

## Editor's Column

AS I HAVE previously noted in this column, the major criterion for acceptance of the articles that now appear in *PMLA* is that they be of significant interest to the journal's highly diverse thirty thousand readers. Thus acceptances, like chips, fall where they may, and no effort is made to shape a particular issue around a theme or subject. While this policy may be frustrating to the specialist, it is precisely the lack of focus that enhances the value of *PMLA* for readers curious about what's happening in fields other than their own. For such readers, this particular issue should be especially rewarding: its subjects range from *Wuthering Heights* and *Oliver Twist* to "L'Après-Midi d'un faune," from the *Second Shepherd's Play* to Donoso's *El obsceno pájaro de la noche*, from Molière's *Dom Juan* to Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*, from a psychobiographical study of Wordsworth's Lucy poems to an attempt to break the code of Wallace Stevens' "fusky" alphabet. A mixed bag, to say the least, but in terms of scholarly significance and, I very much hope, of reader interest this is possibly the best single issue of *PMLA* to appear since we began publishing articles under the present editorial policy.

One of the reviewers of Margaret Homans' study of the repression and sublimation of nature in *Wuthering Heights* called it "an audacious and marvelously interesting essay." I find it to be all that and more, for Homans, applying Freudian and structuralist methods, reveals for me an entirely new dimension to the novel. Surely, whatever else it is, *Wuthering Heights* is a work that captures the wonder, the fierceness, of nature—the desolate moors, the wild crags, the whole romantic bag of tricks that Brontë employed so effectively in creating her memorable playground for Cathy and Heathcliff. Not so, claims Homans, who begins her article by noting that few scenes in the novel are set outdoors, that most of the crucial events take place indoors, and that in neither of the two major narrative units are Cathy and Heathcliff, together or apart, ever presented on the moors. From this quiet beginning, Homans advances a bold and fascinating argument for Brontë's having repressed and sublimated nature in her novel.

William Lankford's concern is with the evolving form of *Oliver Twist*. Suggesting that the thematic and symbolic confusion in the novel is the result of Dickens' transformation of its mode of representation, Lankford shows Dickens' struggle to evolve a narrative mode that could reflect changes in his conception of human nature, of the workings of Providence, and of the realities and consequences of social injustice. Illuminating a critical stage in Dickens' development, Lankford also provides an excellent formal account of the ways in which *Oliver Twist* was shaped. One specialist reader may have been exaggerating when he called Lankford's article "the best thing on *Twist* I've ever read," but I suspect that if casebooks are still being compiled by the end of this century Homans' article on *Wuthering Heights* and Lankford's on *Oliver Twist* will be included as among the most valuable twentieth-century analyses of these Victorian classics.

José Donoso, although one of the most important contemporary Latin American writers, is perhaps not so well known to *PMLA* readers as he should and eventually will be. John Caviglia's essay on *El obsceno pájaro de la noche* may help to address the situation, for Caviglia succeeds in anatomizing an extraordinary novel that has baffled readers ever since its publication (one early critic, accustomed to Donoso's "traditional" work, felt that all one could assert after reading *The Obscene Bird of Night* was that one had done so). Showing how the leap from tradition to "monstrosity" in Donoso's work is internalized in the themes and structures of *El obsceno pájaro*, Caviglia unravels the complexities of this bizarre novel and, in so doing, provides a splendid introduction to Donoso and his work.

Wordsworth's Lucy poems need no introduction, and even nonspecialists are aware of the critical controversy that has long surrounded them. Richard Matlack creates a comprehensive psychological and biographical "ambience" for the poems in an effort to dispel the mystery of their genesis and to account for their intriguing peculiarities. The article illuminates an important crux in Romantic scholarship and, as one reviewer noted, "has the great virtue of presenting a psychoanalytic interpretation in terms that should convince most non- or even anti-Freudians." Similarly illuminating—although with different concerns and a very different

poet—is the article by Philip Furia and Martin Roth on Wallace Stevens' "fusky" alphabet. Proposing that for Stevens the alphabet provided a private code for validating his philosophical concerns, Furia and Roth explore the ways in which the alphabet informs specific poems and how its use generates many of the apparent difficulties of the poetry. Stevens' scholars will long have occasion to refer to this "code-breaking" essay, but anyone interested in how sound and sense operate in poetry should also find the analysis fascinating.

The next two articles share a concern with the handling of farcical material in "serious" drama. Maynard Mack, Jr., stressing that the *Second Shepherds' Play* is one not only of radiant simplicity but also of rare sophistication and artistic daring, shows how dramatic techniques were employed to connect the secular and sacred experience, to shift, through the farce-drama, from initial despair to religious celebration. Similarly, Francis Lawrence suggests that we take a fresh look at Molière's *Dom Juan* and reexamine its central character in the light of his relationship to the Deity. While maintaining that the play's consistency is profoundly comic, Lawrence elucidates a Dom Juan who is actually the comic inverse of the romantic or tragic hero.

This issue concludes with articles on two works that, like *Dom Juan* and the *Second Shepherds' Play*, would seem to be more than just centuries apart—Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* and Mallarmé's "L'Après-Midi d'un faune." Though hardly companion pieces, the articles make interesting reading in conjunction since both interpretations diverge from traditional scholarship. S. Clark Hulse shows how the inconsistencies of *Venus and Adonis*, rooted in sixteenth-century mythography, can be understood in relation to the attribute system of allegorical painting (e.g., Venus is "a series of images, even of puns" and "not so much a person as a diverse group of actions inhabiting a single body"). Steven Walker, although recognizing that the "Faune" reflects its own time in the Gallic wit of its plot and theme, similarly looks to ancient models—in particular, to the pastoral idylls of Theocritus and Vergil—to find the "generic promptings" on which Mallarmé based a new version of pastoral in writing his *Églogue*.

Everyone knows what Mallarmé's faun was up to, but, for those in doubt as to the intentions of Venus, the following illustration provides some useful clues.

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