

worldly pleasures of Princeton's architecture, libraries, and academic debate. Using released time to attend classes at Princeton enabled me to return to my community college and create a course on women in literature and also to pair Jane Eyre with her rebellious contemporary Frederick Douglass in world literature, interdisciplinary humanities, and even remedial writing courses.

When Elaine Showalter asked me to read my feminist satire on *The Island of Dr. Moreau* to her class on the fin de siècle, she invited me to share in the pleasures of challenging old canons and older gender perceptions that used to separate, stratify, stigmatize. Research universities are like the old literary canon—other genres of colleges need recognition, analysis, and connection. At Princeton I saw her practice what she has preached; now, with her well-deserved prestige, she should lead us all to preach what she has practiced.

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To the Editor:

Thanks to Elaine Showalter for her favorable mention in her Presidential Address of the Master of Arts Program in the Humanities at the University of Chicago (324). For the record it should be added that Lawrence Rothfield has been codirector of this program along with me and has contributed greatly to its success.

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## De Quincey and Kant

To the Editor:

I found much food for thought in Paul Youngquist's "De Quincey's Crazy Body" (114 [1999]: 346–58). Unfortunately, Youngquist's primary source of evidence, "The Last Days of Immanuel Kant," is not De Quincey's original composition but a translation of Ehregott Andreas Christoph Wasianski's *Immanuel Kant in seinen letzten Lebensjahren* (1804; *Immanuel Kant, ein Lebensbild*, ed. Alfons Hoffmann [Halle: Peter, 1902]). This fact invalidates much of Youngquist's argument, since nearly every feature of "The Last Days of Immanuel Kant" that Youngquist cites as evidence of De Quincey's attitude toward Kant is taken directly and without substantial alteration from this memoir written by Kant's former student.

Thus, the decision to ignore "the intellectual achievements that made Kant's name famous," as Youngquist puts it, is not De Quincey's but Wasianski's, as is the "audacity" of this "account of Kant's senescence, illness, and death" (347). It is Wasianski, not De Quincey, who "describes the great philosopher's preparations for bed" "[i]n tender detail" (347; Wasianski 301–05), who emphasizes "the severe regularity of Kant's habits," who notes the contribution that "the uniformity of [Kant's] diet" made to "lengthen[ing] his life," who is "especially fascinated by that diet," if anyone is, and who describes in circumstantial detail Kant's popular dinner parties (348–49; Wasianski 293–99).

It is Wasianski, not De Quincey, who, in Youngquist's words, "takes more than a little delight in describing Kant's most striking physiological trait. He did not sweat. Seventy-five degrees Fahrenheit was the customary temperature of his rooms, and he was never known to perspire" (349). "Weder in der Nacht noch bei Tage transpirierte Kant," writes Wasianski. "Auffallend war es aber, dass er in seinem Wohnzimmer eine beträchtliche Wärme ertragen konnte und sich unglücklich fühlte, wenn nur ein Grad daran fehlte. 75 Grad nach Fahrenheit musste der unverrückte Stand seines Thermometers in diesem Zimmer sein, und fehlte dieser im Juli und August, so liess er seine Stube bis zu dem erforderlichen Standpunkte des Thermometers erwärmen" (305). Here is De Quincey's translation: "Kant never perspired, night or day. Yet it was astonishing how much heat he supported habitually in his study, and, in fact, was not easy if it wanted but one degree of this heat. Seventy-five degrees of Fahrenheit was the invariable temperature of this room in which he chiefly lived; and, if it fell below that point, no matter at what season of the year, he had it raised artificially to the usual standard" (*The Collected Writings of Thomas De Quincey*, ed. David Masson, vol. 4 [Edinburgh: Black, 1897], 14 vols., 339–40). This sample is characteristic of De Quincey's method throughout: except for rhetorical flourishes, transpositions, and paraphrase, he adheres faithfully to Wasianski's narrative.

The following three passages from De Quincey, quoted by Youngquist on pages 349 and 350, are direct translations from *Immanuel Kant in seinen letzten Lebensjahren*:

De Quincey: "As the winter of 1802–03 approached, he complained more than ever of an affection of the stomach, which no medical man had been able to mitigate, or even to explain" (357).

Wasianski: "Bei herannahendem Winter klagte er mehr als sonst über jenes Übel, das er die Blähung auf dem Magenmunde nannte, und das kein Arzt erklären, vielweniger heilen konnte" (370).

De Quincey: "His dreams became continually more appalling: single scenes, or passages in these dreams, were sufficient to compose the whole course of mighty tragedies, the impression from which was so profound as to stretch far into his waking hours" (359).

Wasianski: "Seine furchtbaren Träume wurden immer schrecklicher, und seine Phantasie setzte aus einzelnen Szenen der Träume ganze furchtbare Tauer-spiele zusammen, deren Eindruck so mächtig war, dass ihr Schwung noch lange im Wachen bei ihm fortwirkte" (374).

De Quincey: "at intervals he pushed away the bed-clothes, and exposed his person" (376).

Wasianski: "Einige Male stieß er die Bettdecke von Eiderdaunen weg und entblösste sich den Leib" (424).

The only material that is De Quincey's in what Youngquist calls "De Quincey's charming memoir" (347) is his introduction (De Quincey 323–29), his footnotes, and occasional interpolations (some perhaps translated, as De Quincey hints [329n1], from other biographers). Some interpolations are entire sentences, some no more than a phrase. The description of decanters of wine "placed anacronistically on the table" (De Quincey 331), which Youngquist quotes (349), is one such flourish that De Quincey gives to "und Wein besetzt" (Wasianski 294). A few other passages cited by Youngquist also happen to be De Quincey's—for instance, "swathed like a mummy," in the description of Kant's bedtime rituals (De Quincey 338), and the footnote recommending "a quarter gram of opium" for Kant's ills (359). With these citations I have no quarrel. But they are hardly enough to support the large claims Youngquist makes about what De Quincey, as opposed to Wasianski, is up to in "The Last Days of Immanuel Kant."

I have sent a copy of this letter to Paul Youngquist, and ordinarily I would see no reason to pursue the matter further in the columns of the Forum. However, *PMLA* is the flagship journal of the profession, and this is not the first time I've come across the same error of attribution in recent work on De Quincey and Kant, based on the same ignorance of the composition history of "The Last Days." This mistaken attribution figured prominently in two articles I was asked to referee for publication. Clearly, Kant is once more a popular subject for Roman-

ticists, and De Quincey's stock is up as well, not to mention "the body." I gather from Youngquist's thumbnail biography that "De Quincey's Crazy Body" is to become part of his upcoming book "on the body and British Romanticism." If so, I hope this letter will persuade him to revise his essay before the book is published. In any case, it may prevent others from perpetuating his error.

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### Reply:

I want to thank Charles Rzepka for serving up dessert. His remarks are instructive not because they "invalidate" my argument—they don't—but because they raise a larger institutional issue. Literary criticism remains, it appears, in all senses of the word a discipline. Citations are right, or they are wrong, and those in the know are the guardians of virtue. The effects of such bibliographic criticism are mostly conservative, protecting traditional beliefs and practices against unmannerly encroachments. That's exactly the attitude Kant's philosophy takes toward the unruly life of the body. I am not alone in thinking that a culturally inflected criticism should question such attitudes. As English becomes increasingly professionalized, I hope that work that challenges the strictures of conventional scholarship continues to be produced and to be welcomed in *PMLA*. We must open our hearts to what is new if we hope to change old beliefs.

Finally, Rzepka's response reminds me of a few lines of verse, which I confess no more belong to me than do Wasianski's words to De Quincey:

For me who, wandering with pedestrian Muses,  
Contend not with you on the winged steed,  
I wish your fate may yield ye, when she chooses,  
The fame you envy, and the skill you need;  
And recollect a poet nothing loses  
In giving to his brethren their full meed  
Of merit, and complaint of present days  
Is not the *certain* path to future praise.

(Byron, *Don Juan* 1.8)

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