

ideology. Never mind those verbs; never mind the insistences of so many new historicists about the ideological complexity of any cultural moment, the coexistence and interrelation within it of residual, dominant, and emergent ideological formations. We can still “accomplish . . . this task” and thereupon “rightly identify the surface of a Renaissance work.” But how, exactly? One requirement is to avoid “a naive impression of the historical background” (“impression”? “background”?), and the sophisticated impression seems to include getting the *Courtier* and *De Officiis* right. But have people like Javitch and Whigham simply “wrongly identified” Castiglione? As for Cicero, although it’s hardly new to cite his major influence on Renaissance culture, the question remains whether his authority was received passively. What, for instance, about “cogging” Cockledemoy’s running commentary on “Tully’s Offices” in Marston’s *Dutch Courtesan*? Never mind. Just make sure not to see the Renaissance from an “anachronistic” or “modern left-liberal” perspective, and from this objective distance, we can—strange paradox!—“find” what we seek “very close to home, in the European idea of a gentleman, so much admired by Conrad, Hemingway, and Faulkner.”

But the main thing, apparently, in rightly identifying Renaissance texts is to understand the Renaissance the way Marx did. That the *Manifesto* is roughly contemporary with Pre-Raphaelitism and is (in part) suffused with a similar nostalgia for pre-Renaissance culture—these things don’t seem to matter. Somehow Marx’s work is exempt from the historicization that has made us so skeptical about Burckhardt’s version—similarly embedded in nineteenth-century belief, though in a different area—of the Renaissance as a triumphal advance in the ever-progressing history of humankind. Why is Marx’s version recognized not as a version but as the thing itself?

Schneider’s corrective to the new historicists (and I’d say this about any project that flirts with a rehabilitation of Tillyard) seems to me a Great Leap Backwards. This is not to withdraw the skeptical questions I raised about the new historicists, but it is to reaffirm my conviction of the value and interest of their work. They have contributed materially to the general recognition that historicism is central to what we do. “Always historicize,” says Fredric Jameson—as if we had a choice. Even the most enthusiastic affectivist (and Schneider is right to say that I was trying to pay attention to affective components) and the most hermetically enclosed formalist are doing history, in the sense that their approaches derive from, and are directed toward, particular social and cultural situations, past and present. (Perhaps they don’t know they’re doing history, so it might be better to say that history is doing them, but this doesn’t change my argument.)

“Always historicize” is what Jerome J. McGann says too in his claim for “the hegemony of historical method to literary studies in general. [Literature] cannot be carried on (created), understood (studied), or appreciated (experienced) outside of its definitive human context. The

general science governing that human context is socio-historical” (63). But the authors of *The Political Unconscious* and *The Beauty of Inflections*, proceeding from this apparently identical point of origin, work in very different ways, and it’s hard (for me, anyway) to be identically appreciative of their work. I believe these differences matter a great deal, and this is why I tried in my essay—as I’m again trying here—to get beyond the question whether or not to historicize, a question that I think we have already answered or that has already been answered for us by our historical situation, to the much more interesting and difficult question *how* we ought to do it.

EDWARD PECHTER  
Concordia University

### Hitchcock’s *Blackmail*

To the Editor:

I’d have thought feminists had enough problems without inflicting imaginary enemies on themselves. The travesty of my entirely clear arguments in Tania Modleski’s “Rape versus Mans/laughter: Hitchcock’s *Blackmail* and Feminist Interpretation” (102 [1987]: 304–15) does feminism, and *PMLA* readers, no service.

1. My arguments in *The Strange Case of Alfred Hitchcock* (87–91), far from condemning Alice for stabbing the “modern morality” artist who assaults her, vindicate her violent response in principle and establish that she leaves the film without a stain on her character.

2. Far from nobody having implied the opposite, my argument defends Alice against *both* the French Catholic line of *Cahiers du cinéma* and certain Anglo-American Freudianisms and liberalisms, which axiomatically loaded guilt onto Hitchcock’s “good guys,” thus “blaming the victim” here.

3. Far from my subjecting Alice to a mock trial, she tries herself (guilt). Had I foreseen preoccupations with guilt to the exclusion of more obvious emotions, I’d have distinguished between guilt, shame, and simple fear (of interrogation, trial, and a miscarriage of justice, not to mention fear of Frank’s reaction and parental and neighborly responses to her visiting a strange man’s room alone in 1930). Incidentally, the film emphasizes maternal and female-neighbor judgments, entirely correctly given common English family relationships, then *and* now.

4. The notion of “patriarchy” underpinning Modleski’s article mashes together indiscriminately postpermissiveness attitudes—mainly American and academic, that is, sexually casual—with English lower-class attitudes forty years before. A “mainstream” English puritanism regarded rape with loathing, and with the victim herself in view. While the rationale was not modern feminism’s, it was psychological, not sexually fetishistic.

5. Far from my comments eradicating the very notion of rape, they do the opposite; they stress that Hitchcock, Frank, and morally normative 1930s spectators would all agree that the artist “asked for it” by pushing things as he did. That doesn’t rule out the “concessive clauses” and countertensions generated by questions like whether death by stabbing is poetic justice for attempted rape. But even if it was overly severe a punishment here, that wouldn’t make Alice any guiltier. Entertainment abounds in consequences both unintended and undeserved, and fifty-fifty just-yet-unjust is an entirely common balance.

6. Modleski glumly assumes that something called “patriarchy” would convict Alice of murder and “sexuality.” Widespread “patriarchal” theories placidly accept female sexuality, and by 1930 it was a hot topic (see D. H. Lawrence, Louise Brooks, and Garbo and what Elinor Glyn said about “It”). Far from the idea of a lady detective striking the spectator as absurd, the idea is attractive (compare lady-detective-story writers like Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers).

7. This isn’t the place to analyze certain feminist notions of (a) spectators and (b) males. But far from any Alice-centered moral readings criticizing this film’s structure, they obviously *are* its dominant structure. No other character even challenges Alice’s perspective, for male spectators as for female. Few if any males would want to identify with the artist, or the assorted comic policemen, or Frank’s callow streaks.

Most 1930s English male spectators were *not* patriarchal, *not* macho, *not* (vide Modleski’s opening) splatter-loving teenagers but “family men” amidst a family audience. Women predominated in that audience, and to that extent the audience that judged Alice was neither patriarchal nor “subversive” but “split the difference”; given the prevalence of Alice’s experience, a useful term is “matrist” (see Gordon Rattray Taylor, *The Angel-Makers: A Study in the Psychological Origins of Historical Change 1730–1850*, London: Heinemann, 1950).

RAYMOND DURGNAT  
*Royal College of Art*

*Reply:*

I will not respond to the entirety of Raymond Durnat’s letter because its rather bewildering speculations about the mental attitudes of British audiences fifty years ago are largely irrelevant to my argument, which focuses on the way male critics have treated the issue of rape in *Blackmail*. Instead, I will confine myself to making explicit my reason for referring briefly to one short passage in Durnat’s chapter on the film.

Far from travestying his argument, I simply wanted to call attention to the rather extraordinary fact that Durnat and other male critics actually subject the heroine to a mock trial, although there is no trial in the film. I certainly did not and would not deny that he, like all judges,

assumed an air of impartiality (discerning tensions and “countertensions”) in apportioning guilt and innocence. Indeed, the belief in the ability of patriarchal law to *be* impartial is what enables the masculine perspective to pass itself off as the universal one. I wanted to challenge this “aperspectivity” by interpreting the film from the woman’s point of view—precisely the point of view that Durnat ultimately disqualifies: “Hitchcock would not have been allowed to show incontrovertible evidence of rape even if he had wanted to so there’s room for doubt even on the issue of whether Alice is right in thinking she’s being raped rather than merely [sic] forcibly embraced [sic].” (In the scene in question, it will be remembered, the man drags the screaming and struggling woman across the room and forces her onto his bed). Despite Durnat’s claim to have constructed “entirely clear arguments,” the clarity of this particular formulation eludes me, as does the humor he implicitly arrogates to himself by characterizing *my* attitude as “glum.” In tiresomely conjuring up the specter of the humorless feminist, Durnat responds all too predictably to an essay that insisted on the way “man’s laughter” so often entails the objectification of woman and the denigration of her experience.

TANIA MODLESKI  
*University of Southern California*

### The Use of Teaching Associates

To the Editor:

It is now commonplace for foreign language and English departments, particularly those at large state universities, to use (I choose the word advisedly) part-time, temporary faculty members to staff elementary or intermediate language courses. There are slight variations, but in one common pattern, such persons teach three times the load of graduate student teaching assistants for two times the salary. They receive virtually no benefits and have no job security. It is not hyperbole to characterize their employment as exploitative. The fact that in hard economic times people will prefer unfair employment to no employment is inadequate rationalization for such ethically questionable policies. That much is hardly controversial and should, one would think, constitute basis enough for discontinuing the practice; but it hasn’t, and if the issues are seriously discussed at all, the ethical issues are ignored, and the arguments are made on the basis of “programmatic needs.” Cutting ethical corners is justified on the basis of expediency and the alleged strengthening of the program.

In fact, I think quite the opposite is the case. The use of temporary, part-time faculty is shortsighted, detrimental, and ultimately counterproductive. The benefits are purely economic and the costs are high in both human