

I said in discussing the treatment of the tragic endings by these critics (132). But from an intentionalist perspective—and I must repeat myself once more—the question is not whether we can find such problems but whether the ending calls attention to them and so undercuts its own “closure.” I also said in this section that the only ending that apparently would satisfy these critics would be the dismantling of patriarchy and the establishment of a new order of gender equality. If Cacicedo disagrees, then I think he is obligated to tell us what, in his view, *would* constitute an “unproblematic” happy ending.

His next point, that I glided over what I acknowledged to be the “very impressive achievement” of feminist criticism, is correct. I did so because I thought it would be obvious to most readers of *PMLA* and because expanding on it would have meant dropping other material, since the article was hovering on the edge of the word limit, but I may have been wrong. However, I do not see any contradiction between acknowledging this achievement and maintaining that the comedies are meant to end happily. And I never asserted that Leontes’s jealousy “says nothing at all about male attitudes toward women.” Leontes is a male and his jealousy is therefore a male attitude; but Camillo, Antigonus, the unnamed Lord, Dion, and Cleomenes are just as male, and their defense of Hermione is just as much a male attitude. I was arguing about what “the play presents,” and I said it does not present his jealousy as “the intrinsically male attitude” (130). So again we return to intentionality. Cacicedo seems to slide back and forth between intentionalist and nonintentionalist positions, but he cannot have it both ways. I think the basic issue between us lies there, and not in the opposition between my bogus “im-partiality” and his honest partiality, which is how he keeps trying to cast it (although in his third paragraph he claims that *he* is being impartial).

This brings me to his final point, which involves a misreading of my last sentence. I knew that in that sentence I would be flying in the face of the latest orthodoxy, and so I tried to choose my words with some care. I asked not for a scientific study of human development that would “remain free of ‘ideology,’” as he puts it, but for a study based on *evidence* that “compelled the assent of all rational people, regardless of their gender or ideology,” which is a very different thing. And I certainly did not suggest that such a study would give us “a magic key” to “unlock” the “mystery of texts.” In fact, it was precisely the claim to possess such a key to all human behavior that I was objecting to in both the older Freudianism and the feminist revised version that Cacicedo defends. That version, moreover, is not a “conclusion to which feminist readers of Shakespeare come”; it is a theory these critics bring to the plays. And it locates the cause of the masculine malady, not in men’s “strategies to take and keep power,” but in their infantile experience with mothering, and now perhaps in their fetal tissue, to judge from Madelon Sprengnether’s account of “primary femininity” in her article “Annihilating Intimacy in *Coriolanus*,” which

appeared too late for me to consider. So the problem may be sex and not gender after all, and biology can once more become destiny, but this time only for the men.

I would also like to take this opportunity to comment on another matter. I received a number of favorable letters on my article, many of which expressed surprise that *PMLA* accepted it. Apparently there was a widespread impression out there that our journal is not open to criticism of the new approaches now achieving hegemony, an impression that I hope has been dispelled by the publication of my article and Edward Pechter’s last year. And I want to thank the members of the Advisory Committee and the Editorial Board for supporting these dissident voices, with which some of them must have disagreed.

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Craving Oblivion

To the Editor:

Regarding Eco’s theoretical *ars oblivionalis* (103 [1988]: 254–61), the devices by which one forgets on account of excess are quite real and are known to cognitive psychologists as proactive and retroactive inhibition. Proactive inhibition occurs when a body of current information distorts recall of what is learned next, while retroactive inhibition happens when newly learned facts seem to force out the old.

As someone who took his orals not too many years ago, I can vouch for the power of both types of inhibition. No sooner has one memorized the dates of Virginia Woolf’s novels and major essays than one’s grasp on the data surrounding *Ulysses* begins to fade. Reacquiring Joyce forces out certain aspects of Lawrence, and so on. The one consolation is that I am now working on my dissertation. I have only to sit down to work on it when I begin to remember all sorts of information, including luncheon dates, swatches of sonnets, bills to pay, and anything else you care to name. Strangely, there are days when Eco’s “Strategies for Producing Oblivion” seems aimed at a consummation devoutly to be wished.

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Hillis Miller and His Critics

To the Editor:

In his presidential address (102 [1987]: 281–91), Hillis Miller accuses critics of deconstruction, from both “the right” and “the left,” of a collective professional failure to read carefully and accurately “the plain sense” of