ODDITIES AND ATROCITIES:
A preliminary study of
Camille Paglia

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the work of Camille Paglia as a critic of literature and the academy. Its aim is to focus on Paglia as a critic rather than as a controversial public figure. Much of the criticism on Paglia tends to deal with her from a political angle, critiquing, for example, her conservative views and her attacks on feminism. Paglia's criticism of the academy and feminism will be touched upon, but the intended focus is on Paglia as an art critic rather than as a controversial social commentator, particularly on sexual mores and feminism. The first two chapters deal with Paglia's style, showing how it differs from academic convention and its consequent degree of persuasiveness. Next, Paglia's theory and methodology is outlined and examined. Finally, I will assess Paglia's criticism of literature and feminist aesthetic theory. My thesis finds Paglia largely unpersuasive, but concedes that some of her ideas and critiques are legitimate particularly in the areas of literary criticism and feminist aesthetics.
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This thesis is tentatively dedicated to my grandparents Harold and Ivy Bailey and Sidney and Gwendolen Day. I say tentatively dedicated because Grandpa Bailey, being a reverend, would probably not have approved of Ms. Paglia and Grandma Day - well - she would not have approved of Camille at all.
INTRODUCTION

CAMILLE PAGLIA: (imitating Nancy Kulp as the schoolmarmish Miss Jane on The Beverly Hillbillies): The penis. Shall we keep it?
Or should we cut it off and throw it away?

In the thirty years since the sexual revolution, we have thought obsessively about sex but come to no answers to any important sexual question. The penis is shaping up to be the central metaphor of the gender crisis of the Nineties. 1

Camille Paglia. Should we read her? Or should we take her out and throw her away? On this issue critics are divided. Some regard her as a learned eccentric out to save criticism from the doldrums and the academy and feminism from itself. Others see her work as trivial and demented and revile her as a bigot who could put the cause of women's liberation (among other things) back twenty years. Her first book Sexual Personae has attracted widely mixed reviews: it has been variously called "brilliant," "fanatical," "a red comet in a smog-filled sky," and "the most evil academic text I have ever read." 

"[B]rilliant" and "fanatical" occurred in the same review by Lillian Faderman who also called the book "remarkable...at once outrageous and compelling."
A good deal of Paglia's hostile critics attack her for her "ideological incorrectness" - her controversial views on feminism, sexuality and the academy, for example. Robert Caserio notes, for instance, how Teresa Ebert declares that the wit and relative cultural conservativism of Sexual Personae furthers patriarchy. And in one of the most scathing reviews I have read of the book, Stephen Whitworth declares it immoral in its praise of capitalism, patriarchy, and its attacks on liberalism and feminism. That the book discusses authors such as Wilde and Shakespeare, and artists such as Leonardo and Donatello is barely mentioned. You would think it was simply a keg of dynamite thrown in the direction of liberals. True, the book is dotted with landmines aimed at both liberal and conservative views. Paglia likes to goad, and her politics - cultural and otherwise - are a contradictory combination of the liberal and the conservative. She also has a great many controversial opinions on social issues, particularly in the area of sexual mores. Her views on date-rape, for instance, have brought her a good deal of her notoriety. She is also infamous for her opinions on gay activism, pornography, sexual harassment and prostitution - and, of course, "establishment feminism". In all this, it seems to have been forgotten that Paglia's major work, Sexual Personae, ideologically and politically provoking though it is, is a study of art and literature. This brings me to the focus of my thesis. As I have implied, a good deal of criticism of Paglia centres on the political implications of her views, whether cultural or general. For my part, my aim is to deal with Paglia primarily as a critic, both of literature and of academic culture. In
dealing with the latter I will touch upon Paglia's attacks on feminism and liberalism, but only with regard to the study of literature.

This thesis might thus be called a beginner's guide to Camille Paglia, or rather, a beginner's study. In my view, this is all it can be. I am in no position to pass judgement on Paglia's wider claims, whether they be on biological sex differences or the art of Ancient Egypt. Right now, I believe it would take an army of professors to judge whether Paglia's sweeping generalisations have any truth in them. All I propose to do in this thesis is to examine the style and content of Paglia's criticisms. This examination will include both descriptions and assessment of her work. My first two chapters will deal with Paglia's rhetoric and her use of wit and satire. The opening chapter on Paglia's rhetoric will centre on Sexual Personae and consider how she endeavours to persuade the reader. In the second chapter, I will be dealing with Paglia's attacks on the academy and feminism, focusing on pieces from the essay collections, Sex, Art and American Culture and Vamps and Tramps. My first chapter, then, deals with Paglia as an academic critic putting forth her theories, and the second deals with Paglia in her infamous role as an iconoclast, an opponent of academic liberalism.

The third and fourth chapters return us to a consideration of Paglia in her roles as a critic and theorist of art and literature, as opposed to a venomous critic of the academy and feminism. Again, the focus is on Sexual Personae. In the third chapter, I shall outline and examine the theory and methodology of the book; in chapter four, I examine her literary criticism proper. Finally, in chapter five we return to the issue of iconoclasm again when I examine her claim that feminist art
theory submits art to a prefabricated social agenda. By briefly considering the texts Paglia discusses, I will attempt in these chapters to arrive at an assessment of the legitimacy of Paglia's views on literature and feminist theory. Although I can in no way hope to be comprehensive - yet alone final or conclusive - in my account of Paglia, I still wish to urge that we should keep both penises and Paglia, however flawed they may be.
CHAPTER ONE: RHETORIC

In this chapter, we will consider how Paglia attempts to persuade the reader; in short, we shall deal with Paglia's rhetoric. To this end, we will consider her means of persuasion under the Aristotelian categories of logos, ethos, and pathos. In the discussion of logos, we will consider the more academic aspects of Paglia's style: her use of quotation, evidence, and so on. We will also see how Paglia departs from academic procedure in her capacity for unwarranted generalisation and assertion. We will then consider Paglia's ethos - her self-presentation - and how it differs from the more standard academic ethos of Paul de Man. Finally, we shall deal with pathos, the way Paglia uses emotion to persuade her readers. This brings us to Paglia's method of "sensationalism" where she deliberately tries to flesh out thought with emotion and induce emotion in the reader. But, first, to logos, Paglia's use and defiance of the academic protocols of evidence and reason.

Paglia makes use of two devices commonly associated with conventional academic writing, namely quotation and paraphrase. However, quotation tends less to support Paglia's argument than to generate it, though this is not always the case. As for paraphrase, in her attempt to describe the emotional and sensory aspects of a work, Paglia's description of works becomes mixed with metaphor in a manner that is striking and seductive but also overly subjective.
Paglia's citations of text tend to produce her arguments rather than support them. Her quotation of Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" in her major work Sexual Personae, for instance, is followed by her own interpretation. First she quotes lines from the point in the poem where the Mariner finds himself becalmed in water teeming with snakes. Paglia writes: "Irmanent has not yet separated from the waters. The sun is only a yolky yellow in the albuminous jelly of the mother-stuff. Primeval ocean swarms with slime life. "3 Here she does not so much analyse Coleridge's lines as rewrite them as her own prose-poem. She gives no account of how she came to this interpretation; there is no analysis, no train of thought that shows how she came to this evocatively written conclusion. She simply gives it. Similarly, in her discussion of Swinburne's Faustine, the quotations are part of her paraphrase which leads into a series of analogies and which fails to provide any account of how these conclusions are reached. Paglia writes: "Faustine is the goddess Fortuna gambling with dead men's bones. She rules flux and change because she is an early version of Swinburne's ocean mother. "4

However, in some of her analyses, Paglia does use quotation as evidence more than as the starting point for argument. In her reading of Emily Dickinson as sadist, for instance, she fills the chapter with examples of Dickinson's "sweet tooth for sadomasochistic horror."5 Likewise, she is persuasive in her account of Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra in her documentation of the play's astrological imagery. But, as William Kerrigan observes, Paglia's tendency to association and prose-poetry, rather than analysis, persists in the chapter on Dickinson. Kerrigan writes that Paglia's readings serve to
intensify Dickinson’s sadistic passages, rather than analyse them. Of one of Paglia’s readings he remarks, "[t]his is raw association, not analysis." 6

Paglia’s use of paraphrase is likewise riddled with problems. Her use of it is intertwined with metaphor and figurative language which can lead to an account of works that goes beyond "faithful description." 7 As Lillian Faderman puts it in her review of Sexual Personae, Paglia’s "literary interpretations are sometimes fascinating fictions of their own instead of elucidations of a work." 8 In her emotive, figurative manner, Paglia seeks to describe an art work in its "sensory completeness," 9 a style which can make for vivid and striking observations. But it can also seem overly subjective. For instance, there is Paglia’s account of Blake’s "London". Here metaphor colours her paraphrase, as she sees a rain of blood in the poem, compares the city walls to blank faces, and most strikingly employs a Biblical metaphor as she compares the blood-stained wall to Veronica’s veil. A rain of blood is not specifically described by Blake, for instance, but Paglia infers it. Hence Blake is remade in Paglia’s thought. Her commentary on "London" is a prime example of Paglia’s reliance on intuition and imaginative and emotional response in her art and literary criticism, a response which she reproduces for her readers. In departing from strict academic method and writing in a manner as figurative as a novel or poem, Paglia’s writing on works becomes a meditation on them as well as or rather than an explanation.
Paglia's *logos*, then, is in part defined by paraphrase followed by extrapolation or by some combination of the two. In using them, however, Paglia tends to emphasise details, begging the question of what the larger patterns are. For instance, in her discussion of *The Faerie Queene*, she emphasises the description of Belphobe, claiming it is like "a sculpture embedded in the text." She latches on to Britomart and Belphobe as examples of her personae and does not bother too much about the other characters. Britomart takes up a great deal of the discussion and anything outside the areas of sex, violence, and sexual personae are not considered. She emphasises the pornographic qualities of *The Faerie Queene*, telling us that these outweigh the Christian elements which she fails to consider. Paglia tips the scales with examples of sadomasochism, rape, cannibalism, and torture without bothering to examine Spenser's ideas, which according to Helen Vendler, exist in the "dull speeches" Paglia casually dismisses in her discussion of Belphobe.

Another dimension of Paglia's *logos* is unqualified assertion without evidence. Consider, for instance, her opening paragraph, which is full of declarative statements.

In the beginning was nature. The background from which and against which our ideas of God were formed, nature remains the supreme moral problem. We cannot hope to understand sex and gender until we clarify our attitude toward nature. Sex is a subset to nature. Sex is the natural in man.
Paglia's first sentence is an echo of Genesis and establishes her assertive and authoritative tone. Its very brevity adds to this effect. The second sentence is longer and less severe, but still ends in an authoritative statement, namely that "nature remains the supreme moral problem". Paglia then announces: "We cannot hope to understand sex and gender until we clarify our attitude towards nature". And, as if defying imaginary protests, she ends with: "Sex is a subset to nature. Sex is the natural in man". Both these sentences are clipped and repetitive. Their consequent severity implies that Paglia will brook no argument. In short, she preaches.

The assertive, authoritative manner of Paglia's rhetoric is most evident in her sentence structure. Many of her sentences are simple clauses. One statement seems to follow another without development, connection, evidence, or explanation. This trend continues even in close analysis of literary works. Subjects or aspects of a work tend to be dealt with sentence by sentence as well as paragraph by paragraph.

Consider, for example, this extract from the opening to the Swinburne and Pater chapter:

...The revolt against Swinburne after the fall of Wilde was part of the modernist defection from classical tradition, which T.S. Eliot's The Waste Land wrongly shows in disarray. Swinburne demonstrates the great continuity of western culture, that brazen union of pagan antiquity with imperial Hollywood.
Swinburne is a Hollywood poet. His pagan sexual personae, Dolores and Faustine, are blazing projections of Decadent cinematics. 13

There is a connection between these ideas, but the way they are presented - as statements following one another without subordination - makes them seem disparate. Instead of being the development of an idea, this passage comes across as being a series of unqualified, declarative statements for which no evidence is provided. First, Paglia refutes the idea she finds in Eliot that the classical tradition is in disarray. Instead of explaining, developing, or qualifying this idea, however, she goes straight onto her thesis about Swinburne: "Swinburne demonstrates the great continuity of western culture, that brazen union of pagan antiquity with imperial Hollywood."

In the last clause of this sentence, she connects pagan antiquity to Hollywood; but the next statement still comes almost as a shock. The declaration that "Swinburne is a Hollywood poet" seems a leaden statement dropped into the paragraph. As Louis Menand writes in the New Republic, Paglia's style seems like "stream of consciousness." 14 Only the mention of continuity, pagan antiquity, and Hollywood in the previous sentence prepares us for the next statement. It is as if Paglia's own use of the word "Hollywood" leads her to Swinburne. Everything is in the same tense; Swinburne "demonstrates" the unity of Western culture and "is" a Hollywood poet at the same time. One claim does not seem to follow the other, although it must.
Besides using declarative statements and paratactic sentences, Paglia also simply repeats herself in her attempts to appear to be reasonable. Her repetitions give the appearance of logical sequence, as the ideas of prior chapters become supporting evidence in another.

For example, Paglia repeatedly asserts the brutality of nature. In the opening chapter, Paglia sets up, figuratively rather than scientifically, an image of nature as tyrannous, barbaric, and amoral. She then calls upon this image through Sexual Personae to support her argument. Coleridge's Life-in-Death for instance, is the "ur-mother," and in her chapter on Blake Paglia repeatedly refers to what she sees as Blake's acknowledgement of the brutality of nature in poems such as "The Mental Traveller" and "The Crystal Cabinet".

On a smaller scale, Paglia takes the idea she presented in the Spenser chapter on the inherent provocativeness of vulnerability and uses it again in her discussion of Blake's "Infant Joy". In writing on The Faerie Queene, Paglia criticises the character of Florimell, whose vulnerability and femininity she sees as "spiritually deficient" and actually provocative of sadism. "Vulnerability generates its own entrapments, creating a maelstrom of voracity around itself. Nature abhors a vacuum. Into the spiritual emptiness of pure femininity in Spenser rush a storm of masculine forces...[s]adism and masochism engender one another in dizzy oscillation. "17 This general claim, asserted without evidence, is reasserted in the passage on Blake's "Infant Joy". Here Paglia claims that the baby of the poem, by its powerlessness, fragility, and vulnerability actually subconsciously...
generates sadism in the reader. She writes of the baby, "[i]t is the provocative vulnerability of the fleeing Florimell, the purity that sucks filth into its wake. "Infant Joy" is a Rousseauist vacuum into which Sadean nature is about to rush...[t]he egoless softness of the poem awakes in us [Milton] Kessler's sensation [in his reading of the poem] of [the reader's] overwhelming power, which we unconsciously check. "18 Repetition of such kind is perhaps necessary in a book as large as Paglia's, and it certainly makes Paglia's argument and theses relatively easy to remember. Apart from this, though, the repetition can become quite tedious, exhausting and annoying, for Paglia seems to think that by repeating a claim she is providing evidence for it.

Sheer generalisation, without qualification or evidence is another dimension of Paglia's logos. In Sexual Personae, she characterizes feminists as "Rousseauists"19 who attribute social problems to the influence of society: "Feminists grossly oversimplify the problem of sex when they reduce it to a matter of social convention: readjust society, eliminate sexual inequality, purify sex roles, and happiness and harmony will reign. "20 Why, how, and who specifically is not discussed here; it is simply said, without qualification or specific evidence. Likewise, at the outset of the chapter on Spenser, she claims that the teaching of The Faerie Queene is "numbingly moralistic,"21 but does not engage with the arguments of the critics with whom she disagrees. We do not even get any names; we do not know who these critics to whom Spenser is "hostage"22 are. Paglia
simply pauses for a brief dismissal, then launches into her own argument.

Paglia's *logos*, her attempt to persuade us by appealing to some reason, then, is constituted by generalisation, unqualified assertion, repetition, and a subjective use of quotation and paraphrase. But Paglia also tries to persuade us by making use of what Aristotle describes as *ethos* and *pathos*. *Ethos*, according to Aristotle's *Rhetoric* is constituted by techniques by which a speaker represents herself to her audience as a person of moral integrity. Aristotle writes: "There are three reasons why speakers themselves are persuasive; for there are three things we trust other than logical demonstrations. These are practical wisdom and virtue and good will... a person seeming to have all these qualities is necessarily persuasive to the hearers." An example of a persuasive *ethos* is that of Paul de Man, whom I will compare with Paglia. Whereas de Man presents himself as modest, intellectually rigorous, and compassionate, Paglia presents herself as a scholar, libertarian, and the voice of common sense. This, however, sits uncomfortably with her egotism, aggression, vulgarity, and viciousness, which could be annoying and repellent to some readers.

In "Semiology and Rhetoric" in *Allegories of Reading*, de Man presents his case in a modest and understated manner. He writes, for instance, "Metaphors are much more tenacious than facts, and I certainly don't expect to dislodge this age-old model in one short try. I merely wish to speculate on a different set of terms." In this statement, he appears both authoritative and modest at the same
time; he begins with the authoritative statement "Metaphors are much more tenacious than facts" but qualifies this by modestly adding "I certainly don't expect to dislodge this age-old model in one short try. " So, too, toward the end of the essay, de Man argues that the text he has deconstructed actually deconstructs itself. Here he takes an authoritative tone, while paradoxically implying that the deconstruction of Proust was not an act of great intellectual prowess on his part, but simply resulted from a common-sense close reading of the text: "The reading is not 'our' reading, since it uses only the linguistic elements provided by the text itself; the distinction between author and reader is one of the false distinctions that the reading makes evident. The deconstruction is not something we have added to the text but it constituted the text in the first place."26 In this way, de Man implies that he is an intellectual authority, but appeals to the reader by seeming modest to boot. If a reader values modesty, s/he will be affected by de Man's profession of it.

As implied by the last example, de Man's modesty is not only a quality which the reader may find appealing; it also implies that de Man's conclusions are self-evident and can be reached by anyone. In setting himself up as lacking expertise, de Man implies that his conclusions arise from a simple close reading of the texts he studies, a close reading that any competent reader can do; thus he makes himself look modest and humble. The pose of modesty is useful to de Man in that he can use it to support his claim that his observations are self-evident. For instance, on page 17 he writes, "It is easy enough to see that this apparent glorification of the critic-philosopher
in the name of truth is in fact a glorification of the poet as the primary source of this truth. "27 Here he implies that his observations can be made by anyone and that they are purely the result of common sense.

Apart from his modesty and the consequent self-evidence of his ideas, de Man also gives the impression of possessing virtues such as compassion. In picturing critics as being confined in formalist criticism (in an emotionally affective image of imprisonment), de Man shows sympathy for the ideas he is about to debunk: "...with the structure of the code so opaque, but the meaning so anxious to blot out the obstacle of form, no wonder that the reconciliation of form and meaning would be so attractive. "28 More dramatically, towards the end of the essay he presents criticism as being in a predicament that has been uncovered by his apparently innocent, bumbling speculations. He concludes with a pronoun that includes all, including himself, in the general crisis: "We end up...in the case of rhetorical grammatization of semiology, just as in the grammatical rhetoricization of illocutionary phrases, in the same state of suspended ignorance. "29 He shares in the bewilderment that he has created; he does not claim to be the arch-interpreter while everyone else flails in confusion. He also raises compassion for himself by implying that he suffers as others do; he seems doubly noble in that in the midst of his confusion, he is sympathetic to the confusion of others.

De Man thus establishes himself as the self-effacing, quietly pondering, objective scholar; Paglia is an unashamed egoist. Where
de Man judiciously quotes and keeps himself quietly in the
background, Paglia, as we have seen, boldly asserts without
qualification. She rarely stops to justify or prove anything, but simply
gives her conclusions and goes on to the next point. She intimidates
the reader by her assertive style, coupled with her erudition. There is
a constant danger that she may alienate the reader by her hectoring,
repetitive, and subjective manner. However, Paglia's egoism and
aggression may be mitigated by other aspects of her ethos, by her
repeated claim that she is a Sixties libertarian, the voice of common
sense, and a learned scholar. Paglia associates the Sixties with
ideals of freedom of speech, thought and expression, progressive
politics and civil liberties. She claims that her support of
pornography, for instance, arises from a Sixties belief in sexual
freedom. She claims the pornographic film Deep Throat, derided by
feminists such as Catherine MacKinnon, was actually liberating and
enlightening to Sixties women. Likewise, she praises Sixties sex
magazines as "artistic...funky...radical in their politics"30 and claims
they were read by women as well as men. Not only does she
repeatedly claim to be pro-drugs, pro-prostitution, pro-pornography,
pro-homosexuality and pro-abortion, but in the essay collections
especially, Paglia repeatedly refers to her college and graduate
school years during the Sixties. In "The M.I.T. Lecture" she describes
herself as "the Sixties come back to haunt the present,"31 and in
arguing against what she sees as hysteria over date rape, she says
Sixties women's awareness of the dangers of sexual freedom have
been lost. "When I entered college in 1964, women were locked in the
dorm at 11:00 p.m. My generation rebelled against and shattered
these paternalistic rules. But with freedom come risk and responsibility. We accepted the risk in order to explore and learn about life...Today these young women want the freedom that we won, but they don't want to acknowledge the risk. By associating herself with the Sixties, Paglia clearly establishes her ethos as one of independence, courage and freedom.

Paglia also establishes herself as a person of common sense. In an interview on date rape, Paglia claims to be restoring a "common-sense attitude." and many of her ideas seem to be "common sensical" ones. For instance, there is the persistent idea that sex begins in biology and that social constructionists such as Catherine MacKinnon have gone too far in attributing sex differences and behaviours to the influence of society. Likewise, Paglia is up front about what she sees as the pornographic element in art works such as Donatello's David and the paintings of Caravaggio, which she claims other critics have ignored or glossed over.

Paglia's common-sensical views and stance as a Sixties libertarian may appeal to some readers, but some of her views are extreme, and her egoism is pervasive: Vamps and Tramps contains items that could be seen as indulgent, such as a memoir on four gay friends, her "brothers in crime," and appendices featuring cartoons and lists of articles about her (also a feature of Sex, Art and American Culture). Such egoism, to which Paglia readily confesses ("I'm in love with myself. It's the romance of the century!") is perhaps mitigated for some by her wit, passion, and candour. Unlike scholars such as de Man, she is down to earth and unpretentious in her style and
tastes; a strong example of this is her championing of popular culture: she admires popular figures like Madonna and the Rolling Stones and she writes for the media in a lively, accessible style. This may either make her look low and vulgar or unpretentious and accessible to the reader. She flagrantly violates the de Manian ethos.

Like Paul de Man, Paglia also lays claim to authority, but does so far more overtly. The authoritative ethos that appears in de Man is more open in Paglia; coupled with her academic terms and displays of erudition, it makes Paglia seem scholarly, though this is severely compromised by other aspects of her style. In Sexual Personae, the range of periods, artists and writers she commands is vast, "From Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson" as the cover puts it. She also displays her erudition in her essay collections; in her article on Princess Diana, she compares her to a range of mythical figures and archetypes: Cinderella, the betrayed wife, the princess in the tower, the mater dolorosa, the pagan goddess, and the Hollywood queen. From her erudite position, Paglia condemns prominent academics and thinkers as unlearned and limited, but is compromised by her own reliance on anti-intellectual styles such as generalisation and personal attack in her own work.

To strengthen the scholarly side of her ethos, Paglia makes use of academic language. This use of academese is sometimes incongruous with Paglia's predominantly emotive and figurative manner, but it nonetheless gives Paglia the aura of intellectual authority that she claims for herself. Many of Paglia's academic
terms are derived from psychoanalysis, some of which have passed into common usage. These are terms such as "id", "ego", "return of the repressed", "identity crisis" and "family romance". Paglia also invents a few academic terms of her own, namely her "personae" and a few other choice things like "psychoiconism". She introduces this term in her discussion of Geraldine in Coleridge's poem "Christabel".

Geraldine, "illustrates a principle I call psychoiconism:

it governs literary works whose primary inspiration is an experimental, charismatic persona, appearing epiphanically, in iconic frontality.
The figure is invested with so much psychic power that the other characters lose fictive energy and fade into the background. Sir Leoline, for example, is merely a sketch, part of the decor.
Psychoiconism resembles the register, method of Egyptian wall art, where the hierarchically-central figure is three times larger than lesser mortals.36

The last three sentences of this passage rely on an analogy or metaphor - Egyptian art, background, decor, a sketch - to demonstrate Paglia's idea. The first sentence, however, is slightly more intimidating. It has a touch of academese. First we have the
term "psychoiconism", next we have "primary inspiration", thirdly the persona appears "epiphanically, in iconic frontality". Epiphanically hastens a rush for the dictionary, but "iconic frontality" could be glossed as "appears face onwards, like an icon." Paglia's readiness to use such academic terms, combined with her displays of erudition and her assertive manner, make her seem intellectually authoritative. Thus, Paglia's ethos may both attract and repel; on the one hand she presents herself as a libertarian scholar who possesses "common sense", but on the other hand she appears to be an aggressive, arrogant, anti-intellectual egoist.

We now turn from Paglia's ethos to her use of pathos. Pathos is the manipulation of the listener's emotions by the speaker. Aristotle again: "[There is persuasion] through the hearers when they are led to feel emotion (pathos) by the speech; for we do not give the same judgement when grieved or rejoicing or when being friendly or hostile." Paglia is not ashamed of using pathos in Sexual Personae. In the "Cancelled Preface" to Sexual Personae she writes "I am a sensationalist, in all meanings of the word: I make my sensations into ideas and reduce my ideas into sensations, so that thought and feeling are simultaneous." More succinctly, she writes of this "sensationalism" in the preface to Sexual Personae that it seeks to "flesh out intellect with emotion, and to induce a wide range of emotion in the reader." Paglia does this on several fronts. One is in her discussion of individual works which she seeks to "describe with sensory completeness." Another is more generally, in her personification of nature as tyrant. The third is in the outrageousness
of some of her statements and premises, which defy both liberal and conservative academic opinion. We shall deal with such provocation in the chapter "Wit, Satire and Iconoclasm"; for now, we will deal with Paglia's attempts to arouse the reader's emotions in her accounts of individual art works and her personification of nature.

In adopting *pathos* as a means of persuasion, Paglia is reacting against what she sees as the academic tendency to abstraction in art criticism. She writes in the "Cancelled Preface" that "too much academic criticism is as dull as dishwater because the object has receded into the academic distance." 41 In the preface of *Vamps and Tramps* she writes that her "vamping," 42 improvisational style stresses emotional truth and energy rather than "technical perfection and cerebralism." 43 Further, in the course of "Junk Bonds and Corporate Raiders", she laments the emotional distance of late New Criticism. "In the Sixties, amid the cloistered sterility of late New Criticism we vowed: never again. Never again abstractions that kill art; never again the mind divorced from the body or the mind divorced from emotion." 44 In her view, emotional, sensory and imaginative - as well as intellectual - response to art is entirely appropriate.

In her fight against critical abstraction and emotional distance, Paglia takes the view that art is more sensual than cerebral. Praising Milton Kessler, her college teacher, she credits him with making her aware of the "sensory quality of literature, the primary level too quickly overleaped by most criticism." 45 Continuing this theme in the "Cancelled Preface", she enthusiastically declares "Culture is
nuturant, sustaining. Language is fruit and meat, physical, sensual.\textsuperscript{46}

She also proclaims that "the greatest honour that can be paid an art work is to describe it with sensory completeness. \textsuperscript{47} Thus, in her description of Donatello's \textit{David}, for instance, she breathlessly "re-create[s]\textsuperscript{48} the work's inviting yet remote eroticism: its "shimmery, slithery bronze is a frozen wet dream. \textsuperscript{49} The liquid, sensual quality of the adjectives "shimmery" and "slithery", the assonance of "bronze" and "frozen", the lingering slowness of "wet dream" - Paglia's very language conveys and recreates the fluid, erotic quality she sees in the statue, and is aimed at moving her readers' erotic passions.

In trying to convey, or reproduce, the sensory quality of art works such as \textit{David}, Paglia is pursuing her view that art has an emotional and sensual component as well as - if not more than - and intellectual one. She writes in her opening chapter to \textit{Sexual Personae} that there is a "voyeuristic element latent in all art"\textsuperscript{50} and that "all personae in art are sex objects. \textsuperscript{51} For Paglia, emotion, sex and art go together. "The emotional response of spectator or reader is inseparable from erotic response...Emotional arousal is sensual arousal; sensual arousal is sexual arousal...We are voyeurs at the perimeters of art, and there is a sadomasochistic sensuality in our responses to it. Art is scandal, literally a 'stumbling block', to all moralism...Pornography and art are inseparable, because there is voyeurism and voracity in all our sensations as seeing, feeling beings."\textsuperscript{52} She does not subscribe to the belief that art is appreciated on a purely intellectual, "disinterested" level; it appeals to the viewer's emotions and
imagination as well. We have already seen her trying to convey this
effect with her account of David; she seeks by, "sensationalism", to
"recreate" the statue in all its eroticism. This, as Mark Edmundson
points out, is in complete contrast to the art historian H.W. Janson's
account of the work, which emphasises its historical context and
views it in a cool, detached manner. Edmundson writes: "Whatever
the pleasure the piece might yield is quickly refined away by the
academic discipline. Might it not in fact be one of the social functions
of historical criticism to discipline aesthetic pleasures? Do art history
and literary criticism frequently strain to make us address in an
exclusively rational way works aimed to incite our passion? Such
questions don't usually turn up on the exam."53 In contrast to
Janson, Paglia wallows in the sensual, emotional qualities of art; she
views art in terms of its emotional impact, rather than in terms of
what intellectual reflection might reveal. Thus, for example, she
gleefully emphasises the sadomasochistic violence in Blake's "The
Daughters of Thel." Such wallowing in sex and cruelty is most
pointed in her chapter on Emily Dickinson, where, as William
Kerrigan observes, Paglia analyses Dickinson's poems in a way that
makes their sadism abundantly clear, rephrasing Dickinson's
understatement into overstatement. Thus, for instance, Paglia
cheerfully elaborates on Dickinson's image of a brain with a splinter,
spelling out its gruesomeness. "In this example, the brain...is
humming merrily along in its underground railroad of daily custom,
when it is suddenly pierced by a splinter shooting off the wooden
track. "54 The brain, personified (the better to scare you with) "hums"
quietly along in the second phrase, only to be hit by a series of
aggressive verbs; "suddenly pierced" "splinter shooting off". Again, Paglia here appeals to the emotions of fear and anxiety by focusing on a physical detail. As if it isn’t alarming and chilling enough, Paglia then remarks, casually, "It always reminds me of a breakfast-hour high-school driver-education film that made us contemplate a dead truck driver, his skull crushed against the dashboard by a load of lumber shifting forward." Paglia’s high diction and black humour, her cool delight in Dickinson’s sadism is all the more chilling; she tries to make the reader laugh and cringe at the same time.

Still on the issue of Dickinson’s brains, Paglia, writing on the line "I’ve dropped my Brain", again tries to induce bemused revulsion in the reader, to stress Dickinson’s perversity. The account begins innocently enough, with almost cool academic detachment. "Thought is paralysed, with the brain dropped like a handkerchief to the floor." Paglia then turns the screw on the reader, making us anticipate another gruesome finale: "But such an object will hardly float to the floor." We half-imagine the grisly denouement, cringe in the dreadful suspense of what Paglia will say next. She delivers: "We hear a muffled thump, like the paperboy hitting the stoop with the evening edition." Paglia forces us to see, to imagine, what Dickinson’s line only implies. Again, the black wit tries to induce an amused shudder, the former only adding to the latter. We marvel and recoil at Paglia’s - and Dickinson’s - gruesomeness.

Paglia’s sensationalism occurs not only in the discussion of individual art works; it also occurs generally throughout Sexual Personae. Paglia provokes with her challenges to received opinion: there is, for instance, her notorious sentence "If civilization had been
left in female hands, we would still be living in grass huts." But
she also plays on the reader's emotional response with her
personification of nature. She tries to impress on the reader the "awe"
and "terror" to emphasise its influence on human life. For instance, in the second opening paragraph to Sexual Personae, she sets up the image of nature as tyrant that will continue to dominate the book.

Society is an artificial construction, a defense against nature's power. Without society, we would be storm-tossed on the barbarous sea that is nature. Society is a system of inherited forms reducing our humiliating passivity to nature. We may alter these forms, slowly or suddenly, but no change in society will change nature. Human beings are not nature's favourites. We are merely one of a multitude of species upon which nature indiscriminately exerts its force. Nature has a master agenda we can only dimly know.

In her depiction of nature, Paglia appeals to the reader’s fear, conveying what she sees as nature’s cruelty and indifference not by scientific evidence but by affective images. Thus, for instance, "without society, we would be storm-tossed on the barbarous sea that is nature" This image of chaos is enhanced by the rhythm of the sentence; it has an erratic wave-like motion. For most of the paragraph, however, Paglia implies that nature is a remote tyrant that
cannot be defeated: "[w]e are merely one of a multitude of species upon which nature indiscriminately exerts its force." Society "is a system of inherited forms reducing our humiliating passivity to nature".

Paglia's oracular declarations on the brutality of nature have amused some critics. For instance, Walter Kendrick writes: "You think there's beauty in nature? Grow up! 'See nature spuming and frothing, its spermatic bubbles endlessly spilling out and smashing in that inhuman round of waste, rot and carnage.' See nature's 'bloody open mouth', her 'impacted, putrefying womb'! See and be afraid: 'Never send to know for whom the belle tolls. She tolls for thee.' "

Likewise, Kathleen Marie Higgins writes that Paglia's "mournful perspective" on the cruelty of nature and humanity is "burdened...and...tedious." As we can see from Kendrick's quotations, Paglia tries, in her "hyperbolic" way, as Higgins' calls it, to induce the reader's alarm and revulsion; nature aggressively spumes and froths, overflowing in "waste, rot and carnage." Nature is personified again, this time as an aggressive carnivore; Paglia also adds a note of revulsion to the traditional notion of mother nature with "impacted, putrefying womb".

In the area of pathos, then, we see how Paglia uses "sensationalism" to "recreate" the initial emotional impact of seeing or reading an art work and to impress on the reader the "awe" and "terror" of nature. She also seeks to goad and emotionally manipulate the reader by making provocative statements and using satire when dealing with her enemies (as we shall see in the next chapter). This use of pathos, this appeal to the emotions is not the only way in which
Paglia departs from academic convention. For, as we have seen, her ethos differs in its egoism and stridency from the more modest yet authoritative ethos of Paul de Man. Paglia may repel some readers by her egoism and aggression, but may appeal to others by virtue of her wit, apparent common sense, populism and libertarian stance. Her references to scholarly sources also make her seem knowledgeable and scholarly, but such displays of erudition are severely compromised by her departures from academic style. For instead of pursuing the standard academic procedures of reasoned argument and proof, Paglia is declarative in style. As we have seen her *logos* is constituted by generalisation, unqualified assertion, and repetition, paraphrase, and citation rather than reasoned argument to put forward her case. As Helen Vendler puts it, "she goes on as if assertion were its own evidence. "66 This is not always the case, however, for as we shall see in a later chapter, Paglia can produce sensitive and compelling close readings of literary works. But on the whole, her manner is much as Vendler suggests.

When Paglia does draw on academic convention, as in her use of paraphrase and quotation, it appears less as evidence than as a diving board for her conclusions and associations. In her aim to include emotional and sensory response in her analyses, she at times extrapolates from the quotations without outlining how she reaches her conclusions. In her use of paraphrase, she colours literary works by metaphor which marks her attempt to record emotional, sensory, and imaginative response in her art criticism. Paglia's "sensationalism" is often an attempt at this.
Through her "sensationalism", Mark Edmundson writes that Paglia seeks to "seduce and inspire" in her appreciations of art. But seduction and inspiration are not Paglia's only aims in her use of pathos. She also seeks to shock and alarm. This is not only in her depictions of amoral material in art and the brutality of nature, as we have seen, but also in her vicious and personal attacks on others. This brings us to our next chapter.
CHAPTER TWO: WIT, SATIRE AND ICONOCLASM

In the first chapter, our consideration of Paglia's persuasive strategy revealed the employment of what Aristotle would call *ethos, pathos,* and *logos.* But Paglia's concern to persuade is limited. She is also intent upon amusing the reader and attacking her opponents, often at the same time. Her wit alone, as manifest in *Sexual Personae,* is not only a way of making herself congenial to the reader, but also a device for humanising canonical art works, making them seem more accessible to a general audience. She attacks others for both personal and intellectual reasons. She can be seen as simply unleashing her own rage and hatred, but she also claims her offensiveness serves an intellectual purpose. She sees offensiveness as a tool for preventing the consolidation of dogma, and a rebellion against academic codes of behaviour, political correctness, and speech codes which she believes have damaged the cause of free speech and free thought. Her aggression is also, she claims, a feminist rebellion against white, middle-class standards for female behaviour which she believes have crippled women. But however much Paglia tries to justify her aggressive, obnoxious manner in intellectual and feminist terms, it can also be seen as purely personal. It is an expression of her personality and her rage and hatred against the academy and what she calls "establishment feminism." To discuss this dimension of her writing we need to
move past Aristotelian categories and talk about wit, satire, and iconoclasm.

Paglia's sense of humour is one of her most appealing features. It manifests itself not only in her interviews and journalistic pieces, but in the scholarly tome, *Sexual Personae*. Here it not only reflects her personality but also furthers her aim to make academic writing and discussion accessible to a general audience. In pieces such as "Junk Bonds and Corporate Raiders" and "The M.I.T. Lecture", she frowns upon what she sees as the obscurity of most academic writing - particularly theory. "All literary criticism should be accessible to the literate general audience," she writes in "Junk Bonds and Corporate Raiders". "That there is such a general audience, which has been arrogantly blocked out by obscurantist theorists (laughably claiming leftist and populist aims), I know from letters I have received about my own book."2 In her proposals for academic reform, she is adamant that "a sense of the general audience must be recovered."3

Her witty, plain-speaking manner - both in person and in her writing - is one way in which she tries to achieve this.

Paglia's plain-speaking style adds to her wit. For her tendency to discuss high art in demotic terms can lead to bathetic effects. In this respect, it is similar to her comparisons of low and high art and her provocative statements which ring of bathos to some reviewers. For example, Stephen Whitworth concludes his negative review of *Sexual Personae* by saying,

Paglia's willingness to say the unexpected does make parts of *Sexual Personae* exceedingly humourous.
Where else can one go to see Tina Turner put forth as a candidate for the role of Shakespeare's Cleopatra? Who else could mention Madonna in a discussion of Pre-Raphaelite art? What other scholarly work would suggest that the Rolling Stones are the modern incarnation of the Coleridgean spirit?4

Such incongruity continues in Paglia's very style itself, with her combination of academic, literary, and demotic modes of speech. As Paglia might compare Byron with Elvis Presley, for instance, so she might introduce a witty or demotic phrase in a discussion of a canonical art work.

For instance, in her reading of Blake's "The Mental Traveller", Paglia remarks "Service has switched on the Sadean tennis court."5 The effect of this phrase is almost anticlimatic, as a discussion of "high art", namely a Blake poem, suddenly includes a reference to tennis. Paglia later humanises Blake, remarking that he is, metaphorically speaking "tweaking the noses"6 of Swedenborg and Milton. Earlier, Paglia puns on John Donne when she says of the Venus of Willendorf, "Never send to know for whom the belle tolls. She tolls for thee. "7

By such displays of wit and her use of the demotic, Paglia may not only make her readers laugh, but also make her high art subjects less lofty and intimidating to a general audience. She writes in the preface to Sexual Personae that she seeks to "liberate criticism from classroom and library,"8 and her sense of humour and lapses into
everyday speech are ways in which she does this. However, whether by this Paglia achieves her aim to reach a general audience with Sexual Personae is perhaps a vexed question. For all her wit, energy and relative accessibility, Paglia still has a strident style and academic terminology which can still be intimidating and exhausting.

Paglia is also intimidating in her aggressive, vitriolic attacks on her opponents. In Sex, Art and American Culture and Vamps and Tramps, she relies on satire when dealing with her enemies, more than analysis of their works. Part of Paglia's notoriety derives from this approach, as well as the unfashionable nature of her views (her belief in biological sex differences, for example). Paglia is content neither to temper her more extreme views, nor to beg politely to differ with her academic opponents. In the introduction to Vamps and Tramps, she writes that in her efforts to reform academe and feminism, "I have used aggressive 'strikes', based on war and (my favourite sport) football, to damage and punish false leaders. My favourite weapon has been satire, which I studied in Horace, Juvenal, Rabelais, Pope, Swift, Oscar Wilde, Bob Dylan, and Mad magazine."

Intellectually, such an approach may not be to her credit, as in her capacity for vitriol and personal attack she may look like a vicious, unprofessional crank to some observers. But her aggressive approach can at times be extremely funny, memorable, provoking, and accessible.

Let us now see Paglia in action. In "Junk Bonds and Corporate Raiders", she applies nasty epithets to figures and schools of thought popular in academe. Sex analysis by Foucault, for example, is "trial by prune-faced icelock"10 and deconstruction is "masturbation
without pleasure." In this way, Paglia ridicules respected figures such as Derrida, Foucault, and Lacan, cutting them down and making them look foolish or insignificant. She tries to induce in the reader the scorn she herself feels for these theorists. This vitriolic approach is even more pronounced in Paglia's attack on anti-porn campaigners Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon. In "The Return of Carry Nation" she attacks Dworkin and MacKinnon personally, only pausing to make the odd generalisation about their writing; there are few quotations and these are short and undocumented. Throughout "Return of Carry Nation", Paglia builds up a negative characterisation of MacKinnon and Dworkin, making them seem ridiculous and alarming at the same time. For instance, Paglia portrays Dworkin as childish and pathetic, "the Girl with the Eternal Cold," a "morose, unlovable child who never got her mama's approval" Likewise, Paglia ridicules MacKinnon by comparing her to "Nurse Diesel, the preachy secret sadist in Mel Brooks' High Anxiety." She trivialises MacKinnon by turning her into a comic movie character. But Paglia also tries to raise the reader's alarm, as well as contempt, by presenting MacKinnon and Dworkin as threats to free speech and free expression. Loaded words resound in the article, as Paglia paints a picture of Dworkin and MacKinnon as fanatical and totalitarian. On the first page, MacKinnon and Dworkin are "obsessed" and "moralistic"; on the second they are "fanatics, zealots, fundamentalists of the new feminist religion." By such means, she emotionally manipulates the reader, inducing both scorn and alarm. In this way Paglia may be seen to further her project of persuading the reader that the work of
MacKinnon and Dworkin on pornography is worthless. But she is also indulging in her own rage and simply ridicule her opponents in the manner of satirists such as Juvenal.

Such iconoclasm is not unprecedented in the world of letters. Indeed, it has quite a distinguished history. In his article "Journalists, Legislators and Ideologues in the Classroom," Robert Caserio, surveying negative reviews of Sexual Personae, notes that Paglia's confrontational style has precedents in Baudelaire, Wilde, Lawrence and Whistler - and chides one reviewer, Teresa Ebert, for not noticing this fact. By briefly comparing Paglia's brand of iconoclasm with the nihilism of Oscar Wilde and D.H. Lawrence, we can deepen our understanding of this dimension of her work.

Paglia acknowledges a particular debt to Wilde's aesthetic theories and criticism. Defending Madonna's pornographic video "Justify My Love", Paglia backs up her claim that the artist has no obligation to be moral with reference to Wilde and Baudelaire. Earlier, in the introduction to Sex, Art and American Culture, Paglia acknowledges her kinship with Oscar Wilde as a critic. Writing on how her aggressive reviewing style offends some people, Paglia says "[w]hen in doubt I read Oscar Wilde. His battles are my battles, and there are echoes of his strategies and formulations throughout my work. Like Wilde, I try to use all the modalities of language, from lyric to comic and martial, to do yeoman's service in the culture wars." With Lawrence, however, Paglia does not proclaim any stylistic or aesthetic affiliation. However, she does admire him, regarding his novel Women in Love as an influence on Sexual Personae. She expressly admires him as a thinker on sex, ranking him with her other
favourite, Sigmund Freud. She regards them as "the two deepest thinkers on sex in the twentieth century." Lawrence's Studies in Classic American Novel is also cited respectfully in Sexual Personae. But Paglia does not claim to be influenced by Lawrence in her style of critical writing; however, as we shall see, their styles are similar in some important respects.

Paglia resembles Lawrence and Wilde in that she takes a scornful tone with some of her subjects. For instance, in "An Open Letter to the Students of Harvard", she describes with great contempt, how Harvard awards it "highest honours." She claims that a leading academic rose to prominence by following Paul de Man and Derrida, and then, after de Man's disgrace, switching to feminism and Afro-American studies, "neither of which her books had shown prior interest in." To top it all off, she finally came out as a lesbian, "which is now chic." Of this Paglia is scornful, claiming that some academics, such as the one she mentions, "stayed in the closet until tenure - and other people's sacrifices - made it safe to come out and claim the spoils." A similarly contemptuous and scornful tone is taken by Lawrence and Wilde. Lawrence, in "Surgery for the Novel - or a Bomb", shows outright contempt for the modern novel, calling it "childish" and "infantile." Likewise, Wilde entitles his review of a biography of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, "A Cheap Edition of a Great Man" and acidly remarks that "the vulgarisation of Rossetti" has had "remarkable success." This sort of irony and understatement is Wilde's particular quality and is not especially shared by Lawrence and Paglia, who tend to be more hyperbolic in their attacks.
Lawrence, for instance, can be more sarcastic than coolly ironic
and does not really go for understatement at all. In "Surgery for the
Novel" for instance, he parodies what he sees as the morbid self-
consciousness of the modern novel. "'Did I feel a twinge in my little
toe, or didn't I? ' asks every character of Mr. Joyce or of Miss
Richardson or M. Proust. Is my aura a blend of frankincense and
orange pekoe and boot-blacking, or is it myrrh and bacon-fat and
Shetland tweed?"31 Lawrence's contempt is abundantly clear; unlike
Wilde, he overstates rather than understates. Paglia is also over the
top in her sarcastic mockery of Naomi Wolf's sexual confessions in
her attack on Paglia, "Feminist Fatale."32 Paglia writes "one cannot
conclude without exclaiming at the sheer daffy bathos, the Harlequin
Romance vulgarity of Wolf's trumpeting to us the steamy details of
her first orgasm. Oh, the 'pure heat and light' of it! And our gal
miraculously saved from 'septicemia on a basement gurney'! All
because of a white knight giving her 'a rubber disk and trial-size tube
of gel'."33 And if her contempt wasn't clear enough, she concludes "I
guess this is Ivy League pornography, lots of lush gush and chic
social message. "34 In contrast to Lawrence and Paglia, when Wilde
opts for irony, he goes for understatement as well.

One quality all three writers share is a declarative and assertive
manner; in short, they like to preach. The tone of these declarative
styles differs, however: Lawrence tends to be quite impassioned in
his preaching; Wilde is more coolly pronouncing. For instance,
Lawrence in "Pornography and Obscenity" rails against sexual
repression in society and claims it is the cause of pornography. In his
temper he repeats himself, often referring to what he calls "the dirty
little secret" of sex. "No more secrecy!" he bellows at one point, "Away with the secret!" This impassioned, preaching tone recurs in "Surgery for the Novel". He concludes his essay by fervently declaring "The novel has a future. It's got to have the courage to tackle new propositions without using abstractions; it's got to present us with new, really new feelings, a whole line of new emotion, which will get us out of the emotional rut. "37 One can imagine him thumping the table as he "says" this. Wilde, by contrast, is cooler in tone. For instance, disagreeing with an author's estimation of Longfellow, Wilde declares, "Longfellow has no imitators, for of echoes there are only echoes. "38 Earlier in the piece, he declares "Longfellow is so essentially poor in rhymes that it is unfair to rob him even of one. "39 Here we see Wilde's trademark, a mixture of wit and declarative statement.

Paglia partakes of Wilde's pronouncing wit, but also of Lawrence's sermonical fervour. At times her declarations approach Wildean aphorism. For instance, in "Sontag, Bloody Sontag", she declares "An elitist leftism is a contradiction in terms"40 and in "Rape and the Modern Sex War" she writes that "leaving sex to the feminists is like letting your dog vacation at the taxidermist's. "41 At other times, however, she can be almost as sermonical as Lawrence. For instance, in "Open Letter to the Students of Harvard" comes the impassioned cry, "When will Ivy League students wake up to the corruption that is all around them?"42 Likewise in "Junk Bonds and Corporate Raiders" she bristles with contempt for French theory: "Enough already of Lacan, Derrida, and Foucault poured like ketchup over everything."43
We thus see how Paglia ridicules and rails at her opponents, and how her iconoclastic style has affinities with that used by D.H. Lawrence and Oscar Wilde in their own literary criticism. It remains, then, to consider why Paglia uses such an aggressive, anti-intellectual style. In short, (to borrow her own technique for a moment) why is she such an obnoxious, vicious, cantankerous old bat? One can posit many reasons. Presumably, Paglia wishes to provoke, to shock and to be memorable. It is Paglia's express wish to use "shock tactics" in her quarrel with academe and feminism. Specifically, she believes it is the purpose of the artist and intellectual to make people "squeal." The intellectual and artist have an obligation to deal with disturbing material, such as paedophilia, because, in Paglia's view, "I feel that's the only way we can keep ourselves from sliding into dogmatism. To most people, these kinds of things [such as child pornography] are abhorrent. They can't look at them without being disturbed." Elsewhere, she says that she feels that "the function of the modern artist is to shatter all taboos, and that where the subject of the art work causes the most pain, that is where the artist is contributing the most to civilization." This goes for intellectuals as well - which means her:

[W]hat I'm doing is I'm going around as an intellectual...and I am seizing on and attacking each of these jargon phrases [of feminism] and exposing them, and I'm doing it by shock
tactics. For example, this business about snuff films...which is like...
this huge nightmare vision of contemporary anti-porn feminists. And so I'm doing things like saying, 'Let snuff films be made!' Now I don't mean, of course, a film in which a real woman is killed. When we go to a mystery story, we don't want to see a real woman, a real person being murdered...But I'm saying that whenever there's a taboo, it's the absolute obligation of the artist and intellectual to seize on that taboo and to shatter it.48

And, presumably, that goes for academic "niceties" such as being polite with your intellectual opponents names, engaging in "reasoned debate," and not saying "reactionary" or "misogynistic" things like "If civilization had been left in women's hands, we would still be living in grass huts."49

Indeed, Paglia believes that the humanities in America has been crippled by a concern for good manners. She writes in the "Cancelled Preface",

Liberal pieties still hang heavy in the air of American universities.

Sexual Personae, so enamoured of personality, is nevertheless a
book written against humanism, or rather, against humanities in their present academic dilution. Understanding of literature and art, as well as current campus policy is woefully muddled by philanthropic good intentions. The Greco-Roman Italian Renaissance, a period of strong personality and incandescent artistic genius, was fiercely competitive and conspiratorial, showy and violent. Similarly, the neoclassic eighteenth century, before the advent of Rousseauist tenderness, was a spectacle of clashing wills, with its satirical broadsides, public fisticuffs, and rocks flying through dining room windows. Aggression and culture were not yet divorced.

It seems, then, that Paglia wishes for an academic environment more congenial to her aggressive temperament, where her "prickly eccentricity" is tolerated. She laments what she sees as the lack of toleration for eccentricity and individuality among faculty in the American academy. This is in contrast to the tolerance of European academic culture: "American academic life is...enfeebled by its genteel code of professorial deportment. Our universities are the
bland leading the bland. Are academics born sedate, or is sedateness thrust upon them? Promotion requires respectability, spirit-killing constraints. Eccentricities, for which the English are noted, are not tolerated, except in the already famous. The WASP ethic of American universities has given birth to a scholarship the mirror image of itself, passionless and humorless. "52 If expectations to be "nice" have made for boring scholarship, it has also, in Paglia's view, put the dampers on her overriding principle of free speech. She writes in "The Nursery-School Campus"53 that in the 1970s, the colleges' need to attract fee-paying students led to a campus "community" governed by invisible codes of speech, opinions and behaviour. Political correctness and campus speech codes are Paglia's bête noire; she believes that it serves no purpose to put limitations on what can and cannot be said - that presumably includes insulting your intellectual enemies and holding extremely unfashionable views, as Paglia does. Instead, she believes that speech codes on campus shield students from the realities of life and that "offensiveness" in thought and speech is "a democratic right. "54 "I believe, you know, that we should be as nasty as possible, at all times! It serves nothing to just try to squelch speech. It changes no one's opinion of anything."55 Paglia's satiric, vitriolic manner in dealing with her enemies is thus in part a rebellion against what she sees as the "invisible codes" governing the academy, whether they be codes of academic deportment, political correctness or speech codes. She also values iconoclasm, in both intellectual and artistic life, as a way of destroying taboos and preventing the consolidation of dogma, both academic and feminist. She espouses "offensiveness
for its own sake as a tool of attack against received opinion and unexamined assumptions. "56 Paglia's vitriol and ridicule may thus be understood as a manifestation of her anger over the present state of the academy, and her will to fix it.

Paglia's nastiness is not only a symptom of her disgust with academic convention, political correctness, and speech codes, but also a rebellion against expectations of how women should behave. Her aggression is in part a response to the expectation she felt in the Fifties (and which Paglia feels still continues today) for women and girls (particularly of the middle-classes) to be "nice". Recounting how she "broke [her] umbrella over the head of a rash molester", Paglia writes in the "Cancelled Preface" that "[f]rom childhood to the present day, I consider it my task to challenge, by word and deed, the public standards for female behaviour. "57 In her view, middle-class girls and women are still crippled by expectations to be "nice". She writes,

As a teacher, I have seen time and again a certain kind of American middle-class girl who projects winsome malleability, a soft, unfocused, help-me-please persona that, in adult life, is a recipe for disaster. These are the ones who end up with a string of abusive boyfriends or in sticky situations with overfamiliar male authority figures who call
them "honey". Deconstruction of the bourgeois code of 'niceness' is a priority here.58

Paglia's nastiness, then, is in her view partly a feminist act as it is a rebellion against what Paglia sees as the restrictive and imprudent codes of white, middle-class female behaviour.

Paglia thus gives intellectual and feminist reasons for her viciousness, claiming that it is a rebellion against academic and cultural niceties that she believes are detrimental to free speech, free thought and women. For all this, however, Paglia still seems mean and unprofessional, as she attacks her opponents personally more than engaging with them and their work intellectually. Further, it is evident that her viciousness does have a personal basis and is not purely an intellectual exercise. First, Paglia concedes that her personality is an aggressive and vengeful one. Opening her address in "The M.I.T. Lecture", she tells the audience that speaking here...confronted me with a dilemma. I asked myself, should I try to act like a lady? I can do it. It's hard, it takes a lot out of me, I can do it for a few hours. But then I thought, Naw. These people, both my friends and my enemies who are here, aren't coming to see me act like a lady. So I thought I'd just be myself - which is, you know, abrasive, strident and obnoxious.


So then you all can go outside and say, 'What a bitch!' 59

Paglia also concedes that it is not in her nature to turn the other cheek and be forgiving. All who have insulted and rejected her must pay: "That's why I can never be a Christian," she says. "I believe in violence. Whack, whack, whack." 60 Thus, Paglia's hatred of aspects of feminism arises from its rejection of her, as well as ideological differences:

I was expelled from the feminist movement.
There is something very wrong with a movement that began by silencing women like me, who had been very pioneering...
When I started writing about sex issues,
I was treated like dirt. I couldn't get published, I could not get a job in the emerging women's studies programs because women's studies had one ideology... So when feminists say, 'We are so compassionate. We are very open-minded' - bullshit, is what I say. 61

It is also clear that Paglia's attacks on Susan Sontag arise from personal disappointment as well as intellectual disagreement. In her essay "Sontag, Bloody Sontag", Paglia gives an account of how she managed, with some difficulty, to get Sontag to give a public lecture at Bennington College only to be severely disappointed. Sontag comes over as having behaved with an appalling lack of
Paglia writes that Sontag arrives two hours late for her lecture, keeps the audience waiting for an hour, and then, when she finally does speak, her lecture is a complete embarrassment and Paglia is humiliated. "The next day, and for weeks afterward, I had to endure a chorus of derision about the Sontag visit...[it] assumed legendary status as a low-water reference point. It became an inside joke at Bennington about any dreaded drudgery: 'Well, at least we don't have to listen to a Susan Sontag story!' It took me years to live down." And to cap it all off, Paglia finds after talking to Sontag that they have less intellectual interests in common than she thought. Paglia is particularly annoyed by Sontag's dismissal of popular culture, which she had formerly lauded. The intellectual and personal affinity Paglia perhaps hoped for does not materialise. Sontag appears to have betrayed everything that Paglia admired about her - and as the rest of the essay reveals, she continues to disappoint Paglia intellectually.

Thus, Paglia's vitriol not only arises from her opposition to taboo and dogma, but also from her aggressive, vengeful personality and personal disappointments and disillusions. There is perhaps a third reason for Paglia's viciousness. Despite her portrayal of herself as a maverick, a lone crusader against the excesses of academe and feminism, Paglia also gives the impression of craving acceptance or respect which for many years seems to have been denied her. As she tells it, she sees the ideals that she and others fought for in the Sixties as having been betrayed, and she has been personally rejected by academe and feminism for her strong personality, outspokenness and her individual views. For example, she says in
"An Open Letter to the Students of Harvard" that academe rejected her because of her open homosexuality in the pre-Stonewall period and the "then bizarre" themes of her dissertation, Sexual Personae in embryonic form. Paglia seems caught in a paradoxical state: though she regards herself as a maverick and outsider, she still seeks acceptance, or at least, respect. She says that she does not need to be liked, but she certainly needs to be respected intellectually, something that has not been forthcoming in academe as her personality was at odds with the "WASP" ideals of academic deportment. As Paglia puts it, she was regarded "as a fast-talking, little woman" and not taken seriously, except by a few such as her mentor Harold Bloom. Her rage and anger, then, against academe and feminism can perhaps be understood as a railing against those who have failed to accept her as an intellectual and perhaps as a person. Her intimidating manner may both maintain and express her sense of being extraneous.

We see, then, that Paglia's aggressive manner has perhaps personal as well as intellectual origins. This personal, or subjective, dimension to her reasons for attacking others weakens her persuasiveness as much as the vitriol with which she attacks. But if Paglia's vitriolic attacks are unpersuasive on an intellectual level, they are at least good for a laugh. Her viciousness is mitigated, to a small degree, by her lively sense of humour.

In using wit and the demotic, Paglia tries to reach a general audience which she feels the academy has neglected. Her at times bathetic humour during the course of Sexual Personae serves to "humanise" canonical artists and writers and their work, and make
them seem more accessible. But Paglia's wit also manifests itself in her satirical attacks on her enemies. Ridiculing her opponents, Paglia tries to make them look foolish and insignificant, and induce in the reader the scorn and contempt she herself feels. These satirical attacks have precedents in the work of Oscar Wilde and D.H. Lawrence. Paglia acknowledges a particular stylistic and aesthetic debt to Wilde, but does not claim the same for Lawrence although she admires him. However, Paglia does share similarities with Lawrence as well as Wilde stylistically: with Lawrence she shares hyperbole, passion, and sermonical fervour; with Wilde she shares wit, and aphorism; with both she shares scorn and contempt for her enemies and a declarative and assertive manner.

Finally, we have seen why it is that Paglia deals more in satire and vitriol than reasoned argument when dealing with her opponents. First, as an intellectual, Paglia values shock tactics and the shattering of taboos, whether in artistic or intellectual life, as a way of avoiding the consolidation of dogma. Paglia is also in rebellion against the American academic ethos with its lack of tolerance for eccentricity and individuality. She also sees "niceness" in the academy, in the form of speech codes and political correctness, as not being conducive to the values of free speech and free thought - she sees offensiveness as a means of securing certain civil liberties. Paglia's nastiness also occurs as a kind of feminist rebellion against the standards of behaviour expected of women, both in the Fifties and in the present day. These are Paglia's intellectual reasons for her viciousness, but one can sense that she also has personal ones. Her vitriolic attacks are a manifestation of her aggressive personality,
her thirst for vengeance against those who have insulted, rejected, or disappointed her, and a paradoxical desire to be an outsider and to be accepted at the same time. Her expressions of rage and hatred both intimidate people, keeping them away from her, and express a feeling of rejection and alienation.

Paglia's vitriolic manner, then, is both intellectual and anti-intellectual. Despite her personal motives, however, it can be said that her ad hominem attacks on others, though they seem intellectually insubstantiated, can also be seen as an attempt to break the torpor of academic debate (or lack of it, Paglia believes) to unsettle, disturb and challenge readers. We have already seen some of Paglia's accusations, her attacks on feminism and academe. Now we shall examine the claims and arguments of Sexual Personae.
CHAPTER THREE: THE THEORY AND METHODOLOGY OF SEXUAL PERSONAE

One of the overarching theses of Sexual Personae is Paglia's argument for the "unity and continuity of Western culture." She rejects the modernist idea that "culture has collapsed into meaningless fragments"; rather, she sees continuity in history. In art, Paglia argues, this continuity is the pagan tradition, which begins in ancient history and continues to this day in modern popular culture. The pagan appears in art and culture through image and personality (the sexual personae) - the depiction of which is governed in art, says Paglia, by the principles of the Apollonian and the Dionysian. These two terms partly derive from Paglia's concept of the pagan tradition. I say partly because not only does Paglia draw these terms from Plutarch and Greek mythology, but from G. Wilson Knight and Nietzsche. These terms are of great importance because of their centrality to Paglia's thinking. As "Current Biography" puts it, "[a]t the heart of her universe is an Apollonian-Dionysian dualism that permeates everything from great works of art to the eternal state of war between the sexes." Paglia's belief in a continuous pagan tradition bears some comparison with the same view expressed by Matthew Arnold in Culture and Anarchy. What Paglia sees as the pagan element in art was never defeated by Judeo-Christianity but went underground during modernism and continues to this day in popular culture.
Arnold expresses a similar view, writing that the classical stream in
culture was never abolished, but merely repressed. He calls for a
revival of what he defines as the classical values of reason,
observation, and critical thinking. Likewise, Paglia calls for a
conscious awareness of the pagan tradition, its influence, and
continuing relevance. This is not to replace the Judeo-Christian
model she believes is dominant, but simply to complement it. In the
essay "No Law in the Arena", Paglia recommends that gay activists
develop a philosophy based on paganism to counteract the Judaeo-
Christian ethic. And while believing pornography should be freely
available, she also thinks it should not be displayed in public places
where it might offend the religious: "The public spaces, the free
spaces, and so on belong to both traditions - the Judeo-Christian
and the pagan - and, therefore, a person should not have to have
naked ladies overwhelming the eye from a newsstand."5 Thus, in
public life, she affirms both the pagan and Christian dimensions of
Western culture.

However, Paglia's definition of the pagan differs markedly in some
respects from Arnold's. Whereas Arnold regards the pagan spirit as
being essentially that of harmony, balance, and critical thinking,
Paglia sees an aggressive element in the pagan, which flourishes in
the sex and violence in art and popular culture. The pagan tradition
includes not only the virtues of reason and thought that Arnold
describes but also an awareness of the amorality and cruelty of
nature and human nature. Arnold describes the pagan or Hellenistic
spirit, as he calls it, as one of "see[ing] things as they are"6; part of
this "see[ing] things as they are", in Paglia's view, is an awareness of
the amoral, aggressive, dehumanising aspects of nature. This brings us to the terms Apollonian and Dionysian: the Apollonian is associated with reason, order, individuality, mind, culture and the male; the Dionysian is associated with chaos, nondifferentiation, body, nature and woman. In Paglia's view this "pagan dialectic of Apollonian and Dionysian was sweepingly comprehensive and accurate about mind and nature," particularly in its awareness of the innate aggression in nature and human nature. "Rousseauist" views, on the other hand, which see nature as benevolent and human beings as basically good, are misguided and inaccurate.

Let us now examine the terms Apollonian and Dionysian in more detail. I have already mentioned the origin of these terms in Greek mythology, Plutarch, G. Wilson Knight, and Nietzsche. In our discussion of them, Nietzsche will be our particular concern, as we compare his use of the terms with Paglia's usage in order to deepen our understanding of Paglia's application of them. We must now leave Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* behind, and turn to Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*.

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche associates the Apollonian with order, reason, moderation, illusion, individuality, men, and clear images. The Dionysian, on the other hand, is more chaotic, associated with intoxication, the forces of nature, forgetfulness and women. Nietzsche regards the Apollonian as a state of illusion that shields the initiate from the chaos of the Dionysian. The Olympian gods, for instance, are needed to help the Greeks deal with the terrors and horrors of existence; they hide the cruelty of nature and justify life by living it themselves. Paglia follows Nietzsche in
defining the Apollonian as that which can be delusional and
defensive; she writes that "[w]estern science and aesthetics are
attempts to revise this horror [of the Dionysian] into imaginatively
palatable form." 11 The Apollonian brings reason, order, and system,
but it is also an attempt to order or block out the realm of savage,
Dionysian nature.

Nietzsche and Paglia both stress that the Apollonian mode does not
guarantee morality. Nietzsche stresses the amorality of the
Olympians: rather than being moral, they are the deification of good
and bad indifferently.12 Their purpose is to justify the ways of life to
man. Likewise Paglia, seeing art as essentially Apollonian in its
imposition of order on the flux of the natural world, says this order is
not necessarily "just, kind, or beautiful."13 In her account of
Apollonian androgynes such as Belphoebe and the beautiful boy, she
stresses the remoteness, detachment, and emotional coldness she
sees in the Apollonian. Belphoebe loses her fictive power, "with the
advent of pity in her heart";14 she is at her most spectacular, yet
most remote, on her initial awe-inspiring appearance. Likewise Paglia
sees Wilde's beautiful boy, Dorian Gray, as Apollonian in his delicacy,
grace, and blondeness but stresses that he is morally, emotionally,
and spiritually defunct. Dorian, entranced with his own portrait, is
narcissistic and superficial; he is not interested in Sybil, but merely
the roles that she plays. Paglia also stresses that Dorian has no
inner life until he is made self-aware by Lord Henry. Even then this
inner life is not his own but simply a copy of Henry's:

Lord Henry experiments with a male
vampirism, transplanting his temperament
into Dorian, who is possessed by him in both the sexual and daemonic sense. Basil is increasingly dismayed by Dorian’s adoption of Henry’s cynicism, style and sophisticated epigrams. The Apollonian androgyne has no voice of its own; therefore, once its impermeability is breached, it begins to speak with the voice of another.15

Like Belphobe, Dorian the Apollonian androgyne is completely divorced from the Dionysian world of the inner life of emotion. Paglia follows Nietzsche in her account of the Dionysian in terms of pleasure, danger, and self-abandonment. For Nietzsche, the Dionysian ecstasy can reconcile man with man and man with nature, but this mystical experience may destroy the individual and, at its most barbaric, cause the eruption of savagery as well as universal harmony or Oneness.16 For Paglia it is the same, though she stresses far more the dangerous aspects of the Dionysian. To her the Dionysian is the realm of emotion which can be empathic and democratic, - "the Many"17 - but is ultimately destructive. The democracy and empathy of the Dionysian ultimately leads to the destruction or dissolution of the individual; the person is reabsorbed into natural flux. The Dionysian includes violence and aggression as well as empathy and ecstasy; it is what Paglia calls the realm of "pleasure-pain. "18

The most controversial aspects of Paglia’s use of the terms Apollonian and Dionysian is her association of the male with the
Apollonian and the female with the Dionysian. The Apollonian is the male principle, defining itself against and separating itself from woman and nature. The Dionysian, on the other hand, is woman and nature - the qualities of body, emotion, nondifferentiation, and chaos that the Apollonian, with its order and system, seeks to repress and escape. Culture, including art, is the means by which this is done.

This brings us to her notorious view that art and civilization in general is a male attempt to defy nature and form identity against the mother. This male striving, moreover, has a biological basis in men's inborn aggression and the nature of their physiology. In short, Paglia recapitulates the traditional (and to feminists, repressive and patriarchal) association of the male with culture and the female with nature. But though Paglia sees women as limited by nature, whereas men with their greater aggression can be said to be propelled by it, in refuting her critics she claims she never told women not to fight against nature. 19 Indeed, the female writers she discusses - Emily Bronte and Emily Dickinson - have done precisely that. In arguing that all art is Apollonian, Paglia says that any woman who takes it up is trying to control nature as much as any male artist 20. Men are at war with women and nature; female artists are at war with nature and themselves.

Paglia's definition of art as Apollonian does not preclude the presence of Dionysian features. There is a return of the repressed, one might say, in the presence of Dionysian material in art whether in form or content. All art (to follow Orwell) is Apollonian, but some art is more Apollonian than others. Hence Wilde is the more Apollonian artist in that he is concerned with the manners of polite society and
elsewhere trivialises nature. Coleridge, on the other hand, though working in an imagistic style that Paglia defines as Apollonian, presents Dionysian content in both *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and *Christabel*. An art work's form can also reflect nature - Paglia regards Swinburne's metre and Whitman's long, inclusive lines as reflecting the rhythm and inclusiveness of nature respectively. But the fact that it is a form at all makes it art and therefore, in its essence, Apollonian.

Paglia has said of *Sexual Personae* that "the book is not about fixed ideas. It's about the epic struggle between the Apollonian - the form-making aspect of mankind - and the Dionysian, between reason and nature, mind and emotion. The book shows the Apollonian dissolving into the Dionysian, back and forth in this kind of rhythmic, oscillating motion."21 This is what we see in *Sexual Personae*, for as Paglia presents it, art, though essentially Apollonian, can deal with Dionysian form and content. Indeed, she claims that one of the purposes of Romanticism is to explore "the west's repressed emotional life,"22 the Dionysian elements that had been previously repressed.

Paglia's chapter on decadent art, "Apollo Daemonised"23 is another example of where Paglia argues that despite the apparent dichotomy between the Apollonian and Dionysian, art and nature, there is a continuum between them. For in this chapter Paglia says that what she calls Apollonian form - evident in the iconic, sharp-edged, clear style of the Pre-Raphaelites - has been "daemonised"24 by chthonian or Dionysian subject matter. In Rossetti's women, for instance, she sees the repeated appearance of mother nature and in
Burne-Jones' *The Briar Wood* and *The Doom Fulfilled* she sees the essential condition of mankind in danger of becoming reabsorbed into nature. This Dionysian corruption of Apollonian form or ideas also occurs in Sellers *Epipsychidion*. Paglia again sees the chthonian or daemonic transformed by the Apollonian in Sellers use of incest to depict a state of spiritual union:

*Epipsychidion* implodes. The search for a new identity based on gender-free eroticism ends in the extinction of *all* identity. The unity of incestuous twinship collapses into nondifferentiation. Incest restores primeval chaos. Shelley sinks into dispiriting density, like the swamp mud of the Great Mother. The poem is reclaimed by the chthonian. *Epipsychidion* attempts the impossible task of reconciling regression to the womb with Apollonian seraphicization, a burning away and ascent of the gender-limited body.25

Here, as with the Pre-Raphaelite painters, Apollonian form has been contaminated or transformed by Dionysian content.

For Paglia, then, all art is Apollonian in that it is form, whereas nature is flux and process. Art is then in its essence a swerve from nature, but it can nonetheless reflect nature in theme, form, and content, whether intentionally or unintentionally. There is a constant war going on between the Apollonian and the Dionysian in the
human mind, and this is reflected in art. An excess of the Apollonian can lead to ossification and repression, and an excess of the Dionysian can lead to violence, dehumanisation, and chaos. The tension between the two is constant; the Apollonian can swerve from nature, but not defeat it, and the reckless energy of the Dionysian must be controlled by the Apollonian for thought to exist at all.

What is most pertinent for our discussion of Paglia's theory of art, however, is her association of the Apollonian (or pagan in general) with the image and personality. Both of these are an Apollonian defiance of the Dionysian, for in the dark, dank Dionysian realm "we feel but do not think or see"26 and personality itself is an example of Apollonian individuation and form as opposed to Dionysian flux and formlessness. It is the image and personality that dominates Paglia's discussion of art as evidence of the pagan tradition. For example, Paglia declares that the current dominance of the mass media is a return to "pagan pictorialism"27 and says that in cinema "the pagan cult of personality has reawakened and dominates all art, all thought."28

Indeed, so total is Paglia's pursuit of "pagan imagism" that Mark Edmundson notes that for her art aspires to the condition of cinema. He writes "for Paglia the best Western art, including written works, is compellingly visual, 'eye intense'".29 Her interest in "the pagan cult of personality" is also intense. It is this interest that leads to her obsessive cataloguing of what she calls the "sexual personae". To Paglia personality is an art form; she writes that "[t]he hardest object of Apollonian thing-making is western personality, the glamorous, striving separatist ego that entered literature in the Iliad but, I will show, first appeared in art in Old Kingdom Egypt. "30
But first, let us deal with Paglia's intense interest in the image or the
visual. Paglia places great stress on the image in art, both in
literature as well as the visual arts. In Paglia's view, the word in
criticism has been valued at the expense of images. InSexual
Personae she stresses the importance of the visual, claiming that the
problem of modern criticism is that it has tended to ignore it. "Drunk
with self-love, criticism has hugely overestimated the centrality of
language to western culture. It has failed to see the electrifying sign
language of images."31 She seeks a more sophisticated
appreciation of images, writing that art history has not attained the
theoretical and methodological complexity of literary criticism. In her
concept of the Apollonian and pagan, which stresses the visual, she
regards forms such as painting, photography, and cinema (including
television) not as less important than literature, but equal to it. For
her, the visual is primary; for instance, she sees dreaming as
"cinematic pictorialism"32 and rejects Freud's stress on the linguistic
nature of the unconscious. Further, she claims Western thought is
based on "perceptual relations"33, a fact that has not been given due
attention. "The westerner knows by seeing. Perceptual relations are
at the heart of our culture, and they have produced our titanic
contributions to art. Walking in nature, we see, identify, name,
recognize."34

This stress on the visual occurs in Paglia's discussion of literature
as well as the visual arts. This emphasis on the image in literature
occurs often to the point that Paglia describes it in terms of visual
art, particularly cinema. For instance, Paglia describes Belphobe as
"like a sculpture embedded in the text"35 and describes her entrance
as "one of the most...theatrical...in art."36 A repeated analogy in Paglia is that between poetry and cinema. Thus Spenser has his "blazing sightlines"37 and Swinburne's femme fatales make him a "Hollywood poet."38 She also claims that Coleridge and Poe have written "works of cinema."39 Mark Edmundson and other critics express concern that this emphasis on the visual, to the point where literature is treated as visual art, can be reductive, ignoring the literary nature of literature. Edmundson, while fulsome in his praise of Sexual Personae, writes that "Paglia's contention that vision and nature matter almost exclusively is as reductive as the claim by contemporary critics that almost everything boils down to language and culture."40 On a more particular note, Helen Vendler writes of Paglia's reading of The Faerie Queene, that while Paglia is enthusiastic about the poem's images of androgynous females, she is "totally indifferent to Spenser's verse."41 In her opinion, when Paglia is not dealing with "images and (preferably violent) stories" she is unsuccessful in her critiques. But Donald Lyons and Louis Menand are the most vehement critics of Paglia on this count. Lyons writes that "[t]he frozen and static are her terrain...[s]he has yet...to manifest an equal aptitude for capturing story...[s]he needs less attention to attitude and more to process, less "voguing" and more dancing."42 In short, he thinks Paglia is more competent with images (and "emblematic writing")43 than she is with the more fluid, process-orientated nature of "a story, a narrative, a process"44 as he puts it. Menand goes further and says that Paglia can be downright incompetent when it comes to literature. He writes that she is "a kind of mad literalist, which is the explanation for her genuine talent for
visual perception (she really sees what’s there) and her ineptitude with most kinds of literature (she treats poems like pictures). "45 Paglia's stress on the visual in literature can at times lead her to neglect the literary quality of a work; as Menand says, she can end up treating a poem like a picture. This is particularly clear in the case of Swinburne. Here, Paglia seems to be emphasising the visual at the expense of everything else. She concedes that part of his effect lies in his half-musical, half-grinding metre but is more excited by Swinburne's imagery, which is fragmentary rather than detailed and concrete. As I have implied above, Paglia regards Swinburne as cinematic, like Spenser. The cinema analogy holds up with Spenser because of his concrete, detailed visual imagery, but in Swinburne the imagery is fragmented and disjointed. In the opening lines of "Dolores" for instance there is a description of Dolores' eyes, limbs, and mouth, but the images are set up only to be taken away by a rhetorical question. "When these are gone by with their glories, What shall rest of thee then, what remain...?"46 Imagery is offered then taken away by a new train of thought. The second stanza is abstract, concerned with Dolores' sins. The third stanza introduces some imagery, but it is more symbolic than literal as Swinburne subverts religious symbolism: "O garment not golden but gilded...O tower not of ivory, but builded/By hands that reach heaven from hell;/O mystical rose of the mire. "47 In the fourth, a more literal image appears of Dolores' mouth as "curled snakes that are fed from my breast. "48 The fifth stanza is more abstract, dealing with past and future sorrows.
Paglia has her own theory on the fragmentary nature of Swinburne's imagery. She thinks of such imagery as a "Decadent catalogue" derived from Gautier in "A Night with Cleopatra". In such imagery objects are not described completely but in fragments. Thus Dolores appears not as a woman but as eyes, limbs, a mouth. She is reduced to parts. This is not incompatible with the cinematic close-up, but it still ignores the dominance of Swinburne's metre over his imagery; to call him a cinematic poet when he is more of a musical one is to stress visual imagery at the expense of other elements. For all Paglia's attempts to make Swinburne pictorially concrete, the overall impression of Swinburne is one of pictorial vagueness. Fragments of imagery are swept along on the tide of his metre. Hence while Paglia's emphasis on the visual is not unwarranted, in the case of Swinburne the visual is over-emphasized at the expense of the more prominent feature of Swinburne's metre. The criticism directed against Paglia's emphasis on vision is thus to an extent legitimate.

Paglia's intense interest in Apollonian or pagan imagism, then, can lead her to ignore or downplay the role and use of language itself. But what about Paglia's other Apollonian/pagan interest, personality or her "sexual personae"? Let us now turn to this second, overriding concern.

We have observed that Paglia regards personality itself as an art form; like art in general it is an imposition of Apollonian form on the natural flux and process of the Dionysian. This brings us to the term "sexual personae". These are "modes of personality", androgynes that swerve from nature's determinism and its dehumanising quality. As Edmundson
writes: "the glory of art lies in its power to extemporize fictive identities - the personae - that swerve away from biology's literal insistence on what we are. "51 On the issue of dehumanisation, Paglia writes that our "Apollonian integrity as persons"52 is maintained by "blocking from consciousness" the nondifferentiated "squalor and rot" of the natural, Dionysian realm.

That personae are central to Paglia's concerns is evident not only from Sexual Personae (naturally!) but from her other work as well. In "Madonna: Venus of the Radio Waves", she is as interested in Madonna's videos as she is in her music, particularly in the area of how Madonna presents herself.53 And then there is "Diana Regina", where Paglia catalogues Diana's multiple personae from mater dolorosa to princess in the tower.54 The term "sexual persona" seems forever on Paglia's lips; she even applies it to herself. "Scores of cartoons about me have appeared since my last book[Sex, Art and American Culture]; some are reproduced here [in Vamps and Tramps]. They illustrate the degree to which I have become a sexual persona, apart from my ideas, at a moment when both feminism and academe are in flux. "55 It is clear, then, that the art of personae/personality is one of Paglia's primary concerns.

These sexual personae bear some comparison with the traditional concept of the persona. Indeed, as we shall see, they do resemble the literary persona in that they can be self-projections by the author into his or her work. They can be the author's "voice" in the traditional sense. This again runs into trouble, though, given Paglia's stress on the visual. For the sexual personae are "the visible condensation of sex and psyche outside the realm of word."56 They
are still governed by the principle of "pagan pictorialism"; the personae are "visible ideas." This causes some problems when dealing with something so numinous as the author's self-presentation in a text.

Paglia writes in the "Cancelled Preface" that "[m]y personae are not strategies of irony or social adaptation but cinematic visualizations, products of an archaic process of picture-thought. The brain is the neurological repository of the human past, and personae are the hidden masks of our ancestors and heirs." They are "projections of the Apollonian higher cortex," imposing form on the flux of nature and swerving from or doctoring the brutal reality of the Dionysian realm. For instance, the beautiful boy is a sex object partaking of light, grace, and chastity, defying the true qualities of sex and nature which Paglia sees as fluid, murky, and aggressive. So, too, in The Faerie Queene, Spenser, according to Paglia, associates his heroines not with the chthonian or natural female power, but "reimagines them as Apollonian angels." But some personae can be more Apollonian than others. Some still reflect the Dionysian realm, even as they distort and defy it. The Great Mother, for instance, is one such Dionysian archetype, an image of the nature mother who creates and destroys. Likewise the femme fatale is a manifestation of "the west's bad conscience about nature." She is a reflection of the "latent vampirism" in female sexuality and men's sexual fear. In her beauty, however, she is an Apollonian "transformation of chthonian [or nature's] ugliness."

The personae are one of the means by which Paglia argues for the unity of Western culture, for she claims that their recurrence across
space and time demonstrates the West’s cultural coherence. Thus Spenser’s Belphoebe is revisited in Sellers Emilia in *Epipsychidion* and the Epiceone, or man of beauty is Michelangelo’s Guido de Medici, Lord Byron, and Elvis Presley. It should be pointed out that Paglia’s argument centred on the recurring personae is not complete, as *Sexual Personae* is only the first volume of a two-volume project, the second dealing with modern popular culture. Thus, some of the modern instances of personae that crop up in the first volume are presumably waiting their moment to be fully discussed in the second, such as Rita Hayworth “the modern Galatea”65.

Most of Paglia’s personae are original, in that they are her own invention, but others such as the Great Mother and beautiful boy have a historical or mythological precedent. The Great Mother, for instance, is a widespread mythological feature and the beautiful boy is a feature of classical art. When Paglia claims that these personae recur through space and time, (such as when the beautiful boy turns up in Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*), we may well believe her given that they appear to be well-established and widespread archetypes. Some of Paglia’s original personae are also convincingly argued for. The male heroine is one such persona, which appears in Paglia’s discussion of the Romantic poets. Here she clearly relates her idea back to the evidence of the poets’ work. She stresses, for instance, the passive qualities of Coleridge’s Mariner and Wordsworth’s own “wise passiveness”66. But with another persona, the Venus Barbata, Paglia is less convincing. The Venus Barbata appears only briefly in Blake’s prophetic poems and in cinematic characters such as Elizabeth Taylor in *Who’s Afraid of Virginia*
Woolf? Her account of it is not as complete as it is for the male heroine, which is more thorough and widespread.

But Paglia is relieved of the burden of proving that the personae actually recur in western tradition by their "archetypal" nature. For as we have seen, the personae have a basis in the unconscious. So whether Edward Albee's Venus Barbata came from an acquaintance with Blake's prophetic poems is not really an issue as, presumably, the persona in question was there in the unconscious all the time. However, Paglia does make links between certain authors, claiming, for instance, that "Romantic poetry's chthonian daemonism...is a flowering of the secret repressions of The Faerie Queene. "67 As I have said, however, the archetypal nature of Paglia's personae can be said to relieve her from the burden of proof as she implies that they are rooted in the unconscious. It is on the grounds of these personae that recur over western tradition that Paglia argues for the continuity of Western culture.

With regard to literature, the sexual personae not only appear as characters in works but in the self-presentation of the author - in other words, as the author's persona in the traditional sense. Paglia's personae not only include manifestations such as the beautiful boy and the femme fatale, but also the authorial self in the work itself. Such presentations - such personae - can be covert or overt: whereas Bronte and Coleridge transform themselves into Heathcliff and Christabel respectively, the persona of Wilde is the half-feminine epicene and the persona of Dickinson is alternately sentimental and coolly aggressive. Here, the personae of the authors are as androgynous as the sexual personae proper, such as the
feminine yet athletic Epiceone, or man of beauty - of which Paglia gives Byron as an example. This interest in the author's persona or self-projection in a text is in defiance of the French notion of "the death of the author", which Paglia scornfully rejects. She writes "[m]ost pernicious of French imports is the notion that there is no person behind a text. Is there anything more affected, aggressive and relentlessly concrete than a Parisian intellectual behind his/her turgid text? The Parisian is a provincial when he pretends to speak for the universe. "68 To her, the author and his or her presence in the work is of great importance. For "[b]ehind every book is a certain person with a certain history. I can never know too much about that person and that history. Personality is western reality."69

But for all of Paglia's stress on personality, with the idea that no work is free of the author's self-projection, her understanding on artistic motivation is reductive. For, as we have seen, Paglia views art as being motivated by a largely male anxiety about the mother and nature. Though artists may come across as having different personae or personalities in their work, nonetheless they all share the same motivation. One could say that their great minds think alike. They are all trying to order nature, form their identities against their mothers, and, in the case of female artists, they are at war with their own femaleness. They may have different personalities, but they all have the same character. In a way it makes their psychology irrelevant, however much Paglia proclaims the method of Sexual Personae is "psychologistic."70 After all, they all have the same motives for art. This is surely reductive, for Paglia shoves individual
authors and their idiosyncrasies into one theory on the nature of artistic creation. As Katherine Marie Higgins writes in her review of Sexual Personae, Paglia "renders all artists mere personae, their uniqueness mere camouflage for the same sexual saga." For example, Oscar Wilde, rejecting and trivialising nature, and Shakespeare, trying to be sympathetic to it, are essentially trying to order reality. All of the artists Paglia treats are to her concerned with nature in some way. By the fact of being artists they are trying to impose order on nature, even though some have a more sympathetic attitude to nature than others. As Wilde rejects nature and Shakespeare alters it, so, for instance, Swinburne recreates matriarchal nature cult in his poetry. In Sexual Personae Paglia allows for no other subject or concern than escape from or enchantment by nature. She passes briefly, for instance, over the nineteenth-century realist novel. She is nonplused about Eliot's Middlemarch because it has no charismatic androgynes born of a culture/nature conflict; rather, the novel is exclusively concerned with the workings of society. This is strange however as surely a novel exclusively about society would be the ultimate swerve from nature, a complete attempt to ignore it altogether. But Paglia does not argue this; Eliot does not interest her as she is lacking in charismatic sexual personae.

The visual and the personality/personae, then, are two aspects of the Apollonian that Paglia stresses in her discussion of art. As we have seen, however, the emphasis of these can be overwrought, unpersuasive, and even reductive at times. What is also reductive is the way she uses the terms Apollonian and Dionysian when it comes
to dealing with morality and ethics in art. Despite her concession to
the positive and negative in these terms, in her discussion of art she
clearly prefers to stress the negative aspects.

For Paglia, both the Apollonian and the Dionysian are morally
ambivalent: the Apollonian brings order and individuality but can be
cold, remote and cruel; the Dionysian brings empathy, ecstasy, and
union but also the dissolution of identity and a descent into violence
and cruelty. Examples of Paglia's Dionysian are Shakespeare’s
Cleopatra, capable of both tenderness and violence and Spenser's
Bower of Bliss, which threatens to dissolve male identity. A more
moderate example is Byron's Sardandapalus; Paglia sees him as
being Dionysian in his tenderness but in the end his refusal to take
command and act like a king leads to his own destruction.

But despite this definition of the Apollonian and Dionysian as
morally ambivalent - a mixture of good and bad, in other words - in
Sexual Personae it is the negative aspects of these terms that are
Paglia's special concern. Her aim is to show that "art is full of
crimes"72; to show the amoral aspects of great art which have been
"ignored or glossed over by most academic critics"73. In this she is
extremely thorough, cataloguing the sex and violence in art with
great enthusiasm. But what does she think of those gentler souls
who are concerned with ethics and morality? What, for instance,
does she make of Wordsworth's ethos of compassion? Not much.
She openly despises any sign of "sentimentality" in the artists she
treats. This is despite her concessions to the positive aspects of the
Dionysian and her definition of the Apollonian as a mode of illusion.
Paglia's view of art's criminality arises from her stress on the negative aspects of the Apollonian and the Dionysian - even though her definition includes the positive. Her essential view of nature or the Dionysian, for example, is Sadean; nature is, in essence, violent, chaotic, bloody and cruel. Thus any artist who gives such a view is to Paglia giving an accurate view of nature. Any deviation from this view Paglia clearly despises. For instance, in her account of Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, she is contemptuous of what she sees as Coleridge's softening of chthonian reality in the poem by his inclusion of Christian morality and a Platonic gloss. She writes, "How dreadful to see our shaman-poet unmasked, cranking the bellows of afflatus like a stagehand." 74 This is despite her concession that the Apollonian is a mode of illusion and that such Christian morality might be regarded as such an illusion. She also writes, in the Wilde chapter, that Christian feelings reflect the positive aspects of Dionysian emotion. But all this does not stop her despising any signs of what she regards as sentimentality in the authors she treats. Take what she says about Chaucer, for example. Here her contempt for his congeniality is clearly obvious. "[T]he hearty warmth of it all makes my skin crawl...there is no fear and trembling in his theology. Chaucer...accepts the flesh." 75 Indeed, she expels him from her canon, declaring that it was Spenser who made English literature "world-class" 76 because of his revival of the cool, amoral Apollonian eye. She does not treat Chaucer's views neutrally, as an Apollonian illusion. Rather, she openly despises them.
Any author or artist who dares to show a positive side of nature, or an interest in ethics or morality, is going to get trounced by Paglia. As we have seen, this is despite her concession that the Apollonian is a mode of illusion. But it also circumvents the positive aspects in her definition of the Dionysian; for though the Dionysian realm is ultimately the realm of dehumanisation and chaos, it is also the realm of emotion, empathy and democracy. For instance, she dislikes Wilde’s later work such as De Profoundis, whose Christian emotions she finds sentimental. This sentimentality she identifies with the Dionysian, particularly the realm of women. She also seems to take a singular delight in trashing Wordsworth’s ethos of compassion, pointing out how his sympathy does not extend to masculine men and how he dehumanises those closest to him. "[A] stone in the road arouses more fellow-feeling in Wordsworth than a masculine man," she writes. And again, she attacks him for sentimentality with regard to such poems as "The Ruined Cottage." This is despite her association of Wordsworth’s stress on tenderness and empathy with the Dionysian.

Such dismissal of the presence of ethics and morality in art puts Paglia in danger of becoming as reductive as the critics she says she is trying to correct. Whereas Paglia’s alleged opponents refuse to acknowledge the unsavoury aspects of art and human nature, Paglia overlooks or is scornful of the presence of moral or ethical content in art. Once again this is strange given her double-sided thesis that art can both reflect nature and swerve away from it. Surely Wordsworth’s views on nature and human nature as benevolent could be described as a state of Apollonian illusion. Indeed such
Rousseauist views are described as such by Nietzsche. But Paglia does not take up this idea. She also does not interpret Wordsworth’s stress on empathy and tenderness as reflecting the positive in the Dionysian - though Wordsworth shut outs the negative. As we have seen, she scorns it. The presence of amorality in art is the only thing that concerns her.

We see, then, that though some of Paglia’s basic premises can be fascinating, they can be ultimately reductive. In identifying a continuing pagan tradition in western art (much as Arnold does in *Culture and Anarchy*), Paglia emphasises the image and personality or the "sexual personae," and she structures her thinking on art with an Apollonian-Dionysian dualism that is similar to Nietzsche’s. With regard to the image, Paglia’s stress on it can lead her to ignore or downplay the linguistic quality of literature; she ends up treating literary works as a branch of visual art. When it comes to personality, Paglia’s personae are most convincing when they have a historical precedent or are persuasively argued for. But it can be said of them that she is relieved of the burden of proof by the fact that the personae are rooted in the unconscious.

Part of Paglia’s emphasis on the personality and the sexual personae is her stress on authorial self-projection. But for all her professed interest in it, her treatment of artistic motivation is reductive. For her theory of art posits that art is an Apollonian defense against Dionysian nature. In short, however different the artists she treats may appear, they all have the same character and motivation. Paglia allows for no motive for art than escape from or enchantment by nature; hence she passes over or ignores authors
who do not fit her thesis. George Eliot is such an author. For Eliot is concerned with writing a critique of society and her work lacks the charismatic sexual personae that Paglia seeks. This is despite the fact that Eliot's work could be regarded as the ultimate Apollonian swerve from nature. This brings us to Paglia's Apollonian-Dionysian dualism, which while appearing flexible, tends to be reductively used. Paglia argues that the Apollonian and the Dionysian are morally ambivalent, in that the Apollonian brings order and repression and the Dionysian includes empathy and democracy as well as dehumanisation and chaos. She also argues that art, while essentially Apollonian, can reflect the Dionysian in form and content. But Paglia's determination to prove that art is amoral leads to an inflexible use of this dualism. This is especially apparent in her treatment of morality and ethics in literature. For instead of regarding moral codes as Apollonian illusions or as reflections of the positive aspects of the Dionysian, she dismisses them as sentimental nonsense. She is inflexible in her aim to prove the amorality of art, even though the Apollonian-Dionysian dualism is itself flexible. Despite the reductiveness in Paglia's art theory, however, her theses can sometimes lead to compelling interpretations of literary works. Such interpretations shall be the subject of our next chapter.
CHAPTER FOUR: PAGLIA ON LITERATURE

In the previous chapters, we looked at Paglia’s style and some of her basic theories and ideas. We saw how Paglia’s iconoclastic, personal style differs from standard academic writing, which tends to be formal, objective, and detached. This personal style is both beneficial and detrimental to Paglia’s work. On the one hand, it is lively, witty, and accessible, especially her journalistic pieces. At times it is memorably written in a Paterian manner. But this individual style also includes a strong tendency toward unqualified assertion, overgeneralisation, and subjectivity, including scathing personal attacks on enemies and ideas that Paglia rejects. These aspects of Paglia’s style may, in the eyes of some readers at least, detract from her persuasiveness. On the whole, her theses are assertions rather than careful arguments, relying on a hectoring rather than reasoned approach toward the reader. Paglia also departs from conventional academic practice in her rejection of favoured theoretical positions such as feminism and deconstruction. On the whole, her style and theories are both fascinating and infuriating.

Yet, as I hope to demonstrate, there is one area where Paglia’s work has greater substance. This is the area of literary criticism, in Paglia’s analyses of individual works of literature. Despite her subjective style, so often at odds with academic procedure, and her wild and unsubstantiated theories, Paglia can be an observant and careful close reader of literary works, producing some compelling
interpretations. Parts of her reading of Wilde's play *The Importance of Being Earnest* are incisive and thoughtful, and she is highly observant in aspects of her treatment of Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner".\(^2\) As the words *parts* and *aspects* suggest, however, Paglia's readings can be quite uneven. Though she can be sensitive and observant in her readings, she can also be as bombastic and overassertive as ever. In some cases, she overinterprets or ignores counter-evidence to make an art work fit her overall theories of art and nature. An example of this is her treatment of Poe, particularly the stories "Ligeia" and "Berenice",\(^3\) where her insistence on seeing rigid archetypes leads her to ignore the ambiguity present in these tales. In spite of these weaknesses, however, Paglia on literature can be quite strong.

In assessing Paglia's literary criticism, we shall consider her treatment of five authors, each representing a different genre. Wilde, for instance, will be an example of drama, and Wordsworth and Coleridge of poetry. The authors have also been chosen with regard to their place in Paglia's continuum of the Apollonian and Dionysian. Emily Bronte, for instance, is Dionysian in that she deals with nature. Coleridge is also in this category. Wordsworth, on the other hand, is an unintentional swerver from nature. Though he writes about nature, his view of it, according to Paglia, is false and sentimental. Hence his work is a 'swerve', partaking of the Apollonian. There is a greater 'swerver' than Wordsworth, however; Wilde is the purer, more conscious Apollonian artist in that his play, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, deals with social forms and manners, rather than nature.
All this being said, it is now time to consider Paglia's treatment of our first author, Edgar Allan Poe. We shall examine Paglia's readings of several of his short stories, beginning with "Ligeia" and "Berenice". Paglia argues for the chaotic presence of nature in the form of the femme fatale or a more direct image of nature. In describing the latter she is sometimes more convincing, as we shall see, but for the moment we shall consider her discussion of the femme fatale in "Ligeia" and "Berenice", which tends to be unpersuasive. In "Ligeia" the narrator is obsessed with his dead wife, the title character, recounting their life together, her death and her apparent resurrection in the closing lines of the story. In her analysis Paglia concentrates on the character of Ligeia and the strange events of the tale. She claims Ligeia is an archetypal mother figure because the narrator cannot remember how he met her. She also takes Ligeia's struggle against death at face value, as a sign that she is most definitely supernatural and planning her return to life. Aspects of the story certainly present Ligeia and her relationship with the narrator as strange. For example, not only does the narrator forget how they met, but he does not know her paternal name and notes that she has learning and knowledge far vaster and superior to anyone he has known: "I said her knowledge was such as I have never known in woman - but where breathes the man who has traversed, and successfully, all the wide areas of moral, physical and mathematical science?"4 In the context of her apparent resurrection at the close of the story, this vast knowledge implies that Ligeia has returned from death not only once but many times before. Like Pater's Mona Lisa
she seems to have "been dead many times; and learned the secrets of the grave".5

Paglia takes the resurrection story and Ligeia's strangeness as it appears, assuming that Ligeia is an archetypal femme fatale, an image of the nature mother. But in doing so, she overlooks another aspect of the story: the vagueness of the narrator and his unreliability. To begin with, the entire close of the story, culminating in Ligeia's return, occurs while the narrator is under the influence of opium. In fact the narrator is an opium addict. Moreover, the narrator describes his memory as "feeble through much suffering";6 despite his obvious devotion to his wife he cannot remember how they first met and it only occurs to him during the course of his narration how vast her knowledge was. He describes Ligeia's beauty as "the radiance of an opium dream";7 in the light of his bad memory and his later admission to taking opium at the time of her resurrection, the reader wonders if Ligeia might not be just that, an opium dream.

This tension between Ligeia's strangeness on the one hand and the narrator's unreliability on the other is never resolved, leaving the reader unable to decide whether the story is a supernatural one or an account of mental instability. It is this ambiguity - did Ligeia return or didn't she - that, in Terry Heller's view, makes Poe's tale successful. In his book The Delights of Terror,8 Heller describes how "Ligeia" is governed by what he calls "anticlosure".9 In short, Poe's tale is a mystery that can never be solved; for in deciding the story is definitely supernatural, the reader ignores the unreliability of the narrator and vice versa. In being so adamant that the story is supernatural, or rather archetypal, Paglia overlooks this unreliability.
Her reading is thus simplistic, forcing "Ligeia" to fit her overall theory of sexual personae and ignoring the tale's ambiguity and subtlety.

A similar thing occurs, though perhaps to a lesser extent, in her treatment of Poe's earlier tale, "Berenice". Here again we have an unreliable and possibly unbalanced narrator - he suffers from "monomania" and a woman with whom he is obsessed. Or rather, he is obsessed with her teeth. Paglia seizes on the archetypal possibility of this occurrence, saying that the narrator's mutilation of Berenice, his stealing of her teeth, is a classic image of the castration of the vagina dentata. Hence, like Ligeia, Berenice is an archetype of the nature mother, a grisly femme fatale who dominates the shrinking male narrator.

This interpretation runs into two problems. First the figure of Berenice is barely described, whereas Ligeia is described in obsessive detail and, fortunately for Paglia, as a suitably suggestive "dark lady" figure. Berenice, however, is barely described in the story except when she becomes ill and the narrator's obsession begins. There is one detail, apart from the teeth obsession, however, that gives credence to Paglia's interpretation of Berenice as a fearsome femme fatale. When Berenice becomes ill the narrator mentions a change in her character; what this change is never described, except for reference to her "desolate and fallen condition". But because of this change, the narrator comes to fear Berenice, as can be seen from the following passage. "[N]ow I shuddered in her presence, and grew pale at her approach...An icy chill ran through my frame; a sense of insufferable anxiety oppressed me; a consuming curiosity pervaded my soul". This fear however is tempered by the
narrator's mental instability, his tendency to monomania. He may be as unreliable as the narrator of "Ligeia" was. His obsession with Berenice's teeth may not mean that Berenice is some sort of dreadful nature-mother archetype but may be a symptom of the narrator's mental instability and the horror it eventually causes. Once again, in her postulation of the archetype, Paglia overlooks an important element in Poe's story - the unreliability of the narrator.

Paglia's stress on archetypal figures, then, leads her to overlook the presence of unreliable narrators in Poe's tales "Ligeia" and "Berenice". But when dealing with direct images of nature, rather than supposed nature-mother archetypes, Paglia's analyses are sometimes more successful. This is clear in Paglia's account of "A Descent into the Maelstrom". Here she gives a straightforward reading of Poe's tale of natural disaster, though she cannot resist the temptation to personify nature as female. However, her analysis of the story is more a paraphrase than anything else and is quite brief. This brevity also weakens Paglia's account of "The Masque of the Red Death". Generally, her reading of this story is credible, with Paglia's taste for Paterian prose allowing her to make some striking interpretations about the seventh chamber. But her reading of the Red Death as life itself has been done far more subtly and carefully by Joseph Patrick Roppolo in an earlier essay. Paglia, in her assertive manner, is too scanty with her analysis. Her observations, though valid, look especially slapdash when compared to the thorough, detailed analysis Roppolo gives of Poe's tale. His examination of the opening lines of the story, for example, is careful and thorough, describing how Poe implies that the Red Death
represents life itself. He takes an entire essay to give a subtle and careful reading of Poe's story; Paglia dashes off her entire analysis in a few lines.

Paglia's account of "The Pit and the Pendulum", 16 like her accounts of "Masque of the Red Death" and "Descent into the Maelstrom" is too brief, glib, and unqualified to be satisfying. Once again, she sees the prison-house of biology, claiming that the story is concerned with the seventh chamber of birth and death, featured in "Masque". The pit, a slimy cell, and the contracting fiery walls yield their expected associations of the female body and death, Paglia's "womb-tomb". 17 Evidence as to why they should be seen as such does not appear; Paglia just makes her point without explanation. However, her description of the pendulum as Murdering Time is legitimate given that Poe lays on the symbolism with a trowel: the figure of Father Time, after all, appears to swing the razor-edged pendulum over the breast of the hapless prisoner. But symbolic of death-in-life or not, the tale can be read simply as a psychological study of a prisoner's reactions to the terrors of the Inquisition. For here, as in other stories, Poe shows a fondness for detailing morbid, terrified, and criminal states of mind. The detailed terror of the prisoner in "Pit and the Pendulum" is comparable, for instance, to the morbidity of the narrator of "The Premature Burial" 18 and the criminal urges of the narrator of "The Imp of the Perverse". 19

Such brevity, unqualified assertion, and refusal to deal with important details mar Paglia's criticism on Poe. Her readings of Coleridge tend to have the same mixture of sense and nonsense as
do her readings of Poe's tales. We shall see this uneven quality first in her treatment of "Rime of the Ancient Mariner," dealing with the good points first. In her account of the "Rime", Paglia is in keeping with other non-Christian readings of the poem. She is quick to scorn critics who have given the poem a Christian interpretation, pointing out, as others have, the details inconsistent with such a reading. She observes that if the Christian reading is correct, the poem should conclude at the moment the Mariner blesses the water-snakes and the albatross falls from his neck, or at least allow the Mariner to be redeemed. Instead there are three more parts after the blessing of the snakes and at the end of the poem the Mariner is doomed to wander the world repeating his story. That the Christian reading of the poem (including the Mariner's own interpretation of his tale) cannot hold up is revealed by the Wedding Guest's melancholy reaction to the Mariner's tale. Here, says Paglia, the Wedding Guest sees through the Mariner's Christian homilies to the tale's hidden message that "there is no God, and nature is a hell of appetite and force." The Christian elements in the poem and the Platonic gloss, which has misled critics, is an attempt by Coleridge to censor and reverse the vision of cthonian evil that Paglia believes is central to the poem and its achievement. Paglia persuasively argues, then, that a Christian reading of the poem is inconsistent with some of its important features - as other critics have done before her.

However, Paglia's interpretation of "Mariner" does have some faults. This arises primarily from her tendency to see psychological significance in the poem. To begin with, she glibly interprets the
Platonic gloss and Christian moralising in the poem as evidence that Coleridge is trying to censor what he has unconsciously produced, namely a Sadean vision of nature. In giving this interpretation, Paglia gives no evidence from Coleridge's life to support this idea, apart from his observation that the poem had too much of a moral in it. She simply imposes her basic thesis that art is bound up with a fear of nature onto Coleridge (as she does with others), without regard for the idiosyncrasies of individual psychology. As I have argued previously, her assumption that art involves a swerve from or a reflection of nature leads her to create one motive for artistic creation. In Coleridge this means he is an unintentional reflector of nature, repelled by the vision of it he has unconsciously engendered.

Such crude psychologizing continues in Paglia's confusing account of the Mariner, the Wedding Guest, and the Bridegroom as aspects of Coleridge. Again, her theses on art and nature dictate to the evidence, rather than vice versa. For instance, in accordance with her theory that men bond together to create culture and avoid nature and the mother, Paglia claims that the Wedding Guest is on the verge of initiation into the masculine world, represented by the Bridegroom. He is prevented from doing so, however, by the Mariner, a "male heroine" who is still passive to the world of nature. The Wedding Guest thus ends up being enthralled by the Mariner and unable to enter into masculinity, the world of the Bridegroom. But Paglia simply provides no evidence for these claims. As with her treatment of the presence of the Platonic gloss and Christian moralising, here her theories seem to dictate to the evidence, rather than vice versa. Such a priori psychologizing mars the general common sense of
Paglia's non-Christian reading of the poem. Her treatment of this poem is thus quite uneven.

Though Paglia's associative manner tends to make her reading of "Kubla Khan" annoyingly vague, her reading of this poem is not without interest. She interprets the pleasure dome as a temple of art built over the turbulence of nature. This is only to be expected given her thesis on the opposition/continuum between nature and art. She waxes lyrical on the male figure in the poem, interpreting him as a poet-shaman, revered and shunned by those around him. Talking about the figure's long hair, however, leads her into what Louis Menand describes as her "scholarly equivalent of stream of consciousness":

Floating hair normally belongs to the female canon of beauty. One thinks of Botticelli's Venus, Rita Hayworth, Hedy Lamarr. But during the 1790s, when "Kubla Khan" was written, long unpowdered hair symbolized youth, vitality and nonconformity. Coleridge's flashing eyes and floating hair appear in portraits of Napoleon...In "Kubla Khan", the poet's hair lifts by lyric afflatus; he is an Aeolian lyre played by the wind. I said the hyacinthine hair of the beautiful boy erotically entangles the observer's eye. Even in Napoleon's streaming hair there is something
cross-sexual. It was the feminine
element in Napoleon's charisma, a
principle I think always sexually
dual. Napoleon wore long hair only
while he was young and lean, an
aspiring outsider. His cropped
Caesar-style hair belongs mainly
to the imperial period, when he
tended towards corpulence. What
was earlier expressed by his hair
now resided in the female fleshiness
we see in David's Napoleon in his
Study...24

As can be seen from this passage, Paglia's analysis of "Kubla Khan"
is marred by vagueness and too much Paterian stream of
consciousness. It has too much "fervid, florid Italian style"25 and not
enough of the careful close reading of which she is capable. In
Paglia's reading of Coleridge's earlier poem, "The Aeolian Harp,"26
Paglia convincingly argues by means of close reading that Coleridge
has taken on a passive, feminine persona as he compares himself to
a wind-harp. She points out, for example, how he expressly feminizes
himself by comparing the wind-harp (and himself) to a maiden being
wooed, or "played on" by her lover. This passive, feminized reading
of Coleridge becomes extreme, however, when Paglia transports it to
an account of "To William Wordsworth."27 Here her Paterian
lyricism, taste for the lurid and method of "sensationalism"28 run
amok, turning her reading of Coleridge as feminine into hyperbole. In her eyes, Wordsworth's reading of "The Prelude" to the enthralled Coleridge becomes a ritual sex act, so that the audience witnesses Coleridge being ravished by Wordsworth's reading. At this point Paglia seems like some sort of mad Freudian, reducing everything to the promptings of the libido. In stressing the sex and violence in literature and art which she feels other critics have overlooked, Paglia here overstates the case. She sees sex and violence not only in overt cases (such as Blake's "Daughters of Thel") but in apparently covert ones like Coleridge's poem. Here, her determination to record the sex and violence in art leads her to see things that aren't there.

Paglia's sexual interpretation of "Christabel,"29 however, is more legitimate. She declares that critics giving a Christian interpretation of the poem have ignored what she calls the poem's "lesbian pornography,"30 and in her reading she stresses the seduction of Christabel in a way that is not unwarranted. She deftly notes, for instance, the sexual symbolism of the entrance into the castle where Christabel unlocks the "little door."31 Here the castle represents both Christabel's body and society, about to be "defiled" by the "chthonian"32 figure Geraldine. She further observes that Geraldine severs Christabel's mental connection with her betrothed by her story of capture by male rogues. Paglia writes, "psychologically, the tale translates to: men are brutes! This is how Geraldine severs Christabel's mental connection with her betrothed and induces her to give her hand."33 Paglia makes another striking observation. Writing about the appearance of the ghost of Christabel's mother, she notes "The mother died at the hour of Christabel's birth, vowing
she would hear the castle bell strike twelve on her daughter's wedding day. The poem begins with the tolling of midnight. So this is Christabel's wedding day, and she is about to consummate her perverse nuptials. "34

Paglia also observes that Geraldine's evil cannot be halted, and is even encouraged, by the presence of the forces of good. She points out the irony of the Christian appeals for protection that occur throughout Part I. When Christabel first goes out to pray, for example, the speaker declares "Jesu Maria, shield her well!"35 This, and other such appeals for heavenly protection are to no avail. The spirit of Christabel's mother is also helpless to protect Christabel from Geraldine, as Geraldine declares "this hour is mine...'tis given to me. "36 Here Paglia notes that, chillingly, "God and fate take the side of evil."37

Paglia's observations on the weakness of goodness and failure of Christianity in the poem must also be weighed against Coleridge's conscious intention for the poem to be about the redemption of the wicked by the good. On this point, Paglia's determination to prove her thesis that "art is full of crimes"38 leads her to some simplification of Geraldine, and again, of the creative process. First, she dismisses the idea of Coleridge trying to order his work to a conscious plan, claiming that his addition of lines stressing Geraldine's hesitation (255-61) is a red herring: "the reader must never be misled by the attempts of Coleridge the anxious reviser to cover the work of Coleridge the visionary...The poem in its fine original inspiration presents a Geraldine who never hesitates."39 It does not occur to her that Coleridge may have added these lines to
make Geraldine's planned redemption more plausible. These lines and Geraldine's utterance, "I will...try...to requite you well,"40 give the impression that Geraldine is not totally evil and can be redeemed. But Paglia believes that Coleridge's work is not subject to conscious intention; "Christabel" is simply Coleridge "dreaming aloud"41 and any attempt to rework it is necessarily censorship of his original, pure vision. This view reductively fails to consider the conscious working and reworking that can occur in the creation of finished art. For Paglia, Coleridge's poems are necessarily the eruptions of an unrestrained unconscious. Conscious crafting has nothing to do with it.

This is one area where Paglia's treatment of Christabel is unpersuasive. Another is her account of Geraldine. Paglia assumes straight off that Geraldine, mysterious, menacing figure that she is, is an archetype of nature. She repeatedly refers to what she sees as a theme of nature's apocalyptic return. For instance, on the moment when Christabel lies on the bed waiting for Geraldine, Paglia writes,

Christabel is the Iphigenia meekly awaiting
the stroke of the knife. Geraldine is the
high priest praying before her bloody task -
but she prays to herself, the daemonic will.
Murder here is sexual intercourse, for sex
is how nature kills us, that is, how she
enslaves the imagination. Nature draws
first blood, of virgins, of us.42
Paglia gives no reason as to why she assumes Geraldine is an archetypal image of Sadean nature; again, she fits the poem conveniently into her ideas on the nature of art and sexual personae.

Paglia's reading of "Christabel" culminates in the radical statement that Coleridge has projected himself into the character of Christabel. Fortunately, she does have some good, though not overwhelming, evidence for this. She points, first, to dreams of assault recorded in Coleridge's diaries; second, to lines from "On Dejection". These lines concern an image of the mind trapped by "viper thoughts"; this image recurs, says Paglia, in "Christabel" with Darcy's symbolic dream of the serpent (Geraldine) strangling the dove (Christabel). This proves, says Paglia, that Coleridge has projected himself into the character of Christabel. The idea is also supported, she argues, by the tendency of Coleridge to feminize himself in previous poems. Thus the wind-harp/self analogy of "The Aeolian Harp", the passivity of the Mariner, the femininity of the poet in "Kubla Khan," and the psychological rape of Coleridge in "To William Wordsworth" culminate in Coleridge's cross-sexual identification in "Christabel". This is a striking claim, but the evidence is not overwhelming, and relies, as I have argued earlier, on Paglia's tendency to make the poems fit her theories without too much consideration for counter-evidence.

This notion of cross-sexual identification recurs in Paglia's analysis of Bronte's Wuthering Heights. Before considering whether this claim is more convincing in connection with the novel than it is in the connection with "Christabel", however we shall consider Paglia's other views on the novel, particularly in the areas of violence,
amorality, and their repression. In examining these, we will compare Paglia's reading of the novel with that of Sandra Gilbert, a feminist critic whom Paglia has ridiculed.

Both Paglia and Gilbert consider the novel to be constructed around symbols of nature and culture, represented by Wuthering Heights and Thrushgrove Grange respectively. However, the two critics differ in their attitude toward these symbols. Whereas Paglia sees nature/Wuthering Heights as a realm of violence and energy, Gilbert views it as pre-lapsarian state prior to the encounter with culture, represented by Thrushgrove Grange. Gilbert also sees Wuthering Heights as a kind of feminist myth, with Catherine (and her double Heathcliff) as a "wild child" who is indoctrinated into culture/Thrushgrove Grange and is eventually destroyed by it. Paglia views nature and culture in the story more ambivalently. The culture of Thrushgrove Grange is ossified and static, where Wuthering Heights is the realm of natural energy, but this natural energy includes violence, aggression, and cruelty. Gilbert's view of nature, and of Catherine and Heathcliff as its emissaries, is more benevolent than Paglia's, and hence, I believe, less persuasive than Paglia's Sadean view.

First, there is Gilbert's portrayal of Heathcliff and Catherine, where she sanitises the amoral aspects of these characters as Paglia does not. Whereas Paglia stresses Catherine's violent, domineering nature, Gilbert presents her as a feminist heroine who is forced by circumstances to succumb to the dispiriting influence of patriarchy. In doing so, however, she overlooks the unsavoury aspects of her character. Both Catherine and Heathcliff are violent and
temperamental; through Nelly Dean's eyes Catherine is presented as selfish, domineering, and petulant. She and Heathcliff are sympathetic, however, as they appear far stronger than the other characters, particularly the Lintons, and Dean's bias against Catherine in a way defuses any dislike the reader may have of her.

Gilbert assumes that Catherine's temperamentality arises from her struggle for power in a house dominated by her father and with her brother as heir. Unlike Paglia, Gilbert sees Catherine's request for a whip not as symbolic of her masterful nature, but as symbolic of her desire for personal power and autonomy. This corrupts her own theoretical framework for interpreting the scene. In seeing the novel as a kind of myth, Gilbert gives a fairy-tale interpretation to the scene of Earnshaw's departure. For, she interprets his question "What shall I bring you?" addressed to the children and Nelly Dean as meaning "Who are you?". In other words, the responses of the children and Nelly will reveal their innermost nature. Hindley's request for a fiddle and tearful response when it is broken reveals his unsuitability to lead the household after his father's death. It essentially shows his weakness. But Gilbert does not take the common-sense view that Catherine's request for a whip shows a strong and commanding nature; she interprets it as an underdog's desire for power. In the light of the rest of the novel, it is clear that Catherine is anything but a victim; as Paglia points out, even after her marriage to Edgar she is the dominant partner in her marriage. The trappings of culture have a limited effect on her outlook and her will; her wilder self is buried but not destroyed.
This theme of repression of the natural will-to-power is prevalent in Paglia’s analysis. Whereas Gilbert views such repression as necessarily oppressive, Paglia argues that it is a necessary evil. For instance, she writes "only in society can one be an individual. Nature is waiting at society's gates to dissolve us in her chthonian bosom."

For Paglia both nature and culture are ambivalent; nature is energy and barbarity, while culture can be ordering and oppressive. There is a dialectic between the positive and negative aspects of the two, whereas Gilbert sees patriarchal culture as an oppressor. This leads Gilbert to overlook the ambivalent aspects of Wuthering Heights and its occupants, where Paglia does not.

For instance, Gilbert sees the kitchen of Wuthering Heights as representing a more 'egalitarian' world. Thrushgrove Grange, on the other hand, is hierarchical and oppressive. But Paglia's idea of the natural will-to-power seems to suit the Heights better with the jockeying for position that takes place among Heathcliff and his retinue. His household is a hotbed of seething hostilities that Paglia's Sadean view of nature is able to accommodate but that Gilbert's view of it as pre-lapsarian cannot. Paglia sees natural aggression and will-to-power not only in Heathcliff and Catherine, but in the other characters as well, though it is more effectively repressed in them. For instance, Paglia documents the violent, repellent aspects of Lockwood's dream sequence, applying her Sadean view of the unconscious convincingly here. She claims that Lockwood's dream reveals the inherent natural aggression, overt in Catherine and Heathcliff, that he has repressed. This is proof to Paglia of a Sadean view of nature and human nature inherent in the novel. But such
aggression does not stop with Catherine, Heathcliff, Lockwood, and Edgar Linton. Paglia also documents the violent curses and threats delivered by all the characters ranging from the least to the most civilized; she notes that even Nelly Dean gets to say some aggressive things, like that Edgar could no more leave Catherine alone than a cat could leave a half-eaten bird.

Paglia's account of an amoral natural energy, barely kept in check by civilization, seems truer to the raw, turbulent quality of Bronte's novel that Gilbert's account of the book as a feminist myth of the creation of patriarchy. In her analysis of *Wuthering Heights*, Paglia takes account of the amoral, violent aspects of Heathcliff, Catherine and their world whereas Gilbert whitewashes such ambiguities. Paglia's assertion that Bronte has projected herself into the character of Heathcliff is also fairly convincing because she backs it up with biographical evidence. She draws attention to Bronte's masculine qualities as recorded in contemporary accounts and rejects the idea that Bronte's brother was the model for Heathcliff, pointing out the unsuitability of his character for such a role.

Unconvincingly, Paglia goes on to suggest that Bronte was lesbian-tending and that Catherine represents Maria, Bronte's dead and beloved sister. This view requires that Paglia collapse a fraternal relationship into an incestuous one, which she does without reference to the actual circumstances of Bronte's family life. Furthermore, the only evidence Paglia gives of a lesbian tendency is the bitter love poetry Bronte wrote after returning from girls' school. But her earlier idea of cross-gender identification is an interesting and perhaps legitimate one given the biographical evidence
presented. However, Bronte's identification with Catherine (assuming any character identification exists at all) is perhaps not out of the question given Catherine's wilful personality, her 'masculine' character.

The uneven quality of Paglia's criticism, evident in her treatment of Poe, Coleridge, and Bronte, is again evident in her treatment of Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Nonetheless, this is one of Paglia's best analyses. She gives a good close reading of aspects of the play, remaining largely true to its witty spirit. The main problem with her interpretation is the rigid application of her theoretical concepts, namely her idea of the Apollonian-Dionysian continuum and her insistence that art is necessarily an evasion of nature. As we shall see, her notion of the Apollonian works very well with a lot of the material in *Earnest*, but her insistence on seeing a concealed Dionysian or chthonian element leads her into overinterpretation in some areas.

Paglia's association of the Apollonian with form, hierarchy, and appearance works extremely well when applied to certain aspects of Wilde's play. It enables Paglia to make striking and legitimate observations about the play's characters, their concerns and their utterances. Her concept of the sexual persona, in this case the androgyne of manners, also leads her to some legitimate close readings of the characters in the play. She begins her analysis with an account of this androgyne of manners which she sees as the premier sexual persona of the play. This persona is essentially a sexless being in whom masculinity or femininity is merely a social mask. The androgyne of manners also has the quality of possessing
no inner life; in Paglia's words, it transforms "content into form, soul into surface." Paglia gives several examples of what she sees as the superficial gender of the androgyne of manners. She observes, for instance, that Algernon is feminized by his passivity and seductive charm. In arguing this Paglia stresses the fact that Algernon speaks languidly and is always overdressed. In an earlier version of the play he also expresses a distaste for exercise.

"Exercise! Good God! No gentleman ever takes exercise. You don't seem to understand what a gentleman is." Such qualities indicate to Paglia an androgynous quality, or rather it proves to her that gender in the play is purely superficial, a quality of manners. But she spends more time on this matter when discussing Gwendolen and Cecily, claiming that they are never "persuasively 'female'." Her prime example of this is the tea table confrontation between them.

Here, Paglia writes,

Gwendolen and Cecily manipulate their personae with chill virtuosity. Nowhere is it clearer that the gender of the androgyne of manners is purely artificial, that femininity in the salon is simply a principle of decorum shared by male and female. The women's escalating emotion is completely absorbed by the ceremonial framework and by the formality of their social masks...The women's immovable wills press so fiercely against the social limits of the moment that the hierarchical
structure of manners leaps into visibility.50

Paglia thus seeks to prove that the femininity of Cecily and Gwendolen is superficial, a social mask of both manners and seduction.

An important line of thought in this argument, that the androgyne of manners is essentially a sexless being, is that the androgyne necessarily turns "the internal world into the external"51 and therefore has no inner or even physical life, subordinating everything to form and fashion.

Paglia uses the case of Gwendolen and her diary as an example of this phenomenon. Gwendolen says of the diary, "I never travel [without it]...One must always have something sensational to read on the train."52 Paglia proceeds to give a close analysis of this remark, pointing out its implications. First there is the remark's narcissism. Gwendolen reads, as Paglia puts it, "to condense herself,"53 not to broaden her outlook. Secondly, through reading her diary as though it was a sensational novel, Gwendolen implies not only that she has forgotten her past but that she has become detached from it. That this diary-cum-novel is read on the train indicates its superficiality; that it is sensational implies it is titillation without moral meaning. Gwendolen views her life as a voyeur: she has become detached from it, and it has become an artifact that she peruses for light, sensational entertainment.

Gwendolen’s detachment from herself, the absence of a life within her, is shared by the other characters generally. This occurs most patently in the way everything personal, from the emotions to the
body, is subordinated to laws of form and fashion. For instance, Bracknell remarks that "the chin is worn...very high, just at present." Of this utterance Paglia notes that part of the face is reduced to a fashion accessory. In a similar vein, Gwendolen refuses cake from Cecily as it "is rarely seen in the best houses nowadays." Of this Paglia deftly says, Tastiness is irrelevant, since the body has no needs in the Apollonian world of form. Cake and sugar are items of decor, marks of caste by which a group separates itself from a lower group. Personal preference is renounced for hierarchic conformity. 

In both these examples, the body is subordinated to fashion; the chin, cake, bread, and butter are fashion accessories rather than food or a part of the face. Such subordination of the self to fashion and appearance continues in the realm of personal life as well. Paglia uses Jack's proposal to Gwendolen as an example of this. In this scene, Gwendolen announces she will accept him, but she insists that he propose to her into the proper way, down on his knees and true to form. Later on, she tells him, "I hope you will always look at me like that, especially when there are other people present." This indicates to Paglia that Gwendolen is less interested in intimacy than in being displayed to best social advantage. Her romance is never private or intimate, but conducted with an eye to an audience. A similar concern for appearance over intimacy occurs when Algernon meets Cecily. Here, Cecily records not only Algernon's wooing in her
diary, but also their imaginary courtship as well. This diary, however, is not a private record but is intended for publication. It is a partly fabricated love story that will serve Cecily not as a personal document but as a herald of her social and romantic success, displayed like an engagement ring. The fact of Cecily's relationship with Algernon is less important than is her being seen by others to have such a relationship. In personal as well as physical life, then, appearances, "good form," and the high social status it apparently brings, are more important than bodily tastes and personal intimacies.

Maintaining high social status in the world of *Ernest* means more than the subordination of life to form and fashion. The maintenance of social status and personal distance from self and others occurs, Paglia argues, even at the level of speech. In the characters' epigrammatic utterances and in their precedents, the epigrams of the salon, Paglia sees a form of speech that instead of having the aim of communication, has the Apollonian aim of distancing oneself from others, in "hieratic self-sequestration." Paglia views the epigrammatic utterance as a conversation stopper and a weapon of war in the fight for social position. She writes,

The salon dialogue of the androgyne of manners is a duel of "cutting" remarks. Language is used aggressively as a tool of masculine warfare...It is no coincidence that the terms describing a witty exchange - thrust, parry, riposte, repartee - come from
swordplay... Wilde's witticisms operates by systematic 'cutting', separating the self from communality and withdrawing it into aristocratic sequestration. Language in The Importance of Being Earnest is a mode of hierarchical placement. It is a series of psychodramatic gestures, each remark asserting a caste location vis-a-vis some other person or class of person.59

Paglia gives two examples from Earnest of this kind of hierarchical placement; the first is from the tea-table confrontation between Cecily and Gwendolen, the second from Algernon. At the tea-table, Cecily says, "When I see a spade I call it a spade", to which Gwendolen replies, "I am glad to say that I have never seen a spade. It is obvious that our social spheres have been widely different."60 By turning a metaphorical spade into a "calibrator of caste,"61 Gwendolen distances herself from Cecily, implying her greater social status. The same thing occurs at the outset of the play, when Algernon declares of his piano-playing, "I can't play accurately - anyone can play accurately - but I play with wonderful expression".62 Here, says Paglia, Algernon separates himself from the masses by a "false, self-absolving premise", raising himself to a supposedly higher level of "aesthetical 'sensibility'."63 In this way, speech in The Importance of Being Earnest conforms to Paglia's concept of the
Apollonian as a mode of remoteness and separation. It also concurs with Paglia's notion of the Apollonian as form. Paglia observes, for instance, the perfect form of some of Gwendolen's utterances and stresses how the epigram stops rather than forwards conversation.

In her application of the Apollonian to *The Importance of Being Ernest*, Paglia is thus largely successful. Her notion of the Apollonian as a mode of remoteness, appearance, and form is well suited to certain aspects of the play and its characters. As we have seen, Paglia's concept of the Apollonian androgyne of manners, with its lack of Dionysian inwardness, allows her to make pertinent observations on aspects of the characters and their behaviour. She demonstrates how the characters subordinate life to the art of form and fashion and how they separate themselves from their inner world and each other through behaviour and speech. But when Paglia tries to include the Dionysian in her reading of the play, she tends to overinterpret. In her insistence on seeing a suppressed chthonian element in the play, in the form of subtle female dominance and Gothic doubling of the male leads, Paglia wanders from her successful account of the play's essentially trivial quality and ends up in archetypal overinterpretation.

The first case where Paglia unconvincingly postulates a Dionysian element in the play is in her assertion of a repressed theme of female dominance. She finds this dominance in the bossiness of Lady Bracknell, and in Cecily and Gwendolen's manipulation of their suitors. For instance, Paglia points out how Gwendolen and Cecily both manipulate and anticipate their fiancées. She stresses how Gwendolen makes Jack propose to her "properly" and how both she
and Cecily insist on being married to someone called Ernest. Paglia also dwells on Cecily's imaginary courtship with Algernon as recorded in her diary and self-written love letters. Here, she gives the scene sinister implications.

Although they have just met, Cecily claims she and Algernon have been engaged for months. He stands dazed, as she unveils a long saga of courtship, alienation, and reconciliation, recorded in diary and letter. Cecily has imagined Algernon before he has had any opportunity to act on his own. Like Poe's William Wilson, he meets his other self, a doppelganger projected by Cecily. She creates a past for him, a prefabricated set of memories. He is as passive as the waxy Hermaphrodite of Shelley's *Witch of Atlas*... Algernon is half-delighted, half-horrified. The game sways dizzily back and forth from illusion to reality... romantic union is plotted in advance by an ingenious virgin dramatist... Algernon in a condition of masculine nescience, lets himself become engaged to a woman of whom he knows nothing. Thus Cecily's witty manipulation of her suitor is more invasive of male
autonomy than Gwendolen and Lady
Bracknell's bossier maneuvers. 64

As she associates female power with nature, Paglia sees this thread of female dominance in the play as "chthonian." 65 A bossy heroine is not simply a bossy heroine in Paglia's view, but is a disguised or transformed archetype of female nature. Thus, Jack and Algernon's willingness to be christened at the end of the play, as well as their manipulation by Cecily and Gwendolen, are not merely comic but actually sinister. Jack and Algernon "abandon their identities and undertake a Romantic regression to be born again in the image of female desire." 66 The audience fails to acknowledge Gwendolen and Cecily's "nascent maternal tyranny," 67 however, because "Wilde's epicene wit keeps female chthonian power in check by turning all four principals into the glass-bodied androgyne of manners, who escapes and transcends physiology." 68 In this interpretation, we encounter the same problem as we did in her interpretation of Coleridge. For here again we have Paglia trying to cram the idiosyncrasies of individual art works and their creators into her overriding theory that art is necessarily a swerve from and/or reflection of nature. Cecily, Gwendolen, and Bracknell especially cannot simply be dominant female characters but must necessarily be some unconscious invasion of chthonian material into Wilde's denatured world.

Female dominance is not the only chthonian tinge that Paglia sees in the play. For she sees the comic doubling of Algernon and Jack as having a dark precedent in the doubling of man and portrait in The Picture of Dorian Gray. For instance, she stresses how, in
another context, the following scene would be very sinister. This is
the scene where Algernon visits Cecily claiming to be Ernest and
Jack turns up, having "killed off" Ernest, to find that his dead brother
is actually "alive". Paglia claims this doubling is a comic version of
the Gothic doubling of person and portrait that went on in The
Picture of Dorian Gray. This is not unfeasible, but this motif of
doubles and long-lost brothers is also a feature of Shakespeare
comedy, if not a comic tradition. That Wilde was familiar with
Shakespeare is attested to by his essay on him "The Truth of Masks".

Again, Paglia takes aspects of the play that may be intended purely
as comic and turns them into matters of great significance. As
Gwendolen and Cecily's bamboozling of their fiancées indicates a
chthonian presence, so the doubling of Jack and Algernon is not a
literary device, to be used for either comic or Gothic purposes, but a
necessary sign of the Sadean nature that Wilde represses in his
work. The complexities of artistic motivation are reduced, in Paglia's
theories, to an anxiety about nature that in Wilde's case is repressed.
In some cases the overinterpretation this can cause can be
ridiculous; in the course of the Ernest chapter, Paglia goes so far as
to say that Wilde wrote the "chthonian" Salome in French to avoid
contaminating his native language with Dionysian material. Here, as
we have seen in her treatment of Poe and Coleridge, Paglia insists on
forcing everything to meet her concepts of art, culture, and nature,
and where something does not fit easily, she will force it to do so. As
John Updike writes,

[h]er percussive style...functions not
so much as to elicit the secrets of books
as to hammer them into submission.
Stretched on the rack of her taut
opposition of female/Dionysian/
chthonian versus male/Apollonian/
skyey [sic], one author after
another is made to confess to
sexual crossover, androgyny
and sadomasochism. 70

Updike's description gives an apt portrayal of the element of force in
Paglia's analyses, her strident categorisations of works according to
her theoretical schema. This is Apollonian, that is Dionysian, this is a
femme fatale and never mind the ambiguities, such as those we have
seen in Poe, for instance. As T.D. Armstrong71 writes of Harold
Bloom, Paglia's mentor, an awful lot of categorisation goes on; in
Paglia's case this can lead to some successful interpretations but
also to overinterpretation, generalisation, and railroading of
counterevidence.

We now turn to the last author of our survey, William Wordsworth. It
could be said Paglia doesn't quite know what to make of him, in
terms of her theories. On the one hand he lacks the formality and
remoteness of an Apollonian author like Wilde; on the other, his
vision of nature, or the Dionysian, is to Paglia sentimental and
idealistic. But in spite of himself, she reveals, Wordsworth allows
Sadean nature into his work and contradicts his own ideals of
universal love and benevolence. He could be said to embody
unconsciously the cruelty that Paglia emphasises in her overview of art and literature.

Arguing that Wordsworth represses the cruelty of nature, Paglia observes that malevolent images of nature unconsciously appear in his work. Such images occur in poems such as "Incidents on Salisbury Plain" and "Resolution and Independence," despite Wordsworth's own ideals. In such works, Wordsworth sets his characters in desolate wastelands; Paglia sees these images as unconsciously representing nature's hostility: "Wordsworth's poetry makes an apparently generous extension of significance into the most minute and commonplace details of nature, benevolent "nurse" of humanity. But in the poems of aged male solitaries and in such scenes of "visionary dreariness" as the one in The Prelude (XII.251-61), where a girl bearing a pitcher on her head is battered by the wind, a different emotional physics obtains. Instead of spiritual expansion, there are stark disproportions, terrifying vacancies, energy clusters burst and abraded - sudden sacralizations followed by intolerable desolation. The solitaries express Wordsworth's secret fear. They are what is left when mother nature is done with man, dry bones she has picked over... Arguing that nature is benign, Wordsworth is haunted by a spectre of isolation, his own repressed dread of nature's cruelty." Paglia's argument is compelling here, relying as it does on several examples, and certainly teases out a thread of imagery in his poetry that contradicts his professed ideals. Her argument for the return of repressed nature in Wordsworth's poetry grows more tenuous, however, when she deals with "Tintern Abbey." Here she dwells particularly on a single detail, making it
the crux of her argument that Wordsworth is repressing his betrayal by nature.

The crucial line for her is, "Knowing that nature never did betray the heart that loved her." For Paglia this line is the key to the poem; it indicates to her that Wordsworth knows that he is betrayed by nature but tries to deny it. He quickly reassures himself by addressing Dorothy, regarding her as his former self or double. By conjuring her up, he is able to quell his anxiety. Consciously, it seems, this anxiety centres around Wordsworth's sense of his alienation from nature; but unconsciously, it is an anxiety about nature, a fear that his benevolent view of it was misguided. The problem with this argument is that it relies on a single line. With regard to the poem, Paglia's argument that Wordsworth's benevolent view of nature is necessarily a repression is unconvincing here given Paglia's lack of evidence. In this case, her assertion that Wordsworth is repressing the amorality and cruelty of nature seems like an a priori application of her thesis on nature's sadism, rather than a view based on the evidence of Wordsworth's poem. Paglia's dismissal of Wordsworth's positive view of nature also ignores the positive dimension of the Dionysian as she understand it. For the Dionysian incorporates empathy, tenderness, and communion as well as the barbarity and cruelty that Paglia prefers to emphasise. Thus, though her argument for Wordsworth's repression of Sadean nature is served well by the variety of examples she produces of desolate nature in his poetry, it is not supported by her treatment of "Tintern Abbey".
Paglia detects another inconsistency between Wordworth's ideals and his poetry: she finds a discontinuity between the treatment of certain others in his work and his ideals of universal love and sympathy. Wordworth professes ideals of universal love and nature's benevolence. Such ideals violate not only Paglia's Sadean view of nature but also her views on love as they are expressed in the opening chapter of *Sexual Personae*. "To live in love and peace is one of the outstanding contradictions that Christianity has imposed on its followers, an ideal impossible and unnatural...Only a saint could sustain the Christian code of love. And saints are ruthless in their exclusions: they must shut out an enormous amount of reality, the reality of sexual personae and the reality of nature. Love for all means coldness to something or someone." 76

In Wordworth's case this means coldness toward masculine and urbanised males and a failure to see the women he loves concretely. Masculinity, according to Paglia, only makes a show in Wordworth's poetry if it is set in the past or actually maimed in some way. As for the women close to Wordworth, "the more a woman is loved by Wordworth, the less clearly she is seen." 77

Paglia argues that Wordworth's imaginative sympathies do not extend to masculine men, claiming that a character has to be sick, lame, poor, a child, or a woman to qualify as a worthy subject for Wordworth. She gives several examples of Wordworth's shoddy treatment of the masculine in such poems as "Peter Bell" 78 and "Incidents on Salisbury Plain". In the former, Paglia emphasises the laming of the title character; in the second she claims the sailor gets
Wordsworth's sympathy because he is an outcast from society. If Wordsworth has a favourable view of masculinity at all, it is in the "past tense". An example of this is the teacher recollecting his youth in "The Fountain"79 and the vision of the warrior at Stonehenge in The Prelude. Otherwise, Wordsworth frowns on "the sneers of selfish men."80 "[T]hey are obviously virile males!"81 remarks Paglia.

The urbanised, masculine male is not the only blind spot in Wordsworth's universal sympathy. Paglia's observations are even more striking on Wordsworth's treatment of the women who are close to him. Wordsworth has more awareness of and sympathy towards strangers rather than those closest to him, such as his sister Dorothy, Lucy, and his fiancee Mary Hutchinson. According to Paglia, his solitaries, beggars, and other strangers are more concretely described than personal figures like Dorothy or Lucy. For example, Paglia stresses the spiritualisation of Dorothy in "Tintern Abbey". At first, she observes, Wordsworth's listener is not concretely identified. "We are asked to hear a voice and look into the eyes of a being of unfixed gender."82 This being, who later turns out to be Dorothy, is depersonalised, existing to Wordsworth only as an image of his former self. In comparison to the vividly described solitaries, such as the leech-gatherer, Dorothy seems to barely exist. She is just an offshoot of Wordsworth's being. For Paglia, the same dehumanisation occurs in "A Slumber did my Spirit Steal."83 Like Dorothy in "Tintern Abbey", Lucy is depersonalised, though this time less by Wordsworth than by nature. For in the poem Lucy is transformed into a natural force; although dead she is still present as a force of nature, an aspect of the cosmos. But this is not a positive
for Paglia. Rather it is an example of the dehumanising quality of nature, which "waits to dissolve us in her chthonian bosom."84 Here, as in "Tintern Abbey", the woman whom Wordsworth knows personally is never as concrete as are the beggars and solitaries of Wordsworth's other poems. And neither is Mary Hutchinson, Wordsworth's fiancee; Paglia observes that Wordsworth calls her a "phantom of delight."85 She remarks, of Mary and Lucy, that "both suffer the same Wordsworthian fate: their bodies are dematerialized and desexed. Reduced to matter, Lucy loses her gender and human identity."86

As we can see, Paglia finds blind spots in Wordsworth's universal sympathy, and malevolent images of nature while he professes its benevolence. Unlikely as it seems, Paglia makes the apparently ethical Wordsworth produce material for her thesis that "art...is full of crimes."87 Though not professing the supposedly correct Sadean view of Dionysian nature, or posessing Apollonian loftiness, Wordsworth gains, in Paglia's hands, a moral ambivalence. For she finds inconsistencies between Wordsworth's ideals of nature's benevolence, tenderness and universal sympathy. His persona is "one of the strongest, fiercest, and falsest in all poetry."88

Advocating nature's benevolence, Wordsworth allows Sadean visions of nature into his poetry; advocating universal sympathy, his sympathy proves to be limited to troubled strangers.

Paglia's account of Wordsworth is one of her more successful analyses, as are her analyses of Bronte and Wilde. In all three cases, her approach produces some interesting and valid results. In the case of Wordsworth, it leads her to find inconsistencies between his
ideals and his poetry; with Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Paglia's concept of the Apollonian and the sexual persona, combined with strong close reading, produces a substantive account of Wilde's play. With Bronte, Paglia also employs her theoretical outlook with success, as she documents the novel's vision of Dionysian, Sadean nature. This becomes clear in contrast with Sandra Gilbert's reading, where a more positive view of nature leads to an inattention to the amorality of the characters and the violence of the book.

However, there are limitations to the success of Paglia's approach. In her reading of Wilde, Paglia overemphasizes certain details as she insistently pursues her thesis that art is necessarily motivated by a desire to evade nature. Such overinterpretation also occurs in Paglia's analysis of Wordworth's "Tintern Abbey", with her insistence that in the poem (or rather one line), Wordsworth is repressing his sense that nature has betrayed him. This misapplication of theory, as well as overinterpretation and other technical faults, are more pronounced in Paglia's analyses of Poe and Coleridge.

In her treatment of Poe, Paglia's insistence on the presence of the femme fatale, the sexual persona of nature, leads her to ignore the ambiguity of "Ligeia" and "Berenice". Both stories are related by unreliable narrators, something which Paglia ignores in her insistence that the title characters are archetypes of mother nature. When seeing more direct images of nature, such as those in "Descent into the Maelstrom" and "Masque of the Red Death", Paglia is more successful. But here her interpretations are too brief and general. These same faults mark Paglia's analysis of "Pit and the Pendulum", where Paglia insists, without evidence or argument, that
the story takes place in the "womb-tomb" of mother/nature. This insistence on the presence of the Dionysian or "chthonian", combined with too much stress on certain details, a lack of argument or evidence, and woolly Paterian association, persists in Paglia's readings of Coleridge. This is a shame, as at points throughout her analyses, Paglia again proves herself capable of sensitive close reading. She also provides some evidence for her claim of Coleridge's cross-sexual identification in "Christabel". But Paglia's theses still tend to dictate to the evidence. Thus she insists that Geraldine is an image of the nature-mother and Coleridge's adjustments to his work are dismissed as censorship of true pagan visions. And "To William Wordsworth" is reduced to a ritual sex act.

The uneven quality of Paglia's criticism is partly the result of her rigid application of theses on nature, culture, sex, and cruelty to particular texts. It is also the result of a technique that varies from the conventions of close reading and citation of evidence, to generalisation, assertion, and Paterian stream of consciousness. In short, Paglia's literary criticism is both sound and senseless, prudent and imprudent. In Terry Teachout's words, Paglia's criticism is "every bit as intellectually stimulating as it is exasperating."
CHAPTER FIVE: PAGLIA AND FEMINIST AESTHETICS

Paglia is perhaps most famous (or infamous) for her attacks on what she calls "establishment feminism" in both its academic and popular forms. In "Junk Bonds and Corporate Raiders" she calls for the abolition of women's studies, calling it "institutionalised sexism"; she rejects the idea of the "battered woman syndrome" in "No Law in the Arena," and perhaps most notoriously calls feminist concern over date rape "hysteria." In this chapter we confine ourselves to a small area of Paglia's assaults on feminism, namely her contention that feminism is hostile to art and subordinates it to the feminist social agenda.

Paglia generally views liberal academics, such as feminists, as unnecessarily hostile to art and aesthetics. In "The New Sexism" she writes, "Issues of quality and standards have been foolishly abandoned by liberals, who now interpret aesthetics as nothing but a mask for ideology." Feminists in particular view art as intertwined with sexual politics, and can therefore be hostile to male authors and the received canon, on the grounds that they reflect and perpetuate sexist ideology. Paglia attacks feminists for this, accusing them of putting ideological correctness before art. She also attacks feminist dislike of fashion and pornography, claiming that these are art forms.

Of attempts at canon revision Paglia is scornful, claiming that feminist critics want to "throw out the great books." Paglia does not
believe in dismantling the canon; instead she believes it has lasting relevance and should remain at the centre of education.

Education must centre on primary texts, the major artworks so complex and elusive that they have haunted generation after generation. None of us understands them fully. We must present them to the students, then get out of the way. Great art radiates — an uncanny aura beyond good or evil. We literally "expose" ourselves to it, never knowing its deepest effects until years or decades later. 7

She sees universities as "conservative, curatorial", holding "[g]reat works of art...in trust." 8 Furthermore, like Harold Bloom, she believes the canon is not formed just by critics but by artists who see the canon as "the touchstone for creation and innovation." 9 But while Paglia believes in the legitimacy of the Western canon as it stands, this does not mean she thinks it is the only thing that should be taught. For, like her opponents she believes in multiculturalism. In her proposals for education reform, given in the final section of "Junk Bonds and Corporate Raiders" Paglia calls for undergraduates to be broadly trained in world history and culture, including comparative religion.

Paglia's remarks on feminist revision of the literary canon are few and scattered, but she does have more to say about feminist
treatment of art history and the artistic canon. She says in "The New Sexism":

One of the many lies of women's studies is that European art history was written by white males and feminism has conclusively rewritten that history by discovering and restoring major female artists excluded from the pantheon by patriarchal conspiracy. But European art history was not just written but created by white males. We may lament the limitations placed on women's training and professional access in the past, but what is done cannot be undone.

The last twenty years of scholarship have brought many forgotten women artists to attention, but too often their presentation has been marred by anachronistic feminist rhetoric...

Feminism, for all its boasts, has not found a single major female painter or sculptor to add to the canon. It did revive the reputations of many minor women, like Frida Kahlo or Romaine Brooks. Mary Cassatt, Georgia O'Keefe and Helen
Frankenthaler were known and did not need rediscovery. 10

Here, Paglia accuses feminist art historical scholarship of being inaccurate and biased in its assessment of women artists and the Western art tradition. She also objects to what she sees as the derogatory treatment of canonical male artists. "It is scandalous that our most talented women undergraduates are being tutored in attitudes of juvenile resentment toward major male artists of the rank of Degas, Picasso, and Marcel Duchamp, who have become virtual untouchables. We will never get great art from women if their education exposes them only to the second-rate and if the idea of greatness itself is denied. Greatness is not a white male trick. Every important world civilization has defined its artistic tradition in elitist terms of distinction and excellence. "11 Paglia also frowns upon hostile feminist treatment of male authors. For instance, in "Tournament of Modern Personae", Paglia defends D.H. Lawrence, claiming that he, along with Freud, is one of "the deepest thinkers on sex in the twentieth century. "12 Further, she believes that the education of young women has also been damaged by feminist hostility to him, as well as to other canonical male writers. "Many of our most talented women students are graduating from college without having read not only Freud and Lawrence but other major figures like Ernest Hemmingway, Henry Miller, and Norman Mailer...What have we done to young women in the name of feminism?"13 As we have seen, while advocating a "true multiculturalism"14 based on rigourous historical learning, Paglia
affirms the western canon as the centre of education and opposes efforts to depose it.

Paglia not only defends the predominantly male artistic and literary canon against what she sees as "anti-art" attacks by feminists, but she also defends pornography and fashion as art forms. In attacking Catharine MacKinnon and a group of anti-porn protesters in New York, for example, Paglia clearly regards their hostility to pornography as arising out of ignorance of art and art history. She accuses MacKinnon of being ignorant of the sacred pornographic tradition in Hindu art. Paglia also attacks a group of anti-porn protesters, in the transcript "Glennda and Camille Do Downtown" on similar grounds of artistic ignorance. "Send this woman [an anti-porn protester] to an art store! Go look at a painting! Go look at Caravaggio, Michelangelo! Look at Greek art!...This is, like, so...puritanical. Go to India! Pro-sex Hinduism!" Paglia, seeing pornography in art, and vice versa, partly condemns anti-porn campaigners on the grounds of ignorance; her affirmation of pornography and rejection of anti-porn campaigners also arises from her belief that art, and its offshoot pornography, reflects and ritualises the amorality of nature and sex. Whereas some feminists see pornography as a tool of misogyny, Paglia believes that pornography, in itself and in high art, is the "sexual reality" hidden behind the artifices of civilization.

Paglia also embraces fashion as an art form and thereby comes into conflict with the feminist Naomi Wolf. Whereas Paglia sees beauty as an "eternal human value," Wolf claims, in her book The Beauty Myth, that the fashion and beauty industries promote ideals that
are harmful and oppressive to women. In particular, media images of women, particularly in fashion advertising, force a standard of beauty on women that they feel obliged to follow, a compulsion that can lead to eating disorders. Paglia completely rejects this thesis. She sees fashion images not as oppressive but as beautiful and admirable. "I don't feel less because I'm in the presence of a beautiful person. I don't go, ... 'Oh, I'll never be that beautiful!' What a ridiculous attitude to take! - the Naomi Wolf attitude... When people look at Michelangelo's David, do they commit suicide? No.... When you see a beautiful person: 'How beautiful.' ... We should not have to apologise for revelling in beauty. "20 For Paglia, beauty is not a "trick invented by nasty men... on Madison Avenue";21 instead of oppressing and harming women, "today's fashion magazines and supermodels" embody "the cult of beauty for a mass audience."22 A desire to be attractive and fashionable on the part of women is also nothing to be ashamed of. "Women enjoy colour and fabric and fashion and we should not have to apologize for that. American feminism has gotten itself in a corner, because it is unable to explain the attraction of women to beauty and pleasure and sexuality. "23

Ranking fashion and beauty as a form of art, Paglia uses Wolf's book, and feminist praise of it, as evidence that feminism lacks an aesthetic. She says in "The M.I.T. Lecture" that one of the problems with the feminist movement was that "[r]ight from the start there was a problem with aesthetics, a difficulty dealing with beauty and with art. If you think that's an old problem, it isn't. The present prominence of Naomi Wolf and her book indicates that what I'm criticizing is still a contemporary problem. The accolades on the
back of that book from leading feminists, including Germaine Greer -
who said "This is the most important book - since my own book!" -
shows that that's still an issue. "24 But for the most part her
condemnation of The Beauty Myth depends on some general,
unsubstantiated remarks and finally descends into vitriolic and
personal attack - her favoured weapons, as we have seen. She
declares, for instance, that Wolf is "full of paranoid fantasies about
the world" and that she has been "ill-served"25 by her Ivy League
education. Such relative pleasantries do not last long, however, as
Paglia finally vents her rage, calling Wolf a "yuppie," a "parent-
pleasing, teacher-pleasing little kiss-ass" and finally a "twit."26 Such
vitriol occurs, as we have seen, with Paglia's extended attack on
MacKinnon and Dworkin. Other feminist thinkers are also not safe
from Paglia's acid tongue. Helene Cixous, for instance, is a "damp
sob sister" with "diarrhoea prose"27 and her countrywoman Luce
Irigaray is "the pompous lap dog of Parisian cafe despots."28 Thus,
as we have seen, Paglia tends to attack and abuse others personally
rather than engage intellectually with their work.

Paglia's attacks on feminist aesthetics (or perceived lack thereof)
also appear anti-intellectual in that she tends to rely on personal
anecdote. Her criticism of feminism as lacking an aesthetic draws its
main example from personal experience, where Paglia was criticised
for saying the Rolling Stones were artists in spite of their "sexist"
lyrics. "They're screaming in my face: 'Art? Art? Nothing that
demeans women can be art!' There it is!...Right from the start. The
fascism of the contemporary women's movement."29 This is just
concerning New Haven's Women's Liberation Rock Band, but Paglia
sees an "anti-art" attitude in academic feminism as well. Again, this conclusion is supported by personal experience rather than close critique of feminist writing. "At an early conference in New Haven, I had a chance to mingle with and observe at close hand a number of the new feminist leaders, including Kate Millett and Rita Mae Brown. I was disturbed by their tunnel vision, their lack of hard political knowledge, their indifference to aesthetics, and the shrill reductiveness of their discourse." Paglia does not give any examples of what she means; she just states that it is there.

It seems, then, that we cannot look to Paglia's work itself for evidence for the claims she makes about feminism and aesthetics. Hence in order to assess the legitimacy of her attacks, we must consider feminist aesthetic theory ourselves. In order to do so, I will follow Rita Felski who, in Beyond Feminist Aesthetics, notes that there are two dominant branches of feminist aesthetics, one French, the other American. My use of Felski to give a general sketch of these schools will be elaborated by pieces from these French and American feminists. For instance, we will touch upon the work of the American Elaine Showalter and Frenchwoman Helene Cixous. This examination of French and American feminist aesthetic theory will be our main concern, but we shall also consider pieces from the collection Aesthetics in Feminist Perspective and the German anthology Feminist Aesthetics. After this examination of feminist aesthetics, we will then be in a position to assess Paglia's attack upon it.

Let us begin with the French school of feminist aesthetics. The most noted idea to emerge from French feminist thought is that of
l'écriture feminine, or feminine writing, as postulated by Helene Cixous, Luce Irigaray and, at first glance, Julia Kristeva. Cixous and Irigaray (Cixous most concretely, in "The Laugh of the Medusa") posit the idea that women's writing is related to the body and instinctual drives. Cixous, for instance, in "Medusa" explicitly associates women's writing with desire and the body; of women she says, "[m]ore body, hence more writing."33 Likewise, Irigaray associates what she sees as women's multiple sexuality ("woman has sex organs almost everywhere")34 with women's speech, claiming this sexuality is reflected in their utterance.

One can say that the geography of her pleasure is much more diversified, more multiple in its differences, more complex, more subtle, than is imagined - in an imaginary centred a bit too much on one and the same. 'She' is indefinitely other in herself. That is undoubtedly the reason she is called temperamental, incomprehensible, perturbed, capricious - not to mention her language in which 'she' goes off in all directions and in which 'he' is unable to discern the coherence of any meaning.35

Here we are faced with a sex reversal of Paglia's own association of biology with art; for with Irigaray and Cixous, women's writing has a biological basis, whereas for Paglia, art and aesthetics are based in
male biology. Where Paglia argues that art and conceptualization arise from male aggression, anxiety, and sexual compartmentalization, Cixous and Irigaray see women's writing as arising from instinctual drives or sexual multiplicity. So, whereas Cixous says female writing arises from the body, Paglia conceives the female artist as rebelling against her body. A creative woman co-opt the masculine or Apollonian; she joins the male artist in revolt against nature, associated with the female. Paglia writes: "The more woman aims for personal identity and autonomy, the more she develops her imagination, the fiercer will be her struggle with nature - that is, with the intractable physical laws of her own body."36 This is in complete opposite to Cixous: "By writing her self, woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her."37

Cixous and Irigaray are not the only French feminists to associate writing with the body and libido however; there is also Julia Kristeva. But here the association of desire and writing is not expressly a female quality; Kristeva finds this desire or "jouissance"38 in the work of male avant-garde artists such as Joyce and Mallarme. However, implies Felski, Kristeva's concepts seem to have been co-opted by feminist theory because of jouissance's association with what Kristeva calls the "semiotic."39 The semiotic is conceived by Kristeva as the pre-cultural realm associated with the mother's body. Both male and female have access to it, as well as jouissance. What is most important for our purposes, namely our examination of Paglia's claim that feminism reduces aesthetics to politics, is the idea
in all three of these French feminists, that l'écriture feminine is inherently subversive. As Cixous puts it,

A feminine text cannot fail to be more than subversive. It is volcanic; as it is written it brings about an upheaval of the old property crust, carrier of masculine investments; there's no other way. There's no room for her if she's not a he. If she's a her-she, it's in order to smash up everything, to shatter the framework of institutions, to blow up the law, to break up the "truth" with laughter.40

Kristeva likewise says of avant-garde texts, "[I]n a culture where the speaking subjects are conceived of as masters of their speech, they have what is called a "phallic" position. The fragmentation of language in an [avant-garde] text calls into question the very posture of this mastery."41 Furthermore, not only is l'écriture feminine regarded as politically subversive, but literary forms themselves are regarded as inherently subversive and feminine or conservative and male. Note, for instance, how Kristeva associates "conventional" writing with a "phallic position" and sees avant-garde writing as inherently disruptive of this. Likewise, Cixous implies that novels are inherently more conservative than poems. She says that poets have sometimes been able to break with "phallocentric"42 tradition and conceive of women as equals. "But only the poets - not the novelists, allies of representationalism. Because poetry involves gaining
strength through the unconscious and because the unconscious, that other limitless country, is the place where the repressed manage to survive: women, or as Hoffmann would say, fairies." 43

Despite this politicisation of art, however, the French feminists are not without a sense of the aesthetic. For Felski observes that they are aware of the artifice of literary texts. They are formalists, interested in linguistic structure, however politicised their formalism may be. In contrast, American feminist critics tend to be concerned with literature as content: they see it as reflecting male biases or women's experience. However, in their project of recovering a repressed female culture and literary tradition, there is a concern with postulating "female forms." What is more, the American conception of "female forms" is based on the study of what women actually write. This is in contrast to French lecrito feminine which is a projection of what female writing would be like, instead of a theory of feminine writing based on a body of women's work. However, notes Felski, the Americans' research in this area is by no means conclusive and relies on some misguided presumptions. To begin with, the American search for "female forms" comes into conflict with feminist notions of patriarchal domination. The idea of a "female culture" or consciousness tends to posit the idea of a female character or psyche that somehow survived cultural indoctrination under patriarchy. While arguing that women were culturally oppressed and that they internalised these oppressions in their conception of themselves, American feminists also seem to be arguing that there is an essentially female psyche that miraculously
escapes patriarchal ideology in its formation. Furthermore, the idea of a "universal" female consciousness is ill-founded, ignoring the cultural variables of race, class, and sexual orientation, for instance. Universal "female forms" are simply being posited from too narrow a range of work, namely that produced by white, upper-middle class women. Felski quotes the Afro-American feminist theorist Bell Hooks on the matter: "[W]hite women who dominate feminist discourse today rarely question whether or not their perspective on women's reality is true to the lived experiences of women as a collective group. Nor are they aware of the extent to which their perspectives reflect race and class biases."44

Predominant, however, is the American feminists' mimetic conception of art, which tends to ignore the very "literariness" of literature instead treating it as a reflection of women's experience or male bias. Felski claims that the American feminist stress on art as a reflection of "women's experience" ignores the element of artifice in art; in short, it reduces art to autobiography. According to Toril Moi, the limitations of such a reflectionist aesthetic are revealed when Elaine Showalter, a prominent American feminist critic, negatively judges Virginia Woolf. This is because the elusive, ironic quality of Woolf's writing cannot be reconciled with the American notion of women's writing as reflective of female experience.45 Felski notes that the American critics are more concerned with realist texts; there is little analysis of experimental and avant-garde texts. This is the complete opposite of the French critics who focus on avant-garde, experimental texts. By conceiving art as mimetic, then, American
critics ignore the "literariness" of literature; realist texts are comprehensible but those which are not fall by the wayside.

The idea that literature reflects female experience or male bias, a notion which ignores art's artifice and fictionality, leads in feminist criticism to what Helen Vendler calls "socialist realism." The fault of the "feminist critique" in deriding sexist images of women in literature is, according to Vendler, the fact that such critics treat the women characters as "real people." Michele Barrett seems to concur with such a view; the very fictionality of the work is being overlooked. She notes that there is a tendency for feminist critics to approach male and female authors differently. Female authors are "credited" with trying to pose the question of gender or women's oppression in their work. On the other hand, male authors are "discredited" by the assumption that any sexism they portray is their own. "It seems extraordinary that these tendencies, both of which in their rampant moralism deny precisely the fiction, the literary structure of the texts, should have taken such a hold in the field of 'women and literature'." The early feminist critic Kate Millett, however, seems ready to have her cake and eat it too: while condemning Lawrence's patriarchal attitudes, she is more sympathetic to him than she is to a scientist like Freud because he is writing fiction. Millett writes that the critic can make "a radical investigation which can demonstrate why Lawrence's analysis of a situation is inadequate or biased, or his influence pernicious, without ever needing to imply that he is less than a great and original artist, and in many respects a man of distinguished moral and intellectual integrity."
The American feminist perception of male bias in art not only includes literary works themselves, but the work of male literary critics and possibly even aesthetic criteria, particularly those required for canonisation. The world of art in general, whether it be in books and art works or aesthetic theory and criticism, is seen as riddled with bias against women and their artistic work. Kate Millett, for instance, sees the work of Lawrence, Miller, and Mailer as the literary carriers of patriarchal attitudes. Elaine Showalter notes the bias against women expressed by Irving Howe in his reading of Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. Howe writes:

> To shake loose from one's wife, to
discard that drooping rag of a woman,
with her mute complaints and maddening passivity; to escape not by a slinking abandonment but through the public sale of her body to a stranger...and thus to wrest, through sheer amoral wilfulness, a second chance out of life - it is with this stroke, so insidiously attractive to male fantasy, that *The Mayor of Casterbridge* begins. 51

Showalter comments on this: "I quote Howe first to indicate how the fantasies of the male critic distort the text." 52 She further observes that Hardy tells us little about the relationship between Michael and Susan Henchard and what we know does not indicate that Susan is "drooping, complaining or passive." 53 Likewise, Dale Spender, in
"Women and Literary History," criticises Ian Watt for his failure to discuss women novelists in his history of the early novel. She notes, for instance, how despite his admission that a large number of female novelists existed he spends his book examining Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding, confining women writers to a single sentence. In her view this dismissal is not due to lack of quality but to gender: Watt sees a body of women's writing and dismisses it without reading it. This is despite the fact, says Spender, that these women novelists were acclaimed in their own time by intelligent, educated and distinguished people. The claim that they are "not worth reading" is a smokescreen for male bias.

Spender proposes that the female literary tradition be given more attention and status. This is for social as well as aesthetic reasons. She believes that the suppression and erasure of women novelists from literary history reflects badly on society; cultural injustice is a relative of political and social injustice. Following Virginia Woolf, she argues it is necessary to restore the status of these writers on the grounds that an exclusively male literature is limited; it cannot give the complete truth about society and if it remains sole and dominant, it unjustly represses the views of others. The views of women and other marginalized groups, reflected in their literature, is necessary for a complete and balanced view of a culture, if not the world.

Such a view underpins Lillian Robinson's analysis of feminist attempts to widen the canon. The Western Canon as conservatively constituted presents a white, male view of things that excludes and oppresses the views of others, including women, who should be included in the name of fairness and balance. In her article "Treason
our Text: Feminist Challenges to the Literary Canon, "55 Robinson describes how, in various ways, feminist critics have sought to give more women writers canonical status. Their strategies include arguing on a case-by-case basis that an acknowledged woman writer should have more prestige, and researching and uncovering a tradition of previously neglected women writers. Robinson notes that the feminist demand that the canon be opened to include more women writers eventually raises aesthetic questions. "We need to understand whether the claim is being made that many of the newly recovered or validated texts by women meet existing criteria or, on the other hand, that those criteria themselves intrinsically exclude or tend to exclude women and hence should be modified or replaced."

This dilemma, of whether to keep or challenge "existing criteria" is expressed by Nina Baym, in her introduction to her book on American women's fiction between 1820 and 1870.

Reexamination of this fiction may well show it to lack the esthetic, intellectual and moral complexity and artistry that we demand of great literature. I confess frankly that, although I have found much to interest me in these books, I have not unearthed a forgotten Jane Austen or George Eliot... Yet I cannot avoid the belief that "purely" literary criteria, as they have been employed to identify the best American works, have inevitably had a bias in favour of things male - in
favour of, say, a whaling ship, rather
than a sewing circle as a symbol
of the human community.57

Robinson notes the ambiguity of Baym's statement, how she
accepts received aesthetic standards and questions them at the
same time. "What is involved here is...the agony of feminist criticism,
for it is the champions of women's literature who are torn between
defending the quality of their discoveries and radically redefining
literary quality itself."58 However, Robinson writes that Baym's
raising the question of aesthetics does not equal throwing out the
received canon. "[A] commentator like Baym has only to say 'it is
time, perhaps...to reexamine the grounds [of canonisation],,' while
not proceeding to do so, for feminists to be accused of wishing to
throw out the entire received culture. "59 Instead, the ideal is
pluralism - supplementing the traditional canon with the work of
marginalized groups, including women. However, while places in the
canon are unlimited, places in course syllabi are not and the
inclusion of one writer leads to the elimination of another. Here, says
Robinson, comes the crunch; either a given woman writer is good
enough to replace a great, white male on the reading list or she is
not. If she is not the question is whether she should replace him
anyway "in the name of telling the truth about the culture, or she
should not, in the (unexamined) name of excellence."60 There is an
issue here (insufficiently debated in Robinson's view) of whether the
canon, and the syllabi based on it, should be the record of cultural
history or the compendium of literary excellence. And if it is "literary
excellence", should we accept received standards of excellence or
question them, as their criteria may "exclude or tend to exclude women." 61

Thus, some feminists propose that aesthetic judgement by males is not ideologically pure - that is, purely aesthetic - but as prejudiced against the work of women. So, if art theory and criticism, as well as art, is riddled with male bias and discriminates against women, what theory is to be put in its place? Can the ideal of a pure aesthetic still be maintained? Apparently not. For the feminist theorists we have examined tend to conceive of art very politically, whether it is produced by men and reflects their bias against women or is produced by women as a protest against male ideology. In addition to the French and American examples we have seen, Marilyn French expressly states that feminist art is a critique of patriarchal values. Its aim is to improve the world, it is a part of feminist consciousness raising and should not be afraid of being political. She rejects formalism and a concept of art that sees it as speaking universally and detached from ordinary life. In her closing paragraph she says she sees the purpose of art as to "teach and delight." 62 She writes: "Art nourishes a society, feeds it; sturdy, not delicate, it arises from the life of a people like food from the ground, teaching us what we do not know, reminding us of what we tend to forget, emphasizing what is important, grieving over pain, celebrating vitality. It is useful and beautiful and moral - not moralistic." 63

From this stance, French rejects art that she sees as misogynous or sexist - in other words, immoral. For she writes, "the clearest proof of a feminist aesthetics is the distaste or rage feminists feel on encountering works that violate it. Sometimes a negative response
seems to refer to subject matter - for example, I loathe lingering loving descriptions of mutilations of female bodies."64 However, she does not forego the negative depiction of women altogether; it depends, rather on the attitude of the author toward their material. For she continues her quoted statement: "yet when a writer like Andrea Dworkin treats such a theme [of female mutilation], I feel it to be not offensive, but only unpleasant - it falls within the boundaries of "taste". So it is less subject-matter (content) than treatment (style) that is at issue. "65 Later she writes that women authors should not shy away from negative depictions of women; she writes that "[t]here should be room for every kind of female experience, even the inability to live happily ever after. There should be room for depictions of women who are monstrous. Again, difficulties occur in distinguishing portrayals of monstrous women from portraits drawn by woman-haters...Women's own woman-hatred needs exploration in feminist art. "66 There is a taboo of creating "unlikable" female protagonists that should be broken.

French's political conception of art is shared by French and American feminists, as we have seen. But are there any exceptions to these politicised aesthetics? Yes. There are some feminist critics who are less overtly political in their conceptions of women's art, and less quick to reject the forms of "male" art as ideologically tainted. For instance, Ismay Barwell does not conceive of women's art in political terms. In her essay "Feminine Perspectives and Narrative Points of View,"67 she argues not for a universal feminine aesthetic, but for individual female "points of view" in a narrative text, particular
to the author's time, place, culture, class and so on. Moreover, this point of view is not necessarily feminist and politicised. This is in contrast to Cixous, who believes that "l'écriture féminine" is inherently subversive.

With regard to the treatment of traditional art, Silvia Bovenschen argues against summarily rejecting received standards of feminine beauty, for such an outright rejecting and prescribing is a "negative reaction to masculine beauty fantasies" that "would merely limit our freedom once again." \[68\] Old forms should not be hastily thrown out; it is good to consider what can be appropriated or reused. "The rejection of every theory and every academic legacy expresses abstract hostility and puritanical celibacy; it is nothing more than irrationality and politically questionable anti-intellectualism. "\[69\] Paglia might concur with such ideas; she does not see fashion, beauty and so on as oppressive. Instead, Paglia thinks "that all the regalia of sexuality - the high heels, the stockings, the cosmetics and so on - I rebelled against that twenty-five years ago - and I feel that now women can reclaim and use them. "\[70\] Paglia also believes that academic feminism is anti-intellectual; in Junk Bonds and Corporate Raiders she declares that women's studies is "with rare exception, totally unscholarly. "\[71\]

But Barwell and Bovenschen's less politicised views of art are outnumbered by the politicised views of French and American feminists. The French theorists Helene Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva regard l'écriture féminine (Cixous and Irigaray) and avant-garde writing (Kristeva) as inherently subversive of the status quo, whereas traditional forms uphold it and are "phallocentric". 
American critics, on the other hand, examine art in terms of content more than form, and in ideological terms at that, conceiving art as a reflection of male bias or female experience thereby ignoring the "artifice" of art. A search for "female forms" does occur, but it is inconclusive and still based on an "experiential" model.

Some feminists argue that aesthetics and ideology are already entangled in the work of male artists, critics, and aestheticians. Lillian Robinson writes that feminist attempts to widen the canon to include more women writers raises the question of whether or not received standards of literary excellence should be regarded as biased against women. Dale Spender and Elaine Showalter find prejudice against women writers and a female character respectively in the work of Ian Watt and Irving Howe.

Less politicised conceptions of art and aesthetics do occur, as we have seen with Silvia Bovenschen and Ismay Barwell. Bovenschen warns against discarding tradition out of hand, fearing it would be anti-intellectual. Barwell conceives not of a "feminist aesthetic" but individual female points of view in narrative literature, that may not necessarily be feminist and politicised. But the majority of feminist theorists we have examined in this chapter, like Marilyn French, view art in a politicised way, whether they are judging art and art criticism by males or conceptualising women's art.

To return to Paglia's criticism of feminism as "anti-art"72 then, it seems that this criticism has some grounds. A good many of the feminist attitudes to art that we have discussed conceive of art in political terms, subjecting it to "prefab social agenda"73 as Paglia says. This is both in the area of assessing art, where art is judged as
to whether or not its views are "ideologically correct" in Vendler's phrase, or in advocating a theory of women's art; there art is conceived of as being politically subversive in some way. In the case of American feminist literary criticism it also tends to "lack...an aesthetic" in that its mimetic conception of literature ignores its very "literariness."

The prevailing feminist views that art and ideology are intertwined and that the "aesthetic" is never transcendent of art are incompatible with Paglia's views. For she regards art as being "above politics" and under no obligation to be moral, including nonsexist. Feminists, on the other hand, tend to see art and aesthetics as entangled with ideology and take a dim view of images of women in art that endorse what they see as patriarchal attitudes. In Paglia's apolitical conception of art, these politicised views make art "a servant to a prefab social agenda" and are themselves "anti-art". Feminists might argue that Paglia's views ignore (and even endorse) male ideology in art. Anne Williams writes of Sexual Personae: "Paglia has silently assented to the common belief that the male point of view is the point of view...Paglia has given us a compelling discussion of patriarchy's sexual personae, but in her ambitious catalogue of violence and cruelty, she has unintentionally provided feminists with further evidence of their belief that the chief continuity in Western culture is a fundamental, virulent misogyny."
CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have examined Camille Paglia's criticism of both the academy and literature and have found her wanting in both style and methodology. In many respects, Paglia's style defies academic convention in ways that often make her unpersuasive. For she tends to rely on unqualified assertion, repetition, and generalisation more than reasoned argument. Further, her use of citation and paraphrase often serves less to support argument than to generate conclusions and associations which she does not justify. Her use of paraphrase can be particularly unpersuasive given Paglia's tendency to use metaphor, which can make her seem subjective. Paglia's ethos can also be unpersuasive in some respects. For as well as presenting an ethos of the erudite scholar and common-sensical libertarian, Paglia presents herself as an aggressive egotist. This is particularly so when Paglia resorts to vitriol and ad hominem attack when dealing with thinkers such as the French theorists Derrida and Foucault. However much Paglia tries to justify these aggressive attacks on others in intellectual terms - such as claiming to use satire and "shock tactics" as a means of maintaining free speech - she still appears to be petty and vicious. For her attacks also seem to be motivated by her aggression and disappointments. They also appear to make no reasoned, substantive contribution to intellectual debate. However, these attacks can be extremely amusing, given Paglia's wit, and at times her sense of humour may have the effect of 'humanising' canonical art and artists, making them seem less lofty and intimidating to the general reader. But all in all Paglia can be
unpersuasive in that she seems hectoring, subjective, vicious, and anti-intellectual.

Paglia appears particularly subjective in her use of "sensationalism" or pathos. Her stress on the emotional and sensory impact of art leads her to ignore its conceptual aspect. She ends up being as reductive as the academic critics she opposes. Her insistence on the cruelty and amorality of nature is also unpersuasive due to her reliance on pathos. For instead of supporting her claims for nature's cruelty by scientific evidence, Paglia relies on emotional manipulation of the reader. But nonetheless Paglia's "sensationalism" can lead to vivid and evocative appreciations of art and literature. Her stress on the emotional and sensory aspects of art, which she feels too much academic criticism overlooks, also raises the question of whether academic criticism does deal with art, particularly erotic art, in too cerebral a way.

Generally, then, Paglia's style is assertive, strident, and inflexible. As Gisele Marie Baxter writes, it gives the impression that she "is not interested in debate." Paglia can also appear inflexible in the application of her theses. Her stress on the image sometimes leads her to treat literature as a branch of visual art and to ignore its linguistic quality. Likewise, despite her stress on personality and authorial self-projection, her treatment of artistic motivation as an Apollonian evasion of Dionysian nature is also reductive. In her hands, all artists are afflicted with the same anxiety about nature and women and so are compelled to create. Paglia is also inflexible in her aim to prove the amorality of art, which leads her to dismiss moral material. This is despite the ambiguity of her own Dionysian-
Apollonian dualism, which is capable of assimilating such matter. On the one hand, morality could be regarded as an expression of the benevolent aspects of the Dionysian, such as empathy and tenderness; on the other, morality and ethics could be regarded as Apollonian illusions. But instead Paglia is derisive of signs of moral feeling in the artists she treats, dismissing these as sickly sentimentality.

Paglia's rigid application of her theses and her departures from academic style cause some problems for her literary criticism. It is at times marred by brevity, generality, a lack of evidence or argument, a stress on details, assertion, subjectivity, and a tendency to make her theses dictate to the evidence. For all this, however, Paglia can at times be a sensitive and careful close reader, making some legitimate and compelling interpretations of literary works. These can be said to make her all the more infuriating as Paglia shows herself capable of appearing discerning and intelligent. But a cavalier, arrogant attitude and approach to argument pervades too much of her literary criticism, weakening her persuasiveness.

Just because Paglia can be unpersuasive, however, does not necessarily mean that she is wrong. Although she attacks feminist aesthetic theory in a manner that many may find unpersuasive, examination of such theory reveals that her accusations against it may have some truth. Paglia accuses feminists of being "anti-art" and submitting art to a political agenda. This latter point seems fair enough, for, as I have argued, feminist aesthetic theorists do tend to judge and conceptualise art in political terms. Women's art tends to be conceived of as subversive of the status quo and the art of men
(and criticism by men) is regarded as perpetuating and
demonstrating bias against women. Helene Cixous goes so far as to
say that some literary forms are inherently conservative while others
are subversive. Paglia’s claim that feminism lacks an aesthetic is
also borne out by the mimetic approach some American feminists
take towards literature: regarding it as a reflection of male bias or
women’s experience, they fail to see its artifice. The French feminists,
such as Cixous, are interested in literary form, but their formalism is
politicised, with avant-garde form being not only aesthetically but
politically subversive.

So although Paglia may be unpersuasive, she is still right about
some things. She can be rude, obnoxious, cavalier, alarming,
arrogant and infuriating but she can also be witty, stunning, thought-
provoking, perceptive and compelling. Her style is unpersuasive in
its aggressive subjectivity, yet endearing in its wit and stunning in its
vivid and sometimes beautiful appreciations of art. Her theses can be
reductive, yet produce compelling results in their application to
certain works of literature. Her attacks on the academy are
unpersuasive in their personal, vicious nature yet are often very
funny. Some of them, in the case of feminist aesthetic theory, even
have some grounds. In short, Paglia may be a mistress of hyperbole,
but she does have some intelligent things to say.
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