

Date: Wed, 1 Nov 2000 19:24:13 -0600 (CST)
From: Norman Fruman <fruma001@tc.umn.edu>
To: Scott Simpkins <scotts@unt.edu>
Subject: Re: ALSC essay/Winter97

Dear Professor Simpkins:

It sounds like a great idea to me, provided that what you attempt to show is that close reading devoid of common sense can validate whatever theory you have a textual meaning. For example, in the sentence, "Maxwell House coffee is good to the last drop," you can in theory argue that something is wrong with the last drop.

A clever reader might well argue that my essay is a parody, intended to show how preposterous are assaults on close reading, that what I'm really trying to show is how easy it is to ridicule close reading by presenting exaggerations. I know of at least one person who was PERSUADED by the essay that Porphyro had in fact raped Madeline.

So far as I know, only one reader has noticed, or at least commented to me about my response to the student's question about whether Porphyro had indeed ejaculated prematurely. I wrote: "Well, there is always the problem of what Middleton Murry called the 'vagaries of intellect.' Unless you can COME up with some FIRM supporting evidence of Porphyro's lack of control, such as a PREMATURE caesura or MISPLACED EXCLAMATION POINT, for example, this particular interpretation may be a little HARD ON Porphyro. But do go on. I'm DYING to get a clearer picture of what all this is leading into." The question is, did I deliberately use the words COME, FIRM, PREMATURE, MISPLACED EXCLAMATION POINT, DYING and HARD ON, as salacious double entendres, or is a reader who seems them there a person with a dirty mind. You will recall that earlier in the essay it was pointed out that "to die" in Elizabethan times also meant to have and orgasm.

Please do keep me informed. I'm delighted that you find my essay so useful. Students badly need to be brought back to earth and to learn that the enjoyment of literature is not a process of learning to decode but of paying attention.

All the best--

On Wed, 1 Nov 2000, Scott Simpkins wrote:

> Dear Professor Fruman:

>

> I teach--with great delight--your essay on "Reconstructing English"
> (ALSC Newsletter, Winter 1997) in my literary theory courses.

> I am going to propose to my class tomorrow the possibility of
> reading your essay as

> sarcastic or a parody. (The same way you read the English Department
> Chairman's

> letter about Paul Spindles...) Do you have any thoughts on that reading
> possibility?

> Thanks and cheers!

>

> Scott Simpkins

> Assoc. Prof., English

> University of North Texas

> scotts@unt.edu

>

>