Counterhegemonic Acts: Appropriation as a Feminist Rhetorical Strategy

Helene A. Shugart

In this essay, the rhetorical strategy of feminist appropriation is explored in order to assess its function as a counterhegemonic tactic. Two instances of feminist rhetorical appropriation are analyzed—the Australian film, Shame, as an appropriation of the classic Western, Shane; and Margaret Atwood's poems, "Orpheus (1)" and "Eurydice," as a collective appropriation of the classical Greek myth. As a result of these analyses, an explication of the specific strategy employed in each case is advanced, and the implications of appropriation as a counterhegemonic strategy to the end of social change are considered. Key words: appropriation, counterhegemony, hegemony, feminism, margins (use of).

Instances of rhetorical appropriation as practiced by submerged groups abound in contemporary culture. A popular strategy of members of various disenfranchised social groups is to claim and utilize labels conventionally applied by their oppressors in a derogatory manner as a way of challenging their original meaning. Some lesbians and gay men, for example, refer to themselves as dykes and faggots, respectively; some African Americans defiantly refer to themselves as niggers; and some women celebrate their identities as whores and bitches.

 Appropriation is practiced by oppressed groups as well in terms of image. The intermittent popularity of men's clothing in women's fashions signifies a form of appropriation by borrowing items closely associated with the masculine and thus violating what traditionally is considered appropriate feminine dress. Similarly, the clean-cut, spit-and-polish image projected and endorsed by Malcolm X and his followers during the civil rights movement's formative years constitutes appropriation of a sort; their assumption of clothing so closely associated with white, middle-class men articulated a challenge to that very culture.

The claiming by submerged groups of traditional stories closely associated with the oppressor constitutes another form of appropriation. Feminist appropriations of traditional, culturally ingrained fairy tales constitute a collective example of claiming patriarchal fables in order to challenge patriarchal constructs. Other examples include the appropriation by various submerged groups of the Western film, a particularly potent myth that celebrates white, male, Western ideology; recent examples include Thelma and Louise, which featured women in the lead "cowboy" roles and represented a challenge to traditional, patriarchal mores; and Posse, which featured African-American men in the lead roles, thus challenging racist assumptions of the traditional genre. Musical appropriations are not uncommon, either; k. d. lang's appropriation of the song "Johnnie Get Angry" prompts the listener to hear its misogynist, abusive message, whereas the original song equates male anger with adoration. Similarly, 2 Live Crew's appropriation of the 1950s standard, "Pretty Woman," articulates an overt challenge to its traditional perception as a pleasant, carefree, white pop song and, by extension, the white world and culture with which it is associated.

Etymologically, the root of the word appropriation is the Latin proprium, meaning "one's own." Technically, appropriation refers to any instance in which means commonly associated with and/or perceived as belonging to another are used to further one's
own ends. Any instance in which a group borrows or imitates the strategies of another—even when the tactic is not intended to deconstruct or distort the other’s meanings and experiences—thus would constitute appropriation. Appropriation generally is understood and discussed theoretically, however, as a means by which the referenced “other” is challenged. Most theorists understand appropriation as the claiming, by an individual or group, of another’s meanings, ideas, or experiences to advance the individual’s or group’s beliefs, ideas, or agenda. Consequently, the original meaning, which may pose a threat to the appropriator, is deconstructed, distorted, or destroyed so that the perceived threat is undermined and the agenda of the appropriator is advanced instead.

Although dominant groups certainly practice appropriation, in such contexts, it tends to function as reinforcement of existing oppression (e.g., Chapman, 1992; hooks, 1990; Marcus, 1984; Said, 1978, 1989). Social presumption has done much to render the image and meanings of oppressed groups inconsequential, so that calling up those images and meanings entails little comparable risk for the dominant group. I am interested in appropriation as it bears on the discourse of disenfranchised groups because the implications of rhetorically conjuring up both the specter and the tools of one’s oppression are profound. Submerged groups take a significant risk with regard to challenging their oppressors on the latter’s terms because those terms have been used historically to oppress them; that history may carry more weight, ultimately, than innovative, irregular use of those terms.

My specific interest in this essay is in rhetorical appropriation as a feminist counterhegemonic practice. I am defining feminist rhetorical appropriation as a process by which traditional and/or culturally popular stories, songs, myths, rituals, legends, fables, and icons that advance a traditional, oppressive ideology of gender are referenced clearly in such a way that the messages apparent in the new text challenge those traditional conceptions of gender. In my investigation of appropriation as a counterhegemonic and specifically feminist rhetorical strategy, I examine two rhetorical artifacts that, I believe, constitute examples of feminist rhetorical appropriation in that each deviates and unfolds from the original precisely on the point of gender. Specifically, I analyse each artifact in terms of how it addresses and what it suggests about “sexist oppression” (hooks, 1984). The two artifacts I selected for analysis are *Shame*, a cinematic appropriation of the film *Shane*, and Margaret Atwood’s poems, “Orpheus (1) and “Eurydice,” a collective appropriation of the classic Greek myth. Based on my analysis, I argue that while both instances succeed in challenging the hegemonic discourses that they respectively appropriate, the particular appropriative strategy employed in “Orpheus (1)” and “Eurydice” represents a more radical threat to the oppressive ideology espoused in the original.

*Shame* and, collectively, “Orpheus (1)” and “Eurydice” represent two distinct examples of rhetorical appropriation. *Shame*, employing the strategy that I label reflection, holds *Shame*—the appropriated artifact—to its own terms, functioning as the mirror, located at the margins, that does not lie. Namely, *Shame* maintains the identical plot and themes evident in the original but features an alternative location—the margin—from which to understand them. In this way, sexist oppression that is conveyed in the original as natural and socially beneficial is exposed as strategic and even harmful. Conversely, “Orpheus (1)” and “Eurydice” are representative of the appropriative rhetorical strategy of refraction. In this appropriation, as in *Shame*, an alternative, marginalized perspective is featured; however, unlike *Shame*, “Orpheus (1)” and “Eurydice” utilize that locale to create an alternative narrative whose relationship to the original is evident but whose
nature and content are distinct; the narrative is not compelled by or reflective of the original. Whereas *Shame* interrupts the hegemony of the original and creates space for critical awareness within the confines established by the original artifact, "Orpheus (1)" and "Euridyce" effectively rupture the original hegemonic discourse and offer a glimpse of its ideological moorings and implications from without.

Examining appropriation that specifically challenges culturally central stories and myths permits valuable insight into what that rhetorical strategy implies for and about social change and what promise rhetorical appropriation itself holds for such change. This is so because such stories generally constitute hegemony; they serve as ideological vehicles, the means by which oppressive systems are produced, maintained, and reinforced. Adorno (1989a) describes hegemony as parcelled out by a "culture industry" whose "concoctions...are neither guides for a blissful life, nor a new art of moral responsibility, but rather exhortations to toe the line, behind which stand the most powerful interests. The consensus which it propagates strengthens blind, opaque authority" (p. 134).

Although Adorno refers primarily to mass-produced popular culture in this description, his critique is equally—perhaps more pertinently—relevant to traditional myths, fables, and stories that continue to be mass produced in various incarnations and whose primary purpose, after all, is to convey ideological "truths" by way of morals and fables. To the extent that these stories rationalize oppression, they function as hegemonic discourses that serve to impose dominant ideology on the oppressed masses in such a way that their consent is produced (Adorno, 1989a; Becker, 1984; Buci-Glucksman, 1982; Gitlin, 1980; Good, 1989; Hall, 1982). Because appropriation is, at base, an "oppositional reading" (Hall, 1982) of hegemonic discourse, its premise is counterhegemonic; it constitutes a direct challenge to oppressive ideology by taking on the very discourse designed to reproduce, reify, and validate it.

By virtue of its fundamental assumption that social meaning is rhetorically constructed, rhetorical analysis is ideally situated to examine hegemonic discourse as such in the form of traditional and culturally popular stories, myths, and legends. This potential is realized specifically in the approach of critical rhetoric (McKerrow, 1989), whose orientation is to a "critique of domination" (p. 92). Similarly and by implication, rhetorical analysis also provides an efficient means by which to examine counterhegemonic discourse—discourse that challenges the dominant ideological paradigm and attempts instead to articulate an alternative definition of social reality (Buci-Glucksman, 1982). Consistent with a growing awareness of and subscription to critical perspectives within the discipline, an increasing number of rhetorical scholars have turned their attention to discourses that offer oppositional readings of hegemonic texts (e.g., Condit & Lucaites, 1993; Conquergood, 1991; Garrett, 1993; Hariman, 1986), thus illuminating the role of rhetoric in problematizing power and fomenting social change.

The existing literature that addresses appropriation as practiced by oppressed groups can be divided loosely into two categories: some scholars reject the strategic use of appropriation as inherently and wholly inappropriate, while others endorse the use of appropriation as an empowering and effective tool in the hands of the oppressed to the end of their own liberation. Many scholars in the former category reject appropriation on principle (e.g., Daly, 1984, 1990; France, 1988; Kelly, 1987; Tetzlaff, 1993); they believe that such an act is inherently exploitative and oppressive, regardless of intent. Johnson (1989), for example, argues that the means are the ends, that "'how we do something is
what we get’” (p. 35). To partake of or to work within patriarchy, Johnson feels, simply reifies, sanctions, and perpetuates oppression in general and women’s oppression in particular: “there is simply no getting to a feminist value system by acting out of the old patriarchal values of competition, expediency, hierarchy” (p. 41).

Still other theorists who reject appropriation as a useful tactic for submerged groups assert that it reifies existing oppressive paradigms by conceding the status of the oppressor (e.g., Bammer, 1982; Baym, 1984; Kuhn, 1982). Feminist appropriation of patriarchal terms is what Marcus (1984) calls “taking father-guides to map the labyrinth of the female text” (p. 89), thus implicitly affirming patriarchal constructs. Sternhell (1983) suggests that the impulse to appropriate may be less strategic than feminists would like to think and more indicative of residual mystification: “our haste to adopt these [patriarchal] styles, I would suggest, stems from our own divided consciousness. We are too damn eager to be good daughters” (p. 275). Similarly, Showalter (1985) articulates the need for “the female tradition” to “generate its own experiences and symbols which are not simply the obverse of the male tradition” (p. 265). These theorists feel that appropriation ultimately undermines the plight of submerged groups, for locating the oppressor as stimulus—in essence, defining oneself in terms of the oppressive “other”—simply conceals and validates existing power structures and relationships.

Constituting a second body of literature are works by scholars who view appropriation as plausibly and effectively practiced by the disenfranchised, although they disagree about the ramifications and effectiveness of the practice (e.g., Di Stefano, 1989; Kaufmann, 1989; Weimann, 1988). Some theorists acknowledge the potential hazards associated with appropriation but are willing to condone it as a means to an end. Cixous (1976), for example, on locating woman “‘within’ the discourse of man,” urges her to dislocate this “within,” to “explode it, turn it around, and seize it. . . . Just because there’s a risk of identification doesn’t mean that we’ll succumb” (p. 887). Theorists who share this perspective tend to view appropriation as a fundamentally counterhegemonic strategy key to challenge, protest, and social change; they see the nature of appropriation as actional and assertive and thus revolutionary. Making this very point, Finke (1986) argues that “feminists ought to be just as interested in deconstructing culturally erected ‘differences’ that relegate one way of thinking to men and another to women” as they are with articulating new patterns (p. 261).

Many theorists endorse appropriation because they perceive its function as social criticism to be invaluable (e.g., Betterton, 1987; Cranny-Francis, 1990; Johnston, 1979; Kolodny, 1985; Lewis, 1987; Mayne, 1984). Appropriation, these theorists contend, serves to provoke reflection and/or anger and to foster a critical consciousness, largely by virtue of the dissonance created by removing a concept from its conventional context. In this vein, Barry and Flitterman (1987), in their analysis of various feminist resistance strategies in art, suggest that appropriation “transforms the spectator from a passive consumer into an active producer of meaning” (p. 320). Gentile (1985) recommends, in particular, strategies that cause the traditionally passive, absent “‘heroine’ to act, to rebel against the limits of her role” (p. 66), thus fostering audience consciousness of women’s pervasive absence.

Finally, many theorists endorse appropriation primarily for its intensely personal, emancipatory value (e.g., Adelman, 1986; Nogle, 1981; Yaeger, 1988). A recurrent theme of this literature is that appropriation is viscerally liberating and invigorating in its own right, not only or even necessarily as a means to an end. Feminist literary critic
Alicia Ostriker (1985) is a vocal advocate of appropriation for these very reasons, describing it as "a vigorous and various invasion of the sanctuaries of existing language, the treasuries where our meanings for 'male' and 'female' are themselves preserved" (p. 315). To "seize speech" and make it say what we mean" (1986, p. 211) is, for Ostriker, profoundly liberating.

**Shame: Appropriating Shane**

Released in 1952, *Shane* epitomizes the classic Western film; in fact, it is described as the standard on which many films of that genre are based (e.g., Rushing, 1983). The film, directed and produced by George Stevens, is based upon the novel of the same name, written by Jack Schaeffer. Set in the old West, the film chronicles Shane's (played by Alan Ladd) rescue of peaceful homesteaders from the town's terrorists, who are trying to run the homesteaders off their property. These villains perceive the homesteaders to be squatters on land that is rightfully theirs because of their prior presence. True to traditional Western form, Shane is a mysterious fellow with a questionable past. His history as a renegade cowboy gunslinger, although never explicitly addressed, is thinly veiled. Frequent references are made to his established knowledge of gunslinging, usually pursuant to his quick, jumpy draws at any unusual noise. Also consistent with the archetypal Western hero, Shane is very much the strong and silent type; he keeps to himself, cultivating a sense of mystery and others' curiosity about his past, and he exudes machismo via his formidable fighting prowess.

Out of the vast wilderness, Shane rides onto the property of one of the homesteaders, Joe, and stays on as an employee—to reform himself, the implication is, although from what, no one knows. Shane's run-ins with the collective enemy (about a dozen or so men) are marked by restraint at first; he is consciously holding himself back from the violence that apparently checks his past. Ultimately, however, he claims his violent nature on behalf of the homesteader community that he feels compelled to save—a man's got to do what a man's got to do. Also true to archetypal form, Shane eradicates the collective enemy single-handedly in the final scene.

Released in 1988, *Shame*, written by Beverly Blankenship and Michael Brindley, was directed by Steve Jodrell and produced by Damien Parer and Paul D. Barron. This film also features a detached outsider lighting upon a troubled community. Set in Australia, in this case, the outsider is a woman, Asta (Deborra-Lee Furness), who is traveling across the country on her motorcycle. Late one night, she runs off the road and damages her motorcycle. She finds her way to the nearest town and becomes stranded there as she awaits the shipment of a part necessary to repair her bike. While she waits, Asta stays on with the town's mechanic, Tim Curtis, and his family. Asta is mysterious and has a questionable, unknown past; she is, as eventually is revealed, a barrister.

This particular small town has a terrorist element composed of a gang of young men who are sexually terrorizing the women of the community—terrorism that ranges from harassment to, more typically, rape. Their crimes are rarely even acknowledged, however, for the victimized women rather than the perpetrators are held liable by a misogynist community. Furthermore, the young men engaged in the crimes are not so subtly praised for their sexual "escapades," and those who would object are thus silenced. Tim's teenaged daughter, Lizzie, is the latest rape victim. Asta becomes increasingly aware of what is happening, even though most town folk avoid mention of it; she herself is targeted by the gang at one point, although she manages to defend herself
and escape. Gradually, the women of the town begin to look to Asta for guidance, primarily because she is the first person to condemn this behaviour publicly and demand its end. As a result, a collective awareness on the part of the women begins to emerge. The climax of the film depicts the angry young men, incensed at attempts to stop them, descending upon the Curtis home. Tim is severely beaten and another rape (of Tim’s mother) is attempted, but the young men ultimately are apprehended by the town’s women and turned over to the authorities—but not before Lizzie is killed.

Four messages that articulate a challenge to the gender hegemony apparent in the original can be identified in *Shame*. Perhaps the most obvious of these is the message that conventional gender norms are not innate but constructed socially. In *Shane*, gender is depicted as innate: men are men, and women are women. Furthermore, any effort to change that fact substantially is futile, evidenced most clearly in Shane’s concentrated but ultimately unsuccessful (unnatural) effort to eschew his inherent manhood. “A man has to be what he is; he can’t break the mold,” Shane tells Joey, Joe’s young son. Shane epitomizes manhood via his physical strength, gunslinging and fighting prowess, confidence, and independence; as such, he serves as the ideal masculine role model for young Joey. Indeed, Joey’s education in manhood is quite striking in the film; he conspicuously witnesses and is enthralled by the various demonstrations of manhood, usually in the form of fist- and gunfights. Shane teaches Joey to draw and shoot and makes consistent references to Joey as a man in progress.

Manhood is constructed dialectically in *Shane*; it is opposed specifically to women, whose femininity is also innate. Marion is described by Joe as “my little woman who sure can cook”; constant references are made to her appearance. She is worth the wait to gussy herself up (an endeavor with which she is preoccupied), and she is a “pretty wife.” Indeed, Marion is rendered frequently in the film through a smudged lens, which gives her a soft, romantic, traditionally pretty appearance. Women, in general, are depicted as weak in *Shane*; they faint or become hysterical when confronted with violence and are incapable of protecting themselves. Paradoxically, women also are depicted as emasculating men; this is the reason why some men are prevented from being true to their male natures. Joe has been emasculated because of his connection to Marion; he has been rendered benign and passive, even though he yearns to be free of her influence so that he can be himself. This is evident particularly in the scene in which Joe, out of Marion’s sight and influence, participates enthusiastically in an all-out barroom brawl with Shane. Although marriage is the most obvious threat to manhood, motherhood poses the same risks; Marion frequently is chastised for feminizing Joey. Women thus are portrayed in *Shane* as consuming and emasculating men.

*Shame*, however, articulates an entirely different message about gender—namely, that it is socially constructed. As in *Shane*, that message is conveyed primarily by the lead character. Asta does not conform to gender type at all; indeed, she displays more conventionally masculine than feminine characteristics. She is independent, strong—physically and in character—self-sufficient, unconcerned with her appearance (more often than not, she is dirty and grease stained), and rugged. Asta’s deviation from the norm is not calculated, however, nor does she ever attempt to alter her nature, as Shane initially does. Indeed, none of the women depicted in the film evoke exclusively traditional feminine characteristics. The character of Lizzie crystallizes the message that character is dynamic and not biologically determined; she grows from being helpless
and intimidated early in the film into someone who develops the potential, at least, to be confident and to resist efforts to oppress her.

Given this marked distinction between the two films with regard to the nature of gender, notable is the fact that manliness, as depicted in Shame, is perfectly consistent with its depiction in Shane. Shame, however, makes an explicit point of exposing "manhood" as a social construct that serves to establish male privilege. Most of the men are physically strong, confident, independent, and distinguished by their sexual prowess (as they interpret it). Those men who would align themselves with or defend the women are perceived, as in Shame, as feminine, according to conventional standards—they are described as "piss weak." Male bonding, demonstrated in Shame by shared brute force and strength, also occurs in Shame via rape. Similarly, whereas weakness and passivity are appropriate for women in Shame, those qualities are validated by the male-defined community in Shame because they are conducive to male privilege. The notion that gender types are actively cultivated in the community is reinforced by the fact that the few men in the community who recognize the violation for what it is do not know how to make sense of it; they see it only because their loved ones have been raped, and they cannot reconcile their gendered worldview, which justifies rape, with their visceral reactions to the rapes as intolerable.

Although Shame's message that gender is socially constructed and rife with oppressive implications advances a powerful critique of Shame's dominant ideological tenet that gender is innate, the way it is rendered is not entirely unproblematic. This is primarily so because the dialectical construction of gender is retained in the appropriation. The message that gender is socially constructed is conveyed by the fact that women (especially Asta) are equally able and likely to exhibit traditionally masculine characteristics successfully rather than by problematizing the concept that characteristics are gendered at all or that traditionally "feminine" characteristics are devalued. The resultant danger is that masculine gender norms may be reified as inherently worthy. Several traits associated with Asta may reinforce rather than defuse patriarchal constructs, thus reifying the archetypal masculine Western hero described by Rushing (1983) as the rugged individualist who, confronted with the classic Western dilemma of choosing between independence (associated with manliness), and community (associated with the feminine), ultimately chooses the former after rescuing the community from some threat or disaster.

Shane certainly conforms to these generic expectations: Shane is clearly a "loner," and his status as hero is established; he is the one to whom the community looks for salvation and who delivers exactly that. His potent, mysterious manhood—conveyed by his detachment and staunch independence—distinguishes him from the community, his unsuccessful attempts to squelch it early in the film notwithstanding. Conversely, the community is depicted as weak and, implicitly, feminine. In Shame, the rugged individualist is present, in similar ways, in the character of Asta. She, too, is independent and self-reliant, very much in the archetypal atomistic Western tradition, and she clearly is detached from the community. Some of the heroic dimensions of the archetypal Western protagonist also are apparent in Asta; she is a mysterious stranger who blows into town and attempts to save its (women) citizens.

Shane also could be interpreted as reinforcing oppressive constructs in its validation of violence as an impetus for positive change. In Shane, each violent episode marks a significant, positive turning point in the film. It is the means by which Shane's manhood
is explicitly confirmed, male bonding is achieved, and ritual transition from boyhood to manhood is accomplished. The final scene, wherein the villains are conclusively eradicated, is ultimately demonstrative of the benefit of violence. In *Shame*, too, violence in which Asta features results in relatively positive change. Asta’s ability to not only defend herself but inflict damage on her attackers marks a turning point in that many of the town’s women are inspired by her. They see her physical, violent responses to sexist oppression as more compelling than her vocal condemnation. In another scene, Asta overhears a young man taunt Lizzie about her rape and slaps him; via this physical confrontation, Lizzie is able to see that his behaviour was unacceptable and that she has Asta’s support. In the closing scenes, when the young men descend upon the Curtis home, the ensuing violence provides the impetus for the women to band together. Although *Shame*’s ending is not a tidy one, violence is what finally unites and galvanizes these women and what may sustain them in the end.

Nonetheless, the fact that *Shame* articulates a clear challenge to an oppressive paradigm premised upon the biological nature of gender qualifies it as counterhegemonic, offering as it does an alternative reading of the original text. A second, consequent message that augments this challenge and tempers the aforementioned concerns is that gender norms, just as they serve to constitute male privilege, similarly craft women’s oppression. This is most evident with regard to how gender is portrayed in each film as manifest and reflected in community. As Rushing (1983) argues, a hallmark of the Western myth is the hero’s resistance to becoming a part of the community, which is typically associated with the feminine and thus weakness. The Western community of *Shane* is depicted as thoroughly feminine, largely due to the presence of women but also because it features all the trappings of domesticity, both of which imply feminization of men. His attempts to the contrary notwithstanding, Shane resists and ultimately rejects community life because it would mean his emasculation. The final scene epitomizes this rejection; Joe, who represents emasculated manhood, is beaten by Shane in order to prevent him from going to town, a deed that permits Shane alone to rescue the town folk and thus affirm manly, rugged individualism.

*Shame* directly challenges *Shane*’s contention that community is feminine; established community, argues *Shame*, is male defined and characterized by sexist oppression. *Shane*’s depiction of woman-as-emasculator also is rejected; *Shame* illustrates that it is women who are systematically oppressed and violated by men. Whereas *Shane*’s community radiates moral rectitude, wholesomeness, and traditional femininity, the community in *Shame* is closed, threatening (to women), and male defined; it is also one from which women are actively and even violently ostracized. While this does result in an (albeit discouraged) ill-defined subcommunity of women to the extent that they share the status of being victimized and helpless, the point is made that the recognized, established community has no place for women. *Shame* thus gives the lie to *Shane*’s point that community is feminine or, at least, a haven for women. Furthermore, *Shame* argues that gender norms, which form the basis of community in both films, lie at the root of women’s oppression.

A third message that functions counterhegemonically in *Shame* is that women need not rely upon men but are fully capable and responsible for themselves. This is repeatedly conveyed in the film by virtue of the fact that in every successful confrontation, women are responsible for that success, either individually or collectively: Asta’s escape from attack, her showing up of the young men’s swaggering machismo by thwarting their
advances publicly, and the women's dramatic rescue of Tim's mother. These events stand in direct contrast to *Shane*, which features a number of scenes in which women and children are banished to various quarters while the men fend off villains; even witnessing such manly acts prove too much for women, who are wont to faint or become hysterical if they happen to glimpse the mayhem.

Not only are the women of *Shame* extremely capable of their own protection, but the men are just as incapable of protecting them. For instance, when Lizzie is raped by a gang of young men, Tim has no idea what to do or where to direct his anger. As a result, he grows more introverted and distant, especially from Lizzie, whom he feels may be to blame. Asta, on the other hand, is focused, outspoken, resourceful, and practical. Also significant is the fact that Tim's impotence cannot be attributed to a woman in *Shame*; the only source for his helplessness and confusion is the cognitive dissonance he experiences between his instinctive reaction to his daughter's rape and how the male community justifies it. Scriptless, he is rendered impotent. *Shame* thus implies that not only do women not need to depend upon men for protection, they simply cannot do so.

A final, ambivalent message of *Shame* with counterhegemonic implications is that ending sexist oppression entails a long and hard struggle, contrasting starkly with the neat resolution featured in *Shane*. This is counterhegemonic in that it suggests the profundity of sexist oppression, thus prompting a consideration of the depth and extent of the ideological superstructure that continually reproduces and reifies it. The complex nature of this dilemma is conveyed primarily by Asta's relatively realistic rendering as a hero (with some exceptions), which challenges the mythic hero represented by Shane. In response to Lizzie's adulation, for instance, Asta repeatedly urges Lizzie to stand up for herself and not look to others for guidance. She also recognizes that the various strategies she practices (legal, self-defense, among others) and attempts to cultivate in the other women may, in fact, fail. Unlike Shane, Asta does not emerge as savior of the women and, most importantly, of Lizzie. The final, climactic confrontation yields a severely beaten and nearly dead Tim Curtis, and Lizzie is killed.

The message that the road to women's emancipation is a long and hard one is most dramatic at the conclusion, for that is where resolution is achieved neatly and conclusively in *Shane*. After singlehandedly ridding the town of its heinous villains, Shane appears to ascend the heavens; he is swept up into the myth of legendary cowboys, accessorized by a spectacular sunrise. Contrasting dramatically with these sublime final scenes, in *Shame*, Lizzie is on her own at the climactic conclusion of the film; in an attempt to escape her attackers, she launches herself out of a moving car and is killed. The last glimpse of Lizzie is her battered, lifeless body borne away on the bed of a pickup truck.

*Shame*'s final scene is thus ambiguous and marked by a decidedly grim atmosphere. The sheriff—the socially sanctioned authority—into whose hands the perpetrators are rendered is still suspect; he has defended them in the past, and his sexist, oppressive tendencies remain apparent. Asta, her face grimy, tearstained, and swollen, is grittily present, as opposed to Shane's progressive absence at the conclusion of *Shane*. Lizzie—the one person about whose welfare the audience is most concerned—is dead, and the oppression inherent in the community has not been eradicated; if anything, the wedge between that community and the women, many of whom have come to acknowledge the sexual terrorism for what it is, has been driven even further. The overriding impression in *Shame* is that of something unfinished.
As a counterhegemonic text, *Shame* succeeds in raising consciousness and cultivating critical awareness; it does so by placing established, traditional, generic concepts of gender in "new contexts . . . in order to wrest new answers from it, new insights into its meaning" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 347). *Shame*'s strength as a feminist rhetorical appropriation lies in the fact that it affords a broader, extended view of the truths advanced in *Shane*, thus exposing huge gaps in *Shane*'s lessons of manliness. This occurs as a result of *Shame* holding *Shane* to its own terms; *Shame* pushes *Shane* to its own logical conclusion, demonstrating the disturbing implications of manhood, which receives only a superficial and vindicating treatment in the Western. Critical to advancing this fuller perspective, of course, is the fact that *Shame* unfolds from a woman's point of view; as a result of Asta's and other women's experiences with the same manliness championed in *Shane*, the apparently benign and even positive messages regarding gender articulated in that film are posited as inappropriate and even dangerous.

Consequently, the rhetorical strategy at work in *Shame* is that of reflection. *Shame* functions as a mirror situated at the margins to the Western archetype, whose hegemonic truths are assumed as natural and self-evident; in this way, the margin essentially functions as the mirror that affords a starker and more complete view of the Western myth. Via reflection, *Shame* articulates a broader, deeper, and multidimensional perspective of gender "givens" advanced in *Shane*, whose own take on gender is consequently revealed to be myopic, inwardly focused, and distorted to the end of self-validation. The appropriative strategy of reflection from the margins thus serves to cultivate critical awareness, therefore qualifying *Shame* as a counterhegemonic text.

The rhetorical strategy of reflection in *Shame*, however, is necessarily characterized by engagement with and participation in the themes of the original artifact, thus limiting its effectiveness as a counterhegemonic text in some ways. This is largely due to the fact that *Shame* represents an appropriation of genre. In the first place, *Shame* must keep the traditional story in its sights at all times in order to truly reflect it; consequently, the appropriation is defined primarily in terms of that which it seeks to challenge. In choosing reflection as its strategic means, *Shame* must be rapidly attentive to and in some ways imitative of the original, hegemonic text, thus risking the reification of the very oppressive concepts it seeks to challenge. Although use of the margins as a mirror alters the view significantly and invites a distinctly alternative reading, the integrity of the reflected object cannot be simply erased. The effectiveness of reflection as an appropriative strategy is also mitigated by the fact that, constrained by the Western genre, *Shame* can only utilize the very narrowly defined margins established by that genre to situate its mirror. This may explain why Asta's character is inconsistently drawn at times (alternately heroic and realistic, employing violence and seeking legal recourse) and also why the ending is ambiguous. Had the violence and oppression characterizing the conclusion been resolved, *Shame* would have conformed precisely to the archetypal Western genre, thus collapsing the distinction between mirror and object—between margin and center—and belying the appropriation, representing instead a "simple manipulation of a familiar plot" (Anwell, 1988, p. 78).

Although it certainly constitutes an oppositional reading of *Shane*, *Shame*, constrained by the genre it has appropriated, is thus limited by the boundaries established by the Western archetype. As the operationalization of counterhegemony in *Shame*, the rhetorical strategy of reflection is similarly limited; reflection is, by definition, fixed on its focus and thus defined, in large part, by its nemesis. However, reflection does hold significant
promise as a counterhegemonic appropriative strategy in that, utilizing the margins as a site for reflection, it raises consciousness of assumed, ingrained ideological truths by advancing a more complete, complex picture and exposing absences and distortions apparent in the appropriated text. In this way, reflection effectively "disrupt[s] the conventions of a genre" while working within it (Betteton, 1987, p. 250).

"Orpheus (I)" and "Eurydice": Appropriating the Classical Myth

Edith Hamilton's work, *Mythology: Timeless Tales of Gods and Heroes* (1969), still is considered by many scholars to be the definitive collection of classical mythology. That text includes the tale of Orpheus and Eurydice, a straightforward, narrative summary of the myth drawn from primary sources, such as the Roman poets Virgil and Ovid and the third-century Greek poet, Apollonius of Rhodes.

According to Hamilton's account, Orpheus's defining feature is his astonishing musical talent, which endows him with virtue and which he uses to perform good deeds. At one point, traveling aboard the *Argo*, he saves the Argonauts from certain death. When they come within earshot of the Sirens—enchanting, seductive, island women who lure sailors to their deaths by singing so sweetly and temptingly that the men are drawn to the shore and dashed upon the rocks—Orpheus "snatched up his lyre and played a tune so clear and ringing that it drowned the sound of those lovely fatal voices" (Hamilton, p. 104).

Hamilton points out that where Orpheus met or how he courted Eurydice is unclear in any of the existing accounts; however, "it is clear that no maiden he wanted could resist the power of his song" (Hamilton, p. 104). What is known is that upon their wedding day, immediately following their wedding, Eurydice—strolling in a meadow with her bridesmaids—is stung by a viper and dies. Orpheus is devastated; he cannot accept his loss. Daring "more than any other man had dared for his love" (Hamilton, p. 104), he resolves to enter the underworld, the world of the dead, in order to charm its king, Hades, and queen, Persephone, with his enchanting music and ask for Eurydice's return.

The journey to the underworld is understood as "fearsome" (Hamilton, p. 104) because those who enter are not permitted to return. Orpheus, however, manages to charm all those who guard the entrance to Hades. Cerberus, the hound of hell,relaxes; the notorious sinners Ixion, Sisiphus, and Tantalus—each of whom has committed a crime against the gods and must pay an eternal price—stop in the throes of their punishment for the first time. The Furies, charged with punishing evildoers, weep for the first time. Hades, like all those before him, cannot resist Orpheus's musical spell. Eurydice is summoned and given to Orpheus on one condition: that he not look back at her as she follows him out of the underworld until they reach the world beyond. Orpheus agrees, and he embarks on the path that will lead them out. Although he longs to look back to reassure himself that Eurydice follows, he does not. As he steps out of the black cave into the daylight of the upper world, he turns to her—too soon, however, for she is still in the cavern. Eurydice vanishes instantly, slipping back into the underworld, and he hears only her faint "Farewell" (Hamilton, p. 105).

Despondent, Orpheus attempts to follow Eurydice and reclaim her; however, he is not admitted entrance a second time to the underworld while still alive. He returns, desolate, to the earth, where he shuns human company and meets a tragic end at the hands of Maenads—women given to tearing apart hapless creatures and "devour[ing] the bloody shreds of flesh" (Hamilton, p. 56) in a wine-induced frenzy.
Margaret Atwood is a well-known, contemporary author of poetry and fiction; a consistent focus of her work is gender oppression. *Selected Poems II: Poems Selected and New 1976-1986* (1987) is a collection of Atwood’s poems that address women’s oppression in the context of their corporeality. Included in this work are several poems that refer to various classical Greek and Roman myths; among them are “Orpheus (1)” and “Euridice.”

In both poems, Atwood’s version of the tale unfolds from Euridice’s perspective and focuses exclusively on the underworld scene in which Orpheus attempts to reclaim her. In “Orpheus (1),” Euridice’s internal reflections address Orpheus, offering a description of him and the event at odds with the original myth. In this version, he is strange to her, if not exactly a stranger. More significant, he compels her to follow and she does not do so eagerly or even entirely willingly. Also at odds with the original, Euridice describes in this poem the nature of Orpheus’s obsession as rooted in his narcissistic desire rather than in his profound love for her. Euridice nonetheless is seduced by the strength of that desire; she is drawn to it reluctantly and even physically responds to it: “It was this hope of yours that kept me following” (“Orpheus [1],” p. 106).

In “Euridice,” Euridice’s reflections also are recorded, although in this poem she refers to herself consistently in the second person; “Euridice” thus appears to be Euridice’s detached reflections on her own experiences. In this poem, also, Euridice’s perception of Orpheus is featured. She recognizes, in particular, his seductive strategies of songs and promises; he promises “that things will be different up there than they were last time” (“Euridice,” p. 108). An apprehension of her as a physical entity is integral to Orpheus’s love, Euridice realizes; nourished by her presence, “this love of his is not something he can do if you aren’t there” (“Euridice,” p. 109).

Euridice’s state of mind is described in some detail in “Euridice.” She describes herself as “chilled and minimal: moving and still both, like a white curtain blowing in the draft from a half-opened window beside a chair on which nobody sits” (“Euridice,” p. 108), precisely the converse of the “listening and floral [hallucination]” (Orpheus [1], p. 106) for which Orpheus yearns. This world of utter stillness and her place in it is contrasted with Euridice’s rather sudden and disconcerting awareness—marked by jarring recollections of her former life—that she loved Orpheus and still does. Euridice’s acknowledgement of this love ultimately results in her rejection of him, however. Although she realizes at the poem’s end that she is not truly free or at peace in the underworld, she understands, too, that Orpheus’s need and love for her do not offer a suitable alternative: “O handful of gauze, little bandage, handful of cold air, it is not through him you will get your freedom” (“Euridice,” p. 109). She chooses instead to remain in the underworld.

Several counterhegemonic messages can be identified in Atwood’s appropriation of the Orpheus and Euridice mythological tale, most of which are attributable to the narrative strategies utilized in “Orpheus (1)” and “Euridice.” Perhaps the most obvious of these messages is the fact that Atwood’s poems give Euridice voice, contrasting sharply with her profound silence in the classical myth. In that myth, Euridice features only nominally; all that is known of her is that, unable to resist Orpheus, she becomes his wife and is stung and killed by a viper that very day. Upon Orpheus’s successful bartering with Hades, Euridice is “summoned” (Hamilton, p. 105) and follows Orpheus through the cavern to the outside world. The tale chronicles Orpheus’s experiences of the events via an omniscient narrator—his desire for Euridice, his despair at losing her,
his hope that he can get her back, and his anguish at failing to do so. At no point in the story are Eurydice’s own experiences noted. Passive in the extreme, she is exclusively acted upon and inactive—variously stung, summoned, behind Orpheus, and slipping back (Hamilton, pp. 104-105). She consistently is denied agency or subjectivity in this tale.

The Eurydice of Atwood’s version, on the other hand, does feature her as an actional subject, primarily in that both “Orpheus (1)” and “Eurydice” chronicle her reflections and experiences, although, notably, not to the exclusion of others. Eurydice acknowledges Orpheus’s perception of her as a passive object to be acted upon, and she sees this attitude epitomized in his attempt to reclaim her: “I was obedient, but numb, like an arm gone to sleep; the return to time was not my choice... something stretched between us like a whisper, like a rope: my former name, drawn tight. You had your old leash, love you might call it, and your flesh voice” (“Orpheus [1],” p. 106). Furthermore, Eurydice recognizes that Orpheus values her passivity; it is why he has come for her, why he is so chagrined by losing her: “You could not believe I was more than your echo” (“Orpheus [1],” p. 107).

Given voice in “Orpheus (1)” and “Eurydice,” Eurydice directly challenges the hegemony of the classical myth. In the original version, Orpheus is the quintessential mythological hero, the virtuous demigod whose motives are above reproach. In “Orpheus (1)” and “Eurydice,” however, Orpheus’s character—although not altered in any way—is described very differently. In fact, he retains the same manly qualities evident in the original version. He is capable of supernatural feats, including bringing Eurydice back from the dead: “you were singing me; already new skin was forming on me within the luminous misty shroud of my other body; already there was dirt on my hands and I was thirsty” (“Orpheus [1],” p. 107). Orpheus’s feats and abilities are perceived by Eurydice as manifestations of his selfishness and arrogance, however. Instead of admiring his manly fortitude and commitment in coming for her, she sees that deed as selfish of him and threatening to her. It is indicative exclusively of his needs and desires: “Before your eyes you held steady the image of what you wanted me to become: living again. . . .” (“Orpheus [1],” p. 106). Eurydice does not attribute evil intentions to Orpheus so much as she points to self-centered, childlike expectations on his part: “He cannot believe without seeing... he wants to be fed by you” (“Eurydice,” p. 109).

Orpheus’s music, which is featured so prominently as a vehicle for his manliness in the original myth, also is deconstructed in Atwood’s version. In the classic tale, Orpheus’s musical talent is the means by which he asserts his prowess, rendering listeners awed, moved, or inspired. In the appropriation, too, Orpheus’s music is capable of great things. Even though Eurydice is reluctant to return to the upper world, she is seduced by Orpheus’s “song that calls you back, a song of joy and suffering equally: a promise: that things will be different up there than they were last time” (“Eurydice,” p. 108). Eurydice, however, reveals a darker side of that very talent. She demonstrates how this same music serves as the means by which she is erased and reconstructed to Orpheus’s specifications, to be mortal and pliable, as no member of the natural world can resist him. Eurydice finds Orpheus’s music—his “old leash” and “flesh voice” (“Orpheus [1],” p. 106)—more exploitative than charming. Whereas in the original version, Orpheus’s music is celebrated for its capacity to manipulate and control others, Atwood’s version provides a forum and a voice for the experience of being manipulated.

A second message with counterhegemonic implications that emerges from Atwood’s
appropriation is apparent in the fact of Eurydice’s awakening; she is prompted to a new awareness of her circumstances and of her identity. Prior to Orpheus’s attempt to reclaim her, Eurydice has been in limbo, floating in a cold, blank world of silence. Faced with this event, however, Eurydice is forced to consider her existence, for the first time, as something she might choose and in which she might participate. Confronted with the prospect of returning to Orpheus’s world by sheer force of his desire, she is prompted to consider her desire. Furthermore, she recognizes the consuming nature of Orpheus’s desire—it demands her silence and passivity. Although the stirrings of her awakening are apparent, the Eurydice of Atwood’s version is not whole or complete in terms of her identity. She describes herself as insubstantial—a “white curtain,” a “handful of gauze . . . of cold air” (“Eurydice,” pp. 108-109). Rather than resolve her identity, Eurydice has succeeded in identifying it as an issue, albeit a critical one; that awareness is sufficient basis to ultimately reject both Orpheus’s world and the underworld as viable environments in which she can realize her freedom.

Eurydice also demonstrates agency in Atwood’s appropriation, certainly not in evidence in the original myth. Conspicuously absent in “Orpheus (1)” and “Eurydice” is the bartering session between Orpheus and Hades in the original myth, a particularly strange omission given that the underworld is the sole focus of Atwood’s poems and that the bartering scene features so prominently in the original. The only mention of Hades is a figure “who passes you without speaking” (“Eurydice,” p. 108). Eurydice’s compulsion to follow Orpheus, although rooted in residual oppression, at least does not appear to be a result of the men’s negotiation of her fate. Similarly, in the original myth, Eurydice is forced to return in compliance with Hade’s stipulation regarding her complete exit from the underworld. In the appropriation, however, she makes a conscious choice to do so: “Though I knew how this failure would hurt you, I had to fold like a gray moth and let go” (“Orpheus [1],” p. 107).

Eurydice’s conscious comparison of herself to a moth in the appropriation is significant in terms of establishing her agency; it stands in direct contrast to her relatively passive depiction as a “bud” or “flower” in the original (Hamilton, p. 105). As a gray moth—nocturnal, undistinctive, and inconspicuous—a sort of freedom is implied. A moth also is drawn irresistibly to light, even though that light may bode harm. Likewise, Eurydice is drawn initially to the “green light” (“Orpheus [1],” p. 106) of Orpheus’s world and the promise of life that it represents. At the last moment, however, recalling attendant oppression, she determines that, to “the noise and flesh of the surface,” she prefers “emptiness and silence; the stagnant peace of the deepest sea” (“Eurydice,” p. 108), at least for the interim. This choice demonstrates the depth of Eurydice’s new awareness; she is able to resist the powerful, ingrained compulsion to participate in her oppression.

Significantly, Eurydice’s sudden, clear knowledge of what she does not want leads her to consider what she might want; that is, she begins to consider her freedom and what it might mean. This leads her to necessarily confront the structure and nature of her oppression, which constitutes a third counterhegemonic message of the appropriation: that understanding the conditions and dimensions of one’s oppression is critical to transcending it. Eurydice recognizes the pervasiveness and profundity of oppression in the outside world, which she associates with Orpheus in describing his intimate, visceral connection with it. Unlike her, he can “stop light. He wants to feel himself thickening like a treetrunk or a haunch and see blood on his eyelids when he closes them, and the sun
beating” ("Eurydice," p. 109). Just as he surely will erase her identity—mold, confine, restrict, and consume her—so will the world comply with and assist him in that deed. Eurydice, indeed, describes the upper world as malevolent; it “had once grown fangs and killed me” ("Orpheus [1]," p. 106). Nor is Orpheus’s passionate love a means to Eurydice’s freedom. It is “a red seed” she holds ("Eurydice," p. 109), potent and dangerous, whose cultivation likewise nurtures her oppression. This passage also reinforces Eurydice’s agency in that, as possessor of the seed, she has the choice to comply with or reject the terms of her oppression. Although Eurydice does not doubt Orpheus’s love, she now understands it to be threatening and confining; moreover, she begins to see Orpheus and that love as representative of and conducive to a powerful, systemic oppression.

Although Eurydice knows that Orpheus and his overwhelming world define her oppression, this revelation also clarifies for her that she is not free in the underworld, either. She recognizes her heretofore haven of escape as a “domain of hunger” in which she cannot be satisfied ("Eurydice," p. 109). The underworld is bleak, silent, and confining; nonetheless, those conditions enable her to perceive herself as separate from the worldly things that constitute her oppression and foster her compliance with it. Atwood’s appropriation of the myth concludes with the distinct impression that Eurydice, awake and alert, is poised for freedom that she cannot yet articulate but of whose availability she is certain.

In “Orpheus (1)” and “Eurydice,” the only aspect of the original Orpheus and Eurydice myth altered is that of perspective. Whereas in the original version, Orpheus’s story is told via an omniscient narrator, in Atwood’s appropriation, Eurydice is the narrator whose experience is conveyed in an intimate, confiding manner. Consequently, Eurydice’s very personal impressions of and reflections on her experiences are made apparent where they were absent before. This strategy provides an entirely different framework with which to interpret the story of Orpheus and Eurydice. For instance, where the original version of the myth refers to Eurydice only vaguely as the inherently passive object of various actions and manipulations, “Orpheus (1)” and “Eurydice” provide an account of this experience from the other side—that of the subject of those deeds. This particular strategy of appropriation functions as refraction: it uses the margins to articulate an alternative text that, by way of contrast, throws into sharp relief the hegemony of the original. In Atwood’s appropriation of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth, Eurydice is transformed from the passive, silent projection of Orpheus’s need into a complex, thoughtful, and insightful subject, capable of naming her oppression and choosing her course.

This appropriative strategy of refraction, as it occurs in “Orpheus (1)” and “Eurydice,” has significant potential as a counterhegemonic tactic. Because it does not directly engage with or alter the key elements of the original, hegemonic discourse, it runs a relatively low risk of inadvertently reifying ideas and values historically harmful to members of submerged groups. Rather, the appropriative rhetorical strategy of refraction connects with the original discourse but leaves it intact. By focusing on the nexus of its hegemony, however—in this case, the absent, silent Eurydice—and positioning it in such a way that an entirely alternative discourse unfolds, the original is understood in a radically different way. As a counterhegemonic tactic, refraction’s strength lies in juxtaposition; it utilizes the margins as a vantage point from which to articulate an alternative text and thereby recognize hegemony. Refraction thus is not confined by the
appropriated discourse, as other appropriative strategies might be; rather, just as a sound or light wave is refracted, rhetorical refraction functions at the fringes of the original text in order to project an alternative version of—and thus perspective on—that same text. In this way, refraction is consistent with Adrienne Rich's (1979) notion of revision, of assessing "an old text from a new critical direction," thereby exposing the oppressive ideology inherent in the original (p. 35).

The appropriative strategy of refraction suggests that radically alternative ways of "reading" and understanding the world exist, albeit embedded and submerged, even in readily available hegemonic texts; they need simply to be positioned in such a way that they become apparent. As such, refraction implies access for marginalized groups who, by definition, are inappropriately represented (if at all) within an oppressive paradigm. In "Orpheus (1)" and "Eurydice," refraction permits a reading of the original, hegemonic myth from without; the margin, where Eurydice is positioned, becomes a site of rupture from which a new discourse, premised upon a critical reading of the appropriated text, can emerge. Refraction, then, affirms bell hooks's description of the margin as a site one might actively choose because it "offers . . . the possibility of a radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds" (1990, p. 150).

Conclusion

As instances of rhetorical appropriation, both Shame and "Orpheus (1)" and "Eurydice" succeed as counterhegemonic discourses in that both, at minimum, invite a consideration of traditional, oppressive constructions of gender. This is accomplished in each case by explicitly pointing up the hegemonic implications of the original artifact. Shame, using the margins as a site from which to reflect, relentlessly pushes Shame to its own, logical conclusions, which serves to foster a critical consciousness of the implications of gender as traditionally construed, manifest, and reproduced from within that original discourse. In this way, Shame "creates space within [a] culture of domination" (hooks, 1990, p. 148) that "affirms and sustains . . . subjectivity [and] gives us a new location from which to articulate [a] sense of the world" (p. 153). The specific counterhegemonic function of reflection as a rhetorical strategy of appropriation, then, is the cultivation of a critical awareness of oppression.

"Orpheus (1)" and "Eurydice" also invite critical awareness as a result of their appropriation of the original myth. However, by employing the particular strategy of refraction, the poems collectively succeed in moving beyond the terms established by the original discourse and articulating one whose nature and content are thoroughly, qualitatively distinct. As such, "Orpheus (1)" and "Eurydice" serve to rupture the hegemonic boundaries of the original to offer a view of that hegemony from without, thus exposing the paradigmatic structure of the ideology in which gender is encased. Furthermore, the appropriation suggests that confronting and "mending" oppression within that paradigm may not be the only available recourse. This is an example of what Eshbain (1989) refers to as "breaking out of the [original] text" (p. 132) into a place where oppressive ideology is suspended, if not absent—where there is "more ebb and flow of identities, more fluidity of engendered possibilities" (p. 128) than available within the confines of hegemonic cultural texts.

Although I hope that my analyses can contribute to a broader understanding of rhetorical appropriation, based as they are on two very specific paradigm cases of feminist rhetorical appropriation, my findings cannot necessarily be extrapolated and
applied to other instances of appropriation by submerged groups. For instance, feminist rhetorical appropriation that also addresses other forms of oppression might suggest alternative ways to interpret rhetorical appropriation as a counterhegemonic strategy effectively utilized by submerged groups. Hooks (1990) strongly endorses appropriation that is subtle and even covert, such that the act is not necessarily apparent to the dominant, oppressive culture; on this point, she cautions African-American women against being perceived as or assuming the role of “rebellious exotic other” (p. 20). Perhaps rhetorical appropriations that address hegemony on a number of levels run a higher risk of such perception, which may suggest that appropriation can be effective on only one level at a time; or perhaps hegemonic texts that turn on race do not lend themselves to counterhegemonic appropriation.

Similarly, my findings regarding appropriation as informed by analysis of _Shame_ and “Orpheus (1)” and “Eurydice” cannot necessarily be applied to rhetorical artifacts that are not feminist. For instance, the band Indigo Girls’s cover of Dire Straits’s originally performed song, “Romeo and Juliet,” wherein the female lead singer assumes the narrative role of Romeo, constitutes a sort of appropriation—not precisely inversion—that turns on the issue of sexual orientation. Although the juxtaposition afforded by this appropriation could be said to cultivate awareness of heterosexism inherent in the original version, how it does so appears to be quite complex, particularly in terms of the concepts and configuration of margin and center.

Considerable literature exists that addresses appropriation as practiced by submerged groups in terms of its theoretical implications and consequences; however, as suggested by the limitations of this study, much of the terrain remains uncharted. A specifically rhetorical perspective certainly is underrepresented in the literature, and rhetorical analysis could make valuable contributions to the existing body of knowledge. Case analyses of _Shame_ and “Orpheus (1)” and “Eurydice” suggest a number of points for further consideration.

Most significant, these analyses suggest that various appropriative strategies may exist, and to refer generally to appropriation as either harmful to or useful for submerged groups, as the appropriation literature on the whole tends to do, may be misleading. There may exist certain appropriative strategies that are incorrigibly harmful for marginalized groups (see, e.g., Carlson, 1992; Hawkesworth, 1988; Johnson, 1989); inversion may qualify as such a strategy (although whether inversion constitutes appropriation is, I now think, arguable). Similarly, there may exist appropriative strategies that are so powerfully and viscerally liberating in themselves (e.g., Ostriker, 1985) that consequences are irrelevant.

Rhetorical analysis, however, appears to reveal that, for the most part, subversive appropriation is a highly complex enterprise, reflective of the equally complex issues of power, ideology and hegemony with which it deals. As close examination of _Shame_ and “Orpheus (1)” and “Eurydice” reveal, at least two functionally distinct, complex strategies of counterhegemonic appropriation exist. _Shame_, in particular, demonstrates the ambiguity of appropriation as a potentially emancipatory strategy. As an example of appropriative reflection, it simultaneously contains emancipatory and oppressive potential; it advances a definitively oppositional and critical reading of the original text, but in so doing, it reifies certain oppressive constructs. “Orpheus (1)” and “Eurydice” demonstrate the appropriative strategy of refraction. Although apparently not as prone to the charge of reinforcing oppressive constructs as is reflection, the strategy and its particular
implications for critical awareness—and what that means—are not addressed in the current appropriation literature.

The possibility that any number of other appropriative strategies may exist and that such diversity and ambiguity may characterize them calls for further consideration of what constitutes effective and/or constructive appropriation for submerged groups. In terms of the existing literature and in light of my analyses, I would submit that at the point where rhetorical appropriation can be recognized clearly as such, it succeeds at least to the extent that it positions hegemonic discourse as eligible for scrutiny. At the very least, rhetorical appropriation as practiced by submerged groups—quintessential counterhegemony—problematises hegemonic discourse and its embedded, oppressive ideology, thus creating space for critical awareness. Critical rhetorical analysis of *Shame* and, collectively, “Orpheus (1)” and “Eurydice” certainly suggests that hegemonic texts can be and are regularly identified, defined, and challenged by submerged groups. Via rhetorical appropriation, the margins become “a site of resistance—a location of radical openness and possibility” (hooks, 1990, p. 153) to be used critically and creatively by the disenfranchised.

Notes

Helene A. Shugart is assistant professor of speech communication at Augusta State University in Augusta, Georgia. She would like to thank Sonja K. Foss for her contributions to this essay and three anonymous reviewers for the insightful comments that guided its revision. A partial version of this essay was presented at the 1994 convention of the Western States Communication Association.

1 I chose these artifacts because they represent clear instances of appropriation—in each case, the reference to the original artifact, which conveys a traditional ideology of gender, is fairly immediately apparent and unambiguous. I also chose them because the strategic use of appropriation employed in each artifact is distinct. The appropriation practiced in *Shame* appeared, initially, to be inversion and is representative of an appropriation of a genre—*Shame*, the springboard for the appropriation, seems to have been selected primarily because of its archetypal plot and character. Atwood’s poems, “Orpheus (1)” and “Eurydice,” represent a different form of appropriation, in which appropriation occurs exclusively by virtue of a change of narrator; no change in character, plot, or even scene is ventured. Finally, the respective medium of each appropriation—film, in the case of *Shame/Shame*, and literature, in the case of “Orpheus (1)” and “Eurydice”—drew my interest, not least because of Adorno’s discussion of each of these media in terms of hegemony and the dissemination of ideology. Specifically, Adorno (1989a) implies repeatedly that film is a profoundly powerful tool—indeed, the epitome of the culture industry, not least because mass consumption defines it. Film facilitates the hegemonic process of standardizing and rationalizing ideology (p. 130). On the other hand, poetry, argues Adorno (1989b), is positioned by its very nature to circumvent mass-cultivated hegemonic consensus; poetry, by virtue of its individual, personal, *subjective* character, is likelier to challenge or resist hegemony (p. 161) than other mass-produced and distributed cultural forms. Although this distinction may simply reflect Adorno’s peculiar art elitism, it is nonetheless intriguing. Certainly, the mass character of hegemony is well documented (Angus & Jhally, 1989; Becker, 1984; Good, 1989; Hall, 1982; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985).

2 Atwood also includes in this collection a poem entitled “Orpheus (2)”; however, because that poem does not address or challenge traditional conceptions of gender and thus does not constitute a feminist appropriation, I do not include it in my analysis.

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