

## Editor's Column

NEARLY 1,000 MEMBERS heard Germaine Brée deliver her Presidential Address at the MLA Convention in San Francisco last December. That address appears as the first item in this issue of *PMLA*, with the hope that the 29,000 members who did not attend the General Meeting in San Francisco will take this opportunity to read Brée's remarks. The problems she discusses have not gone away since December, nor are they likely to go away in the foreseeable future, unless we—as a profession—succeed in making the kind of united effort for which she so eloquently calls. Indeed, if, as Brée suggests in her address, one wants to read an anatomy of our profession one could hardly do better than to go back through the recent May issues of *PMLA* and review the presidential addresses, starting perhaps with Henry Nash Smith's remarks at the 1969 Convention, "Something Is Happening but You Don't Know What It Is, Do You, Mr. Jones?" Something is still happening, and there is good reason to suspect that not all of us are aware of what that something is.

What's happening in *PMLA* itself is not quite so mysterious. We continue to publish articles that, in the opinion of the Editorial Board, are of significant interest to the entire membership. For this issue we have eight articles that we think fit that description, beginning with R. G. Peterson's study of measure and symmetry in literature. I do not know why we tend to be so fascinated with what Peterson calls "critical calculation." Perhaps as scholars we all have within us a touch of the detective, a compulsion to seek out clues and then with a wave of the wand (perhaps it's a touch of the magician I have in mind) make the magic patterns appear; perhaps as humanists we simply refuse to believe with Yeats that the center does not hold, and thus *want* our critical calculations to confirm a sense of order in literature, even if we have to put it there ourselves. Whatever the case, interest in this area (what one of the readers for Peterson's article termed "this tempestuous and much discussed new field of literary study") is genuine enough, and if Peterson, drawing on a wide range of examples from the *Iliad* onward, provides no answers, his survey certainly leaves us with some intriguing questions. All of us have no doubt expressed similar regrets when seeing an article off to press, but I suspect readers of "Critical Calculations" will understand why, in sending in his final copy, Peterson wrote to me: "I can't tell you how hard it is to part with a manuscript on this subject; the temptation to continue to revise and modify, to acquire new bits of information and work them in, is almost intolerable."

Concern with structure and symmetry can, of course, take many different forms, as it does, for example, in the next two articles in this issue, John Ganim's on *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and Barry Wood's on Emerson's *Nature*, both of which involve close analysis of structural elements. Ganim's essay on *Gawain*, which is in itself, as one reader put it, "superbly designed, argued, and written," assesses an interlocked set of tensions and seeming contradictions—linguistic, thematic, ideological, and cultural—in this most compelling of medieval masterpieces. In a similar vein, Wood's essay—which is of special interest to Coleridgeans as well as to Emersonians—reveals the way in which dialectical method in Coleridge's writings dictated both the content and the form of Emerson's puzzling *Nature*. The articles by Peterson, Ganim, and Wood have come together in this issue purely by chance, but as a unit they make rewarding reading.

As readers of these columns well know, the members of the Editorial Board have long pleaded with those of our colleagues who work with literatures other than English or American to submit to *PMLA* work that would be appropriate under the new editorial policy—articles of interest to the entire membership. I doubt that all of us "in English" are intimate with the works of Fernando de Rojas or Walther von der Vogelweide (for that matter, I am not sure that all of us are intimate with Emerson's *Nature*). For the uninitiated, then, Arthur Groos's analysis of Walther's famous lyric and Peter Dunn's of *La Celestina* provide splendid introductions to these works; moreover, as critical analyses, they are of such importance that they more than deserve to be brought to the attention of *PMLA* readers. Groos's attempt to show how Walther manipulated the traditions he had inherited so as to reinterpret them in an innovative way makes his article attractive, not only to medievalists, Germanists, and comparatists, but even to readers innocent of all specialized knowledge in the field. Dunn's revolutionary interpretation of Pleberio's role in *La Celestina*, which is surely one of the masterpieces of Spanish literature, second only to *Don Quixote* in the view of many Hispanists, is its own justification and in many ways a model of the kind of article *PMLA* seeks to publish on foreign authors.

The divergence between author assertion and author suggestion, the entire question of authorial intention, is a topic of enduring interest to literary scholars. Patricia Meyer Spacks's treatment of two "spiritual autobiographies," *Robinson Crusoe* and Cowper's *Memoir*, and Lawrence Jay Dessner's startling psychoanalytic probing of *Great Expectations* are both cases in point. Although Spacks sees the imagination as the key to the unconscious shaping of the works she discusses and Dessner uses depth psychology to examine the growth of Pip's guilt in the hope of discovering "the core of the novel's appeal," the two articles have more in common than their titles or abstracts might suggest. What they also share is that they force us to take a fresh look at works with which we have probably all thought we had come to terms long ago.

The issue concludes with William Harmon's subtly argued analysis of T. S. Eliot's "raids on the inarticulate." Frustration over the inadequacies of language ("It is impossible to say just what I mean") and a resultant fascination with the sound of silence were around long before Eliot, but few writers have ever been more obsessed with the subject than was the author of "Prufrock" and *The Waste Land*. Harmon, who is far from inarticulate, carefully analyzes Eliot's position and, in the process, sheds new light on the meaning of *The Waste Land*'s vexatious "DA." It is not easy to say something fresh about T. S. Eliot these days, but Harmon has, I believe, managed to do just that.

The illustration accompanying this issue appeared originally in one of the early editions of *Robinson Crusoe* and presents no problems of interpretation. It is not symmetrical, has nothing to offer to psychoanalytic critics, and appears to say (albeit somewhat precariously) just what it means.

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R. Crusoe Saving his Goods out of the Wreck of the Ship.