

Editor's Column

IN MY January editorial I provided biographical information on the issue's authors and tried to give some sense of the impetus behind their essays. That editorial, the first of its sort, I believe, in *PMLA* received a gratifying response from readers, and I have decided to do a repeat. This time my self-appointed task is both simplified and complicated by the fact that the May issue contains, among other things, the Presidential Address, this year given in Los Angeles. I say "simplified" because the author is Wayne Booth, about whom there is a great deal to say, and "complicated" because the author is Wayne Booth, who is so well known that it is virtually impossible to think of anything new to say about him.

For any members who may have been living on the moon for the last twenty years, I will simply announce that our former president has written *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, *A Rhetoric of Irony*, *Critical Understanding*, and other important works, that he holds the George M. Pullman Distinguished Service professorship of English at the University of Chicago, and that he numbers among his many honors the Phi Beta Kappa Christian Gauss Award. Booth has been an exemplary member of our association, too, serving for a term on the Executive Council before winning election to serve again as an officer, participating in our Commission on the Future of the Profession, and contributing a lively essay, "The Scholar in Society," to our *Introduction to Literary Scholarship*. He also takes part in our seminars for English department chairmen; a talk he gave last summer is featured in the most recent issue of *Profession*. It is fine to have in our pages his provocative address, which created a good deal of interest at the Convention and received detailed coverage in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Those of us who heard it can now read it, savoring again its insights and rhetorical flourishes. Those who were not at the meeting can now consider Booth's remarkable statement.

I introduce our other contributors in alphabetical order. Susan Hardy Aiken, whose graduate degrees are from Duke University, is associate professor of English at the University of Arizona, having taught previously at the University of Georgia, the State University of New York at Stony Brook, and Suffolk Community College. Her main interests are nineteenth-century poetry and prose, women and literature, and feminist criticism, and she has published on Browning and Carlyle in such journals as *Victorian Poetry* and *Browning Institute Studies*. Her essay on *The Subjection of Women*, she told me during a telephone conversation, resulted from teaching Mill to both graduate students and undergraduates, especially in courses on women and literature. She was surprised to discover that the book has received so little attention as a literary text. She is now writing a book on Isak Dinesen and recently completed a feminist reading of "Sorrow-acre," a Dinesen story from *Winter's Tales*.

Paul Armstrong, author of "The Conflict of Interpretations and the Limits of Pluralism," is assistant professor of English at the University of Virginia; he spent last year as an Alexander von Humboldt Fellow at the University of Konstanz. His graduate degree is from Stanford, and his major interests are the novel, critical theory, and modernism. He has published essays on Forster, James, Kierkegaard, and Ford, and in November the University of North Carolina Press will bring out *The Phenomenology of Henry James*. He sent the essay presented here to us because "it deals with an issue that is of importance to the entire profession and not just to a small group of theorists—the question, namely, of whether we can distinguish between right and wrong interpretations if we also argue that some incompatible readings are equally legitimate." The article, he says, seeks to chart a middle way between the extreme positions of the radical relativists and the monists—those who argue that interpretation is boundless and those who reply that a single correct reading is possible.

Joan Bennett created and now directs the undergraduate research program at the University of Delaware, where she is assistant professor of English. She too earned her doctorate at Stanford. Bennett belongs to a select society, that rare group of members who have published more than once in these pages; her "God, Satan, and King Charles: Milton's Royal Portraits" appeared in the May 1977 issue, exactly six years ago. (I hope she will provide us with a third study for our May 1989 issue, six years in the future.) Bennett has also published on Milton in *Studies in English Literature* and in *Milton Studies*. Her work in progress concerns the

The
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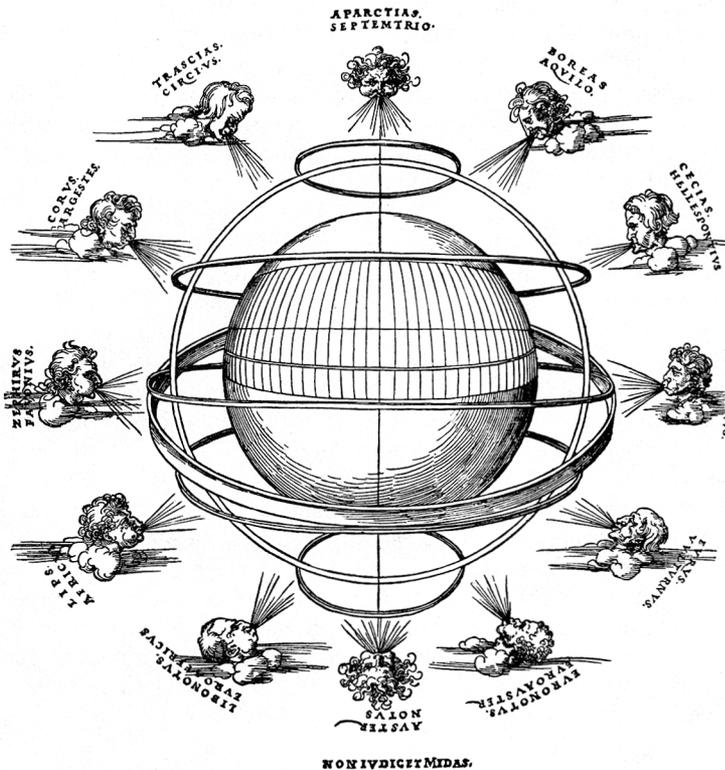
seventeenth-century literary exploration of the human capacity for freedom, which she studies in both its political and its religious contexts.

Susan Kirkpatrick, whose doctorate is from Harvard, is associate professor of Spanish and comparative literature at the University of California, San Diego. Her book on Mariano José de Larra was published by Gredos (Madrid) in 1977, and she has also published on Larra in *Studies in Romanticism* and on Valle-Inclan in *Revista Hispanica Moderna*. The present essay, part of a study of gender differences in Spanish romanticism, originated "as an attempt to demonstrate how a feminist approach could lead to the heart of the main issues raised by a given text." She submitted the paper to us because "PMLA seems to me to be the most appropriate forum for an essay that has a bearing on general theoretical and methodological problems even though it focuses on a particular text or segment of literary history."

Finally, Peter Schroeder, also representing the West Coast, teaches at California State College, San Bernardino. An associate professor of English, he received his doctorate from Harvard, where he specialized in Old English. The paper in this issue, which discusses a relatively new area of interest for him, began as an essay for an NEH summer seminar at Stanford on medieval fiction. Schroeder had never sent off an unsolicited article but, encouraged by the seminar leader, Donald Howard, he did so—and the rest, as they say, is history. Our author spent last year on an NEH fellowship at Cambridge University examining the question of how dialogue is used to develop character in work spanning roughly the period from the twelfth century to the Renaissance.

We are sometimes told that the MLA has an eastern point of view. Perhaps the geographical origins of these fine essays will help persuade our critics otherwise: Delaware, Virginia, Illinois, Arizona, San Bernardino, and San Diego—from sea to shining sea!

JOEL CONARROE



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On the Threshold of the Realist Novel: Gender and Genre in *La gaviota*. SUSAN KIRKPATRICK

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Abstract. Cecilia Böhl, who wrote under the pseudonym Fernán Caballero, manipulated the fictional forms available to her in an attempt to compensate for or conceal her transgression of the taboo against women writers. In the protagonist of *La gaviota* she combined types drawn from three genres—the tale of morals, the Romantic novel of the ambitious provincial youth, and Spanish *costumbrismo*—in an elaborate strategy designed to disavow her identification with her character. In so doing, she constructed a composite fictional discourse that opened the way for the realist novel in Spain. Her anxiety about male-female boundaries, however, extended to generic definitions as well: her static treatment of the fictional modes she brought together prevented her from achieving the fluid, dynamic narrative form that is characteristic of realism. (SK)

The Conflict of Interpretations and the Limits of Pluralism.

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Abstract. The debate about validity in interpretation has pitted monism against pluralism. Some theorists insist that any literary work has a single, determinate meaning, and others argue that there are no limits to the readings a text allows. Neither view adequately describes the field of conflicting interpretations. Critics can and do have legitimate disagreements about literary works; yet we can also say that some readings are wrong, not simply different. The hermeneutic field is divided among conflicting systems of interpretation, each based on different presuppositions that decide what its procedures will disclose and what they will disguise. But several tests for validity—inclusiveness, efficacy, and intersubjectivity—act as constraints on reading and regulate claims to legitimacy. While these tests have limitations that prevent them from resolving all hermeneutic disagreements, literary criticism is nevertheless a rational, disciplined enterprise—though an inherently pluralistic one. (PBA)

Scripture and Poetic Discourse in *The Subjection of Women*.

SUSAN HARDY AIKEN	353
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Abstract. Although critics have largely overlooked the literary properties of *The Subjection of Women*, the essay's effectiveness as theory is inseparable from its poetic dimension. To persuade an unsympathetic audience of a radically subversive thesis, Mill weaves into his argument a poetic subtext modeled on the preeminent mythos of the Western world, the biblical account of history from the fall to paradise. At the same time, aware that Scripture has historically been used to authorize patriarchal values, he exploits the self-critical impulse inherent in biblical hermeneutic traditions, formulating a thematics of language, writing,

and interpretation that allows him to turn patriarchal discourse against itself. He dismantles the very myth he employs in order to remake it as a vehicle for his liberating vision. (SHA)

Hidden Depths: Dialogue and Characterization in Chaucer and Malory. PETER R. SCHROEDER 374

Abstract. Although we know that medieval writers were not novelists, we can still succumb to the illusion that the characters in their works occasionally exhibit a degree of psychological complexity and “depth” out of keeping with our historical expectations. Chaucer’s Criseyde and Malory’s Guinevere are such characters; in both, the illusion results largely from a technique of using dialogue to suggest responses, thoughts, or feelings that are otherwise hidden. To achieve such suggestiveness, Chaucer and Malory employ a device that theorists of speech acts call “implicature.” As we overhear the words of Criseyde and Guinevere, we must constantly fill in gaps, supply missing relations, and guess at some “real” meaning that the surface meaning seems to conceal. Through this process we participate in the construction of two characters whose elusiveness, opacity, and apparent inconsistency are surprisingly verisimilar. (PRS)

“Go”: Milton’s Antinomianism and the Separation Scene in *Paradise Lost*, Book 9. JOAN S. BENNETT 388

Abstract. The quarrel between Adam and Eve in book 9 concerns not only relations between the sexes but also the nature of human government. Prelapsarian Adam and Eve, who, like the antinomian Christian, possess total spiritual liberty, deal with an epistemological dilemma that confronted antinomians like Milton during the English revolution: In the absence of intrinsically authoritative external laws, how can one know when one’s decision to act is based on the direction of God’s spirit dwelling in one’s heart and when it is based on personal desire? In the light of Milton’s historical answer to this question, we can see that Milton dramatizes in Eve the voluntarist antinomian’s tendency to overconfidence and in Adam the humanist antinomian’s struggle with right reason. While neither person sins in this scene, both lose their balance in particularly antinomian ways that grant us insight into the necessarily precarious nature of human freedom. (JSB)

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