

tors' identities, coupled with blind submissions, can only have a salubrious effect on all aspects of the process and, more importantly, on all the individuals involved. The way things are routinely done now, we pander to the worst foibles of human character in the assumption that no other recourse is open to us. A more principled attitude would insist on creating the kind of professional ethos that places scholarly accountability as a cornerstone in the promotion of our goals as scholars.

MICHAEL SHAPIRO
New York, New York

Feminist Readings of Shakespeare

To the Editor:

This letter responds to the attack by feminist critics in the January 1989 issue of *PMLA* (77–78) on Richard Levin's piece on recent Shakespearean criticism ("Feminist Thematics and Shakespearean Tragedy," 103 [1988]: 125–38). As one who occasionally gives a course in Shakespeare and yearly teaches *Romeo and Juliet* in a survey course and who likes to keep up with critical debates, I found Levin's trenchant critique wonderfully informative as well as shrewdly deflating. This is precisely the type of analysis *PMLA* should host: large topics of current concern written in simple, jargon-free language.

Then I received the January issue, in which some of the critics skewered in his essay ganged up to attack him. So far so good, but when I finished their diatribe and ad hominem assaults, which Levin had not resorted to in his essay, I found myself reacting indignantly. Talk about crude Aristotelianism! They acknowledge their own "partiality" of method and concept and then accuse him of believing in an outmoded distinction between genres as if it were astrology or belief in witches. They even attack at length his remark about appealing to rational minds for evidence. What else does *PMLA* appeal to in its articles?

Finally, what I find insufferable is their thinly disguised religious fervor or totalitarianism, the idea that feminist assumptions cannot be subject to the usual methods of analysis and critique and that somehow *PMLA*, which serves a learned profession, should not allow critiques of fadist methods to be aired. I have been a member of the MLA for about twenty-five years and do not take kindly to this attack on what seemed to me a temperate—yes, rational and courageous—look at feminist readings of the tragedies. I only wish for more essays that examine the methods used by contemporary critics and that you and future editors will have the guts to print.

ARTHUR J. WEITZMAN
Northeastern University

To the Editor:

The Editorial Board ought to establish a policy of refusing to publish personal attacks in Forum. The penultimate sentence in the response to Richard Levin insults a distinguished scholar. Because one assumes that letters are scrutinized with some of the same care given to submissions, to print personal attacks on a scholar's career or character seems to lend them credence, however reasoned the victim's reply.

A policy should also insist that letters be free of misquotations and of obvious misreadings or distortions of the text in question. What is obvious, of course, is not always obvious. I thought the writers responding to Levin plainly wrong in asserting that he attacks all feminist criticism. But I am interested here less in that one response to Levin than in principles.

Treat letters like submissions. Have two members of the Editorial Board read each letter for its probity, fairness, and contribution to the issue. Inaccuracy and meanness are as reprehensible as sexist language. No more should they be tolerated.

DWIGHT H. PURDY
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To the Editor:

The letter signed by twenty-four individuals reminded me of a course I used to give years ago—Argumentation and Debate—in which we discussed "The Seven Propaganda Devices." I could have used the letter to illustrate how these devices are employed—not very successfully—by the signatories.

1. *Hasty Generalization*. "We are puzzled and disturbed that Richard Levin has made a successful academic career by using the reductive techniques of this essay to bring the same predictable charges indiscriminately against all varieties of contemporary criticism" (paragraph 7).

2. *Glittering Generalities*. "He [Levin] fails to understand the serious concerns about inequality and injustice that have engendered feminist analyses of literature" (paragraph 2); "the energetic, cogent, sophisticated theoretical debate that is currently taking place within and among schools of Renaissance criticism" (paragraph 7)—a debate that Levin allegedly ignored; and "Levin does not recognize the profound challenges that feminist criticism poses to the crude Aristotelianism he has advocated since his introduction to his 1960 textbook, *Tragedy: Plays, Theory, and Criticism*" (paragraph 5).

3. *Name Calling*. Levin's essay is called "tired, muddled, unsophisticated" (paragraph 7).

4. *Testimonial*. Assuming that reference to the professors listed in paragraph 2 testifies to the worth of femi-