

Editor's Column

GRAVITY'S RAINBOW HAS BEEN called the most important novel to be published in English since the 1940s; while the claim is perhaps exaggerated (Pynchon enthusiasts are nothing if not enthusiastic), no one would deny that the book is complex and intriguing. In approaching his analysis through the writings of Norman O. Brown, Lawrence Wolfley leads us from Pynchon through Brown and back to Freud's postulate that man's essence is repression. For those who have not yet read (or have not yet finished reading) Pynchon's 760-page novel, this article is a splendid introduction to the work, but even those familiar with the book will find in Wolfley's essay rich insight into major questions of modern literature and history. Perhaps, as Wolfley claims, *Gravity's Rainbow* does indeed have the potential for giving the genre a new lease on life; surely it appears likely that, after Pynchon, nothing need ever be excluded from the novelist's repertoire. Whether one's interest is Pynchon or Brown, Marxism or Calvinism, the 1940s or the 1960s, film or fiction or psychoanalytic theories of history, there would seem to be something here to engage all readers.

Wolfley's claim that Pynchon writes out of a sense of wonder, a constant amazement, that we can tolerate the intolerable is an idea that could be applied to many other authors, including those discussed in the next three articles—Rousseau, Blake, and Coleridge—even though the issues addressed are quite different. Juliet Flower MacCannell pursues Rousseau's ideas on the self, treating the subject in Rousseau's own terms and with full regard for the historical and philosophical context in which his speculations occurred. In suggesting that Rousseau's work is the quintessential instance of linking literature to the concept of the self, of the self to literature, MacCannell's article has broad application and is of special interest to those concerned with English Romanticism, who not infrequently misunderstand Rousseau's position. Blake, it sometimes seems, is always misunderstood, and thus Morris Eaves's treatment of Blake and the "artistic machine" is most welcome in clarifying Blake's esthetics, redefining the idea of "harmony," and encouraging a reconsideration of some of our views on neoclassic and Romantic values. In its discussion of art and technology, the article, according to one of our specialist reviewers, is a "pioneering piece"; another reviewer noted that this article has "the rare virtue (for articles on Blake) of lucidity and readability—in fact of wit—and should interest many readers beyond the magic circle of Blake specialists." With the word "Coleridge" substituted for "Blake," the same thing might be said of Jerome Christensen's study of Coleridge's marginal method, for while the discussion of the philosophical weaknesses of the *Biographia Literaria*, of Coleridge's "plagiarism," and of his views on Hartleian association may be of special interest to Coleridgeans, Christensen's analysis of marginal rhetoric has general interest in that it treats a little-understood mode of discourse.

Theological concepts figure largely in the discussions of the next three articles. John Alford explores the use of law in Middle English literature, showing how, to the Medieval mind, human, natural, and divine laws were viewed as being in essence a single law, the tie that binds all things in heaven and on earth. The legal metaphor that Alford shows to have been so widely employed in Medieval literature thus reflected a single coherent vision. That this metaphor no longer holds such meaning—Donne is proposed as the last major poet in whose work it played a significant role—should, as Alford suggests, make us cautious about imposing our own perception of law on our reading of Medieval literature, thereby fragmenting a vision that had once been whole. Centering his study on *Paradise Lost* and Plato's four "furors," Michael Fixler is also concerned with a unified vision, the "universal form" that metaphysically and structurally underlies Milton's classic. Showing the extent to which Milton had assimilated Platonic theories of inspiration and demonstrating the ways in which this assimilation works within the epic's narrative, Fixler includes a succinct and useful history of the relationship between Plato's scale of raptures and the Christian mythic scale of ascent; thus the article should be of considerable interest to Renaissance scholars as well as to Miltonists. Less broad in scope but of equal importance in illuminating a major work is Robert Ellis Dye's analysis of the theological ramifications of Faust's near suicide in Goethe's masterpiece. Comparing the divergent ways in which Werther and Faust respond to the Resurrection when at the point of suicide—

Werther classifying Christ as a model so as to emulate his death and rebirth, Faust coming instead to view Jesus as a “mediator”—Dye unfolds a convincing argument that makes a significant contribution to *Faust* scholarship.

This issue of *PMLA* concludes with two articles concerned in very different ways with poetic language. Contrary to critics who have treated Hopkins' use of language as representational, Jacob Korg argues that Hopkins' linguistic deviations set reference aside in stressing the inherent signifying capacity of language. In an article that one of our reviewers termed a “crucial statement” on this topic, Korg proposes that Hopkins' methods give language dominance over experience and use it to reshape reality according to linguistic principles. Ruth apRoberts, in an essay richly allusive to structuralist concerns and studies, examines Old Testament poetry to show why, through its “rhyming” of ideas rather than sounds, such poetry has long been translated and translatable. The article offers insight into biblical literature as a whole as well as into the process of successful translation.

The illustration that follows accompanies Morris Eaves's article on Blake. Perhaps it might also represent the eye of God watching Goethe's Faust, or Rousseau examining the self, or Coleridge being devious as he writes the *Biographia*. Perhaps it is merely repressed man watching Pynchon watching us.

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