CORRESPONDENCE

Queer science

To the editors:

Lee Siegel's troubles with queer studies stem largely from what he perceives as the discipline's indulgent excesses and its glaring omissions ("The Gay Science," November 9). He laments the reduction of life, sex, and literary criticism purely to matters of the body to the exclusion of love. But why must scholars continually look beyond the corporal for the metaphysically noble? Isn't it the physical act that gets so many "queers" in trouble with society and its laws in the first place? Moreover, since when did queer studies dispose entirely with questions of love?

DICK LANGSTON
St. Louis, Missouri

To the editors:

Lee Siegel's criticism of queer theory would be more properly directed at poststructuralism, with its infamous notion of ever-receding "truths" and its anti-foundationalism. These tendencies, Siegel thinks, ruin appreciation of literature and literary critique. But most of the theorists taken to task in his article, though members of literature departments, are not literary critics—at least not the kind we remember from the supposedly good old days of Brooks and Warren. They are philosophers, linguists, anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, and historians. Literature qua literature is not their central concern.

Why turn to Sedgwick for an analysis of Austen's wit? Why not turn to her for some clues as to what Austen's work might say about how we (have come to) think about sexuality? Siegel is asking perfectly good questions but addressing them to the wrong people.

DOUGLAS E. GREEN
Northfield, Minnesota

To the editors:

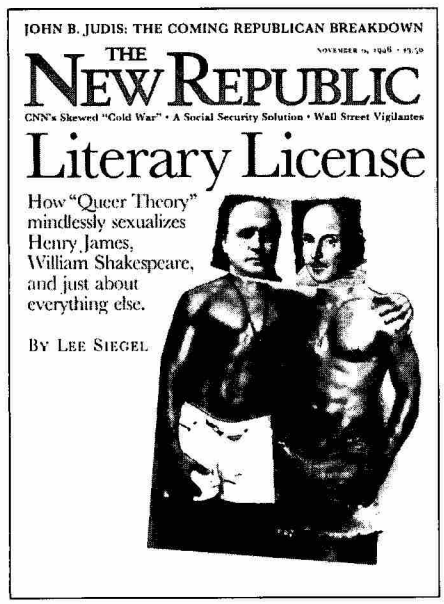
Never mind my numerous disagreements with Lee Siegel's assessment of the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Michael Moon. They pale in comparison to my outrage at his concluding attack on Moon (a colleague of mine). As regards his own life, Siegel assumes that his Ginsberg-inspired claim to be "putting my straight shoulder to the wheel" will be accepted without a murmur of protest. And why not? In the world that we may well live in soon (I certainly hope we will), to "out" oneself as heterosexual may have exactly the same meaning as outing oneself as gay. But—in an article filled with sneering innuendo and blatant misreadings—Siegel also speculates that "[Moon] faints at the slightest whiff of leather." In other words, no matter what one says, a proud-to-be-straight critic is always free to slap on some catchall label of deviance.

JOHN PLOTZ
Baltimore, Maryland

To the editors:

I find it perverse that Lee Siegel characterizes the field of queer theory as fixated on the anus. It is there, to be sure, but the field is to a much greater extent about the investments that characterize and form perception. I wonder if Siegel's myopia does not indicate compulsion and anxiety on his part.

MARK MASTERSON
South Pasadena, California



To the editors:

Lee Siegel's "The Gay Science" was a case of journalistic sensationalism at its worst. The author misrepresented queer theory in several cases—particularly in his attack on the work of Eve Sedgwick. Whether or not one agrees with Sedgwick's ideas, she has engendered and influenced volumes of scholarship that have encouraged literary scholars and students to read familiar texts in a new way, to think about the construction and restrictions of gender, and to reevaluate the role of power.

ARNOLD A. MARKLEY
Media, Pennsylvania

Fair representation

To the editors:

By making me a poster boy for postmodernism, Leon Wieseltier ("Shrunken," November 9) has contributed mightily to the amusement of colleagues familiar with my work, which, I dare say, is dedicated to a defense of liberal jurisprudence and has little to do with what Wieseltier calls the "wanton carnival of signifiers." Apparently Wieseltier believes that a professor who publishes in *Representations* and uses obscure, jargony words such as "icon" must genuflect before the altar of Derrida and Baudrillard. I think a fair-minded reader of "The Shrunken Head of Buchenwald" will conclude that I do not.

Ironically, Wieseltier succeeds at mischaracterizing my work by using the very strategies of engagement that he identifies with the evils of cultural studies. He ignores my central argument and instead shrinks my essay to a single footnote, which he quotes out of context. Wieseltier's claims to the contrary, it seems that postmodernists are not alone in eschewing reasoned argument for partisan caricature.

LAWRENCE DOUGLAS
Amherst College
Amherst, Massachusetts

To the editors:

It is surprising that Leon Wieseltier would condemn me for having mentioned that I am a child of Holocaust survivors in my recent letter to the editor.

I mentioned that only because it was relevant to the topic of my letter—the troubling decision by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum to choose as its research director John Roth, who had compared Israel to the Nazis and Palestinian Arabs to the Jews of Nazi Germany. The fact that I was born in a displaced persons camp in Neu-Ulm, Germany, to parents who had survived Auschwitz and lost most of their family members makes it easier for readers to understand why I felt especially compelled to lead a campaign against the Roth nomination. Roth's incomprehensible comparisons show he had no real grasp of what my parents and family endured during the Nazi era. My personal life was scarred by the fact that I grew up without grandparents and most of my aunts, uncles, and cousins because they were murdered by the Nazis, and my parents never fully recovered from the horrors they endured. Their pain, anguish, and loss became our pain, anguish, and loss.

MORTON A. KLEIN
New York, New York

Peace later

To the editors:

Your recent Notebook item about Americans for Peace Now is off-base in several

respects (November 9). Peace Now is hardly "marginal" in terms of Israeli politics. The movement consistently generates large-scale public demonstrations in support of the peace process, serves as a reliable source of cutting-edge information about political developments in Jerusalem and the settlements, and has one of the most dynamic youth movements in the country. One of the movement's founders—Tzaly Reshef—has recently served as chief of staff to Ehud Barak, leader of the mainstream Labor Party.

Peace Now and Americans for Peace Now are nonpartisan, single-issue movements, promoting peace in the Middle East, a key policy goal of the Clinton administration. Judging from the signatures of Prime Minister Netanyahu and Chairman Arafat on the Wye memorandum, peace is a goal of the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority, too.

Finally, Peace Now was founded 20 years ago, not by "Judy Collins" idealists but by hundreds of reserve officers and commanders of the Israeli Defense Forces who knew that peace is the best way to ensure Israeli security. The movement continues to draw broad support from the Israeli security establishment for the same reason.

EDWARD WITTEN
Princeton, New Jersey

Global fixes

To the editors:

Dani Rodrik's article prompts me to say: If you must fix what is broke, you need to know why it is broken ("The Global Fix," November 2). Rodrik's solution fails that test.

Rodrik believes that the "Reagan and Thatcher 'revolutions'" have made us opt for a let-the-markets-rip strategy without attention to social contexts. We have imperiled the international trade regime in two main ways: we have created "significant inequities, economic instability, or social disruption," and we have ridden roughshod over the diversity of other cultures by indulging demands to harmonize away such differences in the ideological pursuit of free trade. But neither charge is compelling.

First, Rodrik mistakenly transfers to *trade* the serious consequences of *financial* crises such as today's (which have come in any event from an *economic* miscalculation of the risks of freed capital flows, not from a disregard of the *social* context in which these flows were set). Free trade and free capital mobility are distinct phenomena and prescriptions. And misgivings about the malign consequences of trade are a throwback to the fears that plagued the developing countries before they abandoned them.

Second, the harmonization demands afflicting us today owe little to the idea or ideology of mindless free trade. In fact, just the opposite is true.

Competition has intensified as the world economy has gotten more integrated. Firms have clamored therefore to iron out any "unfair" advantages that their rivals may enjoy from differences in their nations' domestic policies and institutions. But these are lobbying demands that reflect protectionism rather than ideological demands for free trade. Freetraders have spent years unmasking them, whereas politicians have embraced them under the slogan "fair trade, not free trade."

But harmonization demands also come from socially motivated groups seeking to use trade policy to prompt social change abroad. However, because trade is driven by economic gain, the chosen social agendas reflect our competitiveness concerns and are consequently distorted and discounted. And the freeing of trade is undermined, as with Clinton's failure on fast-track renewal, because its supporters divide on the social agendas.

The global fix we need requires, then, not that we abandon social agendas, as in Rodrik's blueprint, but that we shift them to other nontrade arenas and pursue them simultaneously with the commitment that we bestow on freeing trade.

JAGDISH BHAGWATI
New York, New York

Dani Rodrik replies:

Jagdish Bhagwati and I agree that it is generally inappropriate for the United States to push a social agenda on trade partners. We disagree on what to do when trade has consequences for *domestic* social arrangements.

Consider the effect of trade on labor-market institutions. How should we respond when firms bargain down working conditions at home by threatening to outsource from a country with nonexistent labor rights? If I understand him correctly, Bhagwati would sacrifice domestic labor standards. I would sacrifice free trade.

I argued that the world economic system is facing a legitimacy crisis because the social and political institutions that underpin a market economy at the national level are missing globally. Building such institutions requires a degree of harmonization of national practices that Bhagwati and I both regard as undesirable. The alternative is to allow

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Through the rich texture of his case-studies Evans thus shows how bourgeois society conjured up the underworld out of its own phobic imagination, to counterpoint its own proprieties. Underworld narratives sparked moral panics and fueled respectable fears. It will be amply clear from this how far the thinking shaping Evans's *Tales* has been enriched by the new historicism. There is also another borrowing that Evans has made, and that is in respect of his source materials and the uses he has put them to. For he is at pains to point out how his archival narratives of crime and punishment reflect and interact with the invention of criminal types in the culture at large, life imitating art while art mimics life. Thus his forger's autobiography—tellingly entitled *Aschenbrenner's Authentic History*—reproduces many of the motifs of the sensational literature of the day. Aschenbrenner's romantic narrative, with its implied message that a life of crime was a life of adventure, strikingly followed the *Räuber- und Ritterroman*, a popular adventure-story genre.

If Aschenbrenner's tale was in the epic mode, the tale of Gesche Rudolph was cast in the mode of tragedy. Coming down to us in the form of a plea by her lawyer, it is an artfully constructed plea for mercy, a literary creation designed to move the reader and to melt an official's heart. Is such "fiction in the archives" (to borrow Natalie Zemon Davis's phrase) trustworthy as historical evidence? There is, maintains Evans, perhaps too confidently, no reason to doubt the truth of those details which it does recount; what we cannot know is what it omits.

And what of the confidence trickster and bigamist Ernst, whose life we possess courtesy of the pen of the hapless policemen charged to question him? As Ernst wove his elaborate web of fantasies and falsehoods, and the police were forced to go to ever greater lengths to tease out the facts, it became apparent that even he could no longer tell reality from fiction. In such ways the underworld was intruding disturbingly—and also comically—into respectable society, since the criminal succeeded in passing as a model of correctness.

After the epic, the tragic, and the comic, Evans presents the ironic. The descent of a decent woman into prostitution, disease, and death casts a critical light on the moral pretensions of the respectable society that first banished her by its own rigid conventions and then exploited her. Thymian Gotteball's diary, while masquerading as a true-life story, was not that at all. It was a social-realist novel, drawing heavily upon literary stereotypes of innocence betrayed and corrupted by hypocritical society. Its fictional status has long been known. Evans's trick of initially presenting it as if it were authentic appears to be evidence that he has assimilated more of the rhetorical devices of postmodernism than one might have supposed.

Thus Evans's case studies reveal a striking conflation of rhetoric and reality, fact and fiction, as the public forged the bogey figures that it needed to vilify. It is almost the very unreliability of the narratives told by, or on behalf of, Evans's protagonists that establishes their true social identity: his heroes were, indeed, untrustworthy sorts. It would appear that the new historicism, and even a postmodernist notion or two, apparently kicked out through the door of *In Defense of History*, have come back through the window of *Tales from the German Underworld*. If this hints at a certain dissonance between the two works, this must be seen not as a blemish, but rather as a sign of creative tension in a scholar at the peak of his powers caught in the act of extending his range.

ROY PORTER is the author of *The Greatest Benefit to Mankind: A Medical History of Humanity* (Norton).

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nations to shelter their social arrangements from the occasionally disruptive forces of trade.

Money for nothing

To the editors:

Peter Diamond offers a spirited defense of the benefits of private capital investment but pooh-poohs the idea of allowing American workers to invest a portion of their own taxes ("Sound Investment," November 9). Instead, he says, let the federal government do it.

But there are risks of centralized investment, primarily that the government would become involved in picking corporate winners and losers. Investing in a stock index fund does not eliminate the problem—the choice of an index is itself a decision to favor some companies over others. And the risk is even greater given the amount of money at stake. Although Diamond does not divulge any numbers, one leading proposal offered last year by former Social Security Commissioner Robert Ball estimates a government investment of $1 trillion (in constant 1996 dollars) in the stock market by 2015. That's enough, according to New York University economist Lawrence White, for the government to become the largest shareholder of many if not most of 500 of the largest companies in America—those listed in the S&P 500.

CAROLYN WEAVER
American Enterprise Institute
Washington, D.C.

To the editors:

Peter Diamond is off the mark to compare government investments of portions of the Social Security trust fund in the stock market to the Thrift Savings Plan. The TSP is a defined contribution program with individually owned accounts. Workers have a property right in their accounts, which is not true of Social Security. Furthermore, the TSP is a voluntary program. If workers are dissatisfied with it, they can refuse to participate. This gives fund managers an incentive to maximize returns. By contrast, a government-invested Social Security system would be mandatory, and workers would be forced to continue contributing 12.4 percent of their income into the system no matter how dissatisfied they were.

MICHAEL TANNER
Cato Institute
Washington, D.C.