

Editor's Column

IN THE FORTY YEARS since Brooks and Warren published *Understanding Poetry*, explication de texte has become somewhat unfashionable, with "close reading" now being left, for the most part, to the undergraduates and to those who create multiple-choice questions for college entrance examinations. Still, as Marianne Moore observed in her poem on poetry ("I, too, dislike it"), "we do not admire what we cannot understand," and I therefore find it refreshing to see that, among the articles accepted by the Editorial Board for this issue of *PMLA*, we have no fewer than three close readings of single poems—Neruda's "Galope muerto," Keats's "To Autumn," and a sonnet by Wordsworth. The poems are reprinted in their entirety in this issue, so readers will have no need to mix memory with desire.

John Felstiner's article on "Galope muerto" involves, however, more than explication. In a sense, his splendid new English translation re-creates the poem, thus making accessible to those who cannot read Spanish a fascinating work by the century's best-known Spanish-American poet. In addition, we are given a searching analysis of Neruda's attempt to create in this early work an "image of dynamic form," incisive commentary on the relation of the poem to Neruda's *obra* and to his development as a poet, and valuable insight into the problems and processes of translation itself.

Geoffrey Hartman's article brilliantly explicates a difficult sonnet and, in so doing, affords a fresh look at the question of Wordsworth's later style ("sad and sublime, subdued yet charged"). While continuing his efforts to bring the later Wordsworth into our critical ken, Hartman, as one of our specialist readers noted, "manages, as always, to make everything new that he touches and to open perspectives beyond the limits of his discussion." Virgil Nemoianu, in the third article in this triad of close readings, also provides a new and compelling perspective as he explores mutation in "To Autumn," suggesting persuasively that the many changes in the poem can be recorded as a series of curves superimposed on the idea of "nature in process." By coincidence, the poems treated in these three articles share a concern with capturing "force" in time, place, and language; used in conjunction with the articles, the poems might make an exciting classroom exercise for a course in which students are struggling to admire what they cannot fully understand.

Although the next two articles treat Victorian novelists—George Eliot and Anthony Trollope—they do so with radically different approaches. Cynthia Chase, focusing on a letter written by a minor character in *Daniel Deronda*, attempts to pinpoint the essential contradiction in Eliot's novel. A superb example of deconstructionist technique, this "double reading" shows how *Deronda* is both a history of the "effects of causes" and a story of "the present causes of past effects." The idea is as fresh as the article is difficult ("I don't know when I have had more fun with an article," reported one of our specialist consultants, "even though, like Huck, I had to sweat over a few passages"). Unlike Chase's "close reading," Christopher Herbert's analysis of Trollope is broadly based. Centering on three novels in the Palliser series—*Orley Farm*, *He Knew He Was Right*, and *The Duke's Children*—Herbert shows how these works reveal what to Trollope was an essentially tragic "fixity of the self." This persuasive, and elegantly written, article establishes a seriousness of artistic purpose in Trollope's work, making him a far more interesting novelist than many have previously assumed him to be.

The Parson's Tale, as Rodney Delasanta readily admits, has long been an unloved segment of the *Canterbury Tales*. Bringing to the text a broad knowledge of Christian discipline and scripture, Delasanta shows how recent critics have been wrong in urging an ironic reading of the tale and presents a strong case for his argument that the penitential ending of the *Canterbury Tales* ("penance and poetry") is justified. Richard Martin treats what is not so much an unloved as an unlovable play, Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*. Intelligently responsive to the texture of the play's language, Martin suggests that *Tamburlaine*, by asserting the mastery of the imagination over the material world, is more a romance than a tragedy, with its language providing the key to a reconciliation of problems that have long troubled critics of the play.

This issue concludes with articles on two important Renaissance authors whose works tend

to have been neglected by American scholarship—Tasso and Du Bellay. Andrew Fichter shows that, in spite of Tasso's objections to romance in the *Discorsi*, the poet attempts to redeem romance in *La Gerusalemme liberata* by construing it as an integral component of Christian epic, converting it to the service of both classical and Christian imperatives. Although of special importance to Tasso studies, the article is suggestive on genre theory and, consequently, of interest to scholars other than those who concentrate on the Renaissance. Margaret Ferguson confronts the many contradictions in Du Bellay's neglected masterpiece, *La Deffence et illustration de la langue françoise*. Employing techniques of structuralist and semiological criticism and revealing impressive sensitivity to sixteenth-century writing, Ferguson demonstrates fundamental tensions in Renaissance critical thought. The article should be of interest to anyone concerned with questions of imitation and translation.

This issue of *PMLA* contains a challenging set of essays, demanding intellectual engagement of a high order. I suggest that readers who enter here should abandon, not all hope, but almost all hope of light reading.

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Devil's Bridge