

troductory and concluding paragraphs, where we emphasize the very point he accuses us of forgetting. Buckley claims that our article's conclusion "is a broad critical commonplace that can be traced to nearly every literary critic in the history of Western thought." Our article says exactly the same thing: that "our investigation has led to . . . a convergence with the mainstream of our critical tradition," to an affirmation of "what critics have maintained from the beginning" (352). There does indeed seem to be an irritating tendency among academics to forget!

Buckley wonders why critics unfairly forget their roots. Freud, a critical root that Buckley "forgets," would say that this forgetfulness is one of many parapraxes produced by basic drives and defenses by which the self seeks to establish and maintain its integrity. Such forces always distort the purity of reading and writing; they are present in our article, in Buckley's response to it, and in this response to Buckley's response. Thus while we dispute the easy conceptual equations and imprecise comparisons that sustain Buckley's charge, we readily admit to a certain anxiety of influence. This anxiety is evident in our opposition to some of our predecessors (e.g., Holland, Iser), in our neglect of others (e.g., Lawrence, Coleridge, Heidegger), and our ignorance of still others (e.g., those Buckley mentions).

Actually, though, the article seems to us to be responding much more to a contrary but equally distorting force, separation anxiety. In its emphatic affirmation, at the beginning, of its ties to the body of literary tradition, in its return to that body at the end, and in its venturing forth only under the watchful gaze of a strong psychoanalytic theory of object relations, one can see a perfect reenactment of the child's enthusiastic yet hesitant venturing away from the mother in the separation-individuation process.

We also invite Buckley to see the oedipal conflict in this movement, in the contrary urges to be rid of the father (Holland, Freud) and to identify with him at the same time. Were Buckley to perceive this second distorting force, he might find a similar force at work in his own letter. He might, for instance, ponder the fact that he fixes on our need to rid ourselves of the father but remains blind to our attempt to identify with him as well. And he might connect this blindness with his own construction of an omnipotent father (Wayne Burns), whom he exhibits as the seminal root of contemporary reader-response theory—a sadly neglected father who incorporates his own fathers (Ortega y Gasset, Lawrence, et al.) and subsumes ("goes beyond") sons such as Alcorn and Bracher who refuse to acknowledge his paternity.

But our playful and defensive fantasy puts us in danger of forgetting the main point we need to make here, the point made in the second paragraph of our article (which Buckley has also "forgotten"): namely, that

while many others have claimed that literature promotes re-formation of the self, no one (so far as we can remember) has supported that claim with a systematic explanation of the structure of the self and the nature of structural transformation. Buckley appears to assume either that the traditional claims about the transformative effects of literature are self-evident or that the testimony of authority makes them so. Many critics assume neither. And for them these traditional claims become much more plausible when supported by psychoanalytic theory, a theory not only coherent and highly respected but also grounded firmly on the empirical evidence of clinical practice. Such an empirically grounded theory makes it much more difficult for claims about the transformative power of literature to be dismissed as wishful thinking. Furthermore, placing traditional claims about the value of literature in the context of psychoanalytic theory opens up new avenues for understanding literature.

In addition, the article offers a sketch—rough and tentative, to be sure—of the psychic terrain through which we lead our students every day but of which we have only a dim vision and no clear overview. This map, when refined, should allow us to pursue our pedagogical goals more effectively: by showing more clearly what particular literary elements and specific psychic structures are involved in such a transformation, the map increases our ability as teachers to promote psychological development.

Finally, the contribution of the article may not rest solely in what is "new." Part of its value is that it serves to remind us of something we too easily forget in our scholarly officiousness: that literary study can help people.

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Ordering the *Canterbury Tales*

To the Editor:

James Dean in his article "Dismantling the *Canterbury Book*" (100 [1985]: 746–62) joins the many critics and scholars who not only accept the Ellesmere ordering of the *Canterbury Tales* as Chaucerian but regard the final sequence in that ordering, from the Second Nun's Tale to the Retraction (GHIR), as a connected group of fragments. He chooses not to discuss the manuscript evidence but falls back on the recent defenders of Ellesmere, "especially Larry Benson, who has argued vigorously, and I think convincingly, for Ellesmere on textual grounds" (746). This is not the place to argue the Benson thesis, but two points need to be made just to set the record straight. Dean has

twice used as the Hengwrt ordering the current state of the text, ignoring the evidence, accepted by everyone who has studied the manuscript, that the original Hengwrt sequence was ADB¹F^aE^bF^bG^aE^aCB²HI. Note 2 gives us the misbound order. In Hengwrt the Manciple's Tale "appears before the Man of Law's Tale, nearer the book's opening than its close" (759), only because of a mistake in binding. The original Hengwrt ordering had the Manciple's Tale in the same position it holds in Ellesmere, just before the Parson's Prologue. The word *Manciple* over an erasure in the first line of the Parson's Prologue in Hengwrt reflects the earliest editors' efforts to make what Chaucer left behind seem more nearly complete than it was.

The second point is more important. At the end of his article Dean argues "for the Ellesmere order rather than for some other order, especially for Hengwrt" (759). His claim misrepresents the situation. Nobody (not even Blake) claims that the Hengwrt ordering had the author's authority. The radical alternative to accepting Ellesmere as Chaucerian is to recognize that the *Canterbury Tales* is not a finished work with a correct sequence of tales, that the fragments reflect different stages of a developing plan, none of which came close to fulfillment.

The contradictions in the sequence Dean regards as a connected group of fragments stem in part from the unfinished state of the *Canterbury Tales*. They make it extremely unlikely that Chaucer planned this sequence as the closure of his great work. If he had, he would not have used the expression "a myrie tale or tweye" (G.597) in the Host's words to the Canon's Yeoman and then made it clear that the plan was for one tale from each pilgrim; he would not have put the G fragment and the H fragment in the morning (G.588f, H.16ff) and the Parson's Prologue at four in the evening (I.5); he would not have had the Cook still to tell a tale in the Manciple's Prologue and then have had the Host say to the Parson "every man save thou hath toold his tale" (I.25); he would not have made the change in speaker from Parson to Chaucer in the Retraction well-nigh impossible to determine; he would not have referred to the *Canterbury Tales* as he did in his list of works to be retracted. These points are trivial in the total impact of Chaucer's work. But an author planning the kind of closure Dean describes in his article would have avoided the contradictions and firmed up the connections among G, H, and I.

The difficulty in determining the change of speaker from the Parson to Chaucer in the Retraction needs elucidation, for to my knowledge no discussion of the subject has been published before. The rubrics in Ellesmere and a number of other manuscripts have the change coming at the beginning of the Retraction: "Heere taketh the makere of this book his leve." But if Chaucer is now the speaker, not the Parson, he is calling the *Canterbury Tales* "this litel tretys" and telling his au-

dience "that if ther be any thyng in it that liketh hem, that therof they thanken oure Lord Jhesu Crist, of whom procedeth al wit and al goodnesse." Precisely what is likely to please his audience in the *Canterbury Tales* Chaucer is about to revoke. He cannot be speaking here; it must be the Parson. Three sentences later it is clearly Chaucer who retracts "my translacions and enditynges of worldly vanitees," including "the tales of Caunterbury, thilke that sownen into synne." A radical "dismantling" of the Canterbury book as presented to us by the fifteenth-century scribes and editors would see the so-called Parson's Tale with the Retraction as a separate work by Chaucer. It would recognize the Parson's Prologue with its connections to the Man of Law's fragment (B¹) as preparing the ending for the tales under the first of Chaucer's plans for the pilgrimage. It would see in the A fragment, praised by Dean for a brilliance lacking in the "intricately wrought conclusion" (758), Chaucer's final work on an enlarged plan, with the storytelling contest projecting a closure more inventive, more sophisticated, and more Chaucerian than his original plan for a Parson's tale.

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Reply:

I agree with Charles A. Owen, Jr., that the choice for the order of the tales is not between Ellesmere and Hengwrt (as misbound or rearranged by scholars); the choice is rather between Ellesmere's order and any other. Owen argues that all received fragment arrangements are scribal and that the Ellesmere concluding order, even for the Parson's Tale and the Retraction, cannot be ascribed to Chaucer. Some have gone so far as to claim that the tales can be read in any order. This issue is crucial to how we view and teach the *Canterbury Tales*: as a collection of short stories to be read in any sequence, as a collection of unrelated or weakly related fragments, or as a book that, although obviously unfinished, is yet complete as an idea (to borrow Donald Howard's characterization).

The first point I wish to make is that many tales within fragments indisputably belong in the Ellesmere *a* order despite the unfinished state of the Canterbury book. The most obvious examples are the tales in Fragment I or group A: Knight's, Miller's, Reeve's. All the manuscripts attest to this order; and Chaucerians for decades have convincingly exposed thematic relations between and among these opening tales. Also well attested in the manuscripts is Fragment III (D): Wife of Bath's, Friar's, Summoner's. The Friar and Summoner exchange unpleasanties at the end of the Wife's Prologue, and then the Summoner requites the Friar for his tale about a wicked summoner. Fragment VII (B²) also comprises a sequence in virtually all the manuscripts.