

from me is being privileged and has become the preferred other at my expense” (202). It’s as though the critics of the journal must be one and the same as the supporters of Pat Buchanan.

Stanton presumably uses the verb *to inscribe* without embarrassment. Twelve years ago in a graduate seminar the professor sternly warned me that my use of the same Derrideanism would provoke laughter if I didn’t remove it from my paper before I read the text before an audience. But *PMLA*’s enshrinement of clichés, its insensitivity to language, and its slavish devotion to sectarian politics most emphatically do embarrass those who still place a high value on the impartial pursuit of knowledge, on clarity of expression, and on independence of thought. *PMLA* is simply not open “to all scholarly methods and theoretical perspectives,” as its charter claims.

THOMAS F. BERTONNEAU
Central Michigan University

A Correction to an Exchange on the Hermeneutic Circle

To the Editor:

In a recent letter to the Forum (111 [1996]: 465–66), I point out that Frederick Amrine, in his remarks in “The Status of Evidence: A Roundtable” (111 [1996]: 21–31), gives an erroneous report of the conception of the hermeneutic circle that appears in my essay “Belief and Resistance: A Symmetrical Account” (*Questions of Evidence: Proof, Practice, and Persuasion across the Disciplines*, ed. James Chandler, Arnold I. Davidson, and Harry Harootian [Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1994] 139–53).

Whereas Amrine claims that “[t]he notion [there] is that in the hermeneutic circle you begin and end in the same place and don’t ever open yourself up to dialectical or dialogic interaction with possibly disconfirming evidence” (27), that idea of hermeneutic circularity is explicitly rejected in my essay, where I write, “Our relation to the universe . . . is both dynamic and reciprocal. . . . The hermeneutic circle does not permit access or escape to an uninterpreted reality; but we do not keep going around in the same path” (151–52). In a reply seeking to justify his remarks (111 [1996]: 466–67), Amrine cites a different passage from “Belief and Resistance,” charging me with “den[ying] having written what is plain on the page” (467). What can or cannot be plain on any page is, of course, part of the general issue here, but I am content to let readers judge for themselves the validity of Amrine’s claims and charges. In assessing the textual evidence, however, they should be aware that Amrine’s paraphrase of the passage he cites (466) reverses my characterizations of, respectively, “constructivist-interactionist accounts of knowledge” and “traditional epistemologies.” They appear in my text as follows:

The former [i.e., “constructivist-interactionist accounts of knowledge”] stress the *participation* of prior belief in the perception of present evidence—that is, the hermeneutic circle. The latter [i.e., “traditional epistemologies”] insist on the possibility of the *correction* of prior belief by present evidence—that is, the possible rupture of the hermeneutic circle by what is posited as autonomous, observer-independent reality—and also on its normative occurrence, as in (genuine) science. (“Belief and Resistance,” 140–41)

BARBARA HERRNSTEIN SMITH
Duke University