

Journal of Hispanic Philology, 10 (1986),
199-201.

EDITOR'S COLUMN

Two Letters to Editors: On Footnotes, On Chivalry

May 6, 1986

Dr. Edna Steeves, Editor
Editors' Notes

Dear Dr. Steeves,

In the latest issue of *Editors' Notes*, James Raymond praises the new MLA style for its program for avoiding footnotes. He also expresses the wish that footnotes disappear entirely, and claims that experienced scholars would not miss them.

I would miss them very much. The footnotes of an article are what I read first. From the notes I can tell quickly: what edition of his/her main text the author of the article uses, with which the quality of the article is sometimes related, whether the author knows the relevant scholarship on the topic, whether the author is indeed familiar with the studies cited or is merely enumerating them to impress. None of this can be determined as easily from a list of Works Cited.

In many cases, the notes are an intellectual "audit trail," allowing one to reconstruct the evolution of the author's thought. They are the accompaniment to the melody of the body of the article. Although ideally it would not be so, there have been many cases in which I have gotten more from reading the notes than the text of an article. Given two articles of equal value save for notes, I would prefer to publish the one with the more extensive footnotes. In my own writing, my notes are commonly as long or longer than the text.

One reason notes have fallen into disfavor is that they have often been made inconvenient, by placing them at the end. In some scholarly books one must consult the table of contents in order to rapidly find a note. Improved typesetting software is making it no more expensive to place footnotes where they belong, at the foot of the pages which they annotate. I hope publishers will return to placing them there.

Sincerely,

Daniel Eisenberg
Editor, *Journal of Hispanic Philology*

(Published in *Editors' Notes*, 5, No. 2 [Fall, 1986], 13.)

November 20, 1985

Dr. Freya Reeves Lambides, Editor
Avalon to Camelot

Dear Dr. Lambides,

My previous letter [Vol. 1 No. 4, p. 2] was hastily written, without the thought that it would be published. Of course my use of the term "fascism" was imprecise. The lesson, I suppose, is that one should not write anything one would not care to see in print.

However, I will stand on and even expand my indictment of chivalric literature, in which I have such illustrious predecessors as Petrarch and Cervantes. Chivalric literature has been predominantly deceptive; that is, it has attempted to mislead readers or listeners about historical truth. It has encouraged bloodshed for the sake of principle, and discouraged learning and study. It also promoted an immature concept of the relations between the sexes, and was, if not openly anti-Semitic (there is a famous example of the latter in the *Cid*), at least quite in harmony with the birth of modern anti-Semitism in the late Middle Ages.

Of course there are works which are exempt from some or all of the charges. Obviously the literature would not have been written or read if some desire for it were not there; however, to exonerate the literature on these grounds is the same as exonerating handguns with the argument "guns don't kill people, people kill people." Of our postwar presidents it was the most aggressive, who laid the foundation for the Vietnam War, with whom chivalry is most closely associated. The role of southern chivalry, derived from the neo-Arthurianism of Sir Walter Scott, in setting the scene for the Civil War was pointed out a century ago; nothing in southern chivalry was found incompatible with slavery. According to its constitution, the Ku Klux Klan embodies in its principles "all that is chivalric in conduct" (Stanley Frost, *The Challenge of the Klan* [1924; rpt. New York: AMS, 1969], p. 68).

I do, then, object to the glamorization and popularization of chivalric literature, and to the eager interest in those seemingly central questions, the existence of a historical Arthur and the origin of the grail legend. It is not that the investigation is wrong

in itself (though it says something about us that chivalry is today the most popular aspect of the medieval world), but the motivation behind it is, on the whole, misguided. Chivalric literature, like all myths, should be studied, but not taught.

You have said you are not certain that *Return to Camelot* makes the case I imply. I will quote only one sentence from the opening paragraph of the final chapter, "The Great War": "One conclusion is undeniable: the ideals of chivalry worked with one accord in favor of war" (p. 276).

Just as you found part of my letter hard to understand, one sentence in your answer is unclear to me. Who are the "beings like Merlin who transcend our known realities"? If you maintain that there are unknown realities, then you have left scholarship, and me, behind.

Sincerely,

Daniel Eisenberg

(Published in *Avalon to Camelot*, 2, No. 2 (1986 [1987], p. 2.)