

close to being the author's "intellectual property" in a way that claims of interpretation at a more abstract level do not. Here the author would have the last word, because—for one thing—there is a last word to be had.

This does not imply or presuppose that authors are to be accorded privileged access on every question of interpretation based on the evidence of syntax. Nor does it mean that, like hand labor that later comes to be done more efficiently by machine, the discussion between Staiger, Heidegger, and Spitzer turns out now to be factitious, straining subtly toward a reading that a single word from the author might have preempted and that, however ingenious, must always await that now impossible word for confirmation. Within its own limits, however, this implication challenges the recent taboos on criticism that uses the language of intention or reference. At least *sometimes*, it seems, those considerations are more pertinent to the reading and translation of a text than are their denials or contradictories.

Obviously, Mörike dead cannot settle anything that he did not settle alive. But this is a limitation in fact, not in principle. Admittedly, the argument that thus challenges the ideal of the death of the author is invoked for an author who is only dead in reality. But perhaps translation and even interpretation may yet learn to live with that.

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It is fascinating to find that, even after forty years, the debate about how Mörike "really meant" the final line of "Auf eine Lampe" to read may have resulted in a genuinely new discovery. By means of traditional philological method, Albrecht Holschuh (above all in his longer article, which I am grateful to have been allowed to read) demonstrates that Mörike rarely used "ihm" as a reflexive pronoun, which the earlier interpreters, however great their differences, took it to be.

Yet the conclusions that Holschuh draws strike me as less certain than his point about Mörike's characteristic verbal habits. The statistical evidence about how a word is used in a poet's writings does not guarantee how that word is to be construed on every possible occasion; at best this evidence can warn us to consider the relative plausibility of alternative readings. I have yet to be convinced that we can make better sense of the poem if we read the "ihm" as a nonreflexive pronoun. If, according to Holschuh, "ihm" as a Swabian reflexive is not permissible in prepositional phrases," one may also wonder how a native Swabian ear such as Heidegger's still heard the word as a reflexive.

But even if we grant that the "ihm" in "Auf eine Lampe" is not a reflexive, and even if we agree that the pronoun's antecedent is "wer," it does not follow that the poem propounds a social view of art antithetical to the "antisocial views" that Holschuh claims the interpreters find in it. The "wer," after all, is the subject of a rhetorical question that by its very nature implies a negative answer. If Mörike's observer is to feel the "blissfulness" of the lamp, it is likely to affect him or her at best in a casual, unpremeditated way. Thus, even when read with "wer" as antecedent, the poem stresses not so much the social effect of art as the power inherent in an artwork to impose itself on its perhaps unwitting observer. If I may cite a poem that has often been compared to Mörike's, we do not ordinarily praise Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" for its social consciousness simply because the poet calls his urn "a friend to man."

In introducing the three early participants in the dispute, I commented on the various ideological concerns motivating the approaches they took to Mörike's poem. Staiger used the poem to buttress the then reigning nationalist narrative of German literary history; Heidegger, to celebrate the union of German poetry and philosophy; Spitzer, to propound the cosmopolitan views of an exiled Jewish Romance scholar. Holschuh, by contrast, lumps them all together for professing "an elitist disdain for vulgar inattention." Can he be interpreting the poem's interpretations of forty years ago to voice a contemporary bias against the barriers separating so-called high and popular art? And, in aligning himself with what he calls "simple folk" against the "power of theory" that he locates in the poem's earlier interpreters, is Holschuh perhaps defending an older philological method against the encroachments of certain theoretical approaches within the academic marketplace today? Does Holschuh not provide us with still another example of the politics of critical language?

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Critical Approaches, Political Positions

To the Editor:

Richard Levin's "The Poetics and Politics of Bardicide" (105 [1990]: 491–504) is, to speak generously, disingenuous in the extreme. A similar collection of favored technical terms and phrases could be produced for any theoretical school whatsoever, including New Criticism, where our exhibits would include such terms

as *ambiguity*, *irony*, *organic unity*, and so on. This is such an oft-told tale by now that I find it hard to believe, much less understand, the apparent approbation of this demagoguery by the topic coordinator of the issue, who remarks that Levin's essay has forever cured him of the use of the word *projects* (405)! Although many aspects of Levin's rhetoric can be exposed as such, given the limitations of the format I will analyze only one particularly egregious bit of his sophistry.

Levin caricatures practitioners of "new historicism" and "cultural materialism" as cultural commissars prescribing what would be a "more acceptable" way for Shakespeare to have written his texts. Levin complains of readings that insist that the text provides an imaginary resolution while it in fact leaves the text-generating conflicts in place:

These critics never explain what would make an acceptable ending, but from their arguments we can infer that it would require a complete transformation of the play's social structure (for the Marxists) or of the psyches of its male characters (for the neo-Freudians) that eliminated all class or gender conflict. In the peculiar logic of this new discourse [I am surprised that the term *discourse* has not been anathematized like *project*—DB], only such an ending, apparently, would *not* be an imaginary and utopian wish fulfillment. (496)

It must surely be obvious to any reader of this criticism that the critics in question do not indicate that the endings of the plays are "unacceptable" or suggest in any way that Shakespeare could have or should have written the endings differently; these critics only state that the problems of society and culture that the plays manifest remained unsolvable within the context of the Renaissance social formation. The resolution, then, that the ending claims to provide is *false*, and it only makes the intractability of the social conflicts and contradictions all the more palpable.

Further, and along the same lines, Levin produces another in his list of cartoonlike "Bad Moves" that new historicists and others write about:

The text offers pleasure. The contention that this is another deceptive strategy that we must reject may puzzle the uninitiated reader, who could be pardoned for thinking, along with virtually all commentators on the subject from the Greeks down to the present, that pleasure is one of the things we go to literature for. (496)

To expose the fallacy of this remark, all we need to do is to replace the words "text" and "reader" with "cocaine" and "user" or with "pimp" and "john." That users go to cocaine pushers for the pleasure of doing

a line or johns to a pimp for the pleasure of having a prostitute does not mean that social critics ought not to condemn the strategies of panderers as deceptive ones that we must reject. Now I do not propose, of course, that the pleasures of literature are as pernicious as the pleasures of cocaine, but I believe that the analogy exposes the underlying postulate of Levin and others of his ilk—namely, that literary criticism (as opposed to all other academic disciplines) is exactly the same practice as literary consumption, except that criticism is done more skillfully. According to them, literary study in the university is comparable in function to the swimming pool rather than to the department of sports medicine, to the dining room rather than to the department of nutrition. Such departments are necessary, of course, because not all is healthy with our practice of sports or of eating. If critique of the pleasures of Shakespeare is not appropriate, it follows that all *is* right with the practice of that pleasure. In short, Levin and his ilk are just as political as the politicized critics that they attack. Levin simply wishes to affirm the values asserted on the surface of texts like *The Tempest* and *The Taming of the Shrew*; other critics disavow those values. But what shall we do, after all, with *The Merchant of Venice*—simply take our pleasures there as well?

New historicists, cultural materialists, and feminists have at least one great virtue that Levin seems to consider unnecessary, the virtue of candor. They make clear what interests they choose to serve in producing their critical studies of literature. "Critics" like Levin, on the contrary, pretend that they are serving no interests but only protecting literature from the Sam the Eagletons of the ivory tower who want to take away the readers' fun. In fact—and though this should be by now commonplace, the publication of such an inept tirade shows that it isn't—they serve only the continued dominance of a particular gender, class, and culture. The appeal to common sense and common language and the caricaturing of the "jargon" of other critics should be exposed for what they are: a cynical attempt to enlist "the uninitiated" as unwitting (and perhaps unwilling) allies in the reactionary protection of the privilege of that very gender, class, and culture.

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Reply:

Daniel Boyarin attributes arguments to me that are not mine. Although I have some fun with the locutions of the critics I discuss, I never accuse them of using "jar-