

## RESPONSE

Segal on Ormand on Segal (*BMCR* 5.4 [1994]: 304-13)

Your reviewer makes many generous remarks about my essay, "Philomela's Web and the Pleasures of the Text" in the Sullivan and de Jong volume, *Modern Critical Theory*; but in his focus on the use of theory he has, I feel, given a misleading impression of my work. He is perfectly justified to quarrel with my eclecticism, but one wishes that he had probed the difficult problem that he raises about the possible gap between theorizing and interpreting instead of leaping to the counter-intuitive generalization that "critical pluralism" often produces "readings that are less critically informed than less 'eclectic' readings." "Critically powerful," perhaps, à la Harold Bloom; but "critically *informed*"? Rather than trying to understand what I try to accomplish by using feminist theorists, he indulges in the

derogatory meiosis, “casual use of bits and pieces of feminist theory”—as if “feminist theory” were a monolithic conceptual unity like the theory of electromagnetism. In fact, my essay begins with a clearly focused and hardly “casual” use of a feminist essay on violence against women that the reviewer rightly calls “classic,” and it builds on this to attempt an integration of reader-response and feminist theorizing in my discussion of Philomela’s web as text. I prepare for and justify my combination of these two theoretical approaches in my introductory section, p. 258.

The reviewer says nothing of the issue of violence, especially sexual violence (he never mentions either word), which is my essay’s starting point and the area where feminist criticism is particularly helpful. Hence my analysis of the maenadic structure of Procne’s revenge, which is closely related to Joplin’s feminist interpretation of the Philomela myth as a whole. The reviewer pays no attention to my closing comparison of Otis and Joplin, where a feminist approach highlights the problems of a criticism based in naive humanism.

Insofar as I can follow his argument, the reviewer’s evidence for my “surprising critical naivete” seems to be my supposed underestimation of the sadistic possibilities of Ovid’s account of the rape because “lingering on the victim’s emotional trauma is stock-in-trade for [sic] sadism” (p. 313). To make his point he quotes, out of context, a small portion of a sentence from p. 262. In fact, I begin this paragraph by refusing to exonerate Ovid “of complicity in the exploitive lubricity of his narrative material”; and I conclude it with a discussion of how the rest of Ovid’s Philomela’s story may be seen as reflecting the experience of rape victims from their, and not the (male) attacker’s, point of view.

To confirm my critical shortcomings, the reviewer offers a mini-lecture on the familiar notion of the gender disequilibrium of the male gaze, complete with a footnote to Irigaray. This point, however, is irrelevant to the specific context of my argument and in any case is implicit in what I say about “sexual domination” on p. 258 and again on p. 276.

It is a small but characteristic omission that the reviewer mentions my acknowledgment of Richlin’s essay, “Reading Ovid’s Rapes” (which, as he rightly says, appeared after I had submitted the essay to this very slow-moving project) but fails to mention that my note about Richlin recognizes her different perspective and her “less positive view of Ovid generally” (p. 259, n. 8). The reviewer refers, twice, to the “rape of Procne” (pp. 312, 313)—this despite the “Philomela” of my title—a slip of the pen, I assume.

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