in *Amistad 2*, ed. John A. Williams and Charles Harris, New York: Random, 1971, p. 7).

Nowhere is this question-begging more apparent than in the last scene of the novel. Following Max's lecture on the evils of "the rich people" and on the need for Bigger to believe in himself, Bigger laughs. Siegel comments, "These words work upon Bigger. They give him what he wants. Ironically, however, they cause him to go further than Max intended" (p. 521). If indeed there is irony, then Bigger is certainly a party to it. His laugh is followed by a self-definition which embodies the core of Max's advice as well as his courtroom speech: "But what I killed for, I *am*! . . . What I killed for must've been good! . . . I can say it now, 'cause I'm going to die." "Ironically," Max cannot accept this bald explication of destructive creativity. Images of blindness used earlier by Max in the courtroom and by Wright throughout the novel are now applied to Max himself: "[He] groped for his hat like a blind man"; on leaving the cell "he did not turn around" to look at Bigger, and when Bigger called to him, "Max paused, but did not look." In this, the most important scene in the entire novel, Max is blind while Bigger can see. The "irony" is compounded in that Bigger sees not only what he is, but what Max is. Bigger had laughed earlier and after Max leaves the cell, "he smiled a faint, wry, bitter smile." Wright has orchestrated this last scene to draw out Max by allowing Bigger to admit his own identity. He succeeds; the orator is speechless. Rhetoric cannot circumscribe Bigger Thomas. Bigger accepts himself finally as a full human being; he thinks about his family and about Jan, and at the same time shouts out the meaning of his own existence by repeating the ideational basis of Max's rhetoric. Faced with this incarnation of his own destructive/creative dialectic, a dialectic finally stripped of all its rhetorical trappings, Max is left, like Conrad's Kurtz, "full of terror." The "irony" is entirely appropriate; the raw humanity of Bigger Thomas prevails, while Max's "understanding of Bigger" (p. 521) is deflated by that final bitter smile, that self-awareness and insight evoked by the prospect of an imminent death.

After becoming disenchanted with Communist literary dogma in the early forties, Wright, in *The God That Failed*, proposed his own artistic ethos: "I would hurl words into [the] darkness and wait for an echo; and if an echo sounded, no matter how faintly, I would send other words . . . to create a sense of the hunger for life which gnaws in us all, to keep alive in our hearts a sense of the inexpressibly human" (ed. Richard Crossman, New York: Harper, 1949, p. 162). In the conclusion of *Native Son* Wright is clearly moving in this direction. He gives the socialist historian his soapbox and allows him to exhaust his supply of rhetorical devices, but in the end finds him sadly lacking when confronted with the "inexpressibly human." Max is a witness, but he neither understands nor shares the struggle of the naked human psyche to come to terms with its own destructive potential as well as its "hunger for life"; Bigger, in proclaiming and embracing his own contradictory nature, destroys Max's rhetorical defenses and achieves at least the bare minimum of spiritual comfort by accepting himself (and forcing us to accept him) as a man.

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Form and Spenser's Venus

To the Editor:

Humphrey Tonkin's attempt to relate Spenser's Venus and Adonis to Britomart and Artegall and Florimell and Marinell in "Spenser's Garden of Adonis and Britomart's Quest" (*PMLA*, 88, 1973, 408–17) is vitiated by his association of Venus with form. We might wish that Tonkin had consulted John Erskine Hankins' *Source and Meaning in Spenser's Allegory* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971) as well as Kermode and Ficino as well as Pico: no commentator on the Garden of Adonis can afford to ignore Hankins' discussion of it (pp. 234–86).

Tonkin's identification of Venus as "the principle of form" (p. 412) results in part from his identification of Venus as the female principle only. He overlooks the description of her as hermaphroditic—"she hath both kinds in one, / Both male and female, both vnder one name: / She syre and mother is her selfe alone, / Begets and eke conceiues, ne needeth other none" (*FQ* IV.x.41)—and ignores her bisexuality. But Spenser's Venus is androgynous; and as she is more than the female principle, she is also more than the principle of form.

Tonkin is accurate in asserting that Venus is not *mater*, *materia*, but Venus' "activity" in *The Faerie Queene* is to be explained with reference to conventional Renaissance Neoplatonism rather than to "Spenser's break with traditional ways of describing creation" (Tonkin, p. 412). Spenser places Venus in Chaos in "An Hymne in Honovr of Loue" (ll. 57–63), and although she is not to be identified with matter, she is to be found acting in it. Hankins has argued for the similarity of Spenser's and Ficino's ideas here, and a brief look at Ficino's treatment of Venus is useful for an understanding of the role of Venus in *The Faerie Queene*. Spenser's Venus, like Ficino's Venus Pandemos, is a generative deity (*FQ* IV.x.44–47). Ficino identifies Venus as the genital nature of things in the lower world: distinguishing between Venus Urania and Venus Pandemos, he assigns the latter a mother—whom he identifies as matter—because of the etymo-

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logical resemblance of *mater* and *mater-ia*. Venus is placed in the World-Soul and assigned a mother *quia materiae mundi infusa cum materia commercium habere putatur* (*Commentary on Plato's* Symposium, II.vii). And the World-Soul, of which Venus is a part, is identified as the soul of first matter: *animam mundi, id est materiae primae* (*Com. on* Symposium, VI.iii). According to Ficino, Venus' activity is the result of her desire, as a lower part of the World-Soul, to produce in corporeal forms the beauty that Venus Urania had beheld in the type-forms (*speciosas rerum formas*) among the divine ideas. Matter is, then, Venus' normal place of abode; and Spenser's description of Venus as leaving her "house of goodly formes . . . / Whence all the world deriues the glorious / Features of beautie, and all shapes select, / With which high God his workmanship hath deckt" (*FQ* III.vi.12)—from which Tonkin argues that Venus is the agent of form rather than of matter—serves to draw the distinction between the Venus of the lower world and Venus Urania, and is a "literary fiction" (in Kermode's terms) of Venus' descent into the World-Soul. Having so descended, Venus is a generative agent, but she is not simply female, nor does her descent make her the "principle of form." As the genital nature of the World-Soul (*Commentary on Plotinus*, V.viii.13), Ficino's Venus makes matter apt for the reception of form; and because she sets forth the forms of things in matter (*rerum formas explicat in materia*) (*Commentary on* Philebus, I.xi), she may be termed the "mother of forms" (as J. W. Bennett did: see Hankins, p. 254). But both Venus and Adonis operate in matter, according to Ficino: Venus is the genital nature of the World-Soul, and Adonis is its active and formative nature, the "father of forms" who represents the type-form (species) and the energizing force which carries forward corporeality into the production of living bodies. Each partakes to some degree in the qualities of the other (Hankins, p. 255).

Even as brief a description as this of Ficino's treatment of Venus may indicate something of the complexity of the goddess in the writings of Renaissance Neoplatonists; and the similarities between Spenser's Venus and Ficino's may suggest that the "strange reversal" of which Tonkin writes has not occurred. By ignoring Neoplatonic treatments of Venus, Tonkin has failed to see that Spenser's uses of this figure go beyond a simple identification of her as "the principle of form." A careful reading of Virgil's third *Georgic*, ll. 135–37; Ficino's *Commentary on* Timaeus, Appendix, Ch. XX, *De Immortalitate*, XV.xi, *De Vita Coelitus Comparanda*, Ch. VI; Comes' *Mythologiae*, IV.xiii, V.xv, and X; and Hankins' comments (pp. 241–46) will indicate the complexity of Spenser's Venus and the brilliance with which he uses contemporary and traditional materials in fashioning her role.

That there is a "linking of Marinell and Florimell with the golden world of the Garden of Adonis" (Tonkin, p. 413) is obvious; that the link is Matter-Marinell-Adonis-Chrysogone and Form-Florimell-Venus-Sun remains debatable. Britomart does owe a great deal to the Venus *armata* tradition, but she also relates explicitly to Minerva and to Diana (as Fowler especially has indicated in *Spenser and the Numbers of Time*). Tonkin follows Ellrodt's landmark *Neoplatonism in the Poetry of Spenser* (Geneva: Droz, 1960) in minimizing Spenser's Neoplatonism. Ellrodt was, of course, reacting against exaggerated claims for Platonic influence on Spenser, and his book, arguing for influence by the Church fathers and especially St. Augustine, was a necessary and welcome corrective when it appeared. Nevertheless, more recent studies, and those of Hankins and Fowler in particular, have indicated that we are likely to err in arguing for *either* Christian *or* Platonic influence. As Hankins puts it: "St. Augustine himself was influenced in his views by Plato. Like him, Spenser has a debt to both Platonism and Christian teaching. There is nothing inherently improbable about a Platonic influence upon Spenser and no reason to exclude it in favour of Christian influence. He had both" (p. 239). If Tonkin's article helps to make clear the need for renewed discussion of the question of "influence" in Spenser's poetry, we may be grateful to *PMLA* for publishing it.

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Theory of Fictional Modes

To the Editor:

Wicks's modal approach to the picaresque narrative (*PMLA*, 89, 1974, 240–49) both pleases and confuses in that, on the one hand, it succinctly delineates the focal elements of the picaresque novel's structural makeup and, on the other hand, proposes to distribute all fictional forms between satire and romance. Wicks begins "from a position that allows us to see the *entire narrative spectrum* with its infinite range of possibilities along the scale from satire to romance" (p. 241; italics mine), a position recently worked out by Robert Scholes. In principle, I have no serious objections to this or a similar position as long as it does not pretend to be universally applicable. Ad rem: Scholes's theory of fictional modes, in the same way as Northrop Frye's theory of modes, is visibly too narrow to accommodate the entire narrative spectrum. The first conceives of its spectrum from the position of history or, one could say, from the position of vector psychology, and the second from the position of the protagonist or, one could say, from the position of individual psychology. In Scholes's spectrum, modal skewness to the right or

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