

From the Editor

As a visual object, *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* is something of a "beauty." At journal displays (like those sponsored by the Council of Editors of Learned Journals at its annual MLA journal exhibit), *Tulsa Studies*—with its embossed saxifrage, its brazen red covers, and the elegant lines of its type—stands off and out from many other journals. As we complete the nineteenth year of this journal's life and career, we are now considering a modernization of the journal's "look"—one that would retain its central elements of design, elegance, and color but that would deploy an unembossed flower—in order to increase our flexibility in working with printers as well as to herald twenty successful years of publication. We would like to forewarn our readers of this still-only meditated change and to solicit your reactions to such a change.

But beauty is (I've always thought) as beauty does, and—for better and for worse—the latter is less easily ascertained or fixed according to an illusion of changeless standards than are commercialized visual paradigms of beauty. The first half of this issue of *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* takes up some of the "Problems of Beauty in Feminist Studies" in a fascinating set of explorations not only of the problems of beauty in and for feminist studies, but also of beauty's deeds: its consequences, its resolutions, and its alternatives for feminists. Overlapping with several sub-plots of this forum—particularly with its occasionally psychoanalytic explorations of desire and with its allusions to the romance paradigm—the dyad of essays that follows delves into problems of mother-daughter relationships in women's narratives. Both of these essays seek to reshape the "mirror" in which mothers and daughters see each other.

Since I discuss the fall 2000 forum in detail in its preface, I will add no more about it here, but rather will say a few more words about this issue's concluding paired essays. Despite their distance from each other in the languages and times they treat—the first essay centering on two eighteenth-century French-language writers, the second essay on two late twentieth-century English-language writers—these two essays have much in common in how they view western Caucasian heritages of mother-daughter relationships. Katharine Ann Jensen explains how Isabelle de Charrière and Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun take up where seventeenth-century writers Madame de Lafayette and Madame de Sévigné left off in "portray[ing] an intense narcissistic relationship between mother and daughter in which the daughter's heterosexual desire threatens the primary dyad by defining the daughter as separate from her mother." Moreover, pressing beyond

these specific French women writers of an earlier age, Jensen argues that the “mother’s nostalgia for reflective unity with her daughter” is “not different in kind from the daughter’s nostalgia in the twentieth century. Feminists’ longing for the preoedipal mother is based on the same fantasy of past reflective unity as the early modern mothers’ longing for their heterosexually undetermined daughters.” Jensen concludes by urging the importance not only of producing alternative “models and metaphors for coexistent maternal and filial subjectivities,” but of demanding “cultural recognition” for alternative models to rival and, if possible, supersede early modern, Freudian, and post-Freudian “elegiac and nostalgic models” alike.

Sarah R. Morrison ponders similarly the strange tenacity of the “traditional courtship or marriage plot” in novels by women, even when these women writers may satirize elements of the plots that they employ. Such plots may, of course, vicariously satisfy many women’s “psychological need for mothering,” but then again, they tend ambivalently, in Marianne Hirsch’s formulation, also to attempt to disassociate the daughter’s “emerging subjectivity” from the long shadow of her mother. As Morrison argues, however, Margaret Atwood’s widely known *The Handmaid’s Tale* and Susan Fromberg Schaeffer’s lesser known *The Madness of a Seduced Woman* exemplify sophisticated contemporary novels that “move beyond the traditional romance not by minimizing or attacking the romance plot but by exploiting it directly.” How do they manage this paradoxical move? In Morrison’s intricate exposition, perhaps most striking are the ways these two novels “abruptly distance readers from the heroine’s narrative and turn the familiar love story into a story about, among other matters, women’s attachment to the fantasy itself.” Morrison’s article interestingly intersects with Shuli Barzilai’s forum essay on Atwood’s *Lady Oracle*, whose woman-writer heroine “admits . . . in explaining the fascination of Tennyson’s fable, ‘I was a romantic despite myself.’” Where Barzilai stresses the way “One can travel to London and Rome, change addresses, lovers, hairstyles, or whatever, and yet move very little (‘say . . . three-quarters of an inch’) or remain in the same place,” so that women writers must contradictorily “comply with” even as they “undermine” the romance plot, Morrison speculates that some women writers like Atwood not only “discover that such escape [from romance] is impossible,” but also “pause to wonder whether such escape” is entirely “desirable.”

As mentioned in my spring 2000 editor’s note, I have indeed become chair of English here, and it is no easier than I thought it would be to keep up with the compounded duties. But I am nonetheless as busy as ever with *Tulsa Studies* and would like to conclude this note by mentioning a couple of our future plans. Next year’s volume will include an issue almost entirely dedicated to consideration of women writers internationally, particularly

beyond the shores of the United States and England. These planned essays have emerged entirely through the regular blind-review submission process. I was so pleased to see an increase in such submissions that I set aside an issue for these essays to highlight non-Anglo-American women writers. Beyond this special issue, I hope (though I remain in the early stages of planning) to devote a forum or complete issue to examination of national and international adoption and its relationship to feminist studies; I am in the process now of seeking essays by adoptive mothers and am asking them to speculate on the ways adoption has affected their thinking as writers, scholars, and theorists, and vice versa. *Tulsa Studies* has given much space over the years to questions of mother-daughter relationships (as in the current issue), but rarely have authors factored in the question of adoption, “open” adoption, and cross-racial or transnational adoption. I cannot hope to contact everyone who has adopted internationally or even to know of everyone in academia who is creating a blended family, and so I wish in closing to invite your suggestions and recommendations. Please let me know if and how you might like to participate in such a forum yourself: holly-laird@tulsa.edu.

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