presidents. As a former university president recently put it to me, it was the decade of the trophy female college president. And it was time, as Susan Faludi eloquently declared in her book of the same name, for *Backlash*. As part of that backlash, a new genre announced itself: the "Who Stole Feminism?" genre. According to this genre, there once had been a great revolution; indeed, the struggle had been pure and praiseworthy; but then the oppressed seized power and installed a new age of terror. It is the way, after all, of revolutions.

A series of books (including Elizabeth Fox Genovese's *Feminism Is Not the Story of My Life*, Daphne Patai and Noretta Koertge's *Professing Feminism*, and, of course, Christina Hoff Sommers' *Who Stole Feminism?*) attacked feminism, especially academic feminism, accusing women's studies of being thinly disguised therapy or heavy-handed indoctrination, and generally excoriating what had become known as political correctness. Attacks came thick and fast. Younger feminists, such as Katie Roiphe and Naomi Wolf, called to account the feminists of their mothers' generation for emphasizing women's oppression rather than women's power.

So here are my representative selections from phase 3, the 90s, and they come from the Sommers 1994 book, *Who Stole Feminism?* with its telling subtitle, *How Women Have Betrayed Women*.

> American feminism is currently dominated by a group of women who seek to persuade the public that American women are not the free creatures we think we are. The leaders and theorists of the women's movement believe that our society is best described as a patriarchy, a "male hegemony," a "sex/gender system" in which the dominant gender works to keep women cowering and submissive. The feminists who hold this divisive view of our social and political reality believe we are in a gender war, and they are eager to disseminate stories of atrocity that are

designed to alert women to their plight. The "gender feminists" (as I shall call them) believe that all our institutions, from the state to the family to the grade schools, perpetuate male dominance. Believing that women are virtually under siege, gender feminists naturally seek recruits to their side of the gender war. They seek support. They seek vindication. They seek ammunition.

Not everyone, including many women who consider themselves feminists, is convinced that contemporary American women live in an oppressive "male hegemony." To confound the skeptics and persuade the undecided, the gender feminists are constantly on the lookout for proof, for the smoking gun, the telling fact that will drive home to the public how profoundly the system is rigged against women. To rally women to their cause, it is not enough to remind us that many brutal and selfish men harm women. They must persuade us that the system itself sanctions male brutality. They must convince us that the oppression of women, sustained from generation to generation, is a structural feature of our society. (16)

Gender feminists have been influential in the academy far beyond their numbers partly because their high zeal and single-mindedness brook no opposition; or rather, because they treat opposition to their exotic standpoint as opposition to the cause of women. University trustees, administrators, foundation officers, and government officials tend generally to be sympathetic to women's causes. Apart from an unwillingness to be considered insensitive and retrograde, they are aware that women have been discriminated against and may still need special protections. So they want to do what is right. But when future historians go back to find out what happened to American universities at the end of the twentieth century that so weakened them, politicized them, and rendered them illiberal, anti-intellectual, and humorless places, they will find that among the principal causes of the decline was the failure of intelligent, powerful, and well-intentioned officials to distinguish between the reasonable and just cause of equity feminism and its unreasonable, unjust, ideological sister—gender feminism. (52-53)

We shall not be surprised by this time to see critique once again framed

as conflict between opposing groups. The "we" of Sommers' story are "American women" who are set in opposition to "them" (the wicked gender feminists). But the antagonism constructed by Sommers is blamed on the gender feminists who hold a "divisive view of our social and political reality." In fact, despite being confronted with this "reality," the gender feminists have constructed a fiction, a lie, and will stop at nothing in their perpetration of a false view of society. It is not that they don't see the point of view of the other side, that it is invisible to them, as seemed to be the case in the previous passages, but that they willfully intend to stamp out any contradictory viewpoint.

Women's bodies are nowhere to be found in Sommers' story. This is a battle of minds (battle for minds): the reasonable versus the unreasonable. Battle, indeed, is Sommers' dominant metaphor. The gender feminists are waging a "gender war" and will make up stories of "atrocity," the way some warriors do, to justify their warlike tactics. Sommers presents herself as calm and rational, a sober stay against the irrational encroaching forces of the gender feminists. But her prose exposes its emotional source, building to a climax of denunciation: "They seek support. They seek vindication. They seek ammunition." Sommers' method of discrediting the "gender feminists" is to identify their viewpoint as completely alien, out of this world ("exotic"), to isolate their fictions in quotation marks, and to harp on the madness of their enterprise.

Clearly, the elements of the story we have been studying resurface here. Once again we find that the story *is* conflict, an oppositional arrangement of justice and injustice, right and wrong. Once again, the narrator takes up a different position; for this narrator is allied with reasonable men and women against unreasonable (mad) women who have seized control of the systems, especially the academy.

PART III: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

What should we make of all this? What is the story? What are the stories? In this third section, I want to raise some questions for consideration.

1. Other critics have certainly puzzled over and recounted the conflicts in the recent history of feminism (see especially Nancy K. Miller's "Decades," and Susan Gubar's "What Ails Feminist Criticism?"); but my focus has been on narrative structure and narrative repetition. I've been telling stories—and the stories have an eerie resemblance. They are about confrontation, power struggle, perpetual conflict. No wonder we are all worn out. The speaker takes a different speaking position each time—but each asserts that power has been misused by the group she attacks and that the right, the justice, of the speaker's position is indisputable. Whether or not we support the group championed by the speaker, we must acknowledge that each speaker's method is to exploit conflict.

Moreover, the group under attack, whether in my fairy tale or in the selected passages, is presented as uniform, flat, without complexity or nuance; the suggestion of diversity is cause for mockery. So here is my first question: is repetition and reenactment of struggle inevitable? Can we make a political story only by unmaking the opposing perspective?

2. Does the story of conflict (whether it is between generations or between interest groups) keep recurring because it is the oldest story and therefore the one we are doomed to repeat? It is, after all, the story of myth, the story of developmental psychology. The young gods displace the old; the son rebels against, and replaces, the father. Young persons or newly-formed groups self-define, forge an identity, by struggling against an older generation, the group that appears to be dominant. We cannot, we are told, become persons without rebellion and separation; we can only define ourselves against what is *not* us. Are we then doomed to make and unmake? We teach our students in elementary fiction classes that conflict makes a story: something versus something. So does the very thing that makes a story undermine our story?

3. Or is that the patriarchal story and do we need to tell another one? Can we make a story from Chloe likes Olivia and Inez and Aisha? And will we, even if we are able to tell another story, be condemned to define that story *in relation to* the one we have rejected? Is there any exit from the master's house? *Are* there other ways to enact the story and to tell it? Can we escape from the linear? Can we escape from conflict? Or are there better ways to deal with conflict? Let us concede that all the critics make valid points. How can we retain the right to be self-critical, critical of our movement, and remain thoughtful without destroying one another?

4. Feminists formed in the 1970s and 1980s believed we had struggled hard for women's causes. But at the very moment when we expected to be encouraging the next generation and welcoming their well-earned gratitude, we found instead hostility and rejection. Is it the fate of all revolutions to splinter? Does the utopian story (such as the one I told in my fairy tale) always and ultimately turn totalitarian?

5. So one conclusion to draw is that we go round and round in circles and accomplish little. We make stories and they are unmade. Everywhere, it seems, the gains that women have made are dismissed or understated. Yes, it is true in our world of the academy that more women are tenured, that women now run departments, are deans and presidents, but the focus is always on what we have not done. No doubt it is true that we have not changed our institutions in a sufficiently sweeping way. There are still hierarchies—albeit with women sometimes at the top; the standards for tenure and promotion remain more or less unchanged; women support staff are still underpaid and complain as much about their new female bosses as they did about their former male ones. Even now, in 2004, we can still hear a student say "Of course I'm not a feminist" or

sadly watch the newest women members of our faculties ally themselves with older men in the department and not with older women. After all these years and all our efforts, feminism is still, for too many, a dirty word.

6. But here's a possibility: perhaps the stories I've told here are not the same stories. Perhaps we are not in a circular structure but a spiral. The story told by Audre Lorde is not an unmaking of Robin Morgan's story but a necessary refinement of it. We needed Lorde's story in order to evolve to a more sophisticated, more inclusive, more aware feminism. And perhaps Christina Hoff Sommers proposes a false dichotomy, manufactures a conflict; surely many of us, men and women alike, are equity feminists. We could say, after all, that over these three decades, many men became feminists; many straight women stood shoulder to shoulder with lesbians; many white women worked for change alongside women of color.

7. Or perhaps we should say, with tongue in cheek, of course, that the story repeated here is a human one. Isn't that what women have aspired to? We have finally achieved a place for women in the human drama. We have become protagonists. No longer are women seen only in relation to men; their roles are now rich and complex, their characters layered and nuanced. Indeed, we might say that not only are women now visible but that they have enacted, and acted in, the most powerful cultural dramas of the last few decades.

8. As we embark on a new century, my taste is for smaller stories—not grand narratives. Perhaps our children or our children's children will bring about the sweeping changes we envisioned. But, for now, in keeping with the title of our symposium, let us consider the notion of common ground. Let us build consensus among both men and women in the academy around common causes—such as child care, parental leave options, benefits for gay partners, shared jobs, tenure clock delays, recruiting from minority groups—many of the causes that marked Susan Gotsch's tenure as Vice President of Academic Affairs and Dean of Hartwick College.

9. We of my generation are older, tired, retiring, dying. Who will tell our stories? How will they be told? What tools have we left for the telling? How can we be sure that what we have made won't get unmade? I have been reading of late in that relatively new genre, the genre of the academic women's memoir. These memoirs offer us women talking, voice by voice, about their experiences in the academy. The genre includes Jane Tompkins' *A Life in School: What the Teacher Learned,* Jill Ker Conway's *A Woman's Education*, Laurel Richardson's *Fields of Play*, Gail Griffin's *Calling: Essays on Teaching in the Mother Tongue*, Annette Kolodny's *Failing the Future: A Dean Looks at Higher Education in the 21st Century*, Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Teheran*, and numerous autobiographical essays from writers such as Carolyn Heilbrun, Nancy K. Miller, Marianna Torgovnick, Sandra Harding, and others. These authors write of their lives and the development of their work within and against academic institutions.

Story by story, this genre is a hopeful one, a genre of making stories, not unmaking them. The women's movement has not always been comfortable with individual stories; this new genre restores a balance, highlighting the story of the individual in the context of the work of others.

And so we come back to the focus of the symposium. This conference, in honor of Susan Gotsch, is an act of remaking, a way of making sure that the Gotsch story at Hartwick gets told and that what she achieved once upon a time at Hartwick does not get unmade. We cannot guarantee a happily ever after but we can be vigilant about the ways we make and tell our stories.

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