

Research Article



Mimesis Reconfigured: Material-Feminist and Posthumanist Transformations of the Female Body in British Women Writers

Yeniden Biçimlendirilen Mimesis: Britanyalı Kadın Yazarların Eserlerinde Kadın Bedeninin Maddesel Feminist ve Posthümanist Dönüşümleri

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Abstract

This article rethinks the concept of mimesis through the lenses of feminist theory, material feminism, and posthumanism. It argues that the mimetic is no longer a matter of aesthetic resemblance or passive imitation but a dynamic, embodied, and ethical mode of becoming. The study, challenging the classical, gendered binaries embedded in Platonic and Aristotelian frameworks, traces how thinkers such as Irigaray, Cixous, Butler, Barad, Alaimo, Braidotti, Malabou, and Lawtoo reconceptualize mimesis as an intra-active, plastic, affective contagion with relational inclinations. Drawing on these reconfigurations, the article offers a constellation of literary analyses from British women writers—ranging from Marie de France and Julian of Norwich to Mary Shelley, Jean Rhys, Virginia Woolf, and Jeanette Winterson—showcasing how mimesis operates as a site of corporeal inscriptions, ethical resonances, and onto-epistemological transformations. Across six thematic clusters—mystical affect, reproductive horror, spatial confinement, temporal fluidity, post-traumatic haunting, and interspecies becoming—the essay demonstrates how British women’s literature mobilizes mimetic processes to reimagine embodiments beyond representational captures. In doing so, it proposes a mimetic ethics grounded in vulnerability, response-ability, and co-becoming, and offers new directions for material-feminist literary criticism and posthumanist thought.

Öz

Bu makale, mimesis kavramını feminist kuram, maddesel feminizm ve posthümanizm perspektiflerinden yeniden ele almaktadır. Mimetik olanın artık estetik benzerlik ya da pasif taklitten ibaret değil, dinamik, bedensel ve etik bir oluş hâli olduğunu öne sürmektedir. Platoncu ve Aristotelesçi çerçevelere yerleşmiş klasik, cinsiyetçi ikilikleri sorgulayan çalışma, Irigaray, Cixous, Butler, Barad, Alaimo, Braidotti, Malabou ve Lawtoo gibi düşünürlerin, mimesisi içten-etkiyen, plastik, ilişkisel eğilimler taşıyan duygulanımsal bir bulaş olarak nasıl yeniden kavramsallaştırdıklarını izler. Bu yeniden biçimlendirmelerden hareketle makale, Marie de France ve Norwichli Julian’dan Mary Shelley, Jean Rhys, Virginia Woolf ve Jeanette Winterson’a uzanan Britanyalı kadın yazarların metinlerinden oluşan bir edebî analiz dizisi sunar. Bu analizler, mimesisin bedensel izlekler, etik yankılar ve onto-epistemolojik dönüşümler için nasıl bir zemin haline geldiğini ortaya koyar. Mistik duygulanım, üreme dehşeti, mekânsal sınırlanma, zamansal akışkanlık, travma sonrası uğraklık ve türler arası oluş olarak sıralanabilecek altı tematik küme boyunca, seçili Britanya kadın edebiyatı eserlerinin, gerçekliği temsili olarak yakalamanın ötesine geçerek bedenlenmeyi nasıl yeniden tahayyül ettikleri gösterilmektedir. Böylelikle, kırılabilirlik, yanıt verebilirlik ve birlikte-oluş temellerine dayanan bir mimetik etik önerilmekte ve maddesel-feminist edebiyat eleştirisi ile posthümanist düşünceye ilişkin yeni yönelimler sunulmaktadır.

Keywords

Mimesis,
material feminism,
posthumanism,
embodiment,
affective relationality,
British women’s
literature

Anahtar Kelimeler

Mimesis,
maddesel feminizm,
posthümanizm,
bedensellik,
duygulanımsal
ilişkisellik,
Britanya kadın edebiyatı

Article History

Received
04.08.2025

Accepted
25.09.2025



Introduction

The notion of mimesis, which has shaped the function and value of literary arts in the history of Western literature since antiquity, has undergone several metamorphoses, signifying not only what to imitate and represent but also how to reflect realities. From the outset, discourses of mimesis were grounded in a male-centered logic of authorship. Plato notoriously dismissed mimesis, positioning (male) poets as “thrice removed from the truth”¹ as “the imitations are” mere “copies”² produced under the “possession” of the (female) Muse.³ This gendered distribution is crucial: the masculine author appears as a passive medium for a feminized, mythical force of inspiration, which Plato then condemns as deceptive and banishes mimetic poets from the ideal state.⁴ Aristotle, by contrast, countered this view in *The Poetics*. There, he frames mimesis as a “deep” characteristic of “our nature”⁵ and points to its dynamic effect of “purgation,” particularly through identification and empathy achieved in tragedies.⁶ Similar to Plato’s, his framework still relies on a binary that aligns masculine rationality with form and relegates feminine matter to chaotic passivity.⁷ Even though this is where an initial recuperation of mimesis might have strengthened its place as a foundational principle of artistic creation imitating life, Aristotle subordinates chaotic (female) matter to rational (male) form. Both philosophers’ approaches remain bound to a representationalist framework that dictates passive, affective reception rather than active, participatory embodiment of refracted realities. Grounded in a dualistic equation of man-rationality versus woman-emotion, both approaches embed authorship itself within a masculine-coded paradigm.

In this sense, this foundational binary between deceptive illusion and revealing representation has shaped subsequent literary discourse for centuries. In the medieval period, mimesis was subordinated to the theological doctrines, and its artistic function was justified merely insofar as it mirrored scriptural authority, divine order, or moral exemplarity.⁸ What is worth underlining is that such reflections of celestial truths with a didactic purpose often situated the writer as a passive conduit for divine logos—a masculinized principle of transcendence that further marginalized embodied and emotional dimensions of experience. This marginalization also targeted forms of immanent expressions, namely those tied to material presence, everyday life, and the immediacy of affect, which were devalued in favor of abstract and transcendental ideals.

¹ Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (Vintage, 1991), X.599.

² Plato, *The Republic*, III.395.

³ Plato, “Ion,” in *Selected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Hayden Pelliccia, trans. Benjamin Jowett (Modern Library, 2001), 533d–534e.

⁴ Plato, *The Republic*, X.607.

⁵ Aristotle, *The Poetics*, ed. and trans. S. H. Butcher (Macmillan, 1898), 1448.b.4.

⁶ Aristotle, *The Poetics*, 1449.b.4.

⁷ Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, trans. A. L. Peck (Harvard University Press, 1953), 729.a–b.

⁸ Stephen Halliwell, *The Aesthetics of Mimesis: Ancient Texts and Modern Problems* (Princeton University Press, 2002), 340–3.

In the early modern era, poets and philosophers turned to classical ideals of “the imitation of nature,” reinforcing formalist notions of harmony, proportion, and decorum.⁹ Furthermore, these ideals—rooted in a classical, masculine aesthetic—reinscribed mimesis within an epistemology of control and hierarchy, suppressing irregularity and spontaneity as deviations from rational form. By contrast, Romanticism brought a significant change by redefining art as the expression of interiority, imagination, and subjective authenticity.¹⁰ Yet even this move toward expressive originality reinforced the ideal of the solitary male genius as the source of introspective authority, once again sidelining the feminine as emotional or irrational excess.

This conventional genealogy of mimetic paradigm has long influenced the representation of women’s bodies, framing them as passive objects, idealized symbols, or sites for inscribing patriarchal fantasies. It is worth noting that only with structuralist and post-structuralist critiques did this paradigm begin to reveal itself, as theorists exposed the constructedness of signs, the referential slippage in language and literature, and the impossibility of stable representation. Within this context, feminist critiques of mimesis emerged not merely as correctives to male-dominated discourse but as transformative interventions that interrogate the very foundations of representation, embodiment, and relationality. In questioning the adequacy of language to mirror any pre-given reality, many feminist thinkers did not reject mimesis outright. Rather, they reappropriated and reconfigured it around nonhierarchical schemata of the world. In this way, they opened space for new understandings of subjectivity, agency, and materiality beyond ancient binaries.

In this essay, I first trace these critical transformations by turning to material feminist thought and its capacity to reconceptualize mimesis not as representational imitation or symbolic displacement, but as an embodied, intra-active, and affective process set in material entanglements. In dialogue with recent mimesis theorists such as Adriana Cavarero, Catherine Malabou, and Nidesh Lawtoo, I explore how mimesis can be reconfigured as metamorphosis, inclination, plasticity, affective contagion, and intercorporeal resonance. This article argues that feminist and posthumanist reconfigurations of mimesis reposition the woman body not as a site of representational capture but as a dynamic interface of affective, material, and ethical entanglement. Building on this, this study develops a framework for analyzing unconventional mimetic representations in British literature, from the medieval to the contemporary, all authored by women. Instead of tracing a linear genealogy of mimesis in literary history, it offers a constellation of readings that illuminate how mimetic processes manifest in surprising, disruptive, and generative ways across six thematic and conceptual clusters. These clusters include (1) explorations of mystical writings that foreground embodied knowledge and affective union, (2)

⁹ Philip Sidney, *A Defence of Poetry*, ed. Jan van Dorsten (Oxford University Press, 1973), 25, 63–4; John Dryden, *Essays: Volume I*, ed. W. P. Ker (Clarendon Press, 1900), 91–2, 125.

¹⁰ William Wordsworth, “Preface,” in *Lyrical Ballads*, by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones (Methuen, 1965), 266; Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. Adam Roberts (Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 234–5.

narratives of reproductive horror that evoke absent bodies and maternal anxiety, (3) depictions of spatial confinement and psychosomatic symptomatology shaped by the gendered gaze, (4) temporal experiments which reimagine gender as fluid, rhythmic, and mutable, (5) post-traumatic texts that inscribe memory and haunting onto maternal flesh, and (6) contemporary representations of interspecies becoming that raise urgent questions about ecological entanglement and bioethical mimesis. In doing so, I demonstrate that mimesis—when rethought through the lens of material feminism—emerges not as a static mirror but as a dynamic, corporeal, and ethical force which reconfigures relations between subjects, bodies, and environments beyond the bounds of traditional representation.

From Resistance to Refiguration: Feminist, Material, and Mimetic Interventions

The rethinking of mimesis through feminist and materialist lenses announces a decisive departure from the rigid binaries that governed its classical formulations. What emerges here is more than a corrective gesture; it marks a thorough and fundamental reorientation of how representation, embodiment, and relationality can be conceived once detached from phallogentric assumptions. By situating mimesis as a contested site where resistance, creativity, and transformation converge, I aim to trace how feminist interventions challenge the authority of inherited representational schemas while opening new modes of becoming. My interest lies in following this movement from critique to reconceptualization: from strategies that expose the mechanics of representation to theories that redefine mimesis as a material, affective, and ethical force. In this way, this section foregrounds how feminist thought destabilizes and refigures the very conditions of mimetic practice, offering tools to think beyond reproduction toward modes of embodied resonance and worldly entanglement.

Feminist Critiques of Representation

The history of feminist critique is deeply intertwined with the interrogations of representation, especially concerning the construction and positioning of the female body within phallogentric symbolic contexts. Beginning with Simone de Beauvoir's assertion that woman has historically been constructed as "the Other"¹¹—i.e., always defined in opposition to the masculine subject—feminist theorists have dissected how representation maintains heteropatriarchal structures through mimetic repetitions of gendered norms. Importantly, mimesis is not merely an oppressive tool; it has been reclaimed as a resource. Several prominent feminist theorists—Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, and Judith Butler, to name a few—have actively reclaimed and recreated mimesis as a tactical apparatus for feminist intervention, resistance, and subversion. In this respect, mimetic processes can be plastic, performative, and transformative: in their formulations, mimesis becomes a site of refiguration—a means of mimicking dominant norms to unravel, parody, or rearticulate them in novel and affectively charged directions.

¹¹ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. and ed. H. M. Parshley (Jonathan Cape, 1953), 16.

Luce Irigaray's intervention into mimetic thought directly challenges the philosophical tradition of phallogocentric representation. Western metaphysics, for Irigaray, has historically positioned woman as the "mirror" that affirms masculine subjectivity. Within this structure, femininity is rendered as "the *same's other*," a mere "mimicry"¹² of masculine models. In this case, the woman is deprived of originality and interiority; she is not defined by what she is, but by how she imitates. Irigaray's approach to mimesis is often described as a "strategic" deployment, an effort for "inhabiting and playing on that improper stage"¹³ of patriarchal discourse not to escape its constraints entirely but to expose and dramatize the conditions of female representation from within. Her critique does not merely reflect or imitate male discourse but mimetically "*disappropriates*"¹⁴ it—displaying, through hyperbolic or ironic repetition, the very "specularization"¹⁵ which renders women as mirrors to masculine subjectivity. Indeed, as Niki Hadikoesoemo clarifies, Irigaray's mimicry should be understood as an "improper origin," much like "doomed improper by Plato,"¹⁶ yet still functions as a space where alternative subjectivities can emerge. It is worth noting that this strategy is deepened through Irigaray's concept of "two *mimeses*,"¹⁷ which distinguishes between a reductive, representational mimesis and a "productive" one associated with "the realm of *music*"¹⁸ and performative vitality. This productive mimesis disrupts phallogocentric logic by asserting that the subject is not fixed but "always already material"¹⁹ and relational. This is what allows mimesis to be reimagined as an act of exposition or a generative space from which a woman's writing—*écriture féminine*—can emerge. At this juncture, Irigaray's strategic mimicry directly resonates with Hélène Cixous's project: while Irigaray exposes the impropriety of patriarchal discourse, Cixous seizes this impropriety as the very ground for a new mode of feminine writing.

Building on Irigaray's reconfiguration of mimesis, Cixous radicalizes the notion of feminine expression by linking it explicitly to writing and corporeality. In her poetic-philosophical concept of *écriture féminine* in "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1975), she underscores that women must write themselves into history through bodily, affective, and nonlinear modes of expression. Where Irigaray dramatizes the specular imprisonment of the feminine, Cixous offers a practice of escape, converting mimicry to productive expression. For Cixous, "woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing," since the symbolic structures forming language,

¹² Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Cornell University Press, 1985), 336–7; italics in the original.

¹³ Niki Hadikoesoemo, "Exhibition/Exposition: Irigaray and Lacoue-Labarthe on the Theaters of Mimesis," in *Homo Mimeticus II: Re-Turns to Mimesis*, ed. Nidesh Lawtoo and Marina Garcia-Granero (Leuven University Press, 2024), 234, 235.

¹⁴ Hadikoesoemo, "Exhibition/Exposition," 235; italics in the original.

¹⁵ Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, 134.

¹⁶ Hadikoesoemo, "Exhibition/Exposition," 235.

¹⁷ Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (Cornell University Press, 1985), 131; italics in the original.

¹⁸ Hadikoesoemo, "Exhibition/Exposition," 235; italics in the original.

¹⁹ Hadikoesoemo, "Exhibition/Exposition," 236.

thought, and subjectivity have long excluded the feminine.²⁰ What emerges from this is a call for a mimetic relation between body and text that breaks with phallogocentric limitations—one that inscribes rhythm, excess, and multiplicity rather than hierarchical patri-logic and conceptual mastery. In other words, Cixous's idea of writing is inseparable from corporeality. Emphasizing that the force of inscription should emerge from the "sexuate"²¹ materiality of the writing subject, she marks that "I write woman: woman must write woman. And man, man."²² Her remark draws a mimetic parallelism between the lived body and its textual articulation. Rather than mirroring dominant codes, *écriture féminine* operates through what we might call a corporeal expressiveness in writing—a linguistic mimesis that echoes bodily fluids like "milk" and "blood"²³ and hence suggests sustenance, life, and embodied desire. Cixous envisions a kind of writing that gives form to the formless without fixing it, allowing the feminine body to speak in rhythms, intensities, and multiplicities distant from phallogocentrism. In her inscriptive praxis, mimesis is neither a mirror nor a model. It is an attunement between the rhythms of corporeal life and the expressive textures of language. It is a writing that breathes, that leaks, that laughs—always becoming, never closed.

While Irigaray and Cixous foreground the poetic and textual possibilities of feminine mimesis, Judith Butler extends their insights into the domain of performativity, showcasing how the body itself becomes the site of mimetic iteration. In *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler famously asserts that gender is "neither the causal result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex," not a static marker of identity, but a constant "doing," "the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts"²⁴ that produce the illusion of coherence over time. These iterative doings constitute what Butler calls performances, which are imitative in structure: they repeat dominant norms.²⁵ To put it differently, bodies materialize within regulatory regimes, societies, and cultures by means of these mimetic performances. That said, Butler also draws attention to the performances' potential for subversion. For her, although imitation fails to be reproduction, it opens a space for critical ambivalence where norms can be destabilized, fractured, and queered.²⁶ Butler's analysis pictures mimesis as a form of coercion and transformative agency. It is true that the body performs its gender through citation; nonetheless, that citation can be reconfigured in the act itself. In this respect, the slippages during/within repetition open the possibility for what she calls gender "trouble"—that is, the performative destabilization of binary norms and the emergence of dissonant subjectivities.²⁷ In this way, Butler transforms Irigaray's and Cixous's textual and

²⁰ Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs* 1, no. 4 (1976): 875.

²¹ Luce Irigaray, *Key Writings*, ed. Luce Irigaray (Continuum, 2004), 10.

²² Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," 877.

²³ Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," 881, 889.

²⁴ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Routledge, 1999), 10, 33, 43.

²⁵ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xxii, 60; Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (Routledge, 2011) 174–5.

²⁶ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 175–9.

²⁷ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xi–xii, xxvii–xxviii.

corporeal strategies into a socio-political onto-epistemology of gender: if Irigaray exposes patriarchal mimicry and Cixous inscribes feminine multiplicity, Butler shows how both are enacted, citationally, through embodied performance.

From a contemporary perspective, this approach of corporeal performance intersects with the mimetic turn in recent theory. As Nidesh Lawtoo argues (with reference to Friedrich Nietzsche),²⁸ mimesis should be understood as a dynamic, affective, and embodied force—a relational energy that makes us, as Christoph Wulf reminds, “open to the world in principle.”²⁹ This force does not simply reflect social forms but actively produces subjectivity and behavior. Urging scholars to reconsider mimesis as an ontological condition rather than simply an aesthetic technique, Lawtoo writes: “a mimetic turn, or *re*-turn to mimesis, is currently informing different areas of critical theory.”³⁰ With this turn, we are obliged to read embodiment, affect, and technology together, because “mirror neurons play an important role in the uniqueness of the human condition” by enabling us to mimic others and playing key roles “in hominin evolution, resulting in our ability to transmit knowledge through example.”³¹ Drawing on neuroscientific insights, Lawtoo situates mimesis not only within literature or performance but also within bio-cultural processes that shape human sociability. Catherine Malabou similarly argues that mimetic reproduction, especially in relation to artificial intelligence (AI) and neural plasticity, should no longer “be eliminated” as mechanical and senseless copying. Instead, she notes in her dialogue with Lawtoo that mimesis “exceeds all its traditional values,”³² becoming a site of emergent intelligence and material transformation. Read through the earlier feminist theorists, Lawtoo’s plastic and affective mimesis can be seen as the ontological deepening of Irigaray’s productive mimesis, the bodily expressiveness of Cixous, and the citational performativity of Butler.

Such interventions, when taken collectively, insist that feminist politics today cannot stop at revealing how bodies are cited. They must also map the neural, technical, and ecological relays through which those citations circulate and mutate. Mimesis, then, we can say, is neither a passive reflection nor a sovereign invention. It is, as Lawtoo contends, “deeply rooted in our evolutionary pre-history” and yet always re-materialized in the nonconventional writings of women as well as in “post-literary” mediascapes.³³ As such, feminist theory benefits not only from its long-standing critiques of mimetic representation but also from its engagement with the new mimetic paradigms emerging across disciplines. In this respect, Butler’s performativity is seen to be just one node

²⁸ Nidesh Lawtoo, *Homo Mimeticus: A New Theory of Imitation* (Leuven University Press, 2022).

²⁹ Christoph Wulf, “Mimesis and the Process of Becoming Human: Performativity, Repetition and Practical Knowledge,” *CounterText* 8, no. 1 (2022): 49.

³⁰ Nidesh Lawtoo, “Posthumanism and Mimesis: An Introduction,” *Journal of Posthumanism* 2, no. 2 (2022): 87; italics in the original.

³¹ V. S. Ramachandran, *The Tell-Tale Brain: A Neuroscientist’s Quest for What Makes Us Human* (W. W. Norton, 2011), 132.

³² Catherine Malabou and Nidesh Lawtoo, “Plasticity and Mimesis: Three Metamorphoses. A Dialogue,” *Philosophy Kitchen: Journal of Contemporary Philosophy* 22 (2025): 215.

³³ Nidesh Lawtoo, “The Mimetic Condition: Theory and Concepts,” *CounterText* 8, no. 1 (2022): 3.

within a broader spectrum of mimetic exchanges. Iterative performances are generatively productive since bodies are already attuned—somatically, affectively, neurally—to citational echoes that surround them. Irigaray's productive mimesis, Cixous's *écriture féminine*, and Butler's stylized repetition all exploit this attunement, bending the echo into new tonalities. Their critical contributions also resonate with Lawtoo's broader call to reconceive mimesis as operating "at the foundations of a chameleon subject characterised by affectivity, relationality, and plastic transformations,"³⁴ rather than reducing it to a merely representational function. In this light, feminist mimesis is not a retreat into mirroring but an ontological maneuver enacting change at the level of becoming.

Material Feminist and Posthumanist Reconceptualizations

Once feminist thought enters into conversation with materialist and posthumanist theories, the understanding of mimesis undergoes a profound shift: from representational copying to a dynamic force of corporeal transformation and intra-active becoming. This reconceptualization displaces the classical representational logic, where mimesis passively reproduces forms or social roles, and instead foregrounds its entanglement with matter, movement, and affect. In this respect, the body is no longer a static object of representation, but a responsive site of continual intra-action with other bodies, environments, and technologies. In what follows, I read mimesis through Barad's intra-action, Alaimo's trans-corporeality, Braidotti's zoe, and Cavarero's inclination to show how form is continually re-authored by material-relational forces.

A pivotal force behind this paradigmatic shift is Karen Barad, whose concept of "agential realism" replaces representationalism with relational onto-epistemology.³⁵ For Barad, things, subjects, or "entities do not pre-exist" their relations; rather, they "emerge through" their "intra-actions"—a term she coins to signal mutual co-constitution rather than interaction between separate entities.³⁶ "Agency," in her words, "is not an attribute but the ongoing reconfigurings of the world."³⁷ This leads to the idea that the body is not mimetically shaped by external symbols alone but emerges 'with' and 'through' matter and force, within "multiple material-discursive practices."³⁸ In this sense, Barad's notion of diffraction, a method of reading differences through entangled patterns, provides a methodological alternative to reflection or representation.³⁹ Mimesis, then, is no longer a copying of a fixed model but a material force of difference-making through entanglements. Read in this register, the mimetic body figures as a diffraction pattern, a view that situates embodiment precisely in the worldly traffic of materials and forces.

³⁴ Nidesh Lawtoo, "The Mimetic Condition," 11.

³⁵ Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Duke University Press, 2007), 132–85.

³⁶ Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 175–6.

³⁷ Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 141.

³⁸ Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 140.

³⁹ Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 28.

Stacy Alaimo further radicalizes this view of agential relationality through her notion of “trans-corporeality,” which maintains that human bodies are always already entangled with the environment, chemical flows, and nonhuman actors.⁴⁰ As she explains in *Bodily Natures* (2010), “the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world,”⁴¹ and any theory of subjectivity or agency must reckon with the body’s permeability, its openness to toxic flows, ecological networks, and microbial interchanges. Significantly, this trans-corporeal ontology dismantles the bounded liberal subject and frames embodiment as “always already part of” fleshy traffic.⁴² In mimetic terms, this means that bodily form and experience do not stem from symbolic mirrors alone; they are shaped by material exposures, contaminations, and cohabitations. Recast differently, mimesis becomes a molecular, planetary phenomenon. What Barad theorizes as intra-action here appears as the concrete ecology of exposure: trans-corporeality renders diffraction worldly, specifying the substances, vectors, and scales through which mimetic becoming proceeds. This porosity, in turn, aligns embodiment with a nonhuman vitality coursing through those same exchanges.

Alaimo’s ecological emphasis is further extended by Rosi Braidotti, who places zoe, “a nonhuman yet affirmative life force,” at the heart of her nomadic ethics.⁴³ In *The Posthuman* (2013), she conceptualizes subjectivity as a vital, relational, and processual mode of existence that is “materialist and vitalist, embodied and embedded, [...] firmly located.”⁴⁴ Her conceptualization emphasizes that subjectivity emerges through shifting assemblages of humans, non-humans, and technologies, thus displacing the liberal ideal of autonomy and coherence. In this context, mimesis can be interpreted as the practice through which subjects align with zoe, attuning themselves to the dynamic forces of life that exceed human mastery. Mimesis, therefore, is not simply a matter of resemblance or reproduction but a mode of becoming-other resonating with zoe’s vitality. Crucially, the ethical horizon of mimesis is thereby transformed from imitation of normativity to affirmation of becoming.⁴⁵ To mimic, in this Braidottian sense, is to enact an openness to zoe’s generative processes, to participate in relational alignments which continually reconfigure subjectivity within the more-than-human field of life.

This ethical tonality of mimesis is explored by Adriana Cavarero in her philosophy of “inclination.” Rejecting rectitude as the posture of the sovereign subject, Cavarero proposes inclination as both bodily gesture and ethical relation—a gesture of “[l]eaning over” or “toward the *other*” that reveals the subject as decentered, “open and relational.”⁴⁶ In *Inclinations: A Critique*

⁴⁰ Stacy Alaimo, *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (Indiana University Press, 2010).

⁴¹ Alaimo, *Bodily Natures*, 2.

⁴² Alaimo, *Bodily Natures*, 17.

⁴³ Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory: The Portable Rosi Braidotti* (Columbia University Press, 2011), 340.

⁴⁴ Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Polity Press, 2013), 103, 188.

⁴⁵ Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 193–4.

⁴⁶ Adriana Cavarero, *Inclinations: A Critique of Rectitude*, trans. Amanda Minervini and Adam Sitze (Stanford University Press, 2016), 9, 11, 12; italics in the original.

of *Rectitude* (2016), she suggests that the upright subject needs to be displaced by an inclined one, whose mimetic posture enacts “exposure, vulnerability, and dependence.”⁴⁷ Inclination is thus a mimetic posture, albeit not one of subservience or mimicry of the strong. Instead, it is the body’s response to the presence of the other—a bending toward, not away. This reframes mimesis as responsiveness rather than reiteration: a gesture that prefigures ethical relationality without the need for representation. Seen alongside Barad, Alaimo, and Braidotti, inclination is the bodily articulation of intra-active, trans-corporeal, zoe-centric becoming. It is a concrete orientation by which the subject consents to be composed with and by others.

Catherine Malabou and Nidesh Lawtoo add yet another layer to this transformation through the concept of “plasticity.” For both thinkers, plasticity names the body’s capacity to receive form, to give form, and to destroy form.⁴⁸ It is not passive malleability, but an active power of transformation. In *What Should We Do with Our Brain?* (2008), Malabou explains that plasticity is the form of a formative potential, “a faculty for adaptation, the ability to evolve.”⁴⁹ In the context of mimesis, this means that repetition is not reproduction—it is an act of (re)forming. Plasticity thus provides the material rationale for Cavarero’s gesture: an inclined body is not merely receptive but form-giving, capable of transfiguring itself and its relations.

Lawtoo extends this view in his works on the “mimetic unconscious,” arguing that mimesis functions beneath rational consciousness as an “affective contagion”—a transmissible, embodied force that binds subjects together.⁵⁰ As he observes in “The Human Chameleon” (2021), the renewed theoretical focus on mimesis centers on phenomena such as “affective contagion, involuntary mimicry, psychic influences, mimetic desire, [and] mirroring reflexes.”⁵¹ He emphasizes that mimesis should not be understood just as a conscious act of representation but as a pre-reflective, embodied, and affective mechanism that shapes subjectivity through “psychic dispossessions of identity” and “mirroring transformations.”⁵² In “The Plasticity of Mimesis” (2017), Lawtoo elaborates this: “plasticity is one of the most recent, most innovative, but not necessarily original conceptual manifestations of what the Greeks called, enigmatically, *mimesis*.”⁵³ Drawing on Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe’s account of the plasticity of subjectivity, Lawtoo illustrates a genealogy in which mimesis and plasticity are shown to be “two sides of the same Janus-faced concept.”⁵⁴ In this perspective, mimetic being is constitutively plastic, subject to

⁴⁷ Cavarero, *Inclinations*, 11.

⁴⁸ Malabou and Lawtoo, “Plasticity and Mimesis,” 218–24, 237–41; Catherine Malabou, *What Should We Do with Our Brain?*, trans. Sebastian Rand (Fordham University Press, 2008), 5–7.

⁴⁹ Malabou, *What Should We Do with Our Brain?*, 5.

⁵⁰ Nidesh Lawtoo, *The Phantom of the Ego: Modernism and the Mimetic Unconscious* (Michigan State University Press, 2013), 13, 19.

⁵¹ Nidesh Lawtoo, “The Human Chameleon: Zelig, Nietzsche and the Banality of Evil,” *Film-Philosophy* 25, no.3 (2021): 273.

⁵² Lawtoo, “The Human Chameleon,” 273, 278.

⁵³ Nidesh Lawtoo, “The Plasticity of Mimesis,” *MLN* 132 (2017): 1201.

⁵⁴ Lawtoo, “The Plasticity of Mimesis,” 1203.

impressions and transformations. Quoting Lacoue-Labarthe, Lawtoo insists that mimesis does not only copy but also gives form, shaping the “malleable—plastic—material of the infant soul.”⁵⁵ Subjectivity, in this view, is formed through repeated exposure to types and figures—what he calls a “mimetic pharmakon,”⁵⁶ capable of both healing and harm. Lawtoo’s account locates mimesis where affective transmission and material re-formation meet; with Cavarero’s inclination, this meeting acquires an explicitly ethical posture.

Collectively, these thinkers compel us to move beyond the representational schema in which mimesis functions as copying or mirroring. Instead, they reclaim it as a material, intra-active, affective, and plastic process that engenders new forms of subjectivity and ethics. Across these frameworks, mimesis designates a site of exposure where bodies are composed and recomposed by entangled rhythms (material, ecological, vital, ethical, and plastic) rather than by fixed images. Mimesis becomes a kind of ontological exposure—a site where bodies emerge through rhythms, resonances, and inclinations towards other bodies, both human and nonhuman. From this viewpoint, material feminist and posthumanist engagements with mimesis do not abandon the term but refigure it: from symbol to matter, from reflection to entanglement, from fixed model to affective potential.

Mimetic Reconfigurations of the Female Body in British Women’s Writing

As established above, feminist thinkers such as Irigaray, Cixous, and Butler reconfigure mimesis not as passive reflection but as a performative and productive force. Likewise, new materialist and posthumanist theorists like Barad, Alaimo, Braidotti, Cavarero, Malabou, and Lawtoo extend this reconceptualization into the realms of ontology, ecology, and affective plasticity. Building on the theoretical groundwork of feminist, new materialist, and posthumanist reconceptualizations of mimesis, this part engages in close literary analyses of women-authored British texts through the primary lens of material feminist thought. These analyses do not seek to reductively illustrate theories, but to demonstrate how literature itself thinks materially and mimetically—how it generates modes of embodiment, affect, and subjectivity that resist representational(ist) closure.

The selected texts are not grouped chronologically but are instead organized into six thematic clusters, each foregrounding a particular mimetic reconfiguration of the female body. These clusters—mystical affect, reproductive horror, spatial confinement, temporal fluidity, post-traumatic haunting, and interspecies becoming—reveal multiple ways in which the mimetic logic of corporeal formation and metamorphosis emerges within literary forms. Importantly, this approach understands mimesis not as passive mirroring but as an active, plastic, and intra-active force that is always already entangled with matter, discourse, and ecology. By drawing on material feminist concepts as well as on contemporary mimetic theories, this section frames literature as a site where the female body is not merely represented but materialized in its mimetic openness to

⁵⁵ Lawtoo, “The Plasticity of Mimesis,” 1209.

⁵⁶ Lawtoo, “The Plasticity of Mimesis,” 1222.

other bodies, environments, and temporalities. These reconfigurative strategies render the female body a site of ongoing mimetic negotiation—a resonant medium through which the ontological, ethical, and political stakes of mimesis are reimaged.

Embodied Knowledge and the Mystical Feminine

Writing at the margins of theological, literary, and philosophical canons, medieval and early modern women authors devised alternative mimetic strategies grounded in affect, materiality, and embodied revelation. Importantly, these authors do not simply reflect divine or patriarchal ideals; they reconfigure mimesis as a performative, intra-active, and corporeally entangled mode of knowledge. They make use of mystical mimesis as a diffractive practice in which knowledge materialized through patterned entanglements of flesh, text, and sacred presence. Through visionary theology, narrative poetry, and autobiographical ecstasy, the female body emerges not as an object of representation but rather as the locus of mimetic agency, aligning closely with contemporary material feminist concerns with affect, corporeality, and relational ontology. This resonates with Irigaray's strategic mimesis and Cixous's *écriture féminine*, both of which foreground the body as a generative site of meanings rather than a derivative image. Hence, I read these women writers' works in a diffractive manner since they refract doctrinal authority through corporeal textures and social entanglements.

In "Laüstic" (ca. twelfth century), Marie de France (fl. 1160–1215) subverts the passive idealization of women in courtly love traditions by means of mediating affect through material form. The woman, confined within a patriarchal household, cannot communicate directly with her lover and instead sends him the body of a slain nightingale wrapped in silk. The symbolic act, far from being a static emblem, inscribes grief and desire into material substance: "In a piece of samite, / embroidered in gold and writing, / she wrapped the little bird."⁵⁷ As such, the woman encodes her emotion into a crafted object; we witness a proto-materialist poetics, wherein feeling and meaning emerge through a bodily and tactile medium. As an inscription of desire through flesh, silk, and song, her suffering gains a trans-corporeal aspect. Then, this crafted packet functions as a diffractive inscription as affect acquires form by passing through cloth, stitch, and avian body.

As another instance, Marie, in "Yonec" (ca. twelfth century), stages the miraculous visitation of a hawk-knight lover to a woman imprisoned in a tower. The union results in a son, Yonec, who will avenge his father's death. This birth is not condemned but celebrated: "Her son was born and nourished, / protected and cherished. / They named him Yonec."⁵⁸ The tale thus imagines a divine-human hybrid, placing female sexual agency and visionary experience at the heart of heroic genealogy. The woman's vision of the knight and her bodily union with him establish a mimetic

⁵⁷ Marie de France, "Laüstic," in *The Lais of Marie de France*, trans. Robert Hanning and Joan Ferrante (Baker Academic, 2008), ll. 135–7.

⁵⁸ Marie de France, "Yonec," in *The Lais of Marie de France*, trans. Robert Hanning and Joan Ferrante (Baker Academic, 2008), ll. 457–9.

logic that defies ecclesiastical models of shame or virginity. In contrast, her body becomes the medium through which miraculous transformation takes place. I frame this miracle as inclined responsiveness: the lover's visitation bends the subject toward relation, which turns vision into generative form.

Julian of Norwich's (b. ca. 1343 / d. after 1416) *Revelations of Divine Love* (ca. fourteenth and fifteenth centuries) offers a radically embodied theology grounded in illness, touch, and maternal affect. Her visions, received during a near-death experience, are visceral: "And at this [vision], I suddenly saw the red blood trickling down from under the crown of thorns, hot and fresh, plentiful and lifelike."⁵⁹ In this case, such detail resists abstraction; instead, it foregrounds flesh as epistemic surface, where divine truth is revealed through somatic suffering. Her famous claim that "[a]s truly as God is our Father, so truly is God our Mother"⁶⁰ destabilizes the gendered binaries of traditional theology as she envisions God as female, or rather, as a mother. In material feminist terms, Julian's divine is not transcendent and patriarchal but immanent, affective, and relational, aligning with Braidotti's zoe-centric ethics. Julian's union with God is not mimetic in the classical sense of resemblance but material resonance. Her God emerges as an event co-produced with and through the writer's suffering body. It is reasonable to deduce that this theological reconfiguration situates Julian as a precursor to posthumanist materialism: a visionary whose divine revelations are grounded not in ideal form but in sickness, flesh, blood, and affective entanglement. This is an exemplary case of diffractive embodiment: doctrinal meaning takes shape through the patterned interference of pain, prayer, and somatic perception.

Often considered the first autobiography in English, Margery Kempe's (b. ca. 1373 / d. after 1438) *Book* (ca. fifteenth century) intensifies this affective materialism by (re)casting the female body as a stage for performative revelation. Kempe's ecstatic outbursts—sobbing, wailing, convulsing—are both hysterical aberrations and embodied epistemologies: "she sobbed, roared, and cried and, spreading her arms wide, said with a loud voice, 'I'm dying! I'm dying!'" and "she cried, she roared, she wept, she fell down to the ground, so fervently did the fire of love burn in her heart."⁶¹ Her body does not represent divine vision; it virtually enacts it. To use Elizabeth Grosz's language, Kempe's is a "volatile" body, whose excesses refuse containment and expose the inside out.⁶² Through such excessive performances,⁶³ Kempe enacts what Lawtoo would

⁵⁹ Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, trans. Barry Windeat (Oxford University Press, 2015), 43.

⁶⁰ Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, 128.

⁶¹ Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, trans. Anthony Bale (Oxford University Press, 2015), 127, 133.

⁶² Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Allen & Unwin, 1994), 111.

⁶³ For a detailed account of Kempe's embodied mysticism as both a spiritual performance and a form of social disruption, see Kübra Vural Özbey, "The Spiritual Development of a Medieval Woman: *The Book of Margery Kempe*," *Ortaçağ Araştırmaları Dergisi* 5, no. 1 (2022): 12–5. Also, for a discussion of the persistent fear of rape and gender violence during her pilgrimage in *The Book*, see Huriye Reis,

describe as “affective contagion,”⁶⁴ a mimetic energy that bypasses conscious representation. Therefore, her spirituality is distinctly intra-active since it emerges from her—often toxic—entanglements with husband, priests, fellow pilgrims, and Christ. Her lived mysticism derives from social, sensory, and material interchanges. In this respect, it is apt to state that her visionary and writing experiences can be treated as contagious diffraction because her feelings, propagating through touch, sound, and crowd, produce knowledge in common.

Rather than being passive reflectors of patriarchal order or theological abstractions,⁶⁵ these women inscribe new mimetic logics into literary forms. They write the divine into the folds of cloth, the flows of blood, the convulsions of grief. Their mimetic strategies do not imitate but emanate, not represent but materialize—in ways that deeply challenge the Platonic suspicion of the body, and deeply resonate with contemporary feminist philosophies of matter, becoming, and inter-corporeality. Mystic writing models mimesis as materially staged knowledge. What their texts reveal is that the mimetic process, when reclaimed by embodied female authorship, becomes a praxis of revelation—one in which the body becomes a site of epistemic generation. In this light, medieval mysticism and visionary literature can be re-read as speculative proto-material feminist interventions into the ontology of subjectivity itself.

Absent Bodies, Reproductive Horror, and Mimetic Anxiety

One of the most persistent fantasies in male-centered literature is the dream of creation without the maternal body. Indeed, it is a disavowal of feminine embodiment in the name of authorship, mastery, or purity. In this context, female writers across centuries have reentered the mimetic field not to replicate but to expose, haunt, and reconfigure this fantasy. Their texts confront reproductive horror not as a sensational trope but as an ontological rupture: one that reveals the affective, ethical, and material stakes of denying bodily kinship.

Mary Shelley’s (b. 1797 / d. 1851) *Frankenstein* (1818) remains a foundational critique of masculine mimesis: Victor’s scientific ambition to “pioneer a new way, explore unknown powers, and unfold to the world the deepest mysteries of creation” seeks to bestow “animation upon lifeless matter”⁶⁶ without recourse to the female body. As a result, his experiment results in a creature gathered from dismembered corpses—an assemblage of materials estranged from their origins. The creature’s grotesque embodiment marks the return of what has been repressed: the materiality of death, birth, and fleshly dependence. Far from merely criticizing male science, Shelley’s text

“[S]che was evry aferd’: Pilgrimage and Medieval Women in *The Book of Margery Kempe*,” *Hacettepe University Journal of Faculty of Letters* 22, no. 2 (2005): 151–60.

⁶⁴ Lawtoo, *The Phantom of the Ego*, 19.

⁶⁵ For an analysis of women’s limited access to discourse and authorship in relation to the repetitive gender/power dynamics critiqued by a medieval male poet, Geoffrey Chaucer (b. ca. 1343 / d. 1400), see Huriye Reis, “Kitaplarda Kadın Olmak: Chaucer ve Ortaçağ İngiliz Edebiyatında Kadın Söyleminin Sorunsallığı,” *Turkish Studies* 4, no. 1-I (2009): 489–504.

⁶⁶ Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (Tor Book, 1989), 38, 42.

mourns the loss of maternal continuity. The absent mother—erased from the narrative, silenced in the destroyed female creature, and echoed in Elizabeth’s fatal passivity—casts a long spectral shadow.⁶⁷ The horror here is not only the stitched body but the violence of exclusion, the desire to “renew life where death had apparently devoted the body to corruption.”⁶⁸ Shelley, who suffered maternal loss herself, infuses the novel with a grief that exceeds metaphor: a mimetic structure undone by its refusal to acknowledge care, relation, and vulnerability.⁶⁹ As the creature articulates his desolation, “I ought to be thy Adam; but I am rather the fallen angel,”⁷⁰ the narrative pivots from invention to abandonment. Replication without relation deforms form and ethics alike. That is why the creaturely and maternal intra-actions replace Victor’s solitary authorship as the creature’s subjectivity emerges through rejection, longing, and material estrangement.

Angela Carter (b. 1940 / d. 1992) responds to this logic of exclusion by occupying its myths and dismantling them from within. In *The Bloody Chamber* (1979), the fairytale is no longer a symbolic container for passive womanhood. Instead, it emerges as a stage for bleeding bodies, erotic metamorphoses, and violent ruptures. Blood—menstrual, virginal, or murderous—stains the text as mimetic excess, materializing the feminine as volatile, mutable, and uncontainable. Like Grosz’s “volatile bodies,” Carter’s protagonists transgress containment through desire, pain, and transformation. In tales like “The Company of Wolves,” the mimetic economy is subverted: women no longer imitate male desire but become animal, hybrid, flesh in flux—co-authors of their own becoming. In “The Company of Wolves,” the girl who confronts the beast sheds fear and cultural shame: “She knew she was nobody’s meat.”⁷¹ Desire, here, does not imitate mythic norms.⁷² Moreover, in *The Passion of New Eve* (1977), Carter magnifies this dynamic through grotesque plasticity. Eve(lyn)’s surgically reassigned body stages a mimetic horror of gender as enforced performance. The reproductive body is no longer symbolic; it is dissected, reassembled,

⁶⁷ For a contemporary reworking of the gothic pattern of vanished maternal figures, see Esra Melikoğlu, “Reiteration of Jane Eyre’s Search for the Feminine Subject in Atkinson’s Crime Fiction,” *IDEAS: Journal of English Literary Studies* 3, no. 1 (2023): 59–62.

⁶⁸ Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 44.

⁶⁹ For an illustration of how taboo embodiment and narrative mimesis interact with nature in Shelley’s another work, *Mathilda* (1959), see Tuğba Karabulut, “An Ecofeminist Analysis of Mary Shelley’s *Mathilda*: The Female Narrator Writing Her Own Taboo Fiction,” *Dokuz Eylül University Journal of Graduate School of Social Sciences* 25, no. 3 (2023): 995–1006.

⁷⁰ Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 96.

⁷¹ Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (Penguin Books, 1993), 118.

⁷² For a feminist narratological reading of Carter’s subversion of “Little Red Riding Hood” here, see Rahime Çokay Nebioğlu, “A Feminist Post-Narratological Inquiry into Angela Carter’s ‘The Company of Wolves,’” *Dil ve Edebiyat Araştırmaları* 19 (2019): 327–36. Also, for a sociological reading of Carter’s characters as performative sites of gendered and symbolic inscription, especially in terms of clothing, nudity, and dual embodiment, see Çelik Ekmekçi, “A Feminist Critique of Body in Philosophy and Sociology,” *KARE BAKEA Special Issue* (2020): 15–22.

imposed.⁷³ Mimicry becomes invasion. Yet even in this dystopia, agency stirs: Eve begins to feel, adapt, desire. “I must climb inside the skin of the girl willy nilly, whether I liked it or not, and learn, somehow, to live there,”⁷⁴ and how to be a woman. Eve confesses, not through imitation of an ideal, but through visceral encounters with pain, power, and relationality. The mimetic frame does not vanish; yet, it is reloaded with instability, turned against itself to uncover the unnatural violence of ‘natural’ roles. While Carter’s theatre of bodies exemplifies plastic re-formation, it becomes clearer that mimetic repetition becomes reshaping rather than compliance.

Where Carter exposes the theatricality and grotesque plasticity of female embodiment in mimetic systems, Sylvia Plath (b. 1932 / d. 1963) offers a more hushed yet equally haunting meditation on reproductive trauma in her poem *Three Women* (1968). Here, the mimetic anxiety of reproduction unfolds through polyphonic affect. Three female voices—a mother, a woman who miscarries, and a woman who aborts—speak in braided monologues that traverse joy, grief, shame, and numbness. Reproduction is a haunted, spectral process, mediated by institutions, technologies, and silent expectations, but not a biological given. Plath’s poem, though restrained in tone, performs a radical mimetic gesture: It echoes, leaks, and splits. These women do not speak for themselves alone; they reverberate each other’s possibilities and losses.⁷⁵ “I am found wanting,” says the second voice, articulating the hollow aftermath of maternal failure within a world that “would have the whole world flat.”⁷⁶ Their bodily experiences emerge through sensory fragments: “the white clean chamber with its instruments,” “a garden of black and red agonies,” “hooks that catch and grate like cats.”⁷⁷ In this polyphonic mirroring, Plath stages what mimesis might mean when it is affective rather than aesthetic—a circulation of pain and presence through the porous female body. The “red lotus” of birth, the “wound walking out of hospital,” and the “terrible cessation of everything”⁷⁸ suggest that embodiment here is not the ground of identity but the site of uncontainable repetition, grief, and transformation. While the poem circulates pain, the poetic voice becomes shared tissue, and what is mimicked is witnessed to be a wound—material, psychic, and historical.

⁷³ For an extensive analysis of Carter’s demythologization of motherhood and her autobiographical writings on maternal ambivalence, see Mine Özyurt Kılıç, “Demythologizing Business: Angela Carter’s Representation of Motherhood,” *Journal of Süleyman Demirel University Institute of Social Sciences* 28, no. 3 (2017): 94–103.

⁷⁴ Angela Carter, *The Passion of New Eve* (Virago Press, 1992), 80.

⁷⁵ For an extended discussion of how Plath’s “Lady Lazarus” (1965) and Madeline Miller’s *Galatea* (2013) dramatize the objectification, dismemberment, and disposal of female bodies, see Aslı Bayram, “The Matter of Bodies: Ableist Bodies, Disablement and Disembodiment in Sylvia Plath’s ‘Lady Lazarus’ and Madeline Miller’s ‘Galatea’,” *Maltepe University Journal of English Language* 1, no. 1 (2023): 2–10.

⁷⁶ Sylvia Plath, “Three Women: A Poem for Three Voices,” *Hello Poetry*, accessed July 04, 2025, ll. 37, 91. <https://hellopoetry.com/poem/three-women>.

⁷⁷ Plath, “Three Women,” ll. 126, 156, 217.

⁷⁸ Plath, “Three Women,” ll. 175, 284, 189.

Jean Rhys's (b. 1890 / d. 1979) *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) completes this thread by returning us to the absent body at the heart of a canonical text: Bertha Mason, the madwoman in the attic in *Jane Eyre* (1847) by Charlotte Brontë (b. 1816 / d. 1855). Rhys restores Bertha—renamed Antoinette—as a subject who feels, remembers, and suffers colonial and marital violence. The body here is doubly exiled: first from representation, then from recognition. “There is always the other side, always,”⁷⁹ Antoinette says, foregrounding the split subjectivity she endures. Rhys reconfigures this mimicry not as a failure but as an imposed distortion. Antoinette mimics the English woman she is expected to become—and breaks under it. “I often wonder who I am and where is my country and where do I belong and why was I ever born at all,”⁸⁰ she confesses, a declaration of mimetic disintegration under imperial and patriarchal forces. Her identity dissolves not through madness but through coerced simulation.⁸¹ Crucially, what Rhys stages is mimetic violence: the collapse of subjectivity under imposed resemblance. Yet even in Antoinette's final act—burning the house—there is a mimetic inversion: destruction becomes the only way to reassert embodiment. In her final vision, she walks into the flames with calm determination, her body not extinguished but re-materialized in fire. All these texts provide a constellation of refusals, hauntings, and reconfigurations. Reproductive horror is not the fear of birth itself, but of disembodied creation—of mimesis without care, repetition without relation, and embodiment without recognition. These authors do not reject mimesis; they unearth its buried core: the female body, long repressed, long spectral, now speaking in blood, fragments, and flames.

Spatial Confinement, Psychosomatic Mimesis, and the Gendered Gaze

Across centuries of women's writing, spatial confinement and visual regimes have served as both narrative backdrops and material technologies that inscribe, discipline, and often disfigure the female body. The domestic home, the bathhouse, the asylum, the governess's attic, and even the prison cell... These spatial structures are never neutral and are always charged environments where surveillance and psychosomatic pressures converge. The female body in such spaces becomes both the object and the surface of mimetic inscription, where ideology is both represented and enacted in flesh. This dynamic process, indeed, parallels Butler's theory of performative citation, where subjectivity is iteratively constituted through spatialized norms and gendered surveillance.

To begin with, Aphra Behn's (b. 1640 / d. 1689) *Oroonoko* (1688) offers an early meditation on the racialized and gendered visual economy of colonialism, in which Imoinda's body is aestheticized, silenced, and disciplined under the overlapping pressures of patriarchal and imperial mimesis. She is introduced as “this fair Queen of Night,” whose modesty, beauty, and sweetness

⁷⁹ Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (W. W. Norton, 1982), 128.

⁸⁰ Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 102.

⁸¹ For a comprehensive analysis of Antoinette's estrangement and fractured selfhood, see Naile Sarmaşık, “Identity, Displacement, and Alienation in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Voyage in the Dark*,” *Eurasian Journal of English Language and Literature* 5, no. 1 (2023): 8–15.

“gain’d a perfect Conquest over [Oroonoko’s] fierce Heart,”⁸² rendering her, therefore, a figure of idealized femininity mediated through both romantic and colonial fantasy. From her first appearance, Imoinda is framed as a visual spectacle: a body to be presented, desired, and exchanged. Her subjectivity is repeatedly effaced under the weight of male desire—first from Oroonoko, then from the King. Though Imoinda protests her status as a “lawful Wife” to Oroonoko, she is forcibly taken and brought to the King’s bath, where, “all in Tears,” she throws herself “on the Marble” and pleads that he not “commit a great Sin.” Her resistance, albeit heartfelt and reasoned, is overridden; she is “led [...] into the Bath,” and it was “in vain for her to resist.”⁸³ Imoinda’s body thus becomes a contested site between representation and erasure. And yet, even in captivity, she finds ways to signify resistance. During a staged dance before the King and Oroonoko, she falls deliberately into the arms of her beloved, provoking the King’s rage. Imoinda’s removal, disappearance, and later false report of death render her a spectral presence in the narrative—both hyper-visible and erased, both beautiful and bereft of speech. On the other hand, Behn’s heroines in *The Rover* (1677) resist through theatrical spaces and bodily performances. Hellena, witty and rebellious, refuses the cloistered life imposed upon her, declaring, “I have an excellent humour for a grate. No, I’ll have a saint of my own to pray to shortly, if I like any that dares venture on me,”⁸⁴ while Florinda uses wit and mobility to evade male control.⁸⁵ They play with masquerade not as mimetic ideals but as figures of interruption—bending mimicry towards feminist subversion. The bath, the stage, and the street operate as scene partners that write and are written by embodied counter-citation.

This reclamation of spatial and visual agency notably reverberates in Eliza Haywood’s (b. ca. 1693 / d. 1756) *Fantomina* (1725), where the heroine repeatedly reinvents herself across social roles—prostitute, maid, widow, and aristocrat—to stage a covert pursuit of erotic and affective power. Each transformation occurs in a distinct setting—playhouse, lodging, servants’ quarter, inn—facilitating a kind of mimetic improvisation, where she shifts from the object of male desire to the orchestrator of its performance. Haywood’s heroine is neither fully empowered nor entirely victimized. She exists in the volatile space between mimetic subversion and social inscription. Employing space as a costume, each site authorizes a new citation which both risks capture and enables play. Through the shape-shifting performances in these sites, Haywood critiques the mimetic expectations that tether women’s bodies to visibility, virtue, and consumption.

In a similar vein, Frances Burney’s (b. 1751 / d. 1840) *Evelina* (1778) enters this legacy of visual constraint through the lens of genteel sociability. Evelina becomes legible only through how others see her: Lord Orville observes her as “a pretty modest-looking girl,” “a *silent* one,” and “a

⁸² Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko*, ed. Joanna Lipking (W. W. Norton, 1997), 14.

⁸³ Behn, *Oroonoko*, 17–8.

⁸⁴ Aphra Behn, *The Rover*, ed. Robyn Bolam (A & C Black, 1995), I.i.162–5.

⁸⁵ For a scrutiny of the monetization and objectification of the woman body in another play by Behn, *The Forc’d Marriage* (1670), see Kübra Baysal, “(De)Monopolisation of the Female Body in Aphra Behn’s Play, *The Forc’d Marriage*,” *The Journal of Academic Social Science Studies* 15, no. 92 (2022): 89–92.

poor weak girl,” marking her not for what she is, but how she appears under the gaze of polite society. The portrait salons, drawing rooms, and carriage scenes Evelina navigates function, therefore, as gendered spaces of affective conditioning, where silence—“I was so wholly ignorant [...] of the provocation you might have had, that I could not but be surprised”⁸⁶—and emotional discomfort are the only possible forms of resistance available to a young woman under scrutiny.⁸⁷ Later, Burney’s own mastectomy letter radicalizes this critique. Recounting her own experience, she writes, “I then felt the Knife rackling against the breast bone—scraping it!”⁸⁸ Refusing sedation and narrative ornamentation, Burney inscribes trauma as a raw, fleshly event, uncontainable by mimetic decorum. Both the drawing room and the surgical theatre make the body speak: the former choreographs docility, whereas the latter inscribes terror.

Spatial constraint also governs the psychosomatic logic of Haywood’s *Love in Excess* (1719–20), where love-induced suffering becomes nearly pathological. Alovysa is described as “[suffering] her self to be agitated almost to madness between the two extremes of love and indignation,”⁸⁹ which is a portrayal that literalizes emotional extremity as bodily destabilization. Desire thus writes itself onto the body, not in gentle languor but in quasi-clinical collapse. These courtly and domestic interiors—drawing rooms, private houses, masked balls—do not protect women; they confine them within loops of mimetic affect and coercion.⁹⁰ Even as their bodies falter, these women turn their suffering into action: letter-writing, speaking, and dramatic gesture all become forms of narrative agency.

This tension between constraint and creation powerfully plays out in Anne Brontë’s (b. 1820 / d. 1849) *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), where Helen Graham withdraws from marital mimicry via spatial removal and diary-writing. When she flees Grassdale Manor with her son, she adopts a new identity—“Helen Graham”—to assert her autonomy and escape her husband’s control.⁹¹ As she renames herself, “[s]he is called Mrs. Graham”⁹² to hide the truth, thereby signaling her rejection of both marital and mimetic capture. Helen’s seclusion at Wildfell Hall

⁸⁶ Fanny Burney, *Evelina, or a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (J. M. Dent, 1958), 31; italics in the original.

⁸⁷ For an analysis of Evelina’s momentary reclaims of agency within patriarchal spaces, see Hakan Yılmaz, “A Romance World of Their Own: Generic and Patriarchal Boundaries Unsettled in ‘Evelina’ and ‘The Female Quixote’,” *DTCF Journal* 61, no. 1 (2021): 155–62.

⁸⁸ Frances Burney, *Journals and Letters* (Penguin Books, 2001), 442.

⁸⁹ Eliza Heywood, *Love in Excess; or, the Fatal Inquiry*, ed. David Oakleaf (Broadview, 1994), 41.

⁹⁰ For a discussion of patriarchal control and limited female agency in the novel, see Kübra Baysal, “Im/Possibility of Female Empowerment in Eliza Haywood’s Novel *Love in Excess or, the Fatal Inquiry* and Elizabeth Inchbald’s Novel *A Simple Story*,” *DTCF Journal* 58, no. 1 (2018): 975–83.

⁹¹ For a material-cultural reading of painting as a site of female agency and spatial autonomy in the novel, see Nazan Yıldız Çiçekçi, “A Studio of Her Own: A Self Behind the Canvas in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*,” *International Journal of Language Academy* 12, no. 1 (2024): 290–7.

⁹² Anne Brontë, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, ed. Herbert Rosengarten (Oxford University Press, 1993), 12.

turns out to be a strategic reterritorialization of selfhood, where refusal to be seen becomes refusal to be defined. Opacity here becomes an anti-mimetic tactic as Helen, by limiting visibility, limits capture.

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (b. 1689 / d. 1762) inverts the mimetic gaze from within the hammams of İstanbul. Her *Turkish Embassy Letters* (1763) reconfigures the harem not as an erotic fantasy but as a space of agency and female solidarity: the women were “all naked [...] yet there was not the least wanton smile or immodest gesture amongst them.”⁹³ Here, she reveals that women’s bodies are not objects of surveillance but self-possessed subjects. In her account of smallpox inoculation, Montagu emphasizes empirical knowledge over abstraction: the smallpox operation was performed by “a set of old women” who applied “a nutshell full of the matter of the best sort of smallpox” into the preferred vein “with a large needle.”⁹⁴ Montagu’s embodied traversal of gendered and imperial boundaries becomes a mimetic counter-gesture—material, experiential, affectively grounded.⁹⁵ In this respect, she sees what the men cannot: that bodies speak in contact, not concept.

Temporal Fluidity, Gender Mutability, and Rhythmic Mimesis

Departing from realist paradigms rooted in visual resemblance and chronological narration, the writers discussed in this section embrace rhythmic, affective, and non-linear strategies of mimesis, which reconfigure the female body as a dynamic locus of becoming. In their hands, mimesis becomes a tool of a poetic, material force, used to inscribe bodily experience through flow, fracture, and temporal vibration. Their narratives challenge the mimetic tradition’s emphasis on fixed identity and instead render embodiment through shifting temporalities, porous materialities, and textual multiplicities. In such nonconventional texts, embodiment emerges through discontinuous time, layered memory, and corporeal rhythm.

Elizabeth I’s (b. 1533 / d. 1603) rhetorical constructions exemplify an early form of mimetic experimentation. Her self-stylizations across speeches and writings, particularly in the “Tilbury Speech” (1588) and “Golden Speech” (1601), instantiate a sovereign subjectivity that is performatively manifold. Just as oscillating between “a weak and feeble woman” and possessing

⁹³ Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *The Turkish Embassy Letters*, ed. Teresa Heffernan and Daniel O’Quinn (Broadview, 2013), 101.

⁹⁴ Montagu, *The Turkish Embassy Letters*, 125.

⁹⁵ For a detailed discussion of Lady Montagu’s challenge to orientalist fantasies about the harem, see Alev Baysal, “Batılılar Gözüyle Harem: Gerçek ve Fantezi,” *Turkish Studies* 4, no. 1-I (2009): 599–602. Moreover, for a recent theorization of Montagu’s letters as a site of posthuman implosion where disease, beauty, gender, nationalism, and medical history intra-act to redistribute narrative agency, see Başak Ağın and Şafak Horzum, “An Implosive Introduction: Haunted Experiences, Affective Assemblages, and Collective Imaginings,” in *Posthuman Pathogenesis: Contagion in Literature, Arts, and Media*, ed. Başak Ağın and Şafak Horzum (Routledge, 2023), 9.

“the heart and stomach of a king,”⁹⁶ she positively transforms the monarch’s body into a mimetic site of oscillation, whereby power is produced through relational citationality.⁹⁷ In the “Golden Speech,” she tells Parliament, “though God hath raised me high, yet this I count the glory of my crown, that I have reigned with your loves.”⁹⁸ Here, sovereignty is enacted through rhythmic inflections of humility, affection, and command. To put it differently, this performative mimesis stages gender as a modulation of affect and discourse—virgin, ruler, mother, and body politic—rehearsed and reconfigured across time. Elizabeth’s strategy destabilizes the visual logics of representation and foreshadows material feminist ontologies: subjectivity as situated, relational, and continuously re-materializing through embodied address. Her alternating personae enact rhythmic mimesis, and her power arrives as cadence.

Virginia Woolf (b. 1882 / d. 1941) carries this rhythmic reimagining into literary form, dismantling linear temporality and coherent narrative to explore identity as an unfolding, corporeal vibration. In *Orlando* (1928), the protagonist shifts sex mid-narrative and lives for centuries, and the novel insists that “[i]n every human being a vacillation from one sex to the other takes place.”⁹⁹ Refusing to root gender in biology or time, Woolf enacts it as a fluid, mimetic continuum shaped by rhythm, costume, gesture, and memory. The narrator in *Orlando* notes: “Change was incessant, and change perhaps would never cease.”¹⁰⁰ This is, in a nutshell, the ceaseless becoming which defines her mimetic vision, one that replaces representation with movement, affect, and poetic resonance. Woolf continues this rejection of static mimesis in *To the Lighthouse* (1927). Traditional plot dissolves into embodied perception and temporal elasticity. During the “Time Passes” section, absence becomes a structuring force: “Night after night, summer and winter, the torment of storms, the arrow-like stillness of fine weather, held their court without interference.”¹⁰¹ Mrs. Ramsay, whose death occurs in ellipsis, becomes both a spectral presence and an affective trace. Her body is mimetically diffused through the atmosphere of the house, materializing in dust, silence, and the aching rhythm of absence. Echoing this louder, Woolf’s formulation of “think[ing] back through our mothers”¹⁰² in *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) performs a kind of genealogical mimesis that is nonlinear, embodied, and rhythmic—an intergenerational echo rather than a direct imitation.

⁹⁶ Elizabeth I, “Speech to the Troops at Tilbury,” in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 8th ed., ed. Stephen Greenblatt, vol. 1, 700.

⁹⁷ For a detailed account of Elizabeth I’s costuming practices through the mimetic fusion of masculine power and feminine virtue, see Esra Melikoğlu, “The *Armada Portrait*: Costume and the Body Politic,” *Litera: Journal of Language, Literature and Culture Studies* 16 (2004): 2–8.

⁹⁸ Elizabeth I, “The ‘Golden Speech,’” in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 8th ed., ed. Stephen Greenblatt, vol. 1, 701.

⁹⁹ Virginia Woolf, *Orlando: A Biography* (Penguin Books, 1974), 133.

¹⁰⁰ Woolf, *Orlando*, 124.

¹⁰¹ Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (Hogarth Press, 1927), 208.

¹⁰² Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own*, ed. David Bradshaw and Stuart N. Clarke (Wiley, 2015), 56.

Jeanette Winterson (b. 1959) further intensifies this mimetic departure from referential representation through a poetics of fragmentation and bodily language. In *Written on the Body* (1992), the author crafts a narrator who slips through the cracks of gendered grammar, never tethered to he or she, remaining exquisitely unclaimed. The beloved's body is remembered in tactile, anatomical language: "You have scored your name into my shoulders, referenced me with your mark. The pads of your fingers have become printing blocks, you tap a message on to my skin, tap meaning into my body. Your morse code interferes with my heart beat."¹⁰³ What unfolds here is not mimesis as mirroring, but mimesis as inscription. Herein, language becomes flesh, memory becomes rhythm. Time stops progressing in a linear fashion. It circles around loss, longing, and the impossibility of closure. At the same time, the author reminds us of temporal flow in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985): "Time is a great deadener. People forget, get bored, grow old, go away."¹⁰⁴ Yet this forgetting is itself corporeal—inscribed in breath and sensation. In *Sexing the Cherry* (1989), Winterson's temporal structure collapses centuries into one another, weaving past and present, fact and fable, into a fluid continuum of affect and embodiment.¹⁰⁵ Time, here, is not a neutral container but, to put it more correctly, a mimetic rhythm: "Time has no meaning, space and place have no meaning, on this journey. All times can be inhabited, all places visited. In a single day the mind can make a millpond of the oceans."¹⁰⁶ Winterson enacts a mimetic poetics of recurrence, disappearance, and return.¹⁰⁷ Her works teach that remembrance is a bodily meter which re-times desire.

Ali Smith's (b. 1962) fiction radicalizes narrative by structurally embedding temporal indeterminacy¹⁰⁸ and ontological permeability into her narratives. In *How to Be Both* (2014), the novel's dual structure—published in two different orders—subverts chronological reading and instead invites the reader to experience time rhizomatically. The historical voice of Francesco del Cossa moves between matter and memory, life and afterlife, while George's contemporary grief reverberates through language, affect, and image. Their stories are not bound by succession, but by what Smith describes as "layers": "It is like everything in layers. Things happen right at the front of the pictures and at the same time they continue happening, both separately and connectedly, behind, and behind that, and again behind that, like you can see, in perspective, for

¹⁰³ Jeanette Winterson, *Written on the Body* (Vintage, 1993), 89.

¹⁰⁴ Jeanette Winterson, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (Vintage, 2001), 91.

¹⁰⁵ For a critique of heteronormativity and gender essentialism in Winterson's another novel, *The PowerBook* (2000), see Mine Özyurt Kılıç, "Transgressing Gender Boundaries: The Function of the Fantastic in Jeanette Winterson's *The PowerBook*," *English Studies* 89, no. 3 (2008): 287–302.

¹⁰⁶ Jeanette Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry* (Vintage, 1991), 87.

¹⁰⁷ For Winterson's critique of hetero-patriarchal history and challenges to temporal and narrative fixities, see Mine Özyurt Kılıç, "Demythologizing History: Jeanette Winterson's Fictions and His/tories," *Feminismo/s* 4 (2004): 127–34.

¹⁰⁸ For a detailed reading of Smith's novel in terms of queer temporality and chrononormativity, see Corpus Navalón Guzmán, "Reclaiming Queer Time: Queer Temporalities in Ali Smith's 'How to Be Both'," *Forum for Contemporary Issues in Language and Literature* 4 (2023): 70–6.

miles.”¹⁰⁹ This spatial metaphor becomes a temporal logic—one in which subjectivity and embodiment emerge through mimetic diffraction and affective resonance. George’s mourning does not unfold in linear stages but through moments of material encounters, while watching video footage, recalling her mother’s voice, seeing art, or feeling the air shift. She reflects, “How can that advert exist and her mother not exist in the world?”¹¹⁰—a question that stages grief not as a psychological process but as a mimetic paradox: the presence of absence, the spectral residue of lost embodiment still shaping the world’s rhythms. George’s question is not epistemological but ontological. It reveals that identity is not formed alone but through affective co-presence with others.

Post-Traumatic Flesh: Memory, Haunting, and Material Spectrality

Across diverse historical contexts and narrative forms, the female body emerges in women’s literature as a haunted, affective archive. It has long been turned into an embodied site where trauma is not simply remembered but materially re-lived. Once again, these texts activate mimesis as a force of corporeal memory: affectively charged, sensorially embedded, and temporally unstable. The body does not signify from a distance; it reverberates with the rhythms of suffering, grief, and spectral presence. Echoing Cavarero’s notion of inclination, traumas are not just recalled. They are materially hosted. For this reason, mimesis here functions as a material relay, where history persists through bodily symptoms, haunted speech, and environmental imprints. Such an approach aligns with material feminist and posthumanist critiques of representation, in which subjectivity and memory are understood as emergent from the entanglements of flesh, matter, and affect. Put differently, the female body no longer serves as a mute canvas upon which history writes its wounds. In fact, it emerges as the living membrane through which trauma pulses—enacted, reshaped, and conducted across fleshly thresholds. The mimetic, then, stops being the staging of resemblance and becomes the echo of a wound that persists to live in nervous systems and spatial atmospheres.

Emily Brontë’s (b. 1818 / d. 1848) *Wuthering Heights* (1847) initiates this transformation by dismantling the mimetic thresholds separating self and other, body and weather, death and affect. Catherine Earnshaw declares, “Nelly, I *am* Heathcliff! He’s always, always in my mind: not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself, but as my own being.”¹¹¹ With a hint of overstatement, this outcry is not metaphoric but ontological: a statement in which relational subjectivity exceeds social inscription. She insists that “[m]y love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath: a source of little visible delight, but necessary.”¹¹² Thus, this insistence frames identity itself as enduring affect rather than representation. Catherine’s bodily decline due to her anorexia and delirious fever, which comes to an end with her eventual death, is not actually

¹⁰⁹ Ali Smith, *How to Be Both* (Pantheon Books, 2014), 239.

¹¹⁰ Smith, *How to Be Both*, 201.

¹¹¹ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* (Wordsworth, 2000), 59; italics in the original.

¹¹² Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 59.

a descent into madness but rather a resistance to the mimetic roles of bourgeois femininity. After her death, Heathcliff pleads, “Catherine Earnshaw, may you not rest as long as I am living! [...] haunt me, then! [...] Drive me mad! only do not leave me in this abyss.”¹¹³ Catherine’s death, far from closure, inaugurates a spectral mimetic force. Her presence lingers in walls, wind, and dreams, enacting a hauntological materiality, where the past persists in the now through flesh and landscape. Although Nelly Dean attempts to rationalize events, her narration itself breathes with the uncontrollable return of the repressed, of bodies that do not imitate but interrupt.

This mimetic haunting is subsequently formalized and intensified in Doris Lessing’s (b. 1919 / d. 2013) *The Golden Notebook* (1962), where identity is shattered across notebooks and the body is rendered as a site of discursive collapse. Anna Wulf’s fragmentation is not merely psychological. On the contrary, it is mimetic in its refusal to stabilize into a singular, legible subject.¹¹⁴ Her body does not mirror any coherent narrative of womanhood; on the flip side, it diffracts through multiple registers, exposing the failure of patriarchal mimesis to capture female experience. As Anna writes, “the point is, that as far as I can see, everything’s cracking up.”¹¹⁵ This leads to a prose that performs a breakdown and denies the reader the comfort of structural or symbolic unity. Rather than signaling loss, however, this disintegration becomes a generative process: a mimetic unfolding of a self that is layered, affective, and relational. Anna’s own reflection captures this tension between collapse and reconstitution when she remarks that “[w]e’re told so often that human personality has disintegrated into nothing under pressure of all our knowledge that I’ve even been believing it. Yet when I look back to that group under the trees, and recreate them in my memory, suddenly I know it’s nonsense.”¹¹⁶ What emerges here is not the recovery of a coherent self but an embodied refusal of fragmentation as absence. The notebooks here do not reveal truth through representation; they emit truth through rupture, rhythm, and recursive collapse.

Pat Barker (b. 1943) brings these questions to bear on classical and modern traumas alike. In *The Silence of the Girls* (2018), Briseis, not mimetically inserted into the epic to correct its male bias, is materialized as a body marked by war, rape, and servitude.¹¹⁷ Her fleshly presence and the pain accompanying that presence resist narrative catharsis. “What can I say?” she asks. “He wasn’t cruel. I waited for it—expected it, even—but there was nothing like that, and at least it was soon over. He fucked as quickly as he killed, and for me it was the same thing. Something in me died that night.”¹¹⁸ This chilling articulation of sexual violence exemplifies the novel’s refusal to offer

¹¹³ Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 122.

¹¹⁴ For an overview of the novel’s complex reception history within feminist criticism, see Emine Akkūlah Doğan, “The Paradox of Free Women in Doris Lessing’s ‘The Golden Notebook’,” *DTCF Journal* 61, no. 1 (2021): 460–8.

¹¹⁵ Doris Lessing, *The Golden Notebook* (Harper Perennial, 1972), 25.

¹¹⁶ Lessing, *The Golden Notebook*, 114.

¹¹⁷ For a feminist reading of Briseis’s narrative voice as an act of resistance against phallogocentric representation, see Merve Altın, “Breaking the Silence: Woman as a Subject in Pat Barker’s *The Silence of the Girls*,” *DTCF Journal* 61, no. 2 (2021): 852–60.

¹¹⁸ Pat Barker, *The Silence of the Girls* (Penguin Books, 2019), 28.

catharsis or redemptive voice. Trauma here is not dramatized in elevated language but rendered in flat, affectively saturated prose. Her voice, when granted, is restrained and taut, shaped by trauma's sedimentation in muscle and breath. "I do what no man before me has ever done, I kiss the hands of the man who killed my son,"¹¹⁹ she recalls from Priam's encounter, she narrates not with pathos, but with the strained clarity of embodied memory. The style is mimetic not of experience as it happened, but of how it lingers. Trauma is rhythmically rendered in abrupt syntax, stark repetition, and emotional suspension:

It was almost impossible to keep track of time in that camp, I seemed to be living in a bubble, no past, no future, only an endless repetition of now and now and now. [...] I'd chosen to live, but if I'd had that choice to make again, *now*, knowing what I knew *now* [...] Would I still have made the same decision?¹²⁰

What surfaces in this self-interrogation is a mimetic rhythm of numbness giving way to unbearable affect. Evidently, this affective minimalism enacts a corporeal mimesis; that is, a narrative technique that mimics how trauma imprints itself in the nervous system and interrupts temporal coherence. "I wandered around the living quarters—not crying, I couldn't cry—just picking up things and putting them down again. [...] For a moment, my breath misted the gleaming bronze and then it was gone—my existence in these rooms as fleeting, as insubstantial, as that."¹²¹ Such moments do not describe trauma from a position of detachment. Rather, they perform its material weight, allowing the reader to feel its suffocating and numbing force through the sparse, halting texture of the prose.

What binds these authors, then, is their attention to post-traumatic embodiment. They deploy what might be called a material mimesis—a poetics of flesh, echo, and entanglement through which history becomes bodily and memory becomes atmospheric. These texts do not imitate trauma; they host it on the page, in syntax, in voice, and in skin. The female body, in their works, does not signify to resemble but pulses, bleeds, and breathes as a site of mimetic survival. In this light, post-traumatic flesh emerges not as a passive residue of violence but as a relational, affective, and spectral force. It turns out to be a site where the past remains insistently present, not as repetition, but as transformation.

Interspecies Becoming and Bioethical Mimesis

When women writers imagine speculative futures or alternate realities, they often do so by unmaking the anthropocentric and gendered logic that has historically constructed mimetic representation. In such literary terrains, then, mimesis is no longer about imitation or mastery over nature. Rather, it becomes a relational, bioethical, and posthumanist force that rewrites

¹¹⁹ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 258.

¹²⁰ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 41; italics in the original.

¹²¹ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 101.

embodiment through entanglement—across species, matter, and time. The key claim is that making-with replaces looking-at.

To begin with, in Margaret Cavendish's (b. 1623 / d. 1673) *The Blazing World* (1666), one of the earliest proto-science fiction novels, we already witness a radical departure from mimetic science's empiricist aspirations. Her heroine becomes empress not by mirroring masculine authority or observing nature as object, but by imaginatively reorganizing a world populated by hybrid bear-men, fish-men, bird-men, and worm-men. Cavendish explicitly rejects the mechanistic, atomistic, and dualistic paradigms of Baconian and Cartesian science, insisting that "nature is" a corporeal assemblage of "self-knowing, self-moving, and so perceptive" bodies and that "sense and reason together" as part of this nature are the grounds of all knowledge.¹²² As such, emerging through an ontological intimacy with her multispecies realm, the protagonist's authority in *The Blazing World* exemplifies a sovereignty premised on affective co-creation and participatory attunement rather than observation or conquest. The Empress, who collaborates with animal-men on philosophy, policy, and invention, does not imitate a natural world from afar but shapes it in concert with its beings. Mirroring Barad's intra-active process and Lawtoo's chameleon subject, this shaping decenters mastery and foregrounds co-constitutive agency. Indeed, Cavendish, in her own words, refers to her fictional world as "a *new world*, [...] but a world of my own creating, [...] which if it add any satisfaction to you, I shall account my self a happy *creatoress*; if not, I must be content to live a melancholy life in my own world."¹²³ This declaration of speculative authorship reveals Cavendish's mimetic departure from the norms of patriarchal science and literary realism.¹²⁴ She does not reproduce a masculine cosmos but configures a sovereign imaginative space in which subjectivity, matter, and creation co-emerge. Her self-insertion into the narrative as the "Duchess of Newcastle" deepens this ontological experiment, modeling a recursive mimetic doubling that fuses authorial body with fictional body, material imagination with textual matter. Through this act, mimesis becomes metamorphosis: not a reflection of the world as it is, but the speculative rendering of what it might become.

In Nicola Griffith's (b. 1960) *Ammonite* (1993), this posthumanist logic of mimesis is further reimagined through viral, ecological, and affective entanglement. The novel takes place on a planet, Jeep, where a virus¹²⁵ has eradicated men and transformed the surviving women

¹²² Margaret Cavendish, *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*, ed. Eileen O'Neill (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 30, 99.

¹²³ Margaret Cavendish, *The Blazing World and Other Writings*, ed. Kate Lilley (Penguin Books, 2004), 124; italics in the original.

¹²⁴ For an analysis of the centralization of interspecies harmony and posthumanist embodiment in the work, see Niğmet Metinoğlu, "A Posthuman View of *The Blazing World*," *IBAD Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 13 (2022): 573–6.

¹²⁵ The Jeep virus, as argued by Horzum, functions as an "absolute other in Derridean sense," whose alterity dismantles liberal humanist assumptions about identity, mastery, and bodily autonomy; see Şafak Horzum, "Symbiotic Adaptation in Posthuman Feminist Environs: Viral Becomings in Nicola

biologically. Imperatively, the novel rejects a simple utopian separatism. Instead, it imagines a world where the self becomes porous to environmental influence. The protagonist, Marghe, does not simply adapt to Jeep's ecosystem; she is reformed by it in ways that elude mastery or control. Her bodily and psychic transformation exemplifies a mode of mimetic becoming that is neither representational nor reproductive, but materially intra-active. As she reflects, "She was not who she had been," as she reflects, "[t]hey were connected: the world, her body, her face. Perhaps she should not be asking who she was but, rather, of what she was a part. [...] Jeep the world, Jeep the virus, would become part of her now whether she wanted it or not."¹²⁶ In this formulation, viral mimesis here positions the subject as entangled in planetary flows, open to contamination, alliance, and change.¹²⁷ *Ammonite* thus renders embodiment as trans-corporeal and mimetic in the deepest material sense: an ongoing negotiation with alterity that reframes survival as relational integration. When identity is co-authored by planet and pathogen, viral entanglement makes mimesis ecological.

Returning once more to *Frankenstein*, we find Shelley probing the bioethical consequences of mimetic creation untethered from responsibility and care. Victor's experiment reveals a deep anxiety about the ethics of creation without accountability: "A new species would bless me as its creator and source,"¹²⁸ he imagines, thereby exposing his desire for origin-status rather than reciprocity. Yet what materializes is a subject excluded from the systems that produced him. The creature's formation unfolds not in the laboratory but through affective exposure, mimetic learning, and emotional dispossession. "I ought not to make the attempt until I had first become master of their language,"¹²⁹ he reasons, grounding his own becoming in relational desire rather than biological inheritance. His body, assembled from disparate remnants, performs a mimetic ontology that defies categorization, neither human nor fully other, neither artificial nor natural. In this case, Shelley stages mimesis as an open-ended, embodied practice shaped by abandonment and longing, rather than by resemblance or design. The violence of his fragmentation is not only anatomical; it also reflects the failure to assume responsibility for mimetic ties. By refusing to acknowledge the entangled dependencies that creation entails, Victor renders his subjectivity incoherent. The creature's dispossession becomes a bioethical critique of the scientific drive to produce without attending to the affective and ontological consequences of that production. Bioethical mimesis fails where care is refused; creation then produces exile instead of relation.

Griffith's *Ammonite*," in *Posthuman Pathogenesis: Contagion in Literature, Arts, and Media*, ed. Başak Ağin and Şafak Horzum (Routledge, 2023), 104.

¹²⁶ Nicola Griffith, *Ammonite* (Grafton, 1993), 213–5.

¹²⁷ Griffith's depiction of viral entanglement "illustrates a new form of parthenogenesis" and frames Marghe's bodily transformation as a "material-semiotic assemblage of skin and consciousness," where subjectivity is formed intra-actively with the Jeep virus; Başak Ağin and Şafak Horzum, "Diseased Bodies Entangled: Literary and Cultural Crossroads of Posthuman Narrative Agents," *SFRA Review* 51, no.2 (2021): 155.

¹²⁸ Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 44.

¹²⁹ Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 112.

Winterson extends Shelley's posthumanist inheritance in her works like *The Stone Gods* (2007) and *Frankissstein* (2019), where technological, gendered, and ecological frontiers are sites of mimetic instability. In *Frankissstein*, Winterson rewrites Shelley's text in a fragmented, nonlinear narrative featuring AI researchers, cryogenics entrepreneurs, and transbodies navigating redefinition. As the fictional Shelley reflects at the beginning of the novel, "the body is not the truth of what we are,"¹³⁰ unsettling biologically essentialist assumptions and opening space for experimental embodiment.¹³¹ Elsewhere, Winterson writes, "I am liminal, cusping, in between, emerging, undecided, transitional, experimental, a start-up (or is it an upstart?) in my own life."¹³² Taken together, these interwoven stories suggest that mimesis is no longer about mastering likeness but about adapting to fluidity—bodies are shaped by machines, desires, and histories that refuse singularity. Similarly, in *The Stone Gods*,¹³³ robotic sentience and planetary ruin converge to showcase an ethics of affection beyond species. "Love is an intervention,"¹³⁴ Billie exclaims, reframing relationality as an active, transformative force. "Love is an experiment," the book insists, since "[w]hat happens next is always surprising."¹³⁵ And in one of the novel's most intimate recognitions, "[i]t doesn't matter—not the reasons for the death, nor the explanation of the love. It is happening, both together, and it is where we are, both together."¹³⁶ These speculative inscriptions, in other words, refuse anthropocentric certainty and instead posit mimesis as an inter-affective mode of being-toward-others, regardless of their organic, mechanical, or planetary natures. Technological bodies here exemplify adaptive mimesis that binds feeling to redesign.

Gwyneth Jones (b. 1952), in her novel *Life* (2004), imagines a near-future shaped by radical scientific discovery: the confirmation of a sort of parthenogenesis in humans by means of "Transferred Y"¹³⁷ phenomenon; that is, a genetic mutation in chromosomal sequences. The protagonist, geneticist Anna Senoz, grapples with the bioethical, social, and epistemological upheaval during this discovery. Rather than treating biology as a fixed system of classification, Jones's narrative emphasizes contingency, fluidity, and relational complexity. "A whole living

¹³⁰ Jeanette Winterson, *Frankissstein: A Love Story* (Knopf, 2019), 15.

¹³¹ For a comprehensive reading of *Frankissstein* as a feminist cyborg narrative that reworks Donna Haraway's cyborg vision through the novel's dual plot and gender-fluid characters, see Belgin Bağlılar, "Winterson's Cyborg Dream in *Frankissstein*," *Söylem: Journal of Philology* 6, no. 3 (2021): 702–10. Additionally, for the discussion of Winterson's "contemporary feminist write-back" in terms of Lord Byron's characterization in the novel, see Başak Ağın, "Mansplaining, Gaslighting, and Microaggression: Lord Byron's Anger in Jeanette Winterson's *Frankissstein*," *forthcoming*.

¹³² Winterson, *Frankissstein*, 29.

¹³³ For an insightful exploration of how Winterson's posthumanist world problematizes sexualized and genetically engineered bodies through the figure of Billie/Billy and the dystopian culture of Orbus, see Kerim Can Yazgünoğlu, "Posthuman 'Meta(l)morphoses' in Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods*," *Ecozon@* 7, no. 1 (2016): 145–58.

¹³⁴ Jeanette Winterson, *The Stone Gods* (Penguin Books, 2008), 83.

¹³⁵ Winterson, *The Stone Gods*, 80.

¹³⁶ Winterson, *The Stone Gods*, 107.

¹³⁷ Gwyneth Jones, *Life* (Aqueduct Press, 2004), 96.

world, that ‘makes sense,’” as Anna explains, “comes out of the flux and blur of genetic variation, that does not ‘make sense’ at all.”¹³⁸ Mimesis, in this context, is not about imitating biological roles but about negotiating their provisional coherence. Having challenged adaptationist orthodoxy through Anna, the novel reframes genetic science as a site of philosophical and political contestation: “Fitness isn’t everything. [...] By the laws of probability, quite a lot of what survives in a genome has to have zero adaptive value.”¹³⁹ In the dialogue between Anna and her husband, the mimetic stakes of evolution are made explicit: “Oh, it’s a battlefield, Spence. One side says everything’s connected; the other side says no, no, every organism for itself.”¹⁴⁰ Jones’s speculative realism rejects the latter in favor of a view of embodiment grounded in shared materiality and radical interconnection: “You couldn’t work long in human genetics without becoming conscious of how extraordinarily alike we all are.”¹⁴¹ Ultimately, the implications are nothing short of revolutionary: “It’s a devastating change for life science. It means rewriting everything, from a completely different perspective.”¹⁴² In this light, mimesis is no longer a passive reflection of biological determinism but an active process of reworlding—a bioethical entanglement in which new ways of living and becoming emerge through the rewriting of scientific, narrative, and ontological codes.

Staging another kind of mimetic upheaval, Naomi Alderman’s (b. 1974) *The Power* (2016) introduces the emergence of a new organ that allows women to emit electrical energy, rather than through interspecies fusion or viral mutation. This speculative transformation, while biological, is also historical and mimetic, as women begin to repeat the structures of domination once reserved for men. Yet rather than portraying this shift as supernatural or anomalous, Alderman grounds it in a rhetoric of naturalism and inevitability. As it is declared in the excerpt of the *Book of Eve* at the beginning of the novel, “[w]e are electrical. The power travels within us as it does in nature. My children, nothing has happened here that has not been in accordance with the natural law.”¹⁴³ This declaration reframes bio-genetic mimesis as an unfolding of latent potential rather than a rupture from prior being. At the same time, the novel interrogates whether the mimetic reversal of gendered violence constitutes ethical transformation or simply replicates patriarchal cruelty through different bodies. The speculative premise thus casts mimesis as a *pharmakon* since it enables empowerment, yet risks reinscribing inherited forms of domination. The work’s nested narrative/apocrypha, framed as a found “manuscript”¹⁴⁴ written by a man in a past where women rule, mimics and satirizes traditional historiography, suggesting that even the act of storytelling is

¹³⁸ Jones, *Life*, 66.

¹³⁹ Jones, *Life*, 66.

¹⁴⁰ Jones, *Life*, 205.

¹⁴¹ Jones, *Life*, 186.

¹⁴² Jones, *Life*, 361.

¹⁴³ Naomi Alderman, *The Power* (Penguin Books, 2017), 3.

¹⁴⁴ Alderman, *The Power*, 334.

subject to mimetic struggle.¹⁴⁵ On these grounds, Alderman compels us to ask whether bodily empowerment that merely inverts existing hierarchies can be truly mimetic in an ethical sense, or whether meaningful refiguration must cultivate new, relational modes of becoming beyond the dialectics of power.

In a composite picture, these authors construct speculative terrains where the female body is positioned as a generative medium of relational becoming rather than an object of scientific representation or symbolic projection. Through viral interconnection, planetary attunement, artificial embodiment, and genetic mutation, mimesis is resituated as a material and affective force that breaks open fixed selves and gendered hierarchies. Cavendish's creative sovereignty, Griffith's viral symbiosis, Shelley's ethical monster, Winterson's fluid bodies, Jones's bio-political realism, and Alderman's electrified critique all foreground how mimetic processes can operate not to mirror but to mutate, to reconfigure the boundaries between self and other, species and subject, matter and meaning. In these texts, mimesis is not a tool of domination or a mirror of the same, but a mode of becoming-with, an ontological inclination towards entangled futures. Thus, mimesis, reconceived as trans-corporeal practice, binds aesthetics to bioethics.

Conclusion:

Mimetic Ethics, Corporeal Entanglement, and Future Material-Feminist Horizons

In this comprehensive essay, I have traced the conceptual and literary reconfigurations of mimesis from its classical representational(ist) roots towards a more expansive, embodied, and intra-active paradigm. By moving beyond the Platonic-Aristotelian model of mimesis as mirroring or imitation—always already inscribed within hierarchical, gendered binaries—we have witnessed how feminist, new materialist, and posthumanist thinkers recuperate mimesis not as a static reflection but as a dynamic force of becomings. In this reconceptualization, mimesis emerges as a relational, affective, and ontologically plastic process that unfolds through the body, across environments, and within the folds of literature itself.

As feminist theorists like Irigaray, Cixous, and Butler have offered, the mimetic has long functioned as both a disciplinary structure and a subversive tool. Through “strategic mimesis,” Irigaray reclaims the improper stage of patriarchal discourse to uncover its exclusions, dramatizing the asymmetries of representation from within. Similarly, Cixous's *écriture féminine* inscribes the rhythms of bodily difference into language, asserting that “woman must write her self” through a mimetic practice that leaks, flows, and gestates new forms of embodiment. Butler, in turn, reframes gender as performative citation, as an iterative mimicry with the potential to destabilize norms and open space for dissonant subjectivities. In recent scholarship, this mimetic refiguration is also extended into the domains of materiality, affect, and ontology. Barad's “intra-action” displaces the

¹⁴⁵ For an analysis of the work as a critique of the mimetic structures of gendered power, see Alyson Miller, “‘Day of the Girls’: Reading Gender, Power, and Violence in Naomi Alderman's *The Power*,” *College Literature* 47, no. 2 (2020): 400–28.

representationalist model altogether, replacing it with a diffractive method that foregrounds entanglement and co-constitution. Mimesis, thus, becomes a site of material-discursive production—an echo that vibrates through bodies, matters, and meanings. Alaimo’s “trans-corporeality” deepens this view, emphasizing that embodiment is always already ecological, exposed to the more-than-human world. Additionally, Braidotti, in her call for a zoe-centric ethics, invites us to consider subjectivity as affective and relational—no longer sovereign but “embedded and embodied, [...] firmly located,” and connected. From this revised framework, mimesis is revealed as neither a mere artistic technique nor an aesthetic category, but a plastic, inclined, and affectively charged mode of existence. Malabou anticipates plasticity as a volatile triad—the ability to absorb form, to sculpt it anew, and to shatter it entirely—underscoring that repetition is never a static echo but a site of perpetual metamorphosis. Lawtoo similarly articulates the mimetic as a vital, affective, unconscious, and performative process that shapes subjectivity through contagion and resonance. What these thinkers collectively underscore is that the mimetic is no longer confined to the logic of visual resemblance or formal repetition since it operates beneath consciousness, across networks, and within the material folds of life itself.

The literary analyses I have undertaken in this article seek to illuminate how British women-authored texts across periods—from Marie de France and Julian of Norwich to Mary Shelley, Jean Rhys, Virginia Woolf, and Jeanette Winterson—activate mimesis as an embodied, transformative force. These works do not represent the female body in its fixed form. Rather, they materialize it through affective rhythms, haunted gestures, viral mutations, and interspecies entanglements. Mimesis here becomes not a mirror of womanhood but a relay of becoming, or a fleshly vector through which trauma is transmitted, resistance staged, and new ontologies imagined. As Lawtoo rightly suggests, the subject is best understood not as a bounded entity but as “a chameleon subject characterized by affectivity, relationality, and plastic transformations.”¹⁴⁶ The implications of this reconfiguration for feminist theory, literary criticism, and ethics are profound. Feminist thought is no longer bound to critique representation as such but can instead reorient toward processes of mimetic emergence, co-affectivity, and corporeal articulation. Literary criticism, in turn, must attend not simply to what a literary work shows or says, but to what it does: how it breathes, leaks, inclines, and resonates across the body of the reader. And ethics, far from being rooted in abstract universals, emerges through the mimetic inclinations of care, vulnerability, and co-becoming.

Thus, to think mimesis in the age of material feminism and posthumanism is to think beyond visibility, beyond identity, beyond representation. It is to approach the literary body as an entangled site of response-ability. In this light, the mimetic becomes a generative aesthetic-ethical mode: a way of inhabiting the world that refuses disembodiment, disconnection, and domination. As we look towards future material-feminist horizons, literature will remain a crucial site where the mimetic unfolds in order to imagine how the world might yet become. Mimesis, rethought, is liberated from its constraints and becomes a condition for transformation.

¹⁴⁶ Nidesh Lawtoo, “The Mimetic Condition,” 11.

Financial Support Statement

The author declares that no specific funding was received for this research.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflict of interest related to this study.

Statement on the Use of AI and AI-Assisted Tools

In this study, artificial intelligence-supported tools were used to a limited extent within the acceptable boundaries defined in *Nesir: Journal of Literary Studies*' Artificial Intelligence Use Policy; all content has been reviewed and approved in its final form by the author.

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