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Source: *Cultural Critique*, No. 29 (Winter, 1994-1995), pp. 77-105

Published by: [University of Minnesota Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1354422>

Accessed: 22/07/2011 07:05

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Documenting Barbarism: Yourcenar's Male Fantasies, Theweleit's Coup

Michael Rothberg

Fantasy is on the side of reality.

—Slavoj Žižek

I

In a famous phrase from his “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” Walter Benjamin asserted that “there is no document of culture which is not at the same time a document of barbarism” (256; translation modified). True enough. But in considering Marguerite Yourcenar’s *Coup de Grace* (written, like Benjamin’s theses, at the very end of the 1930s) and Klaus Theweleit’s *Male Fantasies*, I want to ask if the reverse is true: Is every document of barbarism also a document of culture?¹

I am not arguing that this novel and this historical work are themselves necessarily barbaric, but I do want to draw attention to the risks involved in the task of documenting barbarism. Theweleit’s literary historical project takes seriously the fictions and fanta-

sies of the men of the *Freikorps*—proto-Nazi bands of German soldiers for whom World War I never really ended—in order to demonstrate in frightening detail how barbaric desire resides “on the side of reality.” Yourcenar’s novel recounts the sordid adventures of one fictional *Freikorps* soldier during the unrest following the end of the First World War and the Russian Revolution. Yourcenar provides the kind of subjective “document” that Theweleit demands that we comprehend in order to understand and combat the reality of fascism as it lives on beyond the inter-war period of its germination.

Yet after a generation or more of post-structuralism we know that no documentation (just as no documentary) can document any historical or psychological situation innocently. Such questions are immediately mediated, which is to say, ideological. To document barbarism is to risk the purity of one’s own position as the speaking subject of “culture.” My initial question thus becomes: What are the politics of documenting fascism? And—given the specificity of the texts at issue here—what are the *sexual* politics of fascism and its critique?² I will explore these questions by reading Yourcenar’s and Theweleit’s texts together and historically situating them in their sites of production in order to glimpse the politics of their representation (or lack of representation) of politics.

II

In reading *Coup de Grace* with *Male Fantasies* we must immediately move beyond the certainties that traditional criticism has posed vis-à-vis historical understanding. Over the last two decades various post-structuralist critics have complicated the notion of situating a text historically by simultaneously engaging “the historicity of texts and the textuality of history” (Montrose 20). Critics may no longer conceive of history as a linear narrative of discrete texts and periods, but rather as what Louis Montrose calls “a dynamic, unstable, and reciprocal relationship between the discursive and material domains” (23). Furthermore, instead of delineating texts from the historical contexts in which they arise and in which they are read, “the post-structuralist orientation to history . . . necessi-

tates efforts to historicize the present as well as the past, and to historicize the dialectic between them" (20, 24).

Such "new historical" innovations have reinvigorated the study of literature, opening up multiple paths out of the stale formalist certainties of the pre- and new-critical past. Yet, at the same time, we have witnessed the development of a new *doxa*: the belief that "so many cultural codes converge and interact [within a text] that ideological coherence and stability are scarcely possible" (Montrose 22). Since there *does* seem to be a "coherence and stability" to this particular belief in today's theoretical marketplace, we are probably justified in asking how this unity could be possible and what it might mean.

In fact, given the definition of ideology which Montrose claims to be working with, it would be "scarcely possible" for ideology *not* to create "coherence and stability" out of the contradictions of the text. In Althusser's famous definition, cited by Montrose, ideology "represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (Althusser 162). As a representation of an imaginary relationship, ideology reproduces a coherence and stability which are, on the one hand, false, but, on the other hand, a lived "reality" (which, in a Lacanian discourse such as Althusser's, must be differentiated from the Real, which eludes mimesis). Even if the subject, who constitutes and is constituted by ideology, is a "term inaccurately used to describe what is actually a series of the conglomeration of positions . . . into which a person is called momentarily by the discourses and the world that he/she inhabits" (Paul Smith, qtd. in Montrose 31n), this inaccuracy is also a lived experience, not simply an illusion which the theorist or critic can wish away in an act of demystification. Furthermore, the replacement of the notion of the subject by that of subject-positions in fact does little to displace the metaphysics of individualism since it merely takes the logic of coherence to a different, "sub-atomic" level. Some tendencies within Lacanian theory have been more radical in developing a notion of the subject as precisely that lack (of coherence) which Montrose would like to understand as making the notion of the subject obsolete (Žižek 174–75).

The subject, ideology, and history may all be in some way "impossible" or incoherent, but, ironically, this lack of order structures the social whole, providing its contingent coherence. Post-

structuralist history, as summarized by Montrose, dissolves the tension between the universal and the particular, highlighting multiplicity at the price of recognizing the *totality-effect* that it supports and that makes domination and resistance possible. The very “iterability” of the text, cited by Derrida (326) as that which makes the notion of context impossible, actually constitutes history. Thus, for example, the (re)publication of Yourcenar’s novel in translation bears the traces of a new historical moment and contributes to the constitution of this context. The fact that it takes on unforeseen meanings (that it is an unstable multiplicity) does not detract from, but establishes, its efficacy in producing a context-specific totality-effect that, as we will see, aims to secure a certain ideological position. The historical methodology which I am laying out here seeks to politicize citation, to “gras[p] the constellation which [our] own era has formed with a definite earlier one,” and “to brush history against the grain,” thus wresting the past away from its necessarily constant reappropriation by the status quo (Benjamin 263, 257).

In the context of a project which seeks to investigate the sexual politics of representation, we cannot simply rely on psychoanalytic, marxist, and post-structuralist theories, but must acknowledge the ways in which feminist-inflected (and, more recently, queer-inflected) critique has brushed traditional and even radical history “against the grain.” Feminist historians such as Joan Kelly-Gadol have put into question the overarching diachronic narrative of progress which anchors much historical thinking and which has been written through the exclusion of women’s experience. Jane Marcus, in considering the specific conjuncture relevant to this essay, has cited “the necessity to free women’s history from the yoke of male periodization” (“Asylums” 140) and has demonstrated how various women writers “allow the reader to escape from the standard historical confines of wartime and peacetime” (Afterword 254) that have structured not just literary, but nearly all attempts to periodize the 20th century.

My reading of *Coup de Grace* and *Male Fantasies* is indebted to this “escape” from a restrictive tradition which feminism has enabled. We have here two books that are thoroughly saturated in war, but that illuminate what we usually call the “inter-war” period, those years between the two world wars. They propose, in their different ways, a state of permanent aggression that constitutes

both the social and the individual within the ever-widening Western sphere of influence. Both Yourcenar's novel and Theweleit's historical documentation suggest, through a particular depiction of warrior/fascist subjectivity, a psychological universality, and this, in Theweleit's case, despite a postmodern theoretical apparatus.

In order to rise from this important, but abstract, universality, to a more concrete level (following Marx's methodological suggestion in the *Grundrisse*, 38), we can rehistoricize the two texts, seeking in them an open-ended dialectic appropriate to the multiple moments in which they "take place." This will allow us to regain a concept of periodization adequate to the nonidentical trajectories of the international, gender, and sexual politics at work here. I have conceived of this project in the early years of what I would call a neo-nationalist era. Since 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet bloc, unification on the level of economics (i.e., global capitalism) has coexisted with the proliferation of local political and ethnic differences (i.e., nationalisms).³ As I write, the newspapers bring reports of atrocities in what used to be Yugoslavia which hauntingly recall not only the civil wars of the time "between the wars," but also the Nazi genocide. My study, which proposes to look back at the immediate aftermath of World War I in Europe through the lens of a work of fiction, arises out of contemporary concerns about this "return of the repressed," and out of questions about the historical genealogy of those contemporary concerns.

The era that both *Coup de Grace* and *Male Fantasies* "document" mirrors our own, serving as an imaginary double through and against which we might attempt to define ourselves. The recently concluded First World War had done more to unsettle European politics than to grant closure to the struggles of its various nations and ethnic groups. Arno Mayer has described this moment following the Versailles Peace Conference as "reflect[ing] the intersection of the ending of a gigantic military conflict with the opening of a universal international civil war" (vii). The two works I am considering here take us inside the experience of this terrible historical moment. The landscape that Yourcenar's (anti)hero, Erick von Lhomond, and Theweleit's *Freikorps* occupy seems to consist solely of roving bands of soldiers torturing, killing, and sloggng their way through mud and snow. But, as historian Claudia Koonz suggests about Weimar Germany, we must consider this

time with “a retrospective double vision that encompasses both the prospect of emancipation and progress . . . and the etiology of a disreputable and insignificant movement which spread, undetected, through the body politic and was diagnosed only after it could not be halted” (21). I will argue that, for all their perspicacity, the stories that both Yourcenar and Theweleit construct retroactively about their subjects show us predominantly the latter side of this dialectic between emancipation and terror. While this surprising “univocality” might derive from the polemical nature of these texts within their original, intended contexts, by shifting the terrain and exploring the linguistic and spatiotemporal “translations” of these texts, we begin to grasp their politics at a deeper level.

III

Klaus Theweleit’s two-volume study of the novels and memoirs of the fascist and proto-Nazi *Freikorps* soldiers was originally published in Germany in 1977, but only translated into English in 1987 and 1989. In its original context, Theweleit’s work challenged German citizens’ pre-1960 refusal to accept responsibility for their role in the recent Nazi past, and it grew out of a movement of students obsessed with their parents’ guilt and with the psychology of fascism and authoritarianism. *Male Fantasies* also responded to what Theweleit understood as a shortcoming in the dominant marxist models of fascism provided by the Frankfurt School: an inability to acknowledge the reality of fascist fantasy and to understand the attraction of fascist violence (see Anson Rabinbach and Jessica Benjamin’s foreword to Vol. II, xii). Although *Male Fantasies* was written with the belief that the authoritarian structures of contemporary German society carried with them the possibility of fascist renewal, there was no explicit Nazi mobilization during the era in which Theweleit wrote.

Male Fantasies appeared in English, however, on the cusp of the neo-nationalist era, during a rebirth of fascist street violence and amid a series of “scandals” which caused cultural workers to confront the politically suspect pasts of some of their intellectual forbears. In 1987, Victor Farias published *Heidegger and Nazism* in France (it was translated into English 2 years later), causing a furor

among latter-day Heideggerians and deconstructionists with his claims that the German philosopher was significantly more implicated in fascism than had previously been popularly believed. Also in 1987, scholars discovered that Yale literary critic Paul de Man had written a number of articles for a collaborationist newspaper in Nazi-occupied Belgium during World War II.⁴ My concern here is neither to defend nor to indict Heidegger, de Man, or the philosophies with which they are associated, but rather to outline the conjuncture in which Theweleit's study of fascist subjectivity was introduced into American discourse. The Heidegger and de Man cases not only testify to a "crisis in witnessing" brought about by the experience of fascism and genocide, as Shoshana Felman has argued about de Man (120–64), but are also witnesses to a crisis of nationalism which irrupted on the world stage shortly after their unearthing in the late 1980s. Theweleit's work (and its translation into English at the same moment as the Heidegger and de Man cases attained public attention) also anticipated the political upheavals of national and ethnic violence with which we continue to struggle vainly.

While crises in ethnic and national identity obviously constitute part of Theweleit's landscape, upheaval in the realms of gender and sexual identities have also invigorated his intellectual project. Thus, we ought to situate Theweleit's endeavor in specifically feminist contexts. Although not explicitly acknowledged in the text, Theweleit wrote *Male Fantasies* during a decade of intensive feminist activism in West Germany. Starting with the founding of the Action Council for Women's Liberation in 1968 and the first national women's conference (of the new movement) in March 1971, and continuing through the establishment of women's centers and battered women's shelters during the rest of the decade, the issues of violence, gender, and sexuality addressed by Theweleit were brought into public discourse and consciousness by the Autonomous Women's Movement. From the mid-1970s, theoretical work from France also began to influence German feminists, along with the theoretical stylistics of Irigaray's and Cixous's *écriture féminine*, which Theweleit's "flowing" style often seems to be approximating.⁵ In Alice Kaplan's words, "the authority he substitutes for the fascist one is female" (160).⁶ Given this context, it is not surprising that Theweleit would be welcomed by many femi-

nists upon his text's translation into English. Both volumes of his work, for instance, were prefaced with essays by prominent feminists (Barbara Ehrenreich, for the first volume, and Jessica Benjamin, with Anson Rabinbach, for the second). At the same moment, the issue of "men in feminism" was also coming to attention in the English-speaking world, and Theweleit's text, I will argue, illustrates some of the benefits and many of the pitfalls of that troubled "subject-position."⁷

We can best arrive at an understanding of Theweleit's problematic relationship to feminism if we first understand his explicit debts to a certain version of psychoanalysis. His approach to the subjectivity of the soldier males derives not from Freud or Lacan, but from Deleuze and Guattari's heterodox *Anti-Oedipus*, published in the early 1970s. According to Deleuze and Guattari, the Oedipal structure is not a human universal, as Freud and some anthropologists have attempted to demonstrate, but rather a determinate social relation enforced from above (Theweleit I: 210). In the anti-Oedipal model, the concept of unlimited desire displaces Oedipus as the universal upon which the theorists found their model. The anti-Oedipal model privileges neither the father nor the phallus (II: 175), but rather the subject's relation to its own desiring-production.

Theweleit understands drives within the body to produce revolutionary streams of desire. The soldier represses not the specific desires themselves, but the fact that he produces them: "he subjects the unconscious itself . . . to repression" (II: 6). This repression effects a "progressive displacement of libido . . . from inside the body . . . to the periphery of the body" (II: 216), according to Margaret Mahler's research on psychotic children (another model upon which Theweleit draws). The communists, workers, women, and Jews who haunt the soldier male threaten the boundaries of his body because they embody the liberation of the very desiring-production which he has repressed (II: 7). Julia Kristeva's writings on the "abject" emphasize this same anxiety over the boundaries of the body which she also finds in both "borderline" psychotic patients and in fascist writing, such as that of Céline.

But if we can always rely on Kristeva to find "*jouissance*" in the experience of limits, Theweleit's warrior is in fact an ascetic subject, and what he produces is not bliss, but death (I: 216). The

Freikorps sees itself engaging in “a battle against everything that constitutes enjoyment and pleasure” (II: 7). Theweleit understands anti-Semitism as deriving not primarily from anticapitalist sentiments about Jews as exploiters, but “instead [from] a coupling of ‘Jewishness’ with a ‘contagious’ desire for a better life” (8–9). Given the micro-politics of his theory of fascism, Theweleit probably would not want to admit it, yet this unveiling of asceticism does not differ enormously from Adorno’s analysis of anti-Semitism.⁸ Adorno implicitly links anti-Semitism to the workings of the capitalist Culture Industry by explaining both phenomena as (in Fredric Jameson’s words) “negative embodiments of the deeper *ressentiment* generated by class society itself” toward the “promise of social and personal happiness,” which both Jews and art represent (Jameson 154). The most significant difference is that Adorno’s analysis explains asceticism as a social fact, while for Theweleit it derives from psychological structures.

According to this psychoanalytic model, the very tenuousness of the soldier male’s ego, the fact that he is “not yet fully born” (II: 213), requires him to establish “maintenance mechanisms” as a prop to identity. The soldier male’s ego comes not from identification with the father, as in the Oedipal model, but, rather, through punishment. The fascist “must acquire an enveloping ‘ego’ from the outside,” but his only experience of the outside comes through acts of violence, first perpetrated against himself, and later against others. As Theweleit paraphrases Freud, “Where pain is, there ‘I’ shall be” (II: 164). In military drills and beatings, the soldier’s body submits to “the pain principle,” which reorganizes his fragmented drives and organs into a bodily whole bounded by skin which is quite literally becoming thick beneath the blows of the whip (II: 150, 144). Such a process of ego constitution guarantees that, in the face of the ostensibly liberated and threatening other, this subject will only be able to ensure “his own survival, his self-preservation and self-regeneration” through “the act of killing” or other expressions of violence.

In Theweleit’s account, the threatening other is almost always female, and fascism in fact derives from the relations between the sexes established by a transhistorical patriarchy. His methodology seeks to “trace a straight line from the witch to the seductive Jewish woman” (I: 79). Fascism represents, then, not a break with tradi-

tional gender relations, but an extreme example of the norm, “the tip of the patriarchal iceberg” (I: 171). When killing women, or fantasizing about killing them, the soldier male also expresses hatred of his own self as patriarchy has formed it. He must “dam up” the feminized, interior drives of his body: “When a fascist male went into combat against erotic, ‘flowing,’ nonsubjugated women, he was also fighting his own unconscious, his own desiring-production” (I: 434). The soldier’s permanent state of war against communists, women, and Jews tenuously props up his ego, just as the permanent war economy enables the survival of capitalism, although at the cost of deferring the liberation of desire.

Since the ego of the fascist is not a given, but an external imposition, it best fixes itself in external structures, such as the army or youth organization. In Germany these institutions in part derived significance from historical circumstances. With the nationalist hysteria of the beginning of World War I (also documented by Modris Eksteins, 55–64), “the soldierly core of the army . . . became nation, and leader of the people” (II: 81). With the mortifying defeat of 1918, and the truly external imposition of Weimar democracy (see Koonz, chapter 2), “the key to [the nation’s] rebirth was the arming of the *Freikorps* against the Republic” (II: 81). The true Nation, a roving band of assassins, saw itself as shaping the People out of an amorphous mass, all in the name of the Führer. But at the same time, “the army, high culture, race, nation, Germany—all of these appear to function as a second, tightly armored body enveloping [the soldier male’s] own body armor” (II: 84). For Theweleit, the social and the psychological mutually constitute each other, although, in the last instance, the process starts with the attempt to establish the borders of the body.

Taking off from Deleuze and Guattari, Theweleit derives two basic social structures which he defines as fascist and revolutionary, respectively: the molar mass and the molecular masses (II: 3, 75). According to Theweleit, Deleuze and Guattari define the molecular as a fluid, always changing multiplicity, while the molar mass channels the flow of desiring production into rigid organizational structures overlooked by a Führer or leader. These two structures probably coexist under “normal” circumstances; for

the soldier male, however, the two appear strictly antithetical. . . . [H]is bodily interior (the molecular ordering of the un-

conscious) is incarcerated by an incarcerating body armor (the molar arrangement of domination), and the two are irreconcilably opposed, one subject to the other. (II: 75)

In fact, Deleuze and Guattari's elaboration of the molar/molecular model is considerably more subtle than Theweleit's appropriation. They claim, for example that "every politics is simultaneously a *macropolitics* and a *micropolitics*," and that fascism, in particular, "is inseparable from a proliferation of molecular focuses in interaction, which skip from point to point, *before* beginning to resonate together in the National Socialist State" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 213–14).⁹

Despite such theoretical simplifications, Theweleit's critique of the Left's attempts to understand fascism, which follows from this distinction between the molar and the molecular, puts forward valuable, if not always original, theses. According to his argument, the old Left inevitably reproduced the same "molar" organizational structures as did the fascists, therefore blocking and channeling the potentially revolutionary flows of desire. By calling the language of the fascists "irrational, insane, lacking in substance," leftists missed the point of such discourse: that "what the texts [of the soldier males] have most clearly demonstrated is a refusal by fascism to relinquish desire—desire in the form of the demand that 'blood must flow,' desire in its most profound distortion" (II: 188–89). The refusal to relinquish desire (also the source of Lacan's ethics) does not constitute fascism—to the contrary, the source of fascism's violence comes from the coexistence of overflowing desire with structures of containment which reterritorialize its revolutionary power by repressing the subject's own production and projecting it onto the Other. If the Left cannot learn "that there might be pleasure in liberation, pleasure in new connections, pleasure in the unleashing of new streams" (189), fascism will continue to grip the masses.

Because it recognizes the powers of desire, fascism interpellates the People in the name of desire and then channels this force into hatred and nation-building. The truly revolutionary subject—the schizo—in the truly revolutionary molecular mass will never cede its desire and will never have desire reterritorialized by social constraint. Because of the contradictions of fascism (its ultimate reterritorialization of the desire it unleashes), it produces a psy-

chotic and paranoid subject. This “persecuted persecutor” can today be found among supporters of white supremacy in the United States, among anti-Semites in European countries without Jews, and perhaps in the U.S. men’s movement, with its stress on the “iron”/“wild” man.

IV

The psychotic subject which Theweleit derives from the writings of *Freikorps* soldiers and other proto-Nazis finds a remarkable expression in Yourcenar’s *Coup de Grace*. Her depiction of Erick von Lhomond foreshadows many of the theoretical precepts which Theweleit develops in coming to terms with fascism forty years later. Von Lhomond represents an almost pure example of the warrior-male as it developed during the epoch of the *Freikorps* soldier. The narrator who frames Erick’s story describes him as “one of those men who were too young to have done more than brush with danger, but who were transformed into soldiers of fortune by Europe’s post-war disorders, and by their incapacity for satisfaction or resignation, either one” (4). Although a soldier of fortune ought in principle to be less “ideological” than the nationalist groups of *Male Fantasies*, in fact Erick signs on only with reactionary causes: fighting the Bolsheviks in the Russian Civil War and siding with Franco in Spain.

As with the soldier males, Erick can only give form to the social and psychological “disorders” of his era by joining with the repressive state apparatus as it wages, in one or another of its forms, permanent war against “the enemy.” Erick describes his first military experience—the defeat of 1918—as a losing battle with bodily and political boundaries:

the time came when I had to slip over the border to report for military training. . . . I took my first drill under sergeants weakened from dysentery and hunger. . . . Some of my drill-mates were agreeable enough, and were already launched upon the wild freedom of the postwar era to come. Two months more and I should have been used to stop the gap which the Allied artillery had made in our ranks, and should

at this very moment, perhaps, be peacefully amalgamated to French soil. (15)

Although Erick preserves his own life, the defeat confronts him with “a totally empty future” (16). Erick’s military training follows from a desire, a movement across a border, which should be reterritorialized by his “first drill” [*mon entraînement* (144)]. However, since the sergeants cannot control the boundaries of their own bodies, they have dysentery [*les maux de ventre*], they cannot tame “the wild freedom” [*le grand chahut* (145)] which will therefore reign during the years of Weimar emancipation. Since Erick has not been used to “stop the gap” [*remplir une brèche* (145)], and the gap has not been stopped, his first experience with the military does not fully accomplish his disciplining and subjection. Even though he appears to laud his drillmates’ freedom, he cannot acknowledge the desiring production within his body—the way it wants to “slip over the border” [*faufiler à travers la frontière* (144)]—rather, he winds up feeling “hollow” and “empty.”

Only in the Russian Civil War does Erick find his place and develop what Theweleit calls a “body-armor” which is full, but contained: “The fullest ten months of my life were passed in a command in that godforsaken district where even the names . . . meant nothing” (7–8). Erick’s position in the army comforts him by inserting him in a rigid hierarchical machine; although he commands, he is in turn commanded: “Once swept into the Baltic imbroglio I tried only to be a useful wheel in the whole machine, and to play as rarely as possible the role of crushed finger” (10) [*d’y jouer le plus souvent le rôle de la roue de métal, et le moins possible celui du doigt écrasé* (140)]. This odd, bodily metaphor follows close on the heels of a description of torture, which, although projected onto the “Mongol traditions” of “the Reds” [*les bourreaux rousses* (139)], divulges what is at stake in Erick’s self-construction. (Theweleit includes images of Soviets “orientalized” by Nazi propaganda; cf. II: 270.) Coily taking pleasure in his description of the “Chinese Hand” [*le supplice de la main chinoise* (139)], Erick recounts that the unfortunate “victim was slapped with the skin of his own hand stripped from him while he was alive” (8–9). He reminds us that such stories “harden the auditor that much more” [*durcir chez l’auditeur quelques fibres de plus* (139)], clearly revealing the connections

between torture, the military machine, the armored soldier, and the experience of the body's boundaries (see also the discussion of the Medusa's head below).

If Erick takes a certain "idle excitement" in the telling of such details and in his soldiering experiences generally, these would seem to be the only pleasures in his life. Like the *Freikorps* adherents, Erick ascetically denies his own desiring-production, instead projecting it onto the female other and hinting at, but ultimately repressing, a homosexual subplot. Beneath the triangular, if not strictly Oedipal structure which Erick applies to the characters' relations, we sense that the flow of desire between Erick, Sophie, and Conrad is polymorphous and fluid. In order to take himself out of the flow of sexual drives the narrator uses two strategies: he attempts to turn all interpersonal relations into family ones, and he repeatedly insists on his own utter lack of desire in the face of the other's overflowing want.

When Erick brings his command back to Kratovitsy for the first time, he is greeted by Sophie:

in the first excitement of our return she had kissed me warmly [*à pleines lèvres*], and I could not help thinking, with a shade of melancholy, that that was my first kiss from a young girl, and that I had never had a sister [*et que mon père ne m'avait pas donné de soeur*]. So of course, in so far as was possible, I made a sister of Sophie [*j'adoptai Sophie* (152)]. (24)

The surprising insincerity of the "of course" [*bien entendu*] gives it away; faced with the unfamiliarity of desire evoked by Sophie's passionate kiss, Erick can do nothing but transcode his emotion to an ostensibly safe arena, the family. [He also refers to her boyishness, asserting that she could be "a brother to her brother" (30).] In a moment of particularly twisted logic, he attempts to explain Sophie's alleged desire by way of the family:

I seemed just made to fulfill the aspirations of an immature girl confined, up to that time, to the company of a few dull brutes of no consequence and the most seductive of brothers; nor had Nature seemed to endow her with the slightest inclination towards incest. But perhaps even incest figured here,

for memory's magic transformed me, in her eyes, into an elder brother (33).

The breathtaking contradictions of this passage (equally present in the French, of which this is a fairly literal rendition) demonstrate that Erick will go to any length to avoid what would appear the most obvious explanations of desire. Perhaps desire is not normalizable in *Coup de Grace*; just beneath the surface it flows indiscriminately without respect for social categories such as gender or kinship, but overtly it must be totally denied. Like Theweleit's soldiers, Erick "familializes" the erotic and eroticizes the family (I: 152).

Erick also goes out of his way to emphasize the fraternal nature of his (eroticized) relationship with that "most seductive of brothers," Conrad. Not only did they leave "identical footprints on the sand" (12) during their youthful frolics, but their "physical make-up" was similar right down to the requisite "shade of blue in [their] eyes" (14).¹⁰ Naturally, "the country folk took [them] for brothers, a simple solution for those who have no conception of ardent friendship" (14); although the precise name of this ardent friendship remains unspoken, Erick is pleased at the familial alibi provided by their homologous physiques. Such insinuations add erotic resonance to Erick's assertion that although "there was no lack of girls" during their youth, he "treated all such fancies [*engouements*] with scorn" (13).

Male homoeroticism, according to Theweleit, served certain purposes among the Nazis: it was "simultaneously prohibited and commanded," punished and held as a reward for initiation into the power elite (II: 339). Before the purge of the openly homosexual SA commander, Ernst Rohm, in 1934, a male homosexual tendency existed within Nazism and can be seen in the writings of Hans Bluher, author of *The Role of Eroticism in Male Society* (II: 138) (Vol. I refers to Bluher as Ernst). Since Conrad drops out of focus almost entirely after the first few pages of the novel, we could read Erick's relationship with Conrad as mimicking the tendential repression of homosexuality during the course of German fascism's rise and fall. But, regardless of the historical parallel in Nazi Germany (the full examination of which would take us beyond the scope of this essay), *Coup de Grace* bears out Craig Owens's more

general assertion that a common “legal and medical apparatus” produces both homophobia and misogyny (219).¹¹

The novel suggests that this commonality finds its most obvious expression in anti-sex ideology. In turning away from homoeroticism, Erick certainly does not turn toward heterosexuality. Like the rest of the soldier males, he experiences either a “lack of inclination” or “disgust” and “aversion” (54) vis-à-vis sexuality. Almost the only sympathy evinced by Erick for Sophie comes when he senses a “lack of inclination” on her side:

Here before me was a Sonia indignant [*une enfant outragée* (154)—another familial metaphor] at the slightest suspicion of desire, and everything in me which differentiates me from mere women-chasers, for whom any girl is a windfall, could not but approve her despair. (27)

Immediately afterward he learns of her rape by a Lithuanian sergeant:

now that she was sullied, her experience bordered on my own [*souillée, son expérience avoisinait la mienne*], and the episode of the sergeant made a queer parallel [*équilibrait bizarrement* (155)] with my unique and revolting visit to a brothel in Brussels. (28)

In Erick’s “queer” logic, the “parallel” equates not the prostitute’s experience, but Erick’s voluntary visit with Sophie’s involuntary violation. In an attempt to repress his own “queer parallel” with Conrad through a trip to the brothel, Erick also belittles female sexual exploitation and represses female sexual agency.¹²

As the novel progresses and the idealistic homosocial world recedes behind the more realistic homosocial world of war, Erick’s misogyny overflows across the page. To describe the horrors of Sophie and other women, Erick draws on classical images of threatening women, also found in *Freikorps* discourse (cf. II: 4–6). Sophie’s hair in curlers “made her look like Medusa, serpent-crowned” [*une Méduse coiffé de serpents* (173)], and the “humble café singer” he picks up in Riga ends up clinging to him “with the tenacity of an octopus” [*une tenacité de poulpe* (175)] (52, 55). In the former case, the simple evocation of femininity (the curlers) threatens, and in the latter, the equation of femininity with insatiable

desire provokes a similar dread. Later, the one time Erick kisses Sophie on the lips, he finds that his “ecstasy changed into horror” almost immediately, and he remembers a starfish [*cette étoile de mer*] that his mother had forced into his hand, “almost provoking convulsions in [him]” (76–77).¹³ If these confrontations with the tentacles of the feminine evoke something beyond “hatred or terror” in Erick, they also form the basis of his self-conception. As Freud describes it, “the sight of the Medusa’s head makes the spectator stiff with terror,” but this bodily erection ultimately offers him “consolation,” for it reminds him that he, at least, has a penis (273). The fascist subject similarly uses the revolting female to remind him of his hard, military body. But both Freud and the soldier males may, according to Theweleit, be producing a similar repression in their confrontation with the Medusa’s head. What Theweleit finds significant in this symbol is not the woman’s castration, emphasized by Freud as the antinomy of male “stiffness,” but *her ability to castrate*: “It is in no sense, as Freud thinks, the castrated genitals of the mother that she displays as a deterrent; it is the symbol . . . of man’s fear of her uncastrated, horrifying sexual potency” (I: 201). In Theweleit’s view, then, the hardness of the male body is always much more tenuous than either Freud or the soldiers would want to admit; hence the need to expel Sophie from the scene.¹⁴

Indeed, only when Sophie has left Kratovitsy can Erick regain the imaginary fusion of his early days of male homosociality: “Our ever diminishing group was returning to the great traditions of austerity and manly courage [*courage viril*]; Kratovitsy was becoming again what it had been in times supposedly gone by, an outpost of the Teutonic Order, a frontier fortress of the Livonian Brothers of the Sword [*un poste de l’Ordre Teutonique, une citadelle avancée de Chevaliers Porte-Glaives* (226)].” This “ideal of happiness” reminds him of his childhood (123–24). The casting out of the “Red woman,” the Communist sympathizer, turns the men’s bodies into a fortress, an outpost, a borderline experience of ascetic and racial purity. In what Theweleit calls the “troop-machine,” “new body-totalities are formed,” as the parts of individual soldiers re-fuse into “other totality formations between men, such as the ‘nation’” (II: 154–55). Since the re-establishment of the Teutonic nation is constructed on the absence and demonization of Sophie, *Coup de*

Grace confirms in this specific instance Theweleit's overly general (and thus problematic) assertion that "racism must be seen as patriarchal domination in its most intense form" (II: 77).

But the absent woman, since they have projected her from out of the flood of their own desiring production, continually threatens to expose the frailty of these soldiers "clad in armor" [*à l'intérieure d'une armure* (227)]. Only the tenuous totality of the troop-machine protects them from being "lionized by women" [*livrées . . . aux femmes*] and

subject to certain insidious dissolution, like the loathsome decay of iris . . . [which] die miserably in their own sticky secretion [*la gluante agonie*], in marked contrast to the slow, heroic drying of the rose [*le dessèchement héroïques des roses* (227)]. (125)

But, since the troop-machine "is the front," a permanent war-machine, it must continually transgress and reterritorialize its borders (II: 155). The attempt to keep his mechanized body dry leads the fascist to wade in blood, the "sticky secretion" of the enemy; only by killing, by actually moving through corpses which serve as so many Medusa's heads, can the fascist confirm the "hardness" and dryness [*dessèchement*] of his own body.

In the end, Erick's hatred of women, of communism, of everything which threatens property and his proper body, must culminate in a slaughter. Erick rediscovers Sophie "in the middle of flooded land" [*en plein terrain inondé* (234)], where several soldiers had already drowned (136). For the soldier males, communism and the sexuality of women both seem "to be a kind of ocean that surges onward in waves, inundating and engulfing" (I: 229). It is ironic, then, and perhaps ultimately troubling to Erick's narrative strategy, that his murder of Sophie turns his own past into pure flow, cut off from solid ground: "The disappearance of Conrad's sister would at least liquidate [*liquiderait*] my youth for good, and would cut the last bridge between that country and me" (147, translation modified; see French version, 243). Sophie, a reminder of his own internal drives, creates "a kind of sickening fury in the pit of [his] stomach that made [him] say 'all the better' for her death" (146). But before he actually kills her, Erick literally defaces her: "The first shot did no more than tear open the face" (150). As de Man has provocatively argued, one of the primary

structures of language may concern the trope of prosopoeia, a “giving face” to subjects that also “de-faces” them by subjecting them to the impersonal machine of language (“Autobiography” 930). de Man discusses de-facement as an attribute of autobiography, and indeed de-facement figures importantly in the ways de Man’s own life has come to be understood; here, however, the narrator, Erick, de-faces the narrative’s object, Sophie. Thus, the narrative shifts the uncertainty at the heart of its own enunciation (its own potential de-facement) onto the scapegoated woman, who now becomes a repository for fears not only about femininity and communism, but about the slippage of language itself. The author’s interest in shifting responsibility for contradictions in the text will become clear in the discussion of the preface.

But language, in any post-Lacanian context, immediately entails questions of desire. It becomes clear that in killing Sophie, Erick is killing more than just “woman.” As he approaches her with his gun, he “clung to the thought that [he] had wanted to put an end to Conrad [*j’avais désiré achever Conrad* (245)], and that this was the same thing” (150). In killing Conrad and Sophie simultaneously, he kills desiring-production itself, the whole tangled web of drives which unconsciously saturates all of the social relations represented in the novel.

But Erick cannot simply kill desire once; it demands constant vigilance; hence, his own retelling of the story—“the interminable confession which he was making, in reality, to no one but himself” (5). Instead of coming to consciousness of his polymorphous drives, he attempts to fix them through one final projection onto Sophie: “One is always trapped, somehow, in dealing with women” (151). For Erick, however, being trapped is the condition of his paranoid subjectivity; the real “disorder” lies in the repression of the entire unconscious. This repression amounts, in Theweleit’s terms, to the fascist mode of production, an “antiproduction” whose goal is “the transformation of life into death” (I: 216).

V

The above reading derives from an application of the theoretical apparatus provided by Theweleit to the text of Yourcenar’s novel. *Coup de Grace* lends itself to such a reading, given Erick’s

resemblance to the *Freikorps* warriors. Since Yourcenar initially published the novel in France in 1939, just before the beginning of World War II and just before she left Europe for the United States, it would have been hard for contemporary readers not to understand it as a novelistic indictment of fascism. But if we consider the prefatory material the author appends to her U.S. editions of the novel, an entirely different reading emerges. Although the gloss which Yourcenar gives to her novel in and after 1957 initially appears diametrically opposed to Theweleit's critique of fascism, I will show that they actually share certain precepts.

In 1957, Yourcenar published the novel in English, translating it "in Collaboration" with her companion, Grace Frick (to cite the title page). At this time, she affixes a curious foreword to the story, which, in a later edition, expands into an even more curious preface dated 1962.¹⁵ The preface attempts to forestall any reading which does not accept Erick as the "clear sighted" "hero" of the novel. She claims that the narrative depicts not a sadist, as "a naive reader might make . . . of Erick," but rather "a human being . . . looking squarely upon his own life." In claiming to depict what Derrida would call a subject self-consciously present to himself, Yourcenar attempts to solidify her own authority to dictate the terms of her text at a moment in literary history when the author is, if not dead, at least withering away.

But the stakes are not strictly literary, as Yourcenar's own language reveals. Her preface demands "strict collaboration from the reader" [*la collaboration du lecteur* (130)]; we must not "mistake [Erick] for a professional anti-Semite" [*un antisemite professionnel* (131)]. The reader must collaborate in wiping out the traces of fascist collaboration. But, just as Marcus argues in considering the relation of de Man's late writings to his early journalism, such theoretical anti-historicism needs to be "instantly historicized" ("Asylums" 132). Yourcenar's plea for a vigilant forgetting, for the power that comes with ignorance, occurs just around the moment when the "Holocaust" first comes into public consciousness (but not with that specific name until later in the 1960s); that is, when the "professional anti-Semites" have regained their amateur status, which they will secretly cherish until the late 1980s when they will once again "go professional."

The year 1957 is also when, in France, Céline publishes *D'un*

château l'autre, his novelistic attempt to produce collaborationist-readers who will help erase his guilt. In a manner similar to Yourcenar, Céline both rewrites the past and, in a radio interview from that same year, claims that his work has only aesthetic, and not political, significance: he is merely “a stylist.”¹⁶ If Yourcenar’s novel can so easily be read as a critique of fascism, why, outside of personal predilection, would Yourcenar want to use the same strategy as Céline, whose anti-Semitism could never be “mistaken” by even a “naïve” reader? As Marks argues in an extremely perceptive consideration of the relations between the preface and the novel, Yourcenar “naturalizes” anti-Semitism and links it to the sadistic and sexist acts which the text details (212, 217). Marks also places the novel in the context of Céline’s 1937 anti-Semitic pamphlet, *Bagatelles pour un massacre*, claiming that “it is impossible . . . not to implicate the author” of *Coup de Grace* in anti-Semitism (212).¹⁷

While I am in complete agreement with Marks, I would also claim that Yourcenar’s collaborationist strategy has another agenda, particular to the postwar era. The late 1950s and early 1960s in Yourcenar’s adopted home, the United States, were a time of fierce ideological containment characterized in part by the polarity of the Cold War and by claims that, in fact, we had reached “the end of ideology.”¹⁸ Consonant with the antipolitical politics of the time, Yourcenar stresses that in telling Erick’s story she has “tried to show that particular intimacy or affinity that is stronger than either conflicts of political allegiances or physical passions” [*la passion charnelle* (133)]. She explicitly represses desiring-production, which, for Theweleit, would include precisely what this formulation precludes—passion and politics. Instead of reading politics or passion into the novel, we should look to its value as a “psychological” or “human . . . document” [*un document humain* (134)]. Thus, according to this author-ity, “*Coup de Grace* does not aim at exalting or discrediting any one group or class, any country or party” (French version, 134).

But why not discredit fascism? The answer, again, slips out of the otherwise rigidly controlled language. In the 1957 cloth edition, Yourcenar phrases her apologia this way: “In the present state of the world, and in view of the conflicting attitudes of our day, the author wishes to stress the fact that this account is not

intended to defend or discredit any particular group or party.” Underneath this seemingly balanced sentence lurks the problem. If we were to discredit Erick and fascism, we would have to accept Sophie and, thus, communism as the only textually available heroines of the anti-fascist struggle. Given “the present state of the world” and “the conflicting attitudes” of Cold War politics, given rabid anti-communism in other words, such an option becomes untenable for Yourcenar. In the two decades after its initial publication, *Coup de Grace* took on new meanings its author could not control. Her depoliticizing reassertion of authority amounts to a reterritorialization of what once had been a potentially liberating text.

As is almost always the case, appeals to “human” meaning tend to exclude women. Ironically, this happens in *Coup de Grace* at the very moment when a woman enters the text: in the establishment of a pact between the female author and reader. In her preface, Yourcenar repeats what Ingeborg Majer O’Sickey has found to be Erick’s relation to Sophie. Both author and “hero” “retrieve [themselves] from exile,” and establish their authority, by “ingesting” Sophie (382). Yourcenar manages this by first portraying Sophie only through Erick’s narrative, and then, more seriously, by portraying this portrait as the product of a “clear-sighted” narrator, not the sadist we sophisticated readers know him to be.

VI

If Yourcenar opposes human psychology to politics, and in doing so exiles women from the social realm, Theweleit unifies psychology and politics, claiming that desiring-production and material production are one (I: 323). But, despite his obvious intentions, Theweleit also banishes women and, ultimately, the social itself from his study. Although he succeeds so well in conveying the intimate thoughts of his subjects, Theweleit fares less well in establishing the context of their literary output. Theweleit’s very considerable contribution to the understanding of fascism—that it is a form of reality production, that we must “feel” its utopian pull—ends by limiting his discussion. Just as Yourcenar does in

Coup de Grace, Theweleit constantly evokes women, but he never takes them seriously as anything but effects of male fantasies.

If, as he claims, “a specific male-female (patriarchal) relation might belong at the center of our examination of fascism,” not much can be gained by understanding these relations as simply expressing the “sexuality of the oppressor and the oppressed” (I: 227, 221). Women have no place in Theweleit’s history (which he attempts to extend to all of Western history), except as either victims or possessors of some vague, emancipatory “nature.” The “male-female” relation, which Theweleit promises to unpack, turns out to be simply a “male-male” relationship in which women are “malleable” and passive. In this, he proves himself no different than most historians, who “have not defined women’s support for Nazi Germany as a historical problem” (Koonz 4), and have thus reinforced the appearance of the lack of female agency throughout history. Despite the misogyny of the *Freikorps* and later the Nazis, women supported them out of “conviction, opportunism, and active choice. Far from being helpless or even innocent, women made possible a murderous state in the name of concerns they defined as motherly” (Koonz 4–5). In showing that the soldier males were not insane or irrational, Theweleit leaves us with the impression that any woman who supported them would have to be.

What *Male Fantasies* lacks is not a consideration of the “reality” of women’s agency, where reality would be opposed to the fantasies of the soldier males, but rather an analysis of the discursive context in which the soldiers enunciated their desires—in other words, to understand fascism and patriarchy, we need to end the segregation of texts by gender. Women did produce texts during this period, and a real counterdiscourse would consider these female fantasies alongside more traditional, male documents. The few places where Theweleit promises to reveal “the actual behavior of those women” (I: 138) whom the soldiers depict end in yet more male fantasies. Take, for example, the “Aside on Proletarian Reality, Proletarian Woman and Man of the Left” (I: 138–71). Although Theweleit cites one or two primary sources by women, practically the only ones in either volume, he ends up using these pages to discredit marxism by revealing that proletarian men and communist theorists were almost as misogynistic as the *Freikorps* troops. Similarly, after asserting that the oppressive male ego could not evolve “without the

(admittedly enforced) cooperation of women themselves” (I: 301), Theweleit launches a 150-page history of the world that is unorthodox in everything except its refusal to acknowledge women as political agents or subjects of their own desires.

Although Theweleit wields a politicized psychoanalysis like his subjects wield a bayonet, his analysis falls more on the side of the psyche than the political. He understands the fascists’ permanent state of war as “a function of the body of these men” (I: 192) and as “the ultimate form of male sexuality at odds with itself” (II: 84). Since his view of social formations—any social formations—derives from his study of the patriarchal male body, he reproduces the *Freikorps* dystopia of a society without women. Like Yourcenar, he “ingests” possible female subjectivities in order to “armor” his own theoretical construction of men as the sole social agents. He cannot conceive that, despite, or rather because of, patriarchy, both men and women actively construct society, although not to their equal satisfaction.¹⁹ He cannot see, therefore, that to take society apart will entail not an asocial explosion of desiring-production, but a dismantling from within received identities and positions.

Although I would not in any way claim that Theweleit, like Yourcenar, collaborates with fascism and patriarchy, his figurations of women are idealistic—“Female chauvinism is a contradiction in terms” (II: 87)—and his only solutions remain utopian: “The pathway to a nonfascist life is marked out a little further by every act of lovemaking in which the participants touch neither as images nor as bearers of *names* defined by the social” (II: 104). This may simply sound like the early 1970s love-in, which it is. But such an equation between fascism and the symbolic and social orders suggests a problematic notion of sexuality and a dangerous paucity of political options. The idea that “participants” could confront each other without bearing names derived from the social order not only ignores the last century of humanities and social scientific thinking, it misses the subversiveness built into acts of naming. According to some contemporary feminists, sexuality which foregrounds social roles and names erodes the foundations of patriarchy much more effectively than appeals to some natural, extra-discursive realm.²⁰ Furthermore, as Theweleit himself writes elsewhere, it is precisely men, such as the soldier males, with frag-

mented ego structures who “want a contact with the opposite sex—or perhaps simply access to sexuality itself—which cannot be *named*” (I: 205; see also 284). This contradiction in Theweleit’s text results from the privileging of desiring-production as a ubiquitous and quasi-natural force.

But desire is culturally specific and neither organic nor natural. It is produced by social formations, by the very barriers which Theweleit would exile from his utopian model. We who today are facing a renewal of nationalism and fascism need to be very careful about understanding the social formations which produce such structures of desire; only by acknowledging the materiality of desire can we begin to construct alternative social formations which will oppose fascism and patriarchy. Since, in the end, all such barriers to the free flow of desire are equally oppressive in Theweleit’s model, he cannot distinguish between capitalism, fascism, and communism, and he cannot propose an alternative.

While all existing hegemonic social formations may be the same in upholding patriarchal relations, patriarchy cannot be said uniquely to determine fascism, even if it provides its ground. According to Maria-Antoinetta Macciocchi, fascism builds on a particular religious articulation of patriarchy:

[T]he seizure of power by fascism and nazism uses as levers the martyred, baneful, and necrophiliac femininity of the widows and mothers of men killed in the first world war, and the femininity of Woman as Reproducer of the Species. (68)

Macciocchi also makes clear that we cannot explain patriarchy without acknowledging women’s agency in simultaneously upholding it and resisting the establishment of its barriers. Both Theweleit and Yourcenar (despite herself) have succeeded in documenting barbarism, but they will not be able to explain it until they break with psychologizing models which eliminate the interplay of phantasmic bodies with social formations. For bodies and fantasies are social formations, but social formations are not bodies, and they are definitely not fantasies. The personal is political, but the political is always more than personal.

Antipolitical posturing—whether in the name of humanism and aesthetics or anarchy—constitutes the common deep struc-

ture from which Yourcenar's and Theweleit's superficially different projects unfold. Their interrogation of fascist sexuality and their cross-gender identifications (a woman speaking as/for a soldier; a man writing like a feminist) are not ultimately subversive, but they lead us to further questions about theory and methodology. Perhaps one of the tasks for the critique of fascism in this era of resurgent nationalisms and proliferating sexualities remains the search for methodologies which understand history not as simply "incoherent" and "unstable," but—to paraphrase Benjamin—as a present-day struggle over the future with forces from the past. As long as misogyny and homophobia meet only a depoliticized and antisexual resistance, a fascist return-of-the-repressed will continue to inhabit all male fantasies.

Notes

This project would not have been possible without the advice and criticism of Jane Marcus. I am also grateful to Molly McGarry for her comments on an earlier version of this essay.

1. Unless otherwise noted, all citations from the novel given in the text in English will be from the English translation by Frick (with Yourcenar). The novel was originally translated (by the same two) into English in 1957. When I refer to the French version, I will be quoting from a later edition of Yourcenar's novel: *Alexis ou le Traité du Vain Combat suivi de Le Coup de Grâce*. This edition contains the 1962 preface reprinted in the English edition and crucial to my reading of the novel. Throughout, I will intersperse sections of the French text whenever the language differs significantly from the English or when I am paying particular attention to specific word use. As I hope my reading demonstrates, I am less interested in establishing an "authentic" text than in revealing the specificities of the different versions and editions of *Le Coup de Grâce*.

Theweleit's work was originally published in Germany in 1977 and 1978.

2. The work of Maria-Antoinetta Macciocchi remains among the most provocative on this topic.

3. For a discussion of this contradiction in the context of Marxist and post-Marxist theory, see Rothberg.

4. For documents pertaining to the de Man case, see de Man, *Wartime Journalism*, and Hamacher.

5. This history of German feminism is taken from Altbach. Besides this helpful introductory essay, the volume also contains ample documentation from the movement.

6. Kaplan also situates her reading of Theweleit within the context of the de Man and Heidegger "scandals." Her suggestive analysis reads *Male Fantasies* alongside Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, and Duras and Renais' *Hiroshima mon amour*.

7. For documents from this debate, see Jardine and Smith. Theweleit's work

is cited as an example of “engendered male criticism” in the bibliography of Boone and Cadden.

8. See the final two chapters of Horkheimer and Adorno for an analysis of the capitalist culture industry and anti-Semitism that links these two phenomena on the basis of a critique of instrumental reason.

9. To be fair, this text, entitled “1933: Micropolitics and Segmentarity,” was published in 1980, after Theweleit had completed his work, but the complexity expressed here by Deleuze and Guattari typifies their work—if not always that of their followers.

10. The French is oddly less specific here. Their eyes do not share the marker of Aryan identity; they simply have “*la même nuance d’yeux*” (143).

11. Owens also explicitly refutes Macciocchi’s assertion that “the Nazi community is made by homosexual brothers who exclude the woman and valorize the brother” (223). Owens shows how, even in sophisticated feminist analysis, *homophobia* and *homosexuality* are frequently confused. The assertion of a common apparatus in the repression of women and homosexual men goes a long way to explain many of the fruitful political alliances that have been made between, for example, AIDS activists and reproductive rights activists.

12. Clearly, the notion of the “queer parallel” upon which I am playing here is specific to the English text, but as a choice for translation, it remains significant. The translators (Frick and Yourcenar) are, after all, two women living and working together during a period (the 1950s) when “queer” and not “gay” or “lesbian” was probably the dominant term of self-identification for homosexuals. See Delany’s memoir of this period for a discussion of these identity issues.

13. Elaine Marks also draws attention to the connections between these passages. I will return to her important essay.

14. See Hertz for a more developed consideration of how “questions of sexual difference, of perception and of politics are rapidly brought into relation” (27) around the figure of the Medusa’s head.

15. I have not been able to locate the 1957 foreword in French, but the 1962 preface is, as I noted above, affixed to the 1971 French edition. A couple of contradictions exist between these two documents, neither of which (in the English versions) are given page numbers: Yourcenar claims to have written the novel in 1939; in the second she says 1938; she claims to have heard the story directly from “Erick”; in the second she says it came from one of his friends.

16. The radio interview is with Albert Zbinden and was broadcast July 25, 1957 on Radio-Lausanne. I am grateful to Alice Y. Kaplan for supplying me with a tape of this interview.

17. In this context, I find it rather disturbing that Timothy J. Reiss, in his introduction to a special *PMLA* cluster on “Literature and the Idea of Europe,” should cite Yourcenar as one of the “writers who foster a spirit that counters the historical and ever-present dark side of economic and political forces” (27). To the contrary, my reading of *Coup de Grace*, and that of Elaine Marks, situates Yourcenar specifically on that “dark side.” Furthermore, what Reiss calls Yourcenar’s “scathing 1940 review of Anne Lindbergh’s pro-Nazi *Wave of the Future*” (27) strikes me as a shockingly ambivalent essay—one that, in any case, was not published until after her death and thus cannot be said to have advanced the anti-fascist cause one iota no matter how “scathing” Reiss finds it. True, Yourcenar calls the Nazi’s “barbaric dogmatism” (not their barbarism!) “the most irrefutable appearance of evil.” But, on the other hand, she claims that “nobody can contest that there is beauty in the passionate exaltation of the young Nazi,” and that

Hitler is “in sum a man like any other” and thus must have “some more or less hidden virtues” (*En pèlerin* 61, my translation).

18. See Andrew Ross’s discussion of this era.

19. For the contradictory forms of female subjectivity and agency in the Germany of this era, see the essays collected in Bridenthal et al.

20. I am thinking for example of Judith Butler’s discussion of butch-femme sexuality (122–24).

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