

PMLA

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Number 3

*Publications of the
Modern Language Association
of America*

May 1987



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<p>Abstract. This essay, while referring particularly to commentary about Renaissance drama, examines the new historicism more generally as one of the most powerful and interesting forms of criticism on the contemporary scene. How do new-historicist critics characterize the text? What do they mean by history? How do they understand the relation between the two? And finally, are there other, arguably more useful kinds of answers available to us than the ones the new historicists typically provide? (EP)</p>	
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Abstract. The Orpheus tapestry in Garcilaso's third eclogue is an intertextual construct, a rewriting of the myth through a dismembering and reconstruction of classical and Italian models. Revisionary and corrective, Garcilaso's creative imitation of his antecedents involves a deliberate act of subversion; his text not only remakes its sources but seeks to overcome them. Thus Garcilaso's version of Orpheus and Eurydice rivals its predecessors by its own accuracy of presentation; it depicts exquisite, fragile beauty violently destroyed

and a brooding, solipsistic lover deprived of his lyric power. By subverting the ancient artist-magician, Garcilaso appropriates the Orphic power of song for the lyric speaker's self-presentation as poet, providing the speaker, in the process, with a rite of passage into the mythological world of the nymphs. Finally, an elaborate game of voices, anchored on the Orphic, reveals the text both as an artifact and as a product of an act of rewriting. (MEB)

“And I Mon Waxe Wod”: The Middle English “Foweles in the Frith.”
 THOMAS C. MOSER, JR. 326

Abstract. The tiny lyric “Foweles in the Frith” may be the oldest surviving love song written in English. Endlessly anthologized, this late thirteenth-century poem has in recent years become the object of intermittent academic debate between an old school that views it as a secular love song and some later critics who see it as some sort of religious complaint. Actually, it could have been understood variously by a medieval audience. It works well as a simple spring love poem sung by a man about a woman, but there is also evidence for reading it as a lament for postlapsarian humanity or as a specifically Christological complaint. As one critic has noted, for a medieval exegete the precise relation between a text’s *littera* and *sensus* was far from “automatic”; barring the discovery of an original poetic context for “Foweles,” any unitary solution to the lyric’s meaning will probably remain elusive. (TCM, Jr.)

Chaucer and the Silence of History: Situating the Canon’s Yeoman’s
 Tale. BRITTON J. HARWOOD 338

Abstract. Dissonances within texts may result from contradictions within ideology or the contradiction between ideology and history. The disjunctions between the two parts of the Canon’s Yeoman’s Tale, between both parts and the ending, and the gaps within each of the parts can be explained as arising with the contradiction between Chaucer’s ideological project in the tale—an attack on the emergence of productive capital—and the literary means for the attack. The result is a confession told without moral content and then a fabliau made to serve Christian morality. Productive capital, which is virtually unrepresented elsewhere in the Chaucerian canon, is both invisible and glaring in the tale; and it competed in Chaucer’s London with commercial capital, which reinforced the feudal aristocracy as well as depended on it. (BJH)

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