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ture methodiz'd," that is, making explicit what a universal human nature inevitably produces.

When the focus shifts to the rules governing how readers constitute literature, however, we believe we have something more than a set of conventions. This belief is particularly striking at a time when the conventional nature of just about everything is being widely asserted. In our culture one can fictionalize, allegorize, or thematize a swatch of language to make it literature, and students are routinely taught to do so. Knowledge of such conventions is not what the scientific critics were after, and while it is worth getting, it is a very different sort of thing.

Patrick D. Murphy is confused about what I was trying to do in "Poetics against Itself." Contemporary feminist critics in general, including those he names, are not in the line of scientific criticism at all. They are trying to introduce (or restore) a socially critical dimension to academic criticism. Scientific critics had nothing to do with such efforts, which they would have understood as "extrinsic" criticism, however worthy on ethical or political grounds. Nor does Bakhtin claim, as far as I know, that he is making criticism scientific; dialogism is an interpretive principle. I was also not concerned with poststructuralism, which is an explicitly interpretive enterprise that has nothing to do with transforming criticism into a scientific discipline. Quite the reverse; it relentlessly criticizes such objectivist efforts as inevitably self-deceptive.

Murphy's explanation of why I cited only two women critics out of thirty-five-my sexism-trivializes the issue. If the low representation is simply a result of my sexism—for he makes no effort to say that I am typical —it is a sad but distinctly minor episode. Isn't it more plausible as well as more significant (though the tale has now been told many times) that the reason for the imbalance is our culture's attitudes toward women and work outside the home? A more interesting thesis for the absence of women in the scientific stream has been advanced by Elaine Showalter. (Fraser Easton, my former student, brought this to my attention.) In "Toward a Feminist Poetics" Showalter argues that Marxism and structuralism "claim to be sciences of literature," and that they, along with other "new sciences of the text[,] . . . have offered literary critics the opportunity to demonstrate that the work they do is as manly and aggressive as nuclear physics—not intuitive, expressive, and feminine" (The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory, London: Virago, 1986, 139, 140). There may be something to this. Where I came from poetry was for sissies, but science was OK. Showalter's idea—and simple prejudice—is a more plausible and interesting way of thinking about

the paucity of women theorists in my essay than my "blatant sexism," though even here we should be careful; Constance Rourke and Josephine Miles were among the more scientific of the New Critics.

I agree with R. Lane Kauffmann's criticisms of the "flawed premises" of scientific criticism, and he puts lucidly and straightforwardly what I, as he says, merely implied and hinted. But it still strikes me that one makes a very strong case against a theoretical position if one can show that its practitioners seem unable to practice what the theory preaches. Attacking premises head-on may not be as effective.

The relation between literary theory and interpretation is complex. It is striking that the classic documents in literary theory from Plato to our century hardly mention interpretation or offer anything like what we think of as interpretations, that is, saying the meaning of whole works at some length. Literary theory was tied to the making and appraisal of works and the defense of or assault on poetry itself rather than to interpretation. Meaning seems to have been taken for granted. Things have changed. Now theory becomes the basis for interpretation. Whenever critics use a theoretical vocabulary to talk about an individual work they transform a theory into metaphors that then thematize that work. For example, "like transformational grammar before it, speech act theory has been sacrificed to the desire of the literary critic for a system more firmly grounded than any afforded him by his own discipline" (Stanley Fish, Is There a Text in This Class?, Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1980, 221). I hope to show in a sequel to "Poetics against Itself" that what results from this use of theory is the allegorizing of literary works. This is the contemporary parallel to the allegorizing of Homer by Greek natural philosophers and the Christianizing of classical works by generations of interpreters. It is such allegorizing interpretation rooted in theory that has become, I believe, the dominant form of academic commentary. I think such allegorizing should be clearly distinguished from the various forms of theory that were concerned with making and, by implication, appraising.

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The Fall(?) of the Old English Female Poetic Image

To the Editor:

The argument of Pat Belanoff's engaging article, "The Fall(?) of the Old English Female Poetic Image"

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(104 [1989]: 822-31), rests heavily upon a single phrase from the Old English poem *Genesis B*: "wifes wac geboht" (649a). From this vantage point, Belanoff adduces that "[t]he *Genesis B* poet is simultaneously creating and modifying the traditional image of women in Germanic poetry" (826), one that heralds the "beginning of the influence of ecclesiastical antifeminism on poetry" (828). And she holds that "the antifeminism of [the phrase] weaker mind' is explicit and inescapable" (826). What is thus unique about *Genesis B* is that such criticism of the *minds* of women does not appear elsewhere in the Old English corpus.

Although Belanoff notes in passing that Genesis B is a translation from an Old Saxon poem, extant only fragmentarily, it is significant that she does not discuss the relation between these two texts. The serendipitous discovery of the Old Saxon fragment (corresponding to lines 791-817 of the Old English poem) in the Vatican Library in 1894 shows that the Old English Genesis B poet, to quote George Philip Krapp, "follows the Old Saxon so closely that all thought of accidental similarity or mere imitation is excluded" (The Junius Manuscript, New York: Columbia UP, 1931, xxv-xxvi, vol. 1 of The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records). As an example, we can compare lines 14-18 of the Old Saxon fragment (The Later Genesis, ed. Frederick Klaeber, Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1931, 25) with lines 805-09 of the Old English poem (ed. Krapp):

Hū sculun uuit nū libbian, efto hū sculum uuit an thesum liahta uuesan, nū hier huuīlum uuind kumit uuestan efto ōstan, sūðan efto norðan,— gisuuerek upp drībit, kumit haglas skion himile bitengi, ferið forð an gimang— that is firinum kald—.

Hu sculon wit nu libban oððe on þys lande wesan, gif her wind cymð, westan oððe eastan, suðan oððe norðan? Gesweorc up færeð, cymeð hægles scur hefone getenge, færeð forst on gemang, se byð fyrnum ceald.

The Genesis B poet may be unique in introducing the phrase "wifes wac geboht" to an Anglo-Saxon audience, but, given the slavish translation of the Old Saxon poem into Old English, we cannot ascribe to the poet any credit for creativity, as Belanoff does, for the phrase most likely appeared in the Old Saxon original. Indeed, the phrase marks not the beginning of a complex of new images but simply a new image; antifeminism aimed at women's minds comes after the Norman Conquest, and Genesis B, as Krapp notes, was perhaps "one of the many effects of the cosmopolitan activity in Alfred's court in the second half of the ninth century" (xxvi).

Troubling, too, is Belanoff's selective quoting and her translation of the crucial line "wifes wac geboht." The text reads ". . . and hyge Euan, / wifes wac geboht . . . " (648b-49a). Belanoff quotes only the clause (649a), which she translates as "woman's weak thought." The translation suggestively leads to generic statements, such as: "The Genesis B poet is . . . modifying the traditional image of women" (826); "Criticism of women . . . is directed almost solely to women as sexual beings; their minds are not belittled" (826); Eve becomes here the "generalized female image" (827; italics mine throughout). The word wifes points back to Eve as the antecedent, and the phrase in question must be translated with the definite article, "(the) weak thought of the woman." Eve is a type, to be sure, but she is not a type (and Belanoff would agree) for the weak minds of women, not in Anglo-Saxon England, at any rate.

Belanoff holds before us a candle burning at both ends, for at the same moment that she moves Eve into the arena of "antifeminism" and "generalized female image[s]," she reminds us that "antifeminism did not catch on quickly in Anglo-Saxon England" (827), but would come centuries later under ecclesiastical influence. And yet, we cannot escape the source text, and so should be careful not to ascribe more to the line in question or to the creativity or insight of the Genesis B poet than the source allows. Such practice leads us dare pondus fumo. Further, if the members of an Anglo-Saxon audience understood anything by the reference to "wifes wac geboht," they would see it not as an erosion of the "customary clustering of concepts" (826) but as an expansion. And despite what the Old Saxon or Old English poet has to say, such an audience would more likely call to mind words similar to those of the Old English translation of Gregory's Pastoral Care: "Swa deð se dioful ðæt mod ðæt he gemet on unnyttum sorgum: he hit awiert" 'So does the devil with the mind that he finds unprofitably occupied: he seduces it' (ed. Henry Sweet, 1871; Millwood: Kraus Rpt., 1988, 53: 415) words that are applied jointly to Eve and to Adam. Satan, after all, does not discriminate among sinners.

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Reply:

We Anglo-Saxonists are often viewed by outsiders as erecting precarious (if glorious) edifices on far fewer than three words; what comes immediately to mind are the male pronouns used to refer to Grendel's mother in *Beowulf*. Nonetheless, I do believe my case rests not just