Although *PMLA* claims to be "receptive to [. . .] all scholarly methods and theoretical perspectives," it excludes to a large extent what Wright calls "literary analysis," which may still be of overwhelming interest to an overwhelming number of readers. This exclusivity may not derive from deliberate policy but could be due to the adventitious factor of the selection of the consultant readers and of the Advisory Committee. I wonder how these are appointed and whether care is taken to ensure that various areas and approaches are fairly represented, as far as possible. Couldn't *PMLA* solicit members at large to suggest names for consultant readers and Advisory Committee members, which could then be screened by the journal? A cumbersome process, but in view of the journal's status as an icon of literary studies, any step taken to reduce inadvertent cronyism and to achieve greater reader interest would be worthwhile.

The problem is not that *PMLA* is hospitable to new approaches—which it needs to be—but that it seems to have become increasingly inaccessible to other kinds of scholarship and criticism. Can it be that high-quality manuscripts are being submitted only in these new areas? If manuscripts not embodying certain methods or approaches are consistently turned down, that could surely discourage many from submission.

Finally, members may also be chary of publishing in *PMLA* because of the possibility of their being made targets of comments sometimes bordering on the ferocious. Louisa Mackenzie (117 [2002]: 130–32) and Sherry Lutz Zivley (117 [2002]: 132) make this point. Since *PMLA* urges its members to be sensitive to the "social implications of language," will the journal allow insensitivity of other kinds in matters of language and style? And publish, therefore, especially in the Forum, comments that are not only intemperate but at times downright vituperative?

Let me conclude by reiterating the suggestions I have implicitly made. First, it may be worthwhile for *PMLA* to survey to what extent members read the articles. If it turns out, as I suspect it might, that the percentage of articles read is unusually low compared with other journals, steps should be taken to make *PMLA* more responsive to the needs and expectations of a large majority of its members instead of becoming captive to an articulate and highly visible minority. Second, while appointing consultant readers and Advisory Committee members, *PMLA* should solicit suggestions from members at large. Third, the editor and the copyeditors should ensure that unseemly language is not allowed to appear in the pages of the journal, even if—especially if—it emanates from big names in the profession.

R. K. Gupta
Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur

Montaigne and Scholarly Prose

To the Editor:

George Hoffmann's Montaigne essay in the March issue of *PMLA* ("Anatomy of the Mass: Montaigne's 'Cannibals'" [117 (2002): 207–21]) is a model of poised, "old-fashioned" criticism. It avoids the jargon favored by some younger critics and instead gives us a close reading in historical context. Most essays in *PMLA* used to be like Hoffmann's, and one hopes that you will print more like it. I compliment the *PMLA* editors and Hoffmann.

My work was in medieval English, and though I am not a specialist in Montaigne or in French literature I found the essay informative, civilized, and delightfully written.

Thomas W. Ross
Colorado College

Reply:

Praise that is both warm and unqualified is a rare thing. I appreciate Thomas W. Ross's generosity, but I feel more hopeful than he about the benefit of combining the best of the new with the old. Constraints in time make it easy to understand the attraction held by expeditious approaches to literature. But the current intellectual climate also offers an unparalleled freedom to pick from a wide array of methods and disciplines. Theory as well as literary history, theology as well as social history have enriched my understanding of Montaigne; literary studies would not have tolerated such eclecticism thirty years ago.

Call me an optimist, but I also believe that a brighter future awaits academic prose. Thankfully, clear style is not the exclusive purview of any critical school, and I take heart in the fact that so many of my colleagues at Michigan, hailing from a broad

https://doi.org/10.1632/S0030812900167124 Published online by Cambridge University Press

range of theoretical preoccupations, consider true intelligence to lie in good writing and not in writing that is merely complicated. Gone are the days when one can presume that a public for one's work exists or that once readers pick it up, they will dutifully read it to the end. In this time of unchecked overpublication, good style is not a luxury; it is increasingly a necessity.

Ross's unexpected response to the essay offers as good an argument as any for the ability of prose to reach beyond its author's subspecialty. For that, I am happy. For his part, Montaigne might have been amused that a study on "Of Cannibals" should appear "civilized."

George Hoffmann
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

Milton on Defilement

To the Editor:

In his article "'Lycidas': The Pastoral Elegy as Same-Sex Epithalamium" (117 [2002]: 222–36), Bruce Boehrer argues that in "Lycidas" Milton presents a "discomfort with feminine sexuality" (222) that amounts to viewing women as innately defiling (230–32). Certainly all would agree that in Milton's elegy women offer a distraction to the dedicated shepherd/poet—"sport with *Amaryllis*" and "the tangles of *Neaera's* hair" (68–69)—but to prove that they go beyond this and defile men, Boehrer leads us to one of the biblical sources for line 176, "and hears the unexpressive nuptiall song," in terms of which he reinterprets the whole poem. According to this source, Revelation 14.3–4, the unexpressive song could only be learned by those who "were not defiled with women: for they are virgins" (qtd. in Boehrer 227). If read literally, as Boehrer reads it, this verse strongly supports his argument, but in reading it literally Boehrer skates on thin hermeneutical ice.

It is doubtful whether anything in Revelation should be read literally, and it is clear that in Milton's day Protestants, who believed in a married clergy, rejected the literal reading of this particular verse altogether. *The Geneva Bible* (1560) glosses "defiled with women" as meaning "[b]y whoredome: and vnder this vice he comprehendeth all other: but this is chiefly meant of idolatrie which is the spiritual whoredome." If the passage in Revelation is read thus, marriage to a woman does not constitute defilement, consummation of marriage does not render a man any less a virgin, and all saints may learn the song, regardless of marital status or gender. Milton himself glossed the verse in *An Apology for Smectymnuus* (1642), in an autobiographical digression commonly anthologized but overlooked by Boehrer:

> Nor did I slumber over that place expressing such high rewards of ever accompanying the Lamb with those celestial songs to others inapprehensible, but not to those who were not defiled with women, which doubtless means fornication; for marriage must not be called a defilement.
>
> (Merritt Hughes, ed., *John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose* [Indianapolis: Odyssey, 1957] 695)

Clearly, therefore, women in themselves constitute no defilement, and Milton would no doubt admit among the chorus of heaven the saintly "Lady" of his *Masque* (1634), his "late espoused saint" of sonnet 19, and the ladies of sonnets 9 ("Lady, that in the prime of earliest youth") and 14 ("When Faith and Love, which parted from thee never"), who are said to attend the same heavenly wedding feast and enjoy the same immortal water as Lycidas. To Milton it is fornication, not feminine sexuality, that defiles.

Of course, one might object that *An Apology* was written five years after "Lycidas" and does not necessarily reflect Milton's earlier views. But the digression in *An Apology* is presented specifically as a record of his developing views of chastity from his youth up. Boehrer himself treats a work written two or three years after "Lycidas" as indistinguishable from its predecessor on the topic of female defilement. The paraphrastic rendering of this work, "Epitaphium Damonis," which Boehrer takes from *The Riverside Milton*, seems to reinforce his view. It portrays the deceased Damon as attaining heaven "[b]ecause your youth was without blame, because you never married" (qtd. in Boehrer 225). But Milton's "Quod nulla tori libata voluptas" (line 213) does not mean "because you never married" but "because you did not taste the delight of the marriage-bed" (Hughes 139). The emphasis is on sexual delight, not marriage, and the bed (*torus*) is not even necessarily a marriage bed but any bed on which

https://doi.org/10.1632/S0030812900167124 Published online by Cambridge University Press