

logical resemblance of *mater* and *mater-ia*. Venus is placed in the World-Soul and assigned a mother *quia materiae mundi infusa cum materia commercium habere putatur* (*Commentary on Plato's Symposium*, II.vii). And the World-Soul, of which Venus is a part, is identified as the soul of first matter: *animam mundi, id est materiae primae* (*Com. on Symposium*, vi.iii). According to Ficino, Venus' activity is the result of her desire, as a lower part of the World-Soul, to produce in corporeal forms the beauty that Venus Urania had beheld in the type-forms (*speciosas rerum formas*) among the divine ideas. Matter is, then, Venus' normal place of abode; and Spenser's description of Venus as leaving her "house of goodly formes . . . / Whence all the world deriues the glorious / Features of beautie, and all shapes select, / With which high God his workmanship hath deckt" (*FQ* III.vi.12)—from which Tonkin argues that Venus is the agent of form rather than of matter—serves to draw the distinction between the Venus of the lower world and Venus Urania, and is a "literary fiction" (in Kermodé's terms) of Venus' descent into the World-Soul. Having so descended, Venus is a generative agent, but she is not simply female, nor does her descent make her the "principle of form." As the genital nature of the World-Soul (*Commentary on Plotinus*, v.viii.13), Ficino's Venus makes matter apt for the reception of form; and because she sets forth the forms of things in matter (*rerum formas explicat in materia*) (*Commentary on Philebus*, I.xi), she may be termed the "mother of forms" (as J. W. Bennett did: see Hankins, p. 254). But both Venus and Adonis operate in matter, according to Ficino: Venus is the genital nature of the World-Soul, and Adonis is its active and formative nature, the "father of forms" who represents the type-form (species) and the energizing force which carries forward corporeality into the production of living bodies. Each partakes to some degree in the qualities of the other (Hankins, p. 255).

Even as brief a description as this of Ficino's treatment of Venus may indicate something of the complexity of the goddess in the writings of Renaissance Neoplatonists; and the similarities between Spenser's Venus and Ficino's may suggest that the "strange reversal" of which Tonkin writes has not occurred. By ignoring Neoplatonic treatments of Venus, Tonkin has failed to see that Spenser's uses of this figure go beyond a simple identification of her as "the principle of form." A careful reading of Virgil's third *Georgic*, ll. 135–37; Ficino's *Commentary on Timaeus*, Appendix, Ch. xx, *De Immortalitate*, xv.xi, *De Vita Coelitus Comparanda*, Ch. vi; Comes' *Mythologiae*, IV.xiii, v.xv, and x; and Hankins' comments (pp. 241–46) will indicate the complexity of Spenser's Venus and the brilliance with which he uses contemporary and traditional materials in fashioning her role.

That there is a "linking of Marinell and Florimell with the golden world of the Garden of Adonis" (Tonkin, p. 413) is obvious; that the link is Matter-Marinell-Adonis-Chryso-gone and Form-Florimell-Venus-Sun remains debatable. Britomart does owe a great deal to the Venus *armata* tradition, but she also relates explicitly to Minerva and to Diana (as Fowler especially has indicated in *Spenser and the Numbers of Time*). Tonkin follows Ellrodt's landmark *Neoplatonism in the Poetry of Spenser* (Geneva: Droz, 1960) in minimizing Spenser's Neoplatonism. Ellrodt was, of course, reacting against exaggerated claims for Platonic influence on Spenser, and his book, arguing for influence by the Church fathers and especially St. Augustine, was a necessary and welcome corrective when it appeared. Nevertheless, more recent studies, and those of Hankins and Fowler in particular, have indicated that we are likely to err in arguing for either Christian or Platonic influence. As Hankins puts it: "St. Augustine himself was influenced in his views by Plato. Like him, Spenser has a debt to both Platonism and Christian teaching. There is nothing inherently improbable about a Platonic influence upon Spenser and no reason to exclude it in favour of Christian influence. He had both" (p. 239). If Tonkin's article helps to make clear the need for renewed discussion of the question of "influence" in Spenser's poetry, we may be grateful to *PMLA* for publishing it.

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Theory of Fictional Modes

To the Editor:

Wicks's modal approach to the picaresque narrative (*PMLA*, 89, 1974, 240–49) both pleases and confuses in that, on the one hand, it succinctly delineates the focal elements of the picaresque novel's structural makeup and, on the other hand, proposes to distribute all fictional forms between satire and romance. Wicks begins "from a position that allows us to see the *entire narrative spectrum* with its infinite range of possibilities along the scale from satire to romance" (p. 241; italics mine), a position recently worked out by Robert Scholes. In principle, I have no serious objections to this or a similar position as long as it does not pretend to be universally applicable. Ad rem: Scholes's theory of fictional modes, in the same way as Northrop Frye's theory of modes, is visibly too narrow to accommodate the entire narrative spectrum. The first conceives of its spectrum from the position of history or, one could say, from the position of vector psychology, and the second from the position of the protagonist or, one could say, from the position of individual psychology. In Scholes's spectrum, modal skewness to the right or

to the left on a bilaterally symmetrical scale is computed from the assumed skewness that ideally expresses itself in the mimetic world of history and in the degraded world of satire or the heroic world of romance. This theory does indeed allow one to construct models for that group of fictional types that aim at *representation* of either better, worse, or more or less equal relationships between fiction and our world or between actual and fictional individuals. But these types are to be conceived almost as a rule in terms of the explicit or implied correlations between the explicant and the explicandum. They represent the world beyond themselves rather than present the world in themselves. I grant Wicks that most of the past and current fiction is *representational* and hence could indeed be distributed along Scholes's spectrum of fictional possibilities. But there is "fiction" whose locus is in the realm of the impossible or in the realm of the surreal that has nothing to do with objects, configurations, or worlds outside itself and that yields to no definition by comparison or syllogism. This fiction is simply a new creative addendum to what already is. Such is some of the surrealist prose; such is some science fiction that has no ambition to amplify current scientific progress or anticipate its potential future but simply creates pure fictions by means of quasi-scientific tools; and, finally, such is the "nonsense fiction" without conventional semantic reference. Can such "fiction" fit into one of the seven fictional modes proposed by Scholes? Hardly. Maybe in Scholes's and Frye's definition it is not fiction at all, but then we must either (a) redefine our current notion of fiction or (b) work out another spectrum for those literary constructs that are outside the satire-romance axis.

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Mr. Wicks replies:

The term *mode* is problematic. Ulrich Weisstein in *Comparative Literature and Literary Theory* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1973) wants to discard it "since it is not primarily a generic category but a synonym for technique (point of view) with strong thematological overtones" (p. 309). E. D. Hirsch, asserting in *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1967) that "all understanding of verbal meaning is necessarily genre-bound" (p. 76), argues against monolithic all-encompassing schemes, though he avoids the term *mode* (pp. 110–11). Yet, whether it's the gates of horn and ivory, Clara Reeve's novel-romance distinction, or Scholes's satire-romance axis, the way we describe the worlds we see (imaginatively) is inherently modal. Frye says in *The Educated Imagination* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1964) that

in literature "we always seem to be looking either up or down. It's the vertical perspective that's important, not the horizontal one that looks out to life" (p. 97). Scholes's spectrum corresponds to the archetypal possibilities for extension beyond the given real along an axis traditionally indicated by the poles heaven and hell, dream and nightmare, wish-fulfillment and anxiety, romance and satire. Modes provide perspectives that orient us in the rendered world, and as our literary experiences accumulate, we grow in our abilities to discern the great recurrent patterns of imaginative vision and to recognize their new combinations and mixtures.

In *Elements of Fiction* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1968) Scholes compares the spectrum of fictional possibilities to the color spectrum. Just as the infrared rays are invisible to the naked eye, so the realm of pure history is unknowable: the pure historian would have to be a kind of recording angel. And just as the ultraviolet rays are invisible, so the realm of pure imagination is unattainable: the pure fantasist would have to be a deity who can create something out of nothing. Both go beyond the limits of human perception and vision. The realm of narrative fiction is the communicable (narratable) realm between history and fantasy, between perception and vision, between mimesis and construction. Yet such a modal perspective is not in itself a critical tool. *Mode* has as its root meaning "a measure," but it is the roughest kind of measure. Modes should be distinguished from genres, just as *fiction* ("something formed or shaped") is distinguishable from *narrative* ("something told, related, or recounted"). Modes are ideal fictional types; genres are specific narrative forms. The former posit a spectrum of world visions, which are stable; the latter, a range of possible narrative types, which change. The ideal act of reading, Scholes says, is a process of passing through insensible gradations from a modal to a generic awareness, to a final sense of the uniqueness of the work. In *Beyond Genre* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1972) Paul Hernadi calls for just such a system, one that coordinates macro- and micro-structural qualities.

As for our concept of fiction, the distinction between fictions that "represent the world beyond themselves" and fictions that "present the world in themselves" is one that I'm as suspicious of as Fizer is of modal theory. Doesn't Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* (a quest narrative, aware of its fictionality) represent a world beyond itself? Yet it is a "sub-creation" in the created universe, a construct—it presents a world in itself. And doesn't Robbe-Grillet's *The Voyeur* (a quest narrative, obsessed with its fictionality) present a world in itself? Yet it is a representation, a mimesis of a mind seeking to construct reality—it represents a world beyond itself. Both works present (construct) and repre-