

(Hankins, p. 247). Nevertheless, I gladly concede that it is above all the *union* of form and matter that the *union* of Venus and Adonis sets in motion, or parallels, and that the union is more important than the difference between them.

My article does not deal with connections between Venus and Diana, but that should not indicate that I regard them as nonexistent. Both Britomart and Belphoebe bear evidence of a combination of their attributes. As for Brown's possible implication that I line myself up for Christian influence against Platonic influence in Book III, I agree emphatically with Hankins that both are present, though not necessarily in the proportions that he suggests. Spenser was very much a product of Christian humanism, and as such his work is full of the signatures of holy Socrates.

HUMPHREY TONKIN  
University of Pennsylvania

### *Native Son*

Mr. Siegel replies:

In his comment (*PMLA*, 90, 1975, 122–23) on my article “The Conclusion of Richard Wright’s *Native Son*” (*PMLA*, 89, 1974, 517–23), David S. Lank does not take issue with my two main points: (1) Max, despite the generally accepted opinion (Irving Howe, Alfred Kazin, et al.) that he is a Communist spokesman who makes a “party-line oration” in his courtroom speech that is poorly related to the rest of the novel, is not a Communist, and his speech grows out of what has preceded it; (2) the views that in the final scene Bigger gives himself up to fear (Howe) or, in giving himself up to hate, suffers a defeat (Robert Bone) are wrong: Bigger finds a meaning in his life by accepting his feeling of hate. Instead, Lank takes up a peripheral point: Max’s understanding of Bigger. But what I said about critics reading into the novel their own preconceptions is also true here.

Lank finds it to be a “major weakness” of my presentation that I “ignore Max’s willingness to accept Bigger as an intellectual entity, ‘Negro,’ rather than as a human being facing death” (p. 122). Max’s “‘understanding’ of Bigger,” he says, “is limited by the lofty sociohistorical perspective that he urges the judge to accept” (p. 122). Lank’s preconception is that perceiving a person from a sociohistorical perspective must limit one’s understanding of him as an individual. But it is precisely because Max is able to enter into Bigger’s feelings that he can see him as representative of black millions, with all that this implies for American society, and it is precisely because Max understands the historical forces that have shaped Bigger that he can better understand him and feel with him.

Why did not Bigger understand Max’s speech, Lank

asks me, and he answers his own question: “Bigger does not understand Max’s speech because he does not recognize himself as a rhetorical device to be wielded as a club against racial prejudice” (p. 122). To safeguard oneself against reading one’s own preconceptions into a novel, it is always well to check the text. Bigger “recalled the speech Max had made in court,” says Wright, “and remembered with gratitude the kind, impassioned tone. But the meaning of the words escaped him. He believed that Max knew how he felt” (*Native Son*, New York: Harper, 1940, p. 350). Bigger did not follow Max’s speech because he lacked the vocabulary and the historical knowledge to do so. But, as Wright said earlier, “he had felt the meaning of some of it from the tone of Max’s voice” (p. 339), and this was enough for him to believe Max knew how he felt.

“Whether or not Max is a Communist ‘spokesman,’” says Lank, “is irrelevant to the impersonality he embodies” (p. 122). Max impersonal? It is hard to see how Wright could have depicted Max more clearly as a deeply compassionate man, most sensitively responsive to Bigger. Bigger’s first impression of Max is of his kindness: “The voice was quiet, firm, but kind.” (*Native Son*, p. 247). When Max questions him in his cell, Bigger, who had regarded all whites as hateful, is so moved by his kindness that it is Bigger who feels sorry for Max: “Bigger watched Max’s . . . deep-gray, soft, sad eyes. He felt that Max was kind, and he felt sorry for him” (p. 304). For Max’s questioning of him reveals a sympathy for him as a human being unique in Bigger’s experience: “In Max’s asking of those questions he had felt a recognition of his life, of his feelings, of his person that he had never encountered before” (p. 305).

Max promises, “I’ll tell the judge all I can of how you feel and why” (p. 304). And so he does—to those who will listen. His speech, uttered, we may remember, in a “kind, impassioned tone,” is not, as Lank would have it, a “rather impersonal American social history lesson” (p. 122). To be sure, he tries to explain to the judge how Bigger came to feel the way he does and what this means for America, but he is most certainly concerned to show how Bigger feels: “The central fact to be understood here is not who wronged this boy, but what kind of vision of the world did he have before his eyes” (*Native Son*, p. 333). He begs that Bigger’s life be spared not only that a beginning might be made toward ending the chain reaction of fear-hate-guilt which must cause America’s destruction but that Bigger in prison may “build a meaning for his life” (p. 338).

The other question that Lank would have me answer is why Max in the last scene “does not wish to talk to Bigger about the significance of his life” (p. 122). Lank’s own answer is that Max is “sadly

lacking when confronted with the ‘inexpressibly human’” (p. 123). “For Max, Bigger is . . . a social and not a personal or human problem” (p. 122). But Max, as Bigger realizes, is “trying to comfort him in the face of death,” a comfort without an exploration of the meaning of Bigger’s life that Bigger rejects, just because Bigger is for him a “human problem”: “‘You’re human, Bigger,’ Max said wearily. ‘It’s hell to talk about things like this to one about to die’” (*Native Son*, p. 354).

The meaning of Bigger’s life that Max finds is that, as he expressed it in his courtroom speech, as a result of Bigger’s being “excluded from, and unassimilated in our society, yet longing to gratify impulses akin to our own,” “every thought he thinks is potential murder. . . . Every sunrise and sunset make him guilty of subversive actions. . . . *His very existence is a crime against the state!*” (pp. 335–36; Wright’s italics). When Bigger accepts his overwhelming impulse to kill as good, shouting, “I didn’t want to kill! But what I killed for, I am! . . . What I killed for must’ve been good!” (p. 358), Max is crushed. The revolution against which he warned in a plea to which neither the judge nor the governor paid heed seems to him more than ever inescapable. His eyes are wet as he shakes hands with Bigger, but as he gropes for the door he averts his face from him. It is not “the human reality of Bigger Thomas” that he cannot face but his social significance.

PAUL N. SIEGEL  
*Long Island University*

### The Grisóstomo-Marcela Episode of *Don Quixote*

*Mr. Iventosch replies:*

If by vehemence and insulting tone one could gain a point in an argument such as the present one between Avalle-Arce and myself (*PMLA*, 89, 1974, 1115–16), Avalle would have cleared the lists by now. But since these literary and historical matters can be subjected to a reasonable and objective analysis, Avalle’s criticisms and corrections will not quite do. He is right—I say it with regret—that I intended to “obliterate” his 1961 observations on the Grisóstomo-Marcela episode of the *Don Quixote* (or at least to criticize severely what seemed to me their high irresponsibility), but this was only a small part of my study. When I first read his Forum piece, it seemed to me too idle and too easily refutable to merit a reply. This is perhaps still so. Nevertheless, purely for the record, as they say, there are a series of his points that may with some benefit be corrected. I will follow his own statements in their same order, leaving out a few which seem to me too trivial for serious discussion, such as his exhortations

to consult this or that bibliographical item which I may already have seen and not deemed fit to use.

Concerning Grisóstomo and the “tragedy” or “parody” of his death: Can anyone really discover any tragedy in the pathetic autodestruction of this hapless lover? I believe it is a more generally held view that the realistic prose style developed by Cervantes lends itself little to tragedy. And as for Avalle’s point that Calisto of *La Celestina* is the “real” parody of the courtly lover, does he mean to say that he is the only one?

Concerning the anathema of the Council of Trent against suicide and the question of Christian versus courtly despair: Is Avalle really serious in claiming that in those days of unequaled and widespread secularization of life many people in Spain or anywhere else were constrained from suicide or other life actions by dicta from Trent or other theological codes? And as for despair, does he really think that when people despair over love or other things they are despairing over hope of the future life as expressed in the theological virtue of hope? Avalle upbraids me for “pseudotheological” reasoning, but my point was that there is no theology whatever in these amorous despairings. If Avalle would want to demonstrate a connection between the famous virtue out of the theological triad and lovers’ immemorial despair, I imagine he would encounter difficulty.

Concerning literature and philosophical systems: This had to do with my dismissal of Avalle’s idea that Grisóstomo’s suicide may have been inspired by the Stoic philosophy. I’m aware that this debate over literature and philosophy goes back at least to the days of the ancient Greeks, and there are some philosophical poets on the Mediterranean in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, although few. I feel—to elaborate a little on what I said in my article—that literature tends to lean on philosophy when its own independence and inspiration are weak, as today, with its Freudian, Sartrean, and no end of other philosophically inspired creations.

Concerning the poet Gutierre de Cetina and his own “canción desesperada” which, as I suggested, with virtual certainty inspired Cervantes’ own. I gave convincing evidence in note 8, pointing out that many poets in the sixteenth century, following Petrarch, left their “canción” in the final stanza unadorned, without adjectives, and that Cetina and Cervantes were quite striking in their use of the adjective “desesperada.” Avalle, however, says I am wrong, since Cetina “died an obscure death in Mexico, when Cervantes was probably about ten years old, and his poetry was not published until three hundred years after his murder” (p. 1116). But Cetina was one of the best known of the followers of Garcilaso, mentioned with praise by Juan