

much talk to-day about Criticism as a science and an art. Most of this talk, even when professional critics are the speakers, is deeply imbued with scepticism. (*On Writing and Writers*, ed. George Gordon, 1926, Freeport: Books for Libraries, 1968, 215)

Raleigh, I might add, was venting his antiprofessional feelings specifically against George Saintsbury's history of criticism and Joel E. Spingarn's promulgation of a "New Criticism."

Or note these lines written nearly forty years later, by Helen Gardner, who, attacking a later, quite unrelated New Criticism, looks back nostalgically to an earlier, "non-professional" form of criticism that had no specialized vocabulary or scientific pretensions:

The notion that anybody with natural taste, some experience of life, a decent grounding in the classics, and the habit of wide reading can talk profitably on English Literature is highly unfashionable. The cynic might point to other more sinister signs of professionalism: the esoteric and almost unintelligible vocabulary of some critics; the appearance of a Dictionary of Critical Terms, comparable to a legal or medical dictionary; the embittered quarrels of rival sects, ranged under banners whose significance the lay mind can hardly appreciate. (*The Business of Criticism*, Oxford: Clarendon-Oxford UP, 1959, 3)

In case the graduate student I mentioned in my introduction succeeds in instituting that movement she called the "new essentialism" (407), Mitchell should not be surprised to see the movement's adherents engaging in a variety of professional activities—composing manifestos; holding conferences; founding a journal; arranging talks, grants, publication contracts, and jobs for fellow members of the group; and, not the least of their endeavors, vociferously attacking the theory generation. Nor should he be surprised to find the new essentialists themselves attacked for some imputed neglect of humane values.

HERBERT LINDENBERGER
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To the Editor:

Congratulations on the excellent May issue, which arrived, providentially, as I was finally emerging from my own studies into a consciousness of a higher curiosity—in other words, it arrived when I had time to read it. I began with the last essay (David Kaufmann, "The Profession of Theory," 519–30), as is my habit, only to surmise that the best wine must have been saved till the end of the feast. However, encouraged to look

further—all the way to the first essay—I discovered a classic (Victor Brombert, "Mediating the Work: Or, The Legitimate Aims of Criticism," 391–97). My considered opinion is that this issue deserves a permanent place in my library.

JEANNE McPHEE
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A 1951 Dialogue on Interpretation

To the Editor:

Herbert Lindenberger and the *PMLA* Editorial Board have shown by their selection of "A 1951 Dialogue on Interpretation: Emil Staiger, Martin Heidegger, Leo Spitzer" (105 [1990]: 409–35) that critical readings by distinguished scholars can lead to stimulating ideological and methodological discussion, even if a comparatively obscure eight-line text by a nineteenth-century German author like Eduard Mörike is involved. Parallels can only be found in the analysis of such famous poems as Goethe's "Wandrer's Nachtlid," Baudelaire's "Les chats," and Gerard Manley Hopkins's "The Windhover." Lindenberger does not specially emphasize the problem of translation, but it is a crucial issue here. Idiomatic formulas (e.g., in a letter, "Hochverehrter Herr Heidegger" "highly esteemed Mr. Heidegger") cannot be idiomatically translated. In the use of critical language as discussed (411), the German term *Literaturwissenschaft*, referring to the discipline and field, can only be rendered idiomatically in English by "literary scholarship," the term for the activity; this fact seems paradoxical, but it is true. In the translation of poetry, the theme (topic)–rheme (comment) structure, or the semantic progression of the content and the motivic texture, can be easily rendered, but rarely features of expression like meter, rhyme, "sound symbolism," alliteration (e.g., line 10 of Mörike's poem: "schön . . . selig . . . scheint . . . selbst"). The semantic ranges of equivalent words in two languages are rarely identical: our key word *scheint* versus English "shines" or "seems" is an extreme case and is complicated by the grammatical ambiguity of *selig* 'blissful, blissfully,' by the semantic linkage of *selig* to eternal bliss after death, and by the special meaning of *scheint* in Mörike's Swabian area as "exhibits splendor" (Spitzer's discovery).

I was surprised not to find in the selection and in Lindenberger's comments any reference to a fourth distinguished critical reader: my late colleague Heinz Politzer, who criticized interpretations by Staiger, Spitzer, and Heidegger and also quoted additional readers like

Romano Guardini and the Austrian Moriz Enzinger (*Das Schweigen der Sirenen*, Stuttgart, 1968, 373–98). Politzer's analysis is also entirely text-focused (*werkimmanent*), but he rejects Staiger's concept of interpretation as subjective and creative, as an art (*Kunst*), and prefers to see interpretation as a craft (therefore his title "Das Handwerk der Interpretation").

I have published linguistic analyses of lyric poems (by Grillparzer, Rilke, Goethe), but as a nonspecialist I am, of course, quite reluctant to claim that all the distinguished literary-critical readers of "Auf eine Lampe" missed the basic meaning of the poem, that they did so principally because they seem to have mostly ignored the author of the text, Mörike. Can the poem be called a *Dinggedicht* when it has not even been established whether Mörike ever saw a *Ding* like our lamp anywhere? (This would not have happened to Goethe philologists interpreting a Goethe poem!) The intimate "du" (1) and "deiner" (4) that the poet uses in addressing the lamp implies contrastively an *ich*. Mörike did not want to make it clear to his readers that he sees in the lamp a symbol of his artistic work, because he stresses the lamp's beauty as one main motif in the poem: "schöne," "schmückest" (1), "zierlich" (2), "reizend" (7), "Ein Kunstgebild der echten Art" (9), "schön" (10). Another main motif, however, is an increasing neglect, a lack of appreciation: "Noch unverrückt" (1), "fast vergessen" (3), "Wer achtet sein?" (9). Here the autobiographical reference cannot be misunderstood: Mörike as an author was a tragic, unhappy failure with his contemporary public. In the last line, Mörike uses the semantic range of one word (*scheint* 'shines, glows,' linked to *Lampe* and to "gives the impression of") in a masterly way to combine the apparently impersonal description of an object with his personal conviction that an immortal (*selig*) distinction marks genuine, beautiful artifacts like his own work, regardless of its reception.

HERBERT PENZL
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Reply:

I can agree with everything that Penzl says. Translations, whether of poetry or critical terms, rarely seem satisfactory—but the very untranslatability of which Penzl speaks can also tell us a thing or two about differences between cultures. For example, as I mention in my introduction (401), Berel Lang and Christine Ebel deliberately translated *Literaturwissenschaft* as "science of literature" to stress the affinities perceived in German-speaking countries between literary study and the natural and social sciences. Penzl also points out,

quite correctly, that I do not cite the essay on the controversy by my late acquaintance Heinz Politzer, who mediated the dispute on the meaning of *scheint* by invoking the New Critical concept of ambiguity, with the result that both readings debated by the three critics could seem valid at once. Those preferring to read Politzer's essay in English might note that it was originally published in this language ("The Gentle Craft of Interpretation," *Research Studies* 34 [1966]: 107–22).

HERBERT LINDENBERGER
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The Political Truth of Heidegger's "Logos"

To the Editor:

In "The Political Truth of Heidegger's 'Logos': Hiding in Translation" (105 [1990]: 436–47), on Heidegger's maieutic handling of Heraclitus's Logos, Nicholas Rand (German, "edge, brink") displays a fulsome bit of brinkmanship by means of which, on political grounds, he attempts to hurl Heidegger over the edge of linguistic sanity into the Tartarus of "dreams and poetry" (443). Rand himself, in the manner of Poe's Montresor, leads us down to the "crypt"—"an original and forgotten German crypt" (444) at that—and placidly sets about walling us up in his foregone conclusion: "In 1951 Heidegger replaced the condemned ideology of national supremacy with the disguised promotion of German as a superior language" (445). Rand's basis for this wide-open assertion is that Heidegger claimed a pre-Socratic meaning for both *logos* and its cognate verb *legen*, a meaning, by the way, supported by the nineteenth-century lexicographer Alexandre, and, further, that Heidegger spoke of the German words *Lege* and *legen* as "sheltering" that pre-Socratic meaning. Rand builds his house of jokers on Heidegger's allusion to "our German."

To Heidegger, the pre-Socratic meaning of *logos* and *legen* pertains to gathering, to laying. When Heidegger identifies Logos with Being, he is, in fact, pointing to the Johannine Logos ("either the second person of the Trinity or God" [Chantraine; qtd. on 440]): the layer (as in *bricklayer*) or gatherer of Being as the *foundation* of things and the cause of their existence. Thus, in place of the Heraclitean notion that the element of fire is the Logos, he designates Christ the Logos qua enabling or existentializing Being—that is, qua both Creative Word and the pregrammatological Being that continues to sustain creation and to bestow on it referential meaning.