use of language and imagery, testimony indeed to "the enthusiasm of a young man in love with language."

It would be safe to claim that *Voyages* succeeds as an aesthetic creation and transcends cultural and national boundaries (while remaining immersed in them). Yet the fact that the book is by an Armenian and deals with Armenian concerns—among much else—seems to require special pleading. I could not get over the guilty sensation that I was engaging in propaganda and perhaps forcing on my students a history and a culture they had no desire to unfold. I was plagued by the uneasy feeling of doing something that had not been done before. The book clearly belonged outside.

The students' intense interest in the literature, once it has been introduced to them, is telling. "How come we don't know?" and other genuine expressions of surprise and their disbelief at the enormity of the horrors committed imply that something must be wrong with an educational system that does not make available good and relevant material. Every time I have shared Armenian American literature with my students, the level of their interest and excitement has been at an unprecedented high and my experience of teaching exceptionally rewarding. Enthusiasm, I hope we all agree, is not something to be shunned and mistrusted.

My suggestion, I hasten to add, is not to replace Shakespeare and Hemingway but to expand the canon to include ethnic writers. We need to start teaching ethnic writing because it is good (that is, when it is good) and not because it is politically correct to do so. The difficulty of finding good literature that deals with the complexity of the immigrant experience—the American experience—should make a book like *Voyages* doubly welcome in our classrooms.

Blatant exclusion becomes even more ironic when we consider the trend to contextualize in contemporary literary study. Historical and cultural context has been a dominant focus in theory and criticism for many years, and one would think that ethnic writing, in which frontiers are endlessly crossed and boundaries redrawn, should provide the perfect context for the exploration of the larger cultural and social issues that are inevitably connected to literary texts.

Also, what better way of enhancing our students' critical thinking, a much stated aim of education, than introducing them to the literature of "others," to the perspective(s) of "others"? I have found ethnic writing to be a great tool in promoting the critical thinking and writing skills of my students at all levels in my teaching.

Our task as educators is crucial. To say, as we sometimes do, that students don't know anything because they don't read is an easy way out of a situation that needs to be confronted so it can be corrected. Student apathy, undeniably, is part of the problem. I strongly believe, however, that if the material we make available to our students is relevant to their experiences, the students do read, and good literature goes a long way toward creating that relevance. The story of Aram, alone in a country where no one understands him, alienated and frantically searching, is everyone's story. Najarian states it best in his preface to the 1979 edition of the novel: "The massacre belongs to everyone somehow."

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Script and Performance

To the Editor:

In "Drama, Performativity, and Performance" (113 [1998]: 1093–1107), W. B. Worthen would rescue scripted dramatic performance from neglect by denaturing it, minimizing the importance of the script. As he sees it, the performance of plays in theaters is in decline and destined for no more than "residual" status as a fading subdivision within the much wider and flourishing realm of performances that take place throughout a culture, a realm dominated by unscripted nontheatrical events. He blames this loss of status on those who understand "dramatic performance as authorized in a relatively straightforward way by a scripted text" (1094). Worthen's solution is to look as much as possible for authorization outside and largely apart from individual authors and their texts. To me diminishing the writer's role in written drama in this way seems fundamentally misguided, writers having been integral to the making of dramatic meaning since Aeschylus.

Worthen is right to take sharp issue with those who, in disregard of the collaborative nature of theatrical production, give total sovereignty to the playwright's text over performance. But instead of examining the complex and subtle ways in which the two in fact interact, he himself goes to an extreme. Insisting that there is an "untenable opposition" between them, he maintains that "it is time for the presumed authority of texts over performances to be displaced" (1100) and for primacy to be given to performance: "dramatic performance, far from being authorized by its script, produces the terms of its authorization in performance" (1104). He sees as "normative" *Going, Going, Gone*, a stage production conceived by Anne Bogart in which—by his account—part of the film version of *Who's Afraid of Virginia*

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Woolf? is reenacted except that in place of Albee's dialogue the characters speak a pastiche of fragments drawn from Stephen Hawking, T. S. Eliot, and William Blake. To Worthen it is normative presumably because "[t]he meaning of *Going, Going, Gone* cannot be ascribed to the text [Albee's? Bogart's?]" (1102). When a text cannot as here be distanced or nullified, he praises self-consciously unconventional performances in which it is "decenter[ed]," radically "resituate[d]," "repudiate[d]" (1100, 1102, 1103).

To be sure, such productions are of interest and value, but Worthen would favor them to the exclusion of other kinds of production in which the performance is understood "as a realization, translation, interpretation, or citation of (potentialities latent in) the text" (1102). If heeded, so sweeping an exclusion would enormously constrict performance possibilities, including the greater part of the approaches currently practiced. By this exclusion he would, as he intends, reduce to a minimum the playwright's share in the meaning of a classic play when performed (Worthen's focus), to say nothing of a new play, where the playwright might well play an active role in rehearsals. Yet it is dramatists who have generally led the way in locating new centers of dramatic vitality for their own times and those to come. Clearly, these are drastic changes Worthen is proposing.

Are extreme measures necessary? From his first sentence Worthen expresses a strong sense of "conceptual crisis." It is hard, however, to share his alarm since it is based on the exaggerated opposition he sees between text and performance. He repeatedly describes the two as "entirely incommensurable" (1100). Yet when a production "works" it is in large part because text and performance have meshed, sometimes to the point where the two seem indistinguishable. Again and again Worthen treats both-and situations as either-or choices. If he acknowledged, for example, that text and performance may share authority, in varying degrees, then the contingent circumstances of performance that condition meaning could be given their due (as Worthen wishes) but without slighting the contributions of the text. It is true that with classic plays, the playwrights and their texts are usually accorded chief authority, but this need not be rigid or total. Shakespeare, to cite the supreme example, is notably open to interpretation by his performers.

As for the residual status of dramatic performance, it's nothing new. The reading public for classic plays long ago outnumbered their theatergoing public, and for every theater critic there are hundreds of commentators on plays as read. Fortunately, however, the excessive dominance of plays in print seems to be on the wane in the face of the enormous audiences for films and television. And it is the interworking of live theater with film and television that holds the best prospects for scripted drama. Even for classic dramatic texts, film versions are reducing print to second place. In addition to its values in its own right, the stage can serve as a kind of laboratory or seedbed for discoveries that can then receive wider dissemination on the screen. (Most of the best Shakespeare films, for example, derive from stage productions.)

Worthen is concerned that dramatic criticism too will become residual. Yet giving a dramatic text its due need not be as "incapacitating" or "disabling" to worthwhile study as he fears (1095, 1100). After all, actors, directors, and designers never cease their explorations of classic texts, seeking to find in them and in themselves what is most alive for changing audiences. These continuing efforts in turn provide a never-ending series of findings for scholars to appraise, or critics may engage in the same quest. A student of the drama can welcome the new perspectives coming from the field of performance studies without capitulating to them: the interplay of scripts with the cultural contingencies of their performance is in itself a large and rewarding subject. Worthen laments the lack of "multiplicity and ambiguity" in text-centered performances (1095), yet where better to look for these qualities than in Shakespeare's texts and in productions that reflect them?

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Reply:

Robert Hapgood is right to suggest that playwrights have frequently inspired innovations in performance; he mentions Aeschylus, and in different ways *The Master Builder*, *The Seagull*, *Waiting for Godot*, and *The America Play* all posed challenges to their first actors that could not be resolved with the available technologies of performance. Yet even when dramatic writing forces performers to develop new modes of theatrical behavior—Stanislavsky's work on Chekhov, Alan Schneider's stagings of Beckett—these solutions turn out to be surprisingly evanescent. Chekhov is much funnier onstage than he was a century ago, and Beckett seems less existential and more political than he did in the 1950s: not only do we understand their plays differently, but the behaviors that give the text performative force onstage have changed as well. The spectrum of contemporary Shakespeare performance—Ariane Mnouchkine's orientalizing, Peter Sellars's pomo multimedia, Robert Lepage's multicultural deconstruction, as well as more conventional

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