

viewers had recommended publication, the managing editor invited me to consider “the readers’ suggestions for revision before the article is forwarded to the members of the *PMLA* Editorial Board.” By April 1990—the month that Norton published the second edition of David A. Cook’s *History of Narrative Film*—I had sent my revised article to the board. In my only citation from the first edition of Cook’s book, I state that “David Cook calls the code ‘awesomely repressive.’ From 1934 to the 1950s, Cook notes in *A History of Narrative Film*, the Production Code ‘rigidly dictated the content of American films, and in a very real sense kept them from becoming as serious as they might have, and, perhaps, should have, been’ (266–67)” (432). In the second edition, Cook still calls the Production Code “awesomely repressive” and notes that it “rigidly dictated the content of American films, and in a very real sense kept them from becoming as serious as they might have, and, perhaps, should have, been” (299).

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Feminine Knots and the Other *Sir Gawain*

To the Editor:

PMLA articles must offer a “concise, readable presentation” (Editorial Policy). It pains me to say that Geraldine Heng’s “Feminine Knots and the Other *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*” (106 [1991]: 500–14) is neither concise nor readable.

Her method is interesting: a blend of Freudianism, semiotics, deconstruction, and of course feminism. These fashionable critical postures require some special language. The essay fails, however, not because of its technical terms but because of the gnarled style with which Heng tries to untie the “feminine knots.”

The best scholarly writing is usually simple. If Heng’s piece were written more simply, readers might be able to consider her reading of the great romance.

I defy anybody, including our journal’s editors and manuscript readers, to make sense of this sentence: “The inference is useful in a cautionary way for the rest of the poem, since it positions a reminder that the determined pursuit of determination invariably misses its object, issuing instead in an indetermination that signals the failure of every attempt at containing and regulating, policing, a sign” (505; chosen quite at random).

The fault may not be Heng’s but the editors’. To one and all, I recommend, as an example of lucidity, Alan M. Markman’s “The Meaning of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*,” *PMLA* 72 (1957): 574–86 (not included in Heng’s weighty bibliography). Markman’s essay may be “phallogentric” (Heng’s term), but it is both concise and readable.

THOMAS W. ROSS
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Reply:

Thomas W. Ross’s plain speaking on my “gnarled style” is as lucid and readable as, sadly, he finds my essay is not. To summarize his position concisely: he states a preference in paragraph three of his letter for scholarly writing that is simple—a preference that simply becomes, by paragraph five, the recommendation, “to one and all,” of a lucid and readable phallogentric essay, as the appropriate alternative reading to mine. Plainly, Ross dramatizes a central point of my essay: where this medieval romance is concerned, the languages of feminine desire and of feminism seem to problematize and trouble (his) reading; by contrast, the language of phallogentrism, in the poem and the critical tradition, is *always* readable, usually read, and invariably recommended as absolutely lucid, requisite reading.

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