produced by human minds (*The German Ideology*, which O'Rourke suggests I read, says, "Men are the producers of their conceptions") and that literature is produced by authors, who have various relationships to the dominant ideology (see *Literature and Art by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels: Selections from Their Writings*, New York: International, 1947; this was also the assumption of almost all Marxist criticism of Shakespeare until recently). I will let O'Rourke decide whether Marx or Stallybrass is the better Marxist, a judgment that is not relevant to the issue raised by my sentence. If O'Rourke wanted to face that issue, he should have explained how a text can acquire an ideological project without the help of any human agency—a matter that, contrary to what he seems to think, is not the same as a text's "carrying out an ideological project."

O'Rourke's other criticisms of my article are so generalized that it is hard to answer them. He compares it unfavorably to Pechter's article because Pechter did not provoke as "heated" a response; but in fact that article, which I admire, provoked plenty of anger that never reached the *PMLA* Forum. (Michael Cohen reports that in a 1988 Folger Shakespeare Institute Seminar some members "talked about the Pechter article with disgust and horror" and "someone wondered aloud how *PMLA* could have published such a nasty piece of work" [*Shakespeare Newsletter* 38 (1988): 38].) O'Rourke also claims that those who agree with me will "simply have their prejudices confirmed" without having to study the new approaches; this observation is probably true of some readers, but it is equally true that some of those who disagree with me will simply be confirming their prejudices about the perfidy of the enemy and will dismiss my article as "gratuitous sarcasm" and "critical gossip," as he does, without having to deal with it. I do not think I should be blamed for either of these responses, which are obviously not what I aimed at. And at the end he uses Woolf's caricature to relocate the anger in me rather than in the reaction against me. But I do not feel at all angry at the critics I discuss, some of whom I like, and I leave it to disinterested readers (if there are any left) to judge whether my article or his exhibits more anger.

RICHARD LEVIN
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To the Editor:

Susan Winnett's "Coming Unstrung: Women, Men, Narrative, and Principles of Pleasure" asserts that the study of the structure of narrative would benefit from a feminist perspective. Winnett quotes with approval Scholes's contention that narrative form is essentially determined by the tumescence and detumescence of the male sexual cycle. But, she suggests, is not this view fundamentally sexist? Does it not privilege the male sexual cycle over the rather different female one? In her provocative paper, Winnett asks us to consider the impact on fiction and its interpretation if the female sexual cycle were, to some extent, determinative of the pleasures of the text. As examples of what that determination might mean to practical criticism, she analyzes two novels by women—*Frankenstein* and *Romola*. Her analyses suggest that what are usually construed as narrative flaws may be, according to a feminist reading, alternative structures influenced by the sexual experience of their authors.

I have two points to make concerning Winnett's thesis, one methodological and epistemological, the other political. My first concern is with the matter of evidence and arguments. I do not mean that Winnett owes to her skeptical readers the actual evidence and arguments that might found her claim. Her paper is frankly speculative; she intends, she tells us, only to arrive at "the giddy brink of an alternative" cultural paradigm (505). Still, I think she does owe readers a sketch of the kinds of evidence and arguments that might support so radical a claim. If I found such evidence, what would it look like? If I invented such an argument, what would be its form?

It might be thought that her analyses of *Frankenstein* and *Romola* not only suggest but actually constitute the sought-for evidence and argument. The grounds for her claim, then, are as simple as they are effective: her hypothesis constitutes an explanation of these works at least as compelling as any alternative sponsored by the representatives of patriarchical dominance. But Winnett gives no hint that she wishes to ground her claim in these analyses. Rightly so; novels are fictions so extended and complex that one might almost believe that they would sustain a coherent reading on the basis of *any* interpretative scheme, no matter how outlandish. Winnett is quite right to discount such easy victories. A causal hypothesis such as hers needs firmer buttressing.

It is important not only to substantiate a preferred claim but also to accommodate its plausible alternatives. The alternatives to Winnett's claim form two classes. The first counters Scholes's general assertion that "[t]he archetype of all fiction" is the sexual cycle (qtd. on 506). This alternative holds that the archetype is some other human or natural cycle or some combination of natural and human cycles, a combination that might very well differ as we move from fiction to fiction. The second class of alternatives rejects the very

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notion of an archetype of fiction. It asserts rather that every fiction is sui generis; indeed, in its strongest form, this class reverses the causal arrow, contending that fictions may themselves be the cause of our interpretation of the various human and natural cycles of which we are aware. Winnett recognizes and respects these alternatives (506, 508), but recognition and respect are insufficient; it is also necessary to avoid a benign and empty pluralism under whose protection any set of beliefs can garner its faction and found a critical school.

My second concern involves the political implications that must follow the truth of Winnett's claim. In the literature of feminism, it has been repeatedly asserted that the patriarchal rationalizations that have barred women from full participation in social and political life are powerfully distorting of that life; in supporting unfairness to women, such rationalizations make our society less humane, less viable for everyone. In the disciplines, the particular concern of academics, these rationalizations infect the very structures that constitute knowledge. In short, these rationalizations are dangerous nonsense; differences between men and women have been manufactured to suit a narrow ideology. It follows that equal participation of men and women will lead to a more humane and viable society and polity and to a firmer, more durable form of knowledge. The implications of this claim seem wholly progressive.

But this claim must not be conflated with Winnett's very different claim. Hers seems rather a version of the general claim that women qua women have something special to offer society, that there is something remarkable, something unique in their point of view. According to Winnett, storytelling and story understanding are not, as we might have thought, social capacities generated by our common humanity; they are instead psychological capacities founded on our (generally) irremediable sexual biology. Such biological determinism suited well an archconservative and social pessimist like Freud, and it may well suit contemporary neoconservatives of whatever stripe; but it can hardly be attractive to a movement that depends heavily on progressive and meliorist assumptions. If true, the claim that women possess unique, biologically determined qualities seems to serve, not the women's movement, but its opponents. Why not argue, instead, that a specifically female pleasure is itself a patriarchal construct, an interested valorization of physical differences that ought to be insignificant socially and politically?

I hope that it will not be asserted in reply that my separation of methodology and epistemology from politics is itself political, that the division itself affirms a male "logocentrism" that must be abandoned in the interest of authentic intellectual progress. Whatever the eventual nature of our intellectual society, those making claims will have to assume a genuine burden of proof. When they do, they must deploy evidence and make arguments; moreover, that evidence and those arguments must be capable of close characterization.

ALAN G. GROSS
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Reply:

At the end of Henry James's novel *The Sacred Fount*, the narrator concludes that the reason his antagonist has unstrung the interpretive system he has pursued is not that he "hadn't three times her method" but rather that he "too fatally lacked . . . her tone." I don't for a moment doubt that Gross and Ross have at least three times my method, but both seem to have had considerable difficulties reading my tone.

Gross begins his commentary with the observation that I quote "with approval Scholes's contention that narrative form is essentially determined by the tumescence and detumescence of the male sexual cycle." Only a total misunderstanding of the tone of my essay could lead him to read "approval" into my examination of Scholes's readerly approximation of the sexual act. More serious for Gross's argument than the issue of whether or not I "approve" of Scholes is Gross's view that I would agree with any "essentialist" notion of what determines narrative form. One of the major goals of the article is to demonstrate how any discussion of narrative determinants depends entirely on the conscious or unconscious ideological position of the critic as well as on the text that the discussion is supposed to illuminate or that is to "prove" (as Gross puts it) the viability of the theory. My introduction of possible female counterparts to the images of male "tumescence and detumescence" invoked by Brooks and Scholes is, from the outset, intentionally perverse. (I am not aware of having discussed either the male or the female "sexual cycle"; here, as in Gross's contention that I "suggest that what are usually construed as narrative flaws [in *Frankenstein* and *Romola*] may be . . . influenced by the sexual experience of their authors," I am troubled by his assumption that experiences of the body—and indeed experiences of pleasure—are necessarily sexual. I allude to Shelley's "maternal" experiences but to neither her "sexual experience" nor Eliot's.) The wording of the article makes my limited stakes in the narrative model I devise fairly clear, which doesn't mean that I haven't put considerable care into constructing the model and thinking about its implications: my purpose is to show that even if we retain Brooks's and Scholes's

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