knowing why. 'If I can just get past and out of hearing before she hollers again,' he thought. 'If I can just get past before I *have to hear* her again.' . . . he ran in the final hiatus of peace before the blow fell and the clawed thing overtook him from behind. Then he heard the child cry. Then he knew" (379, emphasis mine).

In the passage from *The Sound and the Fury* that Zender quotes (94), it is the failure of sight that causes the sounds and smells Quentin experiences to begin to embody powerfully the subjective sense of blurring and indeterminacy that characterizes the final portion of his monologue. "Grey halflight" and "twilight" reflect a disintegration of visual control that is the counterpart for Quentin's loss of subjective integrity, his sense of engulfment by sensations alien to him.

This perspective on sound's relationship to the other senses Faulkner uses with similar care enhances many of Zender's observations because it suggests the larger coherence of Faulkner's choices. The interplay of the clarity and precision promised by vision, on the one hand, and the intensity and irrefutability of sound and smell, on the other—and for that matter, of their respective presences and absences in particular scenes—conveys a sense of the larger patterns of perception that inform much of Faulkner's work.

Gail L. Mortimer
Stanford Humanities Center
Stanford University

Reply:

Gail L. Mortimer's comments, though interesting, are not very germane to my essay. As I make clear in my introduction, the purpose of my essay is to explore changes in Faulkner's understanding of himself as an artist. I chose sound as the vehicle for this exploration both because of the historical importance of its association with artistic inspiration and because of its centrality to Faulkner's depictions of the relation between the self and the world. Extending my argument to include sight and smell would not materially alter my conclusions—a point Mortimer implicitly concedes by her failure to disagree with the main lines of my argument.

I wish also to speak to the substance of Mortimer's comments. Her letter repeats an argument she develops at greater length in *Faulkner's Rhetoric of Loss* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1983). Though the argument broaches a valuable area of inquiry, in neither of its forms is it fully convincing. It has two main limitations. The first is that Mortimer's "typical" pattern of a collapse of sight into sound and smell by no means dominates Faulkner's fiction. Often, in fact, an exactly opposite movement occurs. One thinks, for example, of the Reverend Shegog's sermon in *The Sound and the Fury*, which begins with the congregation listening to Shegog maneuver "upon the cold inflectionless wire of his voice," then moves to "hearts . . . speaking to one another in chanting measures beyond the need for words," and finally culminates in the congregation's repeated "I sees, O Jesus! Oh I sees!" and in Dilsey's "I've seed de first en de last." And as a second example, one may cite the repeated pattern in *Absalom, Absalom!*, amounting to a central motif of the work, wherein the various narrators' voices are described as vanishing into acts of vision on the part of their auditors. Faulkner's depictions of relations among sight, sound, and smell are far too various to be confined within the single pattern that Mortimer examines.

The second limitation is related to the first. Mortimer's nearly exclusive emphasis on the psychological dimension of Faulkner's representations of the senses produces a narrow and somewhat negative view of the role of sight in his fiction. The acts of seeing in which Dilsey and the characters in *Absalom, Absalom!* engage are not visual but visionary, and their success or failure depends as much on cultural conditions as on psychological ones. To "see" as Dilsey does is to reside within a set of philosophical and religious assurances that make such transcendental forms of seeing possible. The withdrawal of these assurances is a central theme—perhaps *the* central theme—of Faulkner's fiction, and his attitude toward their disappearance is never unequivocal. Hence efforts to see, far from merely exhibiting a character's "need to understand or feel in control of a situation," often reveal a transcendental yearning that Faulkner endows with positive value; and failures of vision as frequently provide evidence of the tragic stature of Faulkner's characters as of their psychopathology.

Karl F. Zender
University of California, Davis

Gawain's Wound

To the Editor:

One doesn't have to be apologetic for raising the issue of Gawain's wound; we raise it because we have not yet discovered or uncovered all the sources, analogues, and implications of both the wound symbol and the *Gawain* romance.

I agree with Paul F. Reichardt ("Gawain and the Image of the Wound," 99 [1984]: 154–61) that "the image of the wound . . . occupies a prominent place in the poem" (154), that "the sacred wounds of Christ offer a striking contrast to Gawain's wound of 'vnleuté'" (154), that "Gawain's *cervix* is the appropriate location of the Green Knight's blow, for it is the traditional anatomical locus of the problem of stiff-necked pride" (157) not only for Gawain but also for "the Arthurian

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body politic" (158). Of course, since pride is the cause of Adam's prevarication and Gawain's fall from grace, we are entitled to appeal to Scripture and medieval scriptural commentaries for help in explicating the text. However, there is a danger in this quest: one can get lost in the green jungle of medieval Christian commentaries. Reichardt, like many a modern medievalist, seems to be so lost in the forest of Christian symbols that he is even willing to alter the secular motto *Hony soyt qui mal pence* into the religious invocation of the *Anima Christi*: *Intra tua vulnera absconde me* (159). In his excessive zeal Reichardt thinks that the pentangle and the sacred wounds of Christ are opposites and that one is the proud sign of self-sufficiency (159). That is overstretching the symbol. The pentangle, the sign of perfection, is not an emblem of *homo sibi* (not *se*) *relictus* (159) unless one wants to read the Protestant doctrine of *sola fide* into this fourteenth-century Catholic poem by expurgating "And alle his afyaunce vpon folde watz in þe fyve woundez / þat Cryst kazt on þe croys, as þe crede tellez" (642–43) and by ignoring Gawain's devotion and prayers to Virgin Mary (645–48, 736–39, 754–60).

That is not necessary. In my view there is not enough classical scholarship in this essay to keep the author from playing Christian brinkmanship with the poem. Reichardt, like the rest of the "hepe of lerned men," has sought Augustinian obscurities in the poem and overlooked the obvious classicism of the poet. No doubt, there is much Christianity in *Gawain*, but there is also much classicism in spite of its much-trumpeted Celticism. How many readers of the poem have spotted in Gawain's wound the poet's clear allusion to Odysseus' scar? The poet's reference to the *Odyssey* runs from the beginning of the poem to its end. The poem starts with the destruction of Troy and the wanderings of the heroes (1–7) and ends with another reference to the siege of Troy (2325). Within the framework of the destruction of Troy and the wanderings of Odysseus and Aeneas, many details in *Gawain* parallel with the details of the *Odyssey*, especially Gawain's wound, his tests, and the lady's girdle. Just as Odysseus is wounded by a boar (there is also a boarhunt in *Gawain*), lets the scar be uncovered, and is recognized by it in Ithaca, so Gawain is wounded, shows off his scar, and is recognized by it. Just as Odysseus is tested three times by Penelope, so Gawain is tempted three times by the lady of the castle. Further, as Odysseus accepts Ino's girdle, wears it, and returns it to her as soon as he is saved from death, Gawain wears the lady's green girdle to save himself from certain death and gives it back to its owner.

Of course, Reichardt is right in suggesting that Gawain's flaw lies in his head—pride is the capital sin behind the capital sin of lust; but Gawain's fault could also be lack of wisdom and prudence—Odysseus' thigh bears the mark of his vulnerability because he was a ladies' man; for the ancients, wisdom was hidden as much in a man's loins as in his head, as Zeus's creation of Athena and his amorous adventures show.

Finally, the reason for my bringing the Odyssean allusions to critical notice is that it is time we toned down the Christian pitch of many medieval poems and turned up the equally important secular tone of many of these poems. A balanced critical stance is a sine qua non for appreciating the *Gawain* poem as a "romance" (as understood in the medieval meaning of the term).

Zacharias P. Thundy
Northern Michigan University

Reply:

Before addressing Zacharias P. Thundy's concept of the "classicism" of *Gawain*, let me say a few words on other issues raised in his letter. First, I fear Thundy has misread the apology in the initial paragraph of my article if he thinks I was reluctant to discuss the significance of Gawain's wound. My intent was to ask the reader's indulgence for inevitably arriving at the topic of Gawain's "fault." Few subjects in *Gawain* criticism can turn sensible interpretations of the poem into hairsplitting polemics the way this one can, and so I simply hoped to put this aspect of the article in proper perspective. More troubling to me, however, is Thundy's use of phrases like "green jungle of medieval Christian commentaries," "excessive zeal," and "Augustinian obscurities." While I suspect such comments are more fits of pique aimed at strains of modern criticism than specific attacks on my article, they still seem a bit out of place. After all, the fact that my argument draws on a range of authors from Plato and Aristotle to Aquinas and Dante certainly should indicate that I was hardly hunting for "obscurities." These names represent the very mainstream of Western intellectual history. Further, I would hope by now students of *Gawain* are able to accept the premise that the "lerned" quality of the text (like any medieval text) derives quite naturally from the fact that serious scholarly digging is needed to uncover significances buried by the passing of several hundred years of cultural history. The medieval import of Christ's sacred wounds, for example, is not common knowledge today, and it must be studied in its historical context if the poem's statement on the relation of these wounds to the hero's virtue is to be understood. Such study is undertaken at the risk of discovering irritating little "obscurities" that must be accounted for in one's interpretation of the whole text. This is what seems to have taken place in the case of Thundy's objection to my reading of the pentangle image. The evidence of Dante's *Convivio* and the attribution of the sign to Solomon in *Gawain* represent challenges to the view that the pentangle is the true image of perfection. Dante

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