Desirable Diction: Language and Gender in Kathy Acker's Fiction

Faye Allison Trecartin

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Abstract

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Faye Allison Trecartin

Controversy has always surrounded the work of Kathy Acker. She has been accused by some of being an anti-feminist and was subsequently banned in Germany. Some literary critics have simply dismissed her as being a bad writer and she was charged with plagiarism and copyright infringement in England. In contrast, this thesis will explore how Acker has challenged some of Western bourgeois civilization's most hallowed principles: the sanctity of feminine purity and the exalted status and proprietary nature of originality and creativity.

Through a chapter by chapter analysis of Acker's oeuvre, I will establish that the use of plagiarism, imitation, mimicry and schizophrenia is an <u>écriture feminine</u> that reestablishes women's language and desire as a productive force and energy, rather than a lack, and denaturalizes concepts such as gender and identity. I will accomplish this by examining Acker's novels and the writers and intellectuals she admires, as well as using appropriate theoretical approaches from the fields of poststructuralism, narrative theory, psychoanalysis, and feminism when applicable.

To Laszlo Gefin who helped "Unscrew the locks from the door and the doors themselves from the jambs!"

Also many thanks to my readers Bina Freiwald, for her support over the years, and to Marcie Frank, for her helpful comments.

And to Norma and Jill who know why.

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> This writing is all fake (copied from other writing), so you should go away and not read any of it.
>
> Kathy Acker
> Translations of the diaries of Laure the Schoolgirl (1983)

Controversy has always surrounded the publication of Kathy Acker's novels; polemical comments such as the one quoted above have provoked certain critics to dismiss her work outright. For instance, while living in England during the 1980s, Acker was accused of "plagiarizing" four pages from a novel by Harold Robbins entitled The Pirate. She was subsequently charged with copyright infringement and had a collection of her early works withdrawn from publication.

The plagiarized segment in Acker's novel The Adult Life of Toulouse-Lautrec recounts the story of a wealthy white woman who seduces a young black man in a disco. Acker changed the woman's name to Jacqueline Onassis and called the section in her novel "I want to Be Raped Every Night. Story of a Rich Woman." Both Acker's and Robbins' publisher agreed to remove the book from stores and tried to force her to apologize publicly. In a recent interview, Acker defended herself against breach of copyright law by claiming that

> [w]hat a writer does, in nineteenth-century terms, is that he takes a certain amount of experience and

> he "represents" that material. What I'm doing is simply taking text to be the same as the world, to be equal to non-text, in fact to be more real than non-text, and to start representing text. So it's quite clear, I took Harold Robbins and represented it. I didn't copy it. I didn't say it was mine. . . . Robbins is really soft core porn, so I wanted to see what would happen if you changed contexts and just upped the sexuality of the language. ("Devoured" 13)

Acker speaks idiosyncratically of her plagiaristic strategy as a "literary theory" or "literary method." She describes this technique as a type of active reading:

> You just take other texts and you put them in different contexts to see how they work. You take texts apart and look at the language that's being used, the genre, the kind of sentence structure, there's a lot of contexts here that most readers don't see. ("Devoured" 14)

By enabling readers to perceive the carefully constructed nature of fiction and discourse, Acker demonstrates that concepts such as language, genre, and syntax are foundational structures that inform our perceptions of the world. Plagiarism, then, works to undermine the highly questionable essentialist nature of these ideas:

> By breaking down idealisms. I bring everything to the material level. Active verbs; present participles and the past perfects of these active verbs; these kinds of adjectives or the redoubled prefixes of verbs rather than adverbs; commas and dashes rather than full stops. The abolition of psychological, humanistic, and metaphysical terms. . . . There is no idealist proposal. ("The Invisible Universe" 83)

I will argue that Acker is espousing a theory of intertextuality, a term that entered theoretical discourse in the mid-1960s in Julia Kristeva's famous essay on Mikhail

Bakhtin, "Word, Dialogue, and Novel" in which she claims that works of literature are comprised of an anonymous textual landscape; she insists that "[w]hat allows a dynamic dimension to structuralism is his conception of the 'literary word' as an intersection of textual surfaces rather than a point (as fixed meaning), as a dialogue among several writings . . ." (65). Roland Barthes made similar assertions in his influential "The Death of the Author" in which he advocates a rejection of authority:

> We know now that the text is not a line of words releasing a single theological meaning (the message of the Author-God) but a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable centres of culture. (146)

However, it is Gérard Genette in Palimpsestes: La littérature au second degré (1982) who has done the most to categorize and classify the different aspects of intertextuality. In Palimpsestes, intertextuality is just one feature of Genette's general term for his notion of textual transcendence named "transtextualité":

> Je dirais plutôt aujourd'hui, plus largement, que cet objet [de la poétique] est la transtextualité, ou transcendence textuelle du texte, que je définissais déjà, grossièrement, par "tout ce qui le met en relation, manifeste ou secrète, avec d'autres textes." (7)
>
> I say today, more generally, that the object (of poetics) is transtextuality, or the textual trancendence of the text, which I have already crudely defined as "all obvious or shrouded

relationships between texts."[1]

According to Genette, there are five types of transtextual relations: intertextuality, paratext, metatextuality, architextuality, and hypertextuality. The first transtextual association, "intertextuality," is the realm of Kristeva and includes the use of quotation with quotation marks, with or without a precise reference, as well as plagiarism. In contrast to Acker, Genette defines plagiarism as both a literal, undeclared borrowing of texts or, in its more explicit and less literal form, as allusion. Allusion is the domain of Michael Riffaterre and can be divided into two categories: "intertext" and "critique." For Genette, "... intertexte est la perception, par le lecteur, de rapports entre une oeuvre et d'autres qui l'ont précédée ou suivie" ("intertext is the perception, by the reader, of the relationship between a work and others that have preceded or followed it" [9]). "Critique" studies the detailed semantico-stylistic microstructures of literature.

The second type of transtextuality is "paratext" and as the term suggests includes all that is almost text: titles, sub-titles, subheadings, prefaces, postfaces, forewords, and the like, as well as author's notes, marginal notes, epigraphs, illustrations, inserts, wrappers, book jackets, autographs, or allographs. For example, although James Joyce removed subtitles from the chapter titles of Ulysses, this

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[1]. All translations of Genette are my own.

fact is not overlooked by the critics who consider paratext as an important element of transtextuality.

In Genette's classificatory system,

> [l]e troisième type de transcendence textuelle, que je nomme métatextualité, est la relation, on dit plus couramment de 'commentaire,' qui unit un texte à un autre texte dont il parle, sans nécessairement le citer (le convoquer), voir, à la limite, sans le nommer. (11)
>
> The third category of textual transcendence, which I call metatextuality, is the relationship, commonly known as 'commentary,' that unites one text to another without necessarily citing, speaking, or naming it.

Genette cites Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit as the perfect example of the critical relation because it evokes, allusively and silently, Diderot's Rameau's Nephew.

"Architextuality" is the most abstract, yet the most implicit, of Genette's transtextual relations and it refers to the pure taxonomic appearance of a text, or, in other words, its generic quality. There is usually a paratextual reference in the title that can be refuted by critics, readers, or the public. One example is the Roman de la Rose which is not a romance and he points out that "... la perception générique, on le sait oriente et détermine dans une large mesure 'l'horizon d'attente' du lecteur, et donc la réception de l'oeuvre" (". . . the generic perception of a work directs and determines the 'horizon of expectation' of the reader and ultimately the reception of the work" [12]).

Finally, Genette defines the term "hypertextuality" as,

> . . . toute relation unissant un texte B (que

> j'appellerai hypertexte) à un texte anterieur A (que j'appellerai, bien sûr, hypotexte sur lequel il se greffe d'une manière qui n'est pas celle du commentaire. (13)
>
> . . . all relationships that unite text B [which I will call the hypertext] with a previous text A [which I will call hypotext] upon which it grafts itself in a way which is not that of commentary.

The french verb se greffe means to graft, to scion, or to slip and usually refers to skin grafts or organ transplants. This grafting of one text (hypertext) upon another (hypotext) is Genette's general notion of a text at second degree (au second degré) that manifests itself in two different forms: one is descriptive and intellectual in which one text "speaks" of another, for instance, Aristotle writing about Oedipus Rex; or, hypertextuality, in which the hypertext never speaks of the hypotext, but otherwise could not exist without some sort of transformation of the anterior text, and consequently, it more or less manifestly evokes the previous text without necessarily speaking of it. Genette's examples of hypertextuality are Virgil's The Aeneid and Joyce's Ulysses which are two hypertexts of the same hypotext, Homer's Odyssey. These are, however, very different transformations. Ulysses is a simple or direct transformation that consists of transposing action from The Odyssey to twentieth-century Dublin. By contrast, the transformation from The Odyssey to The Aeneid is more complex and indirect; it recounts a different story, but it is inspired by the generic type (both formally and thematically) established by Homer. Joyce's novel is a work of substitution that tells the same story in

a different style; Virgil's epic tells a different story but in the same style.

The imitative practice of indirect transformation is the description par excellence of the literary strategy Acker utilizes over and over in her work; it is what she calls plagiarism (which should not be confused with Genette's concept of intertextual plagiarism). One has only to think of Acker's Great Expectations or Don Quixote that follow their hypotexts closely, yet tell a previously unimaginable story. Through repetition and revision Acker gives the "originals" a new life and currency.

Significantly, in Genette's classification, the indirect transformation of imitation is far more complex and mediating as it requires generic competence and it highlights the non-originary nature of fiction and discourse. For instance, in one of Genette's many literary examples, he insists that contrary to Fielding's claim in his preface to Joseph Andrews (1742), Cervantes' Don Quixote is not the first modern, or realist novel. In fact, the novel's hypertextual character is much more important than Fielding suggests:

> Don Quichotte n'est pas avant tout un hidalgo (c'est-à-dire, en fait, guère plus qu'un picaro) qui court les routes, leurs villages et leurs auberges: il est avant tout un hidalgo qui veut vivre en chevalier, c'est-à-dire comme les héros des romans de chevalier. La référence à ce modèle commande absolument le statut de l'oeuvre. (201-2)
>
> Don Quixote is not above all a hidalgo (that is to say, in fact, scarcely any better than a picaro) who travels the roads, their villages and their inns: he is above all a hidalgo who wants to live

> as a knight, that is to say, like the heros of chivalrous romances. The reference to this model absolutely controls the status of the work.

According to Genette, there are only a limited amount of stories and metaphors available to humanity, yet his concept of hypertextuality includes the inexhaustible and incessant rereading, rewriting, and recirculation of texts. Acker makes a similar assertion in an essay entitled "A Few Notes":

> I now wonder where the idea or the ideology of creativity started. Shakespeare and company certainly stole from, copied each other's writings. Before them, the Greeks didn't bother making up any new stories. I suspect that the ideology of creativity started when the bourgeoisie . . . made a capitalistic marketplace for books. (33)

Recent research into the history of copyright law and intellectual property has proved that Acker's and Genette's suspicions are correct. Responding to Michel Foucault's famous, yet neglected, questioning of the autnor-function in "What is an Author," Martha Woodmansee in The Author, Art, and the Market (1994) has substantiated the notion that the ideology of creativity, moving from the idea of the writer (Gr. rhine, to file, scratch, inscribe) to author (Lat. auctor, originator, founder, creator), emerged at the beginning of the eighteenth century. The concept of the "author," who is uniquely responsible for a self-contained and original work, appeared in response to the growing middle class reading public three hundred years ago. With the development of this new market, substantial profits were at stake and a discursive cultural war broke out amongst three

groups: the publishers, who paid minimal honorariums for intellectual labour; literary pirates, who made fortunes by reprinting inexpensive editions; and the authors of works, who were frantically trying to make a living by the pen after the dissolution of the court patronage system.

The first law that regulated the book trade was the Statute of Anne passed in England in 1709. It was not really a law but a "privilege" granted by the court which protected the rights of printers but not authors. According to Woodmansee, "[t]he privilege, like the honorarium, harks back to an earlier conception of writing as a vehicle of something which by its very nature is public--that is, knowledge--and is therefore free to be reproduced at will" (46). With the growth of the book market and piracy, more pressure was placed by authors on the powers that were to protect them. This pressure took the form of aesthetic tracts that sought to prove that "form" was the exclusive property of the author. Copyright law as we understand it now did not become recognized in legislation until 1810 when Baden, Germany adopted and adapted the Napoleonic Code as state law.[2]

Alexander Pope (1688-1744), the first writer to live solely from the earnings of his writings, began to shift the emphasis away from the idea that a writer is a craftsman. While Pope is often cited for chastising novelty in favour of

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[2]. For an excellent summary of the history of intellectual property see Woodmansee's chapter entitled "Genius and the Copyright," pp. 33-55.

the fresh expression of traditional wisdom in his Essay on Criticism (1711), he also states therein that the writer is capable of accomplishing something original by violating the rules of craftsmanship:

> Music resembles poetry; in each
> Are nameless graces which no methods teach,
> And which a master hand alone can reach. ...
> Great wits sometimes may gloriously offend,
> And rise to faults true critics dare not mend;
> From vulgar bounds with brave disorder part,
> And snatch a grace beyond the Reach of Art.
> (II. 143-53)

For Woodmansee, this statement of the importance of inspiration distinguishes Pope from his ancestral arbiters of taste in the Renaissance or Neo-Classical periods, when the writer was considered a skilled labourer who expertly mastered a "body of rules, or techniques, preserved and handed down in rhetoric and poetics, for manipulating traditional materials in order to achieve the effects prescribed by the cultivated audience of the court to which he owed both his livelihood and social status" (36). During this historical epoch, inspiration was used to describe exceptional manipulated effects in literature, but its source was always defined externally, "attributable to a higher, external agency--if not to a muse, then to divine dictation" (36-7).

With the advent of the capitalist marketplace, inspiration became more and more internalized creating a work that was the product and property of the author, in other words, a commodity. This aesthetic ideology culminated in the writings of William Wordsworth (1770-1850), who believed that

"[g]enius is the introduction of a new element into the intellectual universe: or, if that be not allowed, it is the application of powers to objects on which they had not before been exercised ..." (qtd in Woodmansee p. 39). Here, the author-genius introduces "new elements" into the "universe," much like the Old Testament God introduced light into the dark world of chaos. The concept of form as the author-genius's "application of powers to objects" helped pave the way for the acceptance of the idea that property can be both ideal and real. This shift in aesthetic theory signalled a movement away from a honorarium system to an equivalence between work and payment (known as copyright or intellectual property). In many respects, the poets and essayist of the eighteenth and nineteenth century wrote personally motivated critical tracts. This is not to say that these authors were undeserving of remuneration, but that their personal motives have been mystified over time, leading to an aesthetics which masks the external and inherited conceptions of artistic production.

In Woodmansee's account the concept of the "author" and the economic reality of the capitalist marketplace had specific consequences for women writers. Using the historical case of Sophie von La Roche (1733-1813), who wrote Germany's first epistolary novel, she recounts how women's writing was easily dismissed under the ideology of genius. Even though La Roche's Fraulein von Sternheim profoundly influenced Germany's Sturm und Drang writers, notably Goethe's Werther (1774), her

oeuvre was contained within the editorship of her mentor, Christoph Martin Wieland (1733-1813). In accordance with the contemporary ideal of feminine modesty, the author's name did not appear on the title page and credit was given to its editor: "The Story of Fraulein von Sternheim. As Extrapolated by a Lady Friend from Original Papers and Other Reliable Sources. Edited by C.M. Wieland" (qtd. in Woodmansee, p. 105). In his preface to La Roche's influential novel, Wieland emphasized the amateur origins and domestic utility of the work, as well as the author's lack of "professional 'artistic' ambition" (107); La Roche had no new ideas and her style was considered to have been marred by stylistic quirks. Wieland even went so far as to insist that critics address their objections to LaRoche's work to him. In doing so, he absolved La Roche from her responsibility for the work's "flaws," but also her claim to authorship, with its subsequent monetary reward:

> By thus minimizing La Roche's accomplishment in the preface of her first novel, Wieland may have smoothed its acceptance by readers resistant to the idea of women writing professionally, but he simultaneously removed it from the class of texts worthy of the particular kind of reading and rereading we have identified with the then just evolving category of literary art. (108)

According to Woodmansee, La Roche subsequently disappeared from the enshrined "pantheon" of Germany's writer, barely resurfacing as Wieland's "muse."

To compensate for this historical blindspot in literary aesthetics, much recent feminist criticism was initially

influenced by the theory of "gynocritics" or the theory of images of women in women's literature espoused by writers like Elaine Showalter.[1] In gynocritics, the act of reading is seen as communication between the life experience of the author and the life of the reader. This aesthetic is based on the highly questionable Lukàcsian notion that writing can and should reflect life accurately and inclusively in every detail. However, such a view resolutely refuses to consider textual production as a highly complex and over-determined process with many different and conflicting literary and non-literary determinants. Another strain in feminist literary criticism attempts to define a literary tradition marked by the female author's ambitious wish. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's The Madwoman in the Attic (1979) is the first classic text to argue for a distinctly female imagination. Working from Harold Bloom's concept of "the anxiety of influence," this text discusses women's fear of lack of originality when faced by the father's pen/phallus. For these critics, writing occurs through "misprision," a misuse of male traditions and genres. Yet the writers Gilbert and Gubar discuss were duplicitious in their subversion of "author"ity.

In contrast, Acker has plagiarized openly and this fact differentiates her from other women writers who have been

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1. See Elaine Showalter, "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness," Critical Inquiry Vol. 8 (Winter 1981): 179-205.

boldly, yet perhaps desperately, claiming a legitimate voice for themselves over the past two centuries without questioning the ideological nature of authenticity and its role in a capitalist marketplace.

Acker sets out in another direction, exploring and embracing the idea of being a "fake." And why not? For centuries, women have been accused of imitative practices, from faking orgasms to mimicking male art. As Janey Smith in Blood and Guts in High School claims

> For 2,000 years you've had the nerve to tell women who we are. We use your words; we eat your food. Every way we get money has to be a crime. We are plagiarists, liars, and criminals. (132)

Like many marginal groups living on the edge of legally sanctioned economic activity, women's means of survival are often considered criminal and suspect, a pale reflection of the actions performed by those with free access to the legitimate marketplace.

However, it is important to establish that neither Acker nor Genette believe that the project of literature is exhausted; the idea being challenged is originary nature rather than creativity. For instance, Genette conceives of his hypertextuality as an "open structuralism" (structuralisme ouvert) that not only decodes internal structures, but "... ou l'on voit comment un texte (un mythe) peut--si l'on veut bien l'y aider--'en lire un autre.'" ("wherein one can see how one text (a myth) can--if one helps it--read another" [557]). One of the most obvious, yet significant, challenges of

Acker's imitations is the change in gender of the plagiarized protagonists. For example, her Don Quixote, unlike Cervantes' or Borges', is a female knight/night. Acker forces the reader to ask the question: What is the result of this transformation? Like Cervantes' Don Quixote, Acker's knight/night has read too many books of the wrong kind and embraces a romantic, idealist vision; nevertheless, her historically constructed position as woman alters this story significantly.

Similarly, French feminist and psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray also describes the castrated position women are forced to assume in western society and she challenges women to change this cultural constellation from <u>within male discourse</u>. She has noted in <u>Speculum of the Other Woman</u>,

> But if, by exploits of her hand, woman were to reopen paths into (once again) a/one logos that connotes her as castrated, especially as castrated of words. . . . But how is this to be done? Given that, once again, the "reasonable" words--to which in any case she has access only through mimicry. . . . (142)

Irigaray's reaction to the paradox of writing that mimics through the use of reasonable words is to "turn everything upside down. . . . Insist also and deliberately upon those <u>blanks</u> in discourse which recall the places of her exclusion. . . . <u>Overthrow syntax</u> by suspending its eternally teleological order, by snipping the wires, cutting the current, breaking the circuits, switching the connections, by modifying continuity, alternation, frequency, intensity"

(142). Acker responds to Irigaray's call by turning everything upside down, overthrowing syntax, and also by re-presenting "reasonable" words and resorting to mimicry. It is from these vantage points that I have begun to evaluate Acker's work, as well as women's writing in general.

Acker's plagiarisms, or imitations, have changed in content and form over the years, running the gamut of Genette's transtextuality. Her first plagiarisms in the early 1970s were based on the cut-up experiments of William Burroughs and Brion Gysin in Minutes to Go (1960). By 1978, Acker's Blood and Guts in High School uses the format of a "book report" to recapitulate the plot of The Scarlet Letter, Hawthorne's classic indictment of American puritanism and the repression of female desire. A book report is also what one learns to do while in high school and questions the ideological state apparatus of nationalized educational systems. Acker's imitations of Great Expectations and Don Quixote in the early 1980s are the most obvious examples of Genette's concept of hypertextuality and literature at a second degree. By the time Empire of the Senseless was published in 1988, Acker was using a more narrative and easily recognizable structure than her previous novels; Empire is much more silently allusive in the sense that often one must have read the texts that Acker plagiarizes in order to detect their appearance in her novel. Nonetheless, Empire also closely imitates, among many texts, Mark Twain's The

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, and transforms Abhor, its main character, into a Huck Finn obsessed with sexism rather than racism. Following Genette's dictum, Acker tells the same story but with a different message.

I also believe that Acker's literary plagiarisms serve as an analogy to the state of female desire in our society. In as much as women have always been accused of being plagiarists and liars, of using male words and discourse, they have also been forced to manifest a passive desire that operates as a pale imitation, or plagiarism, of male desire. Since we do not know, as Freud far from innocently suggested, "What women want," her desire has been relegated to mirroring male desire. Consequently, to expose this plagiarism openly through this analogy becomes a kind of revolutionary female writing, an écriture feminine that provides the key to unlock the chastity belt of female writing and desire.

It is important to establish Acker as a revolutionary woman writer, as she has been accused by many critics, including certain feminists, of glorifying pornographic or masochistic fantasies. For instance, Blood and Guts in High School was banned in Germany for promoting kindersex and several writers who supported feminist issues were cited in the court judgement. In Wolkenkratzer (Skyscraper Art Journal), Karin Haderhold, points out that "language is first of all a method of verbal communication, at any given time in daily life, but it can also be alienated and lifted to a level

where it works as communication in the sense of emotional contact. This kind of literature utilizes texts and functions like a distorting mirror."[4] The newspaper, Aachener Illustrierte, remarks: "It is a pity that if a woman throws herself into literary chasms she cannot come up with any varieties or excesses going beyond the traditional male fantasies."[5] However, it is important to recognize that in Acker's novels, relationships between sadistic men and slavish masochistic women represent customary sexual transactions in patriarchal culture. To be generous to Acker's oeuvre, the reader must realize that the quest for an articulation of an active, rather than reactive, female desire is crucial to any discussion of her work. In a sexist culture, female fantasies of masochism are often the only examples of an active female desire--the masochistic literally wills her torture. As Janey Smith says in Blood and Guts in High School, "Sex in America is S&M" (99).

A theory of hypertextuality demonstrates that writing and desire are glued to history and discourse; it suggests that concepts that define gender roles are far from permanent and the ways in which they have previously been defined are

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4. January 11, 1986. From the German court judgement decision of September 18, 1986 that banned Tough Girls Don't Cry, (Blood and Guts in High School). Rpt. in Hannibal Lecter, My Father, pp. 142-8.

5. Issue 2/86. From the German court judgement decision of September 18, 1986 that banned Tough Girls Don't Cry, (Blood and Guts in High School). Rpt. in Hannibal Lecter, My Father, pp. 142-8.

contestable. If Acker writes about female masochism, it is not to state that it represents "essential" female desire. On the contrary, she consistently shows how this type of desire is constructed in a materialist, male-dominated society where female desire is often defined as inactive, the negative term in dualisms such as male/female, mind/body, and so on. Instead of denying these fantasies, Acker explores them to uncover why they have such a tenacious hold on women's imaginations. Her writings are not an inscription, but a performance of an inscription. As feminist philosopher Judith Butler has recently stated concerning agency in an era of the disappearing subject, "[t]he task is not whether to repeat, but how to repeat or, indeed, to repeat and, through a radical proliferation of gender, <u>to displace</u> the very gender norms that enable the repetition itself" (148).

One must also remember that Acker began investigating plagiarism through the use of experiments with schizophrenia and her readings of intellectuals involved in the anti-psychiatry movement. She has been largely influenced by R.D. Laing and later by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Their concept of schizophrenia is based on a particular theory of desire in which desire creates need rather than needs creating desire. In short, Deleuze and Guattari believe that desire is productive and not grounded in a lack of an inherent human want: "Desire is not bolstered by needs, but rather the contrary; needs are derived from desire: they are

counterproducts within the real that desire produces" (Anti-Oedipus 27).

More specifically, Deleuze and Guattari identify two types of desire, the paranoid and the schizophrenic. Paranoid desire runs rampant in authoritarian and fascist society, while schizophrenic desire takes flight from hierarchical or territorial limitations on the self. Paranoid desire is structured and oedipalized, while schizophrenic desire flows freely through individuals and small collectivities. Furthering the ideas of Wilhelm Reich's Mass Psychology of Fascism, Deleuze and Guattari assert that if fascism exists in the outside world, it also exists in the unconscious. In their account, psychoanalysis is a panoptic discourse that monitors the unconscious and that functions to produce cured patients who possess fixed, stable identities. Their critique is based on denying the universality of the Oedipus Complex whose structure and interpretations are known in advance, reducing the patient's dreams and anxieties to predictable explanations. As Guattari notes in Molecular Revolution: Psychiatry and Politics: "Every family pattern is completely different, depending on its particular context. You don't find the same relationship to paternal authority in a shantytown in Abidjan as you find in an industrial town in Germany. . . . There is no such thing as a universal structure of the mind, or of the libido!" (258).

There is also a patriarchal bias in classical

psychoanalysis as desire is forced to circulate around the male sexual organ, the phallus. Subsequently, male desire is seen as active and female desire as reactive. In contrast, Deleuze and Guattari advocate a desire that is productive and hence revolutionary. The reduction of female desire to a reactive state, a lack, is a fascistic structure of domination that must be challenged by any revolutionary writing.

By claiming a stake for an active female desire and writing, Kathy Acker challenges the structure of traditional human relationships by seeing that relationship as horizontal and anarchic, rather than vertical and hierarchical. Her schizophrenic characters are "desiring machines" rather than participants in a subject/object, self/other, or male/female relationship. Plagiarism is connected to Acker's consistent use of shifting schizophrenic personas; in this respect, plagiarism can be defined as the kidnapping or hijacking not only of text, but of identity.[6] Acker's strategic return to

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6. Indeed, the etymological history of the word "plagiarism" betrays this connection. The English word plagiary was adapted from Latin through French in the late sixteenth century and originally referred to a kidnapper or seducer who abducts a child or slave of another. One obsolete use of the term literally meant man-stealer. Over time though, the term came to mean literary theft. The salient point is, of course, that one can detect a semantic shift from the contestation over the ownership of actual bodies to the ownership of text and "original" ideas. While debates about the identity of the true Homer and the real works of Chaucer continue, no such discussions surround the identities and writings of authors in the past four hundred years. According to the O.E.D., from the Renaissance on, writers have distinguished themselves from their classical and medieval ancestors. In 1889, R.B. Anderson claimed that

the "original" signals a critical distance that questions the authenticity of not only the original text, but also the "essential" identities that are constructed therein.

Through a chapter by chapter analysis of Acker's oeuvre, I will establish that the use of plagiarism, imitation, mimicry and schizophrenia is an écriture feminine that reestablishes women's language and desire as a productive force and energy, rather than a lack, and denaturalizes concepts such as gender and identity. I will accomplish this by examining Acker's novels and the writers and intellectuals she admires, as well as using appropriate theoretical approaches when applicable.

In Chapter One, I will discuss Acker's first two novels The Childlike Life of the Black Tarantula by the Black Tarantula (1973) and I Dreamt I Was a Nymphomaniac: Imagining (1974). In these early novels, I will illustrate the influence of writers such as the Frankfurt School philosopher Herbert Marcuse, the radical psychiatrist R.D. Laing, the Black Mountain writer Charles Olson, and avant-garde novelist William Burroughs on Acker's work. Through these writers, Acker developed a critique of homogeneous and one-dimensional

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"The poet Homer in his works was a mere plagiator." Similarly Baring Gould in 1866-7 claimed "[t]he story spread among the medieval chroniclers, who were great plagiarists." By the early nineteenth-century, plagiarism had become a heinous crime that was monitored in an increasingly panoptic society: "The impressment of seamen ... is no better than what civilians call plagiat, a crime punishable with death by all civilized nations."

society that incorporated experiments with schizophrenic characterization, poetic voice, and the use of collage (or the "cut-up") in writing.

Chapter Two is a discussion about Blood and Guts in High School (1978). In this section, I will illustrate that the composition of this novel was a turning point in Acker's career in which she surpasses her previous literary fathers and incorporates the newly imported theories of French post-structuralism, most particularly, the work of Deleuze and Guattari.

With the publication of Great Expectations (1982) and Don Quixote (1986), Acker displayed her interest in challenging concepts such as genre, ideal love, and subject/object dualisms. She accomplishes these experiments through experiments in the art of appropriation. Acker modelled her work after the photographer Sherrie Levine who would often simply reframe famous photographs and name them "After Walker Evans," "After Alexander Rodchenko," "After Edward Weston," etc. At this point in her career, Acker was very much concerned with finding her female voice and I have used the theories of Judith Butler, Jessica Benjamin, and Luce Irigaray to illustrate this development in her writing.

In the fourth and final chapter, I will discuss Acker's 1988 novel Empire of the Senseless. This book marks the end of Acker's love affair with the anti-psychiatry movement. Instead, she states that this novel is an attempt at

"reconstruction"--a search for "a myth to live by." These myths are varied and include the terrorism of cyberpunk cowboys or hackers, voodoo and the Haitian revolution, the nomadic sailor, or the child-like escapades of Huck Finn. They are all collected under the graphic sign of the tattoo. This return to myth poses problems for theorists such as Deleuze and Guattari; for them, myth is fascism. I, however, believe that she moves towards a position that is sceptical of the negativity inherent in the anti-psychiatry movement. Moreover, this myth is a totemistic and fetishistic talisman, literally embodied by the tattoo, that works as a strategy against the real. The fetish, which is always an imitation of the "real" sexual organ, compliments Acker's plagiarisms and a theory of hypertextuality that contest the originary nature of art and literature.

CHAPTER ONE

Literary Foreplay: Acker's Early Novels

> She has yet to feel the need to get free of fabric, reveal her nakedness, her destitution in language, explode in the face of them all, words too. For the imperious need for her shame, her chastity--duly fitted out with the belt of discourse--, of her decent modesty, continues to be asserted by every man. In every kind of tone, form, theory, style, ...
>
> Luce Irigaray
> Speculum of the Other Woman

To fully appreciate Kathy Acker's writing, her readers must comprehend the socio-political and literary context from which her novels arise. As an undergraduate in the 1960s, she studied with the prodigal son of the Frankfurt School and gurufied intellectual, Herbert Marcuse, at Brandeis University. Impressed by his philosophical project, Acker followed him to the University of Southern California (Angry Women 177).

With the publication of Eros and Civilization (1954), Marcuse helped usher in what was to become the "sexual revolution." Attempting to surpass the works of Marx and Hegel, Marcuse believed that individual 'happiness' should be a central concern in a better society. For this reason, Marcuse turned to Freud for a more psychological account of civilization and its discontents. Freud believed that the biological drives of human beings must be controlled by the internalized parent figures of the ego and superego if civilization is to succeed. It is through the renunciation or

sublimation of these pleasurable drives that art and high culture exist.

In contrast, Marcuse distinguished himself from Freud by rejecting the distinction between sexuality and civilization as he did not believe that there is such a marked difference between sexual relationships and other social relationships. Marcuse believed that society could be ameliorated by permitting a new libidinal economy based on social and sexual gratification.

> The replacement of the pleasure principle by the reality principle is the great traumatic event in the development of the genus (phylogenesis) as well as of the individual (ontogenesis). According to Freud, this event is not unique but recurs throughout the history of mankind and of every individual. Phylogenetically, it occurs first in the primal horde, when the primal father monopolizes power and pleasure and enforces renunciation on the part of the sons. Ontogenetically, it occurs during the period of early childhood . . . . (31)

Marcuse adheres to Freud's historicized account of civilization that suggests that the repression of sexuality and instinctual urges are the byproducts of specific historical institutions rather than human nature. However, Marcuse introduced two ideas to amend Freud's theory of human history: surplus-repression and the performance principle. Surplus repression differs from Freud's basic repression, not because Marcuse rejects the idea that certain restrictions are required for the social contract, but that this repression exists in excess to the reality principle. There is a surplus repression that exists beyond the needs of civilization,

especially considering the technical and material progress that has occurred in the last forty years in the western world. In other words, sexual repression has become more and more a means of social domination rather than a means to ensure social stability. Marcuse insists that there is a confusion between the reality principle and those who speak in the name of reality and demand that the social hierarchy and the work ethic be followed. This justification of the work ethic is called the performance principle, a principle that may have been necessary in the past, but now that scarcity is no longer the prime human concern, the ethical valorization of controlled work and the nuclear family is unnecessary. The aesthetic renunciation of sexuality must be overcome if humans are to be liberated and set free.

By the mid-1960s, Marcuse was much less optimistic about the sexual revolution. In Eros and Civilization, Marcuse had heralded technology as the means to eliminate scarcity, but by the publication of One Dimensional Man (1964), he claims that "[t]echnical progress, extended to a whole system of domination and coordination, creates forms of life (and of power) which appear to reconcile the forces opposing the system and to defeat or refute all protest in the name of the historical prospects of freedom from toil and domination" (xxi). Technology silences voices from the margins through material abundance and freedom from scarcity. However, Marcuse makes a distinction between "true" and "false" needs

and declares that the average person is not truly free to be able to make his or her choice in a society dominated by an ideology of consumption.

In a famous passage, Marcuse maintains that the superficial disappearance of class is reinforced by this ideology of consumption: "If the worker and his boss enjoy the same television programme and visit the same resort places, if the typist is as attractively made up as the daughter of her employer, if the Negro owns a Cadillac, if they all read the same newspaper, then this assimilation indicates not the disappearance of classes, but the extent to which the needs and satisfactions that serve the preservation of the Establishment are shared by the underlying population" (24). Also, Marcuse adds that the worker is rendered passive in the semi-automated factory and by the social policies of advanced liberalism and the welfare state.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Marcuse's optimism in the 1950s is eclipsed in the 1960s by the realization that the desublimation he called for in Eros is now controlled by the economically motivated business of leisure that "thrives in advanced industrial society, but is unfree to the extent to which it is administered by business and politics" (53). By 1964, Marcuse had come to the conclusion that desublimation was as repressive as sublimation. Advertising and pornography, which permeate the veneer of social life, are simply controlled releases of

sexual libido that stimulate a simulated sexuality divorced from actual bodies.

Like Marcuse, Acker is similarly fascinated with the connection between the sexual and the political and this fact can be traced back to one of her earliest pieces, written when she was twenty-one. Entitled Politics (1968), it is a collection of short prose poems that also contains large segments of her diary based on her own experiences working in a live sex show. Ultimately, it is also an indictment of the failure of the sexual revolution. In the diary section of Politics, Acker's political situation in the world is linked directly to the commodification of her sexuality: "the filthy bedcover on stage I'm allergic to this way of life mine? the last time I got on stage for the first ten minutes I felt I wasn't me I was going through mechanical personality changes and actions I got scared I might flip in front of the sex-crazy lunatics . . ." (25). Here the reader senses the Marcusian idea that desublimation, a regulated release of libido, controls the audience members and imprisons the stripper. As Marcuse, himself, notes:

> the machine process in the technological universe breaks the innermost privacy of freedom and joins sexuality and labour in one unconscious, rhythmic automatism--a process which parallels the assimilation of jobs. (One-Dimensional Man 27)

Significantly, Acker also adds a feminist note to Marcuse's critique. As a rigidly mechanical object of desire for "sex-crazy lunatics," the narrator's identity is literally

performative where the man in the audience acts as the spectator and the woman on stage acts as the object of desire.

> I won't mind doing the show which is really shitty today but with creeps males chauvinists rednecks pukes John Birchers worse liberals murderers we get in the audience it's a strong show they don't want to see anything but dead cunt they make everything dead with their eyes they're not going to dig any jokes they haven't for three months I come out dance strip do hard spreads no expression 10 seconds each held still to Ike and Tina Turner's RESPECT dance at the end sadism hands on the hip as they clasp Lenny's the Shit Boss Mister Wolf call me Wolf that's real I have to fuck him to get the job. . . . (30)

In this passage, the reference to Ike and Tina Turner's "Respect" is ironically undermined by Acker's degradation as she undertales work in a sex show to survive economically. During the optimistic 1960s, a number of theories announced the end of ideology, the end of class, the end of the proletariat, and so forth. Yet intellectuals like Marcuse and writers like Acker understood that a society of affluence and consumption works to subvert the totality of human desires by breaking them down into fragmentary and autonomous zones of the public and private, a process that subverts the potential contradictory nature of these sites. Both Marcuse and Acker insist that the new incitements to the private realm of leisure do not threaten the equilibrium of society; rather, leisure is a precise measuring of pleasure contributing to strictly proportioned and repressive rituals of order. In consumer society, sexuality is both produced and controlled by the business of leisure in which new forms of "liberation" are

controlled, managed, and blocked, engendering new problems and struggles.

Acker's response in Politics is to resort to solitary auto-erotic act:

> I have no idea what I feel like I never touch myself except for occasionally masturbating a few times stick a finger up my asshole or lick my nipple I draw my fingers around the back of my neck I want to shave my hair off again toes knees I admire criminals in my head knowing they're shits businessmen motherfuckers like everyone else I don't want to fuck it doesn't mean what it should no one else thinks like this anymore say angelic I'm sick of fucking not knowing who I am. (35)

It is significant that Acker refuses to return to a "feminine" language of modesty and decency, a strategy that would return her to Victorian England and the pre-Marcusian notion of sublimation. But most importantly, Acker's language preserves a sphere of tension and contradiction that is necessary to the negative dialectics of Marcuse and which was quickly receding in the superficial luxuriousness of one-dimensional society. As Acker's passages in Politics imply, the narrator's auto-erotic pleasure leads only to robotic alienation where she feels "sick of fucking not knowing who she [is]." Therefore, Acker's "I" dreams of an alternative community based on criminality and, paradoxically, an "angelic" sexuality that reinstitutes a connection between human beings, perhaps an intertextual reference to Allen Ginsberg's "saintly motorcyclists" in Howl. Marcuse's dark vision in One-Dimensional Man is also temporarily alleviated by the belief that beneath the conservative popular base exists a marginal

community of outcasts who live outside the democratic process: "Their opposition hits the system from without and is therefore not deflected by the system; it is an elementary force which violates the rules of the game and, in doing so, reveals it as a rigged game" (256-7).

Acker breaks from Marcuse, however, on his thoughts about art and language. Marcuse, betraying his Frankfurt school roots, particularly the aesthetic philosophy of Theodor Adorno, believed that art had lost its traditional function: "It is good that almost everyone can now have the fine arts at his fingertips, by just turning a knob on his set, or by just stepping into his drugstore. In this diffusion, however, they become cogs in a culture-machine which remakes their content" (One-Dimensional Man 65). According to Marcuse, advertising catch phrases, popular song hooks, sensationalist newspaper headlines, and journalese debase language. Conversely, Acker sides with one of her most significant mentors, William Burroughs, whose literary experiments had always incorporated elements of "low" culture. Most importantly, Acker acknowledges using Burroughs' experiments with cut-ups in The Third Mind as the basis for her own literary experimentation in Politics. On several occasions, Acker has expressed her admiration for the work of Burroughs:

> Burroughs' writing is "immediate." "Immediate" has something to with the sentence "I want to read something that means something to me." Burroughs never bores, for he and the other writers I think of as in "that tradition," "the other tradition," the nonacceptable literary tradition," "the tradition of those books which

> were hated when they were written and subsequently became literary history," "the black tradition," "the tradition of political writing as opposed to propaganda" (de Sade would head this list), do what Poe said a writer should do. They present the human heart naked so that our world, for a second, explodes into flames ("A Few Notes" 31).

Burroughs was introduced to the cut-up by the poet and painter Brion Gysin in 1959. Gysin began his experiments by randomly arranging cut-up newspapers that he published in Minutes to Go. Burroughs modified Gysin's experimental technique by incorporating T.S. Eliot, Rimbaud, the popular press, scientific tracts, popular fiction and his own writing into his cut-up texts. In his theoretical text The Third Mind, co-written with Gysin, Burroughs stated that literature was fifty years behind painting and the cut-up brought collage to writing. Tracing this experiment back to the Dadaist, Tristan Tzara, who caused a riot at a surrealist rally by claiming that he would "create a poem on the spot by pulling words out of a hat" (29), Burroughs creates a do-it-yourself manifesto for writing:

> Take any poet or writer you fancy. Here, say, or poems you have read over many times. The words have lost meaning and life through years of repetition. Now take the poem and type out selected passages. Fill a page with excerpts. Now cut the page. You have a new poem. As many poems as you like. As many Shakespeare Rimbaud poems as you like. Tristan Tzara said: "Poetry is for everyone." and André Breton called him a cop and expelled him from the movement. Say it again: "Poetry is for everyone." Poetry is a place and it is free to all cut up Rimbaud and you are in Rimbaud's place. (31)

Fortunately, Burroughs did more than simply espouse this

populist and utopian appeal by insisting that "[a]ll writing is in fact cut-ups. A collage of words read heard overheard. What else? Use of scissors renders the process explicit and subject to extension and variation" (32). Acker likewise describes her Politics as a cut-up: "I was cutting in tapes, cutting out tapes, using a lot of dream material, using other people's dreams, doing a lot of Burroughs experiments. It was all about the sex shows, with cut-in dreams, cut-in politics, cut-in everything" ("Devoured" 5). Both Burroughs and Acker subscribe to Genette's transtextuality in which both the cut-up and the plagiarized text point to the network or field of citations, allusions, and genres that make up the content of what we have traditionally called literature:

> . . . cut-ups make explicit a psychosensory process that is going on all the time anyway. Somebody is reading a newspaper, and his eye follows the column in the proper Aristotelian manner, one idea and sentence at a time. But subliminally he is reading the columns one either side and is aware of the person sitting next to him. That's a cut-up . . . -- a juxtaposition of what's happening outside and what you're thinking of. (Burroughs 4-5)

The cut-ups of Burroughs are an articulation of non-Aristotelian logic which is embedded in the syntax of the everyday declarative sentence. For this reason, he imagines a language based on images and valorizes the ideograph in Chinese and Japanese culture, as well as the hieroglyphics of Mayan and ancient Egyptian civilization.

Acker, however, shies away from the terms that are normally used to describe his work like "marginal,"

"experimental," and "avant-garde." She believes that the terms words used to describe texts in this other literary tradition are used to dismiss these writers, not because writing such as Burroughs is marginal, but "because our society, through the voice of its literary society, cannot bear immediacy, the truth, especially the political truth" ("A Few Notes" 31).

In her attempts to create a language of "immediacy," Acker affirms that she had an early training in the Black Mountain poets, particularly the work of Charles Olson whom she considers to be one of her literary fathers ("A Few Notes" 33). The Black Mountain College was founded in 1933 by John Andrew Rice in North Carolina. Two decades later, his experiment in education became the centre for those dissatisfied with traditional academic methods. Among the contributing students, teachers, and visitors were Charles Olson, John Cage, Willem De Kooning, Robert Rauschenberg, Paul Goodman, and Denise Levertov. Robert Creeley edited the Black Mountain Review (1954-7) which published the works of William Carlos Williams, Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and Hubert Selby Jr.

The literary locus centred around Charles Olson's now famous "Projective Verse." Its doctrines spring from an admiration for the poetics of Ezra Pound, specifically The Cantos, and T.S. Eliot. Nevertheless, his treatise differs from Pound's poetics as it is non-transcendentalist and he

valorizes the pragmatist tradition by asserting that verse is to be of 'essential use,' and must reflect the breathing of the poet. This claim was partially in reaction to the "closed verse" of traditional poetics. His projective verse or "open field composition" demanded that its users acknowledge the phenomenal world as participants in experience and reality. The poem should be about the nature of physicality and be composed of the minimal particles of language relying on the spontaneous "obedience of his ear to the syllables" (18). He states that the poet must get "rid of the lyrical interference of the individual as ego" (24). Olson advocates a state of kinetic "composition by field," in which energy must be immediately transferred from writer (speaker) to reader (listener): "A poem is energy transferred from where the poet got it (he will have some several causations), by way of the poem itself to, all the way over to, the reader. Okay. Then the poem itself must, at all points, be a high energy-construct and, at all points, an energy-discharge." (16). Acker has admitted to the influence of Olson in her writing:

> So you might say I had an early training in Black Mountain School rhetoric which came mainly out of The Wasteland and Pound's work, The Cantos. Olson's main thesis was that one sentence comes after another sentence so you might have the movement of meaning, but also a movement where language leads to language. Olson also had his way of seeing the world and putting it down in a certain kind of rhythm, usually a very jagged rhythm, like writing from scat. It all had to do with music. ("Devoured" 4)

Acker, who has consistently demonstrated an aversion to

idealism of any sort, attempted to transfer these poetics to prose. In her writing, this emphasis on rhythm and breathing becomes a type of body language similar to that espoused by the French Feminists. In Acker's first full-length novel The Childlike Life of the Black Tarantula by the Black Tarantula (1973), she follows Olson's strategy when the shifting persona of the main "character" states: "I forget who I am I don't know who I am I see a huge soft black widow no identity a large tarantula I have no feelings I begin to float. I'm Helen I know who I am, then my work means nothing to me my work means less to me than my sexuality. . . . What'm I trying to do? My work and my sexuality combine: here the complete sexuality occurs within, is not expressed by, the writing" (50). Acker has translated Olson's breathing of the poet to an extreme, creating a writing that is female desire in which Helen can claim that "my cunt is my center my cunt is my center my cunt is my center . . . " (52).

Nevertheless, Acker soon became suspicious of one of the tenets of Olson's writing:

> Charles Olson said that when you write what you have to do is find your own voice, but it all seemed to be very big, almost God-like, and I found this very confusing . . . I couldn't find my own voice. . . . And I'm sure that's where I started to write in different voices and started to deal with schizophrenia. This was behind it, was in a way a fight against the fathers. . . . ("Devoured" 18)

Consequently, Acker began to combine the work of Marcuse, Burroughs, and Olson with that of the Scottish psychiatrist,

Ronald David Laing ("Devoured" 10). Laing, a counter-culture hero of the 1960s and early 70s, is best known for his belief that psychosis is a sane response to an insane world and that it is in fact a healing process. His first book, The Divided Self (1960) was an existential analysis of schizophrenia in which he states that "sanity or psychosis is tested by the degree of conjunction and disjunction between two persons where the one is sane by common consent" (36). The psychotic experiences him/herself as an outsider who cannot experience either him/herself or others as real, therefore a false self is created to deal with the outside world. In the extremes of schizophrenic breakdown, personality and identity disintegrate. With the publication of The Self and Others (1961), which was heavily influenced by existential phenomenology, Laing applied the theories of anthropologist Gregory Bateson who stated that contradictory situations or "double binds," especially in the family, lead to a schizophrenia that acts as a defense mechanism against oppressive societal forces. By 1967, Laing, in his newly published Politics of Experience, asserted that concepts of sanity and madness reflected the much larger political contradictions of society at large. The Divided Self contained several case studies that proved inspirational to the diary character Acker of Politics who was "sick of fucking not knowing who I am" (35) and that were important in the writing of Acker's first published novel, The Childlike Life

of the Black Tarantula by the Black Tarantula.[1]

Black Tarantula is the first text in which Acker utilized plagiarism and it opens with the epitaph: "Intention: I become a murderess by repeating in words the lives of other murderesses" (emphasis added 2). This opening epigraph was meant to place an emphasis on the role of intentionality and conceptualism in writing and foregrounds the notion that form is not determined by arbitrary rules; certain writing methodologies create certain meanings. It also suggests that to become a murderess, or any identity for that matter, is based on a repetition of words or, to put it another way, a previously written script. Most of the novel is what Acker describes as "a point-to-point comparison between [her] life" and those of famous female murderesses and thieves (23). Each chapter ends with Acker stating a variation on "[a]ll the above events are taken from myself" and biographies and autobiographies of criminal women. Acker based this literary experiment on the model of schizophrenia espoused by R.D. Laing. Indeed, Laing at the age of twenty-two and disillusioned with his medical school education, began

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1. This novel was originally published as a piece of "Mail Art" that was sent by Acker to about two hundred readers. Photocopies must have been made so it is difficult to know how many copies were originally circulated. The publishing house TVRT published it in 1975. Black Tarantula was made available to a larger audience in 1992 when it was published by Pantheon as part of the trilogy A Portrait of the Eye which includes I Dreamt I was a Nymphomaniac Imagining (1974) and Toulouse Lautrec (1975).

experimenting "by trying on the different psychoses to see how they worked and felt. Like intense paranoid schizophrenia."[2] Attempting a similar experiment in prose, Acker placed her own diary material next to appropriated diary material: "I tried to figure out who I wasn't and I went to the text of murderesses. I just changed them into the first person, . . . and put the fake first person next to the true first person" ("Devoured" 7).

Laing, in The Divided Self, describes the schizophrenic as

> an individual the totality of whose experience is split in two main ways: in the first place, there is a rent in his relation with his world and, in the second, there is a disruption of his relation with himself. Such a person is not able to experience himself 'together with' others or 'at home in' the world, but, on the contrary, he experiences himself in despairing aloneness and isolation; moreover, he does not experience himself as a complete person but rather as 'split' in various ways, perhaps as a mind more or less tenuously linked to a body, as two or more selves, and so on. (17)

Demonstrating his interest in existential phenomenology, Laing asserts that the schizophrenic is an individual who suffers from ontological insecurity. For instance, a case study in Laing's book describes a patient David whose "whole manner was entirely artificial; his speech was made up largely of quotations . . . he was playing a part. Usually, in his mind, he was playing the part of someone else, but sometimes he

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[2]. qtd. in Martin Howarth-Williams, R.D. Laing: His Work and its Relevance for Sociology, London: Routledge, 1977, p. 4.

played the part of himself (his own self): that is, he was not simply and spontaneously himself, but he played at being himself" (70-1 emphasis added). Other case histories in the text recount the stories of patients who "feel more and more convinced that it was a mere pretence for them to be somebody and that the only honest course they could take was to become nobody . . ." (157).

Laing connects the idea of ontological insecurity with ontological guilt, in which the individual lacks a sense of being-in-the-world which is their own and reflects some sense of an "inner self." Most people experience themselves as an extension of their bodies; schizophrenics imagine their self as separate from their body where the body is understood as a "false" self disconnected from their "true" self which is considered unembodied (82-3). These differences have ramifications in the existential world of social relations. According to Laing, "normal" people experience their social interactions as

(self/body) ==== world

while the schizoid understands this phenomenon as

self ==== (body/world) (82)

The schizoid self, then, has a limited relationship to the world that excludes any mutual existential confirmation. For the schizoid, "[l]ove is precluded and dread takes its place. The final effect is an overall experience of everything having come to a stop. Nothing moves; nothing is alive; everything

is dead, including the self" (82).

In Politics, Acker's diary section alludes to the sensation of being a robot and lacking identity. Nonetheless, Acker amends Laing's concept of the schizophrenic as it is fundamentally a theory of lack based on ontological insecurity. To begin to overcome her sense of want-of-being, the narrator in Acker's first novel, Black Tarantula, uses schizophrenia as a strategy to reinstitute a being based on productive desire. In fact, the narrator directly links her mimicry to an unblocking of desire: ". . . I rise there against the new lover there is only this and my account of this I immediately begin to come, I see a frame around me: my space. The rest is blackness, money-death-necessity coming to destroy my tentative beginning human sex, I rub my body against P: I become a parrot" (49 emphasis added). Here, desire is productive, an unmotivated force of energy that creates a "tentative beginning human sex," in which identity is not original, only "tentative," creating not a human being but rather a "human sex." This "beginning staves off the death inherent in consumer society; it is not a lack that craves a lost object or sense of being.

By "repeating" the lives of female rogues and murderesses, in this case Moll Cutpurse, the narrator begins to reconstitute desire on her own terms: "I decide immediately to do what I want: have adventures as a highwayman instead of gossiping with a bunch of women liars, fight with

a quarterstaff . . . I'm the bear lady, the leather coated eyes, the tough brawler--queen of the jewels of the slums . . . I'm the black leather Virgin Mary. At this point I change my costume; for the rest of my life I wear only men's clothes" (28). In addition to using schizophrenia as a strategy to escape rigid and robotic socialization, Acker suggests that gender is a performance, a form of cross-dressing. By simply changing her "costume," Moll Cutpurse becomes a man suggesting the historical and cultural character of assigned gender roles. However, there is also a sense that femininity can only be delimited or determined by defining what is masculine, suggesting that the two terms are interdependent with the former representing lack (liars who lack truth, speech, desire) and the latter representing meaning (man as active agent in the world). Femininity is a masquerade and Acker is stating that there is no essence behind the mask as the women are liars; conversely, masculinity is stable as Moll Cutpurse wears men's clothes for the rest of her life. As a tactic, this cross-dressing is done at a cost and implies that to claim desire for oneself, one must become "male." This fact is reinforced in the last two chapters of Black Tarantula when the narrator abandons the idea of becoming a female criminal and takes on the persona of two male authors: William Butler Yeats and the Marquis de Sade.

Fortunately, this strategy is also only temporary. In the chapter on Yeats, the narrator becomes a child emphasizing

the fact that everybody is in drag: "Sometimes, when I'm most in child-drag, I act shy I can't speak to anyone, I lay down and watch people, open to embrace anyone who sits next to me talks to me touches me . . . Only at these strange moments, I call them nymphomaniac moments, I feel free" (67). This return to a "child-drag" signals the existence of a state prior to the signification inherent in the costumes of man and woman. The narrator reverts back to a time, the nymphomaniac moment, before the object of desire has been fixed by oedipal triangulation and the law of the father, before language as she cannot "speak." Of course, to do this in our culture is considered pathological as is suggested by Acker's appropriation of the term "nymphomaniac" from medical discourse.

The novel's last chapter is a proto-anti-oedipal reading of de Sade, in which Acker indicates her belief in the disruptive power of desire and eros[3]:

> Now let us worship our nation, fart over it, get involved in national politics. (Ugh.) I'm gentle I'm scared of people; if I'm constantly terrorized and starved by laws, I cannot come.
>
> I've clearly demonstrated that I no longer need to work. Fire a steel surround my flaming head. Let the thrones of Europe crumble of themselves; your delight will send them flying without your having to meddle at all. (90)

Acker's narrative, schizophrenic "I" is truly a black

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[3]. Acker was only introduced to the writing of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari when she met Slyvère Lotringer in 1977, five years after Black Tarantula was written. See interview with Lotringer, pp. 3-10.

tarantula, a spider whose bite was thought to induce tarantism, an hysterical malady characterized by an extreme impulse to dance, which prevailed in parts of Italy during the fifteenth- to seventeenth-centuries. Acker's Black Tarantula ends with the narrator, Acker/de Sade, exhorting the productive powers of an uncommodified and schizophrenic desire not yet controlled by an ideology of lack inherent in pornographic advertising images or the business of leisure.

Several years later, Acker admitted that the terms of the experiment, splitting identity into fake and true "I"s, were somewhat naive and that

> I learned two things. First, in fiction, there is no "true" or "false" in social realist terms. Fiction is "true" or real when it makes sense. Second, if there is a self, it isn't Hegel's subject or the centralized phallic I/eye. If there is a self, it's probably the world. All is real. When I placed "true" autobiography next to "false" autobiography, everything was real. Phallic identity's another scam that probably had to do with capitalistic ownership. ("A Few Notes" 33)

The schizophrenic strategy that called for playing the roles of male poets or male-identified women is refined in Acker's subsequent novel I Dreamt I Was a Nymphomaniac: Imagining (1974). If "phallic identity" is a ruse, Acker decides that it is essential to examine cultural representations of feminine desire. On one end of the spectrum, feminine desire is negatively defined as the pathological expression of nymphomania; at the other end of the rainbow, this desire is constructed as a lack, hole, or lacunae, which is as unattainable as the proverbial pot of

gold. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, nymphomania is a feminine disease (from the Greek meaning "bride madness") characterized "by morbid and uncontrollable sexual desire." Women who have an active desire are diagnosed as nymphomaniacs. To cure their ill health, they are forced to re-nun-ciate desire. The character, "Kathy Acker," in Nymphomaniac, claims that her "desire begins" only once she is kicked out of her parents house "because [she] wasn't interested in marrying a rich man" (96). Once liberated from a phallic economy of the exchange of women as commodities, her desire is then, and only then, described as nymphomaniacal:

> I dreamed of fucking again and again, again and again because I'm never satisfied. The revolution is taking place, as "Blue" Gene says, without, for there are no, climaxes. I do whatever I want to do: if any one/event opposes me, I do what I can to erase that opposition, and slowly I'm changing. The revolution is taking place, as "Blue" Gene says, because "innate" and "learned" are no longer viable descriptions . . . I have to decide whether I'm an SLA agent or a woman transvestite who's wildly in love with the most gorgeous fag in town. (112)

Unlike in Black Tarantula, which ends with the orgasmic destruction of the "thrones of Europe," desire is described here as having no climax. Sexual climax, cause and effect narrative, and the over-determination of biological difference that establishes rigid constructions of gender are all enemies of Acker in her revolution against bourgeois values. For this reason, the "'Blue' Gene" section, along with many other lengthy ones in the book, are repeated over and over again in the novel. By repeating these sections, Acker again wishes to

enact a schizophrenic strategy that is more formal in nature than that of Black Tarantula. These repetitions undermine the cause and effect reasoning that underlies the naturalization of ideology. Acker has said the following about her second novel:

> In Nymphomaniac, I suddenly realized that I wasn't even thinking about how language works. So I began to explore language--how language works within the parameters of a particular problem. I began to work with memory and with repetition. How does the reader remember, or what does the reader remember when you repeat something over and over again? How do language and memory work even in the most well-constructed, logical texts. ("A Conversation" 15)

In Nymphomaniac, Acker uses these repetitions are enacted to demonstrate that "[t]here's no cause-and-effect (narrative) except in language" (135). For example, the "'Blue' Gene" repetitions describe the cross-dressing of both sexes and reveal that anatomy does not "cause" the "effect" of gender. In Nymphomaniac, the concept of cause and effect is based on notions of absolutist time:

> The first time, I repeated one (writing) event simultaneously slightly changed that event. Repeated this changed event two times. Call the first event 'a'; the repetition of 'a' (which, as I've said, are slightly different from 'a' 'b.') How do these events occur in time? 'a' occurs between zero and 'b.' 'b' occurs between 'a' and 'b.' 'b' occurs between 'b' and 'b.' 'b' occurs between 'b' and zero. Notice each event occurs between two events whose conjunction is unique. (135-6)

This excursus on repetition is really a reformulation of Zeno's paradox about the moving arrow that suggests if reality is what is present at any given moment then it is always in a

particular spot and never in motion. If one insists that the arrow is in motion at every instance, then one must concede that it is marked with traces of the past and future. This passage also points to one of the basic points of Derridean deconstruction highlighted by Jonathon Culler, "[i]f motion is to be present, presence must already be marked by differance and deferral" (95). More specifically, in the novel it is a deconstruction of the metaphysics of presence inherent in notions of fixed and stable identity:

> Say there's two theories of time. Absolutist theory of time: the world is in time. The world events occur in moments. These moments can be mapped on a time line. Relativist theory of time: time is in the world. Time is the temporal relations of events. An event can be earlier (later) than or simultaneous with another event. The first theory suggests that individuals (subjects) are the true substance. The second theory suggests that temporal characters are the true substance of the world. (136)

In this deconstruction of presence, Acker points out that every event is already determined by a prior structure and that the possibility of meaning something is always already inscribed in the structure and syntax of language. In an amusing take on western logic, Acker directly connects the deconstruction of events in absolutist time to the construction of identity:

> If I'm an individual and I persist over a period of time, I'm a substance. If I'm an individual and not a moment, I'm an ordinary individual. Right now (t1) I'm picking my nose. Right now (t2) I'm not picking my nose. "Picking my nose" is a relation between t1 and me. "Not picking my nose is a relation between t2 and me. But what if there aren't distinct moments? If t1 isn't distinct from

> t2? (Relativist theory of time.) I'm an individual who is picking and not picking his nose. Contradiction. I can't be a substance, and an individual who persists in time. . . .
>
> By "I," I mean an unknown number of individuals. Each individual exists for a present and exemplifies one or more characters. These characters exist out of time. (136-7)

The emphasis on language, memory, and repetition is important in Nymphomaniac as Acker uses these investigations to criticize traditional revolutionary practices. The "'Blue' Gene" section advocates revolution as desire without "climax," telos, or end and refutes any cause and effect narrative such as Marx's dissolution of the state through working class revolt. This desire disrupts the traditional narrative of revolutionary myth and thought. In a chapter aptly named, "Distrust," Acker imagines the U.S. if the New Left had succeeded in inciting revolution. The character, "Kathy Acker," participates in the insurrection, yet quickly learns that traditional formulations of revolutionary praxis regulate and restrict desire: "This is the first time I had to choose between my desire to find Peter and my duty as a revolutionary soldier" (166). Here, Acker attacks the political asceticism that incites renunciation and submission to new forms of hierarchy intrinsic to traditional revolutionary thought.

The last chapter, "Dykes," counterposes the previous chapter by advising alternative revolutionary activity. The character Kathy Acker is too afraid to enter in a taboo relationship with a woman. Acker's "revolution" depends on acceptance of the polymorphous perverse nature of desire,

whose objects are only genitally fixed because of oedipal law. A woman Patty attempts to seduce a reluctant Kathy, and these narrative sequences are juxtaposed with other scenes about her artistic friends who are arrested and put in Folsom prison for petty crimes such as writing to the State Legislators about prison conditions, for committing burglary and forgery, and for participating in political agitation. By the end of the novel, these intermittent scenes of desire are gradually replaced by the sole narrative of imprisonment and the prisoners' jail terms, an inference of things to come. Kathy and Patty's desires are never played out and the prisoners are sentenced to a "lifetime punishment in a small cell" (184).

Acker's point is simple: adherence to traditional revolutionary practice, with its emphasis on the creation of utopia, imposes new hierarchies on its collectivity, ignores the individual desires of its members, and will never threaten the hegemonic practices of an increasingly one-dimensional society. Through experiments in repetition and schizophrenia, Acker illustrates how subjectivity is constructed and how it may be undermined by these strategies.

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CHAPTER TWO

Blood and Guts in High School: The French Connection

> To think for myself is what I want. My language is my irrationality. Watch desire carefully. Desire burns up all the old dead language morality. . . . My father willed to rape me because in that he didn't want me to think for myself because he didn't think for himself. My father isn't my real father. This is a fact. I want a man. I don't want this man this stepfather who has killed off the man I love. I have no way of getting the man I love who is my real father. My stepfather, society, is anything but the city of art.
>
> Kathy Acker
> My Death, My Life by Pier Paolo Pasolini

In 1977, Kathy Acker met Sylvère Lotringer, who introduced her to the work of important French philosophers of the day. Lotringer is one of the editors of Semiotext(e), a publishing group that was instrumental in presenting writers such as Jean Baudrillard, Paul Virilio, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari to the American intellectual scene. Acker has admitted to the influence of these theorists in several interviews:

> The work of Laing and Cooper, and whoever else I was going to, gave me no way of really understanding why I was writing the way I was writing. I was like a deaf-dumb-and-blind person for years, I just did what I did but had no way of telling anyone about it or talking about it. And, then I read [Deleuze and Guattari's] Anti-Oedipus and Foucault's work, suddenly I had this whole language at my disposal. I could say, Hi! And that other people were doing the same thing. I remember thinking, Why don't they know me? I know exactly what they're talking about. And I could go further. ("Devoured" 10)

The influence of Deleuze and Guattari is apparent in Blood and Guts in High School (1978), an anti-oedipal text

that moves away from and ultimately rejects a Lacanian theory of desire that subjugates the multiplicity and productive nature of desire to the threefold law of the signifier, structure, and lack, towards an anti-oedipal concept of desire as productive and revolutionary. In Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature, Deleuze and Guattari insist that to resist the psychoanalytic model in Kafka's texts corresponds to the incestuous denial by the body to the Oedipal father and its "contiguous" struggle with the bureaucrat, the lawyer and the judge. For them, the question is not about liberty, not a battle with the father, but rather escape--escape to where the father has never been. In this sense, Acker withdraws her allegiance from the old categories of the negative that are still grounded in notions of authenticity and being. Desire articulated under these constraints causes disease and eventually cancer for Janey Smith, the main protagonist of Blood and Guts. Deleuze and Guattari's Anti-Oedipus is an attack on psychoanalytic theory that claims that psychoanalysis is an invention rather than a discovery. Their critique is most clearly aimed at the leading French psychoanalyst of the 1960s--Jacques Lacan. At this juncture, it is appropriate to briefly outline the importance of Lacan's work and his reworking of several theorists who preceded him, Sigmund Freud, Ferdinand de Saussure, and Claude Lévi-Strauss.

When Lacan began writing in the 1930s, he was interested in showing how unconscious representations of relations in the

family shape human behaviours. The influence of Freud here is evident, yet Lacan also incorporates the linguistic theory of Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), emphasizing the importance of speech and language in the therapeutic process. In his posthumously published Course in General Linguistics (1916), Saussure outlined three basic ideas that were important to Lacan. First, Saussure studied langue (language or code) rather than parole (message or speech). This privileging of structure over individual speech acts emphasized that linguistics should study the grammar and social conventions of language that make speech possible. Saussure emphasizes the social bond that enables communication. In the Course, Saussure states that "language is not a function of the speaker, it is a product that is passively assimilated by the individual. It never requires premeditation. . . . Speaking, on the contrary, is an individual act. It is wilful and intellectual" (67-70). Underlying this assertion is the idea that the relation between a word (signifier) and a thing or concept (signified) is arbitrary. This revelation caused Saussure to advocate a "synchronic" study of language based on the examination of the static, structural systems of language over a "diachronic" approach that previously privileged a historical and evolutionary theory of language.

Secondly, Saussure noted that not only is the meaning of the relation of signifier and signified arbitrary, but it is dependent upon the syntagmatic relation to other parts of

language: "Everything that has been said up to this point boils down to this: in language there are only differences. Even more important: a difference generally implies positive terms between which the difference is set up; but in language there are only differences without positive terms" (120). Meaning in language is not a result of preexisting ideas or concepts. Instead a linguistic system of differences creates "values": "When [values] are said to correspond to concepts, it is understood that the concepts are purely differential and defined not by their positive content but negatively by their relations with the other terms of the system. Their most precise characteristic is being what the others are not" (122).

Saussure's "structural" approach to language challenged the historical and causal theory of diachronic linguistic study. Lacan termed this background system of language the Symbolic (le symbolique). A child enters the symbolic when she acquires language. This entry is also the moment that follows the mirror stage, when the child creates an imaginary identity or ego (moi that becomes je in Lacan's terms) based on her unified reflection in a mirror "language and its structure exist prior to the moment at which each subject at a certain point in his mental development makes his entry into it" (Ecrits 148). Both language and subjectivity are based on a "bipolar structure" (Ecrits 10), where there is no subject without an "other." Since identity and speech are essentially

empty, our desire is based on the desires of the other. The goal of Lacanian psychoanalysis is to demonstrate to the analysand this lack and our fundamental alienation (béance): "the art of the analyst must be to suspend the subject's certainties until their last mirages have been consumed" (Ecrits 44). Lacan departs from Saussure when he creates the "algorithm 'S/s'" that is read as: the signifier over the signified, 'over' corresponding to the bar separating the two stages" (Ecrits 149) The bar indicates the gap (béance) between the human being's alienation from self, as well as the gap (béance) between the signifier and signified. In Lacan's account, the signified (like the signifier) is always self-referential, lacking any relation to a conceptual reality. Nevertheless, the signifier is accorded the more important dimension and the signifier in his system is the Phallus.

For Lacan, the Phallus functions as a point de capiton. Lacan borrows his term from an expression in upholstery meaning an anchoring point or button to describe how certain operations of the phallic metaphor function; the present fabric of our culture is held in place by reference to the Phallus. The Phallus is meaningful and everything is meaningless by comparison.

Assimilating another post-Saussurian reading, Lacan incorporates Claude Lévi-Strauss's The Elementary Structures of Kinship (1949). Lévi-Strauss's structuralist reading of kinship systems insists that the incest taboo, which combines

instinct with the coercive quality of the law, is a way of exchanging women, thus creating social and cultural stability. Rewriting the classical Freudian prohibition of incest, Levi-Strauss claims that it is not so much a taboo against marriage with the mother, sister, or daughter, but rather a statutory insistence that these women be traded to others. Levi-Strauss concludes in Saussurian fashion that "These prohibitions are all thus reduced to a single common denominator: they all constitute a misuse of language, and on this ground they are grouped together with the incest prohibition, or with acts evocative of incest. What does this mean, except that women themselves are treated as signs, which are misused when not put to the use reserved to signs, which is to be communicated" (481).

Lacan's theory states that the Oedipus complex is the process whereby the child incorporates the language of kinship relations and receives a position within his family by taking on a name which is only made intelligible through the language of kinship (Ecrits 66). The name the child learns is "the name of the father" (le nom du pére) which also signifies the child's understanding of the incest prohibition by a pun on the nom du pére by the non du pére. In this sense, the father becomes a "figure of the law" (Ecrits 67).

In "The Neurotic's Individual Myth," Lacan stresses the father's excessive and overdetermined symbolic importance: "The father is the representative, the incarnation, of a

symbolic function which concentrates in itself those things most essential in other cultural structures--namely, the tranquil, or rather, symbolic, enjoyment, culturally determined and established, of the mother's love, that is to say, of the pole to which the subject is linked by a bond that is irrefutably natural" (422-23). In this essay, it is the failure of the real father (and Acker's texts are replete with step-fathers) to live up to these symbolic significations that is the root of neuroses and even psychoses.

In his paper "The Signification of the Phallus" (1958), Lacan emphasizes that the phallus is not a real organ of the body: "For the phallus is a signifier, a signifier whose function in the intra-subjective economy of analysis might lift the veil from that which it served in the mysteries. For it is to this signifier that it is given to designate as a whole the effect of there being a signified" (Feminine Sexuality 79-80). As the phallus functions as a signifier, neither man nor woman can have the phallus. The phallus signifies fullness of being and as the repressed central point-de-capiton, all of our speech is a metonymic attempt to cover over the "want-of-being" (manque-à-être), the fundamental ontological lack of identity.

In Blood and Guts in High School, the Lacanian Phallus is writ large, indicating its extravagant and overblown position in our culture. The narrator begins by stating that the ten-year old Janey Smith "[n]ever having known a mother, her

mother had died when Janey was a year old, Janey depended on her father for everything and regarded her father as boyfriend, brother, sister, money, amusement, and father" (7). This statement is accompanied by an uproarious and grotesque illustration of her father's penis (Fig. 1). Janey then draws a picture of her own genitals that reveals the disgust she feels for them and the desire they represent (Fig. 2). In this sense, the father (or men in general) stands as a figure of excitement and mobility to the young Janey Smith; he is a knight in shining armour who represents freedom and agency in the outside world. Consequently, it is no surprise that Janey desires him. However, the phallus is not intrinsically the symbol of desire but becomes so because of the child's place in the oedipal romance.

Acker emphasizes this point as Blood and Guts begins with a chapter entitled "Inside high school" and is an exhortation on how "Parents stink." Janey is trapped in the oedipalized territories of both the family and its corollary, the ideological state apparatus of the educational system. Within "high school," the phallus stands for the subjugation that occurs when a culture constructs a law of sexual difference that exceeds any natural or biological division. This law creates both a dependence upon and a desire for the father that has been overdetermined in our culture. What is perhaps most shocking about the first section of the novel is that Janey's conversations with her father sound like those of a

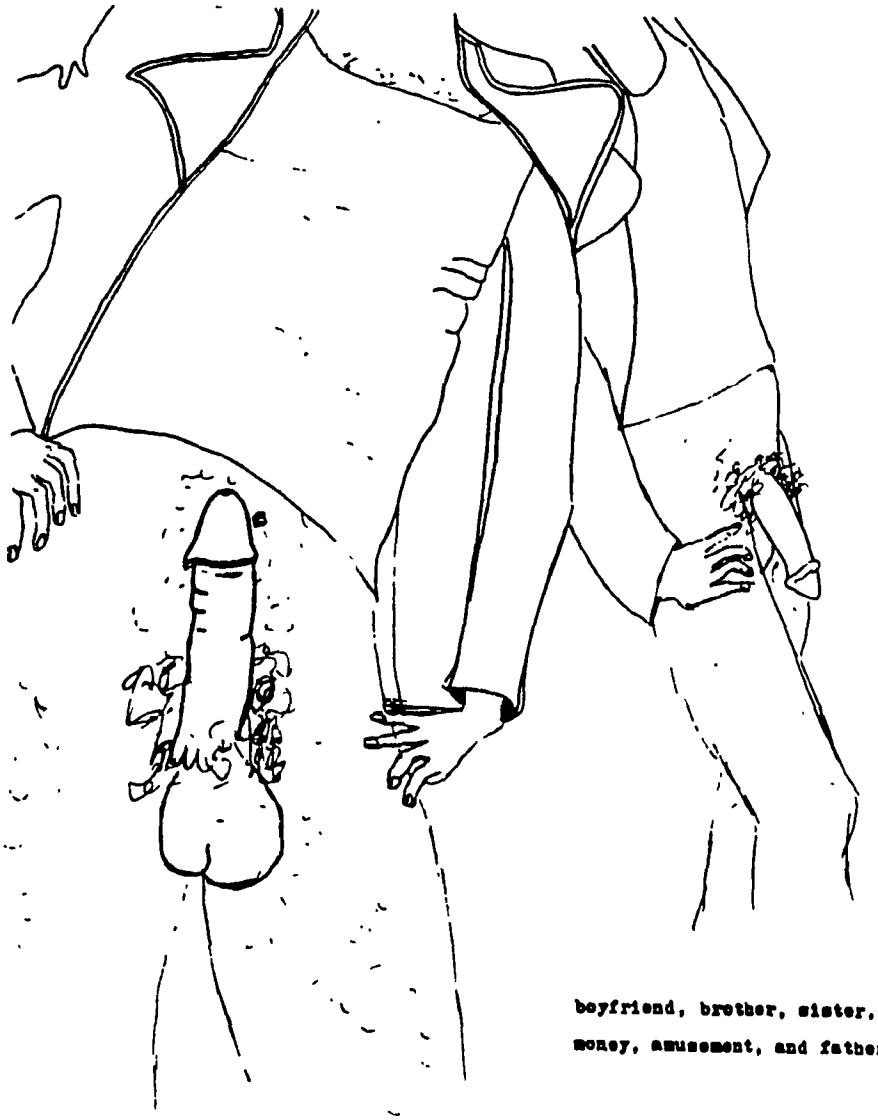


Fig. 1&2

Fig. 1 Kathy Acker, Blood and Guts in High School, New York: Grove, 1978, p. 7.

Fig. 2 Kathy Acker, Blood and Guts in High School, p. 18.

woman and her husband or lover. Acker forces the reader to consider the connection between romantic relationships in our culture and the power of the father in the oedipal family: the father and the husband/lover are part of the same continuum of male prerogative. This connection is repressed in our culture by the hysterical discourse that surrounds the question of child abuse. The abuser is portrayed as the sole, mad pervert rather than the extreme expression of normal oedipal father-daughter relationships.

Janey, however, begins to question this glorification of the Phallus:

> Janey Smith was ten years old, living with her father in Merida, the main city in the Yucatan. Janey and Mr. Smith had been planning a big vacation for Janey in New York City in America. Actually Mr. Smith was trying to get rid of Janey so he could spend all his time with Sally, a twenty-one-year-old starlet who was still refusing to fuck him. (7)

With this realization, Janey becomes frantic. Once she suspects her father's intentions she tears up his bed and locks herself up in their house by shoving boards against the front door. The ensuing arguments with her father are punctuated by Janey's interior screams of masochistic rage: LASHES I FEEL. . . . LASHES MAKE ME NO LONGER MYSELF LASHES, AS IF THE WORLD, BY ITS VERY NATURE, HATES ME. . . . CAUSE OF LASHES: THE SURGE OF SUFFERING IN THE SOUL CORRUPTS THE SOUL" (18-21). Incest and rape by the (step)father is the primal scene in both Blood and Guts and all of Acker's subsequent novels. The fact that this scene is central and

linguistically based is underscored by Acker who names her characters after the Dick (slang for penis = phallus/father), Jane (Janey), and Sally (her father's lover) of elementary school reading primers. The state of shock caused by this primal scene is expressed particularly in one scene that is repeated verbatim six times in the text:

> A few hours later they woke up together and decided they would spend the whole day together since it was their last day. Janey would meet Johnny at the hotel where he worked when he got off from work.
>
> They ate raw fish salad (ceviche) at a Lebanese joint and tea at a Northern Chinese place. They held hands. They didn't talk about Sally or anything heavy.
>
> Johnny left her, telling her he'd be home later. (21)

One could explain these repetitions through the use of classical psychoanalysis. In Freud's Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920) specifically, the repetition-compulsion consists of repeating a painful memory again and again, until a sufficient defence has been built up after the event. Normally, it is anxiety that prepares us to expect danger and therefore an unpleasant surprise always precedes the need to repeat. Nevertheless, the repetition of this passage is an experiment similar to those performed in Nymphomaniac and Acker seems to be suspicious of Freud's defense mechanisms which ensure stable egos who often turn rage inwards and are rendered incapable of expressing anger. Moreover, there is a duplicity to Janey's discussions with her father and her internalized howls of torment. The first capitalized segments in this chapter express Janey's feelings that she is not

herself, that the world despises her, that her soul is suffering. Yet, these statements force her to admit that "I AM NOT ME" (22). These shrieks are "TINY SOUNDS, BUT SOUNDS ..." that interrupt enforced cultural repetitions, that hark back to an alternative history, that "ANNOUNCE THE RUINS PROFOUND OF THE CHRISTS WITHIN (US)" (23-4). These ruptures in conscious thought lead Janey to conjecture the possibility of pleasure in pain: "The thought flashed through my mind that I was getting off on all this. I was a masochist. So: was I making the situation worse?" (20). If Janey acts lovelorn, irrational and possessive towards her father, it is because "(<u>though she wants to keep the conversation light, she's been programmed to say it</u>): You mean you're not going to live with me again?" (27).

Mr. Smith eventually sends a passive and unprotesting Janey, feverish with pelvic inflammatory disease, to school in New York. In Lacan's theory of desire, desire has its origins not only in the alienation of the subject from its being, but in the subject's perception of its distinctness from the objects with which it earlier identified. The alienation of Janey is symbolized by the move from Merida to New York; the scenes in Mexico are written as dramatic dialogue, indicating dialogic interaction, whereas in New York the text shifts to Janey's first person in excerpts from her diary.

In New York, she hooks up with a gang of wild kids called the Scorpions who act as replacements for her lost love

object, her father: "Daddy no longer loved me. That was it. I was desperate to find the love he had taken away from me" (31). What we have here is a description, in Lacanian terms, of the birth of desire and Janey's entry into the symbolic. For Lacan, desire begins as soon as the drives are split off from the subject, consigned forever to the unconscious in a state of non-representation and non-fulfilment. However, Acker's account of Janey's relationship with her father goes beyond Lacan. In Lacanian theory, the infant exists in a state of being, not yet able to distinguish itself from its mother or the rest of the world. The entry into the symbolic, an inauguration into language and meaning, is incited by the oedipal situation and splits off the libidinal drives into the unconscious. In contrast, Janey's entry into the symbolic occurs when she is ten years old and emphasizes the importance of actual rape and incest in the oedipal romance, a fact that Freud had repressed and denied as hysterical and neurotic in classical psychoanalysis. The emphasis on a continuum (from infancy to pre-adolescence and so on) rather than a specific point in time for entry into the symbolic underscores the importance of social factors, such as formalized education (high school) in the creation of a hegemonic symbolic.

Despite this difference, Acker is working within a Lacanian framework at this point in the text. For instance, the Lacanian definition of the real is the phenomenon that occurs when a subject moves from a state of being (a state of

feeling connected to the world) to a state of non-being (marked by the mirror stage and then entry into language, the symbolic, oedipal triangulation and finally the acceptance of the "fact" of castration). The trauma that occurs in moving from being to non-meaning is so intense, in which the subject craves the lost connection so desperately, that interpellation into meaning, ideology, and gender occurs almost naturally. Against Freud who sees desire as a wish to return to a inorganic, preconscious state where we cannot be hurt, Lacan asserts that it is an original lost object that constructs the narrative of lives, causing humans to pursue an endless chain of metonymic substitutions to return to paradise lost--a strategy that ends in disaster for Janey. Joining up with the Scorpions, she gets involved with young men who stand as metonymic substitutions for her father, but these unions result in two abortions whose process is described by Janey in the coldest, clinical terms:

> The women in my line were handed long business forms: at the end of each form was a paragraph that stated she gave the doctor the right to do whatever he wanted and if she ended up dead, it wasn't his fault. We had given ourselves up to men before. That's why we were here. All of us signed everything. Then they took our money. . . .
>
> Having an abortion was obviously just like getting fucked. If we closed our eyes and spread our legs, we'd be taken care of. They stripped us of our clothes. Gave us white sheets to cover our nakedness. Led us back to the pale green room. I love it when men take care of me. (32-3)

Indeed. Clearly, abortions stand as a symbol of sexual relations in our culture. Her father becomes her lover who in

turn becomes her doctor and so on, creating a literal signifying chain of female dependence on men. By adhering to the metonymic ideal of love based on lack, Janey contributes to the perpetuation of male power.

Yet, Blood and Guts is fundamentally a book about strategies for escape. One of the ways that Janey begins to envision an exodus from male property and propriety is through an Artaudian notion of the "theatre of cruelty":

> Every day a sharp tool, a powerful destroyer, is necessary to cut away dullness, lobotomy, buzzing, belief in human beings, stagnancy, images, and accumulation. As soon as we stop believing in human beings, rather know we are dogs and trees, we'll start to be happy. (37)

One of the ways Acker accomplishes this destruction is through the use of a plagiaristic strategy that rewrites and revises. For instance, a significant shift occurs in the novel when the narrative moves from "inside" to "outside high school" through the rewriting of a fairy tale of "How spring came to the land of snow and icicles." This story recounts the lives a hideous monster and his companion the beaver who live in a warm house in a frozen landscape. The surroundings are so cold and stagnant that

> the poor hideous monster couldn't see anything. He started to cry and the tears turned to ice on his cheeks. He didn't know what to do. He grew scared because he didn't know what to do.
> He forgot he didn't know what to do.
> He just stood there.
> He went back inside the hut. (44-5)

Their secure but desolate and empty life is disturbed by the appearance of a cold and hungry bear who wants nothing more

than to enter the house. He tries several times without success. Frustrated, the bear becomes violent and angry and ultimately crazed.

Acker's fairy tale does the opposite of what such a narrative is supposed to accomplish. In his classic text The Uses of Enchantment, Bruno Bettleheim attempts to define the underlying function of all fairy tales: "The figures and events of fairy tales personify and illustrate inner conflicts, but they suggest ever so subtly how these conflicts may be solved, and what the next steps in the development toward higher humanity might be" (xi). To take a case in point, Hansel and Gretel become prey to the witch because they succumb to primitive satisfaction and oral regression. Carried away by their uncontrolled craving they destroy shelter and safety. To subsequently survive, they must take initiative and learn intelligent planning and acting. They must modify their behaviour towards intelligent assessment (the substitution of the bone for the finger, tricking the witch) which must replace wishfulfilling fantasies (eating the house).

Acker is well aware of this use and abuse of narrative. She interrupts her own yarn with the description of a little boy being read his nightly "soothing" tall tale: ". . . the little boy was looking directly ahead at a big being who was telling him a story. 'Once upon a time,' the big being said. 'Once upon a time there was a man who roamed the whole land.

This man wasn't a giant physically, but he was a giant in every other way. The giant ate ears of corn and, now and then, the heads off human beings . . ." (54). How is a little boy to feel when faced with overwhelming power of "big-being" author/"giant." Once again, the initial entry in to language is reinforced in childhood by a myth of the phallus which isn't "giant physically."

In contrast, Acker's bear, frozen and abandoned in the woods, is compared to "some crazy woman who's possessed and turning" (54). Its exclusion from bourgeois comfort leads to a vision of blackness or emptiness of being:

> You, the thing you called 'you,' was a ball turning and turning in the blackness only the blackness wasn't something--like 'black'--and it wasn't nothingness 'cause nothingness was somethingness. . . . Your self is a ball turning and turning as it's being thrown from one hand to the other hand and every time the ball turns over you feel all your characteristics, your identities, slip around so you go crazy. When the ball doesn't turn, you feel stable. (55)

Yet this vision brings happiness to the bear, who "began to dance and sing and make all sorts of funny noises" (55). He eventually spreads his wings and flies away never to return to the beaver and monster's warm house.

At this point, the novel returns to excerpts from Janey's diary where she recounts her recurrent fantasies of sexual encounters that "are always cold wild and free" (58). In this section, which was cited in the censorship trial that banned Blood and Guts in Germany, tells of her masochistic sexual relations with an eighty-year-old writer and her desire to be

raped by young black men. These dreams are interrupted when a one black and one white hoodlum break into her apartment to kidnap her into white slavery. As the men beat her and trash her apartment, the divide between masochistic reality and fantasy becomes apparent:

> Before she could scream, the white one clapped his hand over her mouth. She tried to bite him, but she couldn't. She tried to kick her legs. . . . She felt like that thing--whatever it was--of which she was most scared, the most terrifying thing in the world was happening to her. The thing--whatever it was--she didn't know. The thing--what she most didn't want to happen--she was now right in the middle of. This was the most awful thing that could happen to her. She had to get away.
>
> It just wasn't possible that she couldn't get away. The human imagination couldn't conceive of such a thing. Her mind wouldn't admit defeat. It keep flying and flying. (59-60)

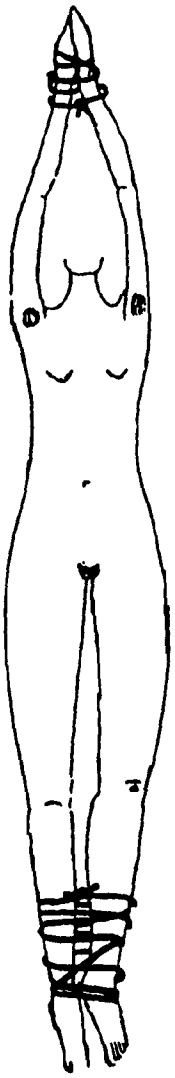
The men take her from the apartment, dragging her "like a doll" through the "poisoned" and "vomity" streets of New York, past the cops who heartily great the kidnappers, to a locked room in the home of the "mysterious Mr. Linker."

Mr. Linker is described as a man "fond of teaching," who pulled himself up from the poverty of Iranian streets where he had been born the son of a beggar. He managed to talk his way into studying in Vienna with Carl Jung and eventually became a lobotomist. While Janey is still locked in her room, he tells the young hoodlums about how "All of our culture comes from ancient Greece. Culture is our highest form of art" and how it separates from the beasts. Citing Goethe, Schiller, and Sartre, Mr. Linker states that Culture is created through disease. He then gives an example of his own disease by

disclosing the story of his wife who died (went insane) from overwork and the inhalation of wool particles as she was making her masterpiece, a rug. The irony here, of course, is that it is not Mr. Linker who is diseased but his wife. Once she is dead/insane, Mr. Linker "added the white slavery business to his lobotomy and summer resort operations" (65).

Acker links this situation to her illustration on the previous page of a woman in bondage entitled "Ode to a Grecian Urn. (Fig. 3)" The title is an intertextual reference to Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn," and one wonders if Acker's drawing is her reconceptualization of his "still unravished bride of quietness" (l. 1). In Acker's drawing, the woman in bondage is "still" and "quiet," and her suspension suggests an immanent ravishing. Of course, in Keats' ode the bride is the urn itself, a "[s]ylvan historian, who canst thus express/A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:" (l. 3-4), which is why the preposition is changed from "on" to "to" in Acker's revision. Acker does this to make a point: works of art and women are both treated as objects.

The poet's attraction to the urn is that is conceals the secrets of life, the men and gods, the mad pursuit, the struggle to escape, the wild ecstasy, and so on (l. 5-10). However, it is significant that this "still unravished" knowledge is expressed with the metaphor that has historically been used to describe the seductive qualities of women. The work of art, like "woman," is an object to be penetrated to



ODE TO A GRECIAN URN

Fig. 3

reveal the mysteries of life. The paradox is that these mysteries must be contained whether in the work of art or the construction of the category of woman, as is revealed by the widely debated first phrase of Keats's poem. Does Keats use the word "still" as an adverb ("as yet") or as an adjective ("motionless"), the latter revealing a nostalgic longing for permanence and truth and not the excess of meaning elaborated in contemporary post-structuralist theory.

The enigmatic quality of Keats's ode has been discussed extensively and it is difficult to definitely determine whether the last two lines ("Beauty is truth, truth beauty") are the expression of a belief in a metaphysical proposal, a piece of dialogue spoken by someone other than the poet, or an absurdity. By contrast, Acker's illustration rails against the concepts of beauty and truth. These formalist concepts have contained art within the limits of Mr. Linker's Culture, in the same way that the beauty of woman and the truth of their essence has lead to their literal bondage. By revising Keats's poem, Acker forces the reader to acknowledge the links between the containment of art and gender.

From this plagiarism of Keats, Janey goes on to write her book report on Nathanial Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter, which she uses to establish how little has changed for women since the time of Hesther Prynne:

> Long ago, when Hawthorne wrote The Scarlet Letter, he was living in a society that was more socially repressive and less materialistic than our. He wrote about a wild woman. This woman challenged

> the society by fucking a guy who wasn't her husband and having his kid. The society punished her by sending her to g[illegible]. . . .
>
> Nowadays most women fuck around 'cause fucking doesn't mean anything. All anybody cares about today is money. The woman who lives her life according to nonmaterialistic ideals is the wild antisocial monster; the more openly she does so, the more everyone hates her. (66)

For Acker, materialism is closely related to the ideology of lack. The unconscious in Lacan's scheme only comes into existence with the birth of desire for an object. Through the plagiarisms of a fairy tale, Keats, and Hawthorne, Janey has begun to question this lack, whether it is for the security of home, truth and beauty, or consumer products. However, these acts of active reading are only the first steps in undermining the ideology of lack, the first steps towards a return to the unconscious. In Lacan's terms, the unconscious contains that which is repressed in consciousness and signifies the split alienated subject. Moreover, the repressed polymorphous desires of the unconscious are <u>not subject to mimesis and identification</u>; instead they operate in a different language. Acker highlights this entry into language in the aforementioned sections of the novel, however, it is most forcefully argued in a section entitled "The Persian Poems." While Acker examines the narrative structure of a fairy tale and an ode to beauty, in these poems the experimentation is brought down to the basic level of grammar and its inherent structures of meaning.

"The Persian Poems" are a hypertextual imitation of an

elementary school textbook: "Janey/Janey is a girl" reminds one of the primary school readers of our own childhoods, our own entry into language, memory, and the Symbolic (72). Everyone remembers the simple and purportedly neutral syntax of "See Dick run. See Jane Run." However, by the third line in Acker's version, it is announced that "the world is red" (72). This line refers to the cultural position of women once they enter language and the Symbolic because the section immediately preceding the Persian Poems is "a book report" on Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter whose main character is forced to wear the red letter 'A' as a mark of her social ostracism for her adulterous behaviour.

Acker takes a stand similar to the French feminist and theorist Monique Wittig who states in the article "The Mark of Gender" that both the French and the English language "give way to a primitive ontological concept that enforces in language a division of beings into sexes" (3). More specifically, Wittig asserts that subjectivity and the construction of gender take place in the category of language and the use of the personal pronoun. For Wittig, personal pronouns designate locuters, namely the first person, the person of the subject, and are the means of entry into language:

> [b]ut in reality as soon as gender manifests itself in discourse, there is a kind of suspension of grammatical form. A direct interpellation of the locutor occurs. The locutor is called upon in person. The locutor intervenes, in the order of pronouns, without mediation, in its proper sex--

> that is, when the locutor is a sociological woman. For it is only then, that the notion of gender takes its full effect. . . . One knows that, in French, with je (I), one must mark gender as soon as one uses it in relation to past participles and adjectives. In English, where the same kind of obligation does not exist, a locutor when a sociological woman, must in one way or another, that is, with a certain number of clauses, make her sex public. For gender is the enforcement of sex in language. . . . (5)

Acker proceeds to expose the ideological function of syntax in language by showing how the grammatical unit of the Cyrillic Persian ezafe (,) that links two grammatical entities, such as an adjective and its noun, much in the way that poststructuralist theory understands meaning to be constructed through a signifying chain in which a word's meaning is solely dependent upon the words that surround it. Through a syntactical sleight-of-hand, "Janey" is associated with the "night," "red night," "night world," a "small room," and "the narrow side-street," namely the cliched realms of the dark continent, sexuality, the domestic, and the particular (72-3). By contrast, we learn next that culture is connected to "books and great men and the fine arts" (73). For Janey, both gendered meanings "stink" and this comparison corresponds to the way that the universal use of the personal pronoun "he" or the noun "man" enforces sex in language. Books, great men, and the fine arts are identified with light, reason, and the universal, relegating women to the realm of the particular. If a woman cannot attain subjectivity then she cannot speak. If she can speak, it is only in "parrot" talk, where women are

slaves echoing their masters' talk or are accused of being plagiarists or liars. In this sense, discourse that privileges the Phallus oppresses women in that it prevents them from speaking unless they speak in its terms.

Other adjectives, such as the demonstrative pronouns "this" and "that," work to create individual egos separated by an artificially created sense of time and space: "this peasant/that peasant" (74). On the basis of this distinction, other judgements can be made using the positive, comparative, and superlative degree of modifiers: "good peasant/a better peasant/this peasant is better/that one./the best peasant/a better peasant/the best peasant/the best peasant of this democracy/this peasant is the best of all" (74-5). Janey prefaces this section of the poems with the statement that "Certain adjectives are deviant: they precede their nouns. No ezafe (,) used here" (74). In English, some adjectives are also irregular and must be memorized (bad/worse/worst, good/better/best, many/more/most) suggesting a structure of language and grammar rather than words reflecting an unmediated reality. Through this grammatical construction, a number of divisions and hierarchies are established causing Janey to plea, "Language/to get rid of language/Janey hates prison" (76).

Grammatical syntax also creates subject/object dualisms that perpetuate myths of activity/passivity and masculinity/femininity. In narrative theory, "[t]he entire business of

representing the processes and participants of reality is . . . termed the ideational function of language. In relation to this ideational function, the clause is the basic vehicle for representing patterns of experience" (Toolan 112-3). Accordingly, Janey cites a list of the infinitives of transitive verbs, verbs that require objects to complete their meaning in English: "to have/to buy/to want/to see/to come/to beat up/to eat/to rob/to kidnap/to kill" (81). This list is immediately repeated with the transitive object attached "to have Janey/to buy Janey/to want Janey . . ." (84). The character Janey is always the object in this syntactical structure, just like Acker's Hester Prynne who explains how she is mistreated by "the young handsome, Reverend Dimwit: you'd marry me, you'd dump me, you'd fuck me, you were going again with your former girlfriend, you'd save me from blindness. You'd. Verb. Me." (95). The grammatical structure of transitivity, including how particular verbs take on direct or indirect objects, divides the world into those who are agents and those who are acted upon. Janey suggests in her "Persian Poems" that usually men are the agents and women are the passive recipients in a language that reinforces the objectification of women and denies the active and productive flows of female desire. Acker's Hester Prynne, attempting to reverse the direction of transitivity, demands: "Teach me how to talk to you. WANT. Is my wanting you so bad, wanting your cock so bad, wanting the feel of your lips on my lips just me

being selfish and egotistic? Is wanting horrible and has to be put down and repressed? Teach me a new language" (96). To enable women to express desire, a new language must be written and hence language and desire are intimately related. By including the cyrillic script and translating from Persian, a language that most of her readers do not understand, Acker underscores that language frames our experience of the world--an experience that is certainly debatable.

Lacan may be excellent at describing the oedipal situation, but he provides little hope of agency or escape; at the end of the "Persian Poems," Janey is able to declare that "my father is dead" and that "my body is life/my body is hot," but ultimately, she is at a loss to reclaim desire as it is still articulated as lack: "my cunt is empty/my cunt is red/this is my cunt" (92-3 Fig. 4). The despotic signifier reigns and desire is an ever-renewed failure that generates a constant yearning. For Deleuze and Guattari, this state of lack is not foundational. On the contrary, it serves an ideological function:

> Lack is created, planned, and organized in and through social production. . . . The deliberate creation of lack as a function of market economy is the art of a dominant class. This involves deliberately organizing wants and needs amid an abundance of production; making all of desire teeter and fall victim to the great fear of not having one's needs satisfied. (Anti-Oedipus 28)

Yet how does one circumvent this endless chain of metonymic substitutions that are centred around the recognition of the phallus, an identification that is constructed through the

بابا father
ببین see!

بابای من ببین see my father!
بابای من وفات آست my father is dead.
بابای من آبی آست my father is blue.
این بابای من آست this is my father.

تن body

تن من ببین see my body!
تن من خان آست my body is life.
تن من تب است my body is hot.
این تن من آست this is my body.

خانه cunt

خانهٔ من ببین see my cunt!
خانهٔ من بی آست my cunt is empty.
خانهٔ من سرخ آست my cunt is red.
این خانهٔ من آست this is my cunt.

. . . . . .

Fig. 4 Kathy Acker, Blood and Guts in High School, pp. 92-3.

exclusion of a sexuality that puts them into question? In the Lacanian framework, identification is understood to be fixed within the binary disjunction of men "having" and women "being" the Phallus, with the excluded ("being") term continually haunting the coherent posturing of the other. The prohibited term is an excluded sexuality that contests the self-grounding pretensions of subjects, as well as claiming to know the source and object of its desire. In Lacan's nomenclature, both positions are signified, with the signifier (the phallus) belonging to the Symbolic that can never be assumed in more than token form by either position. In this sense, both positions are doomed to failure as one can never "be" or "have" the phallus. This failure of both positions breaks down the traditional subject-object binary, reducing both constructions, male and female, to the level of the signified. Nevertheless, Judith Butler suggests in Gender Trouble that a metonymic slip occurs: "[b]y instituting the Symbolic as invariably phantasmatic, the 'invariably' wanders in an 'inevitably,' generating a description of sexuality in terms that promote cultural stasis as its results . . . . That the language of physiology or disposition does not appear here is welcome news, but binary restrictions nevertheless still operate to frame and formulate sexuality and delimit in advance the forms of its resistance to the 'real'".[1] As

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[1]. For Butler, Lacan romanticizes this identificatory failure "before the law," and suggests that it is reminiscent of the Old Testament God and his subjects.

Deleuze and Guattari state, "From the moment lack is reintroduced into desire, all of desiring-production is crushed, reduced to being no more than the production of fantasy" (Anti-Oedipus 111). Acker, like the anti-oedipal philosophers, rejects Lacan's negative assessment of agency, heading out on a different route. To contest the reality of being inside high school, at the mercy of the all-encompassing phallus, Janey begins to adopt an anti-oedipal strategy.

In the section that follows "The Persian Poems," Janey's discourse begins to degenerate into what seems to be nonsense. Acker had previously used this strategy in a short piece entitled Translations of the Diaries of Laure the Schoolgirl. Laure writes in a letter to a lover:

> Sometimes I try to break off everything with you because I hate you so much because you don't give me anything I want everything is your way: you don't have money you don't have time you don't love me
>
> I'd rather be frigid
>
> Laure
>
> a b c d e
>
> I can no longer speak
>
> a b
>
> I'm no longer apart from the world

This religious theme should then be understood as Nietzsche's "slave morality" in On the Genealogy of Morals: "The construction of the law that guarantees failure is symptomatic of a slave morality that disavows the very generative powers it uses to construct the 'Law' as a permanent impossibility" (57). Butler goes on to ask what power creates this fiction and what are the cultural stakes involved in the self-negating binary.

a

I don't know how to count yet. (105)

At this juncture, we have a regression back to Lacan's imaginary before sexual difference and identity have been narrowly defined. Deleuze and Guattari are indebted to Lacan's theorizing of the imaginary that allowed them to theorize an unconscious desire indifferent to a theory of negation, identity, or body image; it is pre-personal, pre-individual, and multiple (Anti-Oedipus 38).

In Blood and Guts, Janey records a similar regression scrawling a series of "I's" across a page and then demanding that "I wish there was a reason to believe this letter" (Fig. 5). The process of schizophrenia, a disbelief in being or self, begins and Janey moves towards the "body without organs." In Deleuze and Guattari's account, schizophrenics enter a catatonic state and inhabit a "body without organs" (taken from Antonin Artaud), experiencing multiple personalities or taking on identities of historical figures. The enforcement of social codes directs desire ("desiring-production") into enforced channels. If these codes are deterritorialized and the "body without organs" enabled, then the nomadic subject charts the fluidity of "becoming other" (Anti-Oedipus 85). Deleuze and Guattari, speaking of Nietzsche's madness, assert that "There is no Nietzsche-the-self, professor of philosophy, who passes through a series of states, and who identifies these states with the names of

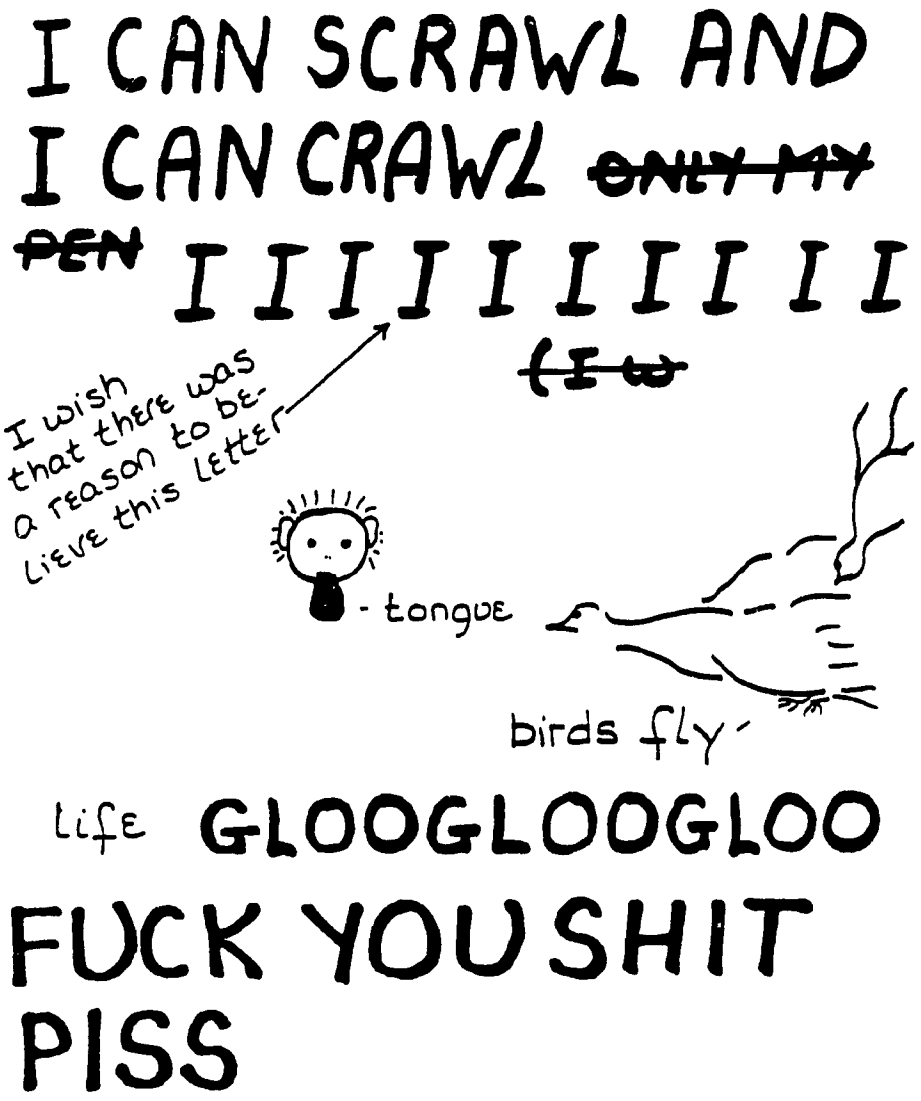

Fig. 5 Kathy Acker, Blood and Guts in High School, p. 101.

history: "every name in history is I". . . . It is not a matter of identifying with various historical personages, but rather identifying the names of history with zones of intensity on the body without organs; and each time Nietzsche-as-subject exclaims: "They're me! So it's me!" (Anti-Oedipus 21)

The goal of Deleuze and Guattari and Acker's work is to trace the multiple paths of desire, both their blockages and metamorphoses and their model is that of the rhizome and lines of flight. Acker in Blood and Guts seems, like Kafka before her, to be writing her own letter to her father. Deleuze and Guattari note that Kafka's strategy is to inflate the father to a point of absurdity as he

> moves from a classical Oedipus of the neurotic type, in which the well-loved father is hated, accused, declared guilty, to a much more perverse Oedipus, who falls for the hypothesis of an innocence of the father . . . but only to give way to an accusation to the nth degree, to reproach so much stronger that it becomes unassignable and unlimited. (Kafka 18)

In an oedipalized world, we need to find a way out. Deleuze and Guattari's "lines of flight" are vectors of affectivity (desiring-production) that rupture any particular structure of power.

Janey writes "The Persian Poems" and "a book report" after being kidnapped by a Persian slave trader and being held prisoner is a literary trope that represents the containment and repression of female desire in western culture. In Deleuze and Guattari's terms, desire has become

"territorialized." Pornography and "free love" are accepted in our society as they have become: "Robot fucking. Mechanical fucking. Robot love. Mechanical love. Money cause. Mechanical causes. Possessiveness habits jealous lack of privacy wanting wanting wanting" (98). The Hester Prynne in Blood and Guts writes to Reverend Dimwit asking that they run away together to become criminals. His response is, "I don't want to run away with you and become a pirate. I just want to save my soul" (100).

Not being able to escape the slave trader, Janey falls in love with him. In a poem to him, based on a "translation" of a Latin poet, Sextus Propertius, her desire becomes "Inside me mongoloid WANTING no known techniques,/can't remember known, like before, to go roads" (101). This repressed or territorialized desire is expressed through the metaphor of pelvic inflammatory disease, heart disease, pregnancy, and cancer: "The Persian slave trader finally decided Janey was ready to hit the streets. She had demonstrated that she knew how to make impotent men hard . . . . Now she was beautiful. There was only one thing wrong, at least according to the Persian slave trader. At this moment he found out she had cancer" (116). However, this disease should not be viewed negatively for it is an escape from an oppressive situation and Acker appropriately describes Janey's cancer through the metaphor of birth:

> Having cancer is like having a baby. If you're a woman and you can't have a baby 'cause you're

> starving poor and 'cause no man wants anything to do with you or 'cause you're lonely and miserable and frightened and totally insane, you might as well get cancer. You can feel your lump, and you nurse, knowing it will always get bigger. It eats you, and, gradually, you learn, as all good mothers learn, to love yourself.
>
> . . . She was no longer totally impotent and passive about her lousy situation. Now she could do something about the pain in the world: she could die. (116)

In a sense, Janey realized her fundamental alienation, her want-of-being by composing The Persian Poems, yet moves from this position of lack and negativity, towards a fundamentally anti-oedipal moment: becoming cancerous. Like Gregor Samsa, who faced with another monotonous day at the office becomes animal, Janey becomes cancerous to elude an oppressive situation. One must understand that Janey wills this becoming and that desire takes on multifarious forms because there is never a causal relationship between the biological urge and its representative or manifestation. Libido, desire, sexual drive are all terms for an energy that is never a thing or entity. Moreover, we cannot distinguish an action and infer from it a parallel physical motive force. Indeed, the aim of desire is variable and its object provisional.

Significantly, Deleuze and Guattari do not think of desire according to the Lacanian "three errors" of lack, law, and signifier.

> It is one and the same error, an idealism that forms a pious conception of the unconscious. . . . From the moment lack is reintroduced into desire, all of desiring production is crushed, reduced to

> being no more than the production of fantasy; but the sign does not produce fantasies, it is a production of the real and a position of desire within reality. From the moment desire is wedded again to the law . . . the eternal operation of eternal repression recommences, the operation that closes around the unconscious the circle of prohibition and transgression, white mass and black mass; but the sign of desire is never a sign of the law, it is a sign of strength. (Anti-Oedipus 111-2)

Against Lacan's declarations about the metonymic nature of desire, Deleuze and Guattari state that there is no lack behind desire, no signifier structuring it, no law controlling it. Desire is both individual and social, productive and positive, creating a multiplicity of connections. Subjects no longer disappear; they are "desiring machines" who produce effects that in practice change the world or Lacan's impossible "real" in some way.

Moreover, Deleuze and Guattari believe that desire is social rather than familial and that the articulation of the Oedipal family structure in traditional psychoanalysis is a way of containing desire in capitalist society. Capitalism undermines traditional beliefs and kinship structures, "deterritorializing" the desire inherent in these codes. However, capitalism also reterritorializes desire into the Oedipus complex and the nuclear family, ensuring a "commodified" desire that is ruled by the economic structures of a capitalist society (i.e. housing starts as a leading economic indicator which in turn is dependent upon the nuclear family). Schizophrenics, according to Deleuze and Guattari,

are those in whom oedipalization has not occurred.

Similar to becoming schizophrenic, becoming cancerous is a sane response to an oppressive situation. Moreover, Acker does not wish us to assume that this ill-health is the lot of prostitutes or of women who live on the margins, rather it is the destiny of all women in our culture:

> Once upon a time there was a materialistic society one of the results of this materialism was a "sexual revolution." Since the materialistic society had succeeded in separating sex from every possible feeling, all you girls can now go spread your legs as much as you want 'cause it's sooo easy not to feel. Sex in America is S&M. This is the glorification of S&M and slavery and prison. (99)

Significantly, this sexual sadism is always connected to powerful males who inhabit the public sphere, such as then American President Jimmy Carter. Masochism, a form of anger, energy, desire, is internalized in the realm of the private: "Living locked up in a slave trader's room is easy. I mean you have the same emotions over and over again, the same thoughts, the same body, and after a while you see it's all in your mind: you're stuck to your mind. SLAVESLAVESLAVE" (112).

Janey escapes from this prison by adopting an anti-oedipal strategy that learns from madness, moving beyond disconnection and deterritorialization to new connections; Janey buys a ticket to Tangier in search of outlaw writer Jean Genet. Their meeting and his fascination with treason helps Janey heal as she begins to develop her own concept of terrorism:

Terrorism is not being conscious. Terrorism is

> letting happen what has to happen. Terrorism is letting rise up all that rises up like a cock or a flower. Tremendous anger and desire. Terrorism is straight-forwardness. You are a child. Only you don't imitate. For these reasons terrorists never grow up.
>
> Terrorism is a way to health. Health is the lusting for infinity and dying of all variants. Health is not stasis. It is not repression of lusting or dying. It is no bonds. The only desire of any terrorist is NO BONDS though terrorists don't desire. Their flaming jumping passions are infinite, but are not them.
>
> No bonds.
>
> For this reason terrorism and health are inseparably bound. (124)

Furthermore, Janey's definition of terrorism bypasses the totalizing paradigms of traditional revolutionary thought, a target in Acker's earlier Nymphomaniac:

> Terrorism can be fun. As far as big goals go, it has no goals so you remain slum-under; it has lots of little goals. You don't have to live any way. You don't have to believe in any certain thing or world. . . . Terrorists believe in nothing and everything; serious terrorists every time they kidnap someone don't believe they're changing anything. (124)

Although Genet obviously embodies deterritorialized desire for Janey, she cannot simply imitate him as the narrator ironically notes: "Janey's in a goal in Alexandria for stealing two copies of Funeral Rites and hash from Genet" (133). New territoralizations constantly need to be deterritorialized. Moreover, Genet's masochism, no matter how he insists, is not that of the subject who is historically constructed as woman. Acker includes a section from Genet's Journal du Voleur in which he describes his desire, "SEX," as violently masochistic: "I like men who hurt me because I

don't always see myself, I have my egotism cut up. I love this: I love to be beaten up and hurt and taken on a joy ride" (129). Acker, in a passage that is reminiscent of the diaries of Wanda von Sacher-Masoch who was forced to play a dominatrix in her husband's exotic sexual fantasies to ensure the economic survival of herself and her three children, illustrates that male sexual masochism is very different from female masochism:

> Janey to herself: Genet doesn't know how to be a woman. He thinks all he has to do to be a woman is slobber. He has to do more. He has to get down on his knees and crawl mentally every minute of the day. If he wants a lover, if he doesn't want to be alone every single goddamn minute of the day and horny so bad he feels the tip of his clit stuck in a porcupine's quill, he has to perfectly read his lover's mind, silently, unobtru-sively, like a corpse, and figure out at every changing second what his love wants. He can't be a slave. Women aren't just slaves. They are whatever their men want them to be. They are made, created by men. They are nothing without men. (130)

Janey's observations anticipate and precede Alice Jardine's critique of the popular trend of "becoming woman" (le devenir femme) in continental philosophy in an excellent article entitled "Woman in Limbo: Deleuze and His Br(others)." While Deleuze and Guattari are publicly supportive of feminism, Jardine notes that they still manage to put forth some surprisingly stereotyped images of women. She maintains that Deleuze and Guattari's "lignes de fuite": "[t]hese escape lines or 'vanishing lines,' as opposed to the 'molar lines' (sedentary, binary, stages) and 'molecular lines' (more fluid, but still with definite frontiers) of Western culture, are

consistently connoted as 'female'" (51). Jardine then asks rather caustically when and how does one become a woman? After the first menstruation? After the Oedipus complex when the girl redirects her object of desire from the mother to the father? The list of questions could be endless, nevertheless, we must remember that Deleuze and Guattari are dead serious when they speak of becoming. Becoming is not a metaphor; it is a metamorphosis like that undertaken by Gregor Samsa who wakes up one morning as a giant bug. According to French Feminist Luce Irigaray, the "Body without Organs" might simply be the historical condition of women:

> And does not one risk, once again, taking back from woman those/her as yet not territorialized spaces where her desire could finally come into its own? Woman having been assigned at the same time to the care of the "material body" and to the "body without organs," won't the "body without organs" come to occupy the place of their [women's] own schize? Of the emptying of their desire in their bodies? Of the still and forever "virginity" of their desire? In order to make of the "body without organ" a "cause" of jouissance, isn't it necessary to have had, with respect to language and sex--to organs?--a relationship which women have never had? (qtd. in Jardine 50-1)

Jardine concurs with Irigaray when she claims that woman will be forced to be the first to disappear and that she becomes "[a] silent, mutable, head-less, desire-less, spatial surface necessary only for His metamorphosis" (54). Despite her criticism, Jardine ultimately concludes that the radical promises of Deleuze and Guattari are important to women as she, in the act of writing, has not been silenced. She also cheers their attempts to invent new subjectivities. However,

she also warns that "[i]t is up to those men to requestion their assumptions about Desire (capital D); to re-explore their seemingly unmeasurable fear of a desire that has not pre-existed any of us, has not been pre-arranged--has not been allowed even to appear--in patriarchal culture" (59). Meanwhile, it is up to "women not to disappear from that space of exploration," and that is an area that Acker has tenaciously hung on to (59).

The loss of identity is frightening in our culture, yet for Deleuze and Guattari, the ego, like Oedipus, must be dismantled. Only once we forget about our egos, or identities, self-constructed as I, can a non-neurotic form of politics be possible, where the singular and the collective are no longer at odds with each other. For this reason, Blood and Guts ends on an anti-oedipal note in which political action is freed from totalizing paranoia, and allegiance is withdrawn from the old categories of the negative (law, castration, lack). Blood and Guts then is a nomadic text that privileges proliferation, juxtaposition, and disjunction in the name of desire, a world where "[p]arents teachers boyfriends/all have got to go" (165). It is a text in which Janey must "die," as the body without organs, the body without image, is a model of death symbolized by the catatonic schizophrenia (Anti-Oedipus 329). However, this death will ultimately give birth to "many other Janeys [who] were born and these Janeys covered the earth" (165).

CHAPTER THREE

Classic Plagiarism: Great Expectations and Don Quixote

> Little wits that plagiarise are but pickpockets: great wits that plagiarise are conquerors.
>
> Blackwood Magazine
> September 1863

Literary critic Ellen Friedman has noted that Kathy Acker's plagiarisms are nearly identical to visual artist Sherrie Levine's replicas of well-known art and photography. Levine became notorious in the mid-1980s for her direct appropriations of other photographer's work by simply framing them and showing them in galleries (Figs. 6, 7, and 8). Her dealers were most disconcerted when they were harassed by lawyers of the estates of the artists whose pictures she had appropriated and when these works turned out to be difficult to sell. However, several art critics and writers, particularly those associated with poststructuralism or contemporary Marxist theory, thought that Levine had successfully broken with the modernist tradition. As Friedman notes in "Now Eat Your Mind": "Plagiarism undermines the assumptions governing representation. That is, in plagiarizing, Acker and Levine do not deny the masterwork itself, but they do interrogate its sources in paternal authority and male desire" (43). Acker and Levine believe that power is held more by those who control the means of representation than by those who control the means of

Fig. 6 Sherrie Levine, After Alexander Rodchenko, 1985.

Fig. 7 Sherrie Levine, After Edward Weston, 1981.

Fig. 8 Sherrie Levine, After Walker Evans, 1981.

production. In a recent ARTnews interview, Levine has expressly stated that her appropriations of masterworks are linked to the articulation of female desire:

> I felt angry at being excluded. As a woman, I felt there was no room for me. There was all this representation . . . of male desire. The whole art system was geared to celebrating these objects of male desire. Where, as a woman artist, could I situate myself? What I was doing was making this explicit: how this oedipal relationship arts have with artists of the past gets repressed; and how I, as a woman, was only allowed to represent male desire. (Marsorati 96-7)

This statements recalls Acker's and Woodmansee's comments cited in the introduction. If a woman is always considered a fake and a liar, it is difficult for her to assume the position of the "author-genuius." By insisting that women write only about the domestic, the particular and the private, they have been reduced to the status of "writer." What Acker and Levine suggest is that all writing, gender, and identity are fake.

By locating the search for modes of representing female desire inside male texts and art, Acker and Levine demonstrate how difficult this process is in daily life, because desire, in our culture, has been constructed as a masculine prerogative. However, since all performances of gender are a plagiarism of a nonoriginary original, with some performances being more credible than others, Acker's work highlights the repetitive dress rehearsals that produce "real" women and men. Feminist philosopher Judith Butler notes that "[a]s in other ritual social dramas the action of gender requires a

performance that is repeated. This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation" (140). Gender then should not be thought of as a stable identity, but rather as "an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts" (140).

With "no doer behind the deed," how is one able to locate agency? According to Butler, agency is not contingent upon the viability of the subject or through recourse to a prediscursive "I":

> [t]he subject is not determined by the rules through which it is generated because signification is not a founding act, but rather a regulated process of repetition that both conceals itself and enforces its rules. . . . In a sense, all signification takes place within the orbit of the compulsion to repeat; "agency," then, is to be located within the possibility of a variation on that repetition. (145)

Understanding identity as an effect that is produced opens up possibilities of agency whereas essentialist theories of identity foreclose certain actions by insisting that biology is destiny. The question one must ask Butler is what exactly constitutes subversive repetition and what interventions into ritualist repetition are possible? Butler notes that

> [t]he critical task is, rather, to locate strategies of subversive repetition enabled by those constructions, to affirm the local possibilities of intervention through participating in precisely those practices of repetition that constitute identity and, therefore, present the immanent possibility of contesting them. (147)

For instance, Acker has said the following about the composition of Don Quixote:

> I had the actual copy of Don Quixote, and as a kind of joke, simply made the change from male to female to see what would happen. I don't think there was much more behind it than this direct simple move. Whenever I us "I," I am and I am not that "I." It's a little bit like the theatre: I'm an actress and that's the role I'm taking on. ("A Conversation" 12)

In this chapter, I will argue that Kathy Acker's Great Expectations (1982) and Don Quixote (1986) are attempts to locate these "strategies of subversive repetition." By exploring feminine fantasies of masochism, romance, and ideal love, Acker participates precisely in the stylized repetitive practices that constitute identity, particularly gendered identities. In doing so, Acker stresses how these identities are constituted in and by discourse and points to possible strategies of intervention and disruption.

I - Great Expectations

> Isn't storytelling always a way of searching for one's origins, speaking one's conflicts with the Law, entering into the dialectic of tenderness and hatred? Today we dismiss Oedipus and narrative at one and the same time: we no longer love, we no longer fear, we no longer narrate.
>
> Roland Barthes
> The Pleasure of the Text

Great Expectations and Don Quixote are the closest Kathy Acker came to Sherrie Levine-type experiments with literature. Acker picked these texts to plagiarize as they are prime

examples of two generally exclusive male genres: the bildungsroman and the picaresque novel. She plays with these genres to reveal how genre has traditionally affected the construction of gender roles. In Great Expectations, the unnamed female narrator takes on several of the traditionally assigned roles for women in our culture. For instance, O in Pauline Réage's The Story of O and the Mme de Cleves in La princesse de Cleves. This schizophrenic strategy is similar to that practised in Acker's first novel The Childlike Life of the Black Tarantula, except here she examines the roles of typically masochistic or passive women rather than the tough murderesses of the earlier novel. However, by plagiarizing a bildungsroman, Acker also places emphasis on several other issues.

In her work entitled Beyond Feminist Aesthetics, Rita Felski states that

> The traditional male bildungsroman is an essentially conservative genre; the hero's passionately held, if often naive ideals, are gradually worn away through encounters with the sobering forces of reality, and the conclusion signals an integration into society. . . . The feminist text, however, reveals a rather different trajectory; the journey into society does not signify a surrender of ideals and a recognition of limitations, but rather constitutes the precondition for oppositional activity and engagement. (137)

Felski claims that the feminist novel of self-discovery rewrites the traditionally, though not exclusively, male and conservative bildungsroman in which the ideals of a young man are worn away so that he may be integrated into society; the

male bildungsroman usually charts a young man's development from a sense of societal integration to eventual disillusionment with and alienation from that community. In the feminist rewriting, the female protagonist begins with an alienated consciousness and moves towards integration in an alternative community. For instance, the snobbish Pip in Dickens' Great Expectations has his ideas about his acceptance into Estella's sophisticated world dashed and his redemption at the end of the novel is based on a rejection of those values and the revalorization of his childhood days with Joe and Biddy. Conversely, Felski has noticed that a great part of feminist writing has been a rescripting of this genre in which a young woman or girl starts out feeling isolated. The tension of the novel stems from her eventual acceptance of an alternative public sphere that challenges mainstream discourse. The trajectory in the female bildungsroman is dependent upon activity.

In her Great Expectations, Acker displays the life plots of certain female role models and the difficulty of wrestling free from these norms. One of the obstacles in women's way is their image of their mother. Here, the novel begins with the narrator's mother's suicide, a paramount image of passivity and an actual event in Acker's own family history. With few images of feminine activity, women have difficulty modelling different lives for themselves. In a typically poststructuralist stance, though, Acker insists that such

articulations of femininity are mere cultural stereotypes. It is no coincidence, then, that Acker's plagiarized bildungsroman commences the way that it does.

Great Expectations begins with a word for word plagiarism of Dickens' text with Acker substituting the name Peter for Pip. The change in name emphasizes Acker's comment on the paternal lineage that is passed on in the name of the father. In the text of Dickens, the young protagonist cannot pronounce his first (Phillip) and family (Pirrip) names, so the two are collapsed into one: Pip. Dickens' text suggests that one has an identity inherent in one's first name, but that one is always formed and shaped by the family romance, therefore the two names become one. He can only imagine his dead parents as taking the shape of their tombstones, suggesting the death inherent in the family romance. The orphan Pip tries to resist his family heritage by refusing to remember his family name. Moreover, Pip's "parents" do not follow the traditional gender roles: his sister becomes his step-mother and takes on the paternal role, whereas Joe Gargery acts as the nurturing mother. This role reversal suggests that mother and father signify cultural positions and have no necessary correlation to biological realities. Indeed, these positions may be occupied by persons who have no natural claim to them. Biological connections have much less importance than social relationships and classifications. This fact is underscored in Dickens' text by the fact that Pip inherits his money and

authority from a criminal and that Estella, the women he loves for unworthy reasons, has a convicted petty criminal and a gypsy who stood trial for murder for parents. The family then is seen primarily through its ability to confer identity upon its members.

Pip does not feel any need to differentiate himself from the maternal Joe in the first third of Dicken's novel. He sees himself as taking of the forge and having great "larks" with his non-biological mother. The trouble begins when Jaggers appears with the news that Pip is expected to have great expectations. In the second-third of the novel Pip is most like Acker's Peter, who cuts himself off from his maternal past, which leads only to self-indulgent egocentrism. Dicken's Pip redeems himself by the end of the novel, something which does not occur in Acker's much harsher account of masculine identity.

Within the phallocentric symbolic order, the discourse of the family produces subjects along the lines of sexual difference. The family or oedipal romance is important in all of Acker's work, particularly the configuration in which the father or step-father exerts authority over the daughter while her mother always commits suicide or is simply absent. However, in this text it is the mother, rather than the father as in Blood and Guts, who haunts the narrator's imagination. Acker's Great Expectations is an exploration of a daughter's identification with the mother. After the initial plagiarism

of Dickens' text, the narrative in Acker's Great Expectations switches to an unnamed female protagonist. The narrator begins by noting that her mother committed suicide in 1978 and that her grandmother died a year later, terminating the maternal family line. This question of maternal family lines links the narrator to Miss Havisham and Estella in Dicken's novel. From textual hearsay, the reader knows that the widowed Estella was beatean by her sadistic husband, but a significant silence surrounds her later life. Trained in the feminine art of haughtiness by the crazy Miss Havisham, Estella has her expectations dashed and is left childless.

In Acker's text, the narrator has her tarot cards read, which reveals her concern about the future and her potential great expectations. Unlike Pip who wishes to explore the public world and to rise to a certain social status, the narrator asks "the cards about future boyfriends" (5). The narrator agrees with the tarot card reader and admits "I have the image obsession I'm scum. This powerful image depends on the image of the empress, the image I have of my mother" (6). The narrator's great expectations include the belief that she is a failure and this melancholia is linked to ideas about her mother:

> Before I was born, my mother hated me because my father left her (because she got pregnant?) and because my mother wanted to remain her mother's child rather than be my mother. My image of my mother is the source of my creativity. I prefer the word consciousness. My image of my hateful mother is blocking consciousness. To obtain a different picture of my mother, I have to forgive

> my mother for rejecting me and committing suicide. The picture of love, found in one of the clusters is forgiveness that transforms need into desire.
>
> Because I am hating my mother I am separating women into virgins or whores rather than believing I can be fertile. (6)

Neither virgins nor whores have a vested interest in giving birth and as long as women think of themselves in these terms they will not be fertile. By fertility Acker also means creativity; however, in our culture the strongest image we have of feminine activity is motherhood. The mother is never articulated culturally as a subject who actively desires or creates outside the realm of reproduction. Once reproduction is separated from female sexuality, we do not have an image of woman's sexual agency. After three waves of feminism in this century, we have still not managed to answer Freud's troublesome question "What do women want?" As we do not have an image or a symbol to counteract the hold the phallus has on representing desire, woman's sexuality resides in her ability to attract. She is a passive object rather than an active subject in the realm of desire. Indeed, the narrator often perceives of her mother as an object of male desire, ultimately forced to sculpt her body into a model image:

> My mother is the most beautiful woman in the world. She has black hair, green eyes which turn gray or brown according to her mood or the drugs she's on at the moment. . . . She's five feet six inches tall. She usually weighs 120 pounds even though she's always taking diet pills . . . . (9)

For Hegel and classical psychoanalysis, the self begins in a state of omnipotence where everything is an extension of

the child who does not yet recognize the other. However, this need for recognition entails a fundamental contradiction in that once a child recognizes its independency, it is forced into realizing that it is dependent upon the other to recognize it. The process of naming oneself is also the moment that one is forced into admitting the limitation of that self. As psychoanalysts from Freud to Nancy Chodorow have noted, in our culture this process of differentiation manifests itself quite differently for girls and boys. The female narrator in Acker's Great Expectations experiences a primal scene: "I walked into my parents' bedroom opened their bedroom door don't know why I did, my father was standing naked over the toilet, I've never seen him naked I'm shocked, he slams the door in my face, I'm curious I see my mother naked all the time . . ." (13). Subsequently, her father has his third heart attack and the narrator surrounded by her mother and grandmother admits "I don't perceive my father. My mother is adoration hatred play. My mother is the world. My mother is my baby. My mother is exactly who she wants to be. . . . The whole world and consciousness revolves around my mother" (14). While this passage seems to contradict the narrator's conception of her mother as an object of male desire, it is a description of a falsely seductive mirage of feminine power. By not differentiating from the mother (the mother as world), girls remain passive and dependent upon men and the daughter will eventually adopt the strategies of her

mother, repeating a cycle of submissiveness. Conversely, a boy must individuate himself from his mother. In her psychoanalytic study The Bonds of Love (1988) Jessica Benjamin notes that, the

> salient feature of male individuality is that it grows out of the repudiation of the primary identification with and dependency on the mother . . . [this] one-sided autonomy that denies dependency characteristically leads to domination ... [yet] since man continues to need woman, the absolute assertion of independence requires possessing and controlling the needed object. The intention is not to do without her but to make sure that her alien otherness is either assimilated or controlled, that her own subjectivity nowhere asserts itself . . . . (80)

In Acker's novel, the process of individuation from the mother also leads to a form of male autism. For example, the sequences penned by the unnamed narrator in the first chapter are punctuated regularly by scenes of the outside world of men, namely that of war, pestilence, and rape. These sections abandon the personal and narrative "I" and adopt an omniscient, descriptive voice--the voice of masculinity, the voice of the author-God.

Later in the text, Acker's Peter, like Pip who effectively discards the maternal Joe Gargery from his life, claims that:

> They call me CRAZY. But I'm not inhuman. I still have burning sexual desires. I still have a cock. I just don't believe there's any possibility of me communicating to someone in this world.
>
> I hate humans who want me to act like I can communicate to them. I hate feeling more pain because I've felt so much pain.
>
> My idea of happiness is numbness. (24)

This inability to relate with other subjects creates a specific Lacanian type of desire, namely a mimetic one based on lack: "I think talking to humans, acting in this world and hurting other humans are magical acts. I fall in love with the humans who I see do these things" (24). Here mimetic desire leads to sadism, a repetitive and ritualistic sexuality, incorporating elements of perverse rationality and control.

As the two gendered narratives of Peter and the unnamed female progress, they both become characters in a plagiarized version of Pauline Réage's Story of O. Acker chooses to plagiarize the Story of O as it confronts the notion that women comply with sadistic men not only out of fear, but in accordance with their desire. The unnamed narrator becomes O (another unnamed protagonist or a pun on "eau," the cliched image of feminine fertility) in a desperate search for recognition. The search concludes by finding the other who is powerful enough to bestow that recognition. In Réage's text, O must serve her masters, give up her rights to her orifices and body, and never look in her master's face. O is reduced to the status of an object and the fact that her masters can only be recognized by her in an indirect form underscores the idea that women only experience desire through identification with the (step)-father. Jessica Benjamin explains that in male sadism

> [a] further danger for the master is that the subject always becomes the object he consumes. By

> negating her will, they turn her into an object. And when her objectification is complete, when she has no more will, they can no longer use her without becoming filled with her thing-like nature. (57)

Therefore, violation must be performed rationally through highly ritualistic means to maintain boundaries between the master and the woman's "thing-like nature." Each violation separates the master from O and this difference is maintained through calculation, objectivity, and control. Acker's plagiarism of Réage's text "summarizes" these points:

> He shows her his whip.
>
> One of his hands lies on her left shoulder.
>
> He tells her she can expect he will hurt her mentally and physically.
>
> He hurts her physically to give her an example.
>
> He tells her there are no commitments and she has to let him make all the decisions, she won't make any more decisions.
>
> IS THERE ANY NEED FOR EMOTION? (39)

Emotion should be understood here as the various aspects of intersubjectivity: fellowship, sympathy, empathy, and communication. Yet the violence becomes so ritualized that the physical contact normally encountered during the sexual act is severed in Acker's account, punctuated by the disgust some men are socialized to feel for women:

> You will masturbate in front of me.
>
> You are a whore.
>
> All women are whores. (42)

As in Réage's book, Acker suggests that once the physical

chains are removed from O she remains a prisoner of a sadistic desire. Yet this "voluntary" submission serves to illustrate the very important point that the "normal" relationships that women willingly participate in in our culture are tainted with this sadistic desire. Yet Acker, premeditating the work of Benjamin, suggests that the predominant fantasies of submission of women "represent an alienated version of the safe space that permits self-discovery," as the abandon demanded by the powerful and controlling other creates an "aloneness in the presence of the other" (Benjamin 97). Nevertheless, women should not accept this situation as their only lot in life. In this respect, Benjamin concludes that women should seek freedom to be both with and distinct from the other. Acker also challenges this predicament and points to the historical and constructued nature of this type of desire which is not "innate" to women:

> This night O has a nightmare. A huge jellyfish glop who's shaped into an-at-least-six-story worm is chasing her down the main and-filled cowboy street. All of her WANTS to get away, but her body isn't obeying her mind. Like she feels she's caught in quicksand so her body is her quicksand.
>
> Nightmare. her body mirrors/becomes her father's desire. (54)

The image of the amorphous jellyfish rapist underscores the tenuous and unsubstantiated power of the father; it functions as a parody of the hard, erect, and all-powerful Phallus. O feels both the desire to escape from and the desire for the rapist: the Cartesian mind/body creates a "WANT"ing to get away and a voice that says no. This attempted flight from

desire defined solely in these (masculine) terms signals the birth of ideal love and "The Beginnings of Romance," the title of the next chapter in her novel.

In romances written for women, from Ann Radcliffe's The Mysteries of Udolpho to contemporary Harlequins, the heroine resists the objectification of the sadistic hero until it is revealed that he truly loves her and will not abuse her despite his previously autistic and violent behaviour. This genre can be traced back to the chivalrous tradition in which the virtuous woman is placed upon a pedestal to be worshipped by a knight who performs all his deeds in her name. Benjamin's starting point is that "ideal love is the key to understanding the intricate relationship between woman's desire and woman's submission" (80).

In a convenient illustration of Benjamin's point, Acker plagiarizes sections from La Princesse de Cleves and the story of her resistance to an affair with her lover Nemours (ne/amours). The novel ends with Mme de Cleves in seclusion contemplating his portrait, suggesting that she opts for autoerotic and fetishistic sublimation rather than an erotic affair. According to critic Nancy K. Miller, in an essay entitled "Emphasis Added: Plots and Plausibilities in Women's Fiction," Mme de Cleves withdraws from the erotic "not merely to resist possession . . . but to improve on it: to rescript possession" (36). Her retreat is not a flight from sexuality or love, but rather a movement towards it; she preserves

passion but on her own terms. The choice of Mme de Cleves, according to Miller, is not a simple reinscription of female renunciation; rather, as the last line in the book claims, "Her life was rather short and left inimitable examples of virtue." As Miller suggests "inimitable" is a challenge to reiteration or ideological repetition and is the mark of the writer's ambitious wish (39).

This emphasis on mimesis, or rather the "inimitable," is also an oft-repeated concern of French feminist and psychoanalytic theorist Luce Irigaray's whose understanding of women's historically complicated relationship with the language of dominant culture leads her to advocate a playful "mimeticism":

> To play with mimesis is, thus, for a woman to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it. It means to resubmit herself .. to "ideas," in particular to ideas about herself, that are elaborated in/by a masculine logic, but so as to make "visible," by an effect of playful repetition what was supposed to remain invisible: the cover-up of a possible operation of the feminine in language. It also means "to unveil" the fact that if women are such good mimics, it is because they are not simply reabsorbed in this function. <u>They also remain elsewhere</u> . . . . (qtd. in Miller 74)

In an excerpt published in the anthology <u>New French Feminisms</u>, Irigaray has also commented upon the autoerotic aspect of women's sexuality, namely her two lips (the labia) that touch and provide pleasure for one another, and recoil in revulsion from "the brutal spreading of these two lips by a violating penis" (100). Irigaray nonetheless pulls back from

the separatist solution of the American radical feminists as, at the end of this essay, she asks: "would not the renunciation of heterosexual pleasure simply be another form of this amputation of power that is traditionally associated with women . . . would it not be a new incarceration, a new cloister that women would willingly build?" (106). Similarly, Acker's Mme. de Tournon "lived with a poet who made her support him by working dirty movies and in a sex show, she swore she hated men. She would always be a lesbian, even though she wasn't sure she physically liked fucking women as much as men, so she could devote herself to her art" (80). Irigaray insists that this confinement must be a temporary strike allowing women long enough to "discover the love of other women protected from the imperious choice of men which puts them in the position of rival goods" (106).

Mme. de Tournon's alter ego, Mme. de Cleves, inhabits an alternate, yet similar prison, and in Acker's Great Expectations she knows that "[b]ecause all the male artists she knows fuck any cunt they can get into and the non-artist males bore her, the female artist doesn't believe love or purity's possible in this world and so sticks with her husband" (80). In the "original" novel, Mme. de Cleves is technically free to marry as she is widowed yet she rejects her lover to live out what Nancy Miller call "another script," the mark of the ambitious wish of the female artist. Through the use of plagiarism, Acker points out that marriage in

contemporary society, lacking any notion of intersubjectivity, is similar to being widowed. This form of autoerotism leads to a myth of art, "[t]he myth of art: artists have to do everything they can to do their art. They can't allow any desire to stop them from working. They deny themselves any lasting pleasure. If and when they fall in love, they destroy their lover or else transform their love into distaste and despair" (81). Against Nancy K. Miller's positive reading of La princesse de Cleves, Acker calls for "[t]he end of hatred. Of that myth of art. The female artist can now love" (81).

Acker's definition of love is always one of erotic mutuality that attempts to ward off isolation and alienation, so it is significant that her Great Expectations ends with a reference to the suicide of the narrator's mother: "My mother committed suicide in a hotel room because she was lonely and there was no one else in the world but her . . ." (127). As she competes with her daughter (and, one assumes, other women) for the attention of other men and as she finds no solace in an emotionally autistic husband who married her for her father's money, the narrator's mother has little choice but to commit suicide. In the narrator's view, the masculine inability to express emotion ("autism" in Acker's novel) is caused by the division between public and private spheres in which feeling and sentiment are quarantined in the private world of the feminine. According to Acker, this subjugation dates back to the dawn of the Roman Empire:

> 29 B.C. Empire begins. Centralization of power which is thought. Any non-political action such a poetry goes against centralization. Ovid is exiled. Propertius and Horace are told they have to write praises of the empire. (104)

In the Roman empire, the poetry of personal feeling and emotion did not fare well. Poets such as Vergil, Catullus and Propertius exhibited some supreme examples of it, but were discouraged from writing more. Ovid, following in the footsteps of his Greek predecessors, produced the Metamorphoses, a highly romantic world of fable. The last section of Acker's Great Expectations is a conversation between Propertius and his mistress/whore, Cynthia, with cameo appearances by Janey Smith, Barbarella, and Colette. It is revealed that when Propertius was confronted by the emperor Augustus about the emotional quality of his poem, he ran away as he doesn't like making his private life public, much like Wemmick, Jagger's clerk in Dickens' text. This division of public and private, however, has many ramifications such as limiting the effects of poetry and altering the manner in which men relate to women. In such a scenario, women become the vessel that contains all irrational emotion, while men are hardened into an autistic veneer of masculinity: "PROPERTIUS TALKS TO CYNTHIA WHO ISN'T IN FRONT OF HIM. I don't want you, slut, because love is mad and I don't want to be mad" (127).

If Acker paints a portrait of masculine autism and female madness that dates back to Roman times, the burden of combatting such a heavy tradition in aesthetics and gender

roles seems almost overwhelming. Nevertheless, as always, Acker points to the historical, and hence flexible, character of these phenomena by directly linking these changes to the centralization of political power and the beginnings of empire. Like Pip, who has his great expectations dashed by discovering the low birth of Estella's parents and the criminal background of his own patron, Magwitch, Acker's unnamed narrator suspects that the connection between identity and concepts such as social class and gender are arbitrary. This parallels Dickens' novel in that several of the wealthy characters, such as Jaggers or Magwitch are often described as being in disguise. Once the historical and arbitrary nature of these "facts" are illuminated and repeated then room for agency is created. The route for agency in the contemporary Great Expectations is centred on an attempt to rewrite the mother's role; the last two words of the novel suggest the beginnings of a new dialogue, as yet unwritten, between mother and daughter as the narrator pens, "Dear mother," (127). Commencing this conversation will hopefully begin to erode the arbitrary fortressed walls that separate the sexes.

II - Don Quixote

> Why? the ditt' is all borrowed; tis Horace's: hang him plagiary.
>
> Ben Jonson
> Poetaster IV iii (1601)

The search for agency is continued in Acker's next novel: Don Quixote (1986). Cervantes' Don Quixote (1604) relates a series of picaresque adventures that befall a unlikely hero who invariably happens upon many misadventures. The stated intention of Cervantes was to parody chivalric romances and their particular manifestation in sixteenth-century Spain, the traditional ballad. Cervantes' text is probably based on a playlet about an insane gentleman who imitates the deeds performed in the chivalric ballads and convinces himself that he is Knight Baldwin. One of the major differences between the medieval and renaissance texts is that Don Quixote, like Acker's knight, knows who he is; or rather he knows that he is a counterfeit. When confronted by his neighbour who insists that he is neither Baldwin nor Abindarraez, Don Quixote responds:

> 'I know who I am,' replied Don Quixote, ' and I know, too, that I am capable of being not only the characters I have named, but all the Twelve Peers of France and all the Nine Worthies as well, for my exploits are far greater than all the deeds they have done, all together and each by himself.' (54)

Don Quixote knows that he is Don Quixote in the guise of a knight errant and all his undertakings to become a chivalric hero underline the theatricality of this pose. For example, Cervantes notes that Don Quixote in making his armour realizes that his helmet lacks a knightly visor: "So he ingeniously made good this deficiency by fashioning out of pieces of pasteboard a kind of half-visor which, fitted to the helmet, gave the appearance of a complete head-piece" (33). This

head-piece is not even strong enough to withstand two strokes of a sword which forces Don Quixote to repair it without retesting its durability. His horse or hack, is but a "skin and bones" version of the chivalric original and his princess on a pedestal is simply a "good-looking farm girl" called Aldonza Lorenzo who he renames Dulcinea del Toboso. All this work is done so that Don Quixote may "turn knight errant and travel through the world with horse and armour in search of adventures, following in every way the practice of the knights errant he had read of, redressing all manner of wrongs, and exposing himself to chances and dangers, by the overcoming of which he might win eternal honour and renown" (33).

Acker's plagiarism of perhaps the greatest picaresque novel indicates that her protagonist also is on a quest. Reiterating and reformulating Cervantes' goal of the quest, she asks: "How can a woman love? By loving someone other than herself. She would love another person. By loving another person, she would right every manner of political, social, and individual wrong: she would put herself in those situations so perilous the glory of her name would resound. The abortion was about to take place:" (9). In order to accomplish this task, to become a female Don Quixote, she must undergo an abortion and Acker's rewriting begins with the substitution of the inn, where Cervantes' Don attains his knighthood, by the waiting room of an abortion clinic. The female Don Quixote's armour becomes the clinic's green paper

operation gown. Her horse is a wheeling bed whose name is 'hack-kneed' or 'Hackneyed,' a play on words indicting the always already plagiaristic role of the writer--a hack or "an attempt to have an identity that always fails" (10). Acker's knight-to-be must repress this assumption and attempts, if only temporarily, the normally male prerogative of identity and naming: "since she was setting out on the greatest adventure any person can take, that of the Holy Grail, she ought to have a name (identity). She had to name herself" (9). In a contemporary Don Quixote's hallucinated vision, having an abortion is a method of becoming a knight and saving the world. Acker's Don Quixote lies down on the abortion table as Tolosa, the daughter of a shoemaker in Cervantes' text. She is also the young girl who, between fits of laughter, anoints Don Quixote and bestows his knighthood in a mock ceremony at the inn (Part I, Ch. 2). Following French Feminist theory and Luce Irigaray's concept of the speculum, women give men their identity by mirroring their desire. In the original text, Tolosa performs this function, but in Acker's, it is Tolosa who attempts a transformation of identity. Moreover, in the contemporary version of the story, this metamorphosis or becoming other, is not a simple conversion from female to male or object to subject. Here Acker puns and her knight/night remains "hole-ly" (13), closing the divide between female and male, object and subject.

A similar transformation of the hypotext exists in Acker's chapter entitled: "The First Adventure." The hypotext and the hypertext recount the story of Don Quixote's encounter with a young boy being beaten by his master. In both versions, the Don insists that the old man release the boy and pay him back wages. The boy also protests when the Don and the knight/night instruct him to return with his master. However, in the "original" the wording is as follows:

> 'He will do no such thing,' replied Don Quixote. 'I have only to lay my command on him, and he will respect it; and on condition that he gives me his oath on the order of knighthood which he has received, I shall let him go free and will guarantee the payment.' (48)

In Acker's account, the young boy does not run away from his master and the knight/night gives the following advice:

> 'You have to go back, for your teacher, deep inside him, wants to help you and has just been mistaken how to help you. If he didn't care for you, he wouldn't want you back.'
>
> The old man took the boy back to school and there flogged him even more severely. As he was flogging him, the teacher said, 'I have a good mind to flay you alive as you feared.' The boy tried to enjoy the beating because his life couldn't be any other way. (15)

Both of theses responses are hazardous to the young boy: Cervantes' Don Quixote errs as he believes in the oaths and heroic deeds of the chivalric tradition; Acker's knight/night errs as she believes in ideal devotion that often confuses violent acts with love. This point is restated in Acker's section called "The Adventure of Men" that closely parallels the famous "The Adventure of the Windmills" chapter in the

Spanish classic. In the female knight's imagination, the giant windmills (or windmill giants) are "big men" and

> Don Quixote verbally dedicated herself to the cause of everlasting love or marriage, which is the most dangerous cause, cause it's no cause at all, then again and again went after the big men.
>
> Some of the big men who didn't want to run away lashed out at this stalwart female. Again and again she rose up and went at them again. Nothing, not even a man, could stop her from going after them. She was inexhaustible indefatigable--a true knight. Nothing could stop her search for love, but death. Finally, a man hit her so hard she almost died. (23)

Both knights suffer from reading too many of the wrong kinds of books, namely romances, as Cervantes makes clear at the beginning of his novel: "In short, he buried himself in his books . . . and so from little sleep and much reading, his brain dried up and he lost his wits . . . and so deeply did he steep his imagination in the belief that all the fanciful stuff he read was true, that to his mind no history in the world was more authentic" (32). The feminine equivalent to Don Quixote's dreams of "enchantments, quarrels, battles, challenges, wounds . . ." (32) is ideal love, romance, and marriage that often end up in crimes of passion committed against women. By rescripting Cervantes' hypotext, we learn a new lesson, one that applies to the historical construction of woman.

Yet romances, whether written for men or women, are not the only texts subject to scrutiny in Acker's Great Expectations. Suffering from a post-abortion infection, Don Quixote is found by three friends, a Leftist, a Liberal, and

a Feminist, lying on the sidewalk in front of her house. They "rationally" deliberate her condition while leaving her out on the road. Her friends "aghast at her femininity" (17) or vulnerability finally decide that she must be taken to the hospital to be treated. Acker points to the potentially fascistic tendencies of even revolutionaries, their proclivity to eventually resort to alternative, yet equally, hegemonic and book-based or discursive practices.

In contrast, the knight/night condones the writing practices of the Arab world: "Unlike American and Western culture (generally), the Arabs (in their culture) have no (concept of) originality. That is, culture. They write new stories paint new pictures et cetera only by embellishing old stories pictures . . ." (25). She also suggests that we vote for the rock star Prince for President (who has, by the way, changed his name to an unpronounceable graphic symbol since the publication of the novel) because "Prince accepts his falsity. Uses his falsity" (22). This first section ends with a call for a retreat from the world of words to that of the body ("This mingling of our genitals the only cure for sickness") and the resolution that "It's not necessary to write or be right because writing's or being right's making more illusion: it's necessary to destroy and be wrong" (37).

The second part of Don Quixote, begins with the following proclamation:

> BEING DEAD, DON QUIXOTE
> COULD NO LONGER SPEAK.

> BEING BORN INTO AND PART
> OF A MALE WORLD, SHE HAD
> NO SPEECH OF HER OWN. ALL
> SHE COULD DO WAS READ
> MALE TEXTS WHICH WEREN'T
> HERS. (39)

This section is made up of several plagiarized segments including a layering, or palimpsest, of Frank Wedekind's femme fatale, Lulu, with George Bernard Shaw's Eliza Doolittle. Schon/Professor Higgins tells Lulu/Eliza that "A woman who utters depressing and disgusting sounds has no right to be--anywhere--no right to live. . . . Your soul's language is the language of Milton and Shakespeare and the English Empire. Wouldn't you like to be able to speak properly?" (78). Other male texts that are rescripted in this section are Andrei Biely's Petersburg, the poems of Catullus, and Giuseppe di Lampedusa's The Leopard. Like Cervantes' Don Quixote, these male texts certainly open themselves up to the complex world of desire and gender issues, but like Acker's critique of Genet in Blood and Guts, they still have more to accomplish in terms of "becoming woman." Like Propertius in Acker's Great Expectations and Wemmick in Dickens' novel of the same name, these men have begun to deterritorialize themselves from their identity as "man," but they have not as yet taken on the full affectivity usually ascribed to "women." Acker has said the following about this part of the novel:

> In fact, I wrote the second part of Don quixote first by rewriting texts, out of a Sherrie Levine-type impulse. Then I wrote the first and third parts later . . . then I actually had an abortion. While I was waiting to have the

> abortion, I was reading Don Quixote. Because I couldn't think, I just started copying Don Quixote. Then I had all these pieces and I thought about how they fit together. I realized that Don Quixote, more than any of my other books, is about appropriating male texts and that the middle part of Don Quixote is very much about trying to find you voice as a woman. ("A Conversation" 13)

This section ends with Acker's Lulu standing looking out to the sea. Completing her active reading of these texts, Lulu, like the knight/night, decides that she must gather momentum, that she must follow a line of flight. There is no safety in constructing a new myth of stability and identity: "Now I must find others who are, like me, pirates journeying from place to place, who knowing only change and the true responsibilities that come from such knowing sing to and with each other" (97).

In the third section of the novel, Don Quixote confronts the "evil enchanters of this world," including Ronald Reagan, separatist feminist Andrea Dworkin, and the editors of the Times Literary Supplement, "who control the nexuses of government and culture're persecuting and will continue to persecute us until they have buried and drowned, drowned us in our own human forgetfulness" (102). Once we stopped being enchanted by these leaders, Don Quixote believes that "human love'll again be possible" (102).

Don Quixote concludes that if she discovers how the American government works, then she can figure out why these people attain positions of power. Don Quixote gives an account of how Nixon and Kissinger operated during the

former's administration and decides that their rhetoric is that of naturalizing the inevitability of present social conditions. Acker then introduces Thomas Hobbes, her Angel of Death, a ghost of American capitalism past and present, who acts as counsellor to Nixon and his followers. With the publication of his monumental treatise, Leviathan (1651), the historical Thomas Hobbes attacked the attempts of papists and presbyterians to challenge the right of the sovereign. He also argued that natural right should reign over natural law, claiming that the right of nature is essentially a right to self-preservation. The peace and security demanded by self-preservation can only be attained through a social contract that upholds the power of a selected person or assembly. To keep each citizen in place, the power of this official or group must be sufficient to inspire reverence. Through the social contract, with its air of a biblical covenant, Hobbes insists that each individual will refrain from harming others because of the belief in the sovereign's power. A sovereign so established may survive even if all its subjects desire to depose it, provided that they do not communicate their desires to one another. As the sovereign's power is absolute, it cannot be unjust to its subjects since they have authorized, much like a masochist authorizes his mistress, its actions and consent precludes violation (injuria non fit volenti).

In Don Quixote's vision, America is Hobbes' Leviathan forced to its logical conclusion, a land where the perversions

of self-preservation and absolute power have rendered the landscape violent and grey. However, Hobbes, as Acker's Angel of Death, warns Nixon that he has "summoned the Despair and Nothingness of your constituents; you have summoned your own destruction" (110). The dogs (here oppressed Puerto Ricans) begin to speak in unison in the vision. The American Hobbes sees only death: "The American Revolution or American freedom is a mask of death. Our nihilism and dying must be the mask of our revolution" (115). He is forced to admit that it is not peace or security that holds society together. In fact, it is a social contract based on militarism and the sacrificial scapegoating of oppressed groups such as the Puerto Ricans that "holds canine society together" (114).

Don Quixote, however, finally realizes that defeating Nixon is like oppressed factory workers burning down a factory. If the logic and rationality that created the factory in the first place still exists then a new factory will simply be erected to replace it. Don Quixote discerns that "to defeat America she had to learn who America is. What is the myth of America, for economic and political war or control now is taking place at the level of language or myth" (117). According to DonQuixote, the reigning myths that keep America going are: 1) The desire for religious intolerance made America or Freedom; 2) American freedom was the supremacy of technology over ideology (as in nuclear government); 3) Freedom was the individual embracement of nonsexual masochism;

4) Individual freedom was the choice between militarism and the refusal to partake in government; and finally 5) freedom and money must be intertwined (117-9). These myths function as the various segmentations that restrict the flow of schizophrenic desire and mobilize discipline in American society.

Nonetheless, analyzing these myths (Don Quixote provides an explanation for the origin of each one) does not change the situation in America: "The United States is exactly as it was started: religiously intolerant, militaristic, greedy, and dependent on slavery as all democracies have been" (124). There is a tragic sense that simply revealing these fantasies as frauds does little to challenge or alter the current situation. Don Quixote exclaims in despair: "I've lost my beliefs. I've nothing left " (124)"

At this point in the novel, the nomadic line of flight comes so close to the abyss, the void of meaning, that it becomes dangerous. Faced with this despair and the failure of her revolutionary potential, Don Quixote's only response is one of religious masochism. She decides that "[she]'ll have to make [her]self into something. (She cuts a cross into her right wrists' flesh . . . She cuts a cross into the other wrist and one into her chest)" (124). The auto-mutilation of the stigmata is a precursor to Acker's subsequent discussions of the tattoo. This acceptance of despair on the part of Don Quixote ultimately provides a sense of, if not freedom, then

pleasure. By plagiarizing the masochism inherent in the Hobbesian social contract, Don Quoxite short circuits its ruling logic by ensuring that pain produces pleasure: "Loneliness-being-lost and lack of liberalism threw themselves upon the Night and her companion like pleasure, like the bliss of a throbbing red cunt dawn" (125).

Once again, Acker's narrator becomes other, becomes "cunt," abandoning the cultural codifications that regiment desire. She has escaped her internal straight jacket that had rendered her defenceless and guilt-ridden. This intensifies her line of flight and Don Quixote begins to decipher the institutional structures, the rigid points or segmentations, that have ruled her life. As Deleuze notes in On the Line:

> we are made of lines, lines that are very diverse in nature. The first type of line (there are many of this type) that forms us is segmentary, or rigidly segmented: family/profession; work/vacation; family/then school/then army/then factory/and then retirement. Each time from one segment to another, we are told, "Now you are no longer a child"; then at school "Now you are no longer at home"; then in the army, "This isn't school any more" . . . In short, all kinds of well-defined segments, going in every direction, which carve us up in every sense, these bundles of segmented lines. (69)

Don Quixote learns that these segmentations are all intimately connected and that phenomena that occur on the political and social level are connected to our personal and sexual relationships and rebellions.

Residing fully in the realm of the night, Don Quixote is able to hear her dog companion's story about "Hetero-

sexuality." In this section, relationships are based on punishment and control. It is the story of a young man, De Franville, who is forced to renounce any trace of femininity: "His father had repeatedly told him that he wasn't acting like and capable of being a man. . . . He had to be more than androgynous: he had to erase loving, sexuality, and identity" (129). His lover-to-be is Villebranche who is described as follows:

> She didn't look or act like a woman because, she had been so rejected as a woman, she had flagellated herself into being someone she wasn't. . . . Her body normally appeared in male clothing and her muscles had been trained into a tough muscularity. Her mind had been trained by western philosophy and chess. In a country in which women appear to be related to the Virgin Mary because the men want them to appear that spectrally, Villebranche was an apparition. Even though she had to be a boy because there was nothing else she could be, she wasn't a boy. De Franville felt that this identity was the masculine or feminine counter part to his own. He kept all of this silent, in himself. (130)

The ensuing passages relate their masochistic games, including dressing up as Nazis, which finally end up in a scene of contractual flagellation with De Franville telling Villebranche that: "You cannot stay the night free, slut, because nothing is free. Slut. Nothing. If you want to stay the night here, you do as I want. This's a contract" (138). The scene ends with Villebranche asking to be whipped ten times by De Franville and both of them exchanging vows to punish one another. This masochistic contract, which functions on the micropolitical level, is also a plagiarism of

the Hobbesian social contract that reveals the nature of self-preservation. The true workings of the social contract at the macro-political level, symbolized by the Nixon administration in this text, are revealed and challenged by Acker's plagiaristic rewriting.

Nonetheless, there is a shift from Acker's earlier novels. For example, in Blood and Guts in High School, Janey Smith states that "Sex in America is S & M" (99), suggesting that sexual relations, from perverse practices to abortion, are an imitation of "regular" social relations. In Acker's Don Quixote, the knight/night's dog, St. Simeon, pronounces that "Masochism is now rebellion" (158).[1] She calls for an ethical valorization of masochism and questions the supposition that it always occurs in the framework of victimization and domination. In an enlightening article entitled "Making Yourself a Body Without Organs: The Cartography of Pain in Kathy Acker's Don Quixote," David Brande asserts that "masochism is used judo-fashion against

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1. There have been several St. Simeons canonized in the Catholic church. I believe Acker is alluding to the eccentric Simeon Salus who "devoted himself to caring for the most wretched and neglected among the people, especially harlots. To share the contempt in which social outcasts were held, he behaved in such strange ways that he was nicknamed the 'crazy' (salus). So outrageous did his conduct become, if it was reported correctly, that it seems likely that he was at times really out of his mind. He was treated by some as a hypocritical rascal; but others saw him as a prophetical and holy figure, and in the end this opinion prevailed." Donald Attwater, The Penguin Dictionary of Saints, 2nd ed., Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1983.

the very phallocratic order of dominance and submission . . . Acker's novel constructs, in part, an experimental and provisional map of masochistic practice in order to destabilize phallocentric structures of gender, by attacking the status and privilege of the subject . . ." (192). His essay is based on a reading of Deleuze and Guattari's sixth plateau of A Thousand Plateaus that asks the pragmatic question "How Do You Make Yourself a Body Without Organs?":

> The Body without Organs is the field of immanence of desire, the plane of consistency specific to desire (with desire defined as a process of production without reference to any exterior agency, whether it be a lack that hollows it out or a pleasure that fills it) . . . the masochist uses suffering as a way of constituting a body without organs and bringing forth a plane of consistency of desire. That there are other ways, other procedures than masochism, and certainly better ones, is beside the point; it is enough that some find this procedure suitable for them. (154-5)

Deleuze and Guattari do not make a distinction between true and false, good and bad, reactionary and revolutionary desires instead they examine desire closely to determine whether it has been stratified through signification and the State or whether it has gathered speed and momentum, taking flight towards asignification and asubjectivity.

In Brande's account, there is only one manifestation of the body without organs in Don Quixote and it occurs in the Defranville and Villebranche section; their cross-dressing, already a point of deterritorialization, serves as a stage in becoming a body without organs. This masquerade is, however, only a "stratum" from which to launch the experiment as cross-

dressing does not ultimately challenge the issues of domination and control:

> Dressing up as a Nazi captain wasn't enough. In order to open myself up, I had to eradicate fear totally. I asked myself: "What do I fear most?"
> Having someone control me so that it's possible I'll be rejected. (134)

Cross-dressing deconstructs biological gender roles yet paranoid desire remains intact. It is only once the "sympathetic" employment of pain has begun that becoming other is possible.

> Due to my increasing ferocity, she(he) twists so much that for the first time just as my whip strokes have become hard enough to make her(him) realize that the pain isn't pretence that pain is only pain and eradicates all pretence and stupid thinking, she(he) reveals a fault that is absolute. (139-40)

As Brande notes, the use of the "she(he)" indicates that the full mutation of the body without organs has not yet happened and it is significant that in the subsequent passages, the utilization of this pronoun is abandoned. More importantly, De Franville's pain is linked to the elimination and "eradication of all pretence and stupid thinking" that is beyond all gendered binaries based on the domination and submission of the master-slave dialectic. When it is De Franville's turn to apply the whip, he does so with the same sympathy: "Since I was her slave, I told her she would have to tell me exactly how many whip strokes I was going to give her. 'Tell me how many times I should hit you.' For a moment she thought. 'Ten.' 'How hard?'" (140). Villebranche admits

to her fear of losing control, of being damaged. De Franville responds, "Each time I whip you, tell me the number of the lash, so your pain is continuously what you want," leaving Villebranche in command. This mutually shared masochistic experiment results in a momentary appearance of the body without organs: "Afterwards, she look up at me in a way that I recognized, for I had looked up to her before in the same way. Being for a split second mirrors of each other, we had to be other than we were" (140). The sympathetic application of pain and the control of the flesh produce a radical otherness, even if only temporarily, of the body without organs.

The dog continues his story recounting the origins of this human heterosexuality. It recounts the male and female side of the oedipal myth, the mommy-daddy-me familial romance, that codifies desire and gender roles. Because of the over-glorification of oedipal myth in our culture, a son learns that his desires are to rape and kill, that he is disgusting monster. This belief invests authority in the role of the father in the private family and political leaders in the public world. Oedipus, asking for love from the father/ leader, is denied any such display of affect: "No. I am not going to touch you. I don't want you. Neither are you allowed to rest in the myth of how disgusting or bad you are, for you know the particulars of why you're disgusting. You know consciousness" (148). The oedipal myth overcodifies

experience turning a young innocent into a guilt-ridden paranoic. As the leader cruelly notes: "The point is that you have no choice. You will obey. Chance governs. You have only what you're given or are: yourself. There's no escape: not even exile's escape" (148).

Meanwhile, on the other side of the gender divide, the young daughter says of her mother: "My mother doesn't have sex because she doesn't have to because she's found a man and because she's a monster" (149). In the oedipalized world of the family romance, the mother is often envisioned as the devouring monster who consumes the daughter's genitals rendering her desire reactive instead of active. This image of passivity, lack, or institutionalized repression results in a vicious cycle of female subservience: "Really, I have always wanted to be a maid. Your maid. I don't know how, it just comes naturally, nobody ever taught me. Nobody ever taught me anything" (149). Sensing the dog-daughter's rebellious nature, "[t]he doctor and my fake mother agreed to send me away to school" (154).

The dog-daughter is shipped off to boarding school, where she will be watched day and night, indicating the panoptic quality of this ideological state apparatus. Institutional education only teaches the daughter isolation: "My 'learning' is when I either do meaningless, that is so stupid as to be unquestionable, tasks, or else when I'm lost in doing nothing in uselessness. . . . I can't even masturbate because all the

spaces here're public" (155). However, during a dream she meets a young rebel, Delbène, who insists on an education that begins with the body:

> In my dream, my teacher said to me: "All the accepted forms of education in this country, rather than teaching the child to know who she is or to know, dictate to the child who she is. Thus obfuscates any act of knowledge. Since these educators train the mind rather than the body, we can start with the physical body, the place of shitting, eating, etc., to break through our opinion or false education. (165-6)

This part of the novel is a rewriting of the Marquis de Sade's Juliette and represents an alternate construction of desire to that of the De Franville and Villebranche section. Delbène instructs the dog-daughter that to relinquish "false education" she must repeat, much like a catechism, Sadean opinions and actions (see pages 166-71). Often the teacher, Delbène, responds to her own questions only to subsequently contradict her answer and silence her students. Moreover, her approach to desire is to rationally stratify cause and effect relations: "My teach told me it wasn't enough to know that my body (me) reacted in this way. I had to know more precisely all my complex reactions. Did I feel or react more strongly in my asshole or in my cunt?" (168). This impulse to classify and categorize is typically Sadean and does little to upset gendered binaries. For instance, Delbène advocates sexual separatism and the dog/Juliette must wear a dildo, she must affect masculine identity, to inflict pain on her wailing lover, Laure. In this travesty of Sadean desire, Delbène

slanders and denigrates her students:

> What are you: women? Do women always wail? Are women weak? Do women never take responsibility . . . do their emotions keep shifting and all they pay attention to are these drifting emotions: are women stupid? Do women take no responsibility for their own actions and therefore have no speech of their own, no real or meaningful speech? (175)

The rebel dog/Juliette responds appropriately, "No, I'm coming."

Through the De Franville/Villebranche and Delbène/Juliette sections of the novel, Acker has very thoughtfully revealed the difference between masochistic desire as detailed in Sacher-Masoch works and sadistic desire in de Sade's novels. As Gilles Deleuze has noted in Coldness and Cruelty, the "sadist is in need of institutions, the masochist of contractual relations" (20). Ultimately, Acker privileges masochistic desire as a strategy, like plagiarism or lack of meaningful speech, like cross-dressing or the masquerade, which reveals the simulacrum and serves as a stratum towards the body without organs.

The novel ends with Don Quixote awakening from her vision and affirming the impossibilities of being an idealistic knight, even a knight/night:

> It is necessary to sing, that is to be mad, because otherwise you have to live with the straights, the compromisers, the mealy-mouths, the reality-deniers, the laughter-killers. It is necessary to be mad, that is to sing, because it's not possible for a knight, or for anyone, to foray successfully against the owners of this world. (193)

However, this does not signify that Don Quixote is heralding

a rampant individualism based on the schizoanalytic experience. In fact, it is quite important that she awakes from her dream vision when she is at the point of contemplating suicide. Coming to the edge of the abyss of despair, Don Quixote pulls back and does end her story with some elements of hope. Through her writing, Don Quixote's anarchy is meant to connect to other desiring machines without segmenting their lines of flight. She explains the dilemma of writing a new language for women, or any person who is invisible (in Acker's vocabulary a "dog"): "I write words to you whom I don't and can't know . . . These words sit on the edges of meanings and aren't properly grammatical. For when there is no country, no community, the speaker's unsure of which language to use, how to speak, if it's possible to speak. Language is community" (191). It is important to note that this community is based on the loosest of affiliations, unlike those of class, race, or gender in traditional revolutionary practice: "The only characteristic freaks share is our knowledge that we don't fit in. Anywhere. It is for you, freaks my loves, I am writing and it is about you" (202). Acker has never abandoned the Marcusian notion of an alternative community that lives on the edges of society and reveals it as a "rigged game."

Acker's unusual definition of community is based on Don Quixote's musing about the anarchist foundations of the Spanish Republic of 1931: "I dream of Spain" (202). These

"anarcho-syndicalists, advocates of decentralized political power, were trying to create a world-collectivist commonwealth. Since dualism's no longer a usable logical model, regionalism and internationalism, anarchy and collectivity can work hand in hand" (204). For Don Quixote, the notion that intense personalized experience is incompatible with notions of community and collectivity is an example of binary thinking that perpetuates all the negative dualisms of philosophy, such as, subject/object, male/female, culture/nature, and so on. Moreover, that this tradition was able to establish itself for a short period of time in Spain was due to the importance of a historical and educational imperative:

> In 1876, Francisco Giner de los Rios, professor of law, a disciple of Sanz del Rio, founded what was to be until 1936 the most influential secondary school in Spain, the Institución Libre de Ensenanza. The school taught that the first principle from which all manifestations come is Creation or Will. A Secondary principle was internationalism: the magazine a Boletín acted as a forum for both Emile Durkheim, Bertrand Russell, John Dewey, etc., and the Spanish intellectuals. (203)

Once again, Don Quixote advocates the importance of an historical and imaginative education that begins with the body rather than the mind. The prominence of mind in Western philosophy and culture has lead to a form of idealism that divorces itself from material conditions. Therefore, it is significant that Acker ends the novel with an androgynous God appearing before Don Quixote and declaring: "That if I, God,

am so frightened that I have to moralize about and condemn Myself rather than other people. . . . So now that you know I'm imperfect, night, that you can't turn to Me: turn to yourself: Because with every night's onset the sun sinks below its horizon, because there are no more new stories, no more tracks, no more memories: There is you knight" (207). An imperfect God who only moralizes out of fear can no longer stand as a representative of western idealism.

Acker's strategy in these two novels has been to challenge masculine privilege by invading its scripts and narratives. Through this approach she demonstrates how gender is constructed through narrativizing and gendered life plots and illustrates the material (con)straints placed upon women who are forced to model their existence after such plots. Acker's representations of Great Expectations and Don Quixote can thus be considered as a playful and tactical form of mimesis that dreams of an inimitable body without organs.

CHAPTER FOUR

Totem and Tattoo: Empire of the Senseless

> Certainly, I thought as I started Empire, there's no more need to deconstruct, to take apart perceptual habits, to reveal frauds on which our society's living. We now have to find somewhere to go, a belief, a myth. Somewhere real. In Rebel without a Cause the kids are desperately looking for a place so they can live.
>
> Kathy Acker
> "A Few Notes"

Empire of the Senseless (1988) is the story of Abhor and Thivai and their travels through postmodern America and Paris. Acker has stated in several interviews that Empire of the Senseless is a new direction in her writing. The change is not so much in her actual method as she still plagiarizes but rather in what she expects to achieve from that process. For instance, while Acker adheres to her experiments with plagiarism, the actual texts she cuts in are much more hidden even though almost all the book is taken from other texts. Empire of the Senseless is more like a traditional narrative than a collage.

Part I, "Elegy for the World of the Fathers," is a revision of the familiar Acker theme of rape and colonization by the patriarchal father that plagiarizes from Freud and de Sade as well as William Gibson's cyberpunk novel Neuromancer. Part II, "Alone," includes paraphrases from A Thousand and One Nights and Jean Genet, as well as texts about the Haitian revolution and voodoo. Part III "Pirate Night," is a rewriting of Mark Twain's The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: "The last section of Empire begins with the text of

Huckleberry Finn, one of the main texts about freedom in American culture. I make nothing new, create nothing: I'm a sort of mad journalist, a journalist without a paid assignment. Twain was obsessed with racism; me, with sexism" ("A Few Notes" 36).

The change or new direction that Acker speaks of is that with her plagiarism she hopes to find a new myth to live by. In this sense, her writing experiments have become constructive rather than deconstructive in contrast to Great Expectations and Don Quixote. In a theoretical section of Empire, Acker reflects on her past literary experimentation and her attempts to merge art and politics:

> Ten years ago it seemed possible to destroy language through language: to destroy language which normalizes and controls by cutting that language. Nonsense would attack the empire-making (empirical) empire of language, the prisons of meaning.
>
> But this nonsense, since it depended on sense, simply pointed back to the normalizing institutions. . . .
>
> Its primary langauge must be taboo, all that is forbidden. Thus, an attack on the institutions of prison via language would demand the use of a language or languages which aren't acceptable, which are forbidden. Language, on one level, constitutes a set of codes and social and historical agreements. Nonsense doesn't per se break down the codes; speaking precisely that which the codes forbid breaks the code. (133-34)

The destruction of meaning that Acker had called for in Don Quixote is now seen by Acker as an exercise in oppositional logic, dependent upon a binary between sense and nonsense, whose transgression simply reinforces the law. Moreover, Acker is not simply reinstituting a new binary between the

unconscious Imaginary and the conscious Symbolic. In an important parenthetical note in Empire she declares, "(If this ideal unconscious or freedom doesn't exist: pretend it does, use fiction, for the sake of survival, all of our survival)" (134).

The first third of the novel is a section entitled "Elegy for the World of Fathers" and it contains many familiar Acker themes, for instance, literal and literary rape by a step-father and the death of a suicidal mother. Cut into the novel are many texts of Freud and de Sade as Acker was particularly concerned with defining oedipal society, to the point that during the initial stages of preparing her text she had considered naming all her characters after Freud's patients: "To learn how the oedipal society looks, I turned to several texts, mainly to those by the Marquis de Sade and by Freud. Freud, for obvious reasons. . . . To the Marquis de Sade because he shed so much light on our Western sexual politics that his name is still synonymous with an activity more appropriately named "Reaganism." ("A Few Notes" 35). Here the reader can detect Acker's admiration for the Italian film director Pier Paolo Pasolini whose strategy in Salo: 120 Days of Sodom was to draw an analogy between fascist Italy and the Gothic sites of torture in de Sade's text.

More than her other novels, Acker places herself firmly within the tradition of American literature, especially Huckleberry Finn. Like Huck Finn before her, Abhor desires to

"light out for the Territory" as "Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and sivilize me and I can't stand it. I been there before" (Twain 229). Like Huck Finn, Abhor associates civilization with the socialized roles of women and freedom with the roaming and privilege of men:

> This substitution of primitivism which must be anarchic (in its non-political sense) for morality gave my father his charm. . . .
>
> Daddy left me no possibility of easiness. He forced me to live among nerves sharper than razor blades, to have no certainties. There was only roaming. My nerves hurt more and more. I despised those people, like my mother, who accepted easiness--morality, social rules. Daddy taught me to live in pain, to know there's nothing else. I trusted him for this complexity. (8-10)

Abhor does not wish to end up like her mother--passive, trapped, and suicidal. She wishes to be like her father; unfortunately Abhor cannot speak or recite this story. The right to express it belongs to her male companion Thivai. The first chapter in Part I, entitled "Rape by the Father," begins with the telling of Abhor's life but through the voice of Thivai: "(Abhor speaks through Thivai) This is what Abhor, who's my partner, part robot, and part black; told me was her childhood . . ." (3). The female voice is appropriated and Thivai speaks in her place; it is only in the third chapter in this section that Abhor begins to speak for herself.

This chapter, called "In Honour of the Arabs," suggests that Empire is a novel that is replete with the proliferation of strategies of otherness. Becoming other in Empire, as in Acker's other novels, is connected to becoming Algerian,

childlike, and primitive. These becomings are active acts of placing the body before the mind: "My action now followed my desire. I went to Algeria. In Algeria, I watched the sun rise on the landscape of my childhood. The only thing I desire is innocence. . . . Climatically Algeria is a sluggish country and cunt" (48). Here Acker makes a metonymic association between the colonization of Algeria and the colonization of female desire. Women, like the Algerians, must resist their oppression. The question is "How?"

One strategy to expose repression that has always been espoused in traditional revolutionary theory is to salvage memory, a collective recollection based on class consciousness. Notably, Abhor has difficulty with this concept even though the following citation appears in a chapter with the subtitle "Abhor speaks" : "But my memory's always been poor. It's as if it lies somewhere in the deserts of North Africa, under shifting sands. As if the only map of my mentality is almost formless. The glory of my mind was formless" (66). Abhor reveals the paradox of contemporary poststructuralist theory: if one accepts that race, class, or gender are socially constructed, then how can one recall one's membership in a revolutionary heritage. In post-structuralist theory, race, class, and gender are not DNA codes passed from one generation to another.

Nonetheless, like Acker's summons to pretend that an ideal unconscious or freedom exists for the sake of survival,

this act of remembrance must be attempted. Therefore, Abhor begins to recount activities of the "Abolitionists and freethinkers, talking to each other over lace-clothed tables within seemingly nice houses, you would be seeing the beginning of revolution always made by females" (66). This meditation is immediately followed by a contemplation that those in power are indiscernible: "France once owned North Africa. It was and is all a matter of devaluations: the owners of money or of total devaluations are invisible" (66). As colonies belong to their civilized masters, so daughters belong to their fathers: "As if in a dream I remembered something: When I was just into the age of fucking, so to speak, puberty,--some say that this is the age of fucking--fucking up and fucking over--, my adopted or fake father came back unexpectedly to his and my mother's apartment" (66). Once Abhor's step-father determines that she has been sexually active, he molests her. Like the incest victim who suddenly remembers repressed scenes of abuse, Abhor admits, "I've always known that story. What I suddenly remembered or knew is that I sexually desired my adopted father" (67). Some defenders of feminism might not be willing to admit that the desire for the father exists, yet this is a "natural" state under a patriarchal system. To worship the powerful father or phallus would seem to imply a certain sharing of that power. Women, like the Algerians under French rule, were seduced into believing that male/colonial control is "not a war for riches

or local aggrandizement but a war for security" (68). As a result, Abhor acknowledges that "It was as if I had been tied up, but I didn't know by whom" (68). Fortunately, there are other voices that call "[f]rom that room up there, I could hear the old women. My grandmothers" (68). The knowledge and wisdom of historical women has been silenced just as the achievements of Algerian civilization were repressed by white colonialists: "The uses of primitive art. White scholars have written essays. Once again a modern reminds us that the Ancients, the very scientists and philosophers who have transmitted present-day civilization from Herodotus and Diodorus from Greece to Rome, unanimously recognized that they borrowed that civilization from blacks on the Nile" (68).

Abhor uses the analogy between colonizer and colonized and adopted father and victimized daughter to suggest that daughters might do well by following the forms of rebellion that the Algerians practised: "Because most of the nation's governments are right-wing and the right-wing owns values and meanings: The Algerians, in their carnivals, embraced nonsense, such as Voodoo, and noise" (73). The Algerians use Voodoo and noise, not because they are inarticulate and ignorant, but because:

> The Caribbean English slave-owners in the nineteenth had injected a poison; similar to formic acid, taken from two members of the stinging nettle family, into the already broken skins of their recalcitrant slaves. Ants crawl ceaselessly under the top layer of skin. And forced their unwilling servants to eat Jamaican 'dumbcane' whose leaves, as if they were actually tiny slivers of glass,

> irritating the larynx and causing local swelling, made breathing difficult and speaking impossible. (74)

In Acker's novelistic world, language and discourse will always be owned by the rich and the powerful, so other theories of resistance must be attempted. Therefore, Thivai's call to arms becomes an attack on all representation and language that excludes the body or the "real:" "We should use force to fight representations which are idols, idolized images; we must use force to annihilate erase eradicate terminate destroy slaughter slay nullify neutralize break down get rid of obliterate move out destruct end all the representations which exist for purposes other than enjoyment. In such a war, a war against idolatry, ridicule'll be our best tool. Remember, whore: Julien's sarcasms did more damage than Nero's tortures" (94-5). Nevertheless, this call to arms is pronounced by Thivai and it underscores the excessive machismo of this type of revolutionary violence as he is abusing a prostitute while he proselytizes. More importantly, Acker suggests that the parameters of the struggle have altered.

For instance, one part of the first section of the novel is an appropriation of the cyberpunk writer William Gibson's Neuromancer (1984). Acker plagiarizes this text as she applauds Gibson's ability to expose the complex networks of power that permeate contemporary culture in excess of the disciplinary nature of the step-father. Abhor notes:

> My father's no longer important cause interpersonal power in this world means corporate power. The

> multinationals along with their computers have changed and are changing reality. Viewed as organism, they've attained immortality via biochips. Etc. Who needs slaves any more? So killing someone, anyone like Reagan or the top IBM executive board members, whoever they are, can't accomplish anything," I blabbed, and I wondered what would accomplish anything, and I wondered if there was only despair and nihilism, and then I remembered. (83)

Abhor's memory, like Huck Finn, is that her father is dead floating down the river on a boat. There is no need to kill him or what he represents as he is already dead and his power has been supplanted by the all-encompassing technological future of Gibson's "Sense/Net ice," a frozen grid of coded rationality. Therefore, Abhor does not advocate the traditional political strategies of resistance instead offering ways to become other, models of becoming a modern terrorist. It is interesting to compare the section from Gibson's novel and Acker's rewriting. First, here is Gibson's text:

> There is always a point at which the terrorist ceases to manipulate the media gestalt. A point at which the violence may well escalate, but beyond which the terrorist has become symptomatic of the media gestalt itself. Terrorism as we ordinarily understand it is innately media-related. The Panther Moderns differ from other terrorists precisely in their degree of self-consciousness, in their awareness of the extent to which media divorce the act of terrorism from the original sociopolitical intent. . . . (58)

Gibson's Moderns are inclined to commit "random acts of surreal violence. . . . [they are] mercenaries, practical jokers, nihilistic technofetishists" (58-9). In contrast, Acker's terrorists question the Moderns' (Acker calls them

"Modernists") plan to shoot misinformation into MAINLINE's internal video.

> Being a bit behind their times the moderns only wanted to destruct. On the other hand my construct (a cunt) and I had to find the code. (36)

Here is Acker's cut-up of the previously cited passages from Neuromancer:

> The modern Terrorists are a new version, a modern version, so to speak, of the hoboes of the 1930s USA. Just as those haters of all work, (work being that situation in which they were being totally controlled; the controllers didn't work), . . . so these Terrorists, being aware of the huge extent to which the media now divorce the act of terrorism from the original sociopolitical intent, were not so much nihilists as fetishists. (35)

In Gibson's account, nihilism and fetishism go hand and in hand. Conversely, like Deleuze who insists that sadists and masochists practice different fantasies, Acker contends that the habits of nihilists and fetishists are quite distinct. In Coldness and Cruelty, a preface to Sacher Von Masoch's Venus in Furs, Deleuze points out that sadism and masochism are two different complexes. For instance, in classical Freudian theory, the fetishist exists in a state of disavowal, denying the fact that the mother does not have a penis and taking as the fetish the last object seen before coming to this realization. In contrast, a sadist would not find much pleasure in finding a victim who enjoyed his tortures. One has only to think of de Sade's 120 Days of Sodom to realize that the sadist truly wishes to harm, if not kill, his victim. The fantasies of the sadist embody pure

negation; the sadist is a nihilist.

Alternately, the masochistic fetishist, in demanding that a contract be drawn between himself and his mistress, parodies the social contract upon which liberal society is based. The masochist is a fetishist who contests the validity of reality and the centrality of the Phallus in the name of the ideal. For instance, in the Hobbesian social contract, the average citizen who should be protected is subject to violence and scapegoating; however, in the masochistic contract it is the masochist who is in control--he promises to obey every command of his mistress, but knows that he will never actually be harmed. Fetishism and masochism are totemistic talismans against the powers that be that stand in contrast to the pure negation of sadistic nihilism. Indeed, through the state of disavowal, the masochist denies the absence of the mother's penis and consequently castration, preferring to reside in a suspended and neutralized state that informs masochistic fantasies of crucifixion, hanging and bondage.

In a section entitled "Let the Algerians Take Over Paris," Abhor claims that "[m]asochism is only political rebellion" (58) and that it is connected to being "[h]uman: I'm a slave or prisoner of my needs. Love is one need. For this reason I wear chains. You could say chains aren't feminist" (55). Acker is most definitely challenging the discourse of certain feminisms here, particularly those that are based on positivist and empiricist rationality. These

discourses deny these invisible chains that still imprison women in a post-feminist world.

For Abhor, a positivistic feminist discourse is clouded by an investment in techno-patriarchal culture. They have not developed their own code of ethics, a theme so important in Twain's tale and Huck's decision to help Jim escape slavery. Like Huck Finn, then, Abhor brands herself completely as an outcast. In order to avoid alienation and nihilism, Acker states that she must search for

> a myth to live by. The purpose is constructive rather than deconstructive as in Don Quixote. . . . The first part is an elegy for the world of patriarchy. I wanted to take the patriarchy and kill the father on every level. And I did that partially by finding out what was taboo and rendering it is words. The second part of the book concerns what society would look like if it weren't defined by oedipal considerations and the taboos were no longer taboo. I went through every taboo, or tried to, to see what society would be like without these taboos. Unfortunately, the CIA intervenes; I couldn't get there. . . . The last section, "Pirate Night," is about wanting to get to a society that is taboo, but realizing that it's impossible. The CIA is symbolic . . . that you can't isolate yourself from the world. . . . It could have been anybody. So I ended up with "Pirate Night." ("A Few Notes" 17)

Speaking about the last section of the novel, "Pirate Night," Acker also appears to be somewhat disillusioned with the practical possibilities of Deleuze and Guattari's "lines of flight:"

> You can't get to a place, to a society, that isn't constructed according to the phallus. You're stuck with a lot of loneliness, so how do you deal with that isolation and loneliness? The third part concerns that issue. Also I'm looking for a myth. I'm looking for it where no one else is looking.

("A Few Notes" 17)

To Acker, the myth is pirates and sailors and their tattoos, a writing of the body and spirit in which the initiate takes over his or her own sign-making. Tattooing becomes an outlaw form of writing:

> Because a sailor has spat on and shits on poverty, the sailor knows that the worst poverty is that of the heart. All good sailors espouse and live in the material simplicity which denies the poverty of the heart. Reagan's heart is empty. A sailor is a human who has traded poverty for the riches of imaginative reality.
>
> Such an act constitutes the destruction of society thus is criminal. (114)

The tattoo has always been the sign of the outcast--the sailor, the biker, the criminal. A recovery of the tattoo for Acker is not only a gesture toward body writing, but a pun on the Levitical taboos that mark an aberrant person as unpleasing to God. In the Old Testament book of Leviticus, aside from the dietary proscriptions and taboos against incest, adultery, and homosexuality, the priests are warned to "not make bald patches on their heads as a sign of mourning, nor cut the edges of their beards, nor gash their bodies" (21: 5-6). Through the repression of these primitive rituals, the Levites and their cultural descendants believed themselves to be God's chosen people who were separate from the heathens. In the section of Empire that details the art of tattooing, a young sailor named Agone is given his first tattoo while he is initiated into his first homosexual encounter.

> Cruel Romans had used tattoos to mark and identify mercenaries, slaves, criminals, and

> heretics.
>
> For the first time, the sailor felt he had sailed home.
>
> Among the early Christians, tattoos, stigmata indicating exile, which at first had been forced on their flesh, finally actually served to enforce group solidarity. The Christians began voluntarily to acquire these indications of tribal identity. . . . Today a tattoo is considered both a defamatory brand and a symbol of a tribe or of a dream. (130)

For Abhor, the tattoo is a resistance to the semiotic cultural codifications that insists that one make one's own bodily inscriptions. It is a taboo-shattering act of making the body a book, a surface upon which meaning is inscribed but whose earthly nature is unmediated by idealism, dissolving the difference between mind/body, spirit/matter, master/slave, subject/object, and signifier/signified. In Acker's earlier work, she devoted much of her energy and attention to the first four dualisms, however, in Empire she is particularly concerned with the privileging of signifier over the signified. Like Charles Olson and William Burroughs before her, Acker has always been interested in forging a new language. Think of her Hester Prynne who demands to be taught "a new language" and the illustrative maps of her dreams. Olson in Mayan Letters claims that

> and i take it, a Sumer poem or Mayan glyph is more pertinent to our purposes than anything else, because each of these people & their workers had forms which unfolded directly from content. . . . (68)

Burroughs, in one of his essays on experimental writing techniques called "Hieroglyphic Silence" in The Third Mind, comments on the advantages of a hieroglyphic language:

> [W]ords become necessary when the object they refer to is not there.
>
> Not matter what the spoken language may be, you can read hieroglyphs, a picture of a chair or what have you. . . . You don't need subvocal speech to register the meaning of hieroglyphs. Learning hieroglyphic language is excellent practice in the lost art of inner silence. (186)

In the use of the tattoo, Acker also deviates from the work of Deleuze and Guattari who believe that this form of sign-making is simply a return to a primitive and hence brutal form of inscription. Therefore, it is worthwhile noting their classification of different writing systems.

In Anti-Oedipus, Deleuze and Guattari posit three modes of representation that follow the sign in oral, literate, and electronic-information systems. These histories correspond to the functioning of the sign in primitive, despotic or state, and capitalist societies. In primitive societies, kinship systems based on blood relations (filiation) and marriage relations (alliance) controlled the exchange of goods and people. Arguing against Lévi-Strauss's structuralist anthropology and following Nietzsche's theory of a primary disequilibrium in The Genealogy of Morals, Deleuze and Guattari argue that debt sets in motion the circulation of gifts. Gift exchange presupposes a unit of debt or a unit of "surplus value of code."

This graphic writing is not a precursor to the language of the signifier and signified. In a passage that coincides with Derrida's critique of "phonocentrism" in Western culture, Deleuze and Guattari state that

> Savage formations are oral, are vocal, but not because they lack a graphic system: a dance on the earth, a drawing on a wall, a mark on the body are a graphic system, a geo-graphism, a geography. These formations are oral precisely because they possess a graphic system that is independent of the voice, a system that is not aligned on the voice and not subordinate to it, but connected to it, co-ordinated " in an organization that is radiating, as it were," and multidimensional. (And it must be said that this graphic system is linear writing's contrary: civilizations cease being oral only through losing the independence and the particular dimensions of the graphic system; by aligning itself on the voice.) (Anti-Oedipus 188)

In primitive ritual there is no fixed relationship between the words pronounced and marks inscribed on a body. The voice and inscription interact in rituals that are not separated from the body and its gestures and stories. However, Deleuze and Guattari do not privilege this form of representation. The mark of the tattoo is a way of compensating a creditor for a debt where the debtor's pain gives the creditor pleasure; it is a "theatre of cruelty that implies the triple independence of the articulated voice, the graphic hand, and the appreciative eye" (189).

Despotic representation occurs with the advent of state society. The despot puts himself in direct line with God and thereby disallows primitive alliances and filiations. The state is "a functional pyramid that has the despot at its apex" (194). At this point in history, there occurs the "subordination of graphism to the voice . . . a fictitious voice from on high which, inversely, no longer expresses itself except through the writing signs that it emits (205).

This shift has specific connotations for both the sign and desire:

> For what is the signifier in the first instance? What it is in relation to the nonsignifying territorial signs, when it jumps outside their chains and imposes--superimposes--a plane of subordination on their plane of immanent connotation? The signifier is the sign that has become a sign of the sign, the despotic sign having replaced the territorial sign, having crossed the threshold of deterritorialization; the signifier is merely the deterritorialized sign itself. The sign made letter. Desire no longer dares to desire, having become a desire of a desire of the despot's desire. . . . The body no longer allows itself to be engraved like the earth, but prostrates itself before the engravings of the despot. . . . (206)

Despotic representation is the Saussurian bond between the signifier and signified.

Deleuze and Guattari describe capitalist society as profoundly illiterate, a place where "non-signifying signs" connected to electronic flows (whether they be words, music, images, etc.) abound. These signs circulate within the capitalist economic process to coordinate exchange and distribution, and production and consumption. However, at times these flows escape the circuits of capitalist production creating schizophrenic moments of desire: "The flows are decoded and axiomatized by capitalism, at the same time. Hence schizophrenia is not the identity of capitalism, but on the contrary its difference, its divergence, and its death" (246). Moreover, capitalist societies

> are caught between the Urstaat that they would like to resuscitate as an overcoding and reterritorializing unity, and the unfettered flows that carry them toward an absolute threshold. They

> recode with all their might, with world-wide dictatorship, local dictators, and an all-powerful police, while decoding--or allowing the decoding of--fluent quantities of their capital and their populations. They are torn in two directions: archaism and futurism, neoarchaism and ex-futurism, paranoia and schizophrenia. (260)

To invest the body with something permanent like a tattoo seems to work against any notion of the Body without Organs. The body without organs is the transparent flesh that refuses to carry significance in the body politic, to bear social codes, or to submit to a "pre-traced destiny." Yet Acker's myth is that of the sailor and the pirate, whose lives are comprised of anti-oedipal "short-term" goals and hardly constitute a fixed point of stability. Moreover, the tattoo serves as the identificatory mark of the sexual masochist, symbolized in Empire by the Agone initiation section, whose pleasure in pain is a stratum towards the body without organs.

A year after Empire was published, Re/Search, a journal published in San Francisco and edited by V. Vale and Andrea Juno, came out with an issue entitled "Modern Primitives" devoted to people who practice tattooing, body piercing, and scarification. These body modifications are part of a trend that has recently resulted in the growth of the urban aboriginal movement. Fakir Musafar, one of the "leaders" of the modern primitive movement, claims that the reason he engages in these practices is that they are quite simply pleasurable: "It's more fun than getting on a bus and going to work in the morning. It's more fun than going to college

and getting a Ph.D" (Vale and Juno 15). Significantly, the practices that he calls "Body Play" are remarkably similar to what is normally considered masochistic exercises: 1) Body Play by Contortion: including enlargement of piercings, high heel shoes, foot-binding; 2) Constriction including bondage, tight ligatures and belts, corsets; 3) Deprivation including sense isolation in boxes, cages, helmets; 4) Encumberment including wearing iron in the form of heavy bracelets, manacles, encasements, chains; 5) Fire including branding and burning; 6) Penetration including flagellation, being pierced, punctured, spiked or skewered, tattooing, bed of nails, etc.; 7) Suspension including being hung on a cross, suspended by wrists, thighs, waist, ankles, etc (Vale and Juno 15). The self-infliction of tattooing and piercing may seem like a return to Deleuze and Guattari's first stage of primitive representation and the domination that occurs in the theatre of cruelty, but in fact it is an example of masochistic pain that is privileged in both Deleuze and Guattari's A Thousand Plateaus and Acker's Don Quixote.

To explain this sanctioning of masochism we must turn once again to Deleuze's On Coldness and Cruelty. In this lengthy essay, sadism and masochism are distinct perversion related to different concepts of a philosophical ideal. The sadist dreams of a primary nature of pure negation and enjoys the intense but impersonal pleasure of demonstrative reason. Deleuze identifies sadism with the Freudian superego and

claims that thought as a form of sublimation occurs once the superego is formed. This idealized superego results in a resexualization of thought itself which culminates in the repetitive, calculated, and rationalized tortures of de Sade's texts.

By contrast, the masochist idealizes the ego and its relation to the reality principle. Unlike the sadist who negates the world of secondary nature, the masochist practices what Freud call disavowal. Freudian disavowal is closely linked to the fetish where the fetishist refuses to acknowledge biological sexual difference supported by the fear of castration based on the absence of his mother's penis. The fetishist then makes a bond with the mother to contest the father. Once again, the father is associated with authority and the law and it is for this reason that the masochist always draws up a contract with his mistress. This contract is of course a parodic imitation of legal documents. The fetishist seems to obey the law but instead subverts the legal function of punishment by ensuring that pain actually guarantees prohibited enjoyment. Similarly, the tattooed body seems to obey codified inscriptions but in fact serves as a tactic in the move towards the body without organs. Though Masoch and Deleuze both speak of fetishistic experience as occurring between a female mistress and male victim, one can certainly substitute the terms male master or authority and female victim in the following passage:

> the masochistic hero appears to be educated and fashioned by the authoritarian woman whereas basically it is he who form her, dresses her for the part and prompts the harsh words she addresses to him. It is the victim who speaks through the mouth of his torturer, without sparing himself. (21-2)

Importantly, the Masochian fetishist, through the process of disavowal, contests the legitimacy of reality, denying an overdetermined sexual difference and fear of castration. In the fetishistic fantasies of the modern primitive that centre on rituals of suspension and immobility, one rests in a neutralized form where the ideal stands as totemistic protest against the real. In many respects, this is not new in Western culture as one only has to look at paintings and statues of a crucified and bleeding Jesus or tortured saints such as St. Sebastian. However, this form of ritual has been lost in a rationalized liberal society where leisure has replaced the sacred. In spite of this loss, modern primitives have resuscitated religious kitsch as art.

Not surprisingly, their body modifications and piercings, like Acker's fiction, have repulsed many. Yet fetishism has become an increasingly popular form of cultural representation, testified by a recent anthology dedicated to this subject entitled Fetishism as Cultural Discourse edited by Emily Apter and William Pietz. Apter believes that "[f]etishism, in spite of itself, unfixes representations even as it enables them to become monolithic 'signs' of culture" (3). The fetish of the tattoo, in common with the plagiarism,

is a metonymic substitution for the phallus:

> The imaginary phallus, venerated elsewhere, ultimately comes to occupy no fixed place at all. And the idea stipulated by classical psychoanalysis that virtually any object--fur, velvet, chair legs, shoelaces, apron strings, hatbands, feather boas, etc.--can become a candidate for fetishization once it is placed on the great metonymic chain of phallic substitutions ultimately undermines the presupposition of a phallic ur-form, or <u>object-type</u>. (4)

Moreover, Acker sets up a comparison between a writer and the tattooist suggesting that the writer often does not follow his or her desire. Conversely, the tattooist has to follow the body: "That's the medium of the tattoo. If you're looking for values, it's where the ground would be for real value. Whereas the ground for the values we have now, there's no reality to it, especially the evangelical movements, other than politics" (18). Against Lacan's impossible real and the poststructuralist prison house of language, Acker uses the tattoo as an outlaw strategy of dereification. Unlike Deleuze and Guattari who see the tattoo as a forerunner to language, Abhor proposes that

> The tattoo is the primal parent to the visual arts. Beginning as abstract maps of spiritual visions, records of the "other" world, tattoos were originally icons of power and mystery designating realms beyond normal land-dwellers' experience.
>
> The extra-ordinary qualities of the tattoo's magic religious origin remain constant even today, transferring to the bearer some sense of existing outside the conventions of normal society.
>
> In decadent phases, the tattoo became associated with the criminal--literally the outlaw--and the power of the tattoo became intertwined with the power of those who chose to live beyond the norms of society. (140)

Yet why a "return to myth?" Myth connotes an ahistorical nostalgia for permanence and identity. Myth is simply another structuring order that overcodifies and overdetermines experience. As always, Acker's myth is a strategic plagiarism of myth, whose mimetic and hypertextual form reveals that permanence and identity do not exist. Significantly, for William Pietz in "The Problem of the Fetish," the fetish is never an ahistorical, Platonic ideal:

> The fetish is always a meaningful fixation of a singular event; it is above all a 'historical' object, the enduring material form and force of an unrepeatable event. This object is 'territorialized" in material space (an earthly matrix), whether in the form of a geographical locality, a marked site of the surface of the human body, or a medium of inscription or configuration defined by some portable or wearable thing. . . . This reified, territorialized historical object is also 'personalized' in the sense that beyond its status as a collective social object it evokes an intensely personal response from individuals. This intense relation to the individual's experience of his or her own living self through an impassioned response to the fetish object is always incommensurable with (whether in a way that reinforces or undercuts) the social value codes within which the fetish holds the status of a material signifier. It is in these 'disavowals' and 'perspectives of flight' whose possibility is opened in the clash of this incommensurable difference that the fetish might be identified as the site of both the formation and the revelation of ideology and value consciousness. (12-3)

Throughout her fiction Acker has been suspicious of traditional revolutionary thought, claiming that its notion of identity is too fixed, puritanical, and ultimately violent. Since the writing of The Childlike Life of the Black Tarantula, Acker had experimented with schizophrenic identity

in her work and she has often resorted to the image of the outlaw or criminal, a consistent theme in American literature, as an ideal for the new revolutionary. In Empire, this research into the use of multiple personalities continues with Abhor taking on the identity of Molly in Neuromancer, a sailor, a pirate, and a member of a motorcycle gang. According to Deleuze and Guattari, schizophrenics love trying on other identities, like Genet becoming woman. Conversely, paranoiacs believe that others are stealing their ideas and purloining their identities; paranoia is the social investment of desire that tears apart all revolutionary groups. Through the intensification of the schizophrenic impulses of capitalism, Deleuze and Guattari believe that the paranoic investment of social desire can be challenged.

Unfortunately, there is a sense that the strategy of becoming schizophrenic other has been limited to men. Therefore, Abhor must mark off a space that is not a masculine becoming other. For instance, Thivai and his gay male friend, Mark, do their best to keep Abhor, a female, out of their motorcycle gang--an image of a br(other)ly schizophrenic line of flight. Significantly, Abhor decides that this exclusion is a good idea: "I told Mark that he was right. I didn't want to be part of a motorcycle gang" (227). Abhor, like Huck Finn who retreats to his raft to escape violence on the shores of the Mississippi, is repulsed by Mark's story of biker rape and violence. Abhor is still a sailor or pirate, but on her

own terms and that is marked by the tattoo. Additionally, Abhor decides that the masculine rules of The Highway Code are strict and hypocritical enforcing rules of male property and propriety. The Highway Code could potentially be read as a symbol for the generations of American male authors that preceded Kathy Acker, whose motto has often been to go on the road: "From now on the Highway Code no longer mattered. I was making up my own rules" (222). It is also a tradition in Anglo-American literature that is greatly admired by Deleuze and Guattari: "Strange Anglo-American Literature: from Thomas Hardy, from D.H. Lawrence to Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac, men who know how to leave, to scramble the codes, to cause flows to circulate, to traverse the desert of the body without organs" (132-3). According to Deleuze and Guattari, all these writers fail, "[t]he neurotic impasse again closes--the daddy-mommy of oedipalization, America, the return to the native land--or else the perversion of the exotic territorialities, then drugs, alcohol--or worse still, an old fascist dream" (133). Acker is less concerned with this question than demanding to know the role of the female protagonist in this script.

Differentiating herself strategically from her ancestral fathers, Abhor's motto becomes "Discipline and Anarchy," and these words are inscribed on a tattoo of a sword piercing a rose. Discipline may seem contrary to the anarchistic body without organs, yet it is an essential component of the

masochistic stratum. Abhor acknowledges that pain exists in the world and insists that to deny anger creates only "self-hatred" and "self-infliction" (221). Abhor's denial of self-hatred and self-infliction may seem like a contradiction in Acker's novel, since a certain amount of masochistic activity permeates all of her texts. However, the point is not to repress this pain, but to render it visible, as Abhor finally concludes:

> It doesn't matter who has handled and shoved in this sword. Once this sword is in me. I'm the piercer and the pierced. Then I thought about all that had happened to me, my life, and all that was going to happen to me, the future: chance and my endurance. Discipline creates endurance. (224)

The pain described here is within the context of masochism and is forbidden within a dialectic of master/slave victimization. For Abhor then, and many of Acker's characters, perhaps the only form of resistance in an increasingly panoptic society, is to take control of one's body and make the discipline visible. And if Deleuze and Guattari are correct in their assessment of a primary disequilibrium symbolized by the tattoo that indicates the debt that is marked on the body as a unit of "surplus value of code," then now it is the debtor, rather than the creditor, who makes the inscription.

Moreover, it is highly appropriate that Acker chooses to rewrite certain scenes from the Twain's Huckleberry Finn. In that novel, Huck Finn and the runaway slave, Jim, espouse a common-sense approach to the world (albeit moderated by certain superstitious beliefs) that are contrasted to Tom

Sawyer's romantic and fanciful visions; Tom is an American Don Quixote. For instance, his ideas are influenced by romances such as Alexandre Dumas' The Count of Monte Cristo. At first, it seems as though Tom is the most imaginative of the three, but it turns out that his schemes and intrigues are the product of the books he reads. Tom is all flash and style and he would never do something in a simple way if he could concoct a more complicated plan of action. Tom is, in fact, a nihilistic sadist who enjoys the intense, impersonal pleasure of demonstrative reason. He enjoys the repetitive, calculated, and rationalist tortures of Jim which are reminiscent of de Sade's texts.

In the chapter significantly entitled "Dark, Deep-laid Plans," Twain's Tom and Huck work out how they will rescue Jim from Silas Phelps who has chained the black slave to a bed in a shack. All Tom and Huck have to do is lift the bed to remove the chain, but Tom rejects this idea. Instead, he insists that they need to saw through the leg of the bed and that they build a moat so that Jim can fall into it and be rescued. Tom also decides that he needs different tools for digging than the hoes and picks that are actually in the shed. Even though Huck, when given the chance to voice his opinion, suggests alternatives, Tom simply throws up his hands with an air of condescension insinuating that Huck does not understand the value of planning with "style." The plot turns more and more sadistic when Tom and Huck catch spiders, rats, and

snakes to make the shack look more like Tom's idea of a dungeon and once released the insects and rodents attack and bite Jim. At the end of the novel, we find out that Tom had known all along that Jim had actually been freed by Miss Watson in her will. For Tom, this torture is a source of amusement, just one big game, and certainly one that is rigged:

> He said it was the best fun he ever had in his life, and the most intellectural; and said if he only could see his way to it we would keep it up all the rest of our lives and leave Jim to our children to get out; for he believed Jim would come to like it better and better the more he got used to it. He said that in that way it could be strung out to as much as eighty year, and would be the best time on record. And he said it would make us all celebrated that had a hand in it. (398)

Twain criticizes Tom because he reads too many books of the wrong kind, notably romances. Acker suggests that other kinds of books might be just as dangerous in her brilliant rewriting of Twain's classic:

> The whole world is men's bloody fantasies.
> For example: Thivai decided he was going to be a pirate. Therefore: we were going to be pirates. If I didn't want to be a pirate, I was rejecting all that he is. He, then, had to make me either repent my rejection or too helpless to reject him. Then, he decided he loved me. By the time he decided that, I was in jail.
> You two collaborated in keeping me in jail by planning escapes so elaborate they had nothing to do with escape. That's western thought for you. (210)

Abhor has now become Jim instead of Huck, and like Jim she must wear chains in order to gain freedom. One remembers that Jim is forced to pretend that he has been captured by the King

and the Duke to avoid raising suspicions. Tom Sawyer's shenanigans actually prolonged Jim's imprisonment, but it is an important historical note that the ending of Huck Finn, once Huck arrives at the Phelps place and Tom Sawyer reappears, has always been considered a failure by many eminent critics, including T.S. Eliot and Lionel Trilling. Trilling praised the novel, but like Eliot felt the need to justify the ending of the book:

> In form and style Huckleberry Finn is an almost perfect work. Only one mistake has ever been charged against it, that it concludes with Tom Sawyer's elaborate, too elaborate, game of Jim's escape. Certainly, this episode is too long--in the original draft it was much longer--and certainly, it is a falling-off . . . from the incidents of the river. (326)

These writers felt that Huckleberry Finn should have ended with the capture of Jim. Leo Marx in a response to this critique suggests that the ending makes so many readers uncomfortable because "[t]o take seriously what happens at the Phelps farm is to take lightly the entire downstream journey" (337). While it is considered acceptable, in fact, appropriate to ridicule the plots of romances, which are usually defined as feminine, the idea of attacking the philosophical voyage is still taboo. It is, after all, not the long voyage that sets Jim free! The fact that male critics have protested so vehemently to the ending of Huckleberry Finn exposes the fear that masculinist philosophy and logic is subject to the logic of its own poststructuralist critique. Empire of the Senseless, like Huckleberry Finn,

ends with a rejection of both the romantic and intellectual traditions when Abhor states: "I stood there, there in the sunlight, and thought that I didn't as yet know what I want. I now fully knew what I didn't want and what and whom I hated. That was something" (227).

This last statement may seem surprisingly modest coming from the young writer of Politics who was sick of not knowing who she was. If there is a progressive, linear thread to be unravelled in Acker's work, it is the acceptance that she will never know her identity, that this project is futile. However, she can decide what she refuses. It is only through plagiarism, a trying on of identities, and strategic masochism, a disavowal of the phallus, that Acker has discovered what she doesn't want and what she hates. Her work may seem shocking at times, but she has remained true to Irigaray's dictum in This Sex Which Is Not One:

> If we keep on speaking the same language together, we're going to reproduce the same history. . . . Come out of their language . . . go back through the names they've given you. . . . You won't be absorbed into familiar scenes, worn-out phrases, routine gestures. Into bodies already encoded within a system. (205-6)

Despite the claims of copyright lawyers, some critics of literature, and certain feminists, Acker has, in fact, created new stories through the paradoxical use of plagiarism. Like the Amazons before her, who were tattooed as sign of their ostracism from Greek society and who auto-mutilated their left breasts to use their archery weapons, Acker is a warrior in a

battle for the psychic happiness of those too often left behind.

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