March 1973

PMA

Publications of the Modern Language Association of America

Volume 88

Number 2

PUBLISHED SIX TIMES A YEAR BY THE ASSOCIATION

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ORGANIZED 1883

INCORPORATED 1900

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Issues for the current year are available from the MLA Materials Center. Claims for undelivered issues will be honored if they are received within one year of the publication date; thereafter the single issue price will be

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> OFFICE OF PUBLICATION AND EDITORIAL OFFICES 62 Fifth Avenue, New York, N. Y. 10011 Tel.: 212 691-3200

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA BY THE GEORGE BANTA COMPANY, INC., MENASHA, WISCONSIN

Contents · March

Perception and English Poetic Meter. PAUL C. BOOMSLITER, WARREN CREEL, and GEORGE S. HASTINGS, JR.	200
Abstract. Metrical organization exists more importantly in the pattern constructions of the listener than in the physical signal. It serves a major function in control of attention, as prosodic features do in daily speech. The accents of speech are timed attention peaks, presenting meanings for which they prepare our attention in advance. Metrical organization fosters expectancy through larger durations—metrical stanzas are larger expectancy spans. The metrical effect is not a mere physical drumbeat; it is an atmosphere of shaped sustained expectancy. Perception is an active process, in which the perceiver contributes pattern. The rhythm of speech is a conspicuous example of such contribution. A technique for investigating and demonstrating the order contributed by meter is provided by unled choral reading. (PCB, WC, and GSH)	
Unamuno's Niebla: From Novel to Dream. Frances W. Weber	2 0 9
Abstract. Critics have said that <i>Niebla</i> shows both the protagonist's emergence into conscious existence and the author's attempt to create himself through the novel. But the plot repeatedly points up the character's self-deception, which makes the author's effort problematical. <i>Niebla</i> begins with a comic view of Augusto Pérez's falling in love with the image of a woman he has invented; it ends with a philosophical defense of the confusion of fiction and reality. The ambiguity caused by these incompatible approaches is heightened by the similarities between Augusto's ideas and Unamuno's. The ironic exposure of self-delusion alternates with a serious theory of fantasy. In the last chapters Unamuno, like Augusto, seems to argue for total delusion. This view is most explicitly formulated in the "Historia de <i>Niebla</i> " which appeared as a prologue to the 1935 edition. In it Unamuno fuses legend, novel, <i>nivola</i> , and eternal life into the image of a communal mist in which one can be saved. Throughout his life Unamuno tried to see himself as a substantial entity and not merely an idea in the minds of others. As that goal became more elusive, he chose instead to imagine that the world was a dream in which he could be eternally represented. In order to perpetuate his illusory self, he turned all reality into fiction. <i>Niebla</i> anticipates this maneuver. (FWW)	
Brechts braver Schweyk. HERBERT KNUST	219
Abstract. A close literary analysis of the text shows that Schweyk im Zweiten Weltkrieg is an artful antimorality play with parodistic parallels to Everyman and Faust. The confrontation and interrelation of the "big" and the "small" provide a thematic and structural pattern on both the political and the social levels of the play. Love, faith, and work of the "little" are exploited by the "big." Scattered revolution and traditional virtues prove useless in an attempt to fight and survive a totalitarian system. Schweyk is caught between a "big" enemy and a "big" friend. As a typical representative of the "little man" he is pitted against Hitler, whose plans he sabotages by a devious method of opportunism mixed with opposition; as an individual he is also contrasted with the fat glutton Baloun, whom he tries to help. In both respects he is "virtuous." However, the juxtaposition of Schweyk in the icy Russian steppes and Baloun in the cozy "Kelch" inn marks two contradictory, yet interrelated extremes of human existence. Brecht subtly points the way out of these undesirable paradoxes. Only if the "little" resolve their differences will they truly cease to be "little." Schweyk's virtues and Brecht's "Schweykian philosophy" are dictated by circumstances; they are not meant to be of permanent value. (In German) (HK)	
Design in Deloney's Jack of Newbury. Max Dorsinville	233
Abstract. Jack of Newbury's surface realism in characters, setting, and speech has led to an underestimation of its historical and literary value. A close reading reveals the consistent use of the Greco-Roman ethical-political conception of the state, epitomized in the figure of the ruler. Deloney shows his familiarity with this tradition, probably known to him through Erasmus and Sidney, in the three controlling motifs of his novel. First, the middle class of weavers, represented in Jack's household and dramatized in allegories	

196 Contents

and symbols, is portrayed as a self-sufficient state where peace and harmony reign. Second, this state is shown to be such because of the nature of its ruler, Jack, a benevolent, generous, wise man. Third, the middle-class way of life—hard work, thriftiness, material gains—serves as princely education; accordingly, Jack, from a menial position, goes on to become ruler of the state. *Jack of Newbury*, as a systematical reordering of an aristocratic tradition, represents the world view of the emergent middle class; and as such, a momentous shift in the social temper of the Renaissance and an important step in the evolution of the novel. (MD)

"The Elements Were So Mix'd . . . " RUTH M. LEVITSKY . . . 240

Abstract. In an effort to correct the overidealization of Brutus, recent criticism has tended to obscure the distinctions between Brutus and his fellow Romans. Yet, Shakespeare was at some pains to depict him as the noblest Roman of them all. That is not to say he was flawless: the noblest pagan was still pagan, and as such was guided only by the light of Reason and tempted to trust in himself. If contemporary prose treatises are any key to Elizabethan attitudes toward ancient philosophy, Shakespeare's audience regarded the Stoic with ambivalence: they admired his constancy, purity of motive, and pursuit of virtue; yet they distrusted his pride, his self-sufficiency, and his hardness. By contrasting Brutus with Cassius and Caesar, Shakespeare has shown him as possessing the best of the Stoic characteristics commingled with touches of Christian compassion and ordinary human weakness. The elements are seen to be so mixed in him that one must say of him with both pride and humility: This was a man. (RML)

The Power of Distance in Wordsworth's *Prelude*. JOHN T. OGDEN 246

Abstract. As Wordsworth views the rustic fair at the foot of Helvellyn (VIII.1-69), distance in the landscape takes on a poetic function, focusing and harmonizing the sights and sounds, and setting the observer apart in a mood of esthetic detachment. As he continues to gaze, distance seems to belittle the men he is viewing, but suddenly his perspective shifts, so that the distant view reveals the preeminence of man. In contrast to this scene, London (Book VII) brings objects too close, leaving him confused and oppressed. In retrospect, however, the temporal distance of memory provides the order and detachment necessary for understanding, and leads him again to see the sublimity of man. Distance in space and time operates on the poet's mind throughout *The Prelude* to modify, shape, and compose the scenes of his life. Distance is necessary to Wordsworth's love of man, and it characterizes the philosophical pose he assumes for "The Recluse." In Wordsworth's poetry distance serves as a power of imagination that elevates the act of perception into the act of poetic creation. (JTO)

Abstract. Where they touch on political themes, Browning's early works—particularly Sordello and the plays—are reflective less of the kind of liberalism he derived from Shelley than of a growing skepticism as to the value of partisan commitments and a distrust of merely "political" solutions. In Strafford, Sordello, Pippa Passes, The Return of the Druses, Luria, and A Soul's Tragedy, Browning explores the relationship between a character or group of characters and a culture in turmoil. Virtually all the characters, in their limitations—whether imposed by blind idealism, indecision, or charlatanism—are unequipped to assume a truly heroic role, and they are frequently poised between two equally unacceptable political alternatives. The rare, truly heroic figures of Browning's poetry are those who transcend the political obsessions of their culture and decisively assert their own best selves. In his distrust of institutional machinery and his emphasis on personal salvation, Browning belongs with Victorians like Dickens and Carlyle; in the major monologues, most of which followed this formative period, he views religion, art, and human love, rather than political action, as the motivating forces in human relationships. (LP)

Contents 197

ROBERT O. STEPHENS	271
Abstract. The degree of Hemingway's frequently confessed debt to Stendhal as master and model is best seen in his adoption of <i>The Charterhouse of Parma</i> as the matrix of <i>A Farewell to Arms</i> . His use of Stendhal's novel is consistent with his esthetic practice of finding imaginative models to extend the meaning of autobiographical experience. He employed the battle and retreat experiences of Fabrizio at Waterloo as the paradigm of Frederic's experience during the Caporetto retreat. Both protagonists play the roles of outsiders in their armies, endure the suspicions of others, leave their retreating columns and seek survival in smaller groups, desert their routed armies, seek refuge in Switzerland, and later attempt to understand through reading and reflection the changes worked in them by their experiences in the debacles. Hemingway also followed Stendhal's lead in depicting the way in which language becomes a casualty of military catastrophe. In his larger development Frederic builds on the example of Fabrizio, changing from a man initially unable to love because he has no religious belief to one who loves and believes passionately and finds his destiny in his identity as a believer. (ROS)	
Image and Introspective Imagination in Montaigne's Essais. GLYN P. NORTON	281
Abstract. One of the most significant bridges between Montaigne, the thinker, and Montaigne, the writer, is in the use of figurative expression. Through application of a portion of Thibaudet's catalog of Montaigne's images, the organic nature of metaphor in the Essais becomes immediately apparent. Sometimes generating each other, sometimes generated within the writer's thought progressions, Montaigne's metaphors are frequently found in clusters. Such clusters depict the movement of the writer's mind as it strives to give a stylistic form to his thoughts. In both their thematic and organic natures, therefore, his metaphors provide introspective glimpses into the operation of the creative mind. (GPN)	
Styles of Cognition as Moral Options in La Nouvelle Héloïse and Les Liaisons dangereuses. CAROL BLUM	289
Abstract. Jean-Jacques Rousseau developed the distinctive style of thought presented in La Nouvelle Héloïse in order to reconcile conflicting needs for erotic pleasure, innocence, and transparency. The cognitive style thus evolved and put forth as a moral imperative, emphasizing both the subject's ability to lose himself in an emotional fusion with others and the overwhelming power of the passions, found favor with the generation coming of age in 1761. Choderlos de Laclos, a member of that generation, although apparently much impressed by some aspects of Rousseau, presents in Les Liaisons dangereuses a cognitive style which is the antithesis and refutation of the one in La Nouvelle Héloïse. The "sentiment involontaire," so frequently invoked in La Nouvelle Héloïse as an excuse for the inadmissible impulse or action, is subject to a scornful analysis by Laclos. Whereas Rousseau attempted to seduce the reader into accepting the morality of his novel, Laclos, on the contrary, sets up a trap by which the reader is made to recognize his own complicity, motivated by curiosity, in the maneuvers of the rapacious protagonists. (CB)	
The Bible and Les Fleurs du mal. ABRAHAM AVNI	299
Abstract. The sources of the Bible's influence on Baudelaire, which is greater than previous research would indicate, are his education at home and school, the example of other French poets, and some preoccupation with the Bible in his criticism of art and literature. The influence manifests itself in allusions to the Bible's characters, often involving use of its imagery, and many other echoes of its diction, including some Hebraisms. Of single books of Scripture, Job, the Song of Songs, and the Apocalypse exerted the strongest influence: Job affected not only the diction but also the structure and train of thought of "Bénédiction"; many love poems of Les Fleurs du mal are indebted to the Song of Songs for their stark sensuality and bizarre similes; the Apocalypse helped to shape the visions of "Une Gravure fantastique" and "Rêve parisien." Also, the poet blunted the anti-Biblical edge of the chapter "Révolte" in Les Fleurs du mal by a genuine Biblical tone and diction. Yet, although Baudelaire is much plagued by a sense of sin and evil, the effect of the Bible on his poetry remains generally external, limited to the use of image, sumbol and event or character. (AA)	

198 Contents

Butor's Use of Literary Texts in Degrés. JENNIFER R. WALTERS.	311
Abstract. The construction of <i>Degrés</i> is based on a series of texts taken from Western literature and ranging from Homer to Keats. These are grouped in different ways around a brief sequence of events, and it is the responsibility of each reader to elaborate on the scanty story by using the information offered by these texts, to the extent of his knowledge, awareness, and willingness to participate in the creation of the novel. An analysis of the texts extracts the information each contains, then correlates relevant fact and possible interpretation in order to show clearly the two major themes of the novel: the relationship of Vernier to his nephew Eller, and the vast possibilities open to man in the world; and the three styles of presentation: as a structure, a personal experience, and a retrospective fact. Butor teaches his readers to understand his work by attempting to break down mental barriers between different fields of experience and force people to draw on the full range of their knowledge at all times. (JRW)	
Forum	32 I
Forthcoming Meetings and Conferences of General Interest	326
Professional Notes and Comment	330



PUBLICATIONS OF THE MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

Published Six Times a Year

Indices: Vols. 1-50, 1935; 51-60, 1945; 51-79, 1964

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