

dience but a double *moment*, a change in temporal standing (a well-known locus of this is of course de Man's "Rhetoric of Temporality"). Apparent or ostensible meanings can indeed be proved wrong in reading—most obviously, for example, in the structure of a detective story.

Levin scorns a rhetorical effect of texts. Levin mocks the "ventriloquized" moves of these younger critics, particularly that a text might have a "project" or "function." But don't texts have rhetorical ends, even if only for entertainment? or for education or acculturation? As a case in point, the common genre of the family sitcom offers amusement and, beyond that, presents a distinct cultural model that is anything but innocent or neutral. Sitcoms advertise the values of the nuclear family, of bourgeois consumption (in the clothes, houses, and concerns of the characters, as well as the incessant train of commercials), and of traditional gender and sexual roles (the women are still usually misty-eyed about babies, and male roommates are always "buddies," not lovers). For that matter, what is the function of teaching a Shakespeare play, say, to students in the middle-class suburbs of Long Island, as Levin does? Not simply to teach reading but to give them what Bourdieu calls "cultural capital," at the least.

Levin proves intentionalism by default. Levin says, rather acerbically, that it is a "curious thing" that Shakespeare has disappeared (491). Why? This observation begs the argument and implicitly states Levin's intentionalist faith. The ghost behind Levin's stance is E. D. Hirsch, whom Levin cites explicitly in his *New Readings vs. Old Plays* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1979) and who posits a single ascertainable authorial intention. Levin seems scandalized that the new "critics maintain . . . that there is no 'unmediated' access to the text 'in itself' and that all interpretations of it are 'appropriations' determined by the interpreter's political position . . ." (492). Since Levin finds this to be a fallacy, does he indeed have unmediated access to Shakespeare's texts? If he does, he should surely tell us. And does he deny that one's position determines one's interpretation? or that one's position entails some sort of politics? His stand here is as the plain-talking literalist sheriff, keeping Shakespeare safe for humanity. And that position does entail consequences, which affect, if not national politics directly, certainly professional politics, departmental politics, the curriculum, book publishing, students, and so forth.

All this is not to say that Levin's analysis is without value. His highlighting of the figures of this criticism—the personification of the text, the use of military terms like *strategy* and *tactics*, and the trope of the text performing mechanistically—are surely worth further ex-

amination. And his analysis of the institutional placement or predicament of these historicist readings—that they enact a kind of (textual) class warfare that their critical arguments are fixed to win and that offers a fantasy resolution (500)—is intriguing and bears on current discussion of the profession of theory.

Nevertheless, finally, the thrust of his argument—that criticism has no political effect—is disturbing and disempowering. The university is not an immune zone of culture but a significant site of ideological (re)production and struggle (indeed, for Althusser, schools are the dominant ideological apparatus). I would hope that one can have an effect, however humble, through various tasks and interventions there.

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To the Editor:

I found Richard Levin's "Poetics and Politics of Bardicide" amusing in its wit, but the article also left me puzzled in some respects and dismayed in others. Perhaps I should define my position: I am a Blakean and, in my reading of Blake, I cannot be a feminist or a sexist, but I lean toward the androgynous; I am also a Humanist (a good Blakean term) and, therefore, interested in all human activities and knowledge, including feminism.

My initial problem with Levin's article is taxonomic. I find his classifications puzzling: "most of the first type [of readings] that I found come from the Marxist cultural materialists and the feminists associated with them, and most of the second from critics employing a feminist revision of Freud that I call neo-Freudian" (491). Feminism is mentioned in both categories, but I cannot place these groupings into what I know of that movement. As an interested outsider reading about the history of the second wave of feminism, I have found that a traditional division is into French, English, and American schools. They possess different emphases and approaches, although they overlap somewhat. The French variety is interested in Lacanian French Freud, deconstruction, and so forth; the English school is often associated with Marxism. But Levin obviously does not use "neo-Freudian" to mean French feminists, and his "Marxist" does not refer to English critics—thus I remain puzzled. Perhaps part of the problem is that feminism is a political issue with a platform in the real world and with a critical stance in academe that is marked by great diversity and no one inflexible set of principles (outside of the political ones) that all practitioners ad-

here to. American academic feminists seem to rove independently through other disciplines that interest them—Marxism, psychoanalysis (diversity exists here, too), history, sociology, anthropology, and so forth—and by their eclecticism defy classification.

My second concern is with the dates of the essays that Levin criticizes. If we delete from the Works Cited list Barthes, Foucault, Levin, and Shakespeare and count articles in books as books, we are left with thirty-six citations as follows: 1980, two (one book, one article); 1981, one (book); 1982, one (article); 1983, three (books); 1984, three (books); 1985, eleven (books); 1986, eight (five books, three articles); 1987, five (three books, two articles); 1988, two (one book, one article). Because a book can take a year or more to write and another year to be published, most of these citations represent approaches of the late seventies through the mid eighties. Levin claims that these are “recent essays” (491), and indeed they would be considered recent in other areas, but feminism seems to be engaged in a constant movement that includes self-correction and rejection of earlier practices that were too simplistic, such as the “images of women” phase. In the mid to late eighties, some feminists shifted away from the earlier, sometimes hostile polarization and moved toward the more inclusive gender criticism. For example, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar now invite a profitable exchange between the sexes (“The Mirror and the Vamp,” *The Future of Literary Theory*, 1989, 144–66), and something new and exciting might blossom from such interaction.

I see feminism’s evolution in Gleckner’s classic Blakean terms, as the movement from innocence to experience to a higher innocence (*The Piper and the Bard*, 1959). Viewed this way, innocence (or ignorance) is the stage before the mid sixties, when the dignity and rights of women, as well as of blacks, were not considered. (Elaine Showalter has delineated the parallels between the women’s and the black movements [*The Future of Literary Theory*, 347–69]). I find it difficult to believe that anyone, male or female, would want to go back to the earlier stage now, although such a regression is theoretically possible. (After all, this is the *second* wave of feminism.) But that would be intolerably inhumane, and perhaps that is why Levin joined NOW (Forum, 104 [1989]: 79). However, confronting the world of experience, taking a close look at man’s inhumanity to man *and* woman—at “the serious concerns about inequality and injustice that have engendered feminist analyses of literature” (Janet Adelman et al., Forum, 104 [1989]: 77)—is never pleasant (nor are some of the negative feminist critiques from the seventies and eighties), but it is a necessary and, I hope, temporary step, one that must be taken before we can go on to a higher

innocence, as might emerge from gender criticism. But a call to engage in a wide attack on feminism—“I believe that the conclusions should apply to other terrains where these practices are appearing” (491–92)—could be perceived as originating from a desire to return to the earlier stage of political ignorance (innocence), when women and blacks were denied the inalienable rights that are supposed to belong to all, and the feminists who are now moving on to gender criticism might fly back to protect their hard-won but possibly fragile political rights. This, I think, would be most unfortunate.

In closing, I would like to commit the intentional fallacy and infer two (of the many) possible intentions of this author. First, Levin might simply enjoy attacking feminists. (I consider this purely punitive intention most unlikely.) Second, his argument over methodology might have been motivated by a desire to defend his dearly loved area of expertise, Shakespeare, from unkind criticism. However, by whetting his wit to protect Shakespeare, might Levin not have written, although “unintentionally,” as if motivated by the first of these intentions?

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Reply:

I will respond to Jeffrey Williams under his own headings.

Levin is obviously right. Obviously I think I am right, just as he thinks he is right. But I do not think all my views are obviously right—some are and some are not. I obviously am not trying to correct “all other positions,” and I cannot see the relevance of his example, where I simply note that what were once called “plays” are now called “texts.” I never suggest that one term is obviously right; that would be obviously wrong. He is also guilty of ageism here: my age is not my fault and should not be used against me. And it has no bearing on the argument.

Levin conflates positions. It is impossible to discuss any group of people or things without some conflating. (He conflates Montrose and Howard, who are very different, and later conflates detective stories, sitcoms, etc.) It is a fault only if it leads to misrepresentations within the specific context of my discussion, but he never tries to show this. He is right in saying that I am not interested here in theoretical distinctions among the new Marxists (though I do not include Montrose in this group, as he seems to think). The reason is not that I