

audience, presumably) move from despair to hope via a parody of the Nativity. And in his assertion that the shepherds end the play, having been “involved . . . in the full story of [Christ’s] life” (p. 84), Mack has provided a stunning insight into the quality of their experience, an insight with which I agree but which I doubt that Mack fully understands. The problem with his interpretation is that, for the sake of thematic values, the play’s theatrical and dramatic values have been misrepresented. Mack’s definition of drama is the key to the problem. In defining a “fully dramatic situation” as “different persons with different voices . . . speaking from different levels of awareness” (p. 79) he is describing not drama but abstract states of being. The bone and gristle of drama and theater are conflict and action—the dramatist and the actor both work to reveal character and theme on stage through successive scenes that compel specifically concrete and physical expression. It would be ludicrous to tell my actors that the shepherds must enter onto the stage and remain “static,” “passive,” and “undramatic” till they run through their lines to Mak’s entrance; that they must, after Mak’s exit, revert back to their former selves, as if “nothing . . . has changed much” (p. 82) and wait in that state until something else external happens to alter their condition; that while Mak is at work they are to experience the rumpling of their lives by the one person around capable of decisive action; and finally, that even Mak lacks “clear motivation or practical direction” (p. 81).

Such a view of the play suggests that only part of it is dramatic and that Mak is its principal character. But this is not so! The *Second Shepherds’ Play* is the *shepherds’* play. They are the only characters who can and do generate and sustain the drama from opening line to closing curtain. They leave the wings and enter the set to escape the tribulations of the world and to find comfort and solace in the company of “Trew men” (l. 52)—thus the movement from complaint to song. This action, based on the mistaken belief that they can make a sanctuary for themselves, precipitates their easy deception at the hands of Mak, an essentially weak character whose danger lies not in his generation of power but in his perversion of it. The sustaining power of the drama lies in the goodwill of the shepherds’ search for innocence and joy, which finds perfect fulfillment in the incarnation of Christ.

We have here a play of the testing, the tempering, the chastening of the shepherds, an ordeal that prepares them in the wilderness, in an apocalyptic time, for the coming of God into the world. They are the apprentice shepherds to the Good Shepherd, and within their limits they “prevent” the coming

of Christ by themselves becoming Christlike. This then gives the power and the beauty to those last scenes of the play, for the shepherds, by being suffering servants themselves, have gained privileged insight into the nature and quality of Christ’s mission. Next to the drama of their trial and redemption Mak’s infatuation with power and forbidden knowledge is silly indeed. This is the sense that I believe Mack may have hoped for in suggesting that the shepherds have been “involved . . . in the full story of [Christ’s] life.”

WILLIAM G. MARX  
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*Mr. Mack replies:*

In his interesting literary and thematic interpretation of the shepherds’ “search for innocence and joy” as the dramatic essence of the play, William Marx seems to me to be mixing effectively the critical perspectives he asserts must remain distinct. To an extent I agree with his interpretation, and I tried to examine both the dramatic development and the symbolic importance of the shepherds. Nevertheless, Mak is dramatically central to most of the action, whatever weaknesses we may see in his character; I suspect Marx’s production will reveal this—as well as possibilities unglimped by either of us.

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### **Neruda’s Imagery and Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle**

To the Editor:

John Felstiner’s reading of Neruda’s “Galope muerto” is sensitive and illuminating (“Translating Pablo Neruda’s ‘Galope muerto,’” *PMLA*, 93 [1978], 185–95). But when he reaches outside the thrust of his discussion to suggest a relationship between Neruda’s imagery and the indeterminacy principle of Heisenberg, he falters.

In a response to Neruda’s use of the simile and the participle (p. 190), Felstiner notes the obvious function of nouns to “identify things in space” and verbs to “release them in time.” He connects this relationship to Heisenberg’s principle: the position of an electron and its momentum cannot be mea-

sured simultaneously. However, the noun function of identification tells us *what* something is, not *where* it is; this function does not correlate with position in Heisenberg. And the verb function of *release in time* does not correlate with momentum, which, roughly speaking, has to do with force of movement (mass times velocity). (Actually, the noun function of identification can tell us how something is acting in time/space as well as what it is; it can tell us how something is moving, for instance. But this is not the issue.)

Felstiner says that the analogy he has drawn is imperfect, but it is in fact fallacious, since the points are not analogous. Furthermore, it is much too large an assertion to come into the essay as a sort of aside. It is provocative; connections between science and art are tempting. And I share Felstiner's intuition that there's a relationship here; it would be worth a disciplined scrutiny.

JANE SOMERVILLE

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*Mr. Felstiner replies:*

I'm grateful to Jane Somerville for pointing out a level on which my analogy does not operate. And I'm aware that analogies or metaphors drawn from science over into art are always risky and often invalid. But when a scientific principle has profound philosophical implications, analogy may be justified. As an unregenerate fan of Heisenberg's uncertainty principle (as it's usually known), I still think it goes to the heart of Neruda's perceptual task. Since Somerville shares my intuition, I'll respond by venturing a little further. Thanks to her, I see that I could have made my case more fully and accurately.

Rather than "indeterminacy," I should have used the accepted term, "uncertainty," which conveys the revolutionary significance of Heisenberg's principle—namely, that uncertainty attends our perception of certain physical phenomena: we cannot measure precisely a particle's position without altering its momentum, and vice versa. Somerville disallows my analogy, saying that *what* something is differs from *where* it is and that a thing's movement differs from its momentum. Granted. But the analogy has rather to do with how we perceive things than with which things we perceive. The crux of Heisenberg's principle is uncertainty.

Before bringing in Heisenberg, my essay noted that "Galope muerto" opens with three similes—three provisional figures for the unfixable heart of

things: "Like ashes, like oceans swarming . . . or like high on the road hearing / bellstrokes cross by crosswise." The word "or" matters. That is, these lines move from things in space to things acting in space and time and then toward the human sensation of things acting in space and time. Neruda's opening images suppose the full complexity and uncertainty of the perceptual task.

Then, in the paragraph to which Somerville refers, I said that "Nouns normally serve to identify things in space, verbs to release them in time." In "Galope muerto," however, noun and verb forms often work together, as if struggling with the limitations implied by Heisenberg's principle. For instance, the ashes may be fixed in place, but the oceans are astir. We hear "cruzar las campanadas en cruz": Neruda's diction lets us perceive at once both their crossing and their crosslike pattern. Then a paradoxical image describes these phenomena as occurring "in the sunken slowness": sunken, as to position, and thus perhaps slow, as to momentum.

My next paragraph remarked that throughout "Galope muerto" Neruda interweaves noun-based similes with present participles, as if trying to work through and then beyond his uncertainty about whether things can be apprehended perfectly. He "bears the brunt of things in flux, yet holds them up to be perceived."

My essay should then have dwelt more closely on what happens at the poem's midpoint. During the first two stanzas no "I" appears, only a welter of things; we're shown a "ceaseless whirl, uncertain, as still / as lilacs around the convent." Then in the third stanza the speaker enters:

That's why, in what's immobile, holding still, to  
perceive  
then, like great wingbeats, overhead,  
like dead bees or numbers,  
oh all that my spent heart can't embrace.

As if to perceive things without imposing himself on them, the speaker is "holding still"—or are things themselves holding still? Yet images supplant one another and are not to be embraced.

Only in the final stanza does Neruda find an image that locates physical nature without stalling it: calabashes "within the ring of summer" yet "stretching," "full" yet "urging forth." The poet finally comes to imagine dynamic form this way by having shared at first in the implications of the uncertainty principle.

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