

known”—that is, through marriage the virtues of a patrilineal social order were established—as well as the poet’s comparison of Eve’s nuptials to those of ill-fated Pandora. Furthermore, Gallagher does not simply misread, he simply *does not read* Milton’s account of Adam’s fall (ix.896–916). Urging that Adam falls through “self-love,” Gallagher implies that Adam is inwardly addressing himself in the line “O fairest of Creation . . . how on a sudden lost?” But of course Adam is inwardly addressing Eve, whom (despite God’s and Michael’s strictures) he reveres as the loveliest of all God’s works. Finally, attempting to show that only Adam thought Eve (despite her beauty) somehow defective, Gallagher notes that Raphael “corrects” Adam in viii.561 but fails to note that in the same passage the angel says to “weigh her with thyself; / Then value: oft-times nothing profits more / Than self-esteem.” In other words, Raphael agrees that Eve is “in the prime end / Of Nature . . . th’inferior.”

Or so I would interpret Raphael’s speech, though Gallagher would not. Here we come to the crux of this debate, and to the point at which a reader-centered criticism appears particularly useful. What is ultimately most disturbing to me is, not the insouciance with which Gallagher offers masculinist quotations to prove that Milton was not masculinist, but this critic’s obviously genuine inability to imagine the feelings female readers might have about an epic in which a male God and a series of male angels continually warn a pattern male human being not to be deceived by the “outward” charms of a not very bright female. In addition, I am not only disturbed but surprised to find that I and another teacher of English have such different interpretations of so simple a word as “slave.” Gallagher asserts that I am wrong to say fallen “Eve is humbled by becoming a slave,” since “God declares only that ‘to thy Husband’s will / Thine shall submit.’” Yet my dictionary defines a slave as “one bound in servitude to a person or a household” or “one submissive to a person or influence,” so I would have thought—considering Eve’s fate—that this last quotation supports my point. Since Gallagher and I speak the same language, I must assume that because he is male and I am female we have different associations with words like “slave” and “submission” (especially when they apply to women), associations that color what we read as well as what we write. Lately feminist critics have tried to bring such associations to consciousness, and Gallagher’s comments show that we are right to do so. For not only female readers but male readers, too, can become entangled in the assumptions about gender that underlie so powerful and complex a work as *Para-*

*dise Lost*. Indeed, Milton’s bogey evidently casts as protean a shadow over Gallagher’s page as over mine or Woolf’s or Brontë’s.

SANDRA M. GILBERT

*University of California, Davis*

### Editorial Policy

To the Editor:

William D. Schaefer in his last Editor’s Column (*PMLA*, 93 [1978], 859–60) deplors the fact that more of us do not “write articles of such scope and breadth that they genuinely demand the attention of all thirty thousand readers.” I believe that the answer to this problem is well known and clearly expressed by the 1975 recipient of the MLA’s James Russell Lowell Prize. Jonathan Culler, in his preface to *Structuralist Poetics*, writes:

Citing no special knowledge which it deems to be crucial and from which it might derive its authority, interpretive criticism seems best defended as a pedagogic tool which offers examples of intelligence for the encouragement of others. *But one needs only a few such examples. . . .* Rather than a criticism which discovers or assigns meanings, [we need] *a poetics which strives to define the conditions of meaning.*

(p. viii; my emphasis)

In short, although simply illuminating a text *is* a vital endeavor, I do not see it as our main responsibility either as teachers or as researchers. Yet, of the four main areas necessary for literary studies, *PMLA* still overwhelmingly favors criticism. Poetics and discussions of the human sciences are rarely present.

Despite its basic importance, *erudition* has no place in a journal with *PMLA*’s diverse readership. Moreover, the annual *MLA Bibliography* and the Association’s related publications offer excellent service to the specialist scholar. (I am, parenthetically, ashamed, however, to notice the lack of response to the now defunct *MLA Abstracts*. Its demise is a sad reflection on our lack of interest in the tools of scholarship—a lack of interest that singles us out once more from the other social and human sciences as unsystematic and casual researchers unconcerned in collective efforts—really, as I see it, as unprofessional.)

Knowledge of the *human sciences* (however difficult to acquire for the student of literature within our present compartmentalized university system) is clearly indispensable too. What can we do to further literary studies if we know only what com-

mon sense tells us and not what the best minds have been slowly and painfully (often painfully slowly) finding out in psychology, sociology, linguistics, or semiotics?

*Poetics*, leaning on the human sciences, provides us with much needed tools of analysis. With it one can begin to analyze and understand the poetry of everyday life and see literature as part and parcel of that life, rather than as some hallowed and mysterious activity cut off from the normal course of social events and essentially irrelevant to it.

But *criticism*, as Culler points out, only repeats yet one more thematic analysis, one more explication de texte, one more. . . . Even criticism that takes into account what poetics has achieved cannot be of interest to the entire profession. (Despite Schaefer's affirmation to the contrary in his May 1978 column, the issue he published is not *essentially* about "Freud, Heidegger, Greimas, Todorov, Derrida, Frye, de Man, Hartman, Holland, Fish, Bloom, and the many other scholars and critics who helped inspire its contents"; it is intelligent criticism inspired by contemporary—and even outdated [Freud!]-thinkers.)

I do not suggest that *PMLA* should publish only, or even predominantly, articles about the above authors or, simply, articles concerned with literary theory—but I do wish that more purely theoretical essays would be accepted, instead of ending up in other publications.

What I do suggest is that, following Culler's approach, *PMLA* encourage articles on poetics—the most abstract kind but analyses that would examine and test theories through the careful study of literary texts. In this fashion, the text would play a truly secondary role, except for those few readers specializing in the author serving as an example. The constant reference to a specific text would ensure two things: readability and relevance. *Readability*: even if logical formalization à la Greimas is indispensable, *PMLA* readers are not accustomed to it and do not accept it in its pure form. But if theoreticians descend from their high level of generality, the *relevance* of their formalizations would begin to be recognized by the whole profession.

In fact, a third advantage would result from this approach: readers previously uninterested, say, in Maupassant might come to understand his works better because of Greimas' three-hundred-page (but not exhaustive) study of the eight-page "Deux amis." In short, what the profession truly shares is an interest in understanding literature and in teaching students and colleagues to enjoy it. Working together to evolve *the best tools* to achieve such ends is the "consummation devoutly to be wished." The

sesame for *PMLA*'s literate monads is not criticism but poetics.

MICHEL GRIMAUD  
Wellesley College

To the Editor:

William D. Schaefer's valedictory remarks on leaving the editorship of *PMLA* impel me to some comments. Perhaps not everyone will agree with them, but one is, after all, sorry to see a person who has served us so well depart with a gesture of failure. Perhaps it may also be perceived as a challenge that encourages response. Let me say at the outset that I think Schaefer in his parting mood underestimates his accomplishment. *PMLA* has changed perceptibly under his editorship in regard to the importance and the methodological implications of the subjects treated; indeed, his last issue seems to me one of the best. But it is true that the purpose of making the whole *PMLA* required reading for the entire membership has not been achieved.

Such a purpose is not an absolute necessity. There is no reason why *PMLA* may not be a repository of the best on the forward edge of our scholarship, with a reasonable eye toward significance and range. Schaefer acknowledges but does not sufficiently stress the desperate economy of time with which we all must wrestle, especially in regard to reading matter. The annual bibliography of the Germanic field listed 6,103 items for 1977. The one author with whom I have been most preoccupied in recent years, Heine, alone generates some two hundred books and articles annually. When we add to that our other reading needs in our fields and in our teaching preparations, in current theory, in unread literature past and contemporary, in history, politics, and current events, along with the desire from time to time to watch a baseball game or even exchange a word with our families, the problem of producing a journal that we all ought to read may seem insuperable.

Still, since it would be valuable for us to learn from one another, Schaefer's purpose is a noble one, and perhaps something went awry in its execution that, on inspection, might be reparable. It seems to me that Schaefer in his own comments on the problem, despite his appeals for "scope and breadth," has tended to stress matter rather than manner. He "would argue that *Beowulf* and *Madame Bovary*, Coleridge and Clemens, are all in the family and that it is important for us to pause, every now and then, to discover how the other half