

that individuals are determined by socioeconomic forces, that no one can or ever could escape the prison of race, class, and gender, and that it is these questions only that it is important to ask? Fraiman is entitled certainly to her assumptions. What she does not seem to realize is that so is everyone else.

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Reply:

Felicia Bonaparte charges me with confusing “the making and the writing of history.” Jerome Buckley, she argues, did not make the history of the *Bildungsroman* but simply wrote it down. Any bias in favor of male development is therefore “purely historical fact,” no reflection on the historian-critic. This equation of history with a set of stable, irrefutable facts, objectively recorded by scholars, is fundamental to traditional historiography. My view of history, by contrast, has been shaped by those revisionists, such as Hayden White, who affirm that the past cannot be understood or even known apart from the stories scholars invent about it. I take for granted, then, that the genealogy of the novel of development is a matter not only of historical facts but also of historical narratives, each of which proposes a particular definition of growing up and so calls attention to some books while ignoring others. Such a view would seem to be supported by the diversity of canons offered by historians of the English *Bildungsroman*: Susanne Howe (1930), for example, proposes *Ernest Maltravers*, *Ranthorpe*, and *The Half-Sisters*, while Jerome Buckley (1974) prefers *David Copperfield*, *Sons and Lovers*, and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. The purpose of my essay is less to question Buckley’s choices than to recognize them as choices and to explore their implications in relation to the critical milieu of the early 1970s.

Bonaparte is right that I am interested in *The Mill on the Floss* as a failed *Bildungsroman*. But identifying the *Bildungsroman* as an ideological construct, variously phrased by critics from Carlyle to Dilthey to Buckley, allows me ultimately to jettison the official category altogether and to query Eliot’s novel for alternative conceptions of development. To rethink coming of age in terms of social context and constraint rather than of individual transcendence is, I agree with Bonaparte, a political proposition every bit as much as Buckley’s project is. I am puzzled, however, by Bonaparte’s sense that my argument is somehow more

coercive than Buckley’s and hers—especially given that theirs remains the standard account of the form. By expressing my opinion in print I do not “require everyone to share” it, nor am I refusing to “let everyone do what he or she wishes.” In suggesting as much, Bonaparte exemplifies the confusion of those who have taken to crying “censorship” whenever they encounter dissent.

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Frankenstein—Fact and Fantasy

To the Editor:

Like much provocative interpretive criticism or “construction,” Bette London’s “Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, and the Spectacle of Masculinity” (108 [1993]: 253–67) depends on arguments based ultimately on analogy and metaphor. So long as the element of similarity appears to predominate over the element of difference that inheres in all such enterprises, the effect is generally persuasive. But this deconstructive situation can be delicately balanced, and in London’s case this reader’s confidence was somewhat undermined by the presence of one outright error of fact and one interpretive swerve where the interplay of similarity and difference is surely not in London’s favor.

In a typically overnuanced sentence London writes that “it is *Frankenstein*’s claims to preeminent originality that support Rieger’s effort at literary resuscitation—the reproduction of the very text, unavailable for over a century, reconstructed in his contribution to the Library of Literature” (257). She is referring to James Rieger’s 1974 Bobbs-Merrill edition of the original 1818 text of *Frankenstein* and rephrasing a claim in his “Note on the Text”: “The Library of Literature *Frankenstein* reproduces for the first time in more than a century the text published . . . in 1818” (xliii). This is simply not so. As Donald F. Glut observes in *The Frankenstein Catalog* (Jefferson: McFarland, 1984), “[A] single-volume edition of the 1818 text appeared during the latter half of the 19th century and has remained in print at least until the early 1940s. Moreover, a number of the foreign language editions of the novel have been translated from the single-volume 1818 text” (4). The volume published in 1865 by Milner and Sowerby, of Halifax, England, was the source of twenty subsequent editions, the last of which was published in 1942.

What strikes me as London’s most fanciful “con-

structive” move—unfortunately a climactic one—occurs when she quotes from Rieger’s text this statement from the last of Robert Walton’s opening frame letters to his sister, Margaret:

I have resolved every night, when I am not engaged, to record, as nearly as possible in his own words, what [Frankenstein] has related during the day. . . . This manuscript will doubtless afford you the greatest pleasure: but to me, who know him, and who hear it from his own lips, with what interest and sympathy shall I read it in some future day! (25)

The word “pleasure” is underlined in Rieger’s edition because Mary Shelley underlined it in the copy of *Frankenstein* that she gave to Mrs. Thomas (it is mistakenly set in italics in London’s article). Arguing perversely that “[t]he question of woman’s pleasure” is here “precluded by the union of male bodies,” London comments: “It is perhaps not surprising, then, that . . . Mary Shelley underlines the word *pleasure* and adds a marginal note, ‘impossible,’ for here especially pleasure is proscribed by sexual difference” (263, 264). But the metaphoric and analogic difference that I am talking about clearly impels readers (Margaret included) to a quite different understanding of Mary Shelley’s “impossible.” She is simply registering astonishment that the genteel Margaret could find any pleasure in what appears to be a tragic if not disgusting tale. Indeed, near the end of the narrative Walton empathizes with Margaret’s response in the following terms: “You have read this strange and terrific story, Margaret; and do you not feel your blood congeal with horror, like that which even now curdles mine?” (206–07). This experience could be pleasurable only to a rare variety of masochist.

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Reply:

In lumping my article with “much provocative interpretive criticism” that ultimately depends on “analogy and metaphor,” David Ketterer would seem to imagine a criticism free of these constraints, a criticism that would not pass as “construction.” Moreover, in evaluating the success of constructions by the degree to which “the element of similarity appears to predominate over the element of difference,” he assumes that one can enjoy an unproblematic relation to these categories and to their calibration. Such

assumptions, of course, are precisely the ones my essay interrogates as components of a pervasive cultural (conventionally male) fantasy—a fantasy significantly illuminated by *Frankenstein*’s story as well as by the history of the novel’s production and reception.

My essay highlights the construction of a number of specific nineteenth- and twentieth-century historical narratives concerning Mary Shelley’s authorship and *Frankenstein*’s themes; these narratives themselves rely on the management and deployment of changing ideas of sameness and difference. That the narratives become readable by virtue of metaphor and analogy should not invalidate their historical credibility; at the same time, recognizing the metaphors that inform a particular piece of cultural history need not doom us to repeat the terms of that historical reading. Surely, one of literary criticism’s truly constructive possibilities is its power to unleash new interpretations, to produce new readings.

As a reader, however, Ketterer finds his confidence in my argument shaken by two lapses—in decorum, at least, if not in reasoning. But Ketterer’s “evidence” does not so much undermine my argument as replay its informing principles: the exposure of the female author at the hands of the male critic at the very moment when her work brings into question received understandings of writing and gender. Ketterer’s “discovery” of textual—and perhaps sexual—indiscretion in my analysis, I suggest, reads uncannily like Rieger’s construction of Mary Shelley’s impropriety. Indeed, Ketterer’s quibble with my scholarship (“one outright error of fact”) is really, as he acknowledges, a quarrel with Rieger—a critic, like Ketterer, not susceptible to charges of deconstructionist tendencies. For when I allude to Rieger’s claims for the originality of his edition (“unavailable for over a century”), the substantiation of them is not really a part of my consideration. My point, quite simply, is to demonstrate Rieger’s reliance on these terms—on the metaphors and nuances of original creation. That Rieger somewhat inflates the claims to uniqueness of his endeavor only reinforces my reading of the authorial anxieties that infiltrate his text, compromising his objective editorial authority. Ketterer’s correction, in fact, adds a new dimension to the way the problems of *Frankenstein* resonate in Rieger’s undertaking.

If at first Ketterer holds me accountable for a tangential error of fact (committed by another), in his second (and final) instancing of my compromised authority, he charges me with an error of fancy. Invoking a rhetoric of deviancy, Ketterer points to an “interpretive swerve” that reflects unfavorably on me, a “fanciful ‘constructive’ move—unfortunately a cli-