

att in the contemporary "dayes of treuthe" deserve the censure of the carping critic. While Low's reading is possible, and its implications about the intention of the whole sonnet attractive, I can accept it as a "fourth complication" only if he means it to be no more complicated than that.

C. W. JENTOFT
Kent State University

"Reading" in *Great Expectations*

To the Editor:

The flurry of self-congratulation with which *PMLA* now opens has perhaps resulted in an academic consumerism which leads us to distrust "significant" and "of interest to the entire profession" as we have learned to doubt Madison Avenue's "whitest," "brightest," and "totally new process." Judgments of significance or interest are necessarily in part subjective, and therefore, understandably, scholars may differ in these matters. I would hope, however, that accuracy of fact and attentiveness to the text would be criteria that readers could unquestionably expect of *PMLA*. This, unfortunately, is not true of Max Byrd's article, "'Reading' in *Great Expectations*" (*PMLA*, 91, 1976, 259-65).

Byrd writes, "Wemmick's reading the newspaper aloud to his Aged Parent both mirrors and corrects Pip's reading aloud to Magwitch: despite the old Man's deafness, despite the absence of an intelligible language between them, Wemmick communicates with a father" (p. 265, n. 8). In *Great Expectations* (Ch. xxxvii), the roles are, in fact, exactly reversed: it is the Aged who reads to Wemmick. Rather than showing us a son who subjects a deaf old man to an unintelligible experience, Dickens clearly indicates the great tact and the generous love with which Wemmick contrives to make his father feel not only wanted but needed.

As a prelude to the newspaper reading, Pip and Miss Skiffins are entertained at tea. "The responsible duty of making the toast was delegated to the Aged," we are told, "and that excellent old gentleman was so intent upon it that he seemed to be in some danger of melting his eyes." After all have enjoyed the "hay-stack of buttered toast" so prepared, Wemmick asks his father to read, explaining to Pip that "this was according to custom, and that it gave the old gentleman infinite satisfaction to read the news aloud." Wemmick adds, "I won't offer an apology, for he isn't capable of many pleasures." The Aged, we are told, is "so busy and so pleased that it was really quite charming." What follows is one of Dickens' characteristically memorable scenes. The old father reads proudly, endangering himself and the newspaper by the closeness

of the candle, watched over by Wemmick's "untiring and gentle" vigilance, and "quite unconscious of his many rescues."

Byrd's reversal of the facts results in his overlooking the most important values in this scene. It is a tribute to Dickens' humane understanding that he shows us vividly how Wemmick's generosity is most evident in his efforts to make his father feel useful, and to preserve for him as far as possible the paternal role of feeding and instructing his son. While it would obviously be easier to take the role of reader, Wemmick goes to much trouble to give his father dignity. The contrast with Pip is indeed marked, and especially in Pip's condescension toward Joe. Wemmick's loving pride in his father, his acceptance of him without reserve, provides an exemplum which Pip will finally be able to follow with Joe and Magwitch.

"Reading" is indeed our stock in trade, as we are reminded in the Editor's Column. Let it be our first concern to do it carefully.

ELIZABETH BERGEN BROPHY
College of New Rochelle

Mr. Byrd replies:

I am sorry for the mistake, but consoled by the fact that the reversal actually strengthens my point that Wemmick's scene of reading improves upon Pip's. In any case, the mnemonic lapse of a single footnote hardly seems to call for so enthusiastic a correction.

MAX BYRD
University of California, Davis

Billy Budd

To the Editor:

Joyce Sparer Adler's "*Billy Budd* and Melville's Philosophy of War" (*PMLA*, 91, 1976, 266-78) is an inaccurate reading. What has not accorded with her thesis simply has been ignored: Complexities have been ironed out with a steamroller. The result is to equate the author with some contemporary protestor against the Establishment. I should like to point out the following:

1. Melville's "hatred of war" is in strong contradiction to his exultation in its glories. This is quite clear in his encomium to Nelson in Part IV, a section totally overlooked by the critic. Nelson's victory at Trafalgar is hailed as one "unmatched in human annals." Strange language indeed for one whose "philosophy" was opposed to war.

2. Melville's sympathies—these are only with the mutineers insofar as their grievances are just, but he is thoroughly opposed to violence on their part. And again he iterates his deep opposition to rebellion. In-