

Personally I find that the *Beowulf* poet was concerned to make his designs clear, not to encode them within a practically indecipherable scheme. When the dragon attacks for the third time, for example, I doubt that the poet was concerned about having him do so in a line whose number (2688) is determined by the following equation, if I follow Hart aright: $x = 3182 - (3182 - \frac{3182}{3\sqrt{3}}) \div 3\sqrt{3}$.

Perhaps I am insensitive to the beauties of mathematics, but I suspect that at this point the poet was not so much worrying about fulfilling such equations as striving, with all the literary art at his command, to communicate something about the nature of heroism in a world in which even heroes must die.

To correct one small point: in my article I did not explicitly exclude from consideration aspects of Hart's work that might seem relevant to my thesis. I did so implicitly and silently. Given this opportunity to clarify my views on the subject, let me now confirm explicitly and emphatically that I find nothing in the art of *Beowulf* that is illuminated by sophisticated numerical analysis.

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Scholarly Citations

To the Editor:

Concerning your recent Editor's Column (*PMLA*, 95 [1980], 3–4) I would call to your attention some newly published evidence bolstering your position on the frequency of citations for a limited number of authors. Eugene Garfield has compiled a similar but considerably more extensive list in a report on the *Arts & Humanities Citation Index (Library Quarterly*, 50 [1980], 40–57). Based on coverage of more than 950 journals he too discovered that Frye, Derrida, Barthes, Lacan, Merleau-Ponty, Kermode, Bloom, Abrams, Sartre, Heidegger, Husserl, Eliade, and Foucault were among the one hundred most cited authors. To these the list adds Julia Kristeva, Tsvetan Todorov, Gérard Genette, Noam Chomsky, Richard Ellmann, Donald Davidson, Willard Van Orman Quine, René Wellek, Theodore Weisen- grund Adorno, Emile Benveniste, and some few others.

Interestingly enough, though Shakespeare finished a respectable third in total number of citations, he was surpassed by both Vladimir Ilyich Lenin and Karl Marx, with Aristotle and Plato not far behind.

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The Phenomenological Approach

To the Editor:

In his article "A Phenomenological Approach to the *Theatrum Mundi* Metaphor" (*PMLA*, 95 [1980], 42–57), Howard D. Pearce proposes to examine from a phenomenological point of view those characteristics of the *theatrum mundi* metaphor that allow for its use in any era. While his analysis is indeed worthwhile, above all for the insight it affords into the way in which fundamental ontological questioning issues from within the metaphorical operation, it promotes a line of thinking about the phenomenological critical approach that is both confusing and inaccurate. Demonstrating the relation between the function of the phenomenological reduction, or epoche, and that of metaphorical activity, Pearce intelligently reveals the dimensions of mobility and potentiality inherent in the dialectical apprehension of reality in and out of the theater. And he offers an impressive discussion on the intersubjective relation of reader and playwright necessarily at work within the text. Despite these and other interesting considerations of those questions that most often concern the phenomenologically oriented critic, however, Pearce's article furthers a *paradoxical* misunderstanding of phenomenological criticism. The clarification of this misunderstanding remains crucial to the growth and acceptance of phenomenological literary study.

Early in his article, Pearce states that "my assumptions are essentially phenomenological, though I cannot claim the advantage of established methodology or tried systems" (p. 42). Both the philosophical and aesthetic phenomenological movements are founded on a *presuppositionless* attitude. This is to say that the very basis of the phenomenological critical orientation is, as it was for Husserl in a purely philosophical framework, the elimination of assumption. The claim that one's assumptions are phenomenological is meaningless, therefore, since it is a contradiction in terms. Moreover, phenomenological aesthetics can hardly be viewed as the *application* of a "tried" phenomenological "system," as the administration to literary study of "established methodology." In Husserl's work, and in that of Heidegger and Sartre, all of whom Pearce acknowledges as influences on his own thought, valid knowledge is gained by way of direct experience of the world through the intentional structure of consciousness, the primacy of perception, and the fusing of ego and world. Phenomenology is therefore not only presuppositionless but radically em-

pirical, and thus it could never lend itself as a “system” to the critical evaluation of textuality. Rather, phenomenological critics are phenomenological precisely insofar as they defy the use of a priori formulations, generalizations, and a system. The common belief that phenomenological literary critics make use of certain philosophic concepts in their critical investigation is not so. Their approach is entirely nonconceptual, and in their effort to delimit the textual zone in which “a world” is constituted, they have recourse only to *the text itself* and its reactivation through the reading activity. It is therefore ironic that a presuppositionless philosophy should be the inspiration for a critical approach thought to apply preconceived philosophic theory to textual analysis.

Finally, the phenomenological analysis of the temporal constitution of a text is proof in itself of the nonconceptual point of departure of phenomenological criticism. Pearce considers the textual components relevant to the ontological and epistemological questions that emerge from the *theatrum mundi* metaphor. In so doing he is forced to touch on the temporal constitution essential to the “open dimension” of Heideggerian thought. And yet, while he makes a most significant contribution in his analysis of the “multiple worlds—stages within stages” (p. 53) that the metaphor calls into being, Pearce does not take full account of the temporal evidence therein, and throughout his article the reader is reminded of his refusal to participate in the spatio-temporal experience of the texts in question. Indeed, his approach might more accurately be termed phenomenistic, as opposed to phenomenological. Numerous references to “the subjective dimension,” “subjectivities and objectivities,” “the ordering subjectivity,” and “the interpenetration of audience and object” are reminders of how far Pearce wanders from the fundamental intentionality of the metaphorical structure operating within the text. This is no doubt a result of his vision of phenomenological criticism as the application of a methodology, of preconceived philosophic notions. A more legitimate phenomenological perspective would reveal that the ontological constitution of the text and, more specifically, the topos of the *theatrum mundi* metaphor are situated *within* the spatio-temporal dimension *theoretically enunciated* by the phenomenological thinker.

LOIS OPPENHEIM
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Mr. Pearce replies:

Lois Oppenheim could be right in objecting that my article is “confusing”—I lay no claim to not

being still confused by much of what it was aimed at. But I wish she had shown me my “inaccuracies” more clearly. As for her two major objections: though they may be a result of the confusion, they do not persuade me that my methods were erroneous or my goals unworthy.

Before responding to the major objections, I must accept her censure concerning “established methodology and tried systems.” The statement that I could not “claim the advantage” of such methodology and system was circuitous and somewhat ironical. Phenomenology, as phenomenology, cannot be so rigidified as to form a closed “system.” Applied phenomenological science, Husserl says, will work methodologically after it has gone back to the *primordial open ground* of phenomenological apprehension. I, wrongly perhaps, was indirectly expressing a certain humility because my method was not “scientific.” But I was also expressing a certain pride in being “more phenomenological” than the “schools” that still claim to be phenomenological. I am sure that Oppenheim recognizes such tendencies in some exponents of the Geneva School and especially in some younger scholars influenced by them.

Oppenheim’s major objections concern “presuppositionlessness” and “temporality.” Presuppositionlessness was for Husserl not only a theoretical ground but also the means of attaining a “fresh” view of things. Hence he developed a methodology that was essentially pragmatic, a way of getting a direct look at the objects of experience by putting in abeyance the preconceptions we bring to bear when we merely glance at those objects in order to reconfirm what we already “know.” Presuppositionlessness then is an aspect of the *activity* involving the phenomenological reduction, the bracketing of assumptions. When presuppositionlessness is abstracted into a pure and total state, we are “two months back in the middle of March,” the Socratic tradition. Heidegger well knew the danger of this possibility in Husserl’s thought and stressed our complicity in those “forestructures,” as well as in the facticity of things on earth, our ground of being. Heidegger tried to keep operative a “turning” (*Kehre*) in the vicious circle of interpretation, so that the activity is qualified by the presupposition that presupposition should not blind us to actuality. The finesse required in trying to hold such preconceptions in abeyance would be obviated by an elevation of the concept to abstract, inviolable idea. It is this vulnerability Marxist criticism often finds in Husserl and condemns as idealism, the inherent bias in decadent Western thought. The practicability of presuppositionlessness must remain at the level of operations of experiencing, of activity.