

lives." Who would deny it? The question is how much we can get out of most of these studies, in themselves uniformly excellent examples, without knowing their subjects pretty well to begin with. I suspect—and I am only guessing, for I have had no experience with the matter under Schaefer's editorship—that, while the call has gone out for breadth of appeal, contributions have been evaluated by rigorous standards of specialized scholarship. This is a contradiction that must be resolved one way or another, for I don't think we can often have it both ways. Specialization is inevitable and necessary, no matter how we may grunt and groan about it, but it is a notorious enemy of universal communication.

Most of us outside our own areas of expertise and experience are amateurs, though of a well-informed and, one hopes, teachable sort. The *PMLA* editorial policy may have been too much in search of the "earthshaking" contribution. We do not need our earth shaken—for that we have the daily newspaper—we need instruction. Perhaps the most suitable posture for an article under the policy I am suggesting would be like that of a teacher presenting an argument to a student by explaining first principles and giving elementary information rather than that of a seminarian in colloquy with his nearest colleagues—the latter image, I think, is reinforced by the impression of fussiness sometimes given off by the Forum section. A structuralist, for example, would not address himself as he does to other structuralists but would endeavor to explain to those of us who are not familiar with his field what he is doing, with what motivation he does it, and what its redeeming social importance might be. A Germanic article might well be composed on the assumption that most MLA members command but the vaguest grasp of the crucial elements of the German tradition. In fact, my own preference would be for less interpretation and more literary history (not, I hasten to add, in the manner of *New Literary History*): rather than an even more refined article on Flaubert, one giving an account of aspects of nineteenth-century French literary life with which we are wholly unacquainted. Schaefer might reply that he did not receive such submissions; but the appearance of *PMLA* does not encourage them, though from time to time there have been a few approaching what I have in mind.

It seems to me, furthermore, that the articles have sometimes been pitched at a level of difficulty that can be intimidating for the general reader. I have a feeling that I am not alone with this problem, in respect not just to *PMLA* but to the whole universe of scholarly discourse in the language and literature disciplines, which have been marked re-

cently by a rush to theory of largely European provenance; since this is an area that was not much stressed in the past in American literary studies, this trend threatens to leave many colleagues behind. We are thirty thousand individuals, all of us educated, all of us presumably knowing something about something; but it is a little much to expect that we are all geniuses or always able to achieve the level of abstract and abstruse concentration that the contemporary idiom regularly requires. Is not *PMLA* better suited to breach these barriers of communication and convey larger perspectives in mankind's literary experience than to examine one more time the theoretical nuances of Wordsworth and Coleridge?

I think there is a danger in failing to recognize that scholarship of sharply focused intensity, on the one hand, and discourse among the language and literature disciplines, on the other, are related but different enterprises. The commitment to the first can lead to a disappointment that flips into rejection. This has happened, it seems to me, to Schaefer in what one may hope is his temporary mood of discouragement, for he has published in *Profession 78* what appears around the edges to be an assault on scholarship itself. I disagree with that part of his argument and regret the prominence it was given in that publication. Some of his quotations from readers' reports may suggest what has been wrong as much with the evaluation process as with the submissions. It is, to be sure, compellingly true that, if we cannot build bridges of communication from the forefront of scholarship to our own profession, our claims for the value and urgency of humanistic education are fatally fragile. The question is whether *PMLA* has yet given the effort a fair trial.

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Herbert's "The Collar"

To the Editor:

Like William D. Schaefer, I found Barbara Leah Harman's essay "The Fiction of Coherence: George Herbert's 'The Collar'" (*PMLA*, 93 [1978], 865–77) very impressive indeed, particularly in the patient clarity of its exposition. In fact, the author does so well what she is trying to do that one need challenge her not at different points but only at the center.

Harman proves to her satisfaction that Herbert's poem eliminates the notion of a coherent self or

experience, expressed or represented. But she does so by playing off against each other the two parts of the poem, the defiant body and the submissive tail. The first part constructs a coherence, which is deconstructed—exposed as a “fiction”—by the second. Each part is ascribed a separate speaker and intending self; the presence of both in the poem therefore cancels the possibility of postulating a single coherent selfhood to which they can be referred.

This style of interpretation, which is astonishingly attractive to sophisticated critics nowadays, seems to me willfully naïve. Or perhaps it would be better to call it antipsychological with a vengeance. In a poem the only self that can ever be expressed or represented is the poet's. It is knocking down a straw man to call one perspective within a poem a self and then show it to be illusory or incomplete. Pound and the New Critics could never have imagined that their useful distinction between poet and persona would someday be pressed with such philosophic scrupulousness that it would become inadmissible to postulate an authorial presence as the source of a work's coherence. Surely the central effect of Herbert's “The Collar” is not the incommensurability of the parts but the very *turn* from the wonderfully drawn-out raving to the sudden awe. Nor are readers deceived by the attitude adopted in the first part of the poem. Although they participate in the excitement of the subversive defiance, they know (from reading Herbert and this kind of poem) that the speaker will be drawn up short, and in fact much of their pleasure comes from anticipating the moment when that occurs.

The one spark of psychological sense in Harman and in the structuralist and quasi-structuralist critics from whom she derives is their recognition, oblique to be sure, that our pleasure in art depends on our sensing that the artist is a self-conscious enough stylist to “know” that creation is a kind of intellectual play, not simply a transcription of experience. But this self-consciousness can be found even in literary artists as earnest and mimetic as George Eliot and Bernard Shaw.

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Ms. Harman replies:

David J. Gordon's reasoned reply to my essay stems from two impulses: first, the desire to restore, to a single, intending presence, control over, and identity with, the representation he produces (“In a poem the only self that can ever be expressed or

represented is the poet's”); and second, the wish, frequently expressed in Herbert criticism, to see the poems as dramatizations of issues long since resolved and, for all intents and purposes, no longer in a position to threaten either poet or reader (“Although they participate in the excitement of the subversive defiance, [the readers] know . . . that the speaker will be drawn up short, and in fact much of their pleasure comes from anticipating the moment when that occurs”).

What I want to suggest is that these two impulses have their source in a single wellspring. Gordon would probably call that wellspring “psychological complexity,” for surely what his position claims for the self is the capacity either to embrace its own parts (“authorial presence is the source of a work's coherence”) or to transform utterly the very notion of parts (“the central effect is not the incommensurability of the parts but the very *turn* from the wonderfully drawn-out raving to the sudden awe”). But I want to call the wellspring “psychological simplicity,” and for two reasons: first, because it insists on the capacity of the self to absorb and resolve all conflicts, or to transform conflict into something else, and even suggests that the process by which this is accomplished produces not discomfort but “pleasure”; and second, because it must, in order to engage the transformations it values, reduce narrative work to “intellectual play”: the artist is in complete control throughout; he is conscious from the start that the poem is only a trap; and he draws out the raving in excited anticipation of turning it, wonderfully, into awe.

The simplicity of this concept lies in the insistence that the self is a master of all situations, that it is able to subsume all representations, to neutralize opposition, to own all versions of experience. It is my view, of course, that Herbert's poems are interesting precisely because they resist this ideology of the well-ordered self and are willing to acknowledge, in what seems to me an extremely complex fashion, both the desire for mastery and ownership and their ultimate inaccessibility. It is not out of a perverse interest (or any real interest at all) in pressing the distinction between poet and persona that I raise the issue of two voices in “The Collar,” but out of a sense, available to me everywhere in Herbert's poems, that the desire to rest in a unified (and invulnerable and complacent) self is always being resisted. In “The Pulley” Herbert even makes a fable out of this knowledge (“Yet let him keep the rest,” declares God, “But keep them with repining restlessness”), and if this is “just knocking down a straw man,” then I think it not unfair to point out that Herbert himself is the great master of making