the jury of my peers, not me, and leaves me to wonder whether she is speaking for the prosecution, for the defense, or just for herself. Merritt talks about asking me how I feel about her questions, but even as she does so she is asking you to judge my responses.

The embarrassment (yes, embarrassment) I feel at having an issue made of my feelings in the public forum of my profession helps me understand why Kay Stockholder is concerned when she thinks I advocate shifting critical attention "from one's friends' views to their persons" and locating "the meaning of people's ideas in their personalities." If I thought dialogics was nothing more than a reader-response criticism of criticism or an argumentum ad hominem, I wouldn't be interested in it either.

I'm sorry that this pair of letters lacks the symmetry of one of the passages Merritt quotes from my article: Merritt's friendly(?) reformulation and elicitation of my words does embarrass me, but Stockholder's reformulation of my ideas in her alien terms does not convert me.

Stockholder's case for the prosecution gets me, Bakhtin, and Aristotle wrong, but her case is at least answerable. Where in Bakhtin's work does Stockholder ground her confident account of the limits of Bakhtin's "concept of the dialogic imagination"? You will not find that concept formulated anywhere in Bakhtin except in his American editors' title for their volume of his selected essays. The phrase appears nowhere in Bakhtin's text, the editors' index, or my article. But in the volume that phrase entitles, you will find a lengthy discussion that does apply his concept of "the dialogic orientation of discourse" to prose forms other than the novel, even the "quotidian, rhetorical, scholarly" forms (279). Bakhtin's text gives no warrant to Stockholder's restriction of the term *dialogic* to mimetic literature, and her reasoning in the sentence where she announces this restriction discovers no other warrant for it. I am at a loss to discover what discipline informs her purportedly disciplined interpretation.

Stockholder's account of Aristotle's distinction between rhetoric and dialectic is similarly unwarranted and incoherent. I concede in my article that Aristotle "complicated the opposition he began with" (788) between dialectic as an art of testing theses and rhetoric as an art of defending and attacking persons, but I would not concede the fundamental point that rhetoric is discourse of, by, and for given persons while dialectic aspires to more impersonal truth. Stockholder appears to make the distinction between the arts turn on rhetoric's appeal to persons' emotions and dialectic's appeal to their reasons, but rhetoric for Aristotle appeals not just to emotions (pathos) but to reasons (logos) *and to the characters of speakers* (ethos). Again Stockholder offers no textual warrant for her shifting assertions about Aristotle or for her charge that I have misinterpreted him.

Her account of my own argument repeatedly treats the dialogic synthesis of person and idea as a reduction of ideas to personalities, views to the characters that express them, rational debates to therapy sessions. Refusing to admit an alternative to rhetorical deviousness and dialectical rationality, she sees dialogics as yet another sleazy rhetorical attempt to evade dialectical responsibility. I would maintain, however, that we can distinguish among interests in others' personalities, in their ideas, and in ideas themselves. Dialogics is interested in ideas as they are held by people and in people as holders of ideas. If Stockholder had been able to imagine such an interest, she might have found an alternative to her rhetorical attack on my professional competence and intellectual good faith and given me an alternative to rhetorically defending myself against her attack. As it is, I have no further interest in her ideas as she appears to have no interest in mine.

Merritt says she is interested in my ideas, but she doesn't ask about them. She wants to know how I feel about her letter, what I have said elsewhere, what others have said to me, how I have revised my paper, how I would want to see a forum like this one used, and whether I think there are other aims of dialogic discourse beyond embarrassing and converting our colleagues. I thought I declared other aims of dialogic discourse in my article, and I did not imagine that embarrassing *or* converting others was an aim of the art—only a consequence of its practice. The aim of dialogics, I wrote, is to articulate "the meaning of people's ideas, our own and those of others" (789) in hopes of learning "not just who these others are but who [we ourselves] may be, not just what others may mean but what [we ourselves] may mean among others" (792).

I guess this exchange has given me some new information on these scores; maybe my irritation *is* a sign that something dialogic has taken place here. Anyone who has read this far can decide whether the exchange was worth publishing (a question for rhetoric) and whether it is worth entering (a dialogic one). For now, my turn is over.

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Historicity and Feminist Criticism

To the Editor:

I thoroughly appreciated the opening up of the text in Susan Schibanoff's "Taking Jane's Cue: *Phyllyp Sparowe* as a Primer for Women Readers" (101 [1986]: 832–47), and I would like to respond as a woman reader and scholar to her feminist analysis of the activity of reading in the multiple parts of Skelton's poem. By noting how modern male scholars, in their "not-reading" the whole poem, have extended the male poet's authorial domination of Jane's "text-body," the essay brings into our contemporary literary context the interpretive questions of "reading like a woman" and of *which* critics authorize what reading is "womanly" enough. Regrettably, my own

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reading of this poem, "The Patristic Humanism of John Skelton's *Phyllyp Sparowe*" (*From Cloister to Classroom: Monastic and Scholastic Approaches to Truth*, ed. E. Rozanne Elder, Kalamazoo: Cistercian, 1986, 202–38), got into print at the same time Schibanoff's essay did. I could have benefited from her astute handling of *all* the parts of this poem for I, like other modern readers, mostly men, excised parts and did not have Schibanoff's synthetic insight. Like her, however, I treat the reading activity of this poem seriously, and I'd like to think that the more historical interests of my essay might have benefited Schibanoff by pointing out ways Skelton reread and rewrote for a sixteenth-century audience particular classical and patristic *artes legendi* drawn from Plutarch, Basil, Augustine, Jerome, and Paulinus. Schibanoff alludes in her first note to Skelton's adaptation of patristic sources "about women," but she apparently did not examine those sources and discover how they were often "about" reading, writing, and poetry, too. In other words, the patristic sources Skelton used can help answer the question of intentionality that, Schibanoff says, a consultant specialist for *PMLA* raised in response to her essay.

For example, just as Skelton amplified Catullus' *passer* poems to picture the fictive schoolgirl Jane's reading experience, he refashioned Jerome's letter to Eustochium in which the male cleric exhorts the young woman to chastity of body *and* of eloquence while advising her to read constantly, to fall asleep reading. To Eustochium Jerome confesses his own love of literature and the necessity for decorum in literacy by telling her his nightmare of being accused before the judgment seat of being a Ciceronian, not a Christian. Long before feminist deconstruction, both Jerome and Skelton analogized textuality and sexuality, indicating a kind of didacticism that has been too long marginalized by critics who prefer to limit this satire to the goliardic humor of the fictive Jane's adolescence. Schibanoff's feminist reading corrects some of that marginalization by letting the analogy of the "text-body" surface, but the lack of a certain historicism in Schibanoff's approach suppresses what could have been one of her major arguments in the interpretation of Skelton's "primer."

Inadvertently, that kind of suppression leads Schibanoff to conclude with the moralisms of a deconstructionist feminist criticism that now needs to critique itself, as Nina Auerbach and others have suggested, for missing the perceptual nuances of texts and contexts. Schibanoff says that Skelton credits Jane's reading autonomy in the afterword but then undermines it by having Jane reject part of herself as she echoes male authorial motives and condemns the celebration of her own awakening female sexuality. On the contrary, both Skelton's satiric purpose and his paternalism support the positive cultural standards of a sound literary education and a blessed sexual life for a fatherless young woman at a time when sewing classes (Jane's embroidery?) and claustration were more likely the norms controlling the expression of value in femininity. Skelton's lampoon of an English girl's literary foibles and adolescent naïveté masks his satire on male clerics, including himself, on church hierarchy, and on the Benedictine nuns of Carrow Abbey who should be tutoring Jane in a Christian hermeneutic and not merely in the fashionable rhetoric of Dame Sulpicia. The didacticism of a historically Christian *ars legendi* permeates Skelton's poem and establishes his use of the primer for women readers as a statement on interpretation conducted by *all* writers and readers.

The broader intentionality of Skelton's argument for the activity of reading derives from Basil's letter "on the usefulness of secular letters," popularly known as *Ad adolescentes* and embraced by Renaissance humanists and educators as the art of reading par excellence. Behind it lies Plutarch's view of reading. We "hear" a poem better, Plutarch says, if we work to exercise our own wit, "to invent something of our owne, as well as to comprehende that whiche we heare of others," to search into the discourse "even to Morall Philosophie, and the gentle framing of the mind unto the love of vertue" (*Philosophie*, Holland trans. [1603], 63, 17–18). It is this exercise of invention that Skelton and his persona Jane alternately perform by rereading and rewriting—educative tasks undertaken for the sake of the soul, according to Basil. Similarly, *Phyllyp Sparowe* is more about "the fall of a sparrow" than about the in-phallicities of male authorial motives, for Skelton poetically designs a morally ambivalent bird, the interpretation of which reveals the characters of the readers as much as its composition does that of the writer. Classically, the sparrow represents venereal love and, patristically, the soul; in Paulinus's exegesis of Psalm 101/102, Christ is the Sparrow who dies and resurrects. Jangling jays will always interpret the ambivalence of Skelton's literary and liturgical *consolatio* in the direction of titillation or condemnation; but readers practicing a Christian hermeneutic will find in Phyllyp the comedy of earthly and heavenly pleasures reconciled through providential care for the soul worth many sparrows (Matthew 10)—in this case the "sparowe's soul" of the literate schoolgirl who builds her nest in the house of God (Psalm 83/84). "Taking Jane's Cue" is too good an analysis to have been pushed, perhaps, into consideration of intentionality not within its scope and to have lost some of its author's reading autonomy.

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Reply:

I have read with interest Mary Jane Doherty's recent article on Skelton in *From Cloister to Classroom: Monastic and Scholastic Approaches to Truth*. Although her study reaches the traditional conclusions of patristic exegetical criticism—that *Phyllyp Sparowe* presents a

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