

A Mindless Man-driven Theory Machine:  
Intellectuality, Sexuality, and the Institution of Criticism

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[Published in *Feminism and Institutions: Dialogues on Feminist Theory*, ed. Linda Kaufmann, 55-78. London: Basil Blackwell, 1989.  
Reprinted in *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*. Eds. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl. New  
Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1991, 40-57.]

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standards of criticism." (John Crowe Ransom, "Criticism,  
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make a piece of writing feminine. It could quite well be  
masculine writing, and conversely, the fact that a piece of  
writing is signed with a man's name does not in itself  
exclude femininity." (Helene Cixous, "Castration")

"The male machine is a special kind of being, different  
from women, children, and men who don't measure up. He  
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to tackle jobs, override obstacles, attack problems,  
overcome difficulties, and always seize the offensive. He  
will take on any task that can be presented to him in a  
competitive framework, and his most important positive  
reinforcement is victory. . . . this ideology makes  
competition the guiding principle of moral and intellectual,  
as well as economic, life. It tells us that the general welfare  
is served by the self-interested clash of ambitions and  
ideas" (Marc Feigen Fasteau, *The Male Machine*)

This is a paper about the tie between the institutional construction of  
intellectuality and the social construction of sexuality. Let me start with error.

Knowing that we do not know is knowledge. And further, knowing that what one  
thought one knew is no longer believable is the most significant form of knowing. Just as

problems, in some sense, precede solutions and questions precede answers; so not-knowing, including not-knowing-one-does-not-know, precedes knowing. This is the precondition upon which an intellectual comes to know. She acknowledges that a problem remains a problem, that an answer does not answer. She acknowledges that she is in error. For her, paradoxically, being in error is not being wrong. Error, in this case, is heuristic. By contrast, the traditional critic, formed by a long anti-intellectual past, insists that what he already thinks will suffice. This is a paper about his willingness not to know.

Indeed, to err is human. We use many words for this contingency. Realizing the inevitability of changing our minds, we speak of making mistakes, being incorrect, finding ourselves wrong, and ridding ourselves of falsehoods. In each case, we offer reasons for changing what we believe, think and/or do. And what would the world be like if we didn't? Cultures change because persons attempt to alter unwelcome states of affairs, to transform errors into questions, to make right what was wrong, to repair mistakes, to revise what is incorrect, to rethink what is false. To be human is to err. Only fools believe they know more than they do not know. This is a paper about resisting change by restricting error.

Error is the state of believing what is untrue, wrong, incorrect, or mistaken. Living with error is not a simple state of affairs. Our use of the word encompasses and often combines a wide range of faults. "Error" implies "deviation from truth, accuracy, correctness, right." It is the broadest term in the following comparisons. On one side of the semantic spectrum, error is understood as "a blunder, a slip, a *faux pas*, a boner." These are "mistakes." The word, "mistake" suggests an error resulting from "carelessness, inattention, misunderstanding." It does not strongly imply wrong-doing. "Incorrect" mostly means not correct. Since correctness refers to "adherence to conventionality" (correct behavior), incorrect suggests little more than deviation from convention. It is a comment upon how accurate, precise or exact one is in performing some pre-designed task. "Wrong," on the other hand, in its primary sense, means "not morally right or just; sinful; wicked; immoral" and, in a derived sense, "not in accordance with an established standard, previous arrangement, given intention. If you are wrong, it is because you "oppress, persecute, aggrieve, or abuse someone." Wrongs are offenses that should be punished. At the other end of the spectrum of error from a mistake is the word "false," the most abstract and legal sense of error. "False," whose root sense is "deception," primarily means "not true." (as in the phrase, "a false argument," *WNWD*). Falsehood refers to "anything that is not in essence that which it purports to be." When deception is involved, the synonyms for "false" are "sham," "counterfeit," "bogus," and "fake." Given such contrasting ideas of error, it would seem that, when persons are incorrect, it is not because they are sinful, that, when statements are false, it is not because they are immoral. In the institution of criticism, however, these terms appear to be conflated in judgments that incorrect statements are wrong because they are false. This is a paper about a particular conflation of error termed "falsification."

In this essay, I focus upon the institutional use of the word "false" as a term paired

with "true." In particular, I focus upon the judgment that critical arguments are "false" as opposed to "true." The distinction between an unsound and a sound argument is the only condition upon which literary study as a discipline can be said to "accumulate knowledge." Hence, "falsification," "falsifiability," "verification," and "verifiability" are crucial theoretical concerns. Since, in practice, verification is the result of falsification, I will focus upon the latter. In literary studies, falsification is a judgment that takes the general form of the utterance: "Professor X is 'mistaken/incorrect/wrong' when he . . . ." Correlatively, the falsifiability of critical discourse is the condition of possibility for grades, ranks, publications. These uses of the concept false depend upon a belief upon which, in turn, the institution of criticism depends: that a claim about a text can be proven false. Since this belief is an idealization of inquiry and therefore an abstraction of it, I have coined the term "falsificity" to identify the particular conflation of errors upon which the institution of criticism is based. In short, falsificity is the principle that it is logically wrong (and therefore culpable and punishable) to mistake the incorrect for the correct. I use the term "wrong" in glossing "falsificity" to emphasize that, in the institution of criticism, critical arguments which are judged false are judged so not on purely logical grounds but on the grounds that they are "sham, counterfeit, bogus or fake" discourses and therefore punishable. False arguments are construed as discourses "not in essence what they purport to be," i.e. not logical. Since they are proffered as criticism, they are instances of counterfeit discourses. According to the principle of falsificity, to submit as criticism a discourse that is not logical is wrong and hence to be punished--to be marked by an "F," to be cast out of editorial houses, to be denied an award. My critique of this principle is that it encourages critics to disagree with each other in ways that do not especially differ from familial quarrelling wherein the keeper of the Logos is the Father who chastises his children. This is a paper about the construction of intellectuality as competitive quarreling.

In this essay, I shall not only try to show that, far from being an impersonal, detached, logical judgment, falsification is a rationalization of academic competition, but, more significantly, that it is a device for maintaining the patriarchal status quo. Ordinarily, the identification of error leads to useful changes. (Problems are resolved; thus, a negative state of affairs is changed.) But, paradoxically, changes in a "system" can be prohibited by defining alternatives to it as errors. (It's wrong, so don't do it!) In the institution of criticism, for example, one is instructed to avoid false arguments, that is, to avoid illogic. This instruction seems thoroughly plausible until one recognizes that, in literary study, the identification of falsehood (illogic) reflects the social construction of the feminine as "man's specular Other" and thus maintains the patriarchal status quo. This is a paper about the oppression of women.

Error can be heuristic. But, falsificity makes error a punishable form of wrongdoing. When we consider that it is a central theoretical assumption in a patriarchal institution hierarchically structured by competition, it can be described as a "mindless, man-driven theory machine" designed to stamp out alternatives to the system it regulates by regarding them as merely feminine.

## the construction of intellectuality in the institution of criticism

The phrase "traditional literary criticism" refers to a multitude of critics who differ widely among themselves. It, nonetheless, is a useful phrase because it designates a common form of argumentation. Nor is this an accident of history. The critics who have worked in the "modern American university," which Laurence Veysey argues in his *The Emergence of the American University* took its shape shortly after the turn of the century, are trained in a common form of argumentation. It is structured by an informal logic whose first articulator was Aristotle. In it, claims are supported by evidence and therefore can be verified. It is requisite in this tradition for critics to discriminate between correct and incorrect readings. For example, in A Handbook to Literature, the most widely used of its kind, we read of argumentation that "its purpose is to convince a reader or hearer by establishing the truth or falsity of a proposition."

Tradition argumentation has long-standing protocols. Most literary students trained in it, have been formed by its scholasticism. Dissertations, for example, follow a pattern reminiscent of the treatises of Medieval theologians. "Most rhetoricians recognized five parts for the usual argumentative discourse: *exordium, narratio, confirmatio or probatio, refutatio, and peroratio*," (Corbett 1971, 303). Before a traditional critic proves his own case ("confirmatio"), he gives the history of preceding arguments ("*narratio*") and afterward refutes the likely objections ("*refutatio*"). Traditional papers, if only in the first footnote, still begin with reviews of the scholarship, most of which is falsified in order to set the stage for the author's view. Footnotes, many of which, as Stephen Nimis points out, have no logical relationship to the argument they footnote, are either formulaic gestures toward verification ("*confirmatio*") or falsification ("*refutatio*").

To our post-modern sensibilities, the theory of falsification that provides a basis for traditional criticism is recognizably "modern." As I implied above, in this essay, the term "modern" refers to the historical period characterized by the infusion of "discipline" (in Foucault's sense) into the structure of western society. By the late nineteenth century, an intellectualized conception of discipline led institutions of higher learning to reorganize along "disciplinary" lines, which, in turn, led to a significant structural change that produced what is often called the modern or new American university. In Veysey's terms, the rise of the professions led to the development of disciplines of study which led to the creation of departments to house them. For the most part, the organization of a newly formed study as a discipline was modelled on the successful institutionalization of scientific research. Literary studies followed this pattern. Before the turn of the century philology gave literary study the disciplined appearance of a science of literature. Then, literary history did. New Criticism gives us a more recent legacy of attempts to reformulate literary studies as a discipline. The overt intention of New Critical theory, in classics like "The Intentional Fallacy" (italics mine) or *Theory of Literature*, was to make literary criticism objective, reliable, verifiable, and so on.

But, it is that *men* endeavored to make criticism a discipline along scientific lines that most interests me in this paper. Though women have argued for literary study as a science, the "canonical" theoretical statements are made by men. The unselfconscious "maleness" of their insistence upon a science of criticism is markable. As Gayle Greene and Coppelia Kahn remind us, "a male perspective, assumed to be 'universal,' has dominated fields of knowledge," ("Feminist Scholarship," 1-2). Literary criticism is no exception. Consider the following remarks of I. A. Richards, John Crowe Ransom and Rene Wellek.

Richards wished to put literary criticism on the solid footing of a discipline. As Elmer Borklund points out, he began his career "by virtually dismissing the entire critical tradition" prior to him (Borklund 1977, 440):

A few conjectures, a supply of admonitions, many acute isolated observations, some brilliant guesses, much oratory and applied poetry, inexhaustible confusion, a sufficiency of dogma, no small stock of prejudices, whimsies and crochets, a profusion of mysticism, a little genuine speculation, sundry stray inspirations, pregnant hints and aperçus; of such as these, it may be said without exaggeration, is extant critical theory composed. (*Principles*, 6)

Simultaneously, in America, John Crowe Ransom took a similar view, but couched it in business terms, unwittingly reflecting the extent to which universities had become corporations.

Professors of literature are learned but not critical men. . . . Nevertheless, it is from the professors of literature, in this country the professors of English for the most part, that I should hope eventually for the erection of intelligent standards of criticism. It is their business.

Criticism must become more scientific, or precise and systematic, and this means that it must be developed by the collective and sustained effort of learned persons--which means that its proper seat is in the universities. . . . Rather than occasional criticism by amateurs, I should think the whole enterprise might be seriously taken in hand by professionals. Perhaps I use a distasteful figure, but I have the idea that what we need is Criticism, Inc., or Criticism, Ltd. ("Criticism Inc.," 328-329).

Wellek believed that we were still recovering from "a disaster." For him, literary criticism, which was "taken over by politically oriented journalism" during the nineteenth century, became "degraded to something purely practical, serving temporal ends." "The critic," he laments, "becomes a middleman, a secretary, even a servant, of the public" ("Literary Theory, Criticism and, History," 3). A decade after the publication of *Theory*, complaining that literary scholars were too much on the defensive, he wrote that:

Our whole society is based on the assumption that we know what is just, and our science on the assumption that we know what is true. Our teaching of literature is actually also based on aesthetic imperatives, even if we feel less definitely bound by them and seem much more hesitant to bring these assumptions out into the open. The disaster of the 'humanities' as far as they are concerned with the arts and literature is due to their timidity in making the very same claims which are made in regard to law and truth. Actually we do make these claims when we teach *Hamlet* or *Paradise Lost* rather than Grace Metalious . . . But we do so shamefully, apologetically, hesitatingly. There is, contrary to frequent assertions, a very wide agreement on the great classics: the main canon of literature. There is an insuperable gulf between really great art and very bad art: between say 'Lycidas' and a poem on the leading page of the New York Times, between Tolstoy's *Master and Man* and a story in *True Confessions*. ("Literary Theory, Criticism and, History," 17-18)

He goes on to defend the possibility not only of correct interpretations but also of correct evaluations. Pointing out that, though the complexity of art might make interpretation difficult,

. . . this does not mean that all interpretations are equally right, that there is no possibility of differentiating between them. There are utterly fantastic interpretations, partial, distorted interpretations. We may argue about Bradley's or Dover Wilson's or even Ernest Jones' interpretation of *Hamlet*: but we know that *Hamlet* was no woman in disguise. The concept of adequacy of interpretation leads clearly to the concept of the correctness of judgment. Evaluation grows out of understanding; correct evaluation out of correct understanding. There is a hierarchy of viewpoints implied in the very concept of adequacy of interpretation. Just as there is correct interpretation, at least as an ideal, so there is correct judgment, good judgment. (18).

For Wellek, the only factor that could keep literary criticism from being a "secretary" to the public was falsification. That we could correctly understand that "Hamlet was no woman in disguise" would allow us to make the "good judgment" that *True Confessions* was degrading. For Wellek, the study of literature was "*Literaturwissenschaft*, "systematic knowledge."

In retrospect, it is remarkable still that the main opponents to New Criticism in the sixties did not question the view that literary criticism, even though it could not muster exacting objectivity, should be modeled on the sciences. They regarded New Criticism as not scientific enough. Northrop Frye, in his "Polemical Introduction" to *Anatomy of Criticism*, outflanks the New Critics by arguing the case for a science of Literature rather than for a scientific method of interpretation. E. D. Hirsch's *Validity in Interpretation* critiques the theory of "the intentional fallacy" by arguing that we can validly determine intention. In the sixties, when anti-New Critical ferment began, system and method were, nonetheless, privileged terms. The most wide-scale attempt to make

criticism into a science belonged to a movement that would have supplanted New Criticism by making its "scientific" tendencies explicit, namely, structuralism. It is now an often told tale how structuralism engendered post-structuralism.

To post-structuralist or post-modern critics, whose intellectual formation is deeply indebted to feminism, traditional or modern theories of criticism are phallo/logocentric.

Imagine someone (a kind of Monsieur Teste in reverse) who abolishes within himself all barriers, all classes, all exclusions, not by syncretism but by simple discard of that old specter: logical contradiction; who mixes every language, even those said to be incompatible; who silently accepts every charge of illogicality, of incongruity; who remains passive in the face of Socratic irony (leading the interlocutor to the supreme disgrace: self-contradiction) and legal terrorism (how much penal evidence is based on a psychology of consistency!) Such a man would be the mockery of our society: court, school, asylum, polite conversations would cast him out: who endures contradiction without shame? Now this anti-hero exists . . . (Barthes, 3)

For the most part, modern criticism is based on the notion that readings can be objective, impersonal and detached, that there is a discipline of literary criticism. Though traditional critics differ widely in their assumptions about interpretation, when contrasted with post-modern critics, they appear similar in their logocentrism. Working within this system, modern critics contend that their readings are demonstrable because textual or contextual evidence can show that rival readings are not logically supported. Since readings that are accepted as "true" at an earlier moment in time can at a later date be shown to be "false," the engine of this system is falsification. New readings supplant old readings. This is a familiar pattern to anyone studying literature. Most critics strive to come up with "new" readings, and, in order to do so, have to clear their paths by falsifying the previously accepted ones.

In other words, what characterizes modern literary criticism is a principle of falsificity.

ii

intellectual sexuality in the institution of criticism

Literary criticism is a career. Burton Bledstein tells us in *The Culture of Professionalism* that the idea of a career emerged concomitantly with the rise of the professions in the 19th century in contrast to "a random series of jobs, projects, or businesses providing a livelihood" (172). It changed the lives of men because it articulated their aspirations as ambitions. It involved "a preestablished total pattern of organized professional activity, with upward movement through recognized preparatory stages, and advancement based on merit bearing honor." Modern literary criticism was conceived during this period. Like professionals elsewhere, critics make their career patterns discernable in their CVs which require them to list chronologically "preparatory

stages," "advancement" in employment, "honors," and "merit" which, in their case, is signalled by increasing success in placing their work with prestigious publishers. What Bledstein calls a "vertical" movement characterizes the careers of successful professional critics. For critics, an outstanding career is one in which they earn higher and higher salaries in a succession of jobs at increasingly prestigious institutions. Since the mid-19th-century, professional success has been imaged as climbing a ladder of institutional status:

New expectations displayed themselves in a new style. In a social environment now offering vocational alternatives, young men could criticize, calculate, envision a ladder of advancement, and act with some measure of impunity toward their less flexible elders. Above all, young men could begin thinking in vertical rather than horizontal imagery. They meant, very literally, to move up and away. (Bledstein, 176)

Bledstein describes the shift in the sense of the purposefulness of a man's life during the 19th-century as a shift away from a belief in a "calling" to a choice of a "career," a shift easily discerned in changing ways ministers, lawyers, doctors and educators spoke about their professions. A "calling" was not the choice of an individual, but a career most certainly was. Bledstein's remark that a career was a choice for "young men" leaves unspoken that women were still "called."

The shift Bledstein describes was hierarchically and competitively configured not merely as a change in status and roles provoked by analogies to ladders and races, but also as a change in the social construction of masculinity provoked by images of gentlemen.

The inner intensity of the new life oriented toward a career stood in contrast to that of the older learned professional life of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In the earlier period such external attributes of gentlemanly behavior as benevolence, duty, virtue, and manners circumscribed the professional experience. Competence, knowledge, and preparation were less important in evaluating the skills of the professional than were dedication to the community, sincerity, trust, permanence, honorable reputation, and righteous behavior. The qualifying credentials of the learned professionals were honesty, decency, and civility. (173)

The career professional, by contrast, thought in terms of advancement. The 19th-century gentleman gave way to the 20th century businessman, who prospered in "a competitive society in which unrestrained individual self-determination undermined traditional life styles," (174). He is the prototype of the persona Marc Fasteau calls "the male machine."

The male machine is a special kind of being, different from women, children, and men who don't measure up. He is functional, designed mainly for work. He is programed to tackle jobs, override obstacles, attack problems, overcome

difficulties, and always seize the offensive. He will take on any task that can be presented to him in a competitive framework, and his most important positive reinforcement is victory. . . . this ideology makes competition the guiding principle of moral and intellectual, as well as economic, life. It tells us that the general welfare is served by the self-interested clash of ambitions and ideas . . .

(1)

Bledstein remarks that in the development of 19th-century professionalism ambitious men were instrumental in "structuring our discipline according to a distinct vision the vertical one of career," (ix). From this point of view, the development of literary study matches Bledstein's delineation of the relationship between the growth of the university and the rise of professionalism. To become a literary scholar is to be professionalized, a social process involving the introjection of an "intellectual competitiveness." The "masculine" qualities of exemplary male professors were imitated and became the traits of an idealized career profile. Exemplary male professors became "role models" for success within the structure of the academy, a phenomenon which shaped the field of literary study as we now know it. We are the heirs of "roles" that are explicitly designed for the new gentleman, the businessman.

The history of literary study, for instance, can be understood as the collective biography of exemplary *male* academic figures: George Marsh, Francis March, Francis Child, Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, Gustave Lanson, I. A. Richards, John Crowe Ransom, Cleanth Brooks, and so on. The crisscrossing movement of their careers influenced the newly developing field of literary study. Its historical development is, in most respects, an account of these critical "movements" which are usually associated with key men who inspired schools of thought. Figures like Childs, Brooks and Lanson are historically significant because they became exemplary figures. These men were "exemplary" because in doing what they believed ought to be done, they became examples for others. Modern literary study developed as a profession to the extent that the manner in which a particular man studied literature was widely imitated, to the extent a man's way of doing criticism or scholarship became a trait in the composite profile of the ideal professor of literature. Invariably, men were the models underlying the ideal profile of the scholar/critic at specific junctures in the development of literary studies. Over time, this idealized career profile became a composite of masculine traits derived from the superimposition of the portrayals of exemplary male scholars. Women working in the academy, in order to succeed in their careers, had to acquire these traits. As Helene Cixous reminds us, a discourse "signed with a woman's name doesn't necessarily make a piece of writing feminine. It could quite well be masculine writing . . ." (Cixous).

Nowadays, to be a professional critic authorized by the institution of criticism still requires submission to an idealized career profile whose masculinity derives from male models. Since this profile is nowhere made explicit as such and *in toto*, I call it the "*Magister Implicatus*" to personify and thus concretize the sum total of performances now demanded for accreditation as a professional critic. He is the image we see when we look in the distorted mirror of our resumes. As we currently know him, the *Magister Implicatus* is a personification of an ideal male career. At present, he stands for the

professionalization of the male scholar from the very first exam through various forms of discipline to the final authorization of his work. He is the unified self of the ways professional critics are taught to portray themselves in official documents--vitae, grant applications, course descriptions and so on.

In his modern, traditional persona, the *Magister's* power enables or disables any member of the institution who introjects him. He punishes by making us believe we have failed, do not deserve tenure, have not published enough. He is the monster in the male machine, the instrument of self-discipline and self-abnegation. In his traditional guise, he is the personification of the patriarchal institution, the site for training, disciplining, schooling men. He professionalizes the amateur. He governs through our introjection of what the desired outcome of any performance must be if it is to be rewarded. It is his male interests that are served when critics serve their institutions by believing those beliefs that hold it together. An emotional bond to him is a bond to the patriarchal institution. In serving him, one serves it, often while believing he has one's best interests in mind.

The *Magister Implicatus* is the ghostly patriarchal figure who haunts our job descriptions, our textbooks, our exam committees, and other quarters of the institution of literary criticism. Not surprisingly, given the history of the institution of criticism, his profile is masculine. Because careers allow for professional advances along a ladder of institutional success (degrees, salaries, ranks and so on), the Magister through his exemplariness inspires critics to compete with one another for awards.

It is upon this one trait of the *Magister Implicatus*, his competitiveness, that I wish to focus your attention.

### iii

falsificity is inextricably linked to competitiveness

In the present academy, competitiveness and falsificity are inextricably bound together. Critics are judged according to the extent to which they have successfully argued. The merit of their arguments is measured by the degree to which they have falsified their rival's claims and the degree to which their own arguments are deemed falsifiable. "And merit is, of course, determined by competition. How else?" (Longino 1987, 253). a critic is therefore inextricably linked with the extent to which he competes with rival critics.

Competition is usually defined as "a striving for the same object, position, prize, etc., usually in accordance with certain fixed rules," (*WNWD*). Rule-governed striving is the generating principle of career success. Each juncture of the career path presents to the careerist a goal for which he must compete--a grade, a degree, a job, a promotion, a grant, and so on. In every case, the competitor is judged on the merit of his critical arguments. Hence, if we consider that arguments displace earlier arguments through

falsification, then the successful competitor is the successful falsifier. Falsification and competitiveness are inextricable in this system.

As Helen E. Longino points out in her, "The Ideology of Competition," "Competition always involves a contest among individuals seeking the same thing when not all can obtain it," (Longino 1987, 250). Some competitions, she argues, are based upon on the availability of a single prize. As in a race, there is only one first "prize." As a consequence, the differences in abilities of the contestants is the salient factor. Such competitions are staged to establish who is "the best" in a particular performance. There are many examples in literary criticism--competing for a job, a grant, an award. In other competitions the scarcity of the "object" sought (the reward) creates a "survival of the fittest" context and the "game" has to be played until winners are determined. In literary criticism, competing for publications, jobs, promotions, and salaries has the structure of a "win/lose" (vs. "prize") competition. In this type of competition the salient factor is not necessarily ability but perseverance, fortitude, endurance, doggedness, and so on.

When we look at literary criticism as an institution through the lens of competition, that is, when we study the ways in which critical argumentation has been institutionalized as a competition, a peculiar distortion of critical inquiry comes to light. In order to decide between winners and losers in the various career games we all play, administrators, in choosing to focus upon the success of critical arguments, force critics to reify their understanding. Knowledge, as Pierre Bourdieu argues, becomes "symbolic capital," (171-183). What we know has to be quantifiable, measurable and therefore cumulative. We might say that insights have to be converted into information in order to be accumulated. In this system, the goal of criticism is to "accumulate knowledge," hence the critic who has accumulated the most knowledge gets the most rewards. Central to this system is falsification.

Let's take a simple example. Jack believes that "X" is the meaning of poem "1." He argues his case on the grounds of the beliefs "A, B, and C" which he takes to be factual. Jill believes that "y" is the meaning of poem "1." She argues her case on the grounds of "a, d, and q." What are Jack's options? Well, obviously, he could agree. He could say, "I was mistaken in believing B and C." If he does so, he admits his reading is false and is no longer eligible for an institutional reward. False arguments are not rewarded. So, in order to maintain his reading, Jack has to say either that d and q are irrelevant or that not-d and not-q are the facts. In other words, to survive the competition among readers, he must maintain his beliefs, otherwise he admits to error and loses status or merit.

In his *Psychology of Intelligence*, Jean Piaget terms the form of intellection I have just described "assimilation," namely, the tendency to assimilate all new experiences into the cognitive frameworks one already possesses. He contrasts this mode of intellection to "accommodation," wherein inquirers allow new experiences to "break down" the frameworks they are accustomed to using. It can be safely said that the institution of criticism encourages assimilation. It does not help your career to go around explaining

how you are in error.

Considering that the institution of criticism encourages assimilation and therefore falsification as the cognitive strategies best suited to the accumulation of knowledge (information), we might, recalling Cixous' use of "the proper," term this cognitive style "appropriation." Appropriation is the acquisition of knowledge understood as an entity (identities, samenesses, i.e. information); it is the assimilation of concepts into a governing framework. Appropriation is an arrogation, confiscation, seizure of concepts. Ideas can be owned and sold at will. They are proper-ties. A contrasting mode of intellection, like intuition, a term I prefer to the term "insight," often involves the in-appropriate, the disconcerting, and so on. Inappropriate because painful, humiliating; disconcerting in forcing one to change one's beliefs. Moreover, intuitions are not appropriatable and thus nothing gets accumulated. Intuitions are unspecifiable. Intuitions are multiple, diverse, ad hoc, diffuse, etc. Whereas logical problems have single solutions, intuited problems have plural solutions and often appear illogical.

For post-moderns, thankfully, the veracity of criticism is not a matter of logic. Thought is not single, unified, centered, present. Though I cannot rehearse post-modern critiques of logocentrism here, I believe that I am not alone in thinking that texts do not provide a factual ground to interpretive claims, that writers and readers are discursive subjects who cannot be codified, that distinctions between correct and incorrect are purely conventional, that truth is a signifier like all others. In short, in post-modern theorizing, the very possibility of falsification is thoroughly undermined as a worthwhile intellectual endeavor.

If falsification does not lead to knowledge, then why do we continue to accept it? Obviously, it serves some other purpose. In the case of traditional criticism, the purpose is to regulate competition. Competition always requires rules. Falsification is the governing rule. Thus, modern criticism is no more than a competition governed by an arbitrary rule interpreted by those institutionally empowered to do so. Falsificity is a mechanism of a disciplinary apparatus to regulate competition. In an academic context, "regulation of competition" refers to the rules that govern the attribution of merit to critical performances. Every competition has to have fixed rules to insure the result that someone will win. Falsification is a regulating mechanism in the sense that it is like tagging the person who is "it." Falsifying reminds one of the fiction boys use in childhood wargames--when an enemy is shot, the victor shouts, "you're dead!," moving on to surprise the next opponent. Falsification is a similar device used by successful competitors to establish their progress (over the corpses of rival critics) along the way to winning. In critical games, though rationalized as a reward for possessing "the best idea" among one's opponents, the competition is for a grade, a degree, a job, a publication, a promotion, a grant, an appointment. The awarding of these prizes in no way guarantees the value of the inquiry. Another irony in this system is that, whereas rules--like falsification--are designed to regulate, to keep under control the aggression involved, they have the effect of increasing it. Falsification, though construed as a regulator, functions only as a measurement of the logicity and frequency of successful counter-

claims; hence, it has the effect of multiplying falsifications.

This system intensifies competition and leads to what I call intellectual machismo, the tendency toward an exaggerated expression of competition for the acquisition and appropriation of ideas. It is an exercise of power. In this sense, it is an instance of domination. The instigator, the person who picks the fight, confirms his sense that he is better than his rival often by creating a situation in which the rival, taken by surprise, is overwhelmed. In this scenario knowledge is power. Oddly, since it is an intellectually trivial pursuit, this wargame has the character of a parlorgame. The machismic critic scores by knowing the most recent article, the exact date, the most stinging review, the precise reference, the received opinion, and so on. A side effect of these games is that it becomes impossible for the critic whose intellectual style is machismic to admit error. It is regarded as a fault, an embarrassment. This is a ridiculous posture. Ironically, the machismic intellectual, by telling what is obviously a kind of lie, places himself in a ludicrous position if he wishes finally to reach some understanding. Nevertheless, the machismic intellectual's discourse is permeated by utterances like, "Professor X is wrong." Because, in the institution of criticism, falsification is bound up with the notion of "wrong-doing," intellectual machismo has a Rambo effect. The heroic critic is obligated morally to rescue thinkers from the prisons of illogic, to stand up to illogic when no one else cares. He is armed to the teeth with falsifications. Nothing but his self-esteem is left in his wake. He is the supreme falsifier, appropriator, assimilator.

Assimilation, the hallmark of appropriation, mechanizes falsification. When undertaken aggressively, it becomes a machine that falsifies everything in its path. The machine is a simple idea-mower, a handy procrustean mechanism. The machismic intellectual already has a set of beliefs to encompass his world. When he encounters someone else's belief, either of two events occur. Either, the announced belief squares with his own and can be assimilated as a confirmation of what he already believes, in which case verification occurs as a kind of negative falsification (we're right, so they're wrong). Or, as is more often the case, the announced belief does not square with his and is assimilated into his belief system as an error. In the latter instance, the Ramboist (this is, after all, a school of thought that needs a name) finds counter-evidence in his stock of beliefs, or identifies a lapse in logic, or invokes an authority (someone who believes what he believes). In short, since he cannot assimilate a belief that is inconsistent with his belief system, it enters his framework as a false belief. In his Ramboistic wargames, critical arguments are not distinguishable from quarrels. Quarrelling is "a dispute or disagreement, especially one marked by anger and deep resentment" and "implies heated verbal strife" that "often suggests continued hostility as a result," (WNWD). This describes Ramboistic criticism (fault-finding) in which machismic critics engage.

Though arguments are said to be logical, dispassionate, detached, impersonal, objective and so on, and in this sense, can be regarded culturally as "masculine," looked at closely, especially in the light of a critique of falsification, they are difficult to distinguish from quarrels. Oddly, the more one examines arguments (intellectual

masculinity), the more one finds quarrels (intellectual effeminateness). Similarly, the more one looks at intuition and the confession of error, etc., (intellectual femininity), the more it looks like a strong, incisive, powerful mode of knowing (intellectual virility).

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#### Intellectual Compassion, Commitment, Collaboration, Concurrence, & Community

Literary criticism is intellectual work. Unlike work-for-profit, the success of which can be enhanced by competition, intellectual work requires compassion, commitment, collaboration, concurrence, and community. I list these as alternatives to the components of traditional criticism I have critiqued. In this section of the paper, I try to articulate my intuitions about them. I admit at the outset that not all of them are obvious alternatives to a competitive system. Collaboration is clearly an alternative to competition, compassion to machismo, intellectual community to scholarly individualism. Once I supply the phrase for which the term stands, it becomes clear that commitment-to-the-public-welfare is an alternative aspiration to self-interested-careerism. Concurrence, however, is not the obvious alternative to appropriation. Consequently, in what follows I write about concurrence incoherently, hoping to stir further discussion.

Let me begin with the need for intellectual compassion. Compassion is ordinarily understood as "sorrow for the sufferings or troubles of another" (*WNWD*) and can be related to the kind of empathy that is necessary for a commitment to collaborative concurrence about painful problems relevant to a community. I contrast it with intellectual machismo. Intellectual compassion allows one intellectual to enter imaginatively into the problematic of another. Problems occasion pain, suffering, etc. This is why they need to be solved. Collaboration, which for me is a desirable alternative to competition, depends upon the ability of one intellectual to enter into the pain or suffering that another is attempting to resolve. This contrasts to the kind of intellectual antagonism that competition spawns which interferes with the resolution of problems.

In this essay, problems are not equivalent to puzzles. A problem is a condition or situation that is not only perplexing, but one which is frustrating, painful, etc. It occasions pain, suffering and so on. Because a problem is also perplexing and difficult, it calls for the articulation of many questions. Each question differs. Questioning requires the breaking down of preconceived frameworks because of the difficulty of formulating the problem in a way that does not simply appropriate it. Collaborative inquiry is not an instance of differing perspectives ultimately coming together in a unified framework. In this situation, intellectual concurrence (rather than appropriation) is sought out. Concurrence, by which I mean an agreement to join intellectual forces to get something done, is a plausible alternative to appropriation only on the condition that the differences among the researchers are allowed free play. In this form of collaboration, researchers are invited into the group not because they represent the same point of view but because

they represent different and even incompatible points of view. Since getting-at-"my"-truth no longer governs the inquiry, quarrels are abandoned while concurrence is sought because any idea that helps solve the problem helps. Removing contradictions or inconsistencies from one's discourse is less important than resolving the cultural conflicts we call racism, elitism or sexism. Concurrence of this sort is particularly desirable in literary research.

Literary criticism calls for intellectual collaboration. The form of critical collaboration I have been advocating converges upon the apprehension of a problem and the critics involved band together to seek solutions to it. This form of collaboration in literary criticism occurs when a group of differing intellectuals, bound together by the acknowledgement of a textual/cultural problem, concur about a possible reading of it. By concurring, they do not seek conformity; they seek the coincidences among their differences. In this collaboration, concurrences about the problem and the solution are transpersonal. This does not necessarily imply a common ideal or *telos* holding the group together. Intellectual compassion and care hold the group together. In this form of collaboration, intellectual subject positions are not configured competitively. Differences are crucial. Reading is not an appropriation by an individual; it is the political concurrence of a group.

Inescapably, collaboration is the heart of the practice of literary study, despite the patriarch's insistence upon individualistic readings. How do we therefore explain that we rarely acknowledge it? In "Competition, Compassion, and Community: Models for a Feminist Ethos," Maria C. Lugones and Elizabeth V. Spelman write that:

The desire to excel, the desire to avoid obscurity, and the desire for distinction become definitive of a competitive attitude in a context of opposition and they come, in their turn, to be shaped by this context. For at the heart of the desire to excel in the context of opposition, is the desire to excel not merely in some non-comparative sense, but to excel over others, to better them. . . . The overriding preoccupation is with standing out against the performances of others. . . .

A competitor qua competitor sustains quite a different conception of herself and others than she would if she were engaged in activities in which it is appropriate to think about other humans as needy or as collaborators. (236-237)

As they remind us, competition is "essentially self-centered," (237). It makes "one's own success and well-being . . . impossible without someone else's failure and/or misery," (241). But, they argue, there is an alternative to the politics of competition--communal excelling.

Collaboration takes place within the polis, the aggregate of communities. An intellectual community is a concurrence of intellectuals. Intellectual communities engender different and sometimes competing collaborations.

There are contexts in which the desire to avoid obscurity and the desire for

excellence are not only compatible with but necessary ingredients of projects that are properly communal. In those cases these desires are incompatible with an individualistic conception of excellence and of the participants in the project. (Lugones/Spelman, 238)

Though the word, "community" includes the word "unity," communities are not unities. Obviously, a notion of community can be deconstructed by pointing out that it implies an essential, central, unity, by pointing out that it implies the "presence" of some entity. My concern here is not so much with the aberrations of a metaphysics of presence but with the naive assumption that communities are in fact unities. I do not mean to suggest by privileging the word "community" that every individual in a community communes, that is, moves through the understanding of common goals and ideals toward identity, sameness. Though the word unfortunately suggests some kind of entity that is unified, it is possible to think of a community as a theatre in which intellectual "play" is dramatized. In this play, the dramatis personae, each with distinct characteristics uniquely performed, act together toward a resolution of a problem. This is a play of differences that concurrently respond to a problem differentially perceived. In this play, critics enjoy differing subject positions and their characters change, that is, they exchange subject positions. The bond of an intellectual community is intellectual compassion, the imaginative entry into another's problem.

In the terms now under discussion, critical inquiry is the compassionate accommodation of difference. Such inquiries are, by this definition, collaborative. But, to be housed in universities, collaborative inquirers (research groups) must, in some sense, share problems with communities. And, ultimately, communities of intellectuals can only legitimize themselves in the institution of criticism to the extent that they inquire into problems characterizing the various public spheres that make up our cultural formation. These are not individualizing possibilities and considering them brings us circuitously back to a consideration of "theory" (but not a man-driven one). Although falsification cannot and should not be recuperated by post-modern critics, in the context of communal inquiry, it seems foolish, if not impossible, to try to do without the heuristic value of error. Problems surely are related to errors. To inquire requires error. It is the breaking apart of pre-conceptions. Inquiries are written (or, in a grammatical sense, inscribed) as questions. Just as texts are intertexts that encompass myriad cultural formations, so inquiries are texts. Knowing this is theorizing.

Theorizing is not necessarily making theories. Theory-making is patriarchal. Theory is often used as a weapon. Theory is an effective instrument of falsification. And so on. But systematic theories that feed into competitive schemes are only the husk of theorizing. It is in the understanding of a problem through differing intuitions of it that theorizing occurs. Out of these intuitions arises a more general view of critical performance than available to the solitary scholar. Competition obscures this phenomenon. In a competition among critics, theories become machines of falsification. They are used to refute the assumptions of rival critics. But, in a communal inquiry, theorizing is informed by intellectual compassion. It arises out of the urgency to end the

pain associated with a specific problem. In that endeavor, performances must be made as effective as possible. Theorizing helps.

The pre-condition of possibility for intellectual compassion, commitment, collaboration, concurrence, and community is the de-masculinization of the *Magister Implicatus*. Why quarrel?

## Notes

I would like to thank my colleagues Ann Ardis, Dale Bauer, Art Casciato, Susan Jarratt, Kristina Straub, Andy Lakritz of Miami University and Patricia Harkin of Akron University for their intellectual compassion. Because of the intellectual community their concurrence occasions, what I have written is, in most respects, collaborative.