

RATIONALITY
HT 2002

**Reason in Her Madness: a Perspective of
Feminine Rationality**

Cheryl M. Cordeiro

**Göteborgs Universitet
Institutionen för lingvistik
Handledare: Jens Allwood**

1. Introduction

With men he can be rational and unaffected, but
when he has ladies to please, every feature works.
~ Jane Austen (1775-1817)

Women are meant to be loved, not understood.
~ Oscar Wilde (1854-
1900)

The promises of maniacs, like those of women, are not
safely relied upon.
~Joseph Heller (1923 –
1999)

Could it possibly by chance that irrationality and hysteria (etymologically from the Greek word 'uterus') was originally conceived as an exclusively *female* complaint, attribute and prerogative of women so that women writers in the literary canon write about their madness, as with the Brontë sisters, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Sylvia Plath and Kate Chopin and that male writers of today may comment and joke about the 'hysteria' or the 'irrationality' of today's women?

1.1 Definition of Rationality

Menestrel (1997) and Muthoo (1999) are authors who give good overviews of the various definitions of rationality however, for the purposes of this paper, rationality may be defined in a tripartite manner:

(i) rationality consistent with or based on / using reason such that a behaviour is said to be rational if it is based on reason and not emotion. In this paper, 'emotion' is defined as a mental state that arises spontaneously rather than

through conscious efforts and reasoning. Emotions are also accompanied by physiological changes whilst reason or what is rational is ideally detached from physiology. What is rational is that which is associated with or requires the conscious use of mind in reason. This definition is most aptly summarised by Isaac Bashevis Singer ¹ who said “The very essence of literature is the war between emotion and intellect”.

(ii) rationality is also defined in this paper to mean ‘of sound mind’, one who is sane and not diseased in the mind, without poor mental health. The word ‘irrationalities’ when used in this paper will refer to the various forms of non-appeals to reason for women, from the medical condition of hysteria to madness (a loss of one’s mind, mental breakdown etc) to simply being creatures that are too emotional

(iii) in the last prong of definition, rationality means ‘to look out for number 1’ i.e., to act in one’s best interest or to act in a manner that benefits oneself

1.2 Purpose of Paper

This paper serves to present a perspective of the construct of rationality by presenting a synopsis of literature from various fields including that of philosophy in ancient western civilisation, western medical history and western literary history with regard to women from the onset of the 18th and 19th century. These various historical synopses serve to build the argument that western (or western influenced) women of today face, what I would call a “Rationality Catch-22” situation. While the term *catch-22* was coined by Joseph Heller that describes a system with a contradictory set of rules and regulations that lead to absurd or unjust conditions, the application of the phrase ‘catch-22’ in this paper takes on a broader scope that refers not just to ‘systems’ but to situations manifested from various historical ‘systems’. The workings of the

¹ Nobel Prize winner for Literature in 1978

literary canon for example, may be described as a particular 'system' and the empirical proof of Hippocrates's medical writings could be said to refer to another 'system'. These various systems which will be presented subsequently then combine to form a specific situation which is thus reflected in today's society. Thus, the first sections of this paper will try to lend an historical overview of how irrationality, madness or hysteria has come to be exclusively associated with women.

With the presentation of "Rationality Catch-22" for today's women, the later sections of this paper will then suggest some methods of addressing this circular argument i.e. how does a woman today break out of what seems to be a circular situation of irrationality on her part.

Some authors speculate that irrationality for women peaked in Victorian times, where it was thought 'fashionable' for women to seem fragile and sickly so that fainting and showings of stress in a woman was considered a feminine virtue that women ought to cultivate. However, long before hysteria and madness were deemed 'fashionable' for women in Victorian times, medical opinions throughout western history, provided empirical and biological proof of women's tendencies towards irrationality and hysteria.

2. Philosophers and Physicians in Ancient Civilisations on Men, Women and Nature

This section shows how western philosophers and physicians (the scientists and great thinkers of society) who were endorsed with the power to move the opinions of masses and the esteemed knowledge builders of society, laid the foundation for the knowledge that women were *biologically* irrational creatures. The language that the philosophers and physicians used was the seemingly objective language of science, thus their claims made all the more believable. They also seemed to provide empirical and biological proofs that

women were irrational and that women were irrational was part of nature, it was part of what was natural.

In 400 years BC, the school of Greek physician Hippocrates (ca 460 – 357 BC) preached eleven treatises on women's health and gynaecology of which some included topics on:

- "On the Diseases of Women" (2 parts)
- "On Sterile Women"
- "On the Diseases of Young Girls"
- "On the Nature of Woman"
- "On the Seventh and Eighth Month Child"

According to Hippocrates, women's diseases arise from the womb, the organ that is responsible for all such diseases (Hippocrates, *Places in Human Anatomy* 47=V 344-6 Littré. G)

Hippocrates' general point being that the womb in women came 'into sympathy' with the upper parts of her body whenever a woman felt bored which thus explained suffocation and sensory disturbances which were cured via fumigations in order to push the womb downwards. Aberrant behaviours or rather what was deemed as 'aberrant behaviours' in women by men were thus concluded to be directly linked to the condition of her uterus or *husterā*, meaning *womb* in ancient Greek. Hysteria was thus attributed by the ancient Greeks to a displacement of the uterus or displaced flow of the uterine. On the topic of 'hysteria in virgins' (Hippocrates, *On Virgins* = VIII.466-70 Littré. G), Hippocrates contends that many people choke to death as a result of 'visions'; more women than men for "the nature of women is less courageous and is weaker. And virgins who do not take a husband at the appropriate time for marriage experience these visions more frequently, especially at the time of their first monthly period". And in further describing the cures and treatments for such hysteric conditions, Hippocrates thus further espouses that the place of the woman is at home with a man, preferably with child at a tender age:

When [the heart and phrenes] are filled with blood, shivering sets in with fevers. They call these 'erratic fevers'. When this is the state of affairs, the girl goes crazy because of the violent inflammation, and she becomes murderous because of the decay and is afraid and fearful because of the darkness. The girls try to choke themselves because of the pressure on their hearts; their will, distraught and anguished because of the bad condition of the blood, forces evil on itself. In some cases the girl says dreadful things: [the visions] order her to jump up and throw herself into wells and drown, as if this were good for her and served some useful purpose. When a girl does not have visions, a desire sets in which compels her to love death as if it were a form of good. When this person returns to her right mind, women give to Artemis various offerings, especially the most valuable of women's robes, following the orders of oracles, but they are deceived. The fact is that the disorder is cured when nothing impedes the downward flow of blood. My prescription is that when virgins experience this trouble, they should cohabit with a man as quickly as possible. If they become pregnant, they will be cured. If they don't do this, either they will succumb at the onset of puberty or a little later, unless they catch another disease. Among married women, those who are sterile are more likely to suffer what I have described.

Aristotle, who had written some on medicine and anatomy had also written in Hippocratic spirit. In such texts as Aristotle's *The Female Role in Generation* as well as *The Seed* and *The Nature of the Child* perpetuated and continued to propagate the idea and belief that women were the result of weaker sperm where Aristotle wrote on the correspondence between the woman's menstrual fluid and the man's seminal fluid, with the only difference that menstrual fluids were incapable of generating off-springs. Aristotle's explanation of the process of conception what that external secretions where the male semen has primary generative importance whilst the female semen (menstrual fluid), though providing a sustaining environment for the developing embryo, has only nutritive value. He further purported that a boy actually resembles a woman in physique and a woman is, as it were, an infertile

male since the female is female on the account of its inability to produce semen because the female body was deemed colder than the male body. On the premise that heat governs development, "That which has by nature a smaller portion of heat is weaker", thus as women have less body heat than men and a smaller body, their brains were less developed and were thus the less likely to be disposed of rational thoughts. The male, because of warmer blood was also deemed the more active whilst the female was passive.

Aristotle also purports that offspring produced by a female are sometimes female and sometimes male because "the female is as it were, a deformed male... a mutilated male and the catemenia are semen, only not pure; for there is only one thing they have not in them, the principle of soul" where he argues that it is the male that has the power of making the sensitive soul. Women are therefore inferior in reasoning because "the rule of the soul over the body is natural [which makes] the male by nature superior and the female inferior; the one rules and the other is ruled. The courage of man is shown in commanding, of a woman in obeying". According to Aristotle, hierarchy was designed by 'nature': soul over body, rationality over emotion, male over female, masters over slaves, humans over animals and Greeks over barbarians.

While some may argue that Plato's position was rather more impartial with regards to gender issues, as Plato in *The Republic*, had argued that women should share the same education as men since women join "men in war and other duties of civic guardianship", he still however, maintains that women bear "lighter tasks because of women's weakness" and that "There is nothing practiced by mankind in which the masculine sex does not surpass the female".

Women were not only proved naturally/biologically irrational, but Galen (129-210 AD), one of the most influential ancient medical writers born in Pergamum proved that the female sex (and therefore women) was inferior to males, for he saw females as imperfect for the principle reason that females

were colder than males and colder animals were less perfect than warmer animals (Galen, *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body* 14.6-7). Females were seen to have smaller testes than males, and whose 'semen' were scantier, colder and wetter than the semen produced from males, thus confirming women as inferior to the male sex. Through Galen, women are thus defined as a castrated male. As a sex, females were a deformity rather than a sex in their own right, women, as it were, were defined as the 'Other', with the male as the centripetal focus.

The writings and 'empirical' proofs from ancient physicians and philosophers, written in the seemingly objectified language of science thus became the norm over centuries to come and laid the foundation for modern thinking. Thus the knowledge (the beliefs of physicians thus justified via their empirical and biological proof) that women suffered from the diseases of their uterus peaked at the end of the 19th century when white, middle-classed women went through an epidemic of 'hysteria'. Ehrenreich and English (1973) whose work documented the tradition of American sexism in medicine before and after the turn of the century contend that medical doctors theorized that each human body contained a set quantity of energy that was directed variously from one organ or function to another such that one organ was developed at the expense of the other. Since women's grand purpose in life was to reproduce, higher education was thus potentially dangerous for them as too much development of the brain would atrophy the uterus. Statements such as this by the British poet and critic, Coleridge:

Women have their heads in their hearts. Man seems to
have been destined for a superior being
~ Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834).
Specimens of the Table Talk of the
Late Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1835).

continue to reverberate throughout literature today, reinforcing and perpetuating ancient points of view. Perhaps however, there is more politics to the agenda than anatomical 'proofs' that higher education for women would atrophy the uterus for the *ideal* woman² in ancient Greek civilisation was one that preferably could not reason, even after being 'educated' by her husband.

3. The 'Ideal Woman' – Training to be Irrational

But you aren't at fault for this... rather I am, since I handed over these things to you without giving orders as to where each kind of thing should be put, so that you would know where to put them and where to find them again

~ Ischomacho to his wife in *Oeconomicus*, VIII 2

The following paragraphs lends insight into what it means to be an *ideal* woman in ancient Greek civilisation. The word 'ideal' is used since in ancient Greek civilisation as demonstrated in Aristophanes' *Oeconomicus*, it was preferable that the woman does not reason because reason would result in certain actions on her part, which may be in the best interest for her i.e. rational behaviour on her part, such as meeting her friends, gaining network, going out of the house for fresh air for health reasons etc, but those actions may not be in the best interest for her husband i.e. she may gossip to relieve stress or complain about her husband and thus bring disrespect to the household. As such, this section shows how women were trained by their fathers and then later by their husbands to be irrational creatures i.e. to *not* act in her best interest but to act in someone else's (mainly the man's) best interests.

The writings of the Greek comedy writer, Aristophanes (ca. 448-385 BC) and the Greek historian, Xenophon (430-350 BC) reflect upon the lifestyles

² readings on *Oeconomicus* provide more details on the 'ideal woman' in ancient Greek civilisation

and gender structures of ancient Greek civilisation. In order for a husband to be able to control his wife easily and to ensure paternity in lineage for the man, women were to be kept as ignorant as possible before marriage so that as she entered marriage, the control over her would pass from father to husband. Ischomachos's wife is an example of such an ideal woman since he says of her that "[she] had previously lived under diligent supervision in order that she might see and hear as little as possible and ask the fewest questions as possible" (Oeconomicus, VII 5). In the world of Ischomachos, women were to enter into a marriage symbolically as an empty vessel so that she might be educated and moulded by her husband to perform such 'womanly duties' or 'wifely duties' such as tending to the house and his children and be tamed to the effect that she does not go out of the house and cause him disrepute or call the paternity of his children into question. The control of husband over wife goes to the extent of whether Isomachos's wife should put on make-up as Isomachos argues, putting on make-up is a form of deception and where he lectured her on other forms of deception where after his lecture, she purportedly "never did anything of that sort again" (Oeconomicus X, 9). Although Xenophon wrote about similar themes, on Greek men's desires for control over their wives, Xenophon writes from the perspective of how men should go about looking for their perfect wife and gave advice on how men should treat their wives after they were married.

Both writers explored themes on how such control were also meant to ensure a properly run household, in tact reputation for the men and undisputed paternity such that women were not meant to be 'thinkers' of any sort. A thinking woman would therefore be hazardous to the man himself causing mischief and grief in the household. And as Isomachos's quotation from above, where he blames himself for his wife's 'mistakes', it is apparent that it was first the man who took charge of the household and taught the woman how he wanted it run and thereafter when he was certain she knew how to run it in the

manner he wanted, he could happily pass the sole duty of running the household to her. As such, ancient Greek civilisation left all possible forms of 'rationalities' and reasoning to the man himself where the woman were only supposed to know as much as the man would have her know and thinking on her own accord is absolutely out of the question.

4. The Silencing of the Voices of Women

She didn't write it
 She wrote it, but she shouldn't have
 She wrote it, but look what she wrote about.
 She wrote it, but 'she' isn't really an artist and 'it' isn't
 really serious, of the right genre... ie. really art
 She wrote it, but she wrote it only one of it.
 She wrote it but it's only interesting /included in the canon for one,
 limited reason.
 She wrote it but there are very few of her.

~ Joanna Russ

Imagine if one had a voice and a will to speak and write about what they thought, felt and experienced and yet were not able to do so. Imagine if someone had come up to you and duct-taped your mouth so that you cannot speak and cannot write, even to cry for help. Such were the experiences of many women authors throughout the western history of literature. The discriminatory practices against women authors in the history of western literary canon, as many women authors write, both induced irrationalities such as hysteria, madness, depression, anxiety of authorship and perpetuated the image of the 'mad woman in the attic' (for women authors often found themselves working in a small room and isolated from society as writers).

The silencing of women did not only happen in ancient civilisations where in the example of the Greek ancient civilisation, a woman was to be seen and heard as little as possible. But the silencing of women occurred on a far grander scale throughout the history of the western literary canon. The above

quotation comes from Russ's (1983) review on some anthologies and academic lists chosen at random from Palgrave's 1861 *The Golden Treasury* where Palgrave's intention was to include only lyrics by writers not living in 1855. Yet Showalter's (1999) study proved that there were many more feminine novelists whose works remained excluded from the literary canon until recently. Palgrave had only included four women in the canon of which were Anna Letitia Barbauld, Jane Elliott, Lady Anne Lindsay and Lady Carolina airne, who were active writers in the 18th century. Palgrave did not consider works by Anne Finch or Aphra Behn and Emily Brontë who died in 1848 was not included either, even though their works would've fallen into the category of literary works. A fuller argument on how women's writers were excluded from anthologies due to their anomalousness can be found in Russ (1983). Female authors as recently as the nineteenth century found it difficult to have their works published and so wrote under male pseudonyms, Charlotte, Emily and Anne Brontë published their works in the mid nineteenth century under the names of Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell. George Eliot is also a male pseudonym that Mary Anne Evans used.

Harold Bloom for example postulates that the dynamics of literary history arise from the writer's "anxiety of influence", where the writer's fear is to not be his own creator of his works and that it will be his predecessor's works who will assume priority over his own works. Bloom's metaphor of literary paternity and his view on relationships between literary artists and their predecessors as 'father-son' relationships parallels Freud's description of the Oedipal struggle in which man can only become a poet if he outdoes his 'father' and invalidates his father's writings. Apart from current day Bloom, John Milton too metaphorically defined the poetic process as a sexual encounter between the poet and his female muse. If such scholars as Bloom who analyses the relationship between literary artists and their predecessors as that of 'father-

son' relationship and the Oedipal struggle, and Milton who sees writers as mainly male, and if the literary canon were built upon the works of such scholars, where and how then do women writers fit in? For Western literary history is overwhelmingly male or patriarchal and while Bloom analyses and explains this as such, other theorists have yet to address this issue but continue to work within the frame of a patriarchal literary canon in that many still work within a framework that has systematically discounted the works of women authors.

The patriarchal literary canon could also possibly explain why so many women authors and poets write about their 'anxiety of authorship' that included writings on their 'madness', hysteria, and irrationalities. Emily Dickenson, for example explored the theme of "infection in the sentence" where she saw literary texts as coercive imprisoning, fever-inducing and producing hallucinations of her losing her 'femininity' in the process of writing both because of her love of writing and of her fragile position as a literary writer. The pen which can be seen as a metaphorical phallus (a phallic symbol) works upon the white sheets of paper that symbolises the clean, pure and virgin woman, unstained and unspoiled. If then a woman writer had power over the pen and thus power over the phallus, she contradicts herself in the process of writing, thus staining herself and her 'femininity'. Sylvia Plath and George Eliot were also writers who suffered from authorship anxiety and both were deemed in poor mental health for long periods of time, prone to depression and headaches that caused them to behave irrationally.

5. The Woman's Rationality Catch-22 Situation

The above paragraphs meant to lend insight into a fragment of the history of women in their struggles for a voice of their own. To summarise briefly, early philosophers and physicians managed to prove that women were

biologically irrational creatures, atop of which some even argued for that women were a naturally inferior sex backed by empirical observations, written in the objective language of science. But not only were women deemed biologically irrational, ancient civilisation moulded and created their ideal woman as one who *was* irrational (preferably unthinking so that her husband could teach her how to think and preferably acting in his best interest, disregarding her own best interests), as such, women from then have been *trained* to be irrational.

One can thus argue for the point that irrationalities in women are a direct result of patriarchal socialisation and that there is little mystery why it is that many societies and cultures deem irrationality as a woman's prerogative to no particular advantage to her.

Girls are born into a patriarchal system of socialisation and from the onset of ancient civilisations, girls are socialised/educated and trained in docility, submissiveness and selflessness. Girls are trained to 'look out for number two' i.e. to act in the best interests of someone else, rather than themselves. To be trained in such characteristics can thus be argued as to be trained to necessarily ill-health and irrationality, since an animal's strongest instinct is that of survival. Women are not taught to survive, so to speak but rather to depend on the male for their survival which thus also explains the high rates of women who put up with or are silent about violent relationships in which they are abused since the male / husband is the provider of the family (cases such as these are more prominent in Asia and the Middle East and less so in western countries) and separating from the husband or the male of the family would leave the women no chance of survival in any case. A woman in such a situation would be in a lose-lose situation where a downward spiral starts should they divorce or separate.

Girls are also socialised and taught to become beautiful objects. As Berger (1972) observes, "Men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at." thus echoing the 'ideal' woman of ancient civilisations, for if she were an ornament, she cannot reason or rather, should not reason, for reasoning is not her purpose or in her capacity.

The girl learns anxiety of self and develops a form of self loathing and the loathing of her own flesh, peering into herself from the perspective of a male-oriented society, she literally wishes to diminish herself, 'reduce' herself. The result of which is physical pain, the pain of starvation, the pain of eating disorders, of ill health in general. She is not a rational creature if she can do this to herself. The concept of beauty for women in the nineteenth-century was one of a 'frail' appearance of the woman that led to tight-lacing fashion wear and the habit of vinegar-drinking for women. In the early twentieth-century, actresses in Hollywood voluntarily swallowed tapeworms so that they may remain pencil thin and have the 'figure of a boy'. Today, the fashion and health industry has given rise to innumerable diets from the Atkins diet, the Scarsdale diet to the 'cabbage soup diet' with various "controlled fasts" such as the Cambridge diet, SlimFast and Dexatrim all to 'help' women (and these days men too) to attain 'their' ideal figure.

With the rise of eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa, bulimia and compulsive eating, the woman's rationality *Catch-22* is complete. The belief that women were irrational creatures began with the empirical proofs of the physicians and the reasoning of the philosophers who justified their beliefs that then gave rise to the knowledge that women were irrational creatures. This knowledge then pervaded societies and cultures across the world where it was once new, it became normalised over time through the socialisation of patriarchal systems and social structures, a normalisation such that it was no longer just men who believed that women were irrational but women too

believed that they were irrational and some could say that they *knew* that they were irrational creatures and pass it off as a 'woman's right' to be so. The circle is complete when today, eating disorders lend credible empirical proof that women act irrational too. Instead of looking after her health and sanity, she is taught the exact opposite. Words such as 'you' and 'your' are used to convince her that these ideas were her very own. The irony of it all is that today, it is she who seeks the idealised form of woman, to the extent that males can now stand back and say, 'women *are* crazy to do this to themselves', it is the males who can say today, 'why do women wear stilettos and starve themselves'? And it is she who takes the responsibility of attaining the ideal, acting irrationally as it were without understanding the workings of the system that created the situation in the first place.

6. Breaking the Rationality Catch-22 for Women

The reason that the rationality Catch-22 situation exists for women is apparently because of the combined workings of patriarchal socialisation and normalisation so that women today rarely look out for number one i.e. themselves. It is not to say that all women today do not look out for themselves, but just to say that women have so far been socialised to be the sex that is the more selfless, the more emotional and the one who strives more for the ideal woman physique etc. to the extent that it is deemed the 'normal thing to do' if you are woman.

Catch-22s exist precisely because there are no easy solutions and as far as I can see, there are no easy ways to break this rationality Catch-22 situation for women, for one cannot undo history and cannot undo that the English language itself is male dominated (Spender 1980, Mills 1990, Cameron 1992). But women can *begin* to undo this situation through the process of

(i) *consciousness raising*, for in order to solve any problem or to bring about a change in a situation or event, one needs to first be aware of the problem and be aware of the situation. For the moment, it seems that if some women can hurt themselves through starvation to achieve some form of 'ideal' physique, or if some women think it 'natural' and 'normal behaviour' to act in someone else's interest other than their own when given a choice, then it seems that they do not see a problem with their reasoning and that they do not see their problematic situation. The process of consciousness raising may in turn lead to the creation of a

(ii) *female language* that may eventually help in

(iii) the defining of self (self of the woman) from the woman's point of view, i.e. that women should see themselves as the *centripetal axis* and resist the traditional notion of 'woman as Other'.

Through consciousness raising, what is meant is that women need to first unlearn what they have been taught thus far and re-educate themselves with themselves as the centripetal axis from which things may be defined, learn to talk about their experiences from their point of view and describe situations and events from how they understand it. Women need to question the manner in which woman is looked at, defined by society itself and to question the validity of such definitions of 'woman'. Consciousness raising may be a process of struggle and endeavour, a long process with effort but through it, perhaps a *female language* may be created.

Otto Jespersen, a Danish grammarian who published a book entitled *Language: its nature, development and origin*, had a chapter specifically devoted to 'The Woman', thus he too had set up the 'male' as the norm and the 'female' as a special case to be studied, a case deviant from the norm. His work claimed that women speak softly, more politely than men and have smaller and less

varied vocabularies and that their sentences were 'loosely' constructed, often left unfinished, all the while jumping from topic to topic.

The very process of consciousness raising is to question the point of view from which such work is written and realise first that such points of view are not value-free. Christiane Makward, an important translator and commentator on French feminism can be said to be using female language when she attempted a definition on a female language: "open, nonlinear, unfinished, fluid, exploded, fragmented, polysemic, attempting to speak the body i.e. the unconscious, involving silence, incorporating the simultaneity of life as opposed or clearly different from pre-conceived, oriented, masterly or 'didactic' languages" (1980:96) Other women sharing this view is Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray, both trained as psychoanalysts by Jacques Lacan with their world view marked by his patriarchy and who both agree that such a female language has never been in use since it was never recognised. Because all languages to a certain extent encompass Makward's description of a 'female language', a female language thus, is not defined in opposition to the already existing language but that such characteristics of the language that is deemed 'female' should be used more often, in place of the characteristics of language that is deemed 'male'. Women should be encouraged to speak themselves and to speak their silences.

And when women learn to speak their silences and to speak themselves, communicating their voices in their own voice, then women will learn to define woman with woman as the centripetal axis of definition. For centuries, women have been seen as the Other from man with man as the centripetal axis (as reflected in Galen, and other philosophers of past), which thus created a certain inequality in attribute, power and in the socio-political structures of society which thus led to woman being defined as irrational from the beginning of reason. To break, what I call the Rationality Catch-22 situation

for women, she needs not only to put herself as centripetal axis (against which all others are 'Other') but she also needs to attempt to normalise that position. It is this position that Emily Dickensen writes on what to her is 'madness':

Much madness is divinest sense
To a discerning eye;
Much sense the starkest madness.
Tis the majority
In this, as all, prevails.
Assent, and you are sane;
Demur, - you're straightaway dangerous,
And handled with a chain.
~Emily Dickinson, 1830-1886
Poet

where the line *Tis the majority* that tells of her position as woman in a male dominated society and if you were not the majority i.e. as a woman, if you act in accordance to your own best interest and not the best interest of the One that is male, then you are mad (irrational). If a woman *demurred* against the norm and the majority, she is of course straightaway dangerous because then she acts in accordance to her best interest and not in the interest of the majority.

References

Berger, John, 1972. *Ways of Seeing*. London, British Broadcasting Corporation; Harmondsworth, Penguin

Cameron, Deborah, 1992. *Feminism and Linguistic Theory* (2nd Ed). Macmillan.

Ehrenreich, Barbara and English, Deirdre, 1973. *Complaints and Disorders: The Sexual Politics of Sickness*. The City University of New York: Feminist Press.

Makward, Christiane, 1980. To be or not to be... a feminist speaker. In: *The Future of Difference*. Alice Jardine and Hester Eisenstein (Eds). Boston: G. K. Hall.

Mills, Jane, 1990. *Womanwords*. Virago.

Russ, Joanna, 1983. *How to Suppress Women's Writing*. Austin : University of Texas Press.

Showalter, Elain, 1999. The female tradition. In: *A Literature of Their Own: British women novelists from Bronte to Lessing*. Pp3-37. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press

Spender, Dale, 1980. *Man Made Language*. Routedledge and Keagan Paul.