

Editor's Column

I WISH I could take some credit for this distinguished issue. The selections were made and the revisions completed, however, long before I became editor—the essays, in fact, were already in galley form when I first saw them. It thus seems appropriate to acknowledge those, including William Schaefer, who are responsible for these riches.

The contribution I did get to make (apart from doing some proofreading) was in establishing the order of presentation. Since I have long been intrigued by such poetic sequences as Williams' *Paterson* and Berryman's *Dream Songs*, especially by the relationship of the various parts to one another, I read these articles with an eye toward possible links, thematic or stylistic. The final plan, however, is based not on any grand design but on my realization that the papers arrange themselves, quite neatly, into three clusters. I early on decided to lead with Mary Carruthers' engaging essay on the *Wife of Bath* and the "painting of lions," and from there the others fell into place. Chaucer, Sidney, and Browne compose the first triad. The essays that follow, on Rousseau, Trakl, and Czechoslovakian literary theory, concern languages and literatures other than English. And the final three, on Conrad, Faulkner, and Hemingway, all deal with modern fiction. The movement, if not quite from Beowulf to Virginia Woolf, takes us from Chaucer to Hemingway—from lion painting to lion hunting.

Neither our specialist readers nor the members of the Advisory Committee and Editorial Board make their decisions on the basis of quotas (subject, gender, rank), and hence it is coincidental that this collection reflects certain facts about our membership. Four essays deal with British topics, two with American, and three with those of other cultures, a balance in keeping with the interests of our overall readership. Three of the authors are women and six are men, just as approximately a third of our members are women. And the contributors (at the time of submission) run the gamut from graduate student to full professor.

In addition to these coincidences of demography, the issue coincidentally includes a number of subjects that rarely brighten *PMLA's* pages. "We have accepted few essays on modern British fiction," an Advisory Committee member wrote in recommending Hunt Hawkins' paper, "and this is the best thing I have seen on Conrad since I began doing evaluations." Pauline Yu's comparative study was described as stimulating and instructive reading "for all of us who are benighted about the East-West correspondence in lyric poetry." This fascinating presentation should interest a great many members, especially Germanists and sinologists. "Articles dealing with linguistic matters are not common in the journal," a specialist wrote in his evaluation of F. W. Galan's account of Czechoslovakian critical theory, a study that caused one Board member to say, "I've been waiting five years for this article." And since one essay on twentieth-century American literature is a rarity for *PMLA*, two constitute a miracle. Moreover, we are probably presenting the first Hemingway paper ever jointly authored by a medievalist and a modernist; as one reader put it, they suggest "all sorts of stimulating directions for further study [and] make me wonder what they might be likely to find in Dreiser and the detective story of the 1930s."

The critical strategies employed by these scholars cover a wide spectrum, too. Mary Carruthers' approach is interdisciplinary: she uses social, legal, and economic history to illuminate the milieu that produced the *Wife of Bath*. Hunt Hawkins also comes to his reading of *Heart of Darkness* with the help of history, politics, and economics. Anne Drury Hall's elegant argument is structuralist, but without the usual terms—she clearly prefers "genre" to "code" and "signifier." Placing Browne's work in a context both historical and generic, she defines his tone, in one reader's words, "with more precision than any other essay since Austin Warren's pioneer study." F. W. Galan's essay on the Prague structuralists, first written for an MLA Convention meeting entitled "Literature and History," makes no claims for original critical theory but attempts, instead, to give a comprehensive account of an existing body of thought. The exposition, as one specialist noted, is "dense in the good sense of the word."

Lester G. Crocker, in providing a "sympathetic description of a Rousseau we are not familiar with," addresses central issues in the writer's thought and in social thought in general,

lucidly demonstrating how apparent contradictions are to be reconciled. Ronald Levao's tightly argued study of Sir Philip Sidney's "complex and self-conscious fiction" is also concerned with contradictions. Finally, Stephen M. Ross approaches Faulkner through an explanation of "voice," a term that is frequently used in criticism but not often defined. "The essay," wrote an evaluator, "clarifies difficult matters in an elegant way: the avoidance of jargon is one of its virtues."

Still, one person's jargon may well be another's daily bread. There are words and phrases in some of these essays that will, depending on your critical assumptions, either please or grate: hypostatization, logocentric metaphysic, continual catachreses, protasis and apodosis, histori-cogenetic method, equipollent facets. Most of the prose in these nine papers, though, is readily intelligible, even lively. What I am wondering is whether the big words that specialists are prone to are inevitable in presenting a complex, high-level argument. Can we simplify and clarify our prose to attract a wider audience without losing precision or watering down ideas or alienating the leading critics in the field? It seems a possibility worth exploring. If scholarly writing is ever to be freed of the charge of pedantry, it would be gratifying to think that the case was won in the pages of *PMLA*.

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The Wife of Bath

From the Ellesmere Chaucer (EL 26 C9). Reproduced by permission of The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.