

be considered the progenitor of this new literary strategy.

*Lucas H. Harriman*  
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*Reply:*

After reading my interview with Orhan Pamuk, Lucas Harriman has concluded that the word “disform” is “an apparent mistake in transcription” resulting from “the author’s Turkish accent.” Harriman writes that Pamuk should be “offered the choice” to respond to the interview. It is important, first of all, to speak about the process by which this interview reached its final, published form. Not only did Pamuk sign an Institutional Review Board consent form at the time of the interview, he also had to review the final version of the interview and sign an additional release form, prepared by *PMLA*. In my e-mail correspondence with him, he expressed his pleasure with the final version of the interview. It would be naive to assume that Pamuk, who has had his fair share of trouble with interviews in the past, did not bother to examine this one, let alone glance at its title, which, as Harriman points out, contains the word in question.

Harriman attributes this error to the author’s accent—an assumption I find condescending and somewhat offensive. As a Turk myself, I can attest to the fact that both Pamuk and I are able to differentiate between “dis” and “this.” And why question only this one word if mispronunciation or “mangled” transcription is an issue? The implied reason for Harriman’s suspicion here, it seems, is the notion that “disform” (which Harriman incorrectly labels a “neologism”) is too difficult a word for Pamuk to use. But Pamuk—a Nobel laureate in literature—is perfectly capable of employing surprising and ambitious vocabulary.

More intriguing here is Harriman’s inadvertent engagement with a much larger, theoretical issue: dialogic interactions. For Bakhtin, for example, verbal “utterances” gain their meaning not merely from authorial intent but from the way they respond to previous utter-

ances, from the speech genre, and from the author’s position. Harriman insists that Pamuk’s meaning “seems obvious,” but it is not: perhaps Pamuk was picking up on my use of the word “dismantling” in the question (177); perhaps he wished to respond to an academic question with academic vocabulary. We cannot know, which is why critics from Aristotle to Žižek have focused on the differences in construction between oral and written meaning. All we know is that by giving consent to the text as it was printed, Pamuk opened up questions about formal textual meaning. Harriman laments that “disform” could have been a “provocative” term, but he is also concerned about all the silly things his colleagues will do with it. So perhaps the word can be seen as legitimately provocative after all.

Finally, Harriman is troubled by my “leading questions,” which he suspects might be an attempt “to characterize the Nobel Prize-winner as a formal subversive.” As to asking leading questions, some might say this is the point of conducting an interview. As to the idea that Pamuk is a formal subversive, I confess that I would find it difficult to argue that he is not one. Anyone familiar with the tradition of the Turkish novel before Pamuk could hardly consider *My Name Is Red* or *White Castle* anything other than revolutionary. Disforming is what he does.

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### Wordsworth the Environmentalist?

TO THE EDITOR:

Given the nature of the times, it is not surprising to find critics who depict Wordsworth as a “green” poet. Adam Potkay characterizes him this way in “Wordsworth and the Ethics of Things” (123.2 [2008]: 390–404). Potkay asserts that Wordsworth’s poetry is EPA approved because it gives human beings and things equal status. But arguing equality makes no sense, for it implies that people and other things have an obligation to be ethical toward each other. If that were true, hurricanes, earthquakes, epidemics, and bear attacks on humans would have

to be considered unethical, and environmentalists could organize marches demanding that they cease. In all such cases, however, equality is a one-way street, binding on people only. The idea of Wordsworth as an environmentalist has to be backed up by the traditional argument that people hold stewardship over nature.

The jumping-off point of Potkay's argument is contemporary "thing theory," which the author sees as an antidote to a selfish, me-first world. Once people realize they are no better than rocks and trees, they will treat the environment with care. I do not see a connection. Given such a perception, people could just as easily respond by abusing the environment. Pointing to Wordsworth's belief that flowers feel joy, Potkay asserts that "[t]he possibility that subrational things experience joy implies ethical consequences in our attitude toward or interaction with them" (398). But arguing "possibility" is not enough, as one can see if we push the argument in another direction: "The possibility that fetuses are human implies ethical consequences."

Potkay constructs a history of thing theory to bolster his argument. He connects it to writers who talked about the "face of things" or the "fullness of things" (395, 391), to Spinoza, who espoused pantheism, and to Milton (392–403). He might have spared us his summary, for a three-page account of over five hundred years, which includes Milton as a forerunner, is not likely to convince anyone. He says that Milton was the first to abandon "the *Satanic* notion that nature revolves around human beings" (396; my emphasis). But Milton didn't abandon that idea, he promoted it. In *Paradise Lost*, Milton says that nature falls with the Fall. One wonders what else might be wrong with Potkay's history.

Potkay has no success applying thing theory to "Tintern Abbey." Wordsworth speaks of "A motion and a spirit, that impels / All thinking things, all objects of all thought, / And rolls through all things." The spirit "rolls through" both thinking and nonthinking things—that is, it holds them in existence; and it directs the thoughts and actions of all thinking things. Potkay has a different take: "both our selves

and the objects we make through thinking are joined in the anteriority and comprehensiveness of 'all things'" (399). This says nothing about "rolls through" or "impels." It is an image of accumulation. Both people and the things they make with their thinking join everything that existed or was made before them. Thus the difference between what Wordsworth says and what Potkay sees is significant. Wordsworth imagines how God works in the world: he gives it existence and direction. Potkay imagines the world without God: a dump that piles up with all the things that the world collects.

Wordsworth says of the "presence" he has felt that its "dwelling is the light of setting suns, / And the round ocean, and the living air, / And the blue sky, and in the mind of man." How would he know this? Potkay's theory says that Wordsworth intuits it (398–99). How would Potkay know that? Does Wordsworth draw knowledge from experience, or do insights come down to him from on high? The answer has to be both. He figures some things out, and he is suddenly aware of others. Reason must be as important as intuition, narration as important as lyric. This is what one would expect from a man who is always writing narratives that communicate spiritual insights and calls the poems he writes "lyrical ballads."

Wordsworth writes, "For I have learned / To look on nature, not as in the hour / Of thoughtless youth, but hearing oftentimes / The still, sad music of humanity." Potkay contradicts this statement. He says Wordsworth hasn't learned to hear the music; he has learned only to look at nature. When he looks, "'hearing' magically appears, a participle unattached to agency . . ." (399).

That is wild. It means that nobody is doing the hearing in the sentence, that the hearing is just being done. This must be the first time on record that an English professor praises a dangling participle. But the participle is not dangling. It is attached to "I." Wordsworth says that he has learned to look at nature in a way that has enabled him to hear "the still, sad music of humanity." Potkay will not admit that Wordsworth has *learned* to hear this music, because it contradicts his own argument that one doesn't

learn from experience. Having boxed himself into a corner, he constructs the best argument he can to get out. But it doesn't help. Hearing the sad music doesn't just magically appear in the poem; it appears because it is what Wordsworth has learned.

Finally, if Potkay really wants Wordsworth to wear the green coat, he has to rescue him from Marjorie Levinson's argument. Wordsworth, Levinson maintains, knew that an iron mill upstream from the Abbey was polluting the river Wye ("Insight and Oversight: Reading 'Tintern Abbey'"; *Wordsworth's Great Period Poems* [Cambridge, 1986; print; 14–57]). A true environmentalist would not retreat upstream beyond the iron mill to view an unpolluted river and talk about the benefits of nature. A true environmentalist would abandon nature and join the protest.

*George Bellis*  
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*Reply:*

Clearly, Wordsworth was not an environmental activist in twenty-first-century Sierra Club mode. In my essay I don't consider Wordsworth to be an "environmentalist" but rather—a very different thing—a poet whose lyric thinking is environmental. Nonetheless, for those who with George Bellis would like to see Wordsworth rescued from Marjorie Levinson's argument, I recommend Charles Rzepka's "Pictures of the Mind: Iron and Charcoal, 'Ouzy Tides,' and 'Vagrant Dwellers' at Tintern, 1798" (*Studies in Romanticism* 42.2 [2003]: 155–85; print). Rzepka scours the historical record to show that in Wordsworth's day the Wye River was not polluted and that we have no evidence of any industrial despoliation whatsoever in the vicinity of Tintern Abbey.

Bellis contests my reading of Wordsworth on three further grounds: grammar, logic, and the nature of God. I do indeed find Wordsworth's grammar in "Tintern Abbey" to be "wild"—that is, odic, difficult, twisting rapidly upon numerous particles, given to anacoluthon. Wordsworth claims that he has learned to look,

but this does not, I think, necessarily mean he has learned to hear. ("If this be but a vain belief, yet, oh!") As for logic, Bellis maintains that ethical reciprocity with subrational or nonsentient things is absurd; what I argue, however, is that Wordsworth in his poetry imaginatively entertains such a reciprocity and seems to think that doing so may have ethically beneficial consequences. This belief does not strike me as absurd. Turning next to "God," I would note that the word does not appear in "Tintern Abbey." In *Paradise Lost*, man is made nature's steward but not its cynosure: Eve falls, in part, by falling for Satan's flattering claim that all things revolve around her (*Complete Poems and Major Prose*; ed. Merritt Y. Hughes [New York: Odyssey, 1957; print; 5.41–47]). Milton's God, by contrast, is of potential service to the World Wildlife Fund. Speaking of the "various living creatures" of earth and air, he asks Adam, "Know'st thou not / Their language and their ways? They also know, / And reason not contemptibly" (8.372–74).

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## Divisions in Comics Scholarship

TO THE EDITOR:

I read Hillary Chute's essay "Comics as Literature? Reading Graphic Narrative" (123.2 [2008]: 452–65) with interest; I found her analyses of Spiegelman and Sacco insightful and look forward to reading more by her in future.

However, I feel I must take issue with her (necessarily brief) contextualization of the graphic novel, particularly with her more sweeping asides about the history of the comic-book medium and the "strongest" work in it. In fact, Chute's essay confirms my suspicion that the nascent academic field of comics studies is already divided from within, along lines that replicate the most basic division of the American comic-book marketplace: the division between genre works (dominated by but not limited to superhero stories) and what we might call "literary nonfiction."

Dangers and distortions threaten when we allow generic divisions to shape our critical