

No doubt *PMLA*'s multiple-submissions policy is well-intended, but it is not realistic in today's world of fax machines, Internet, voice mail, and the like, where communication is virtually instantaneous and decisions in areas outside academic publishing are made immediately. Who can wait a year, or two years, after sending an article to a refereed journal before submitting it to another? Academics who will perish unless they publish must get their writing into print quickly. Multiple submissions are simply a "sellers'" attempt at self-preservation in the treacherous academic job market. While art may be long and scholarship longer, contemporary academic publishing is yet a longer and an even more excruciating process, apparently derived from, and more appropriate to, the hand lettering of manuscripts in the medieval era.

Censorship is hardly the issue. Quick response is. Businesses do not, could not, function as academic journals do. Only in journals is an indefinite response time still tolerated today. It's a luxury that few faculty members scrambling for promotion and tenure can afford.

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To the Editor:

Typically for this egocentric time, the new editor of *PMLA* cannot believe "that the purpose of publication was ever principally and altruistically the benefit of readers" (11n2). Such is Domna C. Stanton's reaction to Ursula M. Franklin's nostalgic essay "Does Scholarly Publishing Promote Scholarship or Scholars?," which finds that crude careerism is now the rule of the day.

We are not dealing with mutually exclusive motives. Of course one writes with hope of reputation and its benefits (sometimes very solid benefits), but those who do not put the reader and the subject matter first are liable to stumble as they dash toward their professional goals. While a true scholar may be defined as a person who is not in a hurry, the research of these numerous others may, as may their conclusions, be quick. Their style is likely to be obfuscatory, for being understood risks objections. Since they do not really care about the advancement of knowledge, they react with not always muted rage (in, for example, the Forum) when corrections or suggestions for expansion are offered; any questions raised are treated as personal insults, despicable and malicious assaults on

their amour propre, and monkey wrenches in their careers. An impersonal interest in getting things right is outside their conception.

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The Paradox of Censorship

To the Editor:

Agreeing with Paul de Man, Michael Holquist contends in "Corrupt Originals: The Paradox of Censorship" (109 [1994]: 14–25) that censorship encourages parabolic and oppositional readings that "specifically resist . . . what the censor wants" (22). My reading of his essay and of the essays that he introduces supports his contention. According to one of Holquist's uses of the word "censorship" (he says that an editorial decision not to print de Man's "Resistance to Theory" was censorship), the Literature and Censorship issue of *PMLA* "censors" the arguments in favor of censorship. Although Holquist is correct to say that censorship is "ineluctable," he merely concludes that it is therefore difficult to know "which of its effects to oppose" (22). For him censorship is always "repressive" and "vicious" (16, 18). People whose utterances are censored are always "victims" (16, 17).

Holquist renders these totalizing judgments while refusing to distinguish between different forms and occasions of censorship—by refusing, one blushes to say, to define his term. It seems that Holquist is against all the various acts throughout history that have been called by someone or other "censorship." At one point "censorship" is even personified—it "loathes" poetry (19). I can report that I do not oppose all that has been called censorship, and I do not loathe poetry. There is at least one exception to Holquist's universalizing judgments.

Certainly there are many repressed questions that his highly censored view of censorship might prompt in the resisting reader. What does it mean to rail against censorship for being repressive in a context in which one has acknowledged that we are always within power—that censorship and power are inescapable facts of social life? Why do the authors in the Literature and Censorship issue inevitably treat the censored author as a victim, without ever considering the ways audiences can be victimized by unscrupulous texts? Why are all the "victims" of censorship chosen

to elicit the academic reader's sympathies—Immanuel Kant, Laura (Riding) Jackson, George Bernard Shaw, Fukazawa Shichirō, and so on? Where are the freshly coiffured and manicured television preachers who promise health or riches to the ignorant in return for donations? Where are the creators of the hatchet-and-chain-saw movies (and now video games) that we can't really insulate our children from simply by being proper parents? Where are the authors of rap who advocate rape and murder to young audiences? Where are the writers who negligently damage reputations and ruin careers?

One might object that Holquist and the others address the problem of *literature* and censorship. But they also beg the question of what constitutes literature; seemingly, literature is the totality of utterances that do not warrant censorship. Uniting against censorship, the authors of *Literature and Censorship* chart a deceptively easy route to the preordained position. Unless, of course, the collection of essays is a cautionary parable of the seductions of academic conformity.

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Reply:

Bruce Henricksen argues that “the *Literature and Censorship* issue of *PMLA* ‘censors’ the arguments in favor of censorship.” Confusing censorship as a force in absentia with historically manifested institutions that concretize the force in praesentia, he believes “[f]or [Holquist] censorship is always ‘repressive’ and ‘vicious.’ People whose utterances are censored are always ‘victims.’” And my fellow contributors and I do indeed take sides. It is obvious, to take only one instance, that we sympathize with Mandelstam and oppose the Stalinists in whose labor camps he died. Henricksen, who is at pains to make clear his high regard for poetry, would presumably not disagree with this specific judgment. Moreover, he would seem to accede to the main thesis of my essay, that censorship is, in general, unavoidable. But Henricksen fails to perceive the sheer complexity of the filiations between any local instance of censorship and censorship's universal aspect of ineluctability. Thus he is led to ask, “What does it mean to rail against censorship for being repressive in a context in which one has acknowledged that we are always within power—that censorship and power are inescapable facts of social life?” His confusion results from certain misconceptions he

holds about my essay and—more significantly—about the nature of censorship.

Henricksen characterizes my argument in the following terms: “Although Holquist is correct to say that censorship is ‘ineluctable,’ he merely concludes that it is therefore difficult to know ‘which of its effects to oppose.’” Merely?! Far from “merely” concluding that it is difficult to know which of censorship's effects to oppose, I go out of my way throughout the essay to insist on such difficulty as the source of responsibility: “Despite Freud's stoic assertions that censorship is unforfeitable, all too often it is still treated through a crude axiology, as an absolute choice between prohibition and freedom. This position denies the reality of interdiction and masks the necessity of choosing between the myriad specific conditions that embody censorship's fatedness” (16). To concede the inescapable nature of censorship is not “merely” to recognize the universality of prohibition. On the contrary, the consequences could not be more momentous.

Although this recognition makes Henricksen uneasy (as it should), he himself seems to have made it. He is disturbed by aspects of American life from which he feels children should be insulated. Although ambiguous, his rhetorical questions about television preachers, makers of violent films, and “authors of rap who advocate rape and murder to young audiences” seem to indicate that these are candidates for his list of what should be prohibited. Were he able, he would presumably enact “good” censorship of a kind he accuses me of seeking to repress.

But my whole point is that censorship, as the materialization of social force, cannot itself be censored; that is what ineluctability means. It follows that censorship is more than “the various acts throughout history that have been called by someone or other ‘censorship.’” By claiming that he does “not oppose all that has been called censorship,” Henricksen thinks he gains freedom from the abstract necessity that these instantiations only partially manifest. As anyone from the former Communist states of Eastern Europe could explain to Henricksen, both oppressors and their victims knew well that censorship was not limited to the public occasions of its expression. These were rare, in fact, and always represented the failure of self-censorship. Everyone understood that interdiction was most powerful when it was ambiguous and did not have to be spelled out in particular acts of institutionalized repression.

Far from being an exception to my “universalizing judgments,” as he claims, Henricksen provides a particularly vivid exemplum of my argument about the necessity of choice. Like the Lord High Executioner