(5) that this interpretive history has self-evident borders (hence de Grazia knows when it begins and what it contains), (6) that an interpretive history exists apart from and prior to its interpretation—much as the sonnets, presumably, exist apart from and prior to their interpretations.

These assumptions are in serious need of questioning. How, for example, would de Grazia deal with an interpretation published *before* the "appearance" of a work? Is Francis Meres's repeatedly quoted praise—Shakespeare's "sugred Sonnets among his private friends" (1598)—part of the interpretive history or not? If not, why not? What about sonnets 138 and 144, published in *The Passionate Pilgrim* (1599)? Which "appearance" is *the* "appearance"? Which version do we interpret? Are the scribal manuscripts dating from the 1620s and 1630s part of the interpretive history? If not, why not?

Another question: why does de Grazia exclude editions from the interpretive history? Are they not interpretive enough? Many editors, particularly in the nineteenth century, have attempted to solve the "problem" of the sonnets by reordering. Are these not interpretations? And, in our own century, is not Stephen Booth's edition an interpretation? Further, is not Benson's edition one of the most influential interpretations of the sonnets yet produced? His "poems" in effect *were* Shakespeare's sonnets from 1640 to 1780.

This line of questioning leads us to ask whether Malone's edition is an "appearance" of the sonnets or an "interpretation" of the sonnets. We can and should question the 1609 Quarto similarly: is it an "appearance" or an "interpretation"? De Grazia assumes that the answers are so self-evident—the sonnets appear there, their interpretive history begins here—that such questions need not be asked. I am arguing otherwise: that not asking these questions leads to claims and assumptions that cannot withstand analysis. Asking and answering these questions, however, requires a conceptual language based on pragmatism and rhetoric, not on—or not only on—representation. My essay argues the problem-solving and change-making powers of this terminological switch, using the dilemma of the sonnets and their interpretive history to exemplify our contemporary theoretical dilemma. My goal was to break our institutional habit of asking the same old questions—to what does the literary work correspond? to what does its interpretation correspond?—by telling the history of how we came to think of these questions as natural and necessary and by showing the greater explanatory power of different questions, namely, whom are we—or they—trying to persuade of what and why?

This argument simultaneously stresses the importance of writing—and of writing about—interpretive histories without repeating the correspondence questions that deconstruction has shown us the futility and folly of asking. The fact that de Grazia's response everywhere asks these questions without anywhere questioning them argues our need for a theory of interpretive history, for self-critical ways of reasoning about this pervasive but as yet unexplained practice.

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Kleist's "Dialogic Midwifery"

To the Editor:

While John H. Smith's "Dialogic Midwifery in Kleist's *Marquise von O* and the Hermeneutics of Telling the Untold in Kant and Plato" (100 [1985]: 203-18) offers a cogent reading of Kleist's dramatization of the limitations of conventional epistemology, I would like to suggest that, for all Smith's dazzling erudition, the hermeneutic bias of his essay is fundamentally misleading. Smith asks us to assimilate the absences in Kleist's tale to a reading that foregrounds the instrumentality of dialogue and applauds the "valuable birth" of new conversations and genres inspired by Kleist's text. Let me state at the outset that I am troubled by Smith's appropriation of metaphors of parturition without a thorough investigation of the dialectic of birth Kleist's story sets before us. Clearly Plato's statement—"So great, then, is the importance of midwives; but their function is less important than mine" (Smith 210)—is not a statement Smith himself would make, and yet Plato's assertion is symptomatic of Smith's line of reasoning. I suggest we look at Kleist's tale from another angle—one that places its "unnarrated center" in explicit dialogue with our culture's contradictory notions about the relation between epistemology annd reproductive labor.

While critics like Smith and philosophers like Gadamer see silence as the impetus for more playful conversations with the tradition, Jurgen Habermas has responded by saying that it is "[o]nly when philosophy discovers in the dialectical course of history the traces of violence that deform repeated attempts at dialogue" that philosophy can further this dialogue. He suggests we seek a form of "dialectic that takes the historical traces of suppressed dialogue and reconstructs what has been suppressed" (*Knowledge and Human Interests*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro [Boston: Beacon, 1971], 315). (In Kleist's tale the suppressed voices are numerous and include the would-be rapists as well as the groom Leopardo. A hermeneutic faith in dialogic being does not seem to include sensitivity to dialogue's social constraints.) This reasoning suggests two questions that the reader of the *Marquise von O* must ask: What is repressed but also given a formal shape and therefore a "voice" in Kleist's narrative? What might be distorted or hidden about Kleist's story in Smith's decision to read these silences as a form of advocacy for the text's own "problematic dialogues"?

We find a partial answer in the obstetric tone of one of the epigraphs, a quotation from Fontane: "All this . . . is depicted briefly and succinctly with the greatest dexterity and with a certain *gynecologic objectivity*" (203; Smith's emphasis). The claim of "gynecologic objectivity" is achieved in Smith's essay only in the positivist sense of these words, only insofar as the pregnant woman and midwife are made object, made metaphor. Such appropriation of reproductive metaphors for "objectively" epistemologic ends helps to obscure Kleist's own bizarre exploration of the relations among paternity, women's reproductive labor, and issues of epistemology. In reading the *Marquise von O*, we should not reduce the asymmetrical relations between reproductive labor and masculine and feminine genders to questions of linguistic relativism, precisely because we can argue that the asymmetry of these relations contributes to the need for dialogic labor in the first place.

What is the relation of dialogic to procreative labor? In *The Politics of Reproduction* (Boston: Routledge, 1983), Mary O'Brien (who is both a midwife and a philosopher) expresses concern that we have not given reproduction the serious theoretical attention we have given to other biological processes, like eating or dying. According to O'Brien we need to recognize that paternity is an idea, that it involves the conscious overcoming of man's alienation from his sperm in the moment of copulation. She claims that men are alienated from this process as parents, not as lovers, and that the repercussions of this alienation are serious, that "[a]lienation [of sperm] is not a neurosis, but a technical term describing separation and the consciousness of negativity" (52). By definition, however, consciousness resists alienation, and male reproductive consciousness has as its dialectical moment the appropriation of the child, not as the acknowledgment of a "natural" relationship but as the assertion of a right. The concept is political. The attempt to establish this relationship on other terms without adequate cultural mediation can be confusing, as we see in the reconciliation scene between the marquise and her father, in which he places her on his lap and begins kissing her erotically on the mouth. The narrator comments that he is treating her as a lover rather than as a child, and yet the text views this event as utterly natural, recognizing that the alienation between father and child is most easily healed by recapturing its erotic origins. The count's task of overcoming paternal alienation is equally strange. Since the dialectical moment of men's reproductive consciousness is the appropriation of the child, which must be mediated through a historical project, it is not the birth that unifies father and child in Kleist's story but the count's ability to establish an economic connection—his tossing a deed of gift into the infant's crib, thus passing on family property as a form of dialectical capital that this male child can mediate in turn.

This argument suggests that the "unnarrated center" of Kleist's tale exists not only because it draws our attention to the ideal relation between philosophic "midwives" and the production of knowledge but because paternity itself is an idea for which culture has yet to establish humane mediations, because there is not yet an adequate practice or theory to account for the paradoxical relations of paternity, parturition, and property: relations that nonetheless bind us violently to the nuclear family. Kleist's text makes these absences visible and offers an opportunity to contemplate a new and dialectically charged situation that suspends the pregnant woman's usual subordination to, and appropriation by, her child's father. It is in the space made visible through the suspension of this domination that our dialogue can begin—in the recognition that the pregnant woman, the woman immersed in a socially valuable form of reproductive labor, becomes more than an "empty center" for her culture's discursive labor.

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Reply:

Patricia S. Yaeger opens up an exciting, topical, sophisticated, and critical approach to Kleist's *Marquise von O*, and I eagerly await the execution of the project she compellingly outlines. Her analysis of the "paradoxical relations of paternity, parturition, and property" in the novella promises to offer new insights into both historical patriarchal structures and Kleist's subversive, creative depiction of their insufficiencies. My response will consist not in a polemical defense but in an attempt to clarify my position, with the aim of rapprochement.

Yaeger says at the outset that she finds my essay and its "hermeneutic bias . . . fundamentally misleading." It was by no means my intention to "lead" readers in the sense of compelling them to adopt propositions that fundamentally contradict Yaeger's feminist-materialist critique of ideology. I would not conceive of my approach as heading in a basically different direction from hers although the paths we take and our vistas along the way are not the same. (My understanding of the Gadamer-Habermas debates sees an underlying agreement on the concerns for dialogue and the possibilities for continuing communication, despite the polemical posturing.) Of course, I do not dispute that the hermeneutic approach I took is limited, and Yaeger is quite right to remind us of Gadamer's essentially optimistic and uncritical view of tradition as the site of an open exchange. I wish to take this opportunity not to *deny* the limitations of my approach but to state that I nonetheless think it possible to pursue narratological hermeneutics without *advocating* its limitations. That is, I am not sure that the narratological and hermeneu-