

problems,” hoping that we do not confound such slogans with the “life in a deeper sense” created and discovered for us in our best literature.

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Notes

¹ I treat this point extensively in my essay “From Imitation to Rhetoric: The Chicago Critics, Wayne C. Booth, and *Tom Jones*” (to appear in forthcoming issue of *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*).

² Crews never mentions a specific critic in his blanket characterization of contemporary criticism. When he speaks of criticism based on “the illusion of present classlessness,” does he have in mind Northrop Frye? For Frye “the central myth of art,” the dream literature reflects, is the classless society: “the end of social effort, the innocent world of fulfilled desire, the free human society” (*Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology*, New York: Harcourt, 1963, p. 18). Though Crews would engage criticism in making the “myth” a reality, Frye sometimes takes pains to keep the utopian strain in his theory from turning explicitly political (see, e.g., *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*, Princeton, N. J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957, pp. 347–49).

³ *The New Apologists for Poetry* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1956), Chs. viii, ix.

⁴ *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1947), p. 194.

Mr. Crews replies:

My paper on the distorting effects of ideology, first delivered to an MLA meeting in 1969, continues to serve as a diagnostic inkblot for some members to weave stories around. John Ross Baker rebuts beliefs that I neither mentioned nor implied nor secretly harbored. Like Morton Bloomfield before him, he chooses to doubt my plain statements about meeting the ideals of scholarship and instead depicts me as cynically “reducing literature to a political content that would make literary studies basically ideological yet save for them the appearance of objectivity.” To his mind, a plea for scholars to watch out for their class presuppositions must entail a “program” to do away with non-Marxist methods, a subordination of literature and criticism to the cause of revolution, a belief that literature has “no unique function of its own,” a diminishing of art to “the coating on [the] doctrinal pill,” and even “a denial of the verbal in literature.” My mention of Georg Lukács in one subordinate clause yields the inference that I am a disciple of Lukács’ “final truth.” In short, Baker’s Rorschach response is, “Looks like a commie to me.”

Why is it so difficult for my colleague to address himself to my manifest argument? His one glancing allu-

sion to it suggests an answer. Instead of denying that American scholars are often influenced in the ways I set forth, he implicitly agrees with me. If we tried to make allowance for our ideological bias, he says, we would only “replace one set of prejudices with another.” We do have a set of prejudices, then—but why worry about them? It’s easier to pretend that the only alternative is revolutionary utilitarianism. Hence the effort to hold up a Marxist bogeyman, bearing my name, who wants to help “bring about an actual classless society” by “reducing literature to class meaning.” Nothing in my essay supports this interpretation, and my remarks about “simpleminded and venal” socialist criticism that “must flatter a bureaucracy and meet a doctrinal test” indicate my opinion of ideological orthodoxy. But Baker is concerned to circumvent my ideas, not to understand them.

My view of left-wing plans for the English curriculum no longer has to be surmised through visionary methods, but can be found in print: “Offing Culture: Literary Study and the Movement,” *TriQuarterly*, 23/24 (Winter/Spring 1972), 34–56. Baker, if he looks at that essay, will think I’ve completely changed my mind—but that’s because he has completely misread “Do Literary Studies Have an Ideology?”

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Timelag and the Forum

To the Editor:

W. B. Carnochan (*PMLA*, 87, 1972, 1,125–26) expresses his puzzlement that a commentary by William Kupersmith on an article of his was published in Notes, Documents, and Critical Comment rather than in the Forum. I think I can clear up the puzzle, and both Carnochan and Kupersmith are entitled to an explanation.

The manuscript of Kupersmith’s comment was sent to *PMLA* in the spring of 1970 and recommended for publication—not, of course, that such recommendation implied editorial agreement with Kupersmith’s as against Carnochan’s position; simply that it seemed a lively and well-presented challenge that deserved to be printed. At that time the Forum was not in existence—it first appeared in January 1971—and in the normal course of editorial processing the piece was channeled into Notes, Documents, and Critical Comment. Hence it suffered the usual timelag of ordinary contributions to *PMLA*—in this case, two years—before it was published.

It was precisely in order to reduce this timelag between the appearance of an article and the publication of controversial commentary on it—and of

reply by the author—that I urged the establishment of the Forum. Kupersmith's communication was exactly the kind of piece for which the Forum was needed; indeed, I think I may have used it as an illustration to support my argument that the Forum should be established. Had the Forum existed when his communication arrived that is undoubtedly where it would have gone. As it happened, however, it was caught up in the older conveyor belt, and thus appeared two years after the article it commented on, to Carnochan's mild but

justifiable irritation. Fortunately, the Forum has provided him with a convenient place for a reply. I think the "rules for debate" in *PMLA* are now quite clear, since the establishment of the Forum. It's a pity that, through the chance of timing, the debate between Kupersmith and Carnochan began in the transitional period just preceding it.

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