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“Obscene Fantasies”: Elfriede Jelinek’s Generic Perversions

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"OBSCENE FANTASIES": ELFRIEDE JELINEK'S GENERIC PERVERSIONS

A Dissertation Presented

by

BRENDA L. BETHMAN

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

“OBSCENE FANTASIES”: ELFRIEDE JELINEK’S GENERIC PERVERSIONS

SEPTEMBER 2009

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This dissertation examines Elfriede Jelinek’s investigation of Austria’s and Western Europe’s “obscene fantasies” through her “perversion” of generic forms in three of her best-known texts (*Die Liebhaberinnen*, *Lust*, and *Die Klavierspielerin*). It also investigates how these texts, at first glance less overtly political than Jelinek’s later work, can be seen as laying the groundwork for her later, more political, analysis of Austrian fascism and racism. The dissertation is composed of three chapters; each investigates a central psychoanalytic concept (alienation, jouissance, perversion and sublimation) and reads a Jelinek text in relation to the genre that it is perverting, exposing the “obscene fantasies” that lie at its heart.

Chapter One examines how Jelinek depicts alienation (in the Marxist, socialist feminist, and Lacanian senses) in her 1975 novel *Die Liebhaberinnen*, and explores how Jelinek’s depiction of alienation functions to make *Die*

Liebhaberinnen an anti-romance. Chapter Two addresses whether Jelinek's novel *Lust* (1989) is a pornographic or anti-pornographic text. I investigate the complex relationship between aesthetics and pornography, arguing that many other Jelinek scholars collapse the distinction between mass-cultural forms of pornography and the high-cultural pornography of Bataille and Sade, and thus fail to understand how her text is simultaneously pornographic and anti-pornographic. Chapter Three focuses on Jelinek's novel *Die Klavierspielerin* (1983), examining the development of its protagonist as a (perverse) sexual subject, and her ultimate failure to achieve a stable sexual position and how Jelinek's text perverts the genre of the *Künstlerroman*. It also discusses Erika's training as a pianist as a possible causal factor of her perversions and lack of sexual identity, concluding that her inability to sublimate demonstrates the similarities (and differences) between the artist and the pervert, illustrating how Jelinek's novel deviates from the traditional *Künstlerroman*.

The dissertation argues that the disruption of genres is one of Jelinek's most significant literary contributions, her works functioning to create a "negative aesthetics" as opposed to a positive reworking of generic forms. Jelinek rejects an identificatory mode of writing and refuses to create "positive" subjects, preferring instead to produce art that is a "critique of praxis as the rule

of brutal self-preservation at the heart of the status quo" (Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 12).

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INTRODUCTION

Der Fall Fritzl

In April 2008, world news was dominated by headlines concerning the Fritzl Case. It emerged that Josef Fritzl of Amstetten in the Austrian province of Lower Austria had been holding his daughter captive in their basement for 24 years (beginning in 1984) and had fathered seven children with her (for more details on the Fritzl case, see Jüttner). In the wake of the scandal, speculation also centered around Fritzl's wife, whose claim of having known nothing many related to the Austrians' collective failure to "know nothing" about what the Nazis were doing in the 1930s and 1940s. As Austrian novelist Josef Haslinger pointed out to *The Australian*: "There is this pretty, shiny surface that Austrians like to show, but it hides a monstrosity . . . On the surface we have moral standards and enlightened policies, but in the background we have this perverse world that nobody wants to talk about" (Campbell).

It is precisely this "perverse world," or what Slavoj Žižek identifies as Austria's "obscene fantasies," that the work of Elfriede Jelinek investigates. As Žižek puts it:

For decades, Jelinek was uncompromisingly describing the violence of men against women in all its modalities, including women's own libidinal complicity in their victimization. Without mercy, she was bringing to light obscene fantasies

that underlie the Middle European respectability, fantasies which crawled into public space in the Fritzl affair which effectively has the unreality of a 'bad' fairy tale (Žižek; see also Robertson, for a discussion of the ways in which "Fritzl existed in literature before he existed in life").

In this dissertation, I examine Jelinek's investigation of Austria's and Western Europe's "obscene fantasies" through her "perversion" of generic forms. In this introduction, I will first give a brief overview of Jelinek's biography and the reception of her work in order to place my work in context.

Elfriede Jelinek: A Brief Introduction

Elfriede Jelinek was born on October 20, 1946 in Mürzzuschlag, Styria in Austria. Her father was a working-class Czechoslovakian Jewish socialist and her mother was a bourgeois Austrian Catholic. Jelinek grew up mostly in Vienna, where she attended kindergarten, grade school, and high school. While at high school, she also studied organ, piano and flute at the Vienna Conservatory, and in 1971 she completed examinations as an organist at the Conservatory. After high school she studied dramatics and art history at the University of Vienna, but she gave up her studies after six terms. Since 1966 Jelinek has lived and worked as a freelance author in Vienna, Munich and Paris, marrying Gottfried Hüngsberg in 1974. Until 1991 Jelinek was a member of the Communist Party

(for further biographical information on Jelinek, see: Fiddler, *Rewriting*, 1-8 & 10-11).

As an author Jelinek is not only productive, but also versatile. Her writings encompass almost all literary genres. She has written poetry, novels, radio plays, dramas, essays, television and film scripts, and also a libretto, *Robert, der Teufel* (*Robert the Devil*). She has also translated novels by Thomas Pynchon and dramas by George Feydeau and Eugène Labiche. She is the recipient of many prizes, including the 2004 Nobel Prize for Literature, which was awarded in recognition of her “musical flow of voices and counter-voices in novels and plays that, with extraordinary linguistic zeal, reveal the absurdity of society’s clichés and their subjugating power” (“Nobel Prize”).

Jelinek’s Reception: Jelinek as a “Political” Writer

Jelinek is often read as a “political” writer thanks to her self-proclaimed Marxism and feminism. At the same time, however, others view her as a “postmodern” author, thus leading Allyson Fiddler to pose in her 1994 essay, “There Goes That Word Again, or Elfriede Jelinek and Postmodernism,” what she considered to be “something of a ‘Gretchenfrage’ of our time, namely, where does Elfriede Jelinek stand on the question of postmodernism, or rather . . . what position, if any, do her texts occupy within the postmodern debate on literature?

Can Jelinek's writing be called postmodernist?" ("There Goes. . ." 129). Part of my intention in this dissertation is to expand this discussion beyond the either/or dichotomy that categorizes much of the discussion regarding Jelinek's politics.

A survey of the critical literature leaves no doubt that many scholars view Jelinek as either a Marxist or socialist feminist.¹ Fiddler, for example, describes Jelinek as a "Marxist-feminist" (*Rewriting*, 12), and in the article cited above, answers her "Gretchenfrage" in the negative, maintaining instead that Jelinek is located "firmly within the older, Modernist tradition,"² due to her "adherence to certain 'metanarratives'—such as Marxism and feminism" ("There Goes. . ." 144).

¹ For the purposes of this dissertation, I will use the terms "Marxist feminism" and "socialist feminism" interchangeably, for as Rosemarie Tong points out, it is difficult to distinguish between Marxist and socialist feminism. Tong goes on to state that she has come to view the differences between them as "more a matter of emphasis than of substance" (94). For example, Marxist feminists often "identify classism rather than sexism as the ultimate cause of women's oppression," while socialist feminists "insist the fundamental cause of women's oppression is neither 'classism' nor 'sexism' but an intricate interplay between capitalism and patriarchy" (Tong, 94). Both Marxist and socialist feminists, however, share the conviction that "women's oppression is not the result of individuals' intentional actions but is the product of the political, social, and economic structures within which individuals live" (Tong, 94).

² For a definition of an "older, Modernist tradition," see Callari and Ruccio, who explain: "As a modernist discourse, classical Marxism was characterized by two mutually supporting forces: the protocols of scientism and a nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century notion of progress . . . Marxism tended to deny the 'constitutive' (as opposed to a 'supportive') role it played in the shaping of history and to believe that it was merely 'revealing' a predetermined historical trajectory. Its belief in notions of progress . . . certified the inevitability of social change, and this, in turn, supported the notion that the laws of history could be discovered scientifically" (11). As I shall make clear in this dissertation, Jelinek's texts cannot be exclusively located within a classical, Modernist tradition of Marxism, as her work clearly posits neither the "inevitability of social change" nor a "belief in notions of progress."

In the same collection in which Fiddler's essay appeared, Linda DeMeritt also argues for a view of Jelinek as a Marxist feminist, citing Jelinek as an example of a writer whose "main theme is the submission of everyone, regardless of sex, to the accumulation of capital and their resultant alienation," (115) and who "effectively advances both the marxist and feminist battle" (125). Other examples of scholars who position Jelinek within a Marxist/socialist feminist framework are: Rudolf Burger (21), Jacqueline Vansant (5), Dagmar Lorenz (111), and Marlies Janz, who uses the term materialist, rather than Marxist or socialist, feminist, but who nonetheless believes that Jelinek's materialist feminist orientation has been falsely assessed in Jelinek criticism (vii).³

³ In Janz's view, the reason for the lack of convincing interpretations of Jelinek's work lies "nicht nur in der Schwierigkeit des Werks, sondern auch in der anhaltenden Verkennung Jelineks als politischer Autorin. So wird wohl ihr Feminismus als auch ihre Situierung im Kontext von Poststrukturalismus und Postmoderne zumeist falsch eingeschätzt, weil ihre marxistischen Orientierungen ausgeblendet werden. Diesen aber ist Jelinek bei allen scheinbaren bzw. partiellen Annäherungen an Verfahrensweisen von Poststrukturalismus und Postmoderne bis heute verpflichtet. Die satirischen Mythendestruktionen, die ihr Werk mit wechselnden Gegenständen und sich ausdifferenzierenden ästhetischen Verfahrensweisen leistet, sind stets bezogen auf ihre materialistischen Gesellschaftsanalysen und verstehen sich als aufklärerische Ideologiekritik" (vii) ["not just in the difficulty of the work, but also in the continual failure to recognize Jelinek as a political author. For this reason her feminism, as well as her location in the context of postmodernism and poststructuralism, is for most part falsely assessed, because her Marxist orientation is not taken into account. Jelinek, however, continues to be indebted to Marxism, despite all of her partial approaches to postmodern or poststructuralist methods. The satirical destruction of myth, which her work achieves with varying objects and sophisticated aesthetic methods, is always related to her material analysis of society, and can be understood as an Enlightenment ideology critique" (my translation)]. While I find Janz's work to be a refreshing change from the either/or dichotomy (that is, a forced choice between Marxism and poststructuralism) that often characterizes the reception of Jelinek, her dependence on Barthes'

Lorenz's article cited above is a good example of how a reliance on solely Marxist feminist categories can produce a one-sided reading of Jelinek, as her focus on Jelinek's Marxist feminism leads her to declare that Jelinek's "works focus on sexual politics, the socioeconomic plight of women to which she subordinates the theme of the female body and sexuality" (111). It should be clear to anyone who has read *Die Liebhaberinnen*, *Die Klavierspielerin*, *Lust* or *Clara S.* (to name just a few) that Jelinek deals with the theme of the female body and sexuality in her work. Indeed, the novel that Lorenz is analyzing (*Die Ausgesperrten*) also treats of female sexuality in the figure of Anna and her attempt to define herself as both an intellectual and a woman, something Jelinek's text makes explicit, when, during a sexual encounter with Hans, Anna realizes that her intellectual skills are of no interest to Hans and also that her identity as an intellectual woman is separate from her sexuality:

Dafür hab ich jetzt den ganzen Sartre in meiner Freizeit gelesen, das ganze Sein und das ganze Nichts, schießt es ihr durch den Kopf, während sie aus der Unterhose steigt. Und jetzt kann ich gar nichts damit anfangen. Ich könnte genausogut eine sein, die niemals irgendetwas gelesen hat außer *Bravo*. Mehr ist hier nicht vonnöten. Daß sie das durchschaut, unterscheidet sie schon wieder von den

work on myth to read Jelinek limits, in my opinion, her otherwise insightful interpretations of Jelinek's work.

Millionen anderer Mädchen, äußerlich sieht Hans aber leider nur eine wie eine Million andere auch (A, 89).⁴

Another problem with the classifying of Jelinek as either a Marxist or socialist feminist is that her interpreters often simply “take her word for it” by quoting one of her many interviews (see for example Jelinek, “Wut,” 89; and Sauter, 110), or citing her membership in the Communist Party (which she left in 1991), as “proof” of her Marxism and/or feminism. But, as Imke Meyer has pointed out:

It is not methodologically sound, in the majority of instances, to ascribe, while concerned with the interpretation of literary texts, the same significance to the elements that comprise the texts as to the facts that comprise the author’s life. Rather, a distinction between, for instance, a narrative voice created in prose fiction on the one hand and the voice of the author of that fictitious text on the other seems appropriate. If such distinctions are not made, potential pitfalls occur. For instance, a creative intention that an author expresses in an interview, might, without further investigation, be understood as having become fully realized in a given literary text. However, this need not necessarily be the case, and it seems, therefore, that if one wants to avoid potentially reductive readings of literary texts, one should not let one’s analysis be guided by an author’s expressed intentions (123).

⁴ “is this why I read the whole of Sartre in my spare time, all about Being and about Nothingness? What use is it to me now? I might just as well be a girl who’s never read anything but *Bravo*. You don’t need any more for this. The fact that she perceives this distinguishes her from millions of other girls, but on the outside Hans, alas, only sees a girl the same as a million others” (*Wonderful*, 85).

Following Meyer's advice, what I will demonstrate in this dissertation is that, despite Jelinek's personal political commitment to Marxism, there is something in her work that goes beyond Marxism and that we need to add psychoanalysis to our interpretative "tool kit" in order to read femininity in these texts. To assist in this effort, I draw on the work of those scholars to attempt to forge a middle ground in this debate, such as Brigid Haines and Margaret Littler, who view Jelinek's work as exemplified by a "complexity" that "arise[s] from a basic three-way tension between the Marxist, feminist, and post-structuralist aspects" of her work, and who see that tension as "continu[ing] to trouble and enrich Jelinek research" (40).

Thus my position on this "debate" is similar to that of Haines and Littler, but has also been influenced by Verena Mayer's and Roland Koberg's argument that because Jelinek as a private citizen is politically engaged, Jelinek the writer does not necessarily feel the need to write unambiguously engaged literature, but instead reserves for herself the "right to art," (Mayer and Koberg, 9), as well as by Matthias Konzett's contention that the political import of Jelinek's work lies in its investigation of Austria as symptom. He views that as taking place in two ways:

- 1) as a case study of symptomatic expression of crisis in postwar affluent Western societies informed by legacies of

colonialism, racism, and Eurocentric claims to cultural supremacy; and 2) as a site of *jouissance* and perverse pleasure won from this symptomatic site of corruption and decadence . . . In this latter version, hyperbole rules and brings comic relief to the forces of repression that sustain the symptom as a camouflage of illness. The illness is finally allowed to resurface as illness (Konzett, 8-9).

Konzett further views Jelinek's work after 1991 (beginning with her play about Heidigger and Hannah Arendt, *Totenauberg*) as becoming more directly political in its engagement with the Holocaust, xenophobia, sport, the Iraq war, etc. (Konzett, 13-14).⁵

Agreeing with this position, I would argue that the works I read in this dissertation (written between 1975 and 1989) are political in Konzett's second sense insofar as they investigate Austria as a "site of *jouissance* and perverse pleasure," and that depict the symptom and the illness of Austria society. They do so in ways that seem less clearly political at first glance, first through their insistent focus on male-female relations. If Ingeborg Bachmann was correct when she claimed that "Der Faschismus ist der erste in der Beziehung zwischen einem

⁵ Here it is interesting to note that 1991 was the year that Jelinek left the Communist Party. Perhaps she felt the need to be more political in her work once she was no longer publicly affiliated with the Party.

Mann und einer Frau,” (Bachmann, 144)⁶ then these works, while at first glance less overtly political than Jelinek’s later work, could be seen as laying the groundwork for her later, more political, analysis of fascism and racism in Austria.

The second way in which these texts can be viewed as political is through Jelinek’s “negative aesthetics” (in the form of rewriting or negating familiar low- and high-culture genres).⁷ Working with generic forms, she focuses on types instead of characters with individual identities and this is also where we can most clearly see that Konzett is correct when he argues that “Historical specificity . . . is often hard to detect in Jelinek” (Konzett, 20). Thus, for example, Brigitte and Paula in *Die Liebhaberinnen* do not necessarily represent what life was “really” like for women in provincial Austria in the 1970s, but instead function as a canvas on which Jelinek paints her version of the romance novel.

In my reading of Jelinek, I have chosen to focus on the feminist corner of what Sture Packalén, in an article on the Nobel Prize website, calls her “triangle,”

⁶ “Fascism is the first thing in the relationship between a man and a woman” (my translation).

⁷ I will return to the question of a “negative aesthetics” in the conclusion. For now, I offer this definition from Hendrik Birus’s reading of Adorno: “Art must be negative in order to ‘bear witness to the negativity of social existence’ (Adorno, *GS*, 14:52, Birus’s translation)” (141).

a triangle “whose corners point in three different directions: towards a feminist perspective, a Nazi past and the contemporary political arena” (“Elfriede Jelinek: Provocation as the Breath of Life”).

Generic Perversions

The definition of genre that I use in this dissertation comes from Frederic Jameson, who defines genres in his book *The Political Unconscious* as “essentially literary *institutions*, or social contracts between a writer and a specific public, whose function is to specify the proper use of a particular cultural artifact” (106, emphasis in original). Additionally, Anne Cranny-Francis in *Feminist Fictions* argues that “feminist generic fiction . . . is a radical revision of conservative genre texts, which critically evaluates the ideological significance of textual conventions and of fiction as a discursive practice. At times this interrogation may transform the feminist text into a virtual parody of the genre” (9-10). The Jelinek texts that I read in this dissertation are parodies of genres that perform a materialist critique of the genres being parodied.

Similarly, Jelinek’s “generic perversions” reveal the ways that genres work to cover up the lack that subjects experience due to the subject’s entry into the symbolic order. In this dissertation, I examine the ways that both popular culture generic forms (the romance novel and pornography) and a “high” culture

form (the *Künstlerroman*) work to convince the reader that lack does not exist. In the case of the *Künstlerroman*, I draw on the work of Julia Kristeva, who, in her book on Colette, notes that through sublimation, “a certain subject is constructed, one who lacks nothing, in fact, except that he lacks a lack” (161). The *Künstlerroman*, in its staging of sublimation, thus works to produce a subject who does not lack. Similarly, romance novels posit that the heroine’s love relationship will make her whole, while pornography depicts the myth of phallic jouissance that will allow the sexual relationship to exist.

Popular generic fiction thus functions on the level of the imaginary, operating “on a metaphysics of wholeness, on the illusory identification of the subject with a unified body,” as Thomas Beebee notes in *The Ideology of Genre* (16), while the *Künstlerroman* fosters an illusion of wholeness through sublimation. Jelinek perverts each of these genres by showing us the lacks that *do* exist outside of them and exposing as myth that imaginary wholeness.

Introduction to Chapters

The dissertation is composed of three chapters, which are tied together insofar as each chapter investigates a central psychoanalytic concept (alienation, jouissance, perversion & sublimation) and reads a Jelinek text in relation to the genre that it is perverting, thus exposing the “obscene fantasies” that lie at the

heart of the genre. In the case of chapter one on *Die Liebhaberinnen* and alienation, the concept is investigated in relation to its use in other theories (Marxism, socialist feminism); that is not the case in the other two chapters.

The chapters do not follow the chronological order of the texts examined. Instead I start with *Die Liebhaberinnen*, which is followed by *Lust* and then *Die Klavierspielerin* (*Die Liebhaberinnen* was written in 1975, *Die Klavierspielerin* in 1983, and *Lust* in 1989). I chose this order for two reasons. First, as Allyson Fiddler has noted, it makes sense to place the chapter on *Lust* directly after the chapter on *Die Liebhaberinnen* because *Lust* can be seen a companion piece to *Die Liebhaberinnen*. While *Die Liebhaberinnen* looks at romance and courtship, *Lust* shows us what happens after the “happy end” of marriage is achieved (“Reading,” 298-99). They are also both set in provincial Austria as compared to Vienna in *Die Klavierspielerin*.

Secondly, the order makes sense in terms of generic groupings: romance and pornography are both popular culture genres with roots in the eighteenth century, while the *Künstlerroman* is a “high” culture genre with roots in the nineteenth century. It was also during the nineteenth century that the piano became the “instrument of the century” (Plantinga, 1).

Chapter One, "Housewife or Shop Girl? Alienation and (Anti-) Romance in *Die Liebhaberinnen*" examines the ways that Jelinek depicts alienation (in the Marxist, socialist feminist, and Lacanian senses) in her 1975 novel *Die Liebhaberinnen*, arguing that while *Die Liebhaberinnen* can be read as a Marxist and/or socialist feminist text, depicting both alienation from labor and sexuality in the Marxist and socialist feminist uses of the term, it also can benefit from a linguistically-based psychoanalytic reading.

Following a discussion of Marxist and socialist feminist alienation, I then turn to an analysis of alienation in the Lacanian sense in Jelinek's novel. I conclude the chapter by arguing that what Jelinek does in *Die Liebhaberinnen* is to construct a materialist feminist version of the romance novel, one that illustrates the ways in which conventional romance novels work are alienating.

In Chapter Two, "A *Jouissance* Beyond the Phallus? *Lust* and Pornography," I address the question of whether Jelinek's novel *Lust*, published in 1989, is a pornographic or anti-pornographic text. Are we to understand it as a repudiation, mockery, and/or parody of (male) pornography and desire, or does Jelinek simply reproduce that which she is supposedly making fun of? To answer the above questions, I discuss in the chapter the complex negotiation between aesthetics and pornography, arguing that many Jelinek scholars have failed to

address these questions adequately through their collapsing of the distinction (complex as it may be) between mass-cultural forms of pornography and the type of pornography produced by writers such as Bataille and Sade.

In order to frame the discussion, I look at definitions of “artistic pornography,” Angela Carter’s “moral pornographer,” linking both to the Marquis de Sade and the notion of a pornographic tradition that demonstrates Jacques Lacan’s famous declaration that the sexual relationship does not exist. I then offer a comparison of *Lust* to both Sade’s “Justine” texts and the film *Deep Throat*, as a means of demonstrating how Jelinek’s text can be seen as in dialogue with the type of pornography exemplified by Sade’s work, as well as engaging critically with the type of mass cultural pornography represented by *Deep Throat* and other filmic pornography, concluding that what Jelinek offers us is a pessimistic pornography without female pleasure.

Chapter Three, “Portrait of the Artist as a (Not-So-)Young Pervert: Pianos, Perversion, Sublimation, and the *Künstlerroman* in *Die Klavierspielerin*,” focuses on Jelinek’s most famous and semi-autobiographical novel *Die Klavierspielerin*. Published in 1983, the novel relates the story of Erika Kohut, piano teacher at the Vienna Conservatory, her development as a (perverse) sexual subject, and her ultimate failure to achieve a stable sexual position.

In this chapter I argue that Erika's training as a pianist, the social history of the piano, especially as it relates to gender, and the use of pianos to represent female sexuality in literature are all inseparable from Jelinek's representation of Erika's perverse subjectivity and her unstable sexual position.

My analysis of the relationship between Erika's perversion and her piano playing thus also makes it possible to read *Die Klavierspielerin's* in generic terms as an anti-*Künstlerroman*. After a discussion of the history of pianos, pianists and Jelinek's 1982 play *Clara S.*, I then place *Die Klavierspielerin* in the context of both the history of pianos and Jelinek's earlier text, before turning to a discussion of perversion, sublimation, and the *Künstlerroman*.

I conclude with the argument that perversion's similarity to sublimation allows us to read *Die Klavierspielerin* as an anti-*Künstlerroman*. Doing so allows us to view Erika's failure to become a concert pianist as simultaneously a failure to achieve sublimation, a failure which manifests itself in perversion as a means of obtaining the *jouissance* denied to her by art. We can thus see that Jelinek offers us an anti-*Künstlerroman* that stretches generic boundaries through its portrait of the artist as pervert rather than genius.

In the conclusion, I argue that the scholarly significance of this dissertation lies in its sustained reading of these three Jelinek texts in generic terms. I also

examine how these works function to create an “negative aesthetics,” as opposed to a positive reworking of generic forms. Finally, I look at how that lack of positivity explains the often fraught reception of Jelinek’s work by both Marxists and feminists.

CHAPTER 1

HOUSEWIFE OR SHOP GIRL? ALIENATION AND (ANTI-) ROMANCE IN

DIE LIEBHABERINNEN

[paula] ist 15 jahre alt. sie ist jetzt alt genug, um sich überlegen zu dürfen, was sie einmal werden möchte: hausfrau oder verkäuferin. verkäuferin oder hausfrau.
Elfriede Jelinek, *Die Liebhaberinnen* (14)¹

Introduction

In her book, *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism*, Rosemary Hennessy criticizes what she terms “culture theory in the humanities [which] has emphasized the language-based construction of consciousness” (212). In particular, Hennessy takes to task the dismissal of the term “alienation” by “poststructuralists” from culture theory. As Hennessy’s critique is so pertinent to my argument in this chapter, I will quote her at some length:

This work has been shaped by the presuppositions of poststructuralism, which stresses the radical loss of authenticity (a true or coherent self), not as an effect of capitalism’s alienating management and commodification of human capacities but of the subject’s entry into a symbolic system of representations where the subject of language is always so to speak “at a loss” because the subject of the enunciation (“I”) is always split from the “self” it refers to. This view dismisses a concept like “alienation” because it connotes either a true “self” somewhere “behind” language,

¹ “[paula] is 15 years old. she is now old enough to be allowed to think about what she wants to be one day: housewife or sales assistant. sales assistant or housewife” (*women*, 12).

or suggests a utopian vision for overcoming losses that for the poststructuralist are irrecoverable. In the postmodern frame of reference, the subject's coherence is mitigated by the radical difference (the loss of self-presence or a splitting of the self) that is the condition for taking up a position in a symbolic order where the instability of cultural signifiers will always undo any provisional or projected self-coherence. It is clear by now that I see these postmodern formations as extremely limited and actually quite conservative, because they foreclose ways of knowing the world that connect the symbolic order (culture) to material social relations that are not symbolic (*Profit and Pleasure*, 212).²

What I would like to suggest with my reading of Elfriede Jelinek's *Die Liebhaberinnen* (English title: *women as lovers*, [1975]) in this chapter, however, is that the choice between "alienation" in the symbolic order and in material social relations is neither as simple nor as complete as Hennessy would have us believe. Rather, what we need to do is to develop an approach with which we can analyze *both* the alienation of the subject in the symbolic order via language and the alienation of labor and sexuality in material social relations.

² Here it is important to note that Hennessy's earlier work (her book *Materialist Feminism and the Politics of Discourse*, published in 1993), was much more sympathetic to postmodernism than her later work. In the earlier work she notes that "Materialist feminism is distinguished from socialist feminism in part because it embraces postmodern conceptions of language and subjectivity. Materialist feminists have seen in postmodernism a powerful critical force for exposing the relationship between language, the subject, and the unequal distribution of social resources" (Hennessy, *Materialist Feminism*, 5). As the above quote makes clear, this more sympathetic reading of postmodernism is largely missing from Hennessy's later book. Jelinek's text, I would argue, has more in common with Hennessy's 1993 views than with her later more traditionally Marxist work. For a useful overview of materialist feminism, see Sara Lennox's essay "Materialistischer Feminismus und Postmoderne."

In addition, Hennessy's critique allows me to raise the following question: what type of "alienation" are we dealing with in Jelinek's text? Is the alienation depicted in *Die Liebhaberinnen* alienation from labor brought on by private property and capitalism, as Marx posited, and something that would be transcended in communism? Or is it, as some socialist feminists claim in their reading of Marx, the alienation of women from both their labor and sexuality, caused by patriarchal relations between men and women in capitalist society, to be overcome in a more just society?³ Or, finally, is it, as in Lacan's work, "an inevitable consequence of the process by which the ego is constituted by identification with the counterpart" (Evans, *Dictionary*, 9)?

In this chapter I will argue that "alienation," at least as portrayed by Jelinek, is *all* of these things, and that one therefore needs to use various methods (Marxism, socialist feminism and psychoanalysis) as a means of reading Jelinek's depiction of alienation in all of its forms in *Die Liebhaberinnen*. While *Die Liebhaberinnen* can be read as a Marxist and/or socialist feminist text, depicting both alienation from labor and sexuality in the Marxist and socialist feminist uses of the term, it also illustrates "how patriarchy exerts its powerful hold through

³ On Marxist/socialist feminist views of alienation, see: Bartky, A. Ferguson, Foreman, Jaggar, and MacKinnon.

the symbolic" (Haines, 653), and thus can benefit from a linguistically-based psychoanalytic reading. My reading of *Die Liebhaberinnen* will seek to coordinate Marxist, socialist feminist and psychoanalytic theories at different textual levels: while Marxist and socialist feminist interpretations are useful at the narrative level (e.g., the plot level or that of the signified), a psychoanalytic interpretation can be used to read the text at the level of the writing itself (that is, the level of the signifier, especially in relation to Jelinek's use of metonymy as a literary device). As Patricia Elliot explains in her discussion of Jacqueline Rose's psychoanalytic feminism:

the psyche can never be a *direct* reflection of social reality or of biology. In other words, psychosexuality is overdetermined. Biology and ideology come to "figure" in it, but there is no causal relationship. Rather, . . . psychical life is characterized by a complex process of mediation, so that femininity cannot be explained as a natural outcome of female anatomy or as the direct result of (oppressive) social relations (77, emphasis in original).

In its neglect of the unconscious elements of sexuality, as they play themselves out in linguistic representation, the socialist feminist concept of alienation therefore needs to be supplemented with psychoanalysis in order to read Jelinek's texts in all of their complexity.

In this chapter, I also read *Die Liebhaberinnen* in generic terms as an anti-romance, arguing that Jelinek's novel performs a materialist critique of the

traditional romance novel's generic perversions by exposing the ways such novels work to construct alienated female subjectivities. Following discussions of Marxist, socialist feminist, and Lacanian alienation in *Die Liebhaberinnen*, I then turn to an overview of the romance genre and the ways that Jelinek's novel works both with and against those generic conventions, concluding that her text can ultimately be read as a materialist feminist romance novel.

*"Sexuality is to Feminism What Work is to Marxism": Alienated Sexuality
and/as Labor in Die Liebhaberinnen*

Set in the mountains of Styria, Jelinek's novel outlines the quest of the two main characters, Brigitte and Paula, to find husbands. This search is determined by the lack of choices for women in this part of rural Austria, as is ironically pointed out by the narrator in regard to Paula: "sie [paula] ist 15 jahre alt. sie ist jetzt alt genug, um sich überlegen zu dürfen, was sie einmal werden möchte: hausfrau oder verkäuferin. verkäuferin oder hausfrau" (*LH*, 14).⁴ While both women are successful in their pursuit of husbands, even accomplishing their goal in the same manner (they become pregnant, which forces the men to marry

⁴ One of the elements of this novel's style is Jelinek's use of non-capitalization. I will follow the text's use of capitalization, rather than "normal" rules when quoting. "she [paula] is 15 years old. she is now old enough to be allowed to think about what she wants to be one day: housewife or sales assistant. sales assistant or housewife" (*women*, 12). There is, also, in Brigitte's case, the option of working in the bra factory.

them), the two characters function as opposites as well: “immer abwechselnd mit dem guten beispiel brigittes schleppt sich das schlechte beispiel paulas dahin” (LH, 26).⁵ Despite the contrast between the story of Brigitte, the “good” example, with that of Paula, the “bad” example, they share the fate of being alienated from both their labor and sexuality; the main difference between their stories being that Brigitte is the “success” story in the text. In her discussion of *Die Liebhaberinnen*, Marlies Janz makes clear the relation between women, labor and capital portrayed in Jelinek’s text, writing:

Der Roman destruiert den Trivialmythos “Liebe,” indem er das Herrschaftsverhältnis unter den Geschlechtern, aber auch den Widerspruch zwischen Kapital und Arbeit darstellt, also ganz marxistisch ausgeht von der doppelten Unterdrückung der Frau und der einfachen Unterdrückung des Mannes, vom Haupt- und vom Nebenwiderspruch. Mit der Gestalt der “höheren Tochter” Susi führt er darüber hinaus das Thema der Priorität von Klassenhierarchien über die Geschlechterhierarchie ein . . . An Brigitte und Paula demonstriert der Roman die Chancenlosigkeit von Frauen aus der Arbeiterklasse, die in ihrem Privatleben nur dasselbe tun können, was sie in der Fabrik tun: sie vermarkten ihre Körper, sei es als Arbeitskraft, sei es als Sexualobjekt und Gebärinstrument (22-23).⁶

⁵ “always alternating with the good example, brigitte, paula, the bad example, trails along” (*women*, 27).

⁶ “The novel destroys the banal myth of ‘love,’ in that it portrays relations of power between the sexes. It also, however, portrays the contradiction between capital and work, thus showing, from a Marxist perspective, the double oppression of women, and the single oppression of men, that is, the primary and secondary contradiction. With the figure of the ‘high-born

In contrast to Janz, however, I do not think that class necessarily “trumps” sex in *Die Liebhaberinnen*; rather, I agree with Brigid Haines that it could be said that it is instead sex that trumps class, or as Engels put it, “Der erste Klassengegensatz, der in der Geschichte auftritt, fällt zusammen mit der Entwicklung des Antagonismus von Mann und Weib in der Einzelehe, und die erste Klassenunterdrückung mit der des weiblichen Geschlechts durch das männliche” (21: 68).⁷

In Brigid Haines’s words, what Jelinek gives us in her novel does indeed agree with Engels’s view of monogamous marriage, consisting of “an exaggerated Marxist-feminist account of life under capitalism, in which men and women are exploited and alienated by capitalism, [and] women are further oppressed by men as a result of capitalism” (649). As she goes on to explain, *all*

daughter,’ Susi, the novel establishes the theme of the priority of class hierarchies over those of sex . . . With Brigitte and Paula the novel demonstrates the lack of opportunities for women from the working class, who are only able to do the same in their private lives as they do in the factory: they sell their bodies, whether as labor or as sexual object and birthing instrument” (my translation).

⁷ “the first class antagonism that appears in history coincides with the development of the antagonism between man and woman in monogamous marriage, and the first class oppression coincides with that of the female sex by the male” (129). All German quotes of Marx and Engels’s works will be cited from the following edition: Karl Marx, and Friedrich Engels, *Werke*, Ed. Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim ZK der SED, 42 vols, (Berlin: Dietz, 1959-1962), and will be noted parenthetically in the text by volume and page number.

women in *Die Liebhaberinnen*, including Janz's "höhere Tochter," Susi, "will have to submit to the violence of patriarchy" (651), as Heinz himself realizes:

heinz denkt, daß sich susi bald nichts mehr um den hunger in den welt scheißen wird, wenn sie zu gänze mit *seinem* hunger wird beschäftigt sein müssen. susis alltag wird einmal ein ausgefüllter werden. susi wird den schwanz fest in die möse und das familienleben fest in den kopf gepflanzt bekommen (LH, 83).⁸

What Jelinek accomplishes in *Die Liebhaberinnen*, then, is a depiction of women's alienation of their sexuality both in terms of Marx's use of alienation to describe alienated labor under capitalism, and of the socialist feminist revision of Marx to include women and their sexuality within Marx's original framework.

In Marx's use of the term, the concept of alienation relates to the labor of human beings, as practiced in a society defined by private property and the division of labor, and it "refers not to natural objects as such but to what happens to the products of labour when (as a result of specific social relationships) they become *commodities* or *capital*" (Colletti, 16). As Marx explains in the 1844 *Manuscripts*: "Die Arbeit produziert nicht nur Waren; sie produziert sich selbst

⁸ "heinz thinks, that susi will soon no longer give a shit about world hunger when she has to devote herself entirely to *his* hunger. susi's day will then be filled up more completely. susi will get his cock firmly inserted in her snatch and family life firmly inserted in her head" (*women*, 99, emphasis in original). I am indebted to Brigid Haines's article for this example.

und den Arbeiter als eine *Ware*" (40: 511, emphasis in original).⁹ He goes on to clarify:

Dies Faktum drückt weiter nichts aus als: Der Gegenstand, den die Arbeit produziert, ihr Produkt, tritt ihr als ein *fremdes Wesen*, als eine von dem Produzenten *unabhängige Macht* gegenüber. Das Produkt der Arbeit ist die Arbeit, die sich in einem Gegenstand fixiert, sachlich gemacht hat, es ist die *Vergegenständlichung* der Arbeit . . . der Arbeiter [verhält sich] zum *Produkt seiner Arbeit* als einem *fremden* Gegenstand . . . Die *Entäußerung* des Arbeiters in seinem Produkt hat die Bedeutung, nicht nur, daß seine Arbeit zu einem Gegenstand, zu einer *äußeren* Existenz wird, sondern daß sie *außer ihm*, unabhängig, fremd von ihm existiert und eine selbstständige Macht ihm gegenüber wird, daß das Leben, was er dem Gegenstand verliehen hat, ihm feindlich und fremd gegenübertritt (40: 511-12, emphasis in original).¹⁰

One example of the manner in which work is depicted as alienated labor in Marx's sense in Jelinek's novel is the description of Paula's work as a seamstress apprentice:

⁹ "Labour not only produces commodities; it also produces itself and the workers as a *commodity*" (EW, 324, emphasis in original).

¹⁰ "This fact simply means that the object that the worker produces, its product, stands opposed to it as *something alien*, as a *power independent* of the producer. The product of labour is labour embodied and made material in the object, it is the *objectification* of labour . . . the worker is related to the *product of his labour* as to an *alien* object . . . The externalization [*Entäußerung*] of the worker in his product means not only that his labour becomes an object, an *external* existence, but that it exists *outside* him, independently of him and alien to him, and begins to confront him as an autonomous power; that the life which he has bestowed on the object confronts him as hostile and alien" (EW, 324, emphasis in original).

zu ihrer schneiderei sagt paula nie: meine arbeit. zu ihrer arbeit sagt paula nie: meine. auch innerlich nicht. die arbeit, das ist etwas, das von einem losgelöst ist, die arbeit das ist doch mehr eine pflicht und geschieht daher dem nebenkörper . . . die arbeit, selbst wenn man sie gern macht, erleidet man. paula hat, trotz aller liebe zur schneiderei, gelernt, daß die arbeit etwas lästiges ist (*LH*, 32).¹¹

It is not only the women, however, but also the men who experience alienation through their labor. In a manner similar to Marx's description of alienated labor in *Capital* "in part, as the actual appearance of people who engage in such activity" (Ollman, 139), "both Heinz's father and Erich's stepfather are ill as a result of work" (see *LH*, 25 & 41, and *women*, 26 & 43) and

both fathers are referred to metonymically by the narrator in terms relating to their ill health: Heinz's father is called 'bandscheibn,' since his discs have suffered as a result of his work as a long-distance lorry driver . . . while Erich's stepfather is called 'asthma,' his condition a result of his work on the railways (Haines, 647, n. 21).

While labor is experienced as alienating by both men and women in Jelinek's novel, it is the women whose relation to work is also related to their sexuality. This leads to the question of how Marx's notion of alienated labor can

¹¹ "about her dressmaking paula never says: my work. about her work paula never says: mine. not even inwardly. work, that is something, which is detached from a person, work after all is more like a duty and so it happens to the second body . . . one suffers work, even if one enjoys doing it. paula, despite all her love of dressmaking, has learned that work is something burdensome" (*women*, 33-34).

be related to women's sexuality, a relation that feminist interpreters of Marx have attempted to define, or, as Catherine MacKinnon once so (in)famously declared: "Sexuality is to feminism what work is to marxism: that which is most one's own, yet most taken away" (3). In Jelinek's novel, this relation is shown through the fact that it is not simply through their work that Brigitte and Paula resemble Marx's alienated workers; rather, it is the metamorphosis of love and sexuality into commodities to be exchanged that most clearly reveals their alienation, in particular from their sexuality. As Marlies Janz puts it. "Indem für die Frauen die 'Liebe' zum Ebenbild von (entfremdeter) 'Arbeit' wird, instrumentalisieren und verlieren sie ihre Körper" (26).¹² While Janz uses the term "love," I am instead arguing that it is sexuality in *Die Liebhaberinnen* that functions in much the same manner as work does for Marx, that is, as something which is alienated by being turned into a commodity, both in its product and its activity.

¹² "Because 'love' for the women becomes the spitting image of (alienated) 'labor,' they instrumentalize and lose their bodies" (my translation). See also Rebecca Thomas who notes that "The capitalist model as perceived by Jelinek demands that everything be assigned a market value and reduced to its commodity function" ("(Re)-Production," 71-72).

For this reason, it is possible to draw a parallel between the ideological fiction of love¹³ in Jelinek's text and money in Marx's work.¹⁴ This comparison is less far-fetched than it may seem at first glance. In another context, the parallel between love and money as "generalized symbolic media of communication" (Luhmann, 18) has been made by Niklas Luhmann (130-31, see also chapter 11, "The Incorporation of Sexuality"). Yet unlike Luhmann's functionalist neutrality, according to which both love and money are forms of social glue, Jelinek preserves the alienating moment of the two. As Marx explains in the *Grundrisse*, it is the process through which a product becomes a commodity that creates exchange value, as measured by money:

Das Produkt wird Ware, d.h. *bloßes Moment des Austauschs*. Die Ware wird in Tauschwert verwandelt. Um sie sich selbst als Tauschwert gleichzusetzen, wird sie mit einem Zeichen vertauscht, das sie als den Tauschwert als solchen repräsentiert. Als solcher symbolisierter Tauschwert kann sie dann wieder in bestimmten Verhältnissen mit jeder andren Ware ausgetauscht werden . . . Die Bestimmung des Produkts im Tauschwert bringt es also notwendig mit sich, daß der Tauschwert eine vom Produkt getrennte, losgelöste Existenz erhält. Der von den Waren selbst losgelöste und selbst als eine

¹³ For more on love as an ideological fiction, see the section below in this chapter on the romance novel.

¹⁴ It is important to note here that I am focusing on the parallel between love and money as that which functions to conceal exchange value. Marx, of course, also attributed many other qualities to money that are not true of love. For more on Marx's view of money, see chapter 1 of *Capital* (23: 49-98; and C, 125-77).

Ware neben ihnen existierende Tauschwert ist—*Geld* (42: 79-80, emphasis in original).¹⁵

In *Die Liebhaberinnen*, it is love that takes on the symbolic form under which sexuality is exchanged, and which conceals the real relations between men and women, as expressed through the alienation of sexuality, just as, for Marx, money functions to conceal the real relations between workers and their products: “in der liebe versteht brigitte keinen spaß. es ist das ernsteste, was sie, so ganz ohne startkapital, für ihr eigenes geschäft tun kann . . . der körper zählt für brigitte als mittel zum besseren zweck” (*LH*, 56).¹⁶

From this, one can see that the fact that love involves labor and capital is clear to Brigitte. Moreover, she is smart enough to invest her labor where it will yield the most profit, by cleaning the toilet at Heinz’s family’s house:

brigitte hilft im haushalt, was das einzige ist, womit sie sich beliebt machen kann, das heißt sie putzt freudig mit dem

¹⁵ “The product becomes a commodity, i.e. a mere element of exchange. The commodity is transformed into exchange value. In order to equate it with itself as an exchange value, it is exchanged for a symbol which represents it as exchange value as such. As such a symbolized exchange value, it can then in turn be exchanged in definite relations for every other commodity . . . The definition of a product as exchange value thus necessarily implies that exchange value obtains a separate existence, in isolation from the product. The exchange value which is separated from commodities and exists alongside them as itself a commodity, this is—*money* (*GR*, 145, emphasis in original).

¹⁶ “brigitte won’t stand for any nonsense when it comes to love. it is the most serious thing which she, entirely without start-up money, can do for her own shop . . . for brigitte her body counts as a means to a better end” (*women*, 64-65).

scheißebecken die klomuschel . . . zu hause hilft brigitte nichts,
das hieße kapital und arbeitskraft in ein von vorneherein zum
scheitern verurteiltes mit verlust arbeitendes
kleinunternehmen zu stecken. aussichtslos. hoffnungslos.
brigitte investiert besser, dort, wo etwas herauskommen kann.
ein ganzes neues leben (*LH*, 13-14).¹⁷

Brigitte is willing to exchange her labor power when necessary for Heinz's family, but not at home, where there would be no reward for it. In this way, she clearly resembles workers, who expend their labor power only when forced, for "sobald kein physischer oder sonstiger Zwang existiert, [wird] die Arbeit als Pest geflohen" (40: 514).¹⁸

As well as portraying love and sexuality in terms of Marx's alienated labor, Jelinek's depiction of women's sexual alienation can also be read via a discussion of the socialist feminist reworking of the Marxist term alienation. Some socialist feminists, such as Alison Jaggar, Sandra Lee Bartky and Ann Foreman, attempted, in the 1970s and early 80s, to appropriate and rework the classical Marxist concept of alienation to apply to women, arguing that the sexual

¹⁷ "brigitte is helping around the house, which is the only way she can ingratiate herself, which means she enthusiastically cleans the lavatory bowl with the shit brush . . . brigitte doesn't help at home, that would mean putting capital and labour power into a small business which was working at a loss and condemned to fail from the outset. pointless. hopeless. better for brigitte to invest where something can come of it. a completely new life" (*women*, 10-11).

¹⁸ "as soon as no physical or other compulsion exists it [work—BB] is shunned like the plague" (*EW*, 326).

alienation of women is structurally similar to the alienation of the worker, as Jaggar points out:

men rather than women control the expression of women's sexuality: women's sexuality is developed for men's enjoyment rather than for women's. In this respect women's sexual situation resembles that of wage workers who are alienated from the process and product of their labor (309).

According to the socialist feminist theory of alienation, two of the major ways through which women are alienated from their sexuality, are: 1) sexual objectification of women "occurs when a woman's sexual parts or sexual functions are separated out from her person, reduced to the status of mere instruments or else regarded as if they were capable of representing her" (Bartky, 35); and 2) the best chance for economic security for many women, marriage to an economically secure man, requires the "sale" of their sexuality in marriage (Jaggar, 308).¹⁹

¹⁹ These are not the only two ways in which women, according to socialist feminists, are alienated as women. Other examples of femininity as alienation include: being "viewed relentlessly as sexual objects," being subjected "continually to sexual assaults and harassment," the fact that "economic survival requires most women to present themselves in a way that is sexually pleasing to men: male superiors penalize women who seem to be 'punishing' or defying men through their appearance" and the reality that "much of women's paid work is sexualized" (Jaggar, 308). Bartky also adds "the cultural domination of women" to her list of ways in which women are alienated as women, explaining that "women as women are clearly alienated in cultural production. Most avenues of cultural expression—high culture, popular culture, even to some extent language—are instruments of male supremacy. Women have little control over the cultural apparatus itself and are often entirely absent from its products; to the extent that we are not excluded from it entirely, the images of ourselves we see reflected in the dominant culture are often truncated or demeaning" (34-35). For other examples of femininity as alienation see: Jaggar

In the following passages describing the relationship between Brigitte and

Heinz, the sexual objectification of Brigitte is made clear:

brigitte haßt heinz unter vielem andren auch deshalb, weil er immer dann ein körperliches gefühl für brigitte in sich hochkommen läßt, wenn gitti gerade von ihren seelischen problemen, die ein kleines häuschen mit garten nach sich ziehen, plaudern möchte. immer dann, wenn brigitte ihr innerstes nach außen stülpen möchte und dabei den ganzen käse von glück, zukunft, säuglingspflege und waschmaschinen herausspeit, dann verhält sich heinz so, als ob er kein hirn hätte, sondern nur einen schwanz.

heinz wird doch in brigitte nicht nur einen körper sehen und nicht die ganze vielfalt, die dahintersteckt? . . . heinz ist froh, endlich einen menschen zum rammeln gefunden zu haben. kaum wird heinz des menschen brigitte ansichtig, schon knöpft er sich auf und geht in startposition. während ihm brigitte noch erklärt, daß sie ihn liebt und gleichzeitig etwas wie hochachtung vor seinem beruflichen erfolg empfindet, während brigitte noch ihre gedanken von liebe und achtung bis zu hochzeit und hausrenovierung schweifen läßt, ehe sie sich noch vorsehen kann, schon hat sie den rammler heinz an ihrem leibe hängen wie einen blutegel (LH, 54).²⁰

(308), Bartky (34-35), and Foreman, who titled her book *Femininity as Alienation*, thus implying that it is simply femininity itself which is alienating. For reasons of length and clarity, I shall focus only on the two forms of alienation mentioned above.

²⁰ "brigitte also hates heinz among other things, because he always lets a physical feeling for brigitte rise, just when gitti would like to talk about her emotional problems, which involve a little house with a garden. whenever brigitte wants to turn her innermost to the outside and spew out all the crap about happiness, future, baby care and washing machines, then heinz acts as if he didn't have a brain, but only a cock. surely heinz doesn't just see a body when he looks at brigitte and not all the variety behind it? . . . heinz is happy at last to have found a person to rut. hardly has heinz set eyes on the person brigitte, than he's unbuttoning himself and going into the starting position. while brigitte is still explaining to him, that she loves him and at the same time

Here the reader can see that, for Heinz, Brigitte is nothing more than her body, a body to be used by him for his sexual pleasure, while he devalues the rest of her. As Bartky puts it: "To be dealt with in this way is to have one's entire being identified with the body . . . [sexual objectification] involves too the implicit denial to those who suffer it that they have capacities which transcend the merely sexual" (35-36).

Jelinek's depiction of the relationship between Brigitte and Heinz, while conforming to a socialist feminist definition of sexual objectification, is, simultaneously, more than just a criticism of this alienation. Her description of Brigitte's "feelings," those feelings which Heinz is devaluing in his appreciation and use of her body, make this clear. For Brigitte's feelings for Heinz, like his desire for her body, are also nothing more than a desire for the commodities he can provide her, in this case a house, garden, and washing machine. Heinz's function for Brigitte is to act as material security and future for her, while Brigitte's feelings for Heinz are not based on love (rather, it is specifically pointed out in the text that she hates him), consequently demonstrating that she too esteems Heinz solely for the value he can provide. In other words, Brigitte's

feels something like respect for his professional success, while Brigitte is letting her thoughts wander from love and respect to wedding and house renovation, before she even has time to watch out, she already has Heinz the rutter clinging to her body like a leech" (*women*, 62).

“capacities which transcend the merely sexual” are nothing more than the desire for the commodities that she can secure from Heinz, and thus related to the exchange value of her sexuality.

In order to satisfy her desire for these commodities, Brigitte sets her sights on marrying Heinz, who hopes one day to open an electrical repair shop. Brigitte detests her work in the bra factory and dreams of escaping it through Heinz:

nicht einmal bei der arbeit hat brigitte ihre ruhe. sogar bei der arbeit muß sie arbeiten. sie soll bei der arbeit nicht denken, etwas in ihr denkt jedoch ununterbrochen. brigitte kann aus ihrem eigenen nichts besseres machen. das bessere soll vom leben von heinz herkommen, heinz kann brigitte von ihrer nähmaschine befreien, das kann brigitte von selbst nicht (LH, 11).²¹

She knows that the best way to accomplish this is through sex (or, as Jaggar refers to it, by selling her sexuality in marriage), which she endures in spite of the fact that she receives no enjoyment from it, other than the knowledge that sex with Heinz means securing her future: “auch ekelt brigitte vor heinz und seinem fetten weißen elektrikerkörper, der auch heinz heißt. trotzdem ist sie auch wieder froh, so froh, todfröh, daß sie ihn hat, weil er ihre zukunft ist” (LH,

²¹ “brigitte doesn’t even get any peace at work. even at work she has to work. she’s not supposed to think while she’s working, yet something inside her thinks uninterruptedly. brigitte cannot make something better of her own life. something better must come from heinz’s life. heinz can free brigitte from her sewing machine, brigitte cannot do it on her own” (*women*, 8).

32).²² Brigitte nonetheless persists in describing her exchange of sex with Heinz as motivated by love, despite her reference to his earning power in her declaration of love:

ja, heinz, es ist die liebe, sagt brigitte . . . du wirst für mich sorgen und mich für meine liebe belohnen und entschädigen, nicht wahr, heinz? . . . ich liebe dich doch gerade deswegen, weil du ein mann bist, sagt brigitte. du bist ein mann, der einen beruf lernt, ich bin eine frau, die keinen beruf gelernt hat. dein beruf muß für uns beide reichen. das tut er auch spielend, weil er so ein großer schöner beruf ist. du darfst mich niemals verlassen, sonst würde ich sterben, sagt brigitte . . . ich liebe dich doch gerade deswegen, weil du mehr verdienst als einer, der weniger verdient (*LH*, 23 & 26).²³

To put it another way: what Jelinek does with the figure of Brigitte is to expose the relation between love and economic survival for women, a relation that, in traditional romance novels, is obscured, as Tania Modleski illustrates in her discussion of Harlequin romances:

While the novels are always about a poor girl finally marrying a rich man, preferably of the nobility, they must be careful to

²² "brigitte also is repelled by heinz and his plump white electrician's body, which is also called heinz. despite that she is also happy again, so happy, dead happy, that she has him, because he is her future" (*women*, 34).

²³ "yes, heinz, it's love, says brigitte . . . you will take care of me and repay and reward me for my love, won't you, heinz? . . . but that's exactly why i love you, because you are a man, says brigitte. you are a man, who is learning a trade, i a woman, who has not learned a trade. your trade must do for both of us. and it will do that easily, because it is such a beautiful trade. you must never leave me, otherwise i would die, says brigitte . . . but that's exactly why i love you, because you earn more than someone, who earns less" (*women*, 22 & 26).

show that the girl never set out to get him and his goods. This is of course a simple reflection of the double bind imposed upon women in real life: their most important achievement is supposed to be finding a husband; their greatest fault is attempting to do so. How to get your heroine from loneliness and penury to romance and riches, without making her appear to have helped herself or even to have thought about the matter, is an old problem for novelists (48-49).

This “double bind” is exactly what Jelinek thematizes through the figure of Brigitte, subsequently revealing women’s pursuit of marriage for what it truly is, an attempt on the part of women to obtain economic security for themselves. Or, as the narrator rather pithily points out: “vorläufig hat b. noch nichts als ihren namen, im lauf der geschichte wird brigitte den namen von heinz bekommen, das ist wichtiger als geld und besitz, das kann geld und besitz herbeischaffen” (LH, 10).²⁴

Heinz, however, while he enjoys using Brigitte to satisfy his sexual needs, has his sights set on something better. He would prefer to marry a woman who can increase his social standing, and possibly provide some start-up capital for his business, something Brigitte cannot do. Heinz is aware that Brigitte is trying to “catch” him and ponders her material value, finding her lacking: “heinz fragt

²⁴ “for the time being b. has nothing but her name yet, in the course of the story brigitte will receive heinz’s name, that is more important than money and property, that can procure money and property” (*women*, 6).

sich oft, was brigitte dann vorzuzeigen hat. heinz spielt oft mit dem gedanken, jemand anderen zu nehmen, der etwas zu bieten hat, wie etwa bargeld oder die räumlichkeiten für ein geeignetes geschäftslokal" (*LH*, 13).²⁵ This leads to a competition between Brigitte and the woman Heinz would prefer, the one who could offer him something other than herself, Susi. The competition takes place mainly on Brigitte's side, however, as Susi has no intentions of lowering her social standing by marrying Heinz. As Brigitte is unaware of this, she believes that she must compete with Susi (and any other unknown rivals) for Heinz's attention. She knows that what she has to offer him is not unique:

brigitte hat einen körper zu bieten. außer brigittes körper werden zur gleichen zeit noch viele andre körper auf den markt geworfen. das einzige, was brigitte auf diesem weg positiv zur seite steht, ist die kosmetische industrie. und die textilindustrie. brigitte hat brüste, schenkel, beine, hüften und eine möse. das haben andre auch, manchmal sogar von besserer qualität (*LH*, 13).²⁶

The great number of women's bodies on the market means that Heinz has a large selection to choose from, and, as a consequence, helps to reinforce

²⁵ "heinz often asks himself, what brigitte has to show for herself. heinz often plays with the idea of taking someone who has something to offer, as for example, cash or suitable premises for a shop" (*women*, 9-10).

²⁶ "brigitte has a body to offer. apart from brigitte's body many other bodies are flooding the market at the same time. the only thing that positively stands by brigitte on this path, is the cosmetics industry. and the textile industry. brigitte has breasts, thighs, hips and a snatch. others have that too, sometimes even of a better quality" (*women*, 10).

Brigitte's status as a body (commodity) to be exchanged.²⁷ In addition, it shows that women, as commodities, suffer the same fate as Marx's workers, as described in the 1844 *Manuscripts*: "Als Kapital steigt [der] Wert des Arbeiters nach Nachfrage und Zufuhr, und auch *physisch* ward und wird gewußt sein *Dasein*, sein *Leben* [als] eine Zufuhr von *Ware* wie jeder andren *Ware*" (40: 523, emphasis in original).²⁸

Just like the worker, Brigitte's value as a commodity also declines in relation to the supply, or the number of women's bodies on the market that Heinz can choose from. Furthermore, Brigitte's value is continually decreasing, for "brigitte wird immer älter und immer weniger frau, die konkurrenz wird immer jünger und immer mehr frau" (*LH*, 13),²⁹ and old women are not particularly valuable, as can be seen through the example of Paula's grandmother: "die oma [hat] ihr einziges kapital, eine vielleicht einmal

²⁷ For an analysis of *Die Liebhaberinnen* and the exchange of women as commodities, see Haines's article, in which she reads Jelinek's novel through Irigaray's analysis of women as objects of male exchange.

²⁸ "As capital, the *value* of the worker rises or falls in accordance with supply and demand, and even in a *physical* sense, his *existence*, his *life*, was and is treated as a supply of a *commodity*, like any other commodity" (*EW*, 335, emphasis in original).

²⁹ "brigitte grows ever older and ever less woman, the competition grows ever younger and ever more woman" (*women*, 10).

vorhandengewesene schönheit, längst verloren. sie wurde entwertet" (*LH*, 70).³⁰

It is not just old age that reduces the value of women, but also their lack of virginity, as exemplified by Paula: "paula geht manchmal auf den tanzboden, wenn ein fest stattfindet. manchmal wird paula von einem besoffenen tanzbodenbesucher wieder in den wald weggeführt, was keiner sehen darf, weil es ihren marktwert gleich ins bodenlose sinken lassen würde" (*LH*, 30).³¹

To further extend the comparison between workers and women, Brigitte's precarious status as a commodity of declining value forces her to compete with others in her quest for Heinz, which in turn kills any feelings of commonality with other women: "in brigittes kreisen haßt man jede konkurrenz. in brigittes kreisen wird haß groß geschrieben. brigitte kann keine liebe zu ihresgleichen aufbringen, das ist alles kaputtgemacht" (*LH*, 65-66).³² Solidarity among women like Brigitte is impossible because she knows that "es gibt so viele frauen, die sich eine fremde, ihre, brigittes zukunft zu einer eigenen machen möchten" (*LH*,

³⁰ "the granny has long ago lost her only capital, a beauty which was perhaps present. granny was devalued" (*women*, 82).

³¹ "paula sometimes goes onto the dance floor, is there's a party. sometimes paula is led away into the woods again by a drunk dance floor visitor, which no one must see, because that would immediately cause her market value to go through the floor" (*women*, 32).

³² "in brigitte's circles one hates any competition. in brigitte's circles hate is writ large. brigitte cannot summon up any love for her fellow women, it has all been destroyed" (*women*, 77).

55),³³ thereby illustrating Jaggar's point that "sexual competition between women often makes them unable to perceive their underlying shared interests, just as wage workers are often unable to perceive the interests they share with their co-workers" (310). Or, as Marx puts it:

Eine unmittelbare Konsequenz davon, daß der Mensch dem Produkt seiner Arbeit, seiner Lebenstätigkeit, seinem Gattungswesen entfremdet ist, ist die *Entfremdung des Menschen* von dem *Menschen* . . . Die Entfremdung des Menschen, überhaupt jedes Verhältnis, in dem der Mensch zu sich selbst [steht], ist erst verwirklicht, drückt sich aus in dem Verhältnis, in welchem der Mensch zu d[em] andren Menschen steht. Also betrachtet in dem Verhältnis der entfremdeten Arbeit jeder Mensch den andren nach dem Maßstab und dem Verhältnis, in welchem er selbst als Arbeiter sich befindet (40: 517-18, emphasis in original).³⁴

In the competition for the security marriage provides, Brigitte is the "success story" in the text, and it is her success which more properly reveals the function of love in Jelinek's text as referred to above. After she becomes pregnant, Heinz marries her, they have two children, open an electrical repair

³³ "brigitte knows, there are so many women who would like to turn a stranger's, her, brigitte's future into one of their own" (*women*, 63).

³⁴ "An immediate consequence of man's estrangement from the product of his labour, his life activity, his species-being, is the estrangement of man from man . . . Man's estrangement like all other relationships of man to himself, is realized and expressed only in man's relationship to other men. In the relationship of estranged labour each man therefore regards the other in accordance with the standard and the situation in which he as a worker finds himself" (*EW*, 329-30, emphasis in original).

shop and buy a house, giving Brigitte the fate she was seeking, a fate she managed to achieve solely through the use of her body: "brigitte's fate was the jackpot, she can't complain, brigitte managed it all with the strength of her womb alone . . . but then what is our women's charm for anyway?" (*women*, 175).³⁵

Despite having achieved her goal of marrying Heinz and getting out of the factory, Brigitte is still unhappy: "die ehe schlägt ihr gut an, das sieht man. sie strahlt mit ihren küchenkästen um die wette. der haß hat sie innerlich schon ganz aufgegessen. aber die freude am besitz ist ihr geblieben. daran klammert sie sich mit eiserner faust" (*LH*, 142).³⁶ Brigitte's role as wife and mother has left her eaten up by hate. The only joy still available to her is the joy of ownership, an ownership which she procured by turning herself into property, since, as Marx once wrote, marriage is also "*eine Form des exklusiven Privateigentums*" (40: 534, emphasis in original),³⁷ thus illustrating Marlies Janz's point that both Brigitte

³⁵ "brigitte's fate was the jackpot, she can't complain, brigitte managed it all with the strength of her womb alone . . . but then what is our women's charm for anyway?" (*women*, 175).

³⁶ "the marriage is filling her out, one can see that. she beams in competition with the baking tins. hate has quite eaten her up inside. but the pleasure of ownership has remained. she clings to it with an iron fist" (*women*, 173).

³⁷ "a form of exclusive private property" (*EW*, 346, emphasis in original).

and Paula “wollen besitzen, weil sie nichts haben, und beide machen sich zum Besitz von Männern, um etwas zu haben” (26-27).³⁸

Brigitte’s continued unhappiness also demonstrates, according to Allyson Fiddler, that love is the main theme of *Die Liebhaberinnen*, despite Jelinek’s seeming emphasis on work:

Work can be seen to function rather as a focal point or sub-theme within a wider theme, which is: love, or the demystification of what the concept of love generally implies. Love is mistakenly perceived by the girls as that which will save them from what they think is the source of their misery. They fail to recognise that the true source of their oppression lies in the very institutions of marriage and the family and in the gender-roles which those inscribe. In the world-view presented in *Die Liebhaberinnen*, the simple substitution of marriage and family for employment . . . is a step out of the frying pan into the fire (*Rewriting*, 72).

What this shows is that while Brigitte has managed to rid herself of the alienation of labor in the factory, she has simply exchanged one oppression for another. What Jelinek depicts, then, in *Die Liebhaberinnen* is the brutality instituted under monogamy as a constitutive element of the relations between men and women,

³⁸ “Both want to possess, because they have nothing, and both turn themselves into possessions of men, in order to have something” (my translation).

focusing on the way that occurs in the working (Brigitte and Paula) and lower-middle classes (Heinz and his family).³⁹

A comparison of the other main figure in *Die Liebhaberinnen*, Paula, to Brigitte, may also help to clarify the role of love in Jelinek's text. Like Brigitte, Paula succeeds in "catching" her man, although she is not as lucky as Brigitte in finding one able to support her. Paula, in an attempt to escape the "Hausfrau/Verkäuferin" choice offered to women, undertakes training as a seamstress. Once she falls in love with Erich, a forester, she gives up her apprenticeship and marries him, after giving birth to his child. Erich, however, is an alcoholic, and spends all of their money on alcohol, finally forcing Paula into prostitution to support the family. After Erich finds out, he leaves her, and her children are taken away to live with her parents. To support herself, Paula must go to work in the same factory from which Brigitte, through her "good" marriage, managed to escape, with the following result: "aus dem hoffnungsvollen lehrmädchen der schneiderei im ersten lehrjahr ist eine

³⁹ Jelinek, of course, is not alone in this particular feminist critique of Engels's perspective, as his formulation of working-class marriage has been criticized by many feminist interpreters. See, for example, Barrett (48-49), Ferguson (25), Hartmann (4-5), Jaggar (63-79), and Vogel (73-92), who terms Engels's view a "defective formation."

zerbrochene frau mit ungenügenden schneidereikenntnissen geworden" (*LH*, 154).⁴⁰

In opposition to Brigitte, whose notions of "love" are always practical and related to Heinz's future earning power and the security he can provide for her, Paula "is closer to the conventional protagonists in love-stories, as she is swayed by the sheer power of physical attraction" (Fiddler, *Rewriting*, 73). For Paula, Erich's good looks have the power of blinding her to his shortcomings:

erich ist nämlich der schönste im dorf. erich ist zwar ein lediges kind mit drei weiteren geschwistern, die alle von einem andren vatter sind, was schlechte ausgangsposition schafft, wie man weiß, aber er ist schön. bildschön wie ein bild mit seinen schwarzen haaren und blauen augen, so recht zum verlieben . . . wichtig ist nur, daß die liebe endlich gekommen ist, und daß sie nicht zu einem *häßlichen*, abgearbeiteten, versoffenen, *ausgemergelten*, ordinären, gemeinen holzarbeiter und ihr, sondern zu einem *schönen*, abgearbeiteten, versoffenen, *stämmigen*, ordinären, gemeinen holzarbeiter und ihr gekommen ist (*LH*, 38, emphasis added).⁴¹

⁴⁰ "the girl in the first year of her dressmaking apprenticeship, who was full of hope, has become a broken woman with inadequate dressmaking skills" (*women*, 189).

⁴¹ "because erich is the handsomest in the village. admittedly erich is an only child with three other siblings each with a different dada, which makes for a poor starting position, as one knows, but he is handsome. as handsome as a picture with his black hair and blue eyes, just the one to fall in love with . . . all that matters is that love has come at last, and that it hasn't come to an *ugly*, worn out, drunken, *exhausted*, vulgar, common woodcutter and her, but to a *handsome*, worn out, drunken, *strong*, vulgar, common woodcutter and her" (*women*, 41-42, emphasis added).

In this passage, Jelinek parodies the calculated self-interest often found in marriage choices, as if to show that Paula thinks she is smarter than she really is.

For Paula, the important thing is that love came to her via a handsome and strong woodcutter, rather than one who is ugly and emaciated; the fact that Erich is, despite his good looks, nothing more than a common and vulgar drunkard is irrelevant.

Furthermore, it is the experience of love itself that is important, although Paula, like Brigitte, also realizes that love will free her from work:

über allem ist die liebe, die das beste ist, sagt paula darauf. paula ist besser [than the housewives on the bus with her—BB], weil sie eine liebe in sich haben wird, wenn der richtige augenblick gekommen sein wird. zuerst ist paula wegen der schneiderei besser, anschließend wird sie von der liebe veredelt werden. die liebe wird die schneiderei ablösen . . . daß paula die liebe mit sinnlichkeit verbindet, ist eine folge der zeitschriften, die sie gerne liest (*LH*, 27 & 30).⁴²

Hence it is clear that, in regard to Paula's views of what "true love" consists, that she "has no inner core to which she can remain true, her core *is* the ideology of love out of which she has been constructed" (Haines, 649, emphasis in original), an ideology that she learns, as in *Madame Bovary*, from reading, in this case

⁴² "but above everything is love, which is best of all, replies paula. paula is better [than the housewives on the bus with her—BB] because of dressmaking, subsequently she will be ennobled by love. love will take the place of dressmaking . . . that paula connects love with sensuality, is a result of the magazines, which she likes to read" (*women*, 28 & 31).

women's magazines, rather than novels. Paula, constructed as she is by the external mediations of her dressmaking and then by the discourse of love, does not experience love as anything other than ideology.⁴³

Once again, this brings us back to a comparison between love and money, women and workers. In relation to money and its function as mediator, Marx, in the *Excerpts from James Mill's Elements of Political Economy*, writes:

Das Wesen des Geldes ist . . . die *vermittelnde Tätigkeit* oder Bewegung, der *menschliche*, gesellschaftliche Akt, wodurch sich die Produkte des Menschen wechselseitig ergänzen, *entfremdet* und die Eigenschaft eines *materiellen Dings* außer dem Menschen, des Geldes wird . . . Durch diesen *fremden Mittler*—statt daß der Mensch selbst der Mittler für den Menschen sein sollte—schaut der Mensch seinen Willen, seine Tätigkeit, sein Verhältnis zu andren als eine von ihm und ihnen unabhängige Macht an. Seine Sklaverei erreicht also die Spitze . . . Sein Kultus wird zum Selbstzweck. Die Gegenstände, getrennt von diesem Mittler, haben ihren Wert verloren (40: 445-46, emphasis in original).⁴⁴

⁴³ In this we can see the tension between Jelinek's views and those of her characters, as Rebecca Thomas points out in her reading of *Die Liebhaberinnen*: "In a pure identification with media images, Paula posits both herself and Erich as possessing a heroic potential for selfhood and individuality that Jelinek vehemently rejects . . . This tension produces an effect that is simultaneously ridiculous and potentially tragic. Whereas Jelinek has created Paula as an example without individuality, the character Paula strains against this negation towards some assertion of herself as a self" ("(Re)-Production," 71). That Paula attempts to assert her individuality through her a view of love constructed by the mass medium of romance novels is, of course, highly ironic.

⁴⁴ "the nature of money is . . . the *mediating function* or movement, human, social activity, by means of which the products of man mutually complement each other, is *estranged* and becomes the property of a *material thing* external to man, viz. money . . . Through this *alien mediator* man gazes at his will, his activity, his relation to others as at a power independent of

For Paula, love operates in much the same way as Marx describes money; that is, as a “mediating function,” for it is love which is the cult that “becomes an end to itself” and which mediates the relationship between Paula and Erich. That it is something external to her is clear through its dissemination via the mass media, media that Paula eagerly consumes.

Finally, while the situation of women in patriarchal romantic relations may indeed parallel that of wage workers under capitalism, as I have argued above, it is not necessarily capitalism alone that is responsible for their plight in *Die Liebhaberinnen*. That this is the case means that the Marxist/socialist feminist analysis of Jelinek outlined above is necessarily incomplete, as I discuss below.

Problems with the Marxist/Socialist Feminist Analysis of Jelinek

One problem, however, with the application of the socialist feminist appropriation of Marx’s theory of alienation to Jelinek’s texts is that, despite their claims to the contrary, Jaggar’s and Bartky’s use of the term alienation still seems to indulge in a continued reliance on the notion of a human essence or the possibility of a coherent self. As another socialist feminist, Ann Ferguson, has put it:

them and of himself—instead of man himself being the mediator of man. His slavery thus reaches a climax . . . His cult becomes an end in itself. Separated from this mediator, objects lose their worth” (EW, 260, emphasis in original).

some socialist feminist perspectives, though they give us important insights about the reproduction and persistence of male dominance . . . fail to explain unconscious, irrational and libidinal forces that keep both the oppressed and oppressors from re-negotiating gendered, racial and class interaction (33).

Jaggar herself is aware of this problem: "In spite of its promise as a critical tool, 'alienation' is a somewhat problematic concept for Marxists because it *may* be taken to presuppose a human essence from which people under capitalism are alienated, and the concept of a human essence seems quite at odds with the conception of human nature as a product of history" (57, emphasis added).⁴⁵ Despite this realization, however, Jaggar never adequately explains how the socialist feminist use of the term alienation will be able to avoid this possible pitfall. Rather, in her description of the alienation caused by conformity to prevailing gender norms, she claims that due to alienation, "both sexes have been prevented from the full and free development of their productive capacities. Both sexes are fragmented distortions of human possibility," (316).⁴⁶

⁴⁵ One should also note here that critiques of "essentialism" in Marx are not necessarily correct. I am, however, referring here to socialist feminists and their use of Marx.

⁴⁶ In addition, Jaggar's endorsement of feminist standpoint theory at the end of her book comes close to claiming an essence for women, albeit one based on social conditions: "The concept of women's standpoint . . . asserts that women's social position offers them access to aspects or areas of reality that are not easily accessible to men . . . Thus the standpoint of women provides the basis for a more comprehensive representation of reality than the standpoint of men . . . The standpoint of women reveals more of the universe, human and non-human, than does the standpoint of men" (384-85). While she does acknowledge that there may, indeed, be problems

Like Jaggar, Bartky is also unable to resolve this problem as is clear in her description of alienation:

Alienation in any form causes a rupture within the human person, and estrangement from self . . . In many ways, psychic alienation and the alienation of labor are profoundly alike. Both involve a splitting off of human functions from the human person, a forbidding of activities thought to be essential to a fully human existence. Both subject the individual to fragmentation and impoverishment . . . To be a victim of alienation is to have a part of one's being stolen by another (31-32).

The socialist feminist concept of alienation, as described by Jaggar and Bartky, is thus one which relies on the notion that there is a whole self that precedes alienation, and to which one could return if social conditions were changed to eliminate alienation.⁴⁷

with feminist standpoint theory (especially in terms of the subsuming of difference), Jaggar nonetheless declares that: "In spite of this unavoidable looseness, I think that the concept of women's standpoint is sufficiently specific to provide a way of evaluating the real strengths and weaknesses of the feminist theories presently available. In particular, I think that it provides a way of justifying the socialist feminist approach to theory and of indicating further directions for theoretical development . . . socialist feminism offers the best available representation of reality from the standpoint of women" (387 & 89).

⁴⁷ For an example of a socialist feminist, whose use of alienation is not dependent on the concept of a human essence, see Ann Ferguson's *Blood at the Root: Motherhood, Sexuality & Male Dominance*, in which she outlines alienation as the following: "a mode of sex/affective production can be described as alienated if 1) there are contradictory values built into the social construction of its sexual symbolic codes; 2) sexual roles require an either/or choice of sexual values which an alternative social construction of sex (one which is historically possible to achieve) would make unnecessary; and 3) social structures in the present social formation make it impossible to achieve all the aims and objects of sexuality as socially constructed (thus implying the need for radical changes in the structure in order to achieve values promised by the society)" (153-54).

That this view (that is, the notion of a whole self preceding alienation) is not present in Jelinek's texts can be seen in the passages such as the one quoted above on page 46 of this chapter ("über allem ist die liebe. . ." *LH*, 27; *women*, 28) and the following:

daß paula die liebe mit sinnlichkeit verbindet, ist eine folge
der zeitschriften, die sie gerne liest (*LH*, 30).⁴⁸

As noted above, these passages demonstrate that Jelinek's figures "are not 'rounded' or autobiographically based characters with whom the reader is asked to empathize . . . but one-dimensional, unsympathetic figures" (Haines and Littler, 39).⁴⁹

In addition to the lack of unity experienced by Jelinek's figures, my use of psychoanalysis to supplement my Marxist/socialist feminist reading of Jelinek exposes another problem with the application of the theory of alienation as outlined by Jaggar and Bartky to Jelinek's texts, for, if as Lacan and Althusser argue, this notion of an undivided self can be seen to be imaginary, a product of

⁴⁸ "that paula connects love with sensuality, is a result of the magazines, which she likes to read" (*women*, 31).

⁴⁹ Haines and Littler also note in their chapter on *Die Liebhaberinnen* that this type of character made for "surprisingly uncomfortable reading for its early feminist readers" (39). That discomfort is, I find, also reflected in the difficulty of applying a purely second wave feminist analysis to the text.

language and/or ideology, how are we then to view the alienation of Jelinek's figures? Both Lacan and Althusser define the subject's unity in terms contrary to those used by Jaggar and Bartky, and this lack of unity caused by the symbolic is present in Jelinek's work, as Brigid Haines has noted:

Jelinek thus shows that women's exploitation, their alienation from each other, from desire, and from the symbolic order are not explicable by the mechanics of capitalism alone but can also be explained in terms of their status as commodities within a patriarchal economy. That these often overlap . . . shows that capitalism has taken over and reinforced pre-existing practices. *This takes us beyond a Marxist analysis and back into the realm of the symbolic* (653, emphasis added).

It is for this reason that I will now turn to an analysis of alienation in the Lacanian sense in Jelinek's novel. For if Marx and socialist feminists can help us to interpret the alienation of labor and sexuality undergone by Brigitte and Paula, Lacan can help us to read the "realm of the symbolic," as Haines puts it.

Lacanian Alienation and Metonymy in Die Liebhaberinnen

In what follows, I will return to the reading of *Die Liebhaberinnen* given above, this time drawing on Lacanian psychoanalysis and its definitions of alienation and subjectivity, as a means of teasing out and illuminating the contradictions and complexity of this text. A Lacanian analysis of alienation will be deployed in order to demonstrate how Jelinek's figures experience not just

their labor or sexuality as alienated, but also suffer from alienation in the Lacanian sense.⁵⁰

As Lacan explains in his article on the mirror stage, alienation results from the fact that the individual believes her or himself to be the coherent whole reflected in the mirror:

The mirror stage is a drama . . . which manufactures for the subject . . . the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality . . . and lastly, to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject's entire mental development (*E*, 4).

Furthermore, "this *Gestalt* . . . symbolizes the mental permanence of the *I*, at the same time as it prefigures its alienating destination" (*E*, 2, emphasis in original).

This coherent self reflected in the mirror is, according to John Muller and William Richardson, "a total unity that replaces [the] earlier experience of fragmentation," (30) and, as such

⁵⁰ Althusser occupies a complementary position here, in his intent "to forestall the use of the early, Hegelianizing Marx, the Marx of the theory of alienation, against the later Marx of *Capital*" (Jameson, *The Ideologies of Theory*, 109). He also relates the mirror stage to ideology, writing: "We observe that the structure of all ideology, interpellating individuals as subjects in the name of a Unique and Absolute Subject is *specular*, i.e. a mirror-structure, and *doubly* specular: this mirror duplication is constitutive of ideology and ensures its functioning. Which means that all ideology is *centered*, that the Absolute Subject occupies the unique place of the Centre, and interpellates around it the infinity of individuals into subjects to the Subject, while giving in them the Subject in which each subject can contemplate its own image (present and future) the *guarantee* that this really concerns them and Him" (180, emphasis in original). The question of ideology is one I shall return to later in this chapter.

becomes idealized into a model for all eventual identification . . . This model, however, although it “fixes” the subject in a certain *permanence* . . . does so in a form that initially . . . is “other” to the subject, exterior to it, hence an “alienation” of it. The stability of this form, contrasting as it does with the instability of the initial fragmentation, assumes a tensile strength that eventually becomes rigid and armorlike (Muller and Richardson, 30-31, emphasis in original).

As a consequence, this coherent self reflected in the mirror is nothing originally given since it is found first in the mirror image, which is a *méconnaissance* “constitut[ing] the ego” and an “illusion of autonomy” (*E*, 6) and later through the same process of misrecognition of oneself as reflected in others. Here it is important to note that for Lacan, alienation is a necessary step in achieving subjectivity insofar as it “represents the instituting of the symbolic order . . . and the subject’s assignation of a place therein” (Fink, *Lacanian Subject*, 52). It is only one step, however, and the second step (and not one that all subjects manage to get to) is separation, in which “the subject attempts to fill the mOther’s lack” (Fink, *Lacanian Subject*, 54; see also *S11*, Chapter 16). In other words, through separation, the subject becomes aware that the mother also has lack. Alienation and separation are later terms for what Lacan earlier referred to as metaphor and metonymy (Laurent, 21).

In the following passage from the novel, the sexual objectification of Brigitte, which results in the type of sexual alienation discussed above, is made

clear: “brigitte hat nichts davon [sex with Heinz—BB] außer einer vagen hoffnung. brigitte hat außerdem eine vagina. gierig schnappt brigittes vagina nach dem jungen unternehmer” (*LH*, 56).⁵¹ Here the reader can see that Brigitte, represented as she is by her vagina, has undergone the fragmentation of her body that Jaggar and Bartky view as an instance of alienating femininity. It is also an example of the alienation women undergo in their search for an economically secure marriage partner; while Brigitte is not yet married to Heinz, she is “selling” her sexuality to him in the hope that it will lead to a future marriage between them. (Here we also see a more Marxian or socialist feminist variant of Jelinek’s alienation at work).

By doing so, Jelinek exposes the relationship that exists between Brigitte’s hope and her vagina as alienated labor or commodity, showing that, for Brigitte, her hope (of a secure future) is based on how well she can use her vagina. What we see in this passage, however, is not only alienation in the Marxist or socialist feminist sense as discussed above, but also, in Jelinek’s use of the “part for the

⁵¹ “brigitte gets nothing out of it apart from a vague hope. apart from that brigitte has a vagina. which she makes use of. brigitte’s vagina snaps greedily at the young entrepreneur” (*women*, 65).

whole” a Lacanian metonymy,⁵² which thus works to undermine alienation. In terms of metonymy, this passage can also be read, via the Lacanian definition of metonymy, as a form of displacement.

In Lacan’s definition, metonymy comes to figure as that which Freud termed displacement.⁵³ In his discussion of metonymy in *Seminar III*, Lacan makes this clear, stating: “One thing is named by another that is its container . . . In general what Freud . . . calls displacement is metonymy,” also pointing out that “the signifier is the instrument by which the missing signified expresses itself” (S3, 221). Lacan’s term is an expanded use of metonymy, meaning both part for whole and one thing for another. In the case of the quote from Jelinek’s

⁵² Anika Lemaire’s definition of metonymy in the Lacanian sense (which differs somewhat from other uses of the term) is useful here: “[metonymy] substitutes one term for another on the basis of a link of proximity, of connexion in meaning between the two terms” (42). For more on metaphor and metonymy in Lacan, see also: Grigg, especially chapter 11; and Ragland-Sullivan (233-58).

⁵³ See, for example, *Die Traumdeutung*, in which Freud defines displacement as follows: “Unter den Gedanken, welche die Analyse zutage fördert, finden sich viele, die dem Kern des Traumes ferner stehen und die sich wie künstliche Einschaltungen zu einem gewissen Zwecke ausnehmen. Der Zweck derselben ergibt sich leicht: gerade sie stellen eine Verbindung, oft eine gezwungene und gesuchte Verbindung zwischen Trauminhalt und Traumgedanken her . . . Der Erfolg dieser Verschiebung ist, daß der Trauminhalt dem Kern der Traumgedanken nicht mehr gleichsieht, daß der Traum nur eine Entstellung des Traumwunsches im Unbewußten wiedergibt” (GW, 2: 312-13) [“Among the thoughts that analysis brings to light are many which are relatively remote from the kernel of the dream and which look like artificial interpolations made for some particular purpose. That purpose is easy to divine. It is precisely *they* that constitute a connection, often a forced and far-fetched one, between the dream-content and the dream-thoughts . . . The consequence of the displacement is that the dream-content no longer resembles the core of the dream-thoughts and that the dream gives no more than a distortion of the dream-wish which exists in the unconscious” (SE, 4: 306-07, emphasis in original)].

text, the vagina is the signifier, while the missing signified is not just Brigitte, but also the commodification of her vagina into a “vague hope.” Brigitte thus does not possess any coherent subjectivity; rather, she comes to figure as a subject through her (or, more properly, her vagina’s) desire, which, for Lacan, is metonymic. As John Muller and Paul Richardson explain: “The mode of metonymy . . . functions through the processes of desire . . . desire . . . seeks its term by ‘eternally stretching forth towards the *desire for something else*’ (Lacan, *E*, 167, emphasis in original), where the ‘something else’ is related to a previous ‘something else’ by means of metonymy” (168-69). What Jelinek does in her novel is to thus relate this Lacanian metonymy back to Brigitte’s social status as lower-class woman: in other words, she contextualizes psychoanalytic metonymy in Marxian and feminist social terms.

Here, Gilbert Chaitin’s gloss on the Lacanian notion of metonymy may be helpful in clearing up what is a rather abstract position:

if . . . any expression may be used to signify something ‘other than what it says,’ then clearly meaning does not inhere in signifiers. It may always be displaced from one set to another. Metonymy is therefore the equivalent of the primary process of displacement . . . In short, displacement/metonymy brings about the detachment of the subject from its attributes—the loss of meaning. Metonymy is essential to the unconscious, because . . . the unconscious is precisely that which escapes expression in language . . . The only way to designate that for

which the word is lacking is to refer to it by another name, by allusion (50).

What this means is that, in the writing of the text, the meaning of either the “vague hope” or Brigitte’s vagina is not an innate quality of the signifiers used to designate them; rather, it is the juxtaposition of the terms that produces meaning and exposes the detachment of the subject (in this case, Brigitte) from its attributes, thus revealing the unconscious dimensions of alienation. If metaphor, for Lacan, is a paternal signifier of repression tied to the Name-of-the-Father, metonymy is what tends to slip away from this through desire. As a consequence, the alienation in the above passage is found not just in Brigitte’s reduction to a body part or the sale of her sexuality (in the narrative), but is also revealed by Jelinek’s use of metonymy in the writing, for it is through this use of metonymy that the instability of the signifier and the fiction of the ego (as the site of alienation) as whole is exposed, naming as it does by allusion (the “vagina” for Brigitte or the “vague hope”).

Jelinek’s use of metonymy therefore functions to expose the alienating fiction of the whole ego by making clear the displacement of meaning that takes place in the unconscious (a displacement that Brigitte naturally does not recognize). As Lacan points out in “Agency of the letter in the unconscious,” the ego’s function is precisely to cover up this displacement: “For this ego, which is

notable in the first instance for the imaginary inertias that it concentrates against the message of the unconscious, operates solely with a view to covering the displacement constituted by the subject with a resistance that is essential to the discourse as such" (E, 169). The function of the ego, then, is to deny the "message of the unconscious," as constituted through metonymy, allowing the subject to experience imaginary wholeness through others:

heinz tut manchmal direkt so, als ob er und brigitte nicht ein mensch wären, was sie aber sind. sehen denn diese frauen nicht, daß wir in wirklichkeit eins sind, eins geworden sind, untrennbar, fragt brigitte verwundert, wenn andre frauen heinz als einen eigenen körper mit einem eigenen geist ansehen (LH, 53-54).⁵⁴

The imaginary wholeness of Brigitte's ego is consequently found through her identification vis-à-vis Heinz, but is exposed by Jelinek as fictional. Lacan discusses this romantic myth of wholeness in the Other at length in *Seminar VIII*, devoted to Plato's *Symposium* (on this, see Z. M. Marks). By contrast, the irony of Jelinek's metonymies has a dehumanizing quality, reducing Heinz and Brigitte to puppets rather than whole *Menschen*.

⁵⁴ "sometimes heinz plainly acts as if he and brigitte were not one person, which they are however. do these women not see that in reality we are one, have become one, inseparable, asks brigitte in astonishment when other women look at heinz as a separate body with a separate spirit" (*women*, 61).

Moreover, Jelinek refuses to allow the reader identification with Brigitte for the same reason: identification is the site of the imaginary, the ego and thus alienation. This refusal can be found in the following descriptions of Brigitte and Heinz's sexual relationship:

auch ekelt brigitte vor heinz und seinem fetten weißen elektrikerkörper, der auch heinz heißt. trotzdem ist sie auch wieder froh, so froh, tod froh, daß sie ihn hat, weil er ihre zukunft ist (*LH*, 32).⁵⁵

zwischen brigitte und heinz ist eine körperliche vereinigung in gänge. brigitte sagt, mir ist es so schön, daß man sterben möchte . . . mit dir ist es so schön, heinz, daß man sterben könnte. bei der arbeit jedenfalls möchte ich nicht sterben, heinz, wenn schon, dann wenigstens vorher (*LH*, 56).⁵⁶

In the second passage, Jelinek is playing with romance novel conventions (as she does throughout the whole novel; see Fiddler, *Rewriting*, 72, and above for a discussion of Brigitte and Paula as "typical" and "atypical" romance heroines, as well as below for more on the romance novel); the phrase "it's so good with you, I could die" is something straight out of a traditional romance

⁵⁵ "brigitte also is repelled by heinz and his plump white electrician's body, which is also called heinz. despite that she is also happy again, so happy, dead happy, that she has him, because he is her future" (*women*, 34).

⁵⁶ "a physical union is in process between brigitte and heinz. brigitte says, it's so good with you, that one would like to die . . . it's so good with you, heinz, that one would like to die. at any rate i would not like to die at work, heinz, if it has to be, then let it be before that at least" (*women*, 65).

novel. In a traditional romance, however, this phrase would be followed by a description of spectacular sex, allowing the reader to identify with the character and her pleasure. Jelinek, however, disallows that pleasure by following this sentence with a reference to work and death, thereby implying a metonymic equivalence between death by sex and death by work (and also destroying the cliché of sex to die for), while the use of the word “todfroh” in the earlier passage also implies the death of Brigitte, this time by happiness. In doing so, Jelinek unpacks both the meaning of happiness (Brigitte is happy because she will escape the factory, *not* because of love for Heinz), and the traditional metaphor of sex as “little death” (the most obvious example being *la petite mort* for orgasm in French). As Marlies Janz points out, death and dead bodies haunt *Die Liebhaberinnen*, with the result that “Die Verdinglichung des weiblichen Körpers in der Sexualität wie in der Arbeit also ist für die Frauen der Tod” (25).⁵⁷ Jelinek’s linking of sexual death to this reification of women’s bodies shows how Brigitte’s desire for Heinz is in fact deadly.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ “The reification of women’s bodies, both through sex and work, results in death for the women” (my translation).

⁵⁸ Indeed, as Janz points out: “Von Anfang an ist in *Die Liebhaberinnen* von toten Frauen die Rede” [“From the very beginning, *women as lovers* speaks about dead women” (my translation 25)]. She goes on to give several examples from Jelinek’s text.

To clarify: Brigitte's desire for Heinz is self-destructive, a desire which will ultimately lead to a deadly result, since "humans are actually driven by a death principle" as both Freud and Lacan insisted in their work (Ragland, 84-85). Here as elsewhere, the ironic brutality of Jelinek's writing lies in the literalness with which she exposes this connection. Lacan illustrates this association with the myth Plato puts into the playwright Aristophanes' mouth in the *Symposium*,⁵⁹ namely that all lovers seek their ideal and fulfilling complement in the beloved:

Aristophanes' myth pictures the pursuit of the complement for us in a moving, and misleading, way, by articulating that it is the other, one's sexual other half, that the living being seeks in love. To this mythical representation of the mystery of love, analytic experience substitutes the search by the subject, not of the sexual complement, but of that part of himself, lost forever, that is constituted by the fact that he is only a sexed living being, and that he is no longer immortal (S11, 205).⁶⁰

What Lacan means by this is that "the living being, by being subject to sex, has fallen under the blow of individual death." In other words, for Lacan (as for Jelinek) the drive "is profoundly a death drive" (S11, 205). What we see, then, in

⁵⁹ See Plato's *Symposium*, in which the character of Aristophanes states that "Love is born into every human being; it calls back the halves of our original nature; it tries to make one out of two and heal the wound of human nature" (27). According to this myth, the wound had developed when Zeus had split humans, who were originally composed of two beings, into two halves.

⁶⁰ This is, of course, the central myth of the Western romance novel – that one can find one's complement or "other half" through romantic love.

Jelinek is a grotesque parody of the romance novel, one that “[undermines] at every turn the ethos of romantic love by showing the economic reasons for marriage and the brutal reality of sexual relations” (Haines and Littler, 42), and that equates love and marriage with death for women (and men [Haines and Littler, 45]).⁶¹ In the following section, I will read *Die Liebhaberinnen* in generic terms as an anti-romance.

“Reading the (Anti-)Romance”: Die Liebhaberinnen and the Romance Novel

First, however, it may be helpful to offer a definition of the genre. Scholars of the romance novel tend to agree that the romance novel is one that tells a (often, but not always, heterosexual) love story. This love story is central to the development of the heroine’s identity, contains barriers that must be overcome in order for the couple to find true love, and tends to result in upward social and financial mobility for the heroine. Consider, for example, the following definitions:

A romance novel is a work of prose fiction that tells the story of the courtship and betrothal of one or more heroines (Juhasz, 14).

⁶¹ In this respect, Jelinek’s work also parallels that of Denis de Rougemont, who, in his book *Love in the Western World*, put forward the thesis that “Passion has thus only played the part of a purifying ordeal . . . in the service of transfiguring death” (Rougemont, 46; Qtd. in Pearce, 15-16).

Zwei Partner (Mann und Frau) werden nach Überwindung von Widerständen gemeinsam glücklich (Peter Nusser qtd. in Thiel, 7).⁶²

the most striking characteristic of the ideal romance [is] its resolute focus on a single, developing relationship between heroine and hero (Radway, 122).

Harlequin novels . . . [tell] the story of how a modern young woman succeeds in marrying a handsome, desirable, and wealthy man . . . Put more polemically, popular romance tells the story of how the heroine gains access to money – to power – in patriarchal society . . . romance tells over and over a story about power deeply encoded within a story about love (Cohn, 3).

Working with the above definitions, it is clear that Jelinek's text both draws from and transcends the traditional romance novel, as I shall explore in more detail below. What she does, I argue, is to construct a materialist feminist⁶³ version of the romance novel, one that illustrates the ways in which conventional romance novels work are alienating.

Viewed in this way, we can see how the contrasting stories of Brigitte and Paula have the effect of demonstrating Jelinek's transformation of romance novel

⁶² "Two partners (man and woman) will be happy together after overcoming obstacles" (my translation).

⁶³ My definition of materialist feminism is taken from Sara Lennox's chapter on Bachmann and materialist feminism in her book *Cemetery of the Murdered Daughters: Feminism, History, and Ingeborg Bachmann*, in which she defines materialist feminism as a methodology that "combined post-Althusserian Marxism with postmodern discourse theories" (*Cemetery*, 298).

conventions. While Jelinek plays with the romance form in her text, *Die Liebhaberinnen* should, however, in Allyson Fiddler's words, more properly be seen as an "anti-romance," since Jelinek "uses the stories of her two protagonists to ridicule the myths of 'true love' and 'passion' propagated by the happy-end school of popular fiction" (*Rewriting*, 72). Because *Die Liebhaberinnen* is an anti-romance, the figure of Brigitte "has no potential for fitting the classic heroine's role. The value of her own 'happy end' is degraded by the motivations which the reader knows have led to her choice of husband and by the crude and unromantic reality of her sexual and social interaction" (Fiddler, *Rewriting*, 73). Traditional romance heroines are not supposed to be actively looking for marriage, especially an economically successful one, despite the fact that "it is a commonplace of romance that the heroine will marry well, a given that the hero will be rich" (Cohn, 127).⁶⁴ Additionally,

the heroine's accomplishment . . . her success in marrying well, must seem almost an accident; it is never her purpose. The idea of a romance heroine setting out to marry successfully is doubly denied. She never seeks marriage in any form, and when she finds her hero, she is never drawn to him by the signs of his economic power. The heroine is defined by her apparent passivity and disinterestedness; she

⁶⁴ See also: (P. Marks) for a discussion of the "good provider" in romance novels; and Dubino, who claims that "All varieties of the romance contain the pattern of 'heroine gets rich through love' " (103, emphasis added).

is a negation of the purposeful, self-interested, mercenary woman . . . This strategy . . . attempts to disguise both the heroine's real goal and the profound association between sexual and economic power that lies at the heart of the romance (Cohn, 127).

In this respect, we can see that Paula truly *is* a romance heroine, albeit a failed one, as she, unlike Brigitte, who deliberately "trapped" Heinz because she knew he was the best she could get, is a far more passive participant in the process of finding love:

Paula wartet darauf, daß sie ausgewählt wird, worauf es ankommt. es kommt darauf an, vom richtigen ausgewählt zu werden. Paula hat niemals gelernt, selber auszuwählen und zu bestimmen. Paula erlebt alles in der Leideform, nicht in der Tätigkeitform (LH, 30).⁶⁵

Precisely by having Paula fail where Brigitte succeeds, Jelinek undoes romance conventions, with the result that the relation of sexual and economic power that traditional romance novels suppress is brought to the fore in Jelinek's text.

Jelinek's transformation of the romance novel form does not, however, take place simply at the formal or plot level, but also at the level of the writing itself, that is, in the text's signifying practice. In terms of the writing, traditional romance novels tend to use a mode of writing that fosters readers' identification

⁶⁵ "Paula is waiting to be chosen, which is what really matters. What matters is to be chosen by the right man. Paula herself has never learned to choose and to decide. Paula experiences everything in the passive voice, not the active voice" (*women*, 31).

with the romance heroine (or hero, as the case may be).⁶⁶ In her study of romances and their readers, Janice Radway discusses the identification that readers experience through “reading the romance”:

all of the women I spoke to . . . admitted that they wanted to identify with the heroine . . . What they [romance readers] enjoy most about romance reading is the opportunity to project themselves into the story, to become the heroine . . . readers project themselves into the story by identifying with the heroine as she responds to the hero with all of her “strongly passionate nature” (64, 67 & 69).

Radway’s observations raise the question of precisely how this identification between reader and romance heroine comes about, a question Radway addresses in her chapter on language and narrative discourse in the romance novel.

As she explains, the “contemporary romance’s prose is dominated by cliché, simple vocabulary, standard syntax, and the most common techniques associated with the nineteenth-century realist novel” (Radway, 189). The effect of these techniques is that the contemporary romance is able to maintain the “illusion that language is a transparent window opening out onto an already existing world” (Radway, 189); with the result that romance readers “come to the romantic text, then, with the understanding that language is there to describe, in

⁶⁶ For a discussion of romance readers’ ability to identify with both the heroine and the hero, see (Kinsdale).

simple and unambiguous terms, events that for all intents and purposes, were 'completed' just before the fictional narrator described them" (Radway, 190).

Moreover, because romance novelists also share this belief with their readers,

they write texts designed to be read in this straightforward manner. The characteristic verbal structure of the contemporary romance thus conveniently lends itself to this kind of interpretation by refusing to present the reader with anything capable of disorienting her or of forcing her to attend differently to the substance and organization of signs that cannot be taken so easily as simple, referential gestures (Radway, 191).

Radway's position is supported by at least two romance writers, Jayne Ann Krentz (who writes under the pseudonyms Amanda Quick, Jayne Castle, and Stephanie James, among others), and Linda Barlow who claim that:

The author of a romance novel and her audience enter into a pact with one another. The reader trusts the writer to create and recreate for her a vision of a fictional world . . . The romance writer gives form and substance to this vision by locking it in language, and the romance reader yields herself to this alternative world in the act of reading, allowing the narrative to engage her mind and her emotions and to provide her with a certain intensity of experience. She knows that certain expectations will be met and that certain conventions will not be violated (15-16).

The type of language used to create this "intensity of experience" is, in their view, a "figurative language . . . rich, evocative diction that is heavy-laden with

familiar symbols, images, metaphors, paradoxes, and allusions to the great mythical traditions" (16).

Barlow and Krentz go on to add that "the language of romance is more lushly symbolic and metaphorical than ordinary discourse" (22) because "lush use of symbols, metaphors, and allusion is emotionally powerful as well as mythologically evocative" (24). As an example of such lushly allusive and metaphorical language, consider the following:

He returned his gaze to his wife's face and lost himself in the soft liquid eyes that beheld him. He was barely conscious of his actions as he leaned forward, almost mesmerized by the deep pools of blue. His free hand slipped through her hair to the nape of her neck and still she stared, and then his mouth found hers and eyelids lowered. He felt her lips slacken and begin to tremble and then open as his mouth moved upon hers. He tasted response, sweet, warm and clinging and was aware of the rapid beat of her heart beneath the fingers resting on her breast (Woodiwiss, 351).

In particular, I wish to draw attention to the use of the phrase "sweet, warm and clinging" to describe Heather's response to the kisses bestowed upon her, as this description is actually a replacement for Heather herself, one that allows the "reader [to] actively [insert] herself in the relations of signification and the subject positions ideology articulates in the text," to borrow from Teresa Ebert ("Romance," 38).

For while Heather's response could indeed be "sweet, warm and clinging," the phrase also functions in a manner similar to that of Hugo's line ("His sheaf was neither miserly nor spiteful" [Qtd. in: *E*, 156]) cited by Lacan as an example of an identificatory metaphor.⁶⁷ As Lacan explains, "If . . . his sheaf does refer us to Booz, and this is indeed the case, it is because it has replaced him in the signifying chain at the very place where he was to be exalted" (*E*, 157). Similarly, Heather, is replaced in the signifying chain above by her response. This, then, allows the reader to identify with Heather through the metaphor/identification of her response, for it is "the structure of the signifier [e.g., the replacement of the signifier Heather with the signifier of her response—BB] which makes possible the transfer of meaning, and thereby the identification, understood in the psychoanalytic sense of the creation of the new identity of the subject" (Chaitin, 45), in this case the romance reader. Since identification, as defined by Lacan, consists of "the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image" (*E*, 2), we can presume that the assumption of this image on the part of the reader will also lead to the creation of an identification

⁶⁷ It should be noted here that Lacan is using the term metaphor in a way that is similar to how others have used metonymy. What is important for my purposes is that when Lacan says "metaphor," he means identification and alienation as well. As Dylan Evans notes, "Metaphor is also the structure of identification, since the latter consists in substituting oneself for another" (*Dictionary*, 113; see also *S3*, 218). For more on metaphor and metonymy in Lacan, see also: (Grigg, especially chapter 11, and Ragland-Sullivan, 233-58).

as “sweet, warm and clinging.” We can thus see how the traditional romance functions to produce “gendered subjects, especially female ones, in male-dominated heterosexual couples” (Ebert, “Romance,” 19). Working in opposition to the traditional romance, Jelinek’s text instead functions to disrupt the production of gendered subjects through caricaturing and overdoing the identificatory metaphors of the romance novel and she creates a text that exposes the ways in which the romance novel is ideological in the sense that Teresa Ebert uses the term. As Ebert defines it

ideology is the organization of material signifying practices that constitute subjectivities . . . Subjectivity is thus the *effect* of a set of ideologically organized signifying practices through which the individual is situated in the world and in terms of which the world and one’s self are made intelligible (“Romance,” 23-24, emphasis in original).

As a result, ideology functions as the “*agency of the symbolic order*,” using the forms and representations of the imaginary on behalf of the injunctions of the symbolic. Ideology harnesses the unconscious—the impetus of desire—in order to engender subjects and secure them in the relations of power and subjugation generated by the symbolic order (Ebert, “Romance,” 25, emphasis in original).

As we have seen, the chief literary agent of this subjugation is identification, which would secure the subject in an alienating fiction of imaginary ego wholeness and identification (Brigitte’s “*vage Hoffnung*” or the

used metaphor of sex-as-death); and it is precisely such metaphors which Jelinek's writing practice refuses to confirm, relying instead on the metonymic unpacking of such metaphoric meaning.

Jelinek's "textual politics," therefore, are more clearly located in her writing practice than at the plot level. In contrast to a writer like Brecht, whose

comments [of the narrator—BB] show the false consciousness depicted to be correctable, Jelinek's narrator speaks from a position much closer to her protagonists and deliberately refrains from stating the essence of what is being depicted, thus making the reader work harder and denying him/her the catharsis resulting from a clear analysis . . . the narrative voice shifts, sometimes appearing complicit in patriarchal ideology, thus turning the reader into a voyeur . . ., sometimes directly mimicking it in order to open it up to scrutiny . . ., and occasionally drawing an unambiguous moral, as in the key passages above concerning Paula (Haines, 654).⁶⁸

It is, then, Jelinek's literary technique that makes the reader work for the insight.

One example of Jelinek's use of varying narrative techniques in *Die Liebhaberinnen* can be found in the following passage, a passage that once again

⁶⁸ Haines's examples of these passages concerning Paula, include, among others: "dieser roman handelt vom gegenstand paula" (*LH*, 130) ["the subject of this novel is paula" (*women*, 158)]; and "über den gegenstand paula bestimmt erich, über dessen körperkräfte wieder andre bestimmen, bis sich seine eingeweide einem frühen tod entgegensetzen, bei dem der alkohol das seine leistet" (*LH*, 130) ["erich makes the decisions for the subject paula, and yet others make decisions about his physical strength, till his innards decompose towards an early death, in which alcohol does its bit" (*women*, 158)], thus clearly demonstrating, as Haines points out, the "hierarchical structure of domination" (651).

makes evident how Jelinek's transformation of romance novel conventions serves to prohibit the reader an identification with the heroine:

kaum schießt heinz zur türe herein, schon zielt er auf das sofa, noch ehe er den pullover ausgezogen hat, schon hechtet er blindlings los, brigitte fängt den ansturm mit ihrem leibe auf. vielleicht hat heinz einmal schon soviel schwung, daß er durch brigitte einfach hindurch und auf der andren seite durch die mauer rast. heute hat heinz gerade nur soviel schwung, daß er ihn in brigitte gekonnt hineinplaciert. es ist eine meisterleistung an präzision. es ist eine qual für brigitte (LH, 55).⁶⁹

That Jelinek is mimicking what Haines refers to as "patriarchal ideology" can be seen if one compares her text to an excerpt from a traditional romance novel:

'Ring was on top of her in a second. All two hundred pounds of him hit her and knocked her to the floor—and his aim was perfect. His mouth hit hers precisely, and all his maleness entered her femaleness in one smooth move. Out of instinct her legs went around his waist as he began to move within her . . . "Yes," she said, and took his earlobe in her teeth. "Yes." She stuck her tongue in his ear and he slammed into her with such blinding force, that for a second she couldn't see as she saw bright white light and her body rocked in tremors (Deveraux, 272).

⁶⁹ "hardly has heinz shot through the door, than he's already aiming at the settee, even before he's taken off his pullover, he's already taking a blind leap, brigitte cushions the onslaught with her body. perhaps one day heinz will have so much momentum that he simply tears through brigitte and through the wall on the other side. today heinz has only just enough momentum, so that he skillfully positions it in brigitte. it is a masterpiece of precision. it is torture for brigitte" (*women*, 63).

These examples make clear that Jelinek must have been familiar with the writing techniques of romance novelists while working on *Die Liebhaberinnen*, for her text precisely parallels that of Deveraux's, but with one major difference: rather than following up her description of Heinz's grand achievement in managing to place himself precisely in Brigitte with a description of the exquisite pleasure Brigitte receives from this act as Deveraux does, she describes it as torture for Brigitte. While what Jelinek does here is a mimicry of the language of romance, she also states the moral clearly in this case. That she does not always make the moral of her text this clear has been shown above in the discussion of Brigitte's "vage Hoffnung", thus showing that what she accomplishes in her text is a deft combination of narrative and didactic techniques to make the reader (sometimes) work for the insight.

To conclude, I would like to return to the discussion of Hennessy's critique outlined at the beginning of this chapter. This analysis of Jelinek's text is not meant to demonstrate that she is what Hennessy refers to as a poststructuralist who "denies that the differences out of which meaning is made have any referent outside these unstable relations among signifiers" (*Profit and Pleasure*, 19), for it is clear the differences which produce meaning in Jelinek's text do indeed have outside referents, for example in the relation of Brigitte's and

Paula's desire for love and marriage to the alienated form their labor takes in the bra factory, or to what they read in the mass media. Rather, what I have shown is that we do not have to (indeed, *must* not) choose between the symbolic and the material, and that Jelinek participates in what Teresa Ebert has termed "materialist critique," that is, a critique which she defines as:

a mode of knowing that inquires into what is not said, into the silence and the suppressed or missing, in order to uncover the concealed operations of power and the socioeconomic relations connecting the myriad details and representations of our lives . . . In sum, materialist critique disrupts "what is" to explain how social differences . . . have been systemically produced and continue to operate within regimes of exploitation (*Ludic*, 7).

It is just such an operation that Jelinek's use of metonymy performs; by linking Brigitte, her vagina and her hope together through metonymy, Jelinek exposes the "suppressed or missing," that is, the connection between these things which usually goes unsaid.

Moreover, since "patriarchy acts on individuals to reproduce gendered subjectivities through the consumption of commodities, notably texts," as Ebert notes, and these texts are an important site for "reproducing gender distinctions" ("Romance," 21), the choice that Hennessy offers us can be viewed as a false one. For while the material relations of labor and sexuality, and the alienation produced by those relations under capitalism, are indeed oppressive to women

(and men) and must be changed, it is also true that the “subject’s entry into a symbolic system of representations” (Hennessy, *Profit and Pleasure*, 212) plays a role in producing female subjectivities that are equally repressive. Or, as Luce Irigaray once put it: women “must go through a complex and painful process, a real conversion to the female gender” (*Je, tu, nous*, 21). In order to change this process, a focus on economics is not enough, for culture, too, plays its role, as Irigaray maintains:

Social injustice is due not only to economic inequalities in the strict sense . . . Social justice, and especially sexual justice, cannot be achieved without changing the laws of language and the conceptions of truths and values structuring the social order. Changing the instruments of culture is *just as important* in the medium to long term as a redistribution of goods in the strict sense. *You can’t have one without the other* (*Je, tu, nous*, 21-22, emphasis added).

It is for this reason that I see my use of both socialist feminist and psychoanalytic theory as a means of furthering Sandra Bartky’s contention that a socialist feminist theory of alienation will not only have to “[uncover] all the modes of alienation [and examine them] in both their relationships to one another and to the modes of estrangement described by Marx” but will also have to reveal “the structuring of the unconscious both in men and women which facilitates the reproduction of alienated modes of existence” (36).

CHAPTER 2

A JOUISSANCE BEYOND THE PHALLUS? *LUST* AND PORNOGRAPHY

*There is a jouissance . . . a jouissance of the body that is . . . a jouissance beyond
the phallus. . .*

Jacques Lacan, *Encore, Seminar XX* (74)

Introduction: An Artistic (Anti-) Pornography?

It has become something of a “Gretchenfrage”¹ in Jelinek criticism to ask if *Lust* is a pornographic or anti-pornographic text. Are we to understand it as a repudiation, mockery, and/or parody of (male) pornography and desire, or does Jelinek simply reproduce that which she is supposedly making fun of? In their eagerness to defend Jelinek from charges of pornography, many scholars have claimed that *Lust* is a repudiation of male pornography, and have failed to take seriously just how indebted Jelinek is to the Western tradition of literary

¹ I have borrowed this phrase from Allyson Fiddler, who uses it to refer to the question of “what position, if any . . . [Jelinek’s] texts occupy within the postmodern debate on literature” (“There Goes. . .” 129). A quick glance at Jelinek criticism, however, shows that the question of pornography has become just as germane a “Gretchenfrage” as that of her Marxist versus postmodernist positions. Indeed, Jelinek’s oeuvre as a whole is often categorized by her detractors as pornography, and many of her works other than *Lust* do contain pornographic elements I will focus my discussion of Jelinek’s appropriation and subversion of the genre of pornography in this chapter on *Lust* as a paradigmatic text because it does not contain other generic elements, but is rather almost exclusively “pornographic.” For discussions on the relation of pornography to Jelinek’s work as a whole and/or other texts, see (among many others) Fiddler, *Rewriting*, Finney, Hanssen, Levin, and Lücke.

pornography, in particular that of the Marquis de Sade.² Although many commentators have pointed out that Jelinek takes over and transforms the conventions of “traditional” pornography, they use as their point of reference “low” culture, or mass-market pornography, rather than “high” culture or literary pornography.³ To my knowledge, no one has yet discussed Jelinek’s affinity with Sade, other than in passing; there have been several comparisons drawn between *Lust* and Bataille’s *Story of the Eye*, but several critics have made the mistake of assimilating Bataille’s work to “pornography” as an undefined

² In this chapter, I will focus on Jelinek’s relationship to a male history of literary pornography, as those are the works on which *Lust* draws. It is important to note, however, that despite Jelinek’s (and other’s) dismissal of women’s pornography as “kaum literarisch interessant” (“Sinn des Obszönen,” 102-03) [“hardly interesting as literature” (my translation)], women were important to the development of the pornographic novel, which in the “mid- to late eighteenth century grew directly out of women’s fiction” (Mudge, 29).

³ For readings of *Lust* that do take seriously Jelinek’s relationship to literary pornography, see Baackmann, Hartwig, Höfler (“Sexualität”), Janz, and Luserke. Ultimately, however, most of these scholars conclude that *Lust* is anti-pornographic, with the exceptions of Hartwig and Luserke, who concludes that *Lust* is neither pornography nor anti-pornography, but rather a “bis an die Grenzen des Möglichen und Machbaren reichende Ästhetik des Obszönen, zu dem die Macht, der Kapitalismus, die Sprache und der Sex, eben das Patriarchat, gehören” (98) [“aesthetics of obscenity that extends to the limits of the possible and feasible, and to which power, capitalism, language, sex, precisely patriarchy belong” (my translation)]. In this chapter, I argue that Jelinek’s text forces us to expand our definition of pornography to include precisely this “aesthetics of obscenity.” Also, none of these scholars read Jelinek with Sade, other than in passing.

whole, neglecting the differences between Bataille's work and mass-market pornography.⁴

The distinction I draw here (and elaborate in more detail below) between mass cultural and high art forms of pornography is not meant to imply that there is no relation between the two, nor that the distinction can always be clearly delineated. Indeed, as Allison Pease has noted in respect to Joyce, Beardsley, and D.H. Lawrence, modernist writers were "not everywhere in opposition to mass culture, but in specific ways they appropriated it, incorporating the images and representational techniques of one very significant mass-cultural product: pornography" (xiii). She goes on to further note, however, that these artists were nonetheless successful at "courting high-art status" despite the introduction of "explicit pornographic tropes into their works" (xiv). In some ways, Pease views the modernist appropriation of pornography as that which enabled the later academic discussion of pornography as a genre to be taken seriously: "This book

⁴ A mistake that Jelinek herself makes (at least when writing about pornography, although not in *Lust* as I shall show), when she claims that "Der männliche Blick auf die Frau . . . ist immer verachtend. Pornografie ist nicht die Darstellung einer Handlung sondern der Erniedrigung. Eine pornografische Darstellung ist immer auch eine geschichtslose Darstellung" ("Sinn des Obzönen," 102) ["The male gaze at the woman is always one of disdain. Pornography is not the representation of an act, but of humiliation. A pornographic representation is also always an ahistorical representation" (my translation)]. In the same essay she designates her own work as "Anti-Pornografie," a designation which scholars have uncritically accepted and repeated. See also Fiddler, "Porn," Höfler, "Vergrößerungsspiegel," and Janz.

serves as proof . . . of the continued impact of modernism's complex negotiation between aesthetics and pornography. If pornography has gained a place in serious academic discourse in the last ten years, it has done so because modernism first demanded that it be taken seriously, and showed us how" (xv). Pease does not, however, maintain that one can collapse the distinction between the mass cultural and high art forms of pornography, since pornography "remained quite distinct from the aesthetic in that it elided the reflective or contemplative distance invoked by [the aesthetic]" (3).

It is precisely this complex negotiation between aesthetics and pornography, as outlined by Pease, that I address in this chapter and that, I argue, many Jelinek scholars have failed to address through their collapsing of the distinction (complicated as it may be) between mass-cultural forms of pornography and the type of pornography produced by writers such as Bataille and Sade. Thus, for example, Allyson Fiddler concludes that *Lust* is an *anti*-pornographic work because compared "to Bataille's or other pornographers [it] in fact tries to say something about sex not with sex but *with language*, and often in particular with the language of sex" ("Porn," 411, emphasis in original). She argues further that in the case of *Lust*,

the characteristics of pornography are only vestigial. At first sight they appear to conform to a standard erotic scenario, but

it becomes clear that Jelinek uses them in order to subvert and frustrate the reader's expectations. Jelinek's text is therefore not pornographic. What *Lust* does become is a parody of pornography, a work of *anti*-pornography ("Porn," 413, emphasis in original).

While I agree in general with Fiddler's conclusions that *Lust* subverts and frustrates its reader's expectations regarding pornography, I quarrel with her claim that the texts of the "other pornographers" to whom she refers (and in whose group she presumably includes Sade as well as Bataille) are "narrated quite economically and are largely uncluttered by the feelings and opinions of the characters" ("Porn," 411). I disagree as well as with Fiddler's assertion that Jelinek's text, in its attempt to "say something about sex not with sex but *with language*" ("Porn," 411, emphasis in original) thus differs from the texts of those "other pornographers." In making these claims, Fiddler draws on the authority of Susan Sontag, who points out in her essay "The Pornographic Imagination" that one of the distinctions made between pornographic writing and "literature" is that "pornography . . . possesses only one 'intention' [to sexually arouse the reader—BB], while any genuinely valuable work of literature has many" (39).

There are two problems with Fiddler's conclusions regarding what she views as the difference between *Lust* and "other pornography." The first problem is that Fiddler fails to note that Sontag, in fact, goes on to posit both Bataille and

Sade as writers whose works do *not* fit into the category of mass-market, easily consumable pornography, the very same distinction that Fiddler claims for Jelinek's text. Fiddler's second problem is that by arguing that *Lust* differentiates itself from pornography through its attempt to "say something about sex with language," she overlooks the complex history of literary pornography, and the ways in which it, too,

works to write the body in as many minute variations as possible, to evoke its materiality and palpability for the sexual imagination of its readers. While Steven Marcus contends that pornography constantly tries to escape language, such an assertion seems counter to the entire project of written pornography which, by writing the body and sexual acts, extends, proliferates and continues the body and the sexual acts in a never-ending stream of words (Pease, 6).⁵

In other words, based on Fiddler's arguments, we can just as easily also claim Sade as an anti-pornographer, since he, like Jelinek, is a writer whose texts "refuse mimesis as a principle of imitation and identification that guides the reader's relation to the text" (Judovitz, 173), and it is precisely this refusal of mimesis that Fiddler claims disrupts the pornographic narrative of *Lust*, thus resulting in an anti-pornographic novel. Given that there is a general consensus

⁵ In this respect, we could also borrow Deleuze's term "pornology" to describe Jelinek's text. "Pornology" is his term for the works of Sade, Sacher-Masoch, Bataille, and others; its applicability of Jelinek's work lies in Deleuze's definition of "pornological literature" as that which "is aimed above all at confronting language with its own limits" (22).

that Sade's works constitute "pornography," his work can also be seen as anticipating the same dilemma regarding Jelinek's text posited at the beginning of this chapter: is it or is it not pornography? My answer is that *Lust*, like Sade, requires us to expand our definition of pornography, precisely in the way Jelinek's novel works with and through different aspects of pornographic traditions. Certainly *Lust* is anti-pornographic if we take the goal of pornography to be solely the "sexual excitement of the reader" (Goulemot, "Sadean Novels," 71), because it is clear that *Lust* refuses to participate in such a project. However, *Lust* is simultaneously a pornographic text in the tradition of Sade (whose texts also make difficult, if not impossible, the sexual excitement of the reader), and his modernist successors. What this means is that we need to talk about two distinct pornographic traditions when we talk about Jelinek's relationship to pornography: a mass cultural tradition, including film, that exists for the "specific purpose of sexually stimulating [its] readers" (Pease, 5), and a high culture literary pornographic tradition.

Peter Michelson offers further clarification of the latter, a high culture literary pornographic tradition, defining it as "artistic pornography," a pornography, that "may and frequently does represent explicit genital sex but integrates sexuality as a theme or rhetoric into an aesthetic context for an

aesthetic purpose" (xii), and one which incorporates what he terms an "aesthetics of obscenity" (xii). This type of aesthetic

implies a perceptual alteration whereby the obscene, a species of the ugly, is reconstituted to a function akin to that of the beautiful. In that sense it is a *contemplation* of the unspeakable and counterpoints traditional aesthetic assumptions . . . A poetics of obscenity, then, describes *speaking* the unspeakable and is defined by the artistic strategies used to change assumptions and perceptions. These will vary according to artist, but what they will have in common is the disposition to make the obscene function aesthetically (xi-xii, emphasis in original).⁶

This tradition of artistic pornography could perhaps also be viewed as including that "anti-pornography" for which so many Jelinek scholars seem to be searching. Sade serves as a paradigmatic example of this (anti-)pornographic tradition, for as Jean Goulemot has noted, "there exists in Sade a frank recourse to the most classical type of pornography, whose literary methods he uses and whose objectives he apparently espouses. But Sade rather quickly diverts this pornography from its objective of sexual excitement" ("Sadean Novels," 64). It is within this second tradition of literary or artistic pornography that I situate

⁶ See also Pease, who describes the "aesthetic of the obscene" as "a mode of sexual representation that, while potentially affecting the sensual interests of its readers, does not, as opposed to pornography, seek sexual arousal as its main purpose . . . In contrast to the pornographic, the aesthetic of the obscene seeks to be accepted into the cultural mainstream, and it does so by mediating its own materialist interests with idealist artistic techniques that promote the kind of consumptive practices associated with the aesthetic" (34-35).

Jelinek's *Lust*. That this tradition also has a political history (one in which both Jelinek and Sade participate) has been made clear by Lynn Hunt, who has observed:

If we take pornography to be the explicit depiction of sexual organs and sexual practices with the aim of arousing sexual feelings, then pornography was almost always an adjunct to something else until the middle or end of the eighteenth century . . . between 1500 and 1800, pornography was most often a vehicle for using the shock of sex to criticize religious and political authorities (10).

In terms of sexual politics, the major similarity that I find in the work of Sade and Jelinek, and that I would claim as a characteristic of the type of literary pornography I have been speaking of, is their depiction of sexuality as based on inequality and as inherently violent (in this respect, Sade has more in common with his critic, Andrea Dworkin, than Dworkin would perhaps care to admit).⁷

As Frances Ferguson has made clear,

Sadean pornography . . . may make sexual explicitness look like a symbolic weapon . . . sexuality, from this position . . . establishes inequality as a necessary, rather than incidental, element of pleasure. The sexual exchange that seems to narrow the sexual contract to its most basic units does not . . .

⁷ See, for example, Dworkin's chapter on Sade in her *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*, in which she claims: "[Sade] both embodies and defines male sexual values . . . In his work he relentlessly celebrated brutality as the essence of eroticism; fucking, torture, and killing were fused; violence and sex, synonymous" (70). Finally, Dworkin's definition of sex as power implies an affinity with Sade, albeit one she would reject.

produce loving mutuality in a private encounter that is a refuge from and counter to a public and unjust world. Rather, inequality begins in sexuality (4-5).

Ferguson goes on to note that the violence and inequality inherent in sexuality is precisely what Bataille's work on Sade elaborates. As Bataille claimed in regard to Sade:

The kind of sexuality [Sade] has in mind runs counter to the desires of other people . . . they are to be victims, not partners . . . if eroticism leads to harmony between the partners its essential principle of violence and death is invalidated. Sexual union is fundamentally a compromise, a half-way house between life and death. Communion between the participants is a limiting factor and it must be ruptured before the true violent nature of eroticism can be seen (167).⁸

In other words, what Sade demonstrates for us, according to Bataille, is not just the lack of reciprocity in the sexual relationship, but also that which Lacan once described as the fact that "sex and its significations are always capable of making present the presence of death" (*S11*, 257).

It is precisely this link between the sexual drive and the death drive that constitutes an important aspect of the sexual politics of Sade's and Jelinek's

⁸ Bataille, of course, is important not only for Jelinek, given her claim that *Lust* originated as a "feminine counterpart" to his *Story of the Eye* (see Fiddler, *Rewriting*, 153), but also for the way Lacan uses the term *jouissance* in his later work. As Dylan Evans has noted, "the shift towards the sexual connotations of the term after 1965 may be inspired by the work of Georges Bataille" ("Jouissance," 4).

“pornology,” namely, their portrayal of sexuality in terms of *jouissance* instead of pleasure. This depiction of *jouissance* instead of pleasure is where I find both Sade and Jelinek to be what I am defining as *anti*-pornographic or pornological rather than pornographic writers, for pornography is about pleasure (the possibility of having a sexual relation) whereas what Sade and Jelinek show us is the inherent impossibility in sexual relations and the link of the sexual drive to the death drive, or *jouissance*, which Lacan defines as involving “precisely the acceptance of death” and as something in which “pleasure *and* pain are presented as a single packet to take or leave” (S7, 189, emphasis in original; see also Dean, *Beyond Sexuality*, 125). The major difference is that if Sade demonstrates for us what Lacan once termed the “right to *jouissance*,” (“Kant with Sade,” 71), a right that Sade viewed as available to both sexes, provided that they were on the side of vice rather than virtue, Jelinek’s text makes it clear that in her view of the world, the “right” to *jouissance* is a phallic one and thus one which excludes women (see below for more on *jouissance* in Jelinek’s novel).

By reading Jelinek and Sade within this tradition of high-culture literary and political pornography that goes beyond the goal of simply exciting the reader sexually, both authors can be seen as “moral pornographers,” to borrow Angela Carter’s term. A moral pornographer, according to Carter, is one who

“might use pornography as a critique of the current relations between the sexes” (19). A moral pornographer possesses the power to change the way we think about relations between the sexes: “Nothing exercises such power over the imagination as the nature of sexual relationships, and the pornographer has it in his power to become a terrorist of the imagination, a sexual guerilla whose purpose is to overturn our most basic notions of these relations” (21).

Carter goes on to claim Sade as precisely this type of pornographer, maintaining that he “was unusual in his period for claiming rights of free sexuality for women, and in installing women as beings of power in his imaginary worlds” (36) and further that she “would like to think that [Sade] put pornography in the service of women, or, perhaps, allowed it to be invaded by an ideology not inimical to women” (37). This, of course, is where Jelinek and Sade part ways; if Carter, as a feminist on the “libertarian” side of the sex wars, can enthuse over Sade’s libertine women’s right to “fuck as actively as they are able” (27), Jelinek is much more pessimistic in her view of women’s ability to determine and control their own sexuality. In regard to women’s power (or lack thereof) to determine and control their sexuality, *Lust* sometimes seems to be closer to the position of the anti-pornography side of the feminist debate on pornography, as exemplified by Luce Irigaray in her short piece on pornography,

entitled "'Frenchwomen,' Stop Trying." Irigaray's title is an obvious reference to Sade's pamphlet "Yet Another Effort, Frenchmen, If You Would Become Republicans," included in *Philosophy in the Bedroom* (296-339). In her essay, Irigaray asserts that "In the pornographic scene, there is nothing for me to say . . . [Women's] training is designed to subject them to an exclusively phallocratic sexual economy" (*This Sex*, 198-99). This is not to claim that Jelinek vacillates between the two dichotomous positions of the feminist sex wars of the 1980s; rather, what she accomplishes with her text is to "significantly [stretch] the limits of the pornography debate" (101), as Ulrich Struve has rightly claimed.⁹

The Misfortunes of Justine and Gerti: Reading Jelinek with Sade

In this section I explore the affinity between Sade and Jelinek, and the ways in which their works differ from those pornographic texts that exist solely for the purpose of sexual excitement. Specifically, I undertake a comparison of one of Sade's *Justine* texts (*The Misfortunes of Virtue*) and Jelinek's novel *Lust*. For if Sade entitled his first version of *Justine* the "Misfortunes of Virtue," Jelinek's *Lust* could just as easily be subtitled the "Misfortunes of Love," as it is in their blind faith in the bourgeois values of virtue and love that Sade's heroine most

⁹ For more on the sex wars in both the U.S. and Germany, see "PorNo" and "Frauen gegen Pornographie" (both published in *Emma*), Assiter and Carol, Duggan and Hunter, Gehrke, Gibson and Gibson, Rick and Treudl, and Segal and McIntosh.

resembles Jelinek's Gerti.¹⁰ In each case, the figure's suffering is directly caused by her refusal to give up this faith, whether in virtue or in love. Moreover, it is in the presentation of the character's misfortune as "an ultimate challenge to any possible identification on the part of the reader" (Judovitz, 173) where Jelinek's resemblance to Sade can best be seen, as a close reading of passages from *The Misfortunes of Virtue* and *Lust* will demonstrate.

However, in order to illustrate the ways in which the artistic pornography of Sade and Jelinek differs from that of other mass-market pornographers, it is first necessary to offer a brief description and example of how the pornographic narrative functions. As a paradigmatic example of a text that works more clearly than Jelinek's or Sade's to fulfill an erotic function, I shall focus on John Cleland's *Fanny Hill or Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (1748/49).¹¹ *Fanny Hill* contains the

¹⁰ Sade's character is known alternately by the names Sophie (in *Misfortunes*), Thérèse (in *Justine*) and Justine (in both *Misfortunes* and *Justine*). In the interest of clarity, I shall refer to the character as Justine when writing of her; the names Sophie and Thérèse will appear only in quotes from Sade's texts and interpretations of his works.

¹¹ It is useful to bear in mind here Jean Goulemot's caution that "there are no (or only very exceptional cases of) strictly pornographic works of fiction. Pure pornography is an extreme case . . . ; a challenge that cannot be met" ("Libertine Fiction," 134). Given *Fanny Hill*'s importance in the development of the novel (see Mudge, 199-213, and Wagner, 237-46) and its curious blend of "natural sexuality" and an "aesthetic framework incorporating the current of sentimentalism" (Wagner, 243), it cannot be considered "pure" pornography. It does, however, conform more noticeably to a standard erotic scenario than Jelinek's and Sade's texts do. *Fanny Hill* is also an important work to read with Sade and Jelinek as it is considered to be part of the anti-*Pamela* wave of the eighteenth century, as are Sade's "Justine" texts (Mudge, 199 and 232-33); Jelinek's

three elements that most critics agree are essential to creating a pornographic or erotic narrative. First, “if any tendency distinguish[s] this category as a whole, it [is] voyeurism” (Darnton, 72; see also Goulemot, *Forbidden Texts*, Goulemot “Libertine Fiction,” Goulemot, “Sadean Novels,” and Pease). Two other elements necessary to create what Steven Marcus has termed “pornotopia” are “an enormous erect penis,” which functions as an “object of worship” (272) and the solicitation of “confessions of the hidden secrets of female pleasure” (L. Williams, 53). As Linda Williams notes, such confessions of pleasure are often “elicited involuntarily,” resulting in scenes of rape and ravishment in which the “unwilling victim’s eventual manifestations of pleasure are offered as the genre’s proof of a sincerity that under other conditions might seem less sure” (50).

The presence of all three of these elements of the pornographic narrative can be found in one of *Fanny Hill*’s early scenes, in which Fanny, hidden in a closet, watches as Mrs. Brown (the procuress with whom she is living) has sex with a horse-grenadier. Because this is such an exemplary scene in terms of its functioning as an erotic narrative, I shall quote it at some length:

novel, in its critical investigation of love and anti-sentimentalism, could also be viewed as part of an anti-*Pamela* tradition.

I [Fanny—BB] instantly crept softly, and posted myself so that, seeing everything minutely, I could not myself be seen . .

Her sturdy stallion had now unbuttoned, and produced naked, stiff, and erect, that wonderful machine, which I had never seen before, and which, for the interest my own seat of pleasure began to take furiously in it, I stared at with all the eyes I had. However, my senses were too much flurried, too much concentrated in that now burning spot of mine, to observe anything more than in general the make and turn of that instrument, from which the instinct of nature, yet more than all I had heard of it, now strongly informed me I was to expect that supreme pleasure which she has placed in the meeting of those parts so admirably fitted for each other . . .

Whilst they were in the heat of the action, guided by nature only, I stole my hand up my petticoat, and with fingers all on fire, seized and yet more inflamed that center of all my senses; my heart palpitated, as if it would force its way through my bosom; I breathed with pain; I twisted my thighs, squeezed and compressed the lips of that virgin slit, and following mechanically the example of Phoebe's manual operations on it, as far as I could find admission, brought on at last the critical ecstasy, the melting flow, into which nature, spent with excess of pleasure, dissolves and dies away (61-63).

Here we see all of the elements coming together to create the "*mise en scène* of the erotic novel" (Goulemot, *Forbidden Texts*, 43): the description of the horse grenadier's penis as "stiff, and erect, that wonderful machine"; Fanny's involuntary, "natural" response to her witnessing of the sexual act, and most

importantly, Fanny's positioning as simultaneously voyeur, narrator, and participant (via masturbation) in the sexual act she is witnessing.

Indeed, it is the positioning of the reader as a voyeur via Fanny that makes Cleland's text pornographic,¹² for it is through identification with her that the reader is enabled to experience the physical desire which the pornographic narrative exists to elicit, as Allison Pease explains in her commentary on this scene:

The voyeur figure . . . offers a model for the reader to engage with, and reproduce for his or her private use, the pleasures of the seen and heard . . . pornography invites readers to indulge their own sensations through a mimetic imaginative practice extended and complemented by the physical act of masturbation (7-8).

As we shall see, it is precisely in refusing the reader this "mimetic imaginative practice" that demonstrates the similarity between Sade's and Jelinek's texts. In the following reading of Sade's and Jelinek's novels, I will discuss the ways in which this refusal takes place at two textual levels: at the narrative or plot level, and at the level of the writing or form.

¹² There are many other instances of Fanny as voyeur in *Fanny Hill*. For example, she and Phoebe watch another young woman in the house have sex with her client (66-71); she spies on her lover, Mr. H., while he dallies with her maid (104-05); and she observes two men engaging in sex through a peephole in the wall of her room in an inn (193-96).

In terms of both narrative and form, Jelinek in *Lust* and Sade in *The Misfortunes of Virtue* employ “strategies that disrupt identification with both mimetic and moral referents” (Judovitz, 174). In terms of the narrative, one way in which they achieve this disruption is by presenting “the reader with an implausible plot: that of the relentless, exaggerated, and caricature-like description of the heroine’s misfortunes” (Judovitz, 174). In the same manner as Gerti, the “heroine” of *Lust*, Justine is “shown to be suffering from her unsuccessful attempts to reconcile her own beliefs and her worldly experiences” (Judovitz, 176). Consequently, Justine’s unwavering belief in virtue and the possibility of meeting with others endowed with that quality causes her to continually trust people, despite the substantial accumulation of evidence to the contrary. Near the end of her tale of woe, Justine is arrested for the accidental death of an infant she was attempting to save from a fire (this after having endured a catalogue of insults, ranging from arrest for crimes she did not commit to rape, and being held captive as a sex slave by a group of perverted monks, among other horrors).

In spite of all her contradictory experience, Justine nonetheless persists in believing that her virtue will endear her to someone, and turns, after her final arrest, for help to Father Antonin, one of the monks who had previously held her

captive as an unwilling participant in their debauched orgies. As Justine explains to her sister Juliette, her reason for depending on someone she knows to be on the side of vice is her stubborn persistence in clinging to and believing in virtue:

Long grown accustomed to slander, injustice, and misfortune, and used since childhood to the idea that I never could yield to any virtuous impulse without being certain to find thorns somewhere in it, my affliction made me feel more bewildered than anguished . . . However, it being natural for any suffering creature to grasp at every possible means by which he might climb out of the abyss into which misfortune has cast him, I thought of Father Antonin (Sade, *Misfortunes*, 138).

That Justine's confidence is misplaced is shown by the friar's answer:

You see where your notions have brought you, for now you have adequate leisure to convince yourself that they have served no purpose but to tip you into one abyss after another. So if you wish your neck to be saved, abandon them for once in your life . . . One of the holy Brothers here in Lyons is a close relative of both the Governor and the King's Intendant . . . By promising to pack you off in a convent for the rest of your life, I am certain that he will prevent matters being taken any further . . . But during your detention, you will belong to me. I make no bones of it: you will be a slave and subject to my whims which you will satisfy without demur (Sade, *Misfortunes*, 138-39).

Justine is, of course, properly horrified at such an offer and rejects it out of hand, preferring death to the surrendering of her virtue, claiming, "you are a monster to take such cruel advantage of my situation to force me thus to choose death and dishonour! . . . I shall die innocent, but I shall at least die without

remorse!" (Sade, *Misfortunes*, 139). To further illustrate his point that virtue will get one nowhere, however, Sade then has the monk nearly rape her: "My resistance excited the villain who thereupon was bold enough to show me just how inflamed his passions were . . . if he did not quite consummate his crime, then at least he left me bearing marks so unambiguous that I could have no possible doubts as to the abhorrent nature of his intentions" (Sade, *Misfortunes*, 139). He then leaves Justine to her fate and "dumbfounded by his sheer impudence and licentiousness" (Sade, *Misfortunes*, 140). By acting in a manner that invites the reader to consider her stupid (how, after all, could she have expected Antonin to help her after her experience with him at the monastery?), Sade thus disrupts a potential identification on the part of the reader with either Antonin (who wants to be as merciless as he?) or Justine (identifying with her victimhood would make the reader feel as stupid as she). As Dalia Judovitz puts it,

The reader is trapped, since s/he cannot identify with either character without a sense of moral complicity with one or the other side—vice or virtue . . . By compulsively upholding an ideal standard of behavior, Justine/Sophie invites transgression. The desiring structure of the text is constituted around the adventures of virtue, the narration of its consistent violation. The reader is thus freed from identification with the discourse of victimization, and made aware of the complicity involved in the act of reading (177).

Jelinek presents her “heroine,” Gerti, in a similar manner. In Jelinek’s case, however, it is Gerti’s persistent belief in the power of love that gets her into trouble, particularly when she goes “looking for love” outside of her marriage, a marriage that has become nothing other than sexual bondage for her. As readers, we have no way of knowing whether Gerti’s decision to marry Hermann was based on love or whether it was pure economic calculation, but her affair with Michael is clearly posited as a misguided search for love. In either case, Jelinek, like Sade, “categorically refuses to stylize [Gerti] as an absolute victim” (Ockenfuss, 75). Instead, Gerti is depicted in a manner similar to Sade’s presentation of Justine, as complicit in her victimization, at least as far as her treatment by her husband is concerned:

Diese Frau hat sich erst letzte Woche einen Hosenanzug in der Boutique gekauft . . . Drei neue Pullover versteckt sie im Schrank, um keinen Anlaß zum Mißtrauen zu geben, sie wolle mit ihrer blutigen Furche sich einen neuen Wonnemonat bereiten. Doch sie pflückt nur die gütige Frucht Geld vom Baum ihres Mannes . . . Das Wirtschaftsgeld wird der Frau ausgezahlt und mehr! (*L*, 45).¹³

¹³ “Only last week the woman bought herself a trouser suit in the boutique . . . Three new pullovers she’s purchased she hides away in the cupboard, so that she offers no purchase to mistrust, no occasion for the suspicion that she’s using her bloody groove as a ticket to a month of pleasures. The fact is that all she picks from the tree of her Man is that goodly fruit, money . . . The woman’s housekeeping money is paid out to her and more!” (*Lust*, 39).

While Gerti may be portrayed as complicit in regard to the bargain struck with her marriage, the text is more ambiguous about her status as a victim in her attempt to find “true” love through an adulterous relationship with Michael. This “relationship” begins when she runs away from home drunk and meets a young student, who offers to take her home, and then half seduces, half rapes her. After this event, dreams of romance immediately awaken in her and she views Michael as the man who will save her from her miserable existence, while he is thinking only of sex:

Noch ehe der Minutenzeiger des Glücks die beiden streichelt, ist bereits eine Flüssigkeit aus Michael ausgetreten . . . Nichts weiter. Doch in der Frau, die das Höchste erleben und erledigen wollte, sind kernlose Werke in Kraft getreten worden. Ein Quellgebiet ist erschlossen, von dem sie jahrzehntelang heimlich träumte . . . Und die Frau gehört der Liebe (*L*, 116).¹⁴

Just as Justine mistakenly believes those she meets to be virtuous, Gerti persists in believing she has found love where she has only found sex.

If, however, the reader may be inclined to feel some sympathy for Gerti in this first encounter with Michael, this sympathy becomes harder to maintain as

¹⁴ “Even before the minute hand of happiness can stroke the two of them, Michael has emitted a fluid, and that’s it. But, in the woman, nuclear energy is powering her higher. These are the headwaters of which she’s secretly dreamed for decades . . . This woman belongs to love” (*Lust*, 96-7).

the novel progresses. For Gerti, in the same stubborn and misguided fashion as Justine, continues to believe in Michael as a “knight in shining armor” despite his less-than-tender treatment of her, which ultimately culminates in a gang rape of Gerti by Michael and his friends on the ski slope (see *L*, 195ff and *Lust*, 159ff). Finally, she attempts yet again to run away to Michael, as she is unable to resist her feelings for him: “Zwanglos verstreut sie sich in ihren Gefühlen. Michael: jetzt gehen wir ihn wieder holen aus seinem Haus, bevor er erkaltet. Gleich wird diese Frau, von Sinnen getrieben, vor einem fremden Haus heulen, weil niemand da ist” (*L*, 213).¹⁵ Once again, just as with Justine, the reader finds her- or himself confronted with the suspicion that Gerti is just not all that clever; surely, interpreting a gang rape as a sign of love is not something a wise person would do?

It is in this refusal of the text to allow the reader to identify with the heroine where I locate what I earlier called the anti-pornographic impulse found in both Sade and Jelinek. The strategies that are used at the narrative or plot level to hinder an identification on the part of the reader with either Justine or Gerti are further complemented by the form of the texts. Specifically, both authors use

¹⁵ “Free and easily she indulges her feelings. Michael: now we’ll go and fetch him out of his house before he goes cold. Presently this woman, impelled by her senses, will be howling outside a strange house because no one’s at home” (*Lust*, 173).

narrative intrusions, which function to disrupt the “mimetic imaginative practice” of voyeurism, which, as discussed above, is one of the traditional and essential elements of the pornographic text.

The function of these narrative intrusions, as Jean Goulemot in his work on Sade has pointed out, is to

[disrupt] the already unsteady mechanism of erotic transference. Rather than being seized, as in the pornographic narrative, with the desire to have an orgasm, the reader is doomed to listen, reason and keep a cool head. All of this is quite foreign to the high pitch of excitement to which, traditionally, the pornographic narrative tries to lead the reader (“Sadean Novels,” 73).

That the use of this technique of narrative disruption is apparent in the works of Sade as well as of Jelinek demonstrates the danger of speaking of “pornography” rather than *pornographies* when trying to determine Jelinek’s relationship to these traditions. A thorough discussion of these narrative devices necessitates a psychoanalytic reading of the way in which they function to preclude identification on the part of the reader.

As I argued in my discussion of *Die Liebhaberinnen* (see chapter one), identification, according to Lacan, takes place in the loci of the imaginary and the ego. This identification is produced through the “transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image” (*E*, 2). In regard to pornography, the

assumption of an image takes place through an identification with the protagonist or voyeur figure, drawing the reader or viewer via this imaginary identification into the erotic scenario through the voyeuristic nature of the text. Mark Bracher's discussion of pornography concludes that the "arousal of desire and the production of *jouissance* for heterosexual men" (85)¹⁶ is achieved in the imaginary register in two forms: "1. The image of a woman's body functioning as a sexual object, and 2. The image of the desiring male protagonist, functioning as either alter ego or rival" (85). These two images serve to establish the desiring subject position¹⁷ of the male heterosexual reader/viewer of pornography because the subject assumes those images through the act of reading or viewing. The use of rape is particularly important in terms of establishing the desiring subject position of the reader/viewer of pornography in the imaginary register, for, as Bracher goes on to note

the Imaginary other [with whom the reader/viewer identifies—BB] can also function as the *subject* of desire, through being the object of the audience's identification. This

¹⁶ While Bracher does not make explicit which type of *jouissance* he is referring to when using the term "sexual *jouissance*," I presume that he means phallic, or what Lacan refers to as the "jouissance of the Idiot" (S20, 81). For more on the different types of *jouissance* and their relationship to Jelinek's text, see below.

¹⁷ I take the term "subject position" from theories of film spectatorship (see, for example, Heath, "On Suture" (101-07); that the question of the subject's position is relevant to Jelinek's positioning of the reader via the text shall be made evident through my reading of *Lust*.

form of the desire of the Imaginary other—the desiring body of the male protagonist as alter ego of the (male) audience—is present whenever a heterosexual male protagonist is represented as desiring . . . rape is a powerful instance, for in presenting an image of the desire of the male body as monolithic (only one thing can satisfy it) and irrepressible (nothing can stop it), the rape provides the male audience with an Imaginary other in whom they can recognize and consolidate their own sexual desire—such Imaginary identification being, as Lacan notes, a fundamental way in which desire comes to be constituted in the first place (Bracher, 91, emphasis in original).

In addition, rape scenes, which often result in the woman's involuntary pleasure of the sexual act, serve to demonstrate hard core pornography's desire of "assurance that it is witnessing not the voluntary performance of feminine pleasure [which can be faked—BB], but its involuntary confession" (L. Williams, 50).

Thus, for example, Walter, the protagonist in the Victorian pornographic novel, *My Secret Life*, repeatedly rapes and ravishes women, allowing the (male heterosexual) reader to identify with Walter and feel that he, too, has aroused involuntary desire in the women being raped and is himself desired. One example of many in the novel is Walter's encounter with a virginal servant named Jenny. Approximately three chapters are devoted to Walter's attempts to wear down Jenny's resistance to his seduction attempts. At first, he tries simply talking to her about his marital problems; when this fails, he resorts to bribery

with new garters; and finally he reads *Fanny Hill* to her, in the hope of exciting her interest through the reading of a pornographic novel (thus we have pornography within pornography—Walter is positioned simultaneously as consumer of pornography and as the desiring subject in his own pornographic narrative). Finally, Walter manages to lure her into bed, where he commits the deed, which Jenny, despite her earlier protests, enjoys immensely:

I had got her somehow on to the bed, she was helpless . . . I shoved . . . A mighty straight thrust; and the virginity was gone at that one effort.

. . . Then I came to my senses; where was I? had she let me, or had I forced her violently?

. . . She lay still, in the enjoyment of a lubricated cunt, distended by a stiff, hot prick. Soon she was sensitive to my moments, her cunt constricted, a visible pleasure overtook her, her frame began to quiver, and the soft murmurs of spermatic effusion came from her lips (Anonymous, 192-93).

Afterwards, they look at the illustrations in Walter's copy of *Fanny Hill* again and Jenny emerges as one contented with her fate as Walter's lover. While Walter does evince a twinge of conscience ("had she let me. . .?"), the switch to the description of Jenny's reaction as one of pleasure serves to reassure both Walter and the reader that she did really desire Walter sexually, despite her protests. As he comments in his diary: "After the first fuck she was like a well-

broken horse; she obeyed me in everything, blushed, was modest, humbled, indifferent, conquered, submissive" (Anonymous, 195).

In the case of *My Secret Life*, Walter is positioned less as a voyeur and more as the subject of desire (and thus object of identification for the reader) that Bracher describes. Nonetheless, his role as alter ego or subject of desire fulfills the same function as the voyeur figure and also serves to make the text pornographic, for he too acts as a mediator who "digests the sexually exciting material in advance of a reader/viewer in order to stimulate a similar response in him or her" (Pease, 93). As we have seen, this voyeur or narrator figure functions in "classic" pornographic texts such as *Fanny Hill* and *My Secret Life* to allow the reader to identify with the erotic scenario. In the artistic (anti-) pornography of Sade and Jelinek, however, this identification process is disrupted, resulting (hopefully) in the production of a different type of reading subject, one who (presumably) has a more critical distance to the text.¹⁸

¹⁸ I add the qualifiers "hopefully" and "presumably" because one can never be sure that the distancing effects employed by Sade and Jelinek will work, depending as they do on a critical reader. As Allison Pease notes in her discussion of the use of pornographic tropes in Joyce and Beardsley: "If a reader is not complicitous with the parodic attitude, unable to understand the tropes as deconstructed, such technique may work against the agent of parody, for parody equally highlights its own artifices in such a way that the parodic text becomes a site of contestation, despite the mutually constitutive nature of such parody" (81-82).

In what follows, I shall focus on two paradigmatic (non-)voyeuristic scenes from Sade's and Jelinek's texts: Justine's encounter with the aristocrat Bressac in *The Misfortunes of Virtue* and the gang rape of Gerti by Michael and his friends on the ski slope in *Lust*. The first, Justine's encounter with Bressac in *The Misfortunes of Virtue*, takes place after she has escaped from Dubois and her gang of thieves. Previously, Dubois had helped Justine escape from prison (where she had been imprisoned for refusing to help her employer rob his neighbor) by setting the prison on fire. While grateful to her benefactress for saving her life, Justine is horrified at the thought of having to "oblige the four lusty lads" (Sade, *Misfortunes*, 26) who make up the rest of Dubois' gang; while the men quarrel over who gets to ravish Justine first, she makes her escape. Deep in the woods, she hides herself in a thicket to sleep, and is later awakened by the arrival of Bressac and his valet, who have come into the woods so that Bressac can sodomize his valet away from the watchful eyes of his mother. The sound of their voices awakens Justine and she finds herself an unwilling voyeur to the sex scene enacted.

Sade, however, presents neither the sex scene, nor Justine's consumption of it in a manner that conforms to the standard pornographic scenario. Instead, Justine views the scene in a way that disrupts the voyeurism one would expect to

find in a pornographic narrative, first by having Justine interrupt her description of the scene and secondly by omitting altogether the description of the sex that she witnesses. In her recounting of the episode to her sister, she states:

They drew near and halted so exactly opposite to me that nothing of what they said, nothing of what they did escaped me and I saw. . .

“Great Heavens, Madame,” said Sophie, breaking off her tale, “can it be possible that fate has always placed me in such uniformly parlous situations for it to be as testing to ordinary decency to hear of them as it is for me to describe them? The horrible offence which outrages both Nature and established law, the heinous crime upon which the heavy hand of God has so often descended, I mean that infamy which was so new to me that I could scarcely conceive of it, was there, before my very eyes, consummated with all the impure refinements and dreadful proceedings which the most considered depravity could inject into it” (*Misfortunes*, 29).

Here the disruption of the pornographic narrative is complete—the reader is not even given a description of the sex that has taken place; rather, what we experience is Justine’s condemnation of it without the use of erotic vocabulary that we would normally expect to encounter.¹⁹

¹⁹ In his later version of this novel, *Justine, or Good Conduct Well Chastised*, this scene becomes more explicit. In her description of the sex act to Juliette, Justine states: “the young master seemed prepared unhesitatingly to brave the shaft that was presented to him . . . the infamous creature writhed and struggled under the iron” (*Justine*, 504). As Goulemot notes, however, the description of the act in *Justine*, while specific, “does not satisfy our curiosity because of a decidedly unrealistic vocabulary; there is nothing but spears, iron shafts. These are terms that divert or suspend the pornographic effect” (“Sadean Novels,” 68).

Justine, while positioned as voyeur, thus refuses the reader the possibility of identifying with her voyeurism, resulting in a lack of the two elements described by Bracher as the means by which the consumer of pornography is able to obtain an imaginary identification with the pornographic protagonist. For indeed, here we find neither a woman's body as sexual object nor an image of a desiring male protagonist; Justine functions as the subject of the scene, not its object; and Bressac, while desiring, is excluded from the text by the ellipse that takes the place of the pornographic narrative one would expect to find in Justine's description of the event she witnessed. Instead, the reader is invited to identify with Justine as a victim of the violence depicted in the text. As Dalia Judovitz notes:

Sade demonstrates that there can be no exterior or privileged position for Sophie or, for that matter, the reader as a voyeur to the scene . . . By identifying with the heroine, the reader becomes a victim as well, since the act of reading, governed by the mimetic relation of reader and text, implies the risk of being marked by the punitive logic of the text. The physical violence unleashed by the text is thus directed not merely towards the heroine, but rather at the traditional conventions that govern the classical novel (177-78).

Finally, Sade's use of disruptive techniques reveals the complicity of Justine and the reader in the violence she both observes and experiences:

As an unconscious exponent of popular ideology, Justine persists in refusing either to reflect or learn from her

misadventures, or to admit to being marked by competing negative ideologies . . . Passing from the position of spectator to that of unsuspecting actor, Justine is shown to be playing the role of the victim whose innocence becomes the stage for a trial of complicity (Judovitz, 178).

In identifying with Justine, then, the reader is also forced to become aware of her/his own complicity in the act of the consumption of pornography. We are a long way from the uncritical voyeuristic consumption of an erotic scenario produced for the reader/viewer of “pure” pornography.

Justine’s death at the end of *The Misfortunes of Virtue* completes the process of depicting her (and the reader’s) complicitous relationship to the violence of sexuality. Again, Dalia Judovitz’ reading of *Misfortunes* is useful:

Justine/Sophie’s death by a thunderbolt . . . reflects her complicitous relation to popular ideology: her identification with the order of representation based on conventional moral principles. She represents the bad reader, the reader who mistakes the material and signifying levels of the text . . . Insofar as the heroine herself is a representation of the reader, it is her bad faith as a reader and good faith as a character that constitute the plot of the text and the texture of her misfortunes (181).

This complicity of the heroine and the reader is portrayed even more strongly by Jelinek in *Lust*. In comparison with *The Misfortunes of Virtue*, which alternates in a fairly stable fashion between Justine’s first-person narration and a third-person omniscient narrator, the narrative voice in *Lust* is, as Gertrud Koch has noted, a

“fragiles literarisches Geschöpf” (135),²⁰ one that is constantly vacillating between different narrative positions. This vacillation has the effect, as in Sade (albeit in a different way), of interrupting the pornographic narrative and making the reader aware of her/his complicity in the act of reading. To achieve this effect, Jelinek doubles the voyeuristic gaze of the pornographic text, thereby deconstructing the traditional voyeuristic position of the reader of pornography: “Die Dekonstruktion der Vorlagen geschieht mittels Verdoppelung des männlichgeilen Blickes: wo immer die Sicht auf die nackte Frau frei ist, merkt der Leser, daß jemand mitschaut, der unbestechlich, meist satirisch das Geschehene übersieht” (Höfler, “Sexualität,” 106).²¹

The description of the gang rape of Gerti by Michael and his friends on the ski slope shows the vacillating narrative positions and the doubling effect of the voyeuristic gaze described by Höfler. As it is such an exemplary scene, I shall quote it at some length before returning to my reading:

Die Buben halten [Gerti] die lebendigen Hände oben über dem Kopf zusammen. Niemand könnte in dieser Stellung

²⁰ “fragile literary creation” (my translation).

²¹ “The deconstruction of the models [of pornography] occurs through the means of doubling the lecherous male gaze: whenever the gaze is openly turned on the naked woman, the reader notices that there is someone who watches with him or her, someone who uncompromisingly, mostly satirically, views the proceedings” (my translation).

seiner Familie über den Bildschirm hinweg zuwinken . . . Das Seidenkleid wird bis zur Taille hinaufgeschoben und das Hoserl, mit dem sie zufrieden war, hinunter. Und jetzt kitzeln wir die Dunkelheit, bis sie krachend über uns zusammenbricht . . . Jetzt werden also diese Fußlappen, diese Abtreter, die alle vier unser sind, auseinandergezogen, bis Gerti aufheult . . . Es ist unglaublich, was man mit den dehnbaren Schamlippen alles anfangen kann, um sie, als wär's ihr Schicksal, in der Form zu verzerren. Man kann sie z.B. zusammendrehen wie eine spitzige Tüte, und vom Oberland biegt sich das Gebirge aus Gertis Kleid. Das tut doch weh, denkt keiner daran? . . .

Haben Sie eben den Donner gehört? Na also, warum treten Sie dann nicht zurück und lassen mich auch einmal im Video zornig ihre Geschlechter aufplusternde Menschen anschauen?
...

Tun wir so, als erblickten wir, einander schauend, einen Film, der einfach einschlägt (einen einschlägigen Film) . . . Und in Gerti prasselt noch immer ein hübsches Feuer, das durch das Gestalt einer Meterwurst in ihrem Mund dargestellt wird. Na, meine Herren und Helden, lassen Sie mich einmal durch den Sucher schauen, Sie haben doch selber jeder ein spannendes Glied! (*L*, 196-97,98 & 202-03).²²

²² "The lads hold her living hands together above her head. In that position, nobody could wave to her family via the TV screen . . . The silk dress is shoved up to the waist and the panties, which she was perfectly satisfied with, are shoved down. And now we'll tickle the darkness till it collapses upon us with a crash . . . So now these footcloths, these doormats, all four of them ours, are parted. Making Gerti howl . . . It's unbelievable how you can stretch and flex the labia to change their shape, as if that were what fate intended for them. For instance, you can pout them into a pointed pouch. And from the higher ground the hills are bowing down from Gerti's dress. That hurts, doesn't that occur to anyone? . . .

Did you hear the thunder just now? So why not get out of the way and let me have a look at the video people wrathfully plumping up their genitals? . . .

Just in these few pages, the narrative voice fluctuates several times: what starts out as a seemingly typical voyeuristic narration in the third-person singular ("Die Buben halten. . .") changes to the second-person plural ("jetzt kitzeln wir. . ."), back to the third-person singular, but now with a direct address to the reader ("Das tut doch weh. . ."), before fluctuating again between the "we" ("Tun wir so. . .") and the third-person direct address ("lassen Sie mich einmal. . ."). The first direct address to the reader is a critical commentary on the happenings, and disrupts the potential erotic transfer. Rather than describing Gerti's pleasure in the sex scene that is taking place, Jelinek points out that the roughness of the others' treatment of her causes pain, not pleasure, thus forcing the reader to reflect on the narrator's commentary as opposed to simply consuming an erotic scenario. In addition, the end of this passage demonstrates the accuracy of Höfler's claim regarding the doubling of the voyeuristic gaze, as the narrator turns her (his?) gaze on the consumers of this scene, for they are now the ones being looked at, rather than simply looking themselves. The narrator, instead of functioning as a model for the reader to identify with,

Let's pretend, as we watch each other, that we're looking at a movie. Really moving . . . And meanwhile in Gerti a fine fire is still crackling, a whole metre of pork sausage like a fire hose in her mouth. Well now, gentlemen, heroes all: let me take a look down my sights, and see if you haven't all got a cock of your own, cocked and ready to fire!" (*Lust*, 160-61, 62 & 64-65).

assumes a critical position, forcing the reader to reflect critically on her or his own voyeuristic pleasure.

Finally, the references to television and film make it even more clear that Jelinek is undermining the traditional voyeuristic nature of pornography (in both its written and visual forms). As Susanne Baackmann has pointed out in her reading of *Lust*, the text itself is organized like a pornographic videoclip (180); in many ways, the structure of Jelinek's text resembles that of the early "stag films," which tended to consist of a "haphazard stringing together of explicit hard-core scenes" (L. Williams, 63). This technique results in a "radical narrative discontinuity" as Linda Williams has termed it (63). In the case of *Lust*, however, the narrative discontinuity produced by the narrator's direct address to the reader about the "film" that she/he is participating in, serves to disrupt the pleasure involved in forming a "gender-based bond with other male spectators" (L. Williams, 73), one of the functions of the stag film. Indeed, given that the sex of the narrator cannot be firmly established (see Baackmann, 182), the gender-based male bonding described by Williams is definitively broken, resulting instead in a narrative voice, which "schießt ebenfalls über die Immanenz der

‘traditionellen’ pornographischen Phantasie hinaus. Anstatt den Leser sexuell zu stimulieren, distanziert sie ihn von der erzählten Handlung” (Baackmann, 181).²³

What we see, then, in *Lust* is how Jelinek, similarly to Sade in *Misfortunes of Virtue*, also disrupts the imaginary identification between the reader and protagonist that Bracher describes as an important element of pornographic writing. While Jelinek takes over many of the other elements of the pornographic narrative, such as the language of obscenity, the endless repetition of the sexual act, and the permanent erection of the man, her transformation of two of the most important pornographic conventions, the voyeur figure and insatiable female desire,²⁴ does indeed result in Carter’s “moral pornography.”²⁵ Through her simultaneous use and transformation of pornographic techniques, Jelinek becomes precisely the type of moral pornographer as terrorist or sexual guerilla that Carter describes, especially in her depiction of female sexuality, to which I now turn.

²³ “goes beyond the immanence of the ‘traditional’ pornographic fantasy. Instead of sexually stimulating the reader, it [the narrative voice] distances the reader from the action depicted” (my translation).

²⁴ See Hartwig (249-51) for an analysis of Jelinek’s refusal of the pornographic portrayal of female desire.

²⁵ See above in this chapter for a definition of Carter’s term.

Female Sexuality and Jouissances

In her discussion of *Lust*, Ina Hartwig describes the way in which Jelinek's text "erzähl[t] höhnisch die Verwechslung des Penis mit dem Phallus" (256, see also 51-59).²⁶ While Hartwig discusses this misrecognition in the context of Jelinek's critical engagement with Freudian psychoanalysis, referring to Jelinek's use of psychoanalytic theory in *Lust* as "ein psychoanalytisches Theorem *après la lettre*" (251),²⁷ in this section I will discuss the confusion of the penis for the phallus in relation to pornography, especially filmic pornography (as exemplified by a "classic" feature-length narrative pornographic film, *Deep Throat* [1972], directed by Gerard Damiano). I will also demonstrate how Lacan's views of female sexuality and *jouissance* can be used to illuminate Jelinek's critical investigation of the mass cultural form of pornography.

Indeed, it is possible to read Jelinek's text as an extended meditation on Lacan's statement that "the sexual relationship cannot be written" (Lacan, *S20*, 35), with one important difference, however: while the view of female sexuality offered in *Lust* has clear affinities with Lacanian definitions of female sexuality,

²⁶ "mockingly portrays the misrecognition of the penis for the phallus" (my translation).

²⁷ "a psychoanalytic theory *après la lettre*" (my translation). Interestingly, Hartwig does not refer to Lacan in her discussion of Jelinek's relationship to psychoanalysis, other than in passing (see 255-56).

Jelinek's depiction of female sexuality could perhaps best be described as "Lacan without feminine *jouissance*." In other words, whereas Lacan allows some space for female pleasure and in fact claims that women may have access to a non-phallic *jouissance* that men do not have, Jelinek's text repudiates Lacan's notion of a "supplementary" *jouissance* "beyond" the phallus available to women (S20, 73-74). Lacan's use of the term *jouissance*, like most other Lacanian concepts, shifts over the years and can be difficult to pin down (See: Evans, "Jouissance," Levy-Stokes, "Jouissance," and Macey, 200-06). It is, however, possible to outline some basic parameters for my use of the term to illuminate Jelinek's work.

Translating from the French, *jouissance* can be rendered literally as "enjoyment," "both in the sense of deriving pleasure from something, and in the legal sense of exercising property rights" (Evans, "Jouissance," 1). The term has sexual connotations as well, as it can mean orgasm in French. Lacan's first use of the term *jouissance* can be found in the seminar of 1953-54, where it appears just twice (S1, 205 & 23) and is used only in relation to Hegel's dialectic of the master and the slave. Here Lacan equates *jouissance* with pleasure, noting the "relation between pleasure [*jouissance*] and labour" and notes that "a law is imposed upon the slave, that he should satisfy the desire and pleasure [*jouissance*] of the other"

(S1, 223). Until Seminar IV (1956-57), *jouissance* meaning simply “pleasure” is Lacan’s only and infrequent use of the term.

In his early work, Lacan’s notion of *jouissance*, while not a Freudian term, has parallels to Freud’s concept of the drive (see Levy-Stokes, “Jouissance,” 102). After 1957, the sexual connotations of the word move to the forefront, and in 1958, he first uses *jouissance* to refer explicitly to orgasm (see Evans, *Dictionary*, 91). Thus, in 1958, Lacan speaks of “masturbatory *jouissance*,” which he attributes to the phallic stage and the “imaginary dominance of the phallic attribute” (*E*, 282).

After 1958, Lacan begins to distinguish between *jouissance* and pleasure. This can be found in Seminar VII (1960-61), where Lacan discusses *jouissance* as an ethical stance in relation to Kant and Sade. In this phase of his work, *jouissance* comes to figure as that which Freud referred to as “beyond” the pleasure principle or, as Lacan puts it, “*jouissance* . . . is suffering” (*S7*, 184). In relation to Kant’s example of the man who refuses a night of pleasure with a woman if the price to be paid is death, Lacan remarks that, while that may be true for the man in pursuit of pleasure, the man in pursuit of *jouissance* (as Sade’s figures are) will accept death as the price to be paid for *jouissance*: “one only has to make a conceptual shift and move the night spent with the lady from the category of

pleasure to that of *jouissance* . . . for the example to be ruined” (S7, 189). In the acceptance of death as the price, the subject experiences *jouissance*, in which “pleasure *and* pain are presented as a single packet to take or leave” (S7, 189).

Despite these earlier references, it is not until 1960 that Lacan gives his first structural account of *jouissance*. In “Subversion of the Subject,” he posits pleasure as that which “sets the limits on *jouissance*” (E, 319). The sacrificing of *jouissance* also becomes here, for the first time, a necessary condition for subjectivity—the subject, by submitting her- or himself to the symbolic order must sacrifice some *jouissance* since “*jouissance* is forbidden to him who speaks” (E, 319). In this, Lacan rewrites Freud’s theory of the castration complex: “Castration means that *jouissance* must be refused” (E, 324). The sacrificed (or “alienated”) *jouissance* becomes the object a, that which is the cause of desire but never attainable.

Finally, in the 1970s, especially in Seminar XX (1972-73), Lacan brings to the forefront his distinction between masculine and feminine *jouissance*. While he had discussed *jouissance* in conjunction with femininity as early as 1958, it is only in *Encore* that Lacan first comes to speak of a qualitatively different type of feminine *jouissance*. He posits feminine *jouissance* against that of the phallic, termed the “*jouissance* of the Idiot” (S20, 81). In *Encore*, Lacan defines phallic

jouissance (which he sometimes refers to as sexual *jouissance*) as that which “is marked and dominated by the impossibility of establishing as such . . . the One of the relation ‘sexual relationship’” (S20, 6-7). Lacan’s use of the term “One” refers to mathematical logic (Frege), to the Platonic myth of the lovers’ unity in the *Symposium*,²⁸ and also to the (presumed) unity of the (male) subject in a philosophical sense. Phallic *jouissance* is thus seen as a barrier to these forms of unity. Or, to put it another way, “Phallic *jouissance* is the obstacle owing to which man does not come . . . to enjoy woman’s body, precisely because what he enjoys is the *jouissance* of the organ . . . *Jouissance*, qua sexual, is phallic—in other words, it is not related to the Other as such” (S20, 7 & 9). The term “Other” here refers both to the linguistic Other (see Dean, “Two Kinds,” 919-20, for more on the linguistic Other) and to the Other sex, e.g., woman. It is precisely man’s experience of phallic or sexual *jouissance* that “covers or poses an obstacle to the supposed sexual relationship” (S20, 9), because in phallic *jouissance*, it is man’s organ and not he as subject who “enjoys.” The phallus thus gets in between the

²⁸ See chapter one of this dissertation for a discussion of Lacan’s use of Plato’s myth of the lovers’ unity, as well as Lacan’s Seminar XI, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (S11, 205).

two sexes presumed to have a relation.²⁹ This phallic or sexual *jouissance* ends up being displaced onto the penis (as a poor substitute for the phallus) and is dependent on the phallic signifier:

phallic or sexual *jouissance* . . . being dependent on the phallic signifier, is completely determined by language . . . This kind of *jouissance* . . . is located outside the body; it is attached to the body only by the slender thread of the sexual organ or the phallicized image of the bodily form . . . The relation of the speaking being to *jouissance* is, therefore, fundamentally insecure. For the *jouissance* he can derive from the sexual relation is never the kind he needs, in the sense that it always bears witness to the disjunction of the body and the genitals and constantly poses an obstacle to the establishment of a true sexual relation between one sex and the other (André, 236-37).

While women have, according to Lacan, access to a *jouissance* that is beyond the phallus, men, by virtue of the fact that it is “through the phallic function that man as whole acquires his inscription” (S20, 79), have to make do with inadequate phallic or sexual *jouissance*, one which causes him to be unable to “attain his sexual partner . . . except inasmuch as his partner is the cause of his desire” (S20, 80). A further cause of the inadequacy of phallic *jouissance* is its

²⁹ It is important to point out here that the terms “male”/“masculine” and “female”/“feminine” do not, in Lacan, refer to anatomy, but rather to subject positions: “It is a difference in the relation of the speaking being to *jouissance* which determines his being man or woman, not anatomical difference” (Levy-Stokes, “Jouissance,” 105). Or, as Lacan puts it: “One ultimately situates oneself there [under the sign of the phallic function—BB] by choice—women are free to situate themselves there if it gives them pleasure to do so. Everyone knows there are phallic women . . . It is, nevertheless, the phallic function that helps [men] situate themselves as men and approach women” (S20, 71).

incompatibility with feminine *jouissance*, thus posing an obstacle to the sexual relationship.

Feminine *jouissance* differs from masculine or phallic *jouissance* through its relation to the Other, especially the Other sex, which for Lacan means woman. While in his earlier work, Lacan attributed to women a *jouissance* associated with the phallic stage and the clitoris (*E*, 282), his work of the 1970s moved away from that position. In particular, Lacan posits for women a specifically feminine *jouissance* which is “beyond the phallus” (*S20*, 74). Women have access to *both* phallic, or sexual, *jouissance*, and also to a supplementary form of *jouissance* by virtue of being not wholly subsumed by the phallic function as men are: “being not-whole, she has a supplementary *jouissance* compared to what the phallic function designates by way of *jouissance*” (*S20*, 73). It is, however, impossible to know anything about this other *jouissance* other than that some women (and men) experience it. Lacan’s paradigmatic example of feminine *jouissance* is that of mystics such as Hadewijch d’Anvers, Saint John of the Cross, and Saint Teresa, thus relating feminine *jouissance* to God. As he asks in relation to mysticism: “Doesn’t this *jouissance* that one experiences and knows nothing about put us on the path of ex-sistence? And why not interpret one face of the Other, the God face, as based on feminine *jouissance*?” (*S20*, 77). This specifically feminine

jouissance (including that of the mystics) is almost always equated with feminine sexuality in Lacan's work. More importantly for my discussion of Jelinek's work and pornography, "jouissance [in the context of femininity—BB] is to be understood as the achievement of some form of sexual satisfaction, often (but not always) equated with orgasm. The distinction between male and female jouissance thus depends on the assumption that there are distinct forms of sexual satisfaction for men and women" (Evans, "Jouissance," 9).

It is these distinct forms of sexual satisfaction that contribute to the incompatibility of phallic and feminine *jouissances*, which in turn leads to the inadequacy of phallic *jouissance* discussed above. The inadequacy of phallic *jouissance* and the incompatibility of phallic and feminine *jouissances* are, however, precisely what pornography functions to hide and what Jelinek's text exposes. In this respect, *Deep Throat* is a paradigmatic example of pornography in that it attempts to portray phallic and feminine *jouissances* as complementary and capable of unity.

This is not to claim, as other feminists have, that *Deep Throat* and other pornographic films of the 1970s are nothing more than exercises in misogyny

that have no interest in the question of female pleasure.³⁰ Indeed, it is possible, as Laurence O'Toole and others have pointed out, to read *Deep Throat's* narrative as predominantly organized around the question of "female pleasure: the getting of it, the enjoying of it" (74). At the time of its release (1972), the sexual revolution was in full swing and many hard core films began to problematize the question of how to attain better sex. *Deep Throat*, as a typical film of its era (and the first to show the "money shot" on a big screen), thus participates in the discourse around the obtaining of better sex, specifically engaging with the question of female sexual pleasure: "The 'problem' of female sexual pleasure is central to *Deep Throat* and many other porn movies of its era. A problem in terms of the dramatic structure that is in need of fixing, but also a problem in terms of the search for some kind of visible sign of a solution" (O'Toole, 74). The visible solution that *Deep Throat* was the first feature-length pornographic film to offer is the "money shot" or the displaying of male ejaculation as the narrative conclusion to a sex number. Further, *Deep Throat* and other hard core films of the 1970s also insist "that this visual confession of a solitary male 'truth' coincides

³⁰ See, for example: Dworkin, Dworkin and MacKinnon, MacKinnon and Dworkin, and the essays in Lederer.

with the orgasmic bliss of the female" (L. Williams, 101), thus reinforcing the notion of male and female sexual pleasure as complementary.

It is the money shot as "solution" to the question of sexual pleasure that leads to *Deep Throat's* central (and for many feminists problematic) plot motive: the locating of the central female protagonist's (played by Linda Lovelace) clitoris in her throat. The plot proper begins with Linda's complaining to a friend that she doesn't enjoy sex, experiencing only a "tingling" when what she had expected from sex was "bombs bursting in air." In an attempt to help her, Linda's friend invites a number of men to their apartment and a long number³¹ of Linda's having sex with several men follows.³² None, however, are able to help her achieve the orgasm she is seeking, so she finally visits a doctor (played by Harry Reems). The doctor discovers that Linda's inability to achieve sexual satisfaction results from the fact that her clitoris is located in her throat. The

³¹ For a discussion of sexual "numbers" in porn films as similar to numbers in a musical and the way sexual numbers function generically, see Linda Williams (130-34).

³² It is also significant to note here that this scene contains no "money" shot, but focuses rather on the "meat" shot of early stag films. A "meat" shot is a "close-up of penetration that shows that hard-core sexual activity is taking place" (L. Williams, 72) and constituted the narrative closure of a sex number in the stag film. Feature-length hard core films of the seventies, however, shifted to using the "money" shot instead of the "meat" shot to signify the end to a sex number and to signify that satisfaction had occurred (for more on the difference between "meat" and "money" shots, see L. Williams, 72-74). *Deep Throat* does not contain any "money" shots until Linda has achieved her goal of sexual satisfaction.

solution? Linda must learn how to perform “deep throat,” a certain technique in performing fellatio, which the doctor teaches her. Overwhelmed with the feeling of being satisfied for the first time in her life, Linda proclaims that she wants nothing more than to marry the doctor and become his “slave.” Instead, however, he makes a sex therapist of her and sends her out to “treat” a series of men with various sex problems. The film ends with Linda’s planning to marry Wilbur, who has a thirteen-inch penis, thus making him the man of her dreams.

While *Deep Throat*, through its concern with the location of Linda’s clitoris, does attempt to argue for a notion of women’s pleasure as distinct from that of men’s, it ultimately fails in its quest as the film is unable to imagine a pleasure located outside phallic *jouissance*. Indeed, it is precisely *Deep Throat*’s obsession with the clitoris and its assumption that the act of fellatio will be what it takes to satisfy Linda (solely through clitoral contact) that demonstrates the assimilation of Linda’s pleasure into a phallic sexual economy, since, as Lacan has noted, the locating of “*jouissance* for the woman in the clitoris [thus raises] it to the function of the phallus” (E, 282). Following Lacan, we can see that *Deep Throat*’s obsessive focus on the clitoral pleasures of Linda causes her to remain trapped in the phallic stage and thus demonstrates the film’s inability to resolve “the

contradiction between clitoral pleasure and the male inability to imagine female pleasure outside a phallic regime" (McClintock, 120-21).

In other words, it is the positing of fellatio as the solution to the incompatibility of masculine and feminine *jouissances* that most clearly demonstrates the failure of the sexual relationship, despite the film's attempt to convince us that the sexual relationship does exist. Again, I turn to Lacan, who notes in *Encore*: "what is known as sexual jouissance is marked and dominated by the impossibility of establishing as such, anywhere in the enunciable, the sole One that interests us, the One of the relation 'sexual relationship' " (S20, 6-7). By relying solely on the money shot, "the most blatantly phallic of all hard-core film representations" (L. Williams, 95), to depict the *jouissance* of both Linda and her partners, *Deep Throat* thus attempts to establish the "One" that Lacan claims is impossible. The establishment of the sexual relationship fails through its reliance on phallic *jouissance* because "Phallic jouissance is the obstacle owing to which man does not come . . . to enjoy woman's body, precisely because what he enjoys is the jouissance of the organ" (S20, 7). The money shot can thus be seen as reinforcing Lacan's claim that phallic *jouissance* causes the man to enjoy only the *jouissance* of the organ and not the woman's body as the man must withdraw from the woman in order for the audience to see his ejaculation take place. In this

way, the money shot, rather than establishing a sexual relationship between the performers, instead “substitutes for the relation between the actors the more solitary (and literally disconnected) visual pleasure of the male performer and the male viewer” (L. Williams, 101).

To conclude my discussion of *Deep Throat*, I return to the question of the confusion of the penis for the phallus, which is also demonstrated through the film’s reliance on the money shot. This reliance on the money shot leads the film, despite all of its talk about the clitoris to “visually fetishize the penis” (L. Williams, 112), and to imply that the penis *is* the phallus. Even Linda’s first orgasm, during her session with the doctor, is portrayed as a montage of phallic symbols (bombs bursting, fireworks, and firing missiles). Nonetheless, the film is not without its anxieties regarding male potency, as is shown through the doctor’s predicament: near the end of the film, the doctor, who has been providing “therapy” to both Linda and his nurse throughout the film, ends up in bed with a bandage around his flaccid penis, unable to keep up with Linda’s demands for more “deep throat.” As Linda Williams points out, this incident invokes the “specter of the insatiable woman” (111), whose *jouissance* cannot be satisfied by a mere penis.

In this way, the film acknowledges Lacan's notion of the incompatibility of men and women in sexual relations. In *Encore*, he turns to the story of Achilles and the tortoise to demonstrate this claim:

Achilles and the tortoise, such is the schema of coming for one pole of sexed beings. When Achilles has taken his step, gotten it on with Briseis, the latter, like the tortoise, has advanced a bit, because she is "not whole," not wholly his. Some remains. And Achilles must take a second step, and so on and so forth . . . It is quite clear that Achilles can only pass the tortoise—he cannot catch up with it (S20, 8).

Harry Reems, lying in bed with a bandage around his penis, can thus be seen as Achilles, who is unable to catch up with the tortoise of female desire, as depicted through Linda's insatiable need for more and more "deep throat." The paradox of *Deep Throat* thus lies in the manner in which it acknowledges the inadequacy of phallic *jouissance* for women, while simultaneously disavowing this inadequacy through its final solution to Linda's problem. As pointed out earlier, the film ends with Linda's planning to marry Wilbur, the man of her dreams with a thirteen-inch penis. It is thus the introduction of a "bigger, better penis" (L. Williams, 111) that solves the problem of Linda's insatiable desire, thereby reinforcing the conflation of the penis with the phallus. Wilbur, it seems, unlike Achilles, is able to catch up to the tortoise with the help of his superior member.

The problem with *Deep Throat*, then, lies less with the questions the film poses, but with the solution it offers insofar as the film is ultimately unable to imagine female sexual pleasure outside of Freud's "economy of the one" (see L. Williams, 133). It is precisely this phallic economy and the confusion of the penis for the phallus that *Lust* exposes as incapable of fulfilling or depicting female sexuality, and her text consistently works to undermine such notions in its portrayal of female sexuality.

Conclusion: A Pessimistic Pornography Without Pleasure

Just as Jelinek's text can be seen as in dialogue with the type of pornography exemplified by Sade's work, so too can it be viewed as engaging critically with the type of mass cultural pornography represented by *Deep Throat* and other filmic pornography. As Günter Höfler has noted, "Sinnliches Begehren wird nämlich . . . bei Jelinek als immer schon von Bildern beherrscht angezeigt, der Mensch ist bei ihr absolut von Medienphantasmagorien und Trivialmythen abhängig, deren Dominanz in der Pornographie am deutlichsten zutage tritt" ("Sexualität," 106-07).³³ To cite just two examples of the way in which

³³ "Sexual desire is always portrayed by Jelinek as determined by images; her characters are entirely dependent upon media fantasies and mythologies, whose dominance can currently most clearly be found in pornography" (my translation).

pornographic and other images from mass culture determine the sexuality of Jelinek's figures in *Lust*:

In saftiger Ruhe schiebt der Mann das Bild seiner Frau in den Schlitz des Betrachters. Schauernd greifen die Wälder nach dem Haus, in dem die Bilder der Videos, eine bepackte Herde von Zeugungsfähigen, vor den Augenzeugen über den Schirm ziehen. An ihren Fesseln werden die Frauen ins Bild gezerrt, nur ihre tägl. Gewohnheiten sind erbarmungsloser (L, 53).³⁴

Doch jetzt schon schreit diese Frau nach dem Götterbild Michael, der ihr auf Fotos, die ihm ähnlich sehen, verheißen worden ist . . . Wie ist es mit den Damen? Das unvergängliche Abbild ihrer Vergnügungen gilt ihnen mehr als das vergängliche Original, das sie früher oder später der Konkurrenz des Lebens aussetzen müssen . . . Jedes Bild ruht besser im Gedächtnis als das Leben selbst (L, 118-19).³⁵

What these two examples demonstrate is the way in which the desires produced by mass-produced images differ according to gender: while the men in *Lust* receive their image of woman as sexual object from pornography, the women

³⁴ "Juicily, calmly, the man inserts the image of his wife into the slit of the viewer. With a shudder the woods reach out for the house, where the video images, a herd of creatures capable of reproduction, are moving across the screen in front of eye witnesses. The women are dragged into the pictures by their fetters. Only their daily routine is more merciless" (*Lust*, 45).

³⁵ "But the woman is crying out loud for her idol Michael, long promised her in photographs that look like him . . . You know how it is with the ladies: the immortal image of their pleasures means more to them than the mortal original, which sooner or later they will have to expose to life. To competition . . . Every one of these images is better accommodated in memory than life itself" (*Lust*, 98-99).

view the men as the idealized image of men found in romance novels and magazines.

It is, however, in the sex scenes in *Lust* where we can most clearly see the way in which Jelinek's text both resembles and differs from filmic pornography. While she does take over certain pornographic conventions such as the cliché of the man as constantly potent and ready for sex, describing Hermann as "Der Mann ist immer bereit und freut sich auf sich" (*L*, 16),³⁶ her text does not participate in hard core's main organizing fantasy of the "assurance that it is witnessing not the voluntary performance of female pleasure, but its involuntary confession" (L. Williams, 50). Rather, female pleasure is depicted as a void, as something that does not exist; instead of the compatibility of male and female pleasure that *Deep Throat* offers, *Lust* contains sex scene after sex scene in which phallic *jouissance* is shown as incapable of satisfying women. One of the sex scenes between Gerti and Michael demonstrates this incompatibility quite clearly:

Gerti spricht von ihren Gefühlen und bis wohin sie ihnen folgen möchte. Michael staunt, langsam erwachen, was für eine Hand ihm da ins Geschoß gefallen ist. Sofort möchte er wieder herumknallen, schiebt die Hand weg und zeigt seinen

³⁶ "The Man is perpetually ready to go. Greedy for his pleasure. To pleasure himself" (*Lust*, 15).

fesselnden Riemen. Er zerrt die Frau an den Haaren herüber, bis sie wie ein Vogel darüber flattert. Gleich will die Frau, aus der Geschlechtsnarkose erwacht, wieder zügellos den Mund zum Sprechen benutzen. Sie muß sich statt dessen aufsperrn und den Schwanz Michaels in das Kabinett ihres Mundes einlassen (*L*, 120).³⁷

What we see in this passage is how Michael's *jouissance* is a phallic one insofar as he relates to Gerti as that which Lacan "refers to as object *a*, that partial object that serves as the cause of desire: our partner's voice or gaze that turns us on, or that body part [in this case, Gerti's mouth—BB] we enjoy in our partner" (Fink, *Letter*, 159). Gerti, on the other hand, attempts to speak, which is simultaneously an attempt to achieve feminine or Other *jouissance*, as the "satisfaction of speech" (*S20*, 64) is part of the ineffable feminine *jouissance* that is opposed to phallic *jouissance*. Lacan goes so far as to claim that "to speak of love is in itself a *jouissance*" (*S20*, 83); it is precisely this feminine *jouissance* of speech, however, that Gerti is denied through Michael's act of inserting his penis into her mouth at precisely the moment she wishes to speak. We can thus see how in *Lust*

³⁷ "Gerti speaks of her feelings and how far she'd like to follow them. Michael gapes as he realizes what he's landed. Time to get out the rod and go fishing again. He hauls the woman round by the hair till she's flapping above him like a great bird. The woman, awoken from the sedation of sex, is about to use her gob for uninhibited talking, but while it's open Michael can think of better things to do with it and shoves his corn-cob in, amazing" (*Lust*, 99-100).

the act of fellatio functions, in contradistinction to *Deep Throat*, to suppress rather than enhance woman's pleasure.

This refusal to portray feminine pleasure or *jouissance*, along with the unmasking of pornography's failure in regard to female sexuality, is what makes Jelinek's text pessimistic pornography, at least in regard to its views on female sexuality for what her text demonstrates is that it is women's sexuality that pornography as a genre does not symbolize. What *Lust* instead portrays is the material effects of the inability to symbolize women and their pleasure.

CHAPTER 3

PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A (NOT-SO-)YOUNG PERVERT: PIANOS, PERVERSION, SUBLIMATION, AND THE KÜNSTERLERROMAN IN *DIE KLAVIERSPIELERIN*

Sie hat Kenntniss von der Sonatenform und dem Fugenbau. Sie ist Lehrerin in diesem Fach. Und doch: ihre Pfoten zucken dem letzten, endgültigen Gehorsam sehnsüchtig entgegen.

(Elfriede Jelinek, *Die Klavierspielerin*, 106)¹

Introduction

Die Klavierspielerin (English title: *The Piano Teacher* [1983]) relates the story of Erika Kohut, piano teacher at the Vienna Conservatory, her development as a (perverse) sexual subject, and her ultimate failure to achieve a stable sexual position. In Lacanian terms, a sexual position as “male” or “female” is not related to biology or identification with the mother or father (as it was for Freud); rather, it is the “relationship with the phallus which determines sexual position” (Evans, *Dictionary*, 178). Developing a stable sexual identity is difficult for both sexes, but especially so for women, since, as Lacan notes, women face a “detour” (identification with the father) in their path through the Oedipal complex (see

¹ “She knows about the form of the sonata and the structure of the fugue. That’s her job, she’s a teacher. And yet, her paws ardently grope toward ultimate obedience” (*PT*, 102).

Evans, *Dictionary*, 179, and Lacan, S3, especially chapters XII and XIII on the hysteric's question. I discuss this in more detail below in this chapter).

In other words, for Lacan, as for Jelinek, becoming a "woman" is no easy process. Indeed, *Die Klavierspielerin* (and the later novel *Lust*; see chapter 2 for more on *Lust*) can in some respects be read, as Allyson Fiddler has noted, as a "putting-into-practice or fictional working-through and problematising of psychoanalytic theories of gender and subjectivity" (*Rewriting*, 160). That *Die Klavierspielerin* dramatizes Erika's failure to achieve a stable "feminine" sexual identity has been frequently commented upon.²

What has been less commented on in Jelinek scholarship, however, is Erika's training as a pianist as a possible causal factor of her perversions and lack of sexual identity.³ Indeed, at first glance, the fact that Erika is a pianist seems to be unrelated to her lack of a stable sexual position and her perverse sexuality, which manifests itself in various ways, including voyeurism, fetishism, and masochism. Discussions of the novel have instead tended to focus on the mother-

² See Mahler-Bungers' article, where she writes: "Es gelingt ihr [Erika] nicht, eine weibliche Identität zu finden" (80) ["Erika is unable to achieve a feminine identity" (my translation)]. Others who also make this point are Hedwig Appelt (118-21), Allyson Fiddler (*Rewriting*, 135ff) and Marlies Janz (72ff).

³ For an exception, see Appelt (119-20).

daughter relationship as the primary determinant of Erika's perversion and unstable sexual position.⁴

In this chapter, however, I argue that Erika's training as a pianist, the piano's role as a "symbol of social behavior and social distinction" (Parakilas, 5), the history of its central role in the education of girls, and the use of pianos to represent female sexuality in literature are all inseparable from Jelinek's

⁴ See, for example: Critchfield, Fiddler, *Rewriting*, Janz, Kecht, Klages, Kosta, "Inscribing," and Kosta, "Muttertrauma"). Many of these discussions employ psychoanalytic feminist object relations theory (for example, the work of Jessica Benjamin and Nancy Chodorow) as their theoretical framework and thus focus on the pre-Oedipal mother-daughter bond and Jelinek's critique of the institution of motherhood. Thus Barbara Kosta concludes that "Jelinek breaks into the sacrosanct territory of motherhood and critically exposes its cultural standing" (Kosta, "Inscribing," 231) While I agree with many of the conclusions regarding motherhood that Kosta and others employing a feminist object relations framework draw, I find a Freudian/Lacanian framework ultimately more convincing as Jelinek's figures can be viewed as also "exposing the fiction of subjectivity upon which a patriarchal social order is founded," as Richard Allen (50) describes Lacan's project. Conversely, feminist object relations relies on a conception of the subject as one possessing a coherent ego, a fiction that Jelinek (like Lacan) rejects.

For discussions of *Die Klavierspielerin* from a Freudian/Lacanian perspective, see: Appelt, Lücke, Wright, "Aesthetics," and Wright, *Speaking Desires*. Also, Mahler-Bungers offers a reading of *Die Klavierspielerin* that views mourning for the lost father as one of the central structuring elements of the text, while Jelinek offers an autobiographical psychoanalytic reading in her interview with Adolf-Ernst Meyer (Jelinek, Heinrich, and Meyer, 51-52). In addition to psychoanalysis, other perspectives used by scholars to read *Die Klavierspielerin* include film theory (Wilke and Maltzan); Marxist (DeMeritt and Young); Deleuzian (Berka, Fiddler, *Rewriting*, and Kosta, "Inscribing"); autobiographical (Barthofer, Critchfield, Meyer, and Swales); and as demythification in the Barthian sense (Brunner, Doll, Hanssen, and Janz). Another popular approach is the discussion of musical discourse and intertexts (see, for example, Doll, 86-99; Janz, and Solibakke). Ma, Riemer, Wigmore ("Sex"), and Wood also discuss the role of music in Haneke's film. For discussions of the role of music in general in Jelinek's works, see Fuchs and Janke, "Elfriede Jelinek und die Musik."

representation of Erika as a perverse subject and her failure to achieve a stable sexual position.

My analysis of the relationship between Erika's perversion and her piano playing thus also makes it possible to read *Die Klavierspielerin* in generic terms as an anti-*Künstlerroman*. For if Erika's story is on the one hand the story of the "failings of feminine desire," it is simultaneously the story of her inability to sublimate, to use the piano as an "artistic outlet beyond perverted obsessions and behaviors" (Sjöholm, 151). In this way, Erika's story deviates from the traditional *Künstlerroman* by demonstrating the similarities (and differences) between the artist and the pervert.

By addressing the role of the piano and the generic aspects of *Die Klavierspielerin*, this chapter fills an important gap in Jelinek scholarship. To my knowledge, the only scholar to discuss the piano's role in Erika's development as a perverse subject is Hedwig Appelt, and her treatment of the subject is relatively short (118-21). Similarly, while many scholars (see footnote 4 in this chapter) stress the importance of a Freudian or Lacanian psychoanalytic reading for Jelinek's text, few engage Lacan's work in a significant way (for exceptions, see

Appelt, Lücke, Wright, "Aesthetics," and Wright, *Speaking Desires*)⁵ and none discuss the structural similarities between perversion and sublimation. Finally, while a few scholars (Bandhauer, Fiddler, *Rewriting*, Hanssen, and Wigmore, "Power") mention *Die Klavierspielerin's* status as an anti-Künstler or – *Bildungsroman*, no scholar offers a sustained reading of the text in generic terms. My hope for this chapter is that it advances scholarly discussion of *Die Klavierspielerin* by tying together the seemingly disparate threads of the novel.

The Androgynous Piano: Women's Piano Playing as Feminine and Masculine

Piano historians date the invention of the pianoforte to 1700, with the first such instrument built in Italy by Bartolomeo Cristofori. Scholarship on the history of the piano generally falls into three areas: the technological development of pianos; performance, pedagogy, and repertoire; and the social history of the piano.⁶ In this section, I will focus on social histories of the piano,

⁵ For this reason I have found the scholarship on Michael Haneke's film adaptation of Jelinek's novel generally more useful than the scholarship on the novel. Scholars whose work has been particularly influential in my reading of *Die Klavierspielerin* are Champagne, Restuccia, Wyatt, and Wrye. None of these scholars address the question of sublimation, however, and only one briefly discusses Erika's role as a pianist (see Champagne), while another notes the film's connection to an "ever-expanding cycle of piano films," that use the piano "as a locus of the thwarted, muted, and repressed desires of female pianists" (Ma, 297).

⁶ For the history of the technological development of the piano, see the following: Cole, Dolge, Ehrlich, Good, Harding, Parakilas (especially chapter two), Pollens, Rowland (chapters 1-3), and J.-P. Williams.

in particular the following four elements that that social history emphasizes: music as a female accomplishment and its role in the domestic life of the bourgeois family; the importance of piano playing in the development of a certain type of middle-class femininity; the piano's role in courtship (focusing especially on upward mobility through marriage and female visual display); and the "masculine" nature of female concert pianists (e.g., those whose playing took place in the public sphere versus the private). Another important topic for the social history of the piano and one that this chapter shall only briefly touch on is the history of visual and literary representations of the piano and its (female) players.⁷

For histories of performance, pedagogy, and repertoire, see: Citron, Dahlhaus, Gramit, Czerny, Grover, Letňanová, Reich, "European Composers," Rowland (chapters 7-12), Todd (chapters 2-11), and Weitzmann. Note that this list focuses primarily on the nineteenth-century as that is the century during which the piano, became, in Leon Plantinga's term "the instrument of the century" (1, Laura Vorachek also borrows this term for the title of her article on pianos and female sexuality). For a feminist perspective on music pedagogy in Germany, see Rieger .

The literature on the social history of the piano and/or music is vast, but some of the more important sources are: Burgan, Davis, Ellis, Gramit, *Cultivating Music*, Green, Hanson, Hildebrandt, Hoffmann, Laing, Leppert, *Music and Image*, Leppert, *Sight of Sound*, Loesser, Parakilas, Post, Ritchie, Sabin, Smith, Solie, and Vorachek.

⁷ See, for example: Mary Burgan, whose article on women and music in nineteenth-century fiction is still considered the standard work on the topic of literary representations ; and Parakilas (75-80). Other scholars who investigate literary, visual, and filmic representations of female piano players include Laing, who discusses the representation of female musicians in the "woman's film" (chapter 4), Leppert, whose work focuses almost exclusively on visual representation (*Music and Image*; and *Sight of Sound*), Sabin (chapter 3), and Vorachek .

While pianos were still not widespread by the late 1760s, piano historians credit the dramatic rise in the popularity of pianos in the years between 1770 and 1830 to Muzio Clementi and his “Piano Revolution” (Ehrlich, 13-20, and Parakilas, 64-109). Clementi, unlike child prodigies such as Mozart, was a virtuoso to whom the public could relate as he demonstrated what James Parakilas terms “what an ordinary mortal could achieve by hard work” (66). He also anticipated the split between public and private piano-playing that would become especially important for female players (see below) and significantly influenced the expansion of the market for pianos (Parakilas, 66-70).

One of the earliest histories of the piano was published in 1897 by C. F. Weitzmann. This history focused primarily on the public nature of pianos and piano-playing, looking at the instrument’s development and different styles of piano-playing, primarily focusing on male composers and virtuosos (Beethoven, Chopin, Liszt, R. Schumann, etc.; see Weitzmann). Rosamund Harding’s detailed history of the piano and its technical development, published in 1933, similarly had little to say about the piano’s domestic nature and its social history. These piano histories tended, as Cyril Ehrlich notes, “to distort our view of the piano’s development . . . In its golden age [the piano] became the centre of domestic entertainment, of musical education and achievement and, not least, a coveted

possession, symbolic of social emulation and achievement" (9). This limited view of the piano's history began to change, however, with Max Weber's short work "The History of the Piano," first published in 1921, and in which Weber describes the piano's "musical nature" as that of a "bourgeois domestic instrument" (*Selections*, 382).⁸

The piano's "musical nature" was not only class-based, however, but was also gendered female. The first piano historian to systematically look at the relationship between women and pianos was Arthur Loesser, who notes in his *Men, Women and Pianos*, published in 1954, that "the history of the pianoforte and the history of the social status of women can be interpreted in terms of one another" (267). Loesser's work formed the basis for future social histories of the piano focusing on what Richard Leppert terms the "multiple and complex" connections between women and the piano in the nineteenth century (*Sight of Sound*, 119), connections that feminist scholars in particular have emphasized and elaborated.

It was feminine piano playing that led to the piano's rise in prominence in late eighteenth-century musical life, as playing the piano became a necessary

⁸ Similarly, Weber describes the piano's "peculiar nature" as a "middle-class home instrument" *The Rational and Social Foundations of Music*, written between 1910-11 and published in 1921 (*Music*, 124).

accomplishment for white, middle- and upper-class women in Western Europe. Women's piano playing served a variety of purposes from attracting a husband and demonstrating economic status, to functioning as a site onto which the desire of middle-class women could be displaced (cf. Vorachek, 27ff; also see Solie, chapter three, " 'Girling' at the Parlor Piano," for a useful overview of the various purposes the piano served in women's lives).⁹

For the middle-class, learning to play the piano became an essential skill for girls, as it was believed to "provide discipline, diversion, and a skill that would help her attract a husband" (Vorachek, 26; see also Ritchie, chapter one, "Discipline, Pleasure, and Practice," for more on the role of discipline in piano playing). Further, the piano was viewed as an appropriate instrument for women (unlike, say, the flute or cello) due to its association with the "motionlessness" considered to be the proper position for women's bodies (Hoffmann, 42-43, and Sabin, 31-35). As Arthur Loesser points out:

A girl could finger a . . . pianoforte with her feet demurely together, her face arranged into a polite smile . . . and be an outward symbol of her family's ability to pay for her education and decorativeness, of its striving for culture and the graces of life, of its pride in the fact that she did not have to work and that she did not "run after" men (65).

⁹ For further details, see Hoffmann, Sabin, Parakilas, and Vorachek.

Playing the piano was thus a way of signaling a certain type of middle-class femininity, one that demonstrated the family's wealth and its daughters' virtuousness. This display could also lead to social mobility as young women's piano-playing skills could be used to improve her status by marrying well (Burgan, 56, and 60-61, Parakilas, 178, and Sabin, 43-45).

The quest for upward mobility through marriage meant that women's accomplishment at music became an important part of courtship, a time during which a young woman was "simultaneously and continuously under the scrutiny of both suitor and parents" (Parakilas, 79). The piano served a mediating function between the worlds of suitor and parents since the "domestic piano, although it was one of her means of seduction, was firmly planted in the center of her parents' house or some other home where members of the older generation could supervise her seducing" (Parakilas, 79; see also Sabin, Solie, and Vorachek).

In the safety of the salon, young women could flirt without danger while playing the piano. One scholar of the history of women and pianos, Stefana Sabin, describes the interaction of male suitor and female piano player as the "primal situation" of bourgeois heterosexual interaction, one with the ultimate goal of finding a husband for the daughter of the family. As she notes:

Eine junge Frau am Klavier, den Blick auf den Tasten gesenkt
. . . daneben stehend ein junger Mann, der sie bewundernd
anschaute . . . – das war sozusagen die bürgerliche Ursituation
der Geschlechterinteraktion. Der Salon war ein geschützter
Ort, in dem die höhere Tochter – und ihre Eltern – sich nach
einem Ehemann umsehen konnten (43).¹⁰

Importantly, it is the piano that is the symbol of both the daughter's desire for courtship and the quest for a husband.

Other scholars stress the importance of Jane Austen's work for representing the role of the piano in courtship (see, for example, Burgan, Salwey, and Vorachek; also see Leppert, *Music and Image*, for a discussion of the importance of the representation of female piano players and their male suitors in eighteenth-century painting). Yet another piano historian, James Parakilas, cites a scene from Jane Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice* as an example of just such supervised seduction. During a visit to Lady Catherine's home, Elizabeth plays the piano for Darcy and his relative Colonel Fitzwilliam; as her playing progresses, she and Darcy become so engrossed in conversation that Elizabeth ceases to play, with the following result: "Here they were interrupted by Lady

¹⁰ "A young woman sitting at the piano, with her gaze directed to the keyboard and a young man by her side, gazing admiringly at her . . . – that was the primal situation for bourgeois sexual interactions. The salon was a protected place, where middle-class daughters – and their parents – could search for a husband" (my translation).

Catherine, who called out to know what they were talking of. Elizabeth immediately began playing again" (Austen, 157).

Despite (or perhaps because of) such supervision, the piano became, as Laura Vorachek notes, "a sexual symbol at almost the same moment it became a symbol of middle-class domesticity" (31). What piano playing enabled for middle-class women was an acceptable means of visual display in the privacy of their homes, as well as a suitable way for their suitors to indulge in voyeurism, something that is also made clear in the Austen scene cited above:

[Darcy] walked away from [Lady Catherine], and moving with his usual deliberation towards the piano forte, stationed himself so as to command a full view of the fair performer's countenance. Elizabeth saw what he was doing, and at the first convenient pause, turned to him with an arch smile (Austen, 155).

That such visual display and voyeurism were intended outcomes of women's domestic¹¹ piano playing has also been commented on by piano historians who note changes in piano design over the course of the nineteenth century, including pianos decorated with hunting scenes (clearly intended for men), as well as the development of the small, upright piano, which enabled the

¹¹ The expected outcomes and connotations of visual display for female professional pianists differed significantly from those associated with domestic playing, as we shall see below.

performer to be seen more easily than the tall upright did (see Leppert, *Sight of Sound*, 119-51, and Vorachek, 31).

There was, however, a contradiction at the heart of the history of femininity and piano playing. For if the piano in the nineteenth century was a symbol of middle-class femininity, it simultaneously represented gender ambiguity through its connection to the public sphere and virtuosi, as many scholars have argued. While the majority of amateur pianists were female and confined to the private sphere of domesticity, the piano was, as Laura Vorachek and other scholars have argued, “also a public instrument during the nineteenth century, most notably used by the increasingly popular international concert virtuosi” (Vorachek, 29; see also Ellis, Green, Parakilas, and Post).

While these public virtuosi were (mostly) male,¹² changes in pedagogical practice over the course of the nineteenth century encouraged young girls learning the piano to nonetheless identify with them, as James Parakilas has pointed out. Parakilas uses the term “domestic virtuosi” to refer to female amateurs for whom the amount of practice time recommended matched that undertaken by male pupils preparing for a public career as a pianist. In the late

¹² Famous exceptions to the rule of male virtuosi were Marie Pleyel, Sophie Bohrer, and, of course, Clara Schumann. For more on both female professional pianists and Clara Schumann, see below.

eighteenth century, piano teachers recommended a few hours per week of practice time for those learning the piano for pleasure, as opposed to three to four hours per day (in addition to a daily one hour lesson) for those preparing to be professional pianists. Over the course of the nineteenth century, however, this distinction all but disappeared (Parakilas, 115), thereby creating gender instability by teaching girls to be virtuosos, despite their being simultaneously discouraging them from becoming so.

This discouragement was given by the same people encouraging girls to spend long hours practicing, namely piano masters themselves (Parakilas, 119-22). Parakilas uses Carl Czerny¹³ as an example of such a piano master, pointing out that Czerny, in his *Letters to a Young Lady, on the Art of Playing the Pianoforte* writes: "Many pupils . . . who ought to practise for years *studies* and easy and appropriate pieces, have the presumption to attempt *Hummel's concertos* or *Thalberg's fantasias!*" (Czerny, 48; see also Parakilas, 119-21). As Parakilas goes on to state, Czerny's concern here is to uphold "artificial gender distinctions to maintain the power of men in a field that otherwise would have soon been

¹³ Czerny (1791-1857) was an Austrian piano player and teacher. A child prodigy, he studied with Clementi and Beethoven and in turn, he became Liszt's teacher. He composed over 1,000 pieces, but is best known for his etudes and drill pieces, which are still used for piano teaching. For more on Czerny, see (Gramit, *Czerny*, and Wehmeyer).

dominated by women” (Parakilas, 121).¹⁴ In other words, while it may have been in Czerny’s and other piano teachers’ (financial) interest to encourage girls to undertake a time-consuming course of lessons and practice, their need to maintain male superiority led them to attempt to prevent women and girls from becoming *too* skilled or encroaching on male turf by playing virtuosic pieces.

As scholars such as Mary Burgan and Katherine Ellis have made clear, one result of the above was that the female pianist was viewed by her (male) critics as ambiguously gendered should she gain too much skill (see Burgan, Ellis, Green, and Post). Burgan discusses the ways Victorian literature depicts female pianists with a high skill level, noting that “those women who are depicted as conscious artists tend to be ‘performers’ through and through, seeking an unseemly domination over their masculine audiences” (Burgan, 63). Further, female concert pianists were evaluated according to notions of what constituted “proper” feminine display and skill and were often judged harshly if their playing was too “masculine” due to its disruption of gendered mores. As Katharine Ellis explains, “a woman pianist performing operatic fantasies and

¹⁴ It should be noted here that there were other reasons for encouraging girls to spend long hours practicing, one of the most popular being the belief that such practice would result in moral discipline. See below in this chapter for more on the role of discipline in women’s piano playing.

other virtuoso pieces in Paris's concert halls provided a direct challenge to such behavioral codes by making a spectacle of herself . . . any public performance by a woman raised questions about her personal conduct" (361).

As noted above, feminine visual display as part of a courtship ritual was an accepted part of domestic piano playing, while the display associated with a female professional pianist was viewed more skeptically. As Lucy Green has argued, female performers are always "to some extent close to being thrown into a world of feminine sexual display," resulting in an affirmative of the female performer's "discursive position as feminine" (26). In other words, what female performers (whether in the domestic or public realms) cannot escape is their femaleness. The ways in which that femininity is interpreted vary, however, according to whether we are viewing a private or public performance, and whether an instrument is involved in the performance.

Thus Green argues that female singers are received as "affirmative of femininity" (28), whereas the presence of an instrument means that women instrumental soloists are viewed as interrupting femininity (52ff).¹⁵ As she goes on to point out:

¹⁵ Note, however, that Green views women pianists in domestic settings as affirming their femininity: "in an early nineteenth-century domestic setting . . . a woman pianist would

the act of instrumental performance by women threatens a disintegration of some of the fundamental characteristics of femininity . . . The display she enacts, rather than that of a playful or alluring singing bird, is that of a more controlled and rational being who appears capable of using technology to take control over a situation . . . women's instrumental performance threatens to break out of patriarchal definitions and offer a femininity which controls, a femininity which alienates itself in an object and impinges on the world (54).

The result of this interruption of femininity is that the women enacting it are viewed as masculine women (see Ellis, 362).¹⁶

Excursus: Clara S.

The most famous female professional pianist of the nineteenth century was, of course, Clara Schumann. In regard to Jelinek, Clara Schumann is also the title character of Jelinek's play *Clara S.* First performed in 1982, *Clara S.* can, in many ways, be viewed as an *étude* for *Die Klavierspielerin*, treating similar themes

have given rise to display-delineations that were to all intents and purposes just as affirmative as those of a woman singer" (52).

¹⁶ Such masculinizing of female musicians was commonplace. For other discussions of the phenomenon, see Jennifer Post, who points out that "Until recently, women involved in public performance were regarded by others and viewed themselves as unique. Their performances were seen as exceptional. In fact, women were sometimes not identified as women" (45). Similarly, Heather Laing's study looks at the treatment of female musicians in classic Hollywood film, and she also finds that "The difficulty of characterizing the female musician, particularly in the face of her performance, therefore often leads to representations that deny the woman as a musician and/or as a 'woman' . . . In *The Great Lie*, renowned concert pianist Sandra (Mary Astor) is characterized as monstrously selfish and unfeminine, devoid of humility, sympathy and, most heinous of all, the maternal instinct" (107).

such as the difficulties faced by women artists, the (over)identification with a parent (in Clara's case, the father; in Erika's, the mother), the "love triangle" (Clara/Schumann/Wieck; Erika/Klemmer/Mother), and the unstable gendering caused by success in the "male" profession of professional pianism.¹⁷ In this section, I will extend the discussion begun above regarding the ambiguous gendering of female professional pianists (including Clara), turning then to Jelinek's portrayal of Clara Schumann in her play, before moving on to a discussion of the piano and sexual difference in *Die Klavierspielerin*.

The gender ambiguity found in portrayals of female professional pianists took place not only in contemporary descriptions of Clara Schumann, but is also present in the scholarship on her life and work. All biographies of Clara Schumann published prior to Nancy Reich's book *Clara Schumann: The Artist and the Woman* (first edition, 1985) were based on one source: Berthold Litzmann's *Clara Schumann: Ein Künstlerleben*, which was authorized by the family and published between 1902 and 1908 (for details on Litzmann's book and his

¹⁷ That Jelinek was also drawing on Clara Schumann's life story when writing *Die Klavierspielerin* seems clear, given the similarities between Wieck's domination of Clara and Mother Kohut's domination of Erika. Jelinek's Clara explicitly links the two: "Meine Intensität als deutsche Pianist kommt ausschließlich aus einer heftigen anfänglichen Kindheitsdissonanz!" ("CS," 93) ["I owe my intensity as a German pianist to violent dissonance in childhood!" (*Clara*, 410)].

sources, see Reich, "Clara Schumann," Reich, *Clara Schumann*, and Reich and Burton).¹⁸ According to Reich, Litzmann's biography and the subsequent scholarship based on it portrayed Clara as

(1) a devoted wife and mother, (2) a "consecrated, loyal priestess," (3) a figure in a great romance with Robert Schumann, or (4) a party to a "passionate friendship" with Brahms (Reich, "Clara Schumann," 252).

At the same time, however, as both Jennifer Caines and Reich have demonstrated, Clara was viewed by contemporaries as an artist who transcended the female roles described by Litzmann.

In her article on representations of Clara in nineteenth-century concert reviews, Caines looks at Eduard Hanslick's review of Clara's Viennese concerts held in 1856. She points out that Hanslick "unquestionably associates Clara with masculinity, rather than femininity," citing several examples from his review (Caines, 40-44). Indeed, Hanslick goes so far as to explicitly compare Clara to other male pianists of the time, declaring her superior: "she rather shames the brilliant virtuosi of our time, by the masculinity of her playing" (Qtd. in Caines, 40). In her feminist biography of Clara, Nancy Reich cites Clara's contemporaries to support her claim that Clara may well have been able to transcend her sex in

¹⁸ For a "post-Reich" biography of Clara Schumann, see Kühn.

some ways: “to male musicians of her own age or older . . . she was a professional colleague above gender” (*Clara Schumann*, 190). She also notes, however, that Clara herself often found her roles as artist and woman conflicting, writing that “Always accepted by her male colleagues as one of them, Clara Schumann nevertheless remained sensitive to prevailing attitudes toward women” (Reich, “Clara Schumann,” 275). Robert Schumann also had, according to Peter Ostwald, a “highly ambivalent attitude toward her femininity” (26)¹⁹

The contrast between Clara Schumann’s status as “honorary man” in her public career and woman in her private life is also explored in Reich’s biography. Raised and educated like a boy by her father, Friedrich Wieck (Caines, 34-35; see also Reich, *Clara Schumann*, 15 and 21), Clara experienced something of a crisis as her marriage to Robert drew near, and Reich notes that Robert began to press her to abandon her role of artist for that of wife, as indicated in his letters to her:

I have just read in your letter, “If I stay in Dresden for a year, I’ll be forgotten as a musician” – Klärchen, you’re not really serious – and if you were forgotten as musician, won’t be loved as a wife? . . . you *should* forget the musician the first year of our marriage; you *should* live for no one but yourself and your house and your husband, and just wait and see how I make you forget the musician – no, the *wife* is more

¹⁹ As evidence of this ambivalence, Ostwald cites the following quote from one of Robert’s letters to Clara: “I often think of you, not as brother [might think] of sister, or as a boy of his girlfriend, but as a pilgrim at a distant shrine” (Qtd. in: Ostwald, 26).

important than the musician, and my fondest wish will have been fulfilled if I can get you to have nothing more to do with the public (Schumann, 2: 246, emphasis in original; see also Reich, *Clara Schumann*, 67-69).

Robert Schumann, it seems, understood that the “feminine” role of wife might well require Clara’s sacrifice of her “masculine” public role.²⁰ It is precisely this tension between Clara’s roles as artist and woman, as well as the myth of Clara created by Litzmann and other biographers that Jelinek’s play addresses.

In her play, Jelinek takes on the gender confusion caused by Clara’s multiple roles, when she has her Clara state:

Wenn sich die Fähigkeiten der Frau über die Norm der Zeit hinaus entwickeln, dann entsteht eine Monstrosität. Sie ist ein Verstoß gegen die Eigentumsrechte dessen, dem sich das Weibstier zur Verfügung zu halten hat. Der Geist der Frau gehört . . . der Erfindung von Neuspeisen und der Abfallentfernung (CS, 118).²¹

Jelinek’s Clara also points out the roles that her father and Robert played in helping to create the “monstrosity” of a female artist: “Mein Vater hat die

²⁰ This tension between a woman artist’s artistic ambitions and love or duty is a common theme in the *Künstlerinroman* and one that Jelinek picks up on in both *Clara S.* and *Die Klavierspielerin*. See Varsamopoulou, Heller, and Huf for more on the *Künstlerinroman*.

²¹ “If a woman’s abilities develop beyond the usual norms, a monstrosity results. It’s an offense against a man’s rights of ownership which any female animal has to obey. A woman’s mind . . . should be permanently focused on creating new dishes and disposing of human waste” (*Clara*, 425).

männliche Vorstellung vom Genie in mich hineingehämmert und mein Gatte hat sie mir gleich wieder weggenommen, weil er sie für sich selber gebraucht hat" (CS, 82).²² She blames her marriage to Robert for her failure to achieve greatness as a composer: "Ich bin im sakralen Raum deiner Genialität geopfert worden, Robert! . . . Diese grausige Ehe mit dir! Immer wenn ich zum Klavier und an eine Komposition schritt, fand ich den Apparat bereits besetzt: von dir!" (CS, 117).²³

Jelinek's Robert agrees with Clara in finding her status as a "monstrosity" offensive, and describes her as incompetent as a composer as well as sexually unattractive:

[es] fiel mir plötzlich ein, wie unfähig meine Frau Clara für das selbstständige Komponieren mit Tönen immer gewesen ist. Für das Magische der Kunst . . . Der einzige Effekt ihrer Kompositionsversuche was das sukzessive Absterben ihres weiblichen Geschlechtsreizes für mich (CS, 115).²⁴

What these excerpts from *Clara S.* demonstrate is the way that Jelinek shows us through the figures of Clara and Robert how there is a "double standard"

²² "My father dinned the male idea of genius into me, but my husband snatched it back because he wanted it all for himself" (*Clara*, 405).

²³ "Sadly, Robert, I was a sacrificial victim of your genius! . . . It was such a nightmare being married to you! Every time I went to the piano to compose something, the piano-seat would be already occupied—by you!" (*Clara*, 424).

²⁴ ". . . it suddenly struck me how incapable my wife Clara has always been of composing her own music. Of any artistic magic, in fact . . . The only thing her attempts at composition achieved was a gradual weakening of her sexual attractiveness for me" (*Clara*, 423).

applied to women artists, as Caitlin Gannon has noted: “Whereas a man can write poetry or compose music and win the affection of a woman through his art, a woman attempting the same is viewed as threatening and unfeminine. Her production of art negatively affects her attractiveness” (150).²⁵ In this respect, Jelinek’s Clara figure foreshadows the dilemma of the female pianist that she develops more fully in *Die Klavierspielerin*, to which I now turn.

The Piano and Erika’s Sexual Position in Die Klavierspielerin

In this section, I look at how Jelinek’s novel works with the traditions of both feminine display and the masculine nature of professional pianists, thus illustrating the same contradictions at the heart of piano playing that the social history of the piano and *Clara S* demonstrate.

The format of this section follows the format of the “Androgynous Piano” section above. I will thus look at the four elements from the piano’s social history outlined in that section (music as a female accomplishment and its role in the domestic life of the bourgeois family; the importance of piano playing in the development of a certain type of middle-class femininity; the piano’s role in courtship; and the “masculine” nature of female concert pianists) as they

²⁵ For other readings of *Clara S*, see Erdle, Heinemann, Janz (53-62), and Thomas, “Subjectivity.”

influence Jelinek's text, concluding with a discussion of Jelinek's portrayal of a pianist lacking a stable sexual position. I also argue that Jelinek's portrayal of this ambivalently gendered history can be related to Lacan's claim that becoming a woman is always precarious and incomplete.

Jelinek's text is, obviously, a novel and not a historical text. Nonetheless, it is clear that the history of ambiguously gendered pianos and pianists is reflected in Jelinek's history of one piano player, albeit always in an ironic fashion. Turning first to the domestic life of the bourgeois family, the reader sees Jelinek's trademark use of irony in her description of the role of art in comforting Erika for her domestic life with her mother:

SIE [wird] in ein paar Minuten unter der heißen Flamme des mütterlichen Scheidbrenners zu einem Häufchen Asche verbrennen, weil sie spät nach Hause gekommen ist. Dabei wird die ganze Kunst SIE nicht trösten können, obwohl der Kunst vieles nachgesagt wird, vor allem, daß sie eine Trösterin sei. Manchmal schafft sie allerdings das Leid erst herbei (*KS*, 27).²⁶

With this passage, Jelinek turns on its head not only the notion that art offers solace (indeed, here it actually causes the suffering), but also the notion that

²⁶ "a few minutes from now, SHE will feel the hot flame of her mother's blowtorch and SHE will be burned on to a pile of ashes because SHE is late in getting home. No art can possibly comfort HER then, even though art is credited with many things, especially an ability to offer solace. Sometimes, of course, art creates the suffering in the first place" (*PT*, 23).

daughters would use art (e.g., their piano-playing) as a means of giving solace to the domestic life of the bourgeois family, which was one of the main functions of salon music, as musicologist Ruth Solie has noted. She cites an example from a nineteenth-century German advice manual:

Father comes home in a bad temper, having had a hard day in the hostile world outside; his daughter opens the piano, touches the keys and sings her father his favorite song. Isn't it wonderful to see the sunshine return to his face, and the ugly shadows disappear? (Qtd. in Solie, 96).

Erika, hurrying home to a mother in a bad temper, will neither offer nor receive any solace from her piano-playing.

Looking at the importance of piano playing in the development of a certain type of middle-class femininity, we see that Jelinek portrays Erika as understanding that piano playing can be used as a means of displaying a certain type of femininity: "Um von ihm [the first violinist to whom she is attracted – BB] als Frau anerkannt zu werden, um im Notizbuch seines Geistes einen Eintrag als weiblich zu erhalten, spielt sie in den Pausen ganz allein solo auf dem Klavier, für ihn allein" (KS, 88).²⁷

²⁷ "In order to have him recognize her as a woman and register her as 'female' in his mental notebook, she plays the piano for him alone during breaks" (PT, 84). It is also important to note here that this attempt fails, for reasons I shall outline later in this section.

This type of femininity is, of course, related to the piano's role in courtship discussed above. Once again, Jelinek's novel links ironically to the tradition of feminine display and male voyeurism described above in the scene depicting Walter's thoughts on Erika's performance at a private concert:

[Klemmer] bewundert uneigennützig die Technik Erikas und wie sich ihr Rücken rhythmisch mitbewegt. Er betrachtet, wie sich ihr Kopf wiegt . . . Er sieht das Muskelspiel ihrer Oberarme, was ihn aufgrund des Zusammenpralls von Fleisch und Bewegung aufgeregt macht. Das Fleisch gehorcht der inneren Bewegung durch Musik, und Klemmer fleht, daß seine Lehrerin dereinst ihm gehorchen möge. Er wetzt im Sitz. Eine seiner Hände zuckt unwillkürlich an die gräßliche Waffe seines Geschlechts (*KS*, 66-67).²⁸

Given the domestic setting of the performance and the presence of Erika's mother, we can safely place desire for Erika within the literary and historical traditions of domestic piano playing as a "source of visual pleasure for men" (Vorachek, 31). With a twist, however; by informing the reader that Klemmer is masturbating and wishing for Erika's eventual obedience while watching her play, Jelinek demonstrates for the reader in a less genteel fashion just what Mr. Darcy and Walter's other literary predecessors may really have been thinking in

²⁸ "[Klemmer] unselfishly admires Erika's technique, he admires the way her back moves to the beat, the way her head sways . . . He sees the play of muscles in her upper arm, he is excited by the collision of flesh and motion. The flesh obeys an inner motion that has been triggered by the music, and Klemmer beseeches his teacher to obey him some day. He masturbates in his seat. One of his hands involuntarily twitches on the dreadful weapon of his genital" (*PT*, 62-63).

the respectable middle-class salon. In doing so, Jelinek demonstrates once again her belief that male-female relations are always marked by a violent undercurrent,²⁹ even in the seemingly innocent pursuit of music-making and viewing.³⁰

While Jelinek portrays Erika and Klemmer as willing participants in courtship rituals centered around the piano, she has Erika's mother reject one of the most important motives that formerly drove parents to have their daughters learn piano, namely, the obtaining of a skill that would prove useful in attracting a husband. Indeed, the mother prefers to keep Erika single so that she (and not a husband) can enjoy the fruits of Erika's labor (See *KS*, 8-9, and *PT*, 4-5) To achieve this goal, Erika's mother uses Erika's training as a pianist as a means of keeping her away from men and of de-sexing Erika's body:

Die Pubertärin lebt in dem Reservat der Dauerschönzeit. Sie wird vor Einflüssen bewahrt und Versuchungen nicht ausgesetzt. Die Schönzeit gilt nicht für die Arbeit, nur für das Vergnügen. Mutter und Oma, die Frauenbrigade, steht

²⁹ For more on Jelinek's depiction of male-female relations as always marked by violence, see Beard (especially 344-47), and Hanssen (chapter 7).

³⁰ In this, Jelinek is once again true to the historical record in that connections between music and violence were routinely made in the nineteenth-century, if in a more subtle form (on this, see Leppert, *Sight of Sound*, chapter 6, "Sexual Identity, Death, and the Family Piano in the Nineteenth Century").

Gewehr bei Fuß, um sie vor den männlichen Jäger, der draußen lauert, abzuschirmen (KS, 37).³¹

The primary way through which Erika's mother attempts to keep Erika free from male influence is the discipline of piano practicing. The mother also views Erika's practicing as a way to keep her daughter from achieving sexual attractiveness:

Kritik braucht SIE [Erika] nicht zu fürchten, die Hauptsache ist, daß etwas erklingt, denn das ist das Zeichen dafür, daß das Kind über die Tonleiter in höhere Sphären aufgestiegen und der Körper als tote Hülle untengeblieben ist. Die abgestreifte Körper der Tochter wird sorgfältig nach den Spuren männlicher Benützung abgeklopft und dann energisch ausgeschüttelt. Frisch kann sie nach dem Spiel wieder übergestreift werden, schön trocken und raschelnd steif gestärkt. Fühllos und keinem zum Fühlen preisgegeben (KS, 38).³²

Despite her mother's attempts at keeping her unsexed and away from men, however, it is music and piano-playing that brings Erika into contact with male

³¹ "The adolescent girl lives in a sanctuary, where no one is allowed to bother her. She is shielded from influences, and never exposed to temptations. This hands-off policy applies only to pleasure, not work. Mother and grandmother, the female brigade, stand guard, rifle in hand, to protect Erika against the male hunter lurking outside" (PT, 33).

³² "SHE [Erika] does not need to fear criticism, so long as something can be heard, for the sounds indicate that the child has ascended the scale, to reach loftier spheres, while leaving her body down below as a dead frame. The daughter's physical remains, sloughed off in her ascent, are combed for any traces of male use and then thoroughly shaken. After completing the music, she can slip back into her mortal coils, which have been nicely dried and starched stiff and crisp. Her frame is now unfeeling, and no one has the right to feel it" (PT, 35).

musicians and awakens a yearning for sexual experience in her: "Die angehenden Männer und derzeitigen Nachwuchsmusiker, mit denen zusammen sie kammermusiziert und zwangsorthestriert, erwecken eine ziehende Sehnsucht, die immer schon tief in ihr zu lauern schien . . . Ihr Docht strahlt heller als tausend Sonnen auf diese ranzige Ratte hinab, die sich ihr Geschlecht nennt" (*KS*, 87-88).³³ Here we see that the activity of piano playing leads, for Erika, to a desire for sex as opposed to being an experience of sublimated desire (for more on sublimation, see below). In this way, Erika's project differs from her mother's, as she flirts with the idea of attracting a mate: "Sie wartet still, immer stiller, daß einer sich für sie entscheidet, und sie wird sich daraufhin sofort glücklich für ihn entscheiden" (*KS*, 89). Ultimately, however, Erika is portrayed as being ambivalent regarding her desire for a mate: "Sind Sie noch nicht verheiratet, Fräulein Erika, fragt die Milchfrau and fragt auch der Fleischhauer. Sie wissen ja, mir gefällt niemals einer, antwortet Erika . . . Sie hat noch ein Mütterlein und braucht daher keinen Mann zu frei'n" (*KS*, 17).³⁴ Erika's

³³ "The future men and present music pupils with whom she performs chamber music and is forced to play in orchestras arouse an ache in her, a yearning, which has always seemed to lurk in her . . . Her wick burns brighter than a thousand suns, focusing on the rancid rat known as her genital" (*PT*, 83).

³⁴ "You still aren't married, Fräulein Erika? the dairy woman asks, and so does the butcher. You know I can never find a man I like, Erika replies . . . She's still got her mom, she don't need no Tom" (*PT*, 13).

vacillation between these two positions is mirrored by the text's multiple shifts in narrative perspective, and is also, I would argue, connected to the piano's nature as "both masculine and feminine," (as pianist Kevin Kopelson puts it [98]), as well as its potential for blurring sexual difference, to which I now turn.

As noted above, a contradiction existed at the heart of the history of femininity and piano playing thanks to the piano's dual nature as private (feminine) and public (male) instrument. Jelinek's piano player is one who demonstrates this dual nature through her inability to be successful in either role – for Erika does not achieve greatness as a concert pianist, nor is she one whose feminine display as a performer attracts men, as the novel demonstrates in its portrayal of her attempt to attract male attention through her piano-playing (cited above; see *KS*, 88; and *PT*, 84). This attempt fails since her feminine skills at piano-playing cannot make up for her lack of femininity in other matters: "Auf dem Klavier ist sie sehr gewandt, doch nur nach ihrer schrecklichen Plumpheit im täglichen Gebrauchsleben wird sie von ihm beurteilt. Diese Ungeschicklichkeiten, mit denen sie sich nicht in sein Herz trampeln kann" (*KS*, 88).³⁵

³⁵ "She is very skillful on the keyboard, but he judges her purely by her terrible ungainliness in daily practical life—the clumsiness with which she cannot trample into his heart" (*PT*, 84).

Erika's failure to register as "female," despite her attempted display of femininity as a pianist can thus be related both to the history of female pianists (and their ambiguous gendering), and also to her failure to achieve a sexual position. As discussed earlier in this chapter, many scholars have noted that *Die Klavierspielerin* stages Erika's failure to achieve a stable "feminine" sexual identity.

Before looking at how that failure is portrayed in *Die Klavierspielerin*, I would first like to give a brief summary of Lacan's account of the difficulty for women in assuming a sexual position. While Lacan, like Freud, sees the Oedipus complex as significant in determining a subject's sexual position, his formulation of the Oedipus complex differs from that of Freud. As Dylan Evans points out:

For Freud, the subject's sexual position is determined by the sex of the parent with whom the subject identifies in the Oedipus complex (if the subject identifies with the father, he takes up a masculine position; identification with the mother entails the assumption of a feminine position). For Lacan, however, the Oedipus complex always involves symbolic identification with the Father, and hence Oedipal identification cannot determine sexual position (Evans, *Dictionary*, 178).

Identification with the father thus causes women to experience the Oedipus complex in a way both similar to and different from men, as Lacan noted in *Seminar 3*:

For the woman, the realization of her sex is not accomplished in the Oedipus complex in a way symmetrical to that of the man's, not by identification with the mother, but on the contrary by identification with the paternal object, which assigns her an extra detour (S3, 172).

It is precisely that detour that makes "the subject's sexual identity . . . always a rather precarious matter" (Evans, *Dictionary*, 179) especially for women, since, as Lacan puts it: "The metaphysics of the woman's position is the detour imposed upon her subjective realization. Her position is essentially problematic, and up to a certain point it's unassimilable" (S3, 178). For Lacan, a sexual position is determined by the relationship a subject has with the phallus,³⁶ a relationship that can best be summed up as "having" (masculine) or "being" (feminine) (see Evans, *Dictionary*, 178, Grosz, especially chapter 3, and Levy-Stokes, "Phallus").

That Erika, in Lacanian terms, and like the piano and its players, is also ambiguously gendered, is made clear on the first page of the novel, when the reader is informed that Erika serves her mother as a replacement for the father: "Nach vielen harten Ehejahren erst kam Erika damals auf die Welt. Sofort gab der Vater den Stab an seine Tochter weiter und trat ab. Erika trat auf, der Vater

³⁶ It is important here to note that the phallus is not the same as the penis. Indeed, "the possession of a penis does not guarantee possession of the phallus. A biological male may be completely identified with not having the phallus" (Levy-Stokes, "Phallus," 138)

ab" (*KS*, 7).³⁷ By replacing the father, Erika fulfills two roles for her mother, that of child and husband. In other words, she both *is* the phallus for the mother (as child) and *has* the phallus (as father replacement). One way in which Erika attempts to replace the missing phallus of the father for her mother is through her piano playing: "So situiert sie sich mit Hilfe des Klaviers . . . als Künstlerin der Phallus zu sein, den die Mutter begehrt." (Appelt, 119-20).³⁸

It is important that one of the ways that Erika attempts to have the phallus is through her piano playing, as the piano also functions in history and Jelinek's text as a signifier of sexual difference, but one that is as unstable as women's difficult journey through the Oedipus complex with its detours. In structural terms, I would argue that the piano functions in a manner similar to phallus in that it is the player's relation to the piano that determines her or his sexual position. In other words, the masculine position of concert pianist could be seen as a subject who possesses the phallus, while the feminine display associated with amateur piano-playing relates to being the phallus. That Erika cannot be

³⁷ "The baby was born after long and difficult years of marriage. Her father promptly left, passing the torch to his daughter. Erika entered, her father exited" (*PT*, 3).

³⁸ As artist, she positions herself, with the help of the piano, as the phallus that the mother desires" (my translation).

firmly fixed as a masculine or feminine player can thus also be related to her dual position as having and being the phallus for her mother.

Sublimation and Perversion: Die Klavierspielerin as Anti-Künstlerroman

Erika's lack of a sexual position is therefore very much overdetermined, as simultaneously cultural and individual: it can be linked both to the history of the piano and female piano players, and to her relationships with her mother and her missing father. As Erika's failure to achieve a sexual position is most clearly demonstrated through her perversions, the following will discuss perversion as a structure, the portrayal of Erika's development as a perverse subject, and the ways in which *Die Klavierspielerin*, through its portrayal of perversion instead of sublimation, can be read as an anti-Künstlerroman.

Erika's lack of a sexual position is related to perversion as both are formed during the Oedipus complex, as Julia Kristeva has noted (158). The perverse subject fails to acknowledge the mother's castration as part of going through the Oedipus complex and is instead characterized by disavowal, or the refusal to give up one's mother and the pleasure one receives as the object of her desire (Fink, *A Clinical Introduction*, 170; see also Gurewich). Thus, Erika's perversion, especially in regard to her relationship with Klemmer, can be understood as an

attempt to break free from her mother and to cease being a stand-in for the father.³⁹

At the same time, however, perversion ends up only reinforcing those unfree “bonds of love” it seeks to escape because inability to give up the mother means that the pervert’s subject position is actually that of object. As Lacan puts it: “the whole problem of the perversions consists in conceiving how the child, in his relation to the mother . . . identifies himself with the imaginary object of [the mother’s] desire in so far as the mother herself symbolizes it in the phallus” (*E*, 197-98). What that means is that the pervert (in this case, Erika) “plays the role of object: the object that fills the void in the mOther” (Fink, *A Clinical Introduction*, 175).

Additionally, perversion is characterized by disavowal (denial of the mother’s castration) and is also related to “the father’s desire, the father’s name, and the father’s law” (Fink, *A Clinical Introduction*, 170). As Fink goes on to note:

From a Lacanian perspective, the apparent contradiction inherent in disavowal can . . . be described as follows: “I know full well that my father hasn’t forced me to give up my mother and the jouissance I take in her presence . . . hasn’t exacted the ‘pound of flesh,’ but I’m going to stage such an exaction or forcing with someone who stands in for him; I’ll

³⁹ For discussions of how this failure to break free from the mother is portrayed in Haneke’s film version of *Die Klavierspielerin*, see Champagne, and Wyatt.

make that person pronounce the law" (*A Clinical Introduction*, 170).

Perversion, then, is not to be understood as a "form of sexual aberration," but rather as a "specific mode of desiring and making sense of the world" (Gurewich, 192).

Both of these characteristics of perverse subjects (the attempt to break free of the mother and to find a substitute for the father) are present in *Die Klavierspielerin*. In the first case, Jelinek portrays Erika's mother as understanding Erika's relationship with Klemmer as an attempt to get away from her:

Die Mutter hat einen kurzen Verdacht, daß Herr Klemmer vom längst vergangenen Hausmusikabend versucht, sich zwischen Mutter und Kind zu zwängen. Dieser junge Mann ist recht nett, doch er ersetzt keine Mutter (*KS*, 157).⁴⁰

In regard to the father, Erika's relationship with Klemmer can also be understood as her search for someone to pronounce the father's law, or as the narrator puts it in describing the scene in which Erika gives Klemmer a letter outlining the masochistic contract she would like to enter into with him: "Erika Kohut

⁴⁰ "Mother briefly suspects that Herr Klemmer, from that long-past home recital, is forcing his way between mother and child. That young man is very nice, but he can't replace a mother" (*PT*, 155).

versteigt sich dahin, daß sie ein Versäumnis begehen wird, wofür sie sofort bestraft zu werden wünscht" (KS, 225).⁴¹

Finally, I would like now to relate perversion to sublimation in order to discuss *Die Klavierspielerin* in generic terms as an anti-*Künstlerroman*. For Erika, as a perverse subject, proves unable to (consistently) sublimate or to express herself through her art, despite its being, as pianist Kevin Kopelson notes, an "ideological given" that "pianists express themselves" (10) when they play. This leads him to claim that "by playing Beethoven, Romantic Beethoven, I *sense* myself—my authentic, essential self . . . Or, rather, we both sense my authentic, essential, *sexual* self" (11, emphasis in original). Erika also subscribes to this "ideological given," explaining to her students: "die Koreaner sollen fühlen, nicht eine Schallplatte von Alfred Brendel stumpf imitieren" (KS, 116).⁴² Jelinek, however, in her deliberate ironizing of this Romantic ideal, depicts Erika as unable to display an "authentic" self through her playing: "Sie hat Kenntnis von der Sonatenform und dem Fugensbau. Sie ist Lehrerin in diesem Fach. Und doch: ihre Pfoten zucken dem letzten, endgültigen Gehorsam sehnsüchtig entgegen"

⁴¹ "Erika is presumptuous: She wants to be naughty so she can be punished on the spot" (PT, 221-22).

⁴² "The Koreans should feel, they should not stolidly imitate a recording by Alfred Brendel" (PT, 114).

(KS, 106).⁴³ In other words, what Jelinek shows Erika expressing through her piano playing is not her “essential, sexual self” but a longing for obedience, which can also be understood as perversion (i.e., masochism).

What we also see in this passage is that Erika’s perversions can be related to her music-making via sublimation. According to Lacan, the pleasure achieved by the pervert (through her or his perversions) and the artist (through sublimation) are closely related, as Jacques-Alain Miller has pointed out:

There is a question in psychoanalysis as to the connection between sublimation and perversion . . . The point is . . . to see that [perversion and sublimation] stem from the same question: satisfaction from activities other than fucking (312).

To put it in other terms: both the artist and the pervert desire in a similar fashion, insofar as both wish to go “beyond” the pleasure principle. *Die Klavierspielerin* constantly unmask this linkage between music and sexuality as the dirty secret of German Culture, as the following discussion demonstrates.⁴⁴

⁴³ “She knows about the form of the sonata and the structure of the fugue. That’s her job, she’s a teacher. And yet, her paws ardently grope toward ultimate obedience” (PT, 102).

⁴⁴ This can, of course, also be related to Freud’s argument in *Civilization and its Discontents* that “An dieser Stelle mußte uns die Ähnlichkeit des Kulturprozesses mit der Libidoentwicklung des Einzelnen zuerst aufdrängen” (GW, 14: 457) [“we cannot fail to be struck by the similarity between the process of civilization and the libidinal development of the individual” (SE, 21: 91)].

It is precisely perversion's similarity to sublimation that allows us to read *Die Klavierspielerin's* status as an anti-*Künstlerroman*. The *Künstlerroman* has, of course, a long and distinguished history in both German literature and modernism. As scholar Evy Varsamopoulou points out, beginning with Ludwig Tieck's *Franz Sternbalds Wanderungen* (1798), German authors have used the genre of the *Künstlerroman* to offer a "narrative account of the formation, development, psychology of an artist, as a *special* type of individual" (xi). Jelinek's portrayal of Erika as an artist is then not new, but what is new in Jelinek is a female subject who is unable to sublimate, but instead remains simply and unredeemably perverse. I should now like to offer a brief outline of the *Künstlerroman's* generic conventions before turning to a discussion of the ways in which *Die Klavierspielerin* both conforms to and disrupts these conventions.

To do so, I have drawn on the scholarship on the *Künstlerroman* to compile a list of four thematic similarities shared by *Künstlerromane*. Despite the fact that there is a fairly large body of work on *Künstlerromane*, I have chosen to focus on the work of only a few scholars for this list due to the fact that most studies tend to focus on individual works (accepting the genre as something already given) as opposed to setting out definitions of generic conventions. One of the few works to attempt to define the *Künstlerroman* is Maurice Beebe's *Ivory Towers*

and *Sacred Founts*, which, despite its age (it was published in 1964)⁴⁵ remains one of the definitive scholarly works on the *Künstlerroman*.

Looking at their work, one can thus conclude that four of the most important thematic traits that make a text a *Künstlerroman* in generic terms are: 1) the artist protagonist; 2) depiction of the artist as a genius or “special” individual; 3) a geographical or metaphorical voyage made by the artist “in search of new experiences or situations” (Seret, 4), experiences and situations that he⁴⁶ will then use to create art; and 4) portrayal of what Maurice Beebe terms the conflict between “sexual love and artistic creation” (Beebe, 97), which, I argue below, is resolved by the artist’s learning how to sublimate.⁴⁷

Turning first to characteristics one and two, while having an artist as protagonist is obviously a requirement needed to classify a text as a *Künstlerroman*, it is also important that it not just be any artist. The artist

⁴⁵ One reason that Beebe’s work is still a relevant source may well be the fact that, as Varsamopoulou points out, “the *Künstler(in)roman* is not a fashionable critical object” (xvii). In addition to Beebe’s work, I also used Varsamopoulou’s, Roberta Seret’s, and P.M. Pasinetti’s books to formulate the list of conventions discussed in this chapter.

⁴⁶ I use the pronoun “he” here quite deliberately as the majority of *Künstlerromane* have male protagonists. See note 19 for references to scholars who discuss the *Künstlerinroman*.

⁴⁷ For more on the elements (thematic and formal) that comprise *Künstlerromane*, see Beebe, Seret, Varsamopoulou, and Pasinetti).

protagonist of the *Künstlerroman*, and indeed the genre itself, both have their roots in the German Romantic movement.

While it is possible to view the *Künstlerroman* as a subgenre of the *Bildungsroman*, the Romantic *Künstlerroman* differentiated itself from the *Bildungsroman* by “[rejecting] the priorities and principles informing the *Bildungsroman*” (Varsamopoulou, x) in favor of a text that featured an artist (or aspiring artist) as the central character, an artist who conformed to the Romantic notion of “the artist [as] a human being inhabited by a special power or genius that singles him out and estranges him from others” (Pasinetti, 4), as well the view of the artist “as a genius endowed with the talents to originate beauty and reveal truth (Seret, 3).

Jelinek’s novel conforms to one of these characteristics insofar as Erika, as a pianist, can be viewed as a type of artist. Where *Die Klavierspielerin* departs from the *Künstlerroman*’s generic conventions, however, is in its relationship to the view of the artist as genius or special. Indeed, she pokes ironic fun at such a notion in passages such as the following:

Erikas Beruf ist gleich Erikas Liebhaberei: die Himmelsmacht Musik.

Sie blicken die Schülerin an und denken, die Musik habe ihr Gemüt schon früh erhoben, dabei erhebt es ihr nur die Faust.

Für Erika wählt die Mutter früh einen in irgendeiner Form künstlerischen Beruf, damit sich aus der mühevoll errungenen Feinheit Geld herauspressen lässt, während die Durchschnittsmenschen bewundernd um die Künstlerin herumstehen, applaudieren (KS, 10, 20, 26).⁴⁸

What we see here is that while the narrator early on informs us that Erika's love is music, thus leading the reader to believe that the novel may go on to be a portrait of the artist as a female genius, the reader instead soon learns that Erika's status as an artist has not come about due to an irrepressible desire to create or to be a genius, but rather because her mother chose an artistic career for her in order to make money and to separate Erika from the masses. This is certainly a far cry from Stephen Dedalus's desire to "discover the mode of life or of art whereby [his] spirit could express itself in unfettered freedom" (Joyce, 267). As Andrea Bandhauer has noted:

Erika's artistic existence does by no means reflect the cliché of the artist's freedom and the bourgeois myth of the "artist as genius" . . . Rather, it is a tortured existence based on force and disciplinary measures generated by a mother motivated by petty-bourgeois materialistic ambitions (5).

⁴⁸ "Erika's vocation is her avocation: the celestial power known as music" / "They look at the music student and imagine that music has raised her spirits; but the only thing that's raised is her fist" / "Mother chose a career for Erika when her daughter was still young. It had to be an artistic profession, so she could squeeze money out of the arduously achieved perfection, while average types would stand around the artist, admiring her, applauding her" (PT, 6, 16, 24).

The motivation behind Erika's career choice brings us to the third generic characteristic listed above (the artist's search for new experiences or situations that he can use to create art). To return to the comparison with Joyce's *Portrait*, while Stephen will use the "reality of experience" to "forge in the smithy of [his] the uncreated conscience of [his] race" (Joyce, 275-76), Erika's experiences are used in large part to satisfy her mother's ambition:

Eine weltbekannte Pianistin, das wäre Mutters Ideal . . . An keiner Stufe, die Erika erreicht, ist es ihr gestattet auszuruhen, sie darf sich nicht schnaufend auf ihren Eispickel stützen, denn es geht sofort weiter. Zur nächsten Stufe . . . Am Gipfel herrscht Weltberühmtheit . . . Solange die Mutter noch lebt und Erikas Zukunft webt, kommt für das Kind nur eins in Frage: die absolute Weltspitze (KS, 28).⁴⁹

Unfortunately for Frau Kohut, Erika is destined to fail as an artist: "Dann versagt Erika einmal bei einem wichtigen Abschlußkonzert der Musikakademie völlig . . . Was bleibt ihr anders übrig, als in das Lehrfach überzuwechseln. Ein harter Schritt für den Meisterpianisten" (KS, 30-31).⁵⁰ Erika's failure at art is also

⁴⁹ "A world-famous pianist – that is Mother's ideal . . . Erika is never allowed to rest at any level she reaches, never allowed to catch her breath and lean on her icepick . . . The peak offers international fame, which is never reached by most climbers . . . So long as Mother lives and continues planning Erika's future, there is only one possibility for the child: the top of the world" (PT, 24).

⁵⁰ "Then, one day, at an important concert at the Academy of Music, Erika fails totally . . . What else can she do but become a teacher? A difficult step for a master pianist" (PT, 26-27).

reflected in her failure at developing and experiencing as a human being, as Carlotta van Maltzan has noted:

At the end of the novel, all the events described turn out to have been non-events for Erika in the sense that they have had no effect on her. The fact that her life situation remains the same is highlighted by the connection of the first and last sentences of the novel⁵¹ . . . In its constant repetition her life/story remains the same (101).

If *Die Klavierspielerin* were truly a *Künstlerroman*, as opposed to an anti-*Künstlerroman*, the events of the novel would instead add up to experiences that result in “a journey of the mind and soul, a movement away from the materialistic toward the abstract.” (Seret, 2).

Furthermore, Erika’s non-experience brings us to the fourth generic trait outlined above, namely that of the conflict between “sexual love and artistic creation” (Beebe, 97), which I see as being at least partially resolved by the artist’s learning how to sublimate (here it is important to bear in mind that genital sexuality can also be viewed as a form of sublimation, as noted above). In this respect, it is significant that not only is Erika doing the same thing at the end

⁵¹ Both of these sentences describe Erika as on her way to her mother: “Die Klavierlehrerin Erika Kohut stürzt wie ein Wirbelsturm in die Wohnung, die sie mit ihrer Mutter teilt” / “Erika weiß die Richtung, in die sie gehen muß. Sie geht nach Hause. Sie geht und beschleunigt langsam ihren Schritt (KS, 7 and 285). [“The piano teacher, Erika Kohut, bursts like a whirlwind into the apartment she shares with her mother” / “Erika knows the direction she has to take. She heads home, gradually quickening her step” (PT, 3 and 280).]

of the novel as at the beginning, but that that same thing is going home to mom. For if Erika fails to sublimate (as I argue below that she does), it is her failure to separate from her mother that prevents her from achieving sublimation.

And giving up mom and learning how to sublimate are, I would argue, the primary tasks that male artist-protagonists of *Künstlerromane* have to achieve in order to become artists.⁵² As Maurice Beebe notes in his study of *Künstlerromane*:

In the artist-novels [of] the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the artist is often forced to choose between woman and vocation, and only rarely does he achieve fulfillment as both artist and lover . . . most portraits of the artist assume that sexual love and artistic creation are in conflict (97).

Thus, at the end of *Portrait of the Artist of a Young Man*, Stephen takes leave not only of Ireland, but of his mother and the young woman whose sexual attractiveness had inspired his writing of a villanelle, separating both from sexual activity and desire for the mother. The reader is left to assume that the energy that Stephen would otherwise have used in those relationships will instead go towards the creation of art.⁵³

⁵² Obviously this is also true of all male subjects. My point here simply is that the *Künstlerroman* thematizes this more directly than some other genres.

⁵³ This redirection corresponds to Freud's definition of sublimation: "Die Sublimierung ist ein Prozeß an der Objektlibido und besteht darin, daß sich der Trieb auf ein anderes, von der

This is not to argue that all artists sublimate all of their sexual desire all the time (and indeed many artists, including Joyce, did and do enjoy active sexual lives). As interpreters of Freud and Lacan have noted, Freud himself never “presented sublimation as equivalent to sexual abstinence . . . Sublimation simply gives another aim to the drive, another satisfaction” (Kaltenbeck, 105). Jean LaPlanche also notes that “sometimes, indeed, sublimation does work in opposition to sexuality, but sometimes, on the contrary, the two complement each other, work together” (24).

Jelinek makes reference to the popular understanding of sublimation as equivalent to sexual abstinence in *Die Klavierspielerin*, when she has Erika’s mother express her belief that the artist must give up sex in order to achieve artistic greatness:

Lieber den Gipfel der Kunst als die Niederungen des Geschlechts. Dieses Geschlecht hat der Künstler dagegen landläufiger Meinung von seiner Zügellosigkeit zu vergessen, glaubt die Mutter . . . Leider wimmeln die Künstlerbiographien, welche überhaupt das Wichtigste an

sexuellen Befriedigung entferntes Ziel wirft” (GW, 10: 161) [“Sublimation is a process that concerns object-libido and consists in the instinct’s directing itself towards an aim other than, and remote from, that of sexual satisfaction” (SE, 14: 94)].

den Künstlern sind, all zuoft von geschlechtlichen Lüsten und Listen ihrer Protagonisten (KS, 199-200).⁵⁴

Jelinek's tongue-in-cheek reference to "Künstlerbiographien" serves to remind the reader of *Klavierspielerin* that while this novel can be read as an artist's biography, it is one that also foregrounds the sexual exploits of its artist, but in a way that differs from the usual *Künstlerroman*.⁵⁵

For example: while watching a porn film, Erika mentally compares the work of the actors to the work of musicians: "Erika ist darauf geeicht, Menschen zuzusehen, die sich hart bemühen, weil sie ein Ergebnis wünschen. In dieser Hinsicht ist der sonst große Unterschied zwischen Musik und Lust eher geringfügig" (KS, 110).⁵⁶ Here Jelinek makes for the reader a connection between music and sex as both performance, almost sport. Similarly, Erika feels sexual

⁵⁴ "Better the peak of art than the slough of sex. Contrary to the popular notion of his wantonness, the artist, Mother believes, must forget about sex . . . Unfortunately, biographies of artists, which are the most important things about artists, teem all too often with the sexual ruses and abuses of their protagonists" (PT, 197).

⁵⁵ Here we need to remember that sublimation can also be related to "normal" heterosexual genital sexuality as Tim Dean has noted: "if we take *satisfaction of the drive without repression* as our definition of sublimation . . . then we're led to the counterintuitive conclusion that heterosexual copulation itself constitutes a kind of sublimation" (*Beyond Sexuality*, 276, emphasis in original). In this respect, Erika's failure to achieve "normal" sexual relations with Klemmer can also be seen as a failure to sublimate.

⁵⁶ "Erika is geared to watching people who work hard because they want results. In this respect, the normally large difference between music and sexual pleasure is quite tiny" (PT, 106).

pleasure when talking about music to one of her students: "Erika erhebt . . . Bachs Werk in Sternenhöhe . . . Erika spürt das Prickeln zwischen den Beinen, das nur der von Kunst und für Kunst Ausgewählte fühlt, wenn er über Kunst spricht" (KS, 104).⁵⁷

There is, however, one important difference between perversion and sublimation and that is, that while the pervert retains a subject position as object (of the mother's desire), the artist is able to maintain an active position as a desiring subject (on this, see Lacan, *S7*, 112). Since Erika does not achieve a subject position, but remains instead the object of her mother's desire, she is unable to sublimate through art, which would require her to take that active position.⁵⁸

To conclude, I would like to return to the discussion of Julia Kristeva's work that appears in the introduction to this dissertation. For if Kristeva is correct in arguing that sublimation creates a subject "who lacks nothing, in fact, except that he lacks a lack," (161), and if Jean Wyatt is correct in her contention

⁵⁷ "Erika praises Bach's work to the skies . . . Erika feel the tingling between her legs, something felt only by those chosen by and for art when they talk about art" (PT, 101).

⁵⁸ Thus Renate Schneider has written of *Die Klavierspielerin*: "Der gesamte Text ist ein Hohn auf die These der Sublimierung des Eros durch die Kunst" (363) ["The whole text is a mockery of the thesis of the sublimation of Eros through art" (my translation)].

that Erika is a subject (child) who “need never confront lack, either in the mother or in herself” (460), then we can see how music and perverse sexuality are intertwined for Erika—her failure to become a concert pianist is simultaneously a failure to achieve sublimation, a failure which manifests itself in perversion as a means of obtaining the *jouissance* denied to her by art. What Jelinek demonstrates with her perverse piano teacher, then, is not just the similarity between the pervert and the artist, but she also offers us an anti-*Künstlerroman* that stretches generic boundaries through its portrait of the artist as pervert rather than genius.

CONCLUSION

During the 2002 fall semester, I taught an honors seminar, titled “Love, Sex & Domesticity in Women’s Writing,” for first-year students in the College of Liberal Arts at Texas A&M University. One of the texts we read over the course of the semester was *Die Liebhaberinnen*. My students had a mixed reaction to Jelinek’s novel, with one of them explaining that while she found it an interesting and funny, she was dismayed that Jelinek’s novel had “ruined” her future reading of romance novels due to the way *Die Liebhaberinnen* laid bare for her the manner in which romance novels function.

In other words, my students recognized that, as noted in the introduction, genres are indeed “social contracts between a writer and a specific public, whose function is to specify the proper use of a particular cultural artifact” (Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 106). They also realized that Jelinek’s reworking of genres results in what Anne Cranny-Francis views as a “fundamental intervention in the relationship between reader and text, a disruption of the reader’s conventionalized understanding of the contract, the literary institution of a particular genre” (18).

This disruption of genres is one of Jelinek’s most significant literary contributions and one of the reasons I chose to focus on sustained readings of

these three Jelinek texts in generic terms in this dissertation. As I argued in the introduction, it is through Jelinek's use of generic forms where we can locate the politics of the texts examined in this dissertation. For if genres are political and ideological as many have argued,¹ then the rewriting of generic forms is also political. In Jelinek's case, however, the politics of rewriting do not necessarily conform to an expected Marxist or feminist form. For that reason, one can argue that these works function to create a "negative aesthetics," as opposed to a positive reworking of generic forms. It is this lack of positivity that explains the often fraught reception of Jelinek's work by both Marxists and feminists,² and is also where Jelinek's affinities to figures such as Ingeborg Bachmann and Theodor Adorno can be seen.

In regard to Bachmann, Sara Lennox has argued that:

Bachmann's analysis of her period and of the situation of women within it is enabled by her profound appropriation of a Frankfurt School analysis, whose leading theorist, Theodor W. Adorno, declared: "There's no right way to live when the world is wrong" (*Cemetery*, 15).³

¹ See, for example, Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, Cranny-Francis, and Beebee.

² For more on Jelinek's reception by Marxists and feminists, see DeMeritt, Fiddler, *Rewriting* (Chapter 1, "Jelinek in Context"), Haines and Littler, and Mayer and Koberg.

³ "Es gibt kein richtiges Leben im falschen" (Adorno, *GS*, 4: 42, Lennox's translation).

Similarly, Jelinek's analysis of Austria and gender relations conforms both to Adorno's aphorism cited above, as well as his view that "[das Kunstwerk] kritisiert . . . die Realität. Es ist deren negative Erkenntnis" (GS, 11: 261).⁴ Through her use of what Allyson Fiddler has termed a "super-reality" (*Rewriting*, 31), Jelinek creates texts that, due to their affinity with Adorno's idea of a negative aesthetic, reject earlier feminist theories of aesthetics. Rita Felski defines those earlier theories as fostering "literature as a form of self-expression, identification between reader and author" (30). As I have demonstrated in this dissertation, Jelinek rejects this identificatory mode of writing and refuses to create "positive" subjects, preferring instead, through her generic perversions, to produce art that is a "Kritik von Praxis als der Herrschaft brutaler Selbsterhaltung inmitten des Bestehenden" (Adorno, GS, 7: 26).⁵

⁴ 'Art is the negative knowledge of the actual world" (Adorno, "Reconciliation," 160).

⁵ "critique of praxis as the rule of brutal self-preservation at the heart of the status quo" (Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 12).

APPENDIX

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Works by Sigmund Freud

GW *Gesammelte Werke*

SE *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*

Works by Elfriede Jelinek

A *Die Ausgesperrten*

Clara *Clara S. A Musical Tragedy*

CS *Clara S. musikalische Tragödie*

KS *Die Klavierspielerin*

LH *Die Liebhaberinnen*

L *Lust (German)*

Lust *Lust (English)*

PT *The Piano Teacher*

women *women as lovers*

Wonderful *Wonderful, Wonderful Times*

Works by Jacques Lacan

E *Écrits. A Selection*

S1 *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book I: Freud's Papers on Technique 1953-1954*

- S2 *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Techniques of Psychoanalysis 1954-1955*
- S3 *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book III: The Psychoses 1955-1956*
- S7 *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960*
- S11 *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*
- S20 *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XX: Encore. On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge*

Works by Karl Marx

- C *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*
- EW *Early Writings*
- GR *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)*

Full details on the editions used can be found in the Works Cited.

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