In the name of a homohistory that resists the pressures of modernity, scholars are just as capable of reconstituting conventional periodizations as are scholars working with more traditional delineations of the past. It is no longer sufficient, if it ever was, to quote theorists of collapsing boundaries but cling (however inadvertently) to basic periodizations, for in so doing the investigation of the vast multiplicities of the past will be curtailed. We second Goldberg and Menon's endorsement of Lee Edelman's theoretical program in his recent book *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Duke UP, 2004). The resistance to teleology might just begin with a resistance to the future and to that intransigent heterosexual reproductive teleology that renders the sixteenth century a rebirth and the Middle Ages a happily superseded interlude between antiquity and modernity.

But we're not merely disgruntled medievalists ever trying to get our due from Renaissance scholars. The issues are more complex than simple turf battles. In our current world of academic jobs and curricula, still resolutely organized according to traditional disciplinary boundaries and periodizations, how do we break chronological boundaries in significant and sustained ways? If, as Chakrabarty has so eloquently suggested, the time of the *now* is heterogeneous, on what new bases do we make choices and set priorities for study? What are the substantial and abiding consequences of this kind of thinking for the practice of literary history?

We suspect that the difficulty of such questions may have stalled the field, if this essay is any marker of queer history now (as its title suggests). The conceptualization of homohistory here does not move much beyond what Louise Fradenburg and Carla Freccero urged in 1996, in an essay Goldberg and Menon quote. Goldberg and Menon mention various recent queer Renaissance studies that are in tune with the project of homohistory, and maybe these studies substantially address the problem of periodization we point out here; in this essay there's no indication. The more general challenge now is how to proceed nonlinearly. It has become almost routine for literary scholars to critique the positivist discipline of history, but after the critique how do we, as a "collectivity" (adapting Paul Strohm's term [*Theory and the Premodern Text* (U of Minnesota P, 2000) 93]) trained in literary periods, create and use nonlinear histories? How do we articulate them with one another? Facing such questions as these will be crucial if we are to figure out how the field can truly and queerly develop.

Carolyn Dinshaw
New York University

Karma Lochrie
Indiana University, Bloomington

Reply:

In a recent performance in Washington, the camp show duo Kiki and Herb riffed on the revolutionary gay liberation slogan "We're here, we're queer!" by fitting it to the times. The new motto now weakly claimed, "We're here, we're beige."

The pair got at something that many queer theorists refuse to comprehend—namely, that our modes of studying desire have become predictable and boring. How refreshing, then, that Carolyn Dinshaw and Karma Lochrie call on queer theory to heed Kiki and Herb's lament, to bravely resist convention, and to spurn the reification of telos. How surprising, then, that they seem to want both to challenge teleology and to claim a certain priority for medieval studies.

Dinshaw and Lochrie's main argument is not with our essay's call to arms against historicism as a mode by which to study desire but rather with a lack of acknowledgment accorded to "medieval" literature, culture, and history. What they deny is a turf war is exactly that by any other name. This war crystallizes around the essay's use of the term *Renaissance*. We used the word not to celebrate a rebirth that supersedes an intervening period between itself and antiquity but to insist on the impossibility of any historical period's ever achieving self-identity. Queering the term *Renaissance* and the period it would designate affects all terminologies of periodization, none of which can lay claim to a point of origination, all of which undergo an unending process of renewal. As the essay states at its beginning, in a sentence Dinshaw and Lochrie quote, homohistory is "invested in suspending determinate sexual and chronological differences while expanding the possibilities of the nonhetero, with all its connotations of sameness, similarity, proximity, and anachronism." That our

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essay was prompted by a consideration of work in Renaissance studies by no means implies the Renaissance is a privileged site for such work; if anything, homohistory argues against the privileging of distinct chronological difference.

The most useful point in Dinshaw and Lochrie's letter, then, is not the incompatible desire to assert the medieval in the face of attempting to destroy chronology as the basis for what we do. Rather, it is their question of how we may practically study desire without being bound by "traditional disciplinary boundaries and periodizations." One answer, which is so important that it formed the title for the essay, is by queering history—and by queering the parameters within which we are medievalists, early modernists, or modernists. This "new" configuration of the discipline might return to a past in which these distinctions did not exist in the form they do today. Or it might spurn that past and focus only on the today. Either way, our relation to history is complex and anachronistic, as Dipesh Chakrabarty has shown so compellingly in his work on decolonization. The temporal version of decolonization—what may be termed dechronolization—would involve taking anachronism seriously and defying difference as the underwriter of history.

At that perhaps never-to-be-achieved date, we will finally be rid of beige.

Madhavi Menon
American University

Pragmatism and Principle

To the Editor:

A few days ago, I read Robert Scholes's Forum reply to James D. Hoff, on the issue of pragmatism and principle (*PMLA* 121 [2006]: 297–98). What Scholes said there seems to me to be mistaken. I would like to convey my reasons for disagreement.

Scholes offers the lone example of slavery and suggests that we really need to say that it is wrong. This would be a matter of principle and, as such, would "not be subject to change." Principle is based on "fixed belief."

In taking this position, he has overlooked the changing historical view of slavery. Before 1700, few people thought slavery was wrong in principle. A lot of people thought it was perfectly all right. As many students of history have pointed out, Aristotle thought slavery was normal; he did not criticize it. Jesus did not object to it. The "fixed belief" to which Scholes appeals simply did not exist.

Even today, where slavery exists in various parts of the globe, I venture to say that some of the slaveholders and their suppliers (now often referred to as those who traffic in humans) believe that there is nothing wrong with what they are doing. They see no universal, unchanging principle such as Scholes is using in his argument against Hoff. They also might maintain that what they are engaging in is not slavery at all, as it has been traditionally defined. For some forms of human trafficking as it exists today, the definition of slavery might have to be adjusted to make it applicable to new developments.

This does not mean that pragmatists in the United States today—or in the Western world, or in most of the world—would seriously argue on behalf of slavery or that they would contend that this issue should be debated all over again. Pragmatists, like anyone else, can learn from historical experience. We don't have to find out now if slavery is wrong: it has been found to be wrong. It is dehumanizing. John Dewey was right: when we have "warranted assertability" to declare something is wrong, then we have reached a determination of an issue. Yes, at that point, there are "reasonable grounds for connecting our beliefs to the world," as Scholes desires. But we are human beings who know our fallibility. For the Peircean view of pragmatism, the acknowledgment of fallibility is essential. Followers of Richard Rorty cannot be faulted for asserting that if we had not been products of the Western world, it is utterly unlikely that our view of slavery would ever have evolved to its present principled form. People like Scholes may believe that they are relying on a principle that has been and will be unchanging, that they are speaking from a "fixed" position, but that is an illusion. It may have become a fixed position for most of us now, but it took a lot of critique and reappraisal for it to reach such a status.

I grant that Scholes's principled stand—and the similar stand of millions of other people—will help prevent the human race from slipping back into widespread acceptance of slavery. But that amounts to saying that principles have pragmatic value. They "work."

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