pulses seem more palatable when they are allied metaphorically with the amoral, destructive forces of nature.

I have no doubt created a sufficiently Johnsonian picture of myself by now, opposing inevitable developments in literary criticism by kicking up old rocks; so, in closing, may I reiterate my fascination with this analytical approach to fiction and my thanks to Homans for writing one of the most stimulating essays I've read recently.

Syndy M. Conger
Western Illinois University

Ms. Homans replies:

Were the portrayal of character the novel's only concern, Syndy Conger's arguments would very likely be correct. There is no discrepancy between her final point and my essay's account of Brontë's use of figures drawn from nature. Brontë finds in nature a language for human passions that would exceed less metaphorical terms, and in using these metaphors she limits her characters. What suggests the model of sublimation, to which Conger takes exception, is that nature does not always act as this comforting ground. A few passages, such as the story about the lapwings' nest, reveal glimpses of an entirely different function for nature and suggest a less neutral origin for these figures. The entire letter, but particularly its second and third points, raises a question about critical assumptions. Why must a novelist have a "primary interest" that belittles all other interests? The point about the novel's lack of "sophisticated forms of human society" is fascinating, but there is no reason why this reading should be exclusive. My essay did not claim a thematic priority for the absence of literal nature in the novel, nor did it suggest that nature was Brontë's primary interest, and I see no competition between Conger's reading and mine. I could argue that my point about the function of nature contributes to our understanding of the larger topic of "people," or that we may learn more about a primary interest by shifting it to the periphery of critical vision. But interpretation need not impose extraneous hierarchies. Equally unnecessary is Conger's boundary between people and nature. My essay concerns not nature but what nature represents, and literal meaning and death have as much to do with humanity as does any overt discussion of character. It is an understandable defense against the disturbing diffuseness of *Wuthering Heights* to try to contain it in one interpretive scheme, but by widening the scope of criticism we may increase our perception of the novel's richness.

Margaret Homans
Yale University

Second Shepherds' Play

To the Editor:

I write in response to the recent article by Maynard Mack, Jr., "The *Second Shepherds' Play*: A Reconsideration" (*PMLA*, 93 [1978], 78–85). Since I am currently directing a production of the *Second Shepherds' Play* for the Medieval Drama Company of Michigan State University, I would like to pursue his interpretation to examine and clarify what seem ambiguities to me. While proposing much that is valuable to my work, Mack's essay seems to gather and mix literary, theological, dramatic, and theatrical perspectives on the structure and meaning of the play. The *Second Shepherds' Play* offers much to discuss in each of these areas, but while these areas complement one another, they must remain distinct. The problems of the dramatist have always been as distinct from those of the literary critic as the work of the actor has been distinct from them both. I feel that the major thrust of Mack's article is literary and that the presentation of his thesis in the guise of theatrical and dramatic insight unnecessarily confuses, even distorts, his meaning.

The essential argument of Mack's article seems to be that Mak, as the play's "energizer," is the principal instrument by which the Wakefield Master prepares not only the shepherds but also the audience for the entry of Christ into their lives. As such, Mak is the most dramatic character in the play; his antics disrupt a static and despairing world and thus prepare it to witness and accept mysteries and events far stranger and more miraculous than any even Mak could expect. Mack presents this interpretation in a threefold manner, characterizing the play's opening as a "largely choric and undramatic" formal complaint, the business of Mak's theft of the sheep as the transition from the "lyric to the dramatic" (p. 80), and the choric adoration of the shepherds at the Nativity as a return to an essentially undramatic, but now sublime, state of being, "the only appropriate response to a message of such incomparable good news" (p. 84).

The strength of this interpretation is in its fundamentally literary tracing of theme through the movement of the play—the shepherds (and the audience, presumably) move from despair to hope via a parody of the Nativity. And in his assertion that the shepherds end the play, having been "involved . . . in the full story of [Christ's] life" (p. 84), Mack has provided a stunning insight into the quality of their experience, an insight with which I agree but which I doubt that Mack fully understands. The problem with his interpretation is that, for the sake of thematic values, the play's theatrical and dramatic values have been misrepresented. Mack's definition of drama is the key to the problem. In defining a "fully dramatic situation" as "different persons with different voices . . . speaking from different levels of awareness" (p. 79) he is describing not drama but abstract states of being. The bone and gristle of drama and theater are conflict and action—the dramatist and the actor both work to reveal character and theme on stage through successive scenes that compel specifically concrete and physical expression. It would be ludicrous to tell my actors that the shepherds must enter onto the stage and remain "static," "passive," and "undramatic" till they run through their lines to Mak's entrance; that they must, after Mak's exit, revert back to their former selves, as if "nothing . . . has changed much" (p. 82) and wait in that state until something else external happens to alter their condition; that while Mak is at work they are to experience the rumpling of their lives by the one person around capable of decisive action; and finally, that even Mak lacks "clear motivation or practical direction" (p. 81).

Such a view of the play suggests that only part of it is dramatic and that Mak is its principal character. But this is not so! The *Second Shepherds' Play* is the *shepherds'* play. They are the only characters who can and do generate and sustain the drama from opening line to closing curtain. They leave the wings and enter the set to escape the tribulations of the world and to find comfort and solace in the company of "Trew men" (l. 52)—thus the movement from complaint to song. This action, based on the mistaken belief that they can make a sanctuary for themselves, precipitates their easy deception at the hands of Mak, an essentially weak character whose danger lies not in his generation of power but in his perversion of it. The sustaining power of the drama lies in the goodwill of the shepherds' search for innocence and joy, which finds perfect fulfillment in the incarnation of Christ.

We have here a play of the testing, the tempering, the chastening of the shepherds, an ordeal that prepares them in the wilderness, in an apocalyptical time, for the coming of God into the world. They are the apprentice shepherds to the Good Shepherd, and within their limits they "prevent" the coming of Christ by themselves becoming Christlike. This then gives the power and the beauty to those last scenes of the play, for the shepherds, by being suffering servants themselves, have gained privileged insight into the nature and quality of Christ's mission. Next to the drama of their trial and redemption Mak's infatuation with power and forbidden knowledge is silly indeed. This is the sense that I believe Mack may have hoped for in suggesting that the shepherds have been "involved . . . in the full story of [Christ's] life."

William G. Marx
Michigan State University

Mr. Mack replies:

In his interesting literary and thematic interpretation of the shepherds' "search for innocence and joy" as the dramatic essence of the play, William Marx seems to me to be mixing effectively the critical perspectives he asserts must remain distinct. To an extent I agree with his interpretation, and I tried to examine both the dramatic development and the symbolic importance of the shepherds. Nevertheless, Mak is dramatically central to most of the action, whatever weaknesses we may see in his character; I suspect Marx's production will reveal this—as well as possibilities unglimpsed by either of us.

Maynard Mack, Jr.
University of Maryland

Neruda's Imagery and Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle

To the Editor:

John Felstiner's reading of Neruda's "Galope muerto" is sensitive and illuminating ("Translating Pablo Neruda's 'Galope muerto,'" *PMLA*, 93 [1978], 185–95). But when he reaches outside the thrust of his discussion to suggest a relationship between Neruda's imagery and the indeterminacy principle of Heisenberg, he falters.

In a response to Neruda's use of the simile and the participle (p. 190), Felstiner notes the obvious function of nouns to "identify things in space" and verbs to "release them in time." He connects this relationship to Heisenberg's principle: the position of an electron and its momentum cannot be mea-