

mactic one” that he claims I argue “perversely.” The interpretive move that Ketterer finds troubling involves my introduction of the question of men’s alliances and women’s pleasure. Yet it is hardly controversial to suggest that Walton’s relationship with Frankenstein has displaced his relationship with his sister; Frankenstein’s story literally fills Walton’s journal, leaving Margaret (now no more than a nominal addressee) only a precarious place on the margins. And the specific “union of male bodies” I cite is that between Frankenstein as author and Walton as amanuensis. Why, then, should Ketterer deem it perverse for me to point out this exclusion and to read it as gendered? Upholding the conventional view of the “genteel Margaret,” Ketterer applauds Margaret’s exclusion from an experience that could “be pleasurable only to a rare variety of masochist.” But if this is the case, that rare masochistic breed includes, presumably, not only myself but all the novel’s central male characters. Indeed, from my perspective, *Frankenstein’s* articulation of masochism as a masculine position is one of the novel’s most interesting features.

Commenting on Mary Shelley’s textual annotations, Ketterer implies that I misrepresent her position; and he reinforces this point by eliding, in the sentence he quotes from my essay, my reference to her underlining the word “pleasure” in *the copy of the text presented to Mrs. Thomas* (a context he supplies as if missing from my discussion). Ketterer explains Shelley’s notation, “impossible,” as her recognition that a response of pleasure would be out of character for Margaret—an interpretation I concede as a starting point. But such a reading need not be viewed as self-sufficient, foreclosing further scrutiny. After all, Margaret’s gentility exists in the novel only as Walton’s construction, itself a reflection of cultural imperatives not of his or her making. And Shelley’s annotation functions within the confines of an open communication from one woman to another, where the author might be particularly attentive to conventional expectations. That the pleasure withheld, moreover, may not be deemed desirable by the modern critic does not contravene its mapping along gender trajectories. In denying women one of the novel’s central avenues of pleasure, Shelley’s text, I argue, opens a space for imagining pleasure differently. The force of such a claim surely does not rest on adherence to the vision of feminine receptiveness Walton imagines or to the contours of the ideal reader Ketterer fantasizes as universal. Nor does it rest on reconstructing Shelley’s intentions, were such a project possible. Far from being the hinge on which my whole argu-

ment turns, this particular reading of the question of pleasure represents the type of interpretive possibility my larger (preceding) argument can unleash. The realization of such interpretations, of course, depends on modern readers who come to *Frankenstein’s* texts already steeped in the novel’s critical legacy—and on readers interested in “construction,” in building something new to advance critical discussion beyond the reproduction of stable, fixed, and unchanging meanings.

BETTE LONDON

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From Plagiarism to Appropriation

To the Editor:

In general, I agree with the central tenet in Ellen G. Friedman’s “Where Are the Missing Contents? (Post)Modernism, Gender, and the Canon” (108 [1993]: 240–52)—that most male modernist authors nostalgically refer to the old master narratives, whereas female modernists for the most part tend to envision some as-yet-unfulfilled future. Carolyn Heilbrun and others made this point with regard to Joyce and Woolf some time ago. I am far less comfortable with Friedman’s citing the appropriations of Kathy Acker and Sherrie Levine as a current form of this forward vision.

Some women artists seek a gendered equality, others an androgynous wholeness, still others a separate female medium whose terms are still evolving. Acker’s and Levine’s plagiarisms, however, are at most minor subversions within the system. Plagiarism is a bad deal no matter what the scale: it seeks to possess what is not its own, it accepts the value of goods it perhaps should reject, and it proposes no further future than success on another’s terms or easy apprehension of the trick. Even as an *épater les hommes* or “in your face” gesture, the act is as mean as it is unimaginative. Friedman’s essay advocates a progressive feminism of which I approve, but this isn’t it.

DAVID GALEF

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Reply:

Some critics accused D. M. Thomas of plagiarizing when he incorporated passages from Anatoli Kuznetsov’s *Babi Yar* in *The White Hotel*, despite the fact

that Thomas “gratefully acknowledges” Kuznetsov in the book. Most of us can agree that Thomas’s act of appropriation is different from, say, Stephen B. Oates’s plagiarism of the work of B. P. Thomas for the biography of Abraham Lincoln or from I. U. Tarchetti’s claiming his translation of Mary Shelley’s *The Mortal Immortal* as his own original work or even from Eddie Murphy’s illegal use of Art Buchwald’s script idea for the film that became *Coming to America*. I agree with those who view Thomas as pursuing—with a postmodern twist—the theme of authenticity and history, an interpretation corroborated by other aspects of the text.

There are many reasons to adopt a complex attitude toward plagiarism. In the seventeenth century, print artists regularly copied paintings. Although they accurately reproduced the composition and position of the figures, they sometimes tinkered with the facial expressions, thereby reserving some originality in their prints for themselves. In recent autobiographical writing, Denis Donoghue boasts that he diligently copies in a notebook felicitous phrases he reads and then uses them in his own work. The poetry of Pound and Eliot is rapturously threaded with other texts. Appropriation for male modernists, particularly, paid tribute to the sources, as well as calling them into the present. Joyce Carol Oates’s short story collection *Marriages and Infidelities*, on the other hand, takes canonical texts like Chekhov’s “The Lady with the Dog” and refashions them into interrogations of the originals. Oates’s version of Chekhov’s story relocates the plot and characters in the twentieth century and moves the point of view from the man to the woman, thereby effectively arguing the proximity and distance of the two eras. In a similar vein, when Jean Rhys usurped the characters and plot of *Jane Eyre* for her *Wide Sargasso Sea*, she hoped to expose the assumptions of the amiable alliance of nineteenth-century English imperialism, Christianity, and patriarchy that served as the context for Charlotte Brontë’s text. According to Harold Bloom, all the great poets were plagiarists to some degree. And Michel Foucault’s question “What is an author?” throws the complications attached to plagiarism into hyperdrive.

Appropriation is part of the subversive idiom of postmodernism, as Andy Warhol’s iconic Campbell’s soup can attests. What does plagiarism mean when an author entitles books *Great Expectations* and *Don Quixote*, as does Kathy Acker, or an artist entitles a duplicate of an image by Miró *After Joan Miró*, as does Sherrie Levine? Calling such appropriation “plagiarism” abets the act’s calculated perversity. Like Oates and Rhys, Acker and Levine interrogate the

ubiquitous power of male culture in history. They make seditious moves against past paternal authority, which has largely determined the traditions within which present-day artists work.

Acker’s and Levine’s appropriations help me make the point in my article that an analysis of culture attempting universal statements that do not take difference into account, such as Jean-François Lyotard’s *The Postmodern Condition*, may need to be adjusted for difference. For Acker and Levine, male texts and images determine the limits of representation for the female writer and artist. By insinuating themselves into canonical male works, Acker and Levine call attention to how much the works are governed by male desire and to their own alienness within it. The argument seems to be compelling: I just finished reviewing a new novel by a young writer, Lauren Fairbanks, entitled *Sister Carrie*.

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Excavating Epochal Allegory

To the Editor:

As someone who has a strong interest in allegory theory and who often laments its scarcity in the pages of *PMLA*, I enjoyed reading Jeanne P. Brownlow’s article “Epochal Allegory in Galdós’s *Torquemada: The Ur-Text and the Episteme*” (108 [1993]: 294–307). I also found illuminating and convincing Brownlow’s incisive reading of Comtean historiography and economic metaphors in Galdós’s text. I would like, however, to see clarification of some of the key theoretical formulations regarding the mutual relations among allegory, the Foucauldian episteme, and the problem of anteriority.

I am uneasy about the designation of Foucault’s episteme as “allegorical.” Theorists have been unable to settle on a consensus definition of allegory. Many of them see allegory as a synthesizing or totalizing mode of cognition. Specifically, allegory seems to reinvoke the Platonic dream of ideal and absent, unknowable, ineffable, extralinguistic, or supersensible essence. This dream and its various manifestations have been decisively targeted by poststructuralism, through a range of approaches including Foucauldian genealogical analysis, Derridean deconstruction, and Rortian pragmatism. Allegory would thus be taken as a formal sign for what Foucault’s archaeology seeks to demolish.