

I show in *Marquesan Encounters: Melville and the Meaning of Civilization*. Similarly, when Una strikes Hawthorne as “supernatural,” the moment evokes a tradition of religious thought that is traceable to ancient Greece, in a version latterly conditioned by deist conceptions of nature. When Hawthorne in the same passage views his daughter’s boldness as a lack of “delicacy,” he relies on conceptions of gender that likewise have a long history and that took an especially polarized form in the early nineteenth century.

To demonstrate these influences on perception is a matter of understanding the cultural traditions that were active in the mentalities of our forebears and of showing such traditions to be at work in specific cases. Mellard, by contrast, demands a blanket theoretical authority; he “expects to find a theoretical claim that remarks about angels and devils are ‘really’ about the contrasts between men and women.” My argument about Hawthorne’s perceptions is certainly open to dispute, if substantive contrary evidence can be found, as is the argument of the essay as a whole. But my conclusions cannot be dismissed merely because they are painful, nor do Mellard’s intemperate denunciations vitiate their force.

The article on Pearl and Una, like my forthcoming book on the Hawthornes’ family life, deals in issues that are charged with emotional torment, such that clarity of understanding is not achieved separately from coming to terms with one’s own psychic investment in them. Hawthorne’s writing remains a cultural treasure for us largely because of the way it engages chronic anxieties regarding sexuality, gender, and the politics of intimate experience.

T. WALTER HERBERT, JR.
Southwestern University

PMLA’s Editorial Policy

To the Editor:

Under the heading “Widening *PMLA’s Appeal*” (103 [1988]: 816–17) you print Guy Stern’s plea for a more tolerant editorial policy, which would be less committed to the new (?) orthodoxy of style and method expected of articles submitted for publication in *PMLA*.

Stern ultimately argues the benefits of scholarship and knowledge that will accrue from a policy designed to attract young scholars and probing new ideas to the association. While I am in full agreement with him, let me add another aspect in support of his appeal. As one of the 4.14% of the MLA membership residing in “the rest of the world” (as Jerome Mandel puts it in the Fall 1988 *MLA Newsletter*), I prize *PMLA* as a means of keeping abreast of the variety of scholarly endeavor in our vast discipline, at least so far as the North American scene is concerned. Scholars sharing my situation are likely to regard their

membership similarly, as a link to those activities (mirrored in *PMLA* particularly) from which they feel separated by physical distance, if by no other circumstances.

Such members abroad would clearly favor an editorial policy that would place less emphasis on the in-depth pursuit of specialized topics, which generally find appropriate outlets in established journals and reviews devoted to just those specialties. *PMLA*, we would argue, should make it an obligation to ensure the lateral growth of linguistic and literary scholarship by providing a forum for ideas and opinions that have not yet been canonized but that—who knows?—may provide essential stimuli to the tradition-building debate among members of our profession.

This is not an argument against quality and standards. I merely wish to put the quality of critical substance and generating potential before that of form and style in a journal that should, I feel, stop short of becoming an aesthetic object.

KURT OPITZ
Fachhochschule Hamburg

PMLA’s Review Process

To the Editor:

Stanley Fish’s guest column, “No Bias, No Merit: The Case against Blind Submission” (103 [1988]: 739–48), strikes me as wrongheaded on several counts, and I will let other respondents do the work of demolition that the piece deserves. I would, however, like to raise one point that Fish does not—namely, the anonymity of the referees.

The main argument for confidentiality in all such processes of evaluation (including the work of appointment and promotion committees) comes down to the assertion that evaluators will be inhibited from writing their candid opinions if their identities are known to the persons being evaluated. Now, I doubt that any reader of *PMLA* would contest the judgment that the veil of anonymity also licenses the worst abuses of probity and fairness.

To make the review process really open and fair, it seems to me that blind submissions are not enough. Consultant specialists and members of the Advisory Committee should be willing to stand behind their written evaluations, particularly rejections, although positive evaluations should not be allowed to warrant anonymous reports either.

If the price that the cause of scholarship has to pay is the refusal of some referees to involve themselves in a review process that requires their identities to be disclosed, so be it. In the long run, neither the body of scholars nor the advancement of knowledge will suffer irreparable damage. On the contrary, full disclosure of the evalua-

tors' identities, coupled with blind submissions, can only have a salubrious effect on all aspects of the process and, more importantly, on all the individuals involved. The way things are routinely done now, we pander to the worst foibles of human character in the assumption that no other recourse is open to us. A more principled attitude would insist on creating the kind of professional ethos that places scholarly accountability as a cornerstone in the promotion of our goals as scholars.

MICHAEL SHAPIRO
New York, New York

Feminist Readings of Shakespeare

To the Editor:

This letter responds to the attack by feminist critics in the January 1989 issue of *PMLA* (77–78) on Richard Levin's piece on recent Shakespearean criticism ("Feminist Thematics and Shakespearean Tragedy," 103 [1988]: 125–38). As one who occasionally gives a course in Shakespeare and yearly teaches *Romeo and Juliet* in a survey course and who likes to keep up with critical debates, I found Levin's trenchant critique wonderfully informative as well as shrewdly deflating. This is precisely the type of analysis *PMLA* should host: large topics of current concern written in simple, jargon-free language.

Then I received the January issue, in which some of the critics skewered in his essay ganged up to attack him. So far so good, but when I finished their diatribe and ad hominem assaults, which Levin had not resorted to in his essay, I found myself reacting indignantly. Talk about crude Aristotelianism! They acknowledge their own "partiality" of method and concept and then accuse him of believing in an outmoded distinction between genres as if it were astrology or belief in witches. They even attack at length his remark about appealing to rational minds for evidence. What else does *PMLA* appeal to in its articles?

Finally, what I find insufferable is their thinly disguised religious fervor or totalitarianism, the idea that feminist assumptions cannot be subject to the usual methods of analysis and critique and that somehow *PMLA*, which serves a learned profession, should not allow critiques of fadist methods to be aired. I have been a member of the MLA for about twenty-five years and do not take kindly to this attack on what seemed to me a temperate—yes, rational and courageous—look at feminist readings of the tragedies. I only wish for more essays that examine the methods used by contemporary critics and that you and future editors will have the guts to print.

ARTHUR J. WEITZMAN
Northeastern University

To the Editor:

The Editorial Board ought to establish a policy of refusing to publish personal attacks in Forum. The penultimate sentence in the response to Richard Levin insults a distinguished scholar. Because one assumes that letters are scrutinized with some of the same care given to submissions, to print personal attacks on a scholar's career or character seems to lend them credence, however reasoned the victim's reply.

A policy should also insist that letters be free of misquotations and of obvious misreadings or distortions of the text in question. What is obvious, of course, is not always obvious. I thought the writers responding to Levin plainly wrong in asserting that he attacks all feminist criticism. But I am interested here less in that one response to Levin than in principles.

Treat letters like submissions. Have two members of the Editorial Board read each letter for its probity, fairness, and contribution to the issue. Inaccuracy and meanness are as reprehensible as sexist language. No more should they be tolerated.

DWIGHT H. PURDY
University of Minnesota, Morris

To the Editor:

The letter signed by twenty-four individuals reminded me of a course I used to give years ago—Argumentation and Debate—in which we discussed "The Seven Propaganda Devices." I could have used the letter to illustrate how these devices are employed—not very successfully—by the signatories.

1. *Hasty Generalization*. "We are puzzled and disturbed that Richard Levin has made a successful academic career by using the reductive techniques of this essay to bring the same predictable charges indiscriminately against all varieties of contemporary criticism" (paragraph 7).

2. *Glittering Generalities*. "He [Levin] fails to understand the serious concerns about inequality and injustice that have engendered feminist analyses of literature" (paragraph 2); "the energetic, cogent, sophisticated theoretical debate that is currently taking place within and among schools of Renaissance criticism" (paragraph 7)—a debate that Levin allegedly ignored; and "Levin does not recognize the profound challenges that feminist criticism poses to the crude Aristotelianism he has advocated since his introduction to his 1960 textbook, *Tragedy: Plays, Theory, and Criticism*" (paragraph 5).

3. *Name Calling*. Levin's essay is called "tired, muddled, unsophisticated" (paragraph 7).

4. *Testimonial*. Assuming that reference to the professors listed in paragraph 2 testifies to the worth of femi-