of solemn unaccommodating egotism," and is "colored by a snarl of indulged anger" (p. 227); he objects to the "emptiness of the message" in *The French Revolution*, which "does not really challenge at all, which is probably why it was so popular (pp. 229–30); he finds much of *Heroes and Hero-Worship* "dramatic nonsense," as well as "platitudinous *and* oracular—not to mention vulgar" (pp. 227, 231); and he credits Carlyle as being "one of the prime agents in training the nineteenth century to absorb and applaud crude rhetoric and sentimental profundities without flinching" and in doing so "succeeded in passing himself off as a national sage" (p. 230). What place these outrageous remarks, and others like them, have in an essay that has as its expressed purpose "the interests of literary justice" (p. 234) is certainly not made clear.

[11] See Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Past and Present," *The Dial*, 4 (July 1843), 96, 101.

Mr. Wilkinson replies:

Let me begin by saying that it was never my purpose to "chastise" David DeLaura—and certainly not in the spirit in which Rodger L. Tarr seems out to chastise me—nor did I ever intend to question DeLaura's "scholarly integrity" as Tarr claims. For DeLaura I have nothing but respect, as might be inferred from my article. It was his critical judgment in a particular case that I contested, and I had some hope that he might even come to agree with me. I cannot, on the other hand, see much chance of agreement between Tarr and myself.

Tarr's defense of Carlyle's "sincerity" seems to me to be based on a very curious notion. He seems to suggest that *because* Carlyle made use of Tennyson to support his own standpoint, he was *therefore* for some reason or other sincere. I can make little sense of this, even after having reread Tarr several times with as much willing suspension of disbelief as I can muster. He goes on to say that Carlyle's using of Tennyson showed something still more important, namely that he was optimistic. I can't see why it should. Even if Tennyson had been a profoundly optimistic poet (faintly trusting the larger hope?), why should Carlyle's using of him make Carlyle optimistic? That Carlyle *wanted to convey* a certain sense of optimism may well be true, but if the optimism doesn't come through as genuine, it hardly matters whom he quotes. In other words, we are still left with the question of the literary quality of Carlyle's finished product—a question that Tarr solves very simply. He says that the following expresses Carlyle's "explicit sincerity of conviction": "There lies the port and happy haven towards which . . . the Supreme Powers are driving us . . . Let all true men . . . bend valiantly, incessantly, with thousandfold endeavour, thither, thither!" The sincerity of this, for Tarr, is "beyond question" and so "need not be dwelled upon." Since a large part of my article was devoted to arguing (in detail) that it is just this sort of language that I find highly questionable (pp. 230–31), little more need be said here. In the above instance I suppose it is especially that emphatic "thither, thither!" that must make one pause—it is so embarrassingly pompous; and pomposity of this kind conveys, I suggest, neither conviction nor sincerity.

Tarr then finds it convenient to believe that I don't know what a British Council pamphlet is, not stopping to consider whether I might have referred to one *because* it was "for general rather than for scholarly consumption," as he puts it. In my article I wrote: "We all know of the growing number of works . . . in which the reading public is pressed to respect unduly the second rate" (p. 233). In a note to this statement I quote from the British Council pamphlet on Carlyle because it is addressed to the reading public and not primarily to scholars. If Tarr thought I had made a mistake, I don't see why he couldn't have been civil about it (see the tone of his ninth note).

Finally, I am accused, among other things, of quoting out of context (though I am not told where). Let me return the compliment, with the civil addition of a specification. The whole of Tarr's eighth note represents a piece of rather unpleasant misreading. He says I dispute DeLaura's point about Carlyle's "pervasive influence" over Arnold in these words: "This is not just an overstatement: it is simply not true, and Mr. DeLaura knows it is not true, which is what is so puzzling" (p. 232). This sentence in my article does not in fact refer to the "pervasive influence," but to a notion of the "total perfection of man," which DeLaura mistakenly said Arnold got from Carlyle. If Tarr had quoted my next sentence it would have been perfectly clear that I was referring to a very particular notion and *not* to the "pervasive influence," and that the "absoluteness" of my position was therefore in no sense "impropitious." My sentence reads: "Earlier in his [DeLaura's] own article he made it clear that Arnold derived this notion elsewhere—that much of his thinking was in fact humanist in origin." This eighth note of Tarr's, let me add, is to illustrate and confirm his contention that my arguments tend to be based upon quicksand. I have a suspicion that I deserve an apology that I won't get.

D. R. M. Wilkinson
University of Groningen

Once Again: Romania

To the Editor:

At the risk of appearing needlessly concerned, I wish to point out to Peter Brooks ("Romania and the Widening Gyre," *PMLA*, 87, Jan. 1972, 7–11) that

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Curtius' concept of Romania is far from being "in the nature of a *myth* [my italics] of origins" (p. 7). It is the result of the same "painstaking philology," which Brooks has characterized above, and is accurate in all the parts researched by Curtius. Even to compare this concept to that of folklore created by the Grimm brothers is an ingenious (but, alas, uninformed) enterprise which may appeal to anyone who (1) abhors painstaking (but honest) philology, (2) wishes to depreciate German scholarship, or (3) has not read Curtius' book.

To buttress his arguments, Brooks produces "evidence" from poor Madame de Staël who, like Curtius, cannot defend herself, and for the same reason, and states the *palissade* that the modern age is complex due to cross-cultural borrowing, and that the cohesion of Romania is gone forever. Curtius, I am sure, would agree. Dropping names such as "Germanomania" and "Shakespearophilia" in quick succession, Brooks anaesthetizes the reader to the point where he may not even wonder whether Curtius ever *claimed* that a "morphology of the modern traditions of literature can be established within the sole context of Romania" (p. 7).

Indeed, when comparing Brooks's key quotation from the Curtius translation with the German original, we find that the translation is inaccurate. Curtius never uses the term "moderne Literatur," but simply "neuere Literatur," which does not necessarily mean "modern." It means "more recent," relative to a previously mentioned point in time, namely the period of the Crusades. "More recent" is therefore any literature following this period, be it the poetry of the Troubadours, or French epic literature, or French seventeenth-century drama, or the literature of the Italian, French, and English Renaissance. The sense in which Curtius wishes to be understood is quite clear for anyone who reads the entire paragraph (pp. 41–42 in the German, p. 34 in the English version). Here are the two passages:

> Die romanischen Literaturen haben im Abendlande die Führung von den Kreuzzügen bis zur Französischen Revolution, wobei eine die andere ablöst. *Nur von der Romania aus gewinnt man ein zutreffendes Bild vom Gang der neueren Literatur* [my italics].

> The Romance literatures hold the lead in the West from the Crusades to the French Revolution, one succeeding another. *Only from within Romania does one obtain a true picture of the course of modern literature.* (Brooks, p. 7)

Furthermore, while Brooks is perfectly free to stay unconvinced "that Romania is in fact the most viable context for the study of the Renaissance or Neoclassicism" (p. 7), even the slightest attempt at exposing students to, say, a Renaissance sonnet would put Brooks in the position of having to account eventually for the presence of certain details. He would have to trace their origins and show their transformation by the Renaissance poet. If, in addition, he wishes to apply the structuralist method, the resulting treatment of the poem would be totally adequate—from our point of view (speaking as a literary critic and educator at this particular point in the 1970's).

For the structuralist, the literary work becomes raw material which he uses to build his own philosophical and linguistic superstructure, borrowing terminology from the natural sciences and mathematics. Once initiated, the reader (even the student) can appreciate the structuralist critic's intellectual acrobatics and may, hopefully, gain more insight into the poem—but not necessarily so. Witness David Kuhn's treatment of Villon's poetry (*La Poétique de François Villon*, Paris: Colin, 1967): the passages where Kuhn remains faithful to the text are quite outnumbered by those where he yields to a tendency of "roaming" and reading additional significances into Villon's work. Such multiple meanings may be perceptible to Kuhn or the twentieth-century reader, but might appear regretfully dated and outmoded even fifty years from now, and were almost certainly not intended by Villon. The shortcomings of the structuralist approach have been shown by Michael Riffaterre as early as 1966 (*Yale French Studies*, Vols. 36–37, pp. 200–42), and no further commentary seems necessary.

The question whether Curtius' concept could be used in the post-Romantic era has never occurred to us, and certainly not to Curtius, as the most cursory glance at his table of contents reveals. All the more astonishing, then, that Brooks should fight so eloquently against this windmill. In what sense certain Romance Language departments in this country have applied the concept—for this Curtius should not be held responsible. Brooks' suggestion of abandoning the study of origins altogether strikes us as somewhat rash, to say the least. How would he teach, for example, Giraudoux and Anouilh, Gide (*Œdipe*; *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*) or Sartre (*Les Mouches*), or, for that matter, O'Neill, T. S. Eliot, Brecht, Gerhard Hauptmann, Goethe, Grillparzer, and von Hofmannsthal? I doubt very much that their works can be treated adequately just on the basis of "patterns of comparison, superimposition, and variation" (p. 8).

From the preceding it is obvious that Brooks prefers the structuralist approach, but he has also fallen victim to what one might call modernomania in twentieth-century criticism: a deplorable tendency of making relevance the foremost criterion in all research and teaching, both to attract students and to satisfy budget-conscious administrations who, in turn, profit from this latest form of permissiveness in higher edu-

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cation. As always, the American student is the one who suffers in the long run. Knowing little, he is allowed to know less and to "identify" with what he knows already, namely the tendencies, ideas, and artistic movements of the era in which he lives. Even the terms "studying," "learning," and "knowing" are avoided, replaced in university catalogs and course descriptions by "experiencing," "appreciating," and the careful "exposure," often defined as "modes of knowing."

As a corrective to this new type of academic extremism I wish to propose revision of the term "relevance"—if we have to work with so presumptuous a concept any longer—so that it includes "the usable past" as well (Henri Peyre's term—and it is equally biased, but will have to do for the time being). It would be a surprise for many to find that much of the past turns out to be "relevant" or "usable." Let us not fool ourselves: the aversion of many students toward studying past periods and origins stems very often from previous failure of their professors to meet the challenge of lively and knowledgeable presentation; in other words, it is a pedagogical rather than a curricular problem.

Therefore, by all means, let us teach students how to read literature, as Brooks points out so well, but by combining information (all kinds, as much as possible, certainly origins) with esthetic experience, fathom the *signifié* (in its widest sense) along with the *signifiant* and its various linguistic forms. Only then will we succeed in preventing the dangerous intellectual impoverishment which is already spreading in our academic field.

Edelgard DuBruck
Marygrove College

Mr. Brooks replies:

DuBruck's letter demonstrates so total a misunderstanding of my argument that I despair of explaining myself to him. His defense of Curtius is unnecessary, for Curtius was never under attack. I made clear my admiration for Curtius. And I am of course aware of what Curtius means by "modern literature" in the context of *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*. I was myself speaking within the context of a debate (at the 1970 MLA Annual Convention) on the adequacy and usefulness of Romania as a conceptual framework for study and teaching today. Why my critique should be read as either an abhorrence of painstaking philology or a depreciation of German scholarship, I do not know. And I am not in the habit of quoting from books I have not read.

DuBruck wishes to see me as a victim of the search for "relevance"—his term, not mine—and suggests that I represent all sorts of deplorable tendencies in the contemporary academy. I in reply can only suggest that he attend to what I in fact said, rather than to his own obsessions. If the past is to remain knowable, the knowers will have to respond to its challenges with more than a ritual defense of past practices.

Peter Brooks
Yale University

The Man of Law's Tale

To the Editor:

A colleague and I had been working for some time on many of the problems associated with Chaucer's Man of Law's Tale, and had reached certain conclusions about this puzzling work, when you published Morton W. Bloomfield's provocative article "The Man of Law's Tale: A Tragedy of Victimization and a Christian Comedy" (*PMLA*, 87, May 1972, 384–90). In the space available here we will not be able to stress the virtues of Bloomfield's essay, but we feel that we must indicate the way in which it perpetuates certain problems of interpretation regarding the MLT rather than solves them.

Notwithstanding the complex argument indicated in the title, the first difficulty with the article is that it leaves Chaucer as a less than competent artist. There are no single statements to this effect, yet a brief look at a number of key passages in the paper will suggest what we mean. Bloomfield writes: "Many explanations have been offered for our lack of enthusiasm for the tale. The most obvious is its indifference to realistic characterization, motivation, and circumstance" (p. 384). He continues: "What are we to feel about an incredible heroine, Constance, who is subject to an impossibly ridiculous and coincidental series of events which one cannot take seriously, while the teller apostrophises and laments in exaggerated fashion over the happenings, attempting, directly it seems, to play on our feelings?" Developing his argument, he says: "We cannot identify with the protagonist as we long to, because the author or persona perpetually keeps us at a distance" (p. 385). We find that the Man of Law "frequently interrupts his narrative. He is a garrulous man who must comment on the action." Moreover, "The interruptions all serve in different fashion to alienate us from the story and to stylize the action" (p. 385). These observations, all descriptively correct, suggest a lapse in Chaucer's artistry, but this, surely, is a conclusion that we should be reluctant to arrive at.

The second problem with the article is the assumption that all the descriptively correct observations above should be viewed as negative elements from which we must rescue the tale. If the text reveals, as it

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