

nationalist and internationalist perspectives, and the contemporary relevance of classical myth as we read Rita Dove, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Williams, and other poets, we seek not to demonstrate the utility of cultural studies but to develop a fuller understanding of the poetry, of its aesthetic *and* social dimensions.

To thrive, poetry does not need to be utilized to exemplify a theoretical perspective. Poetry simply needs to be taken seriously in itself—as a literary genre that can do certain things more efficiently than other genres, in its intense and memorable depiction of scenes, emotions, and narrative. As the American poet-critic Dana Gioia argues in *Can Poetry Matter?*, the real problem is not poetry's marginalization in the academy but its marginalization in American culture. One cause of this problem is the unwillingness of theorists and critics to accord poetry in itself the attention that other genres receive—a tendency that Noland displays, perhaps unwittingly.

KEVIN WALZER
University of Cincinnati

Reply:

Kevin Walzer's central point, that I "utilize" a poem "to exemplify a theoretical perspective," misrepresents both the substance and the objectives of my essay. To begin with, I would be hard-pressed to name precisely which theoretical perspective I "utilize" the poem to exemplify. In my close readings I attempt to forge a synthetic approach informed at once by French formalist methodologies and by an imperative I associate with cultural studies to provide a thick description of the context in which the poem was written. I never meant to imply that a poem is of interest only when it contains the language of advertising. Nor did I want to subordinate an understanding of Cendrars's work to a demonstration of the worth of cultural studies. I hoped instead to explore whether there were in fact aspects of a poem that a cultural studies approach might elucidate, while simultaneously suggesting how a formalist analysis of poetry can open new avenues for a project engaged in analyzing cultural dynamics (the ways cultural practices influence one another).

Although I too am tempted to affirm the aesthetic "as such," poetry "in itself," I can't help wondering what poetry in itself would be and whether in fact we ever have unmediated access to it. It may be that, as Theodor Adorno writes, "[i]f art is perceived strictly in aesthetic terms, then it cannot be properly perceived in aesthetic terms" (*Aesthetic Theory*). The tension between the two impulses Adorno invokes—the ontological and the materialist—is, I believe, highly productive; I would not want to see either foreclosed. One of the things poetry does

"more efficiently than other genres," as Walzer puts it, is to juxtapose the ontological and the materialist, to express at once a yearning for an "in itself" and a perception of radical contingency. Therefore, in my readings of specific poems I focus both on the formal experimentation that distinguishes Cendrars as a poet and on the cultural context that provided him with his extraliterary material and with the directive to use it. My intention was to study both the "aesthetic *and* social dimensions" of the poem "Aux 5 Coins," as well as to show how the two are formally interdependent and thematically intertwined.

Finally, I am not convinced that poetry is "doing just fine in the academy," despite the fact that Walzer teaches a good deal of poetry in his classroom. So do I in mine. However, we are in the minority for a large variety of reasons, only one of which is that too many contemporary critics are interested neither in the study of poetry nor in the close analysis of form. If Walzer treats "feminism and race" and "the tension between nationalist and internationalist perspectives" as well as poetry in his classroom, he would surely not disagree with me that poetry studies and cultural studies each can benefit by attending to reading strategies associated with the other. But when Walzer lumps Marjorie Perloff together with "cultural theorists" such as Cary Nelson, he fails to make some necessary distinctions between different critical emphases and ideologies. As the letters included in the recent *PMLA* Forum on "the actual or potential relations between cultural studies and the literary" repeatedly stress (112 [1997]: 257–86), there is a difference between approaches that replace the study of canonical literature with the study of popular or marginalized forms and approaches that seek to understand the literary within a broader context of institutions and signifying practices.

My own goal is to shed light on specific poems while advancing, modifying, and nuancing a useful critical apparatus. Although I reject Walzer's characterization of my intentions, I nonetheless hope to continue conversing with him and with others who share his views in the future.

CARRIE NOLAND
University of California, Irvine

To the Editor:

In delineating the differences between prominent academics of early- and late-twentieth-century America, David R. Shumway underestimates the public presence of the earlier group ("The Star System in Literary Studies," 112 [1997]: 85–100). While it is unarguable that a superficial star system has largely replaced earlier modes of notoriety, it is not true that "[b]efore World War II,

leading scholars may have been famous in the profession, but they were almost invisible” (86). The George Lyman Kittredge papers in the Harvard Archives, for instance, feature scrapbooks containing newspaper accounts of Kittredge’s seemingly countless public lectures. Cartoons in the *Harvard Lampoon* routinely caricatured his appearance and pedagogical style. That the play *The Philadelphia Story* (1939)—written by the Harvard-educated Philip Barry—and its film version (1940) feature a character named George Kittredge (albeit one apparently untouched by philology) suggests a notoriety that even Stanley Fish might envy.

Paradoxically, some early-twentieth-century academics possessed a public voice that none of the more recent stars has commanded. Perhaps the most widely and positively received work of literary criticism in this century, for example, was John Livingston Lowes’s *The Road to Xanadu: A Study in the Ways of Imagination* (1927). Lowes’s personal scrapbook on his book’s reception, held in the Harvard Archives, contains approximately 170 reviews and notices, almost unanimously flattering, that appeared in publications ranging from Asian newspapers to domestic serials and indicate a popularity unimaginable for a study of literary sources today. The public had a similar acquaintance with the Chaucerian research of Edith Rickert and John Manly (amply documented in the Special Collections of the University of Chicago). Such scholars lectured to attentive audiences composed primarily not of academics and students but of ordinary citizens, many of them without higher education. On one occasion, the interest in Kittredge’s public lectures was so great that he had to repeat them later in the day. These scholars were prominent figures, but they remained more interested in their research than in their worldly fortunes.

Indeed, Shumway does not stress the disparity of wages between the groups. Although he delicately hints at the inflated salaries of current stars (94), he neglects to observe that the wages of scholars such as Kittredge were low, even when compared to the meager salaries of instructors and assistants. That these scholars continued to labor at their research and teaching for slender compensation may have come in part from the greater respect that literary studies inspired then. But they were also dedicated to conveying what they had learned about literary works to their contemporaries (lay and academic alike), as well as to posterity. It seems worth asking whether current academic celebrities differ most markedly from earlier scholars not in form of notoriety but in depth of commitment to the works of others.

DOUGLAS BRUSTER
University of Texas, San Antonio

Reply:

I appreciate Douglas Bruster’s useful emendations to my account of the relative celebrity of early-twentieth-century literary scholars. His evidence suggests that leading scholars were more visible than my essay allows. However, Bruster’s letter does not clarify the meaning and status of that visibility within the discipline. Did other scholars routinely attend Kittredge’s lectures, or were these lectures intended for and attended only by nonspecialists? Did the visibility of Kittredge and Lowes in the public eye contribute to their professional authority?

I am not convinced that the notoriety of earlier scholars was similar to that of today’s stars. I accept Bruster’s claim that Philip Barry borrowed the name George Kittredge from the Harvard scholar because the name of another character in *The Philadelphia Story*, C. K. Dexter Haven, seems to derive from that of Raymond Dexter Havens, editor of *Modern Language Notes* (1925–48) and *ELH* (1945–48). This says something about Philip Barry—what, I’m not sure—but nothing about the fame of Kittredge or Havens.

Bruster supports my argument when he observes that in Kittredge’s era some academics “possessed a public voice that none of the more recent stars has commanded.” As I put it in the essay, the stars’ “celebrity has not made the knowledge that [they] produce any more widely known or given that knowledge greater public authority” (98). But the star system does not provide a complete explanation for the diminished public authority of contemporary literary scholars. For one thing, academic publishing was much less isolated from trade publishing before World War II. Academic books were routinely reviewed in newspapers and general-circulation magazines. After World War II, academic books became too numerous to be routinely reviewed, and print media in general lost the cultural centrality that they previously enjoyed. This explains why later literary scholars had a harder time reaching the public and why the public had less interest in their subject matter. The star system has not helped remedy this situation. It is unlikely that a serious work of literary scholarship, criticism, or theory will ever again command the attention that Lowes’s *The Road to Xanadu* received.

DAVID R. SHUMWAY
Carnegie Mellon University

To the Editor:

PMLA’s well-intentioned January 1997 issue tells us something about literature but next to nothing about teaching. It censors teaching much as Roland Barthes