

Editor's Column

THE MLA's survey, in 1973, of its members' interests revealed a major discrepancy between the way participants classified their "real" scholarly concerns and the traditional division of literary studies into chronological-geographical units. Consequently, only about half of the seventy-three new MLA Divisions engendered by that survey are centered on author, period, or country; others are organized by genre, comparative approach, analytical method, critical procedure, or pedagogy. Many scholars still, of course, work within periods and concentrate their research on single authors, but increasingly, it would appear, it's what we do with what we've got that counts.

PMLA—which under its revised editorial policy is more than ever a mirror, not a lamp—confirms these new directions. Although the articles in this issue, for example, might be conventionally described as studies of Milton, Keats, and Emily Dickinson, *A Tale of Two Cities*, *La Vie de Saint Alexis*, and *Il Gattopardo*, they could also be described, and perhaps with greater validity, as essays on narrative theory and feminist perspectives, on psychoanalytic and reader criticism, on philosophical approaches and comparatist techniques. The articles "discuss" Milton and Keats, Dryden and Blake, Dickens and Lampedusa, but this issue is really "about" Freud, Heidegger, Greimas, Todorov, Derrida, Frye, de Man, Hartman, Holland, Fish, Bloom, and the many other scholars and critics who helped inspire its contents.

No single issue of *PMLA* could possibly reflect all current approaches and concerns. Since this issue does, however, include quite a few of them, I have chosen to arrange the articles by approach rather than by subject, beginning with a splendid example of a comparatist essay, Edith Kern's 1977 Presidential Address. Ranging from Pope to Joyce to Beckett, from Vico to Heidegger to Spitzer, from *Forbes* magazine to Sunkist oranges to the Hildesheim cathedral (and, in the process, drawing on Molière and the *Rigveda*, Cervantes and Stendhal, Auerbach and Chomsky), Kern uses all the tools of the comparatist to support her contention that the proper study of mankind is man, that "we alone, as human beings, can discover and reveal those underlying structures that give evidence of the unity of all knowledge."

The next two articles, Sandra Gilbert's reflections on Milton's "bogey" and Paul Sherwin's analysis of Keats's struggle with Milton, share a number of features—Milton, the Romantic poets, a concern with questions of influence ("Life to him would be death to me"), and an interest in Harold Bloom's recent work on the anxiety of influence. Gilbert, in an essay described by one of our consultants as "an extended meditation in which one insight bursts into another," uses Milton as a springboard to leap forward to Virginia Woolf, then back to Blake and the Brontës, seeing Milton as Bloom's "great Inhibitor" as she develops a feminist perspective on patriarchal poetry and women writers. Similarly concerned with Milton's impact on a later writer, Sherwin extends Bloom's theories of influence to the specific problems of *Hyperion*, which he skillfully elucidates as "Keats's dying into life." The two articles may antagonize hard-line Miltonists, but I would suggest that they are compulsory reading for anyone interested in Milton, Keats, feminist criticism, Blake, the Brontës, or Bloom, not necessarily in that order.

Structure, form, and narrative theory are among our greatest concerns as a profession, with few articles in any recent issue of *PMLA* having been able to avoid that magic word "structuralism." In an essay that could influence all future analyses of Christian medieval narratives, Evelyn Birge Vitz considers the relationship between Subject and Object as it applies to hagiography in general and to *La Vie de Saint Alexis* in particular. One need not know the work in question, or even have heard of Saint Alexis, to enjoy and profit from Vitz's lively anatomy of Greimasian narrative theory. Although his concerns are somewhat different, Richard Lansing also explores narrative structure, persuasively elucidating concentric symmetry within Lampedusa's *Il Gattopardo* and thereby dispelling the notion that this celebrated novel lacks structural coherence.

Sharon Cameron's article on Dickinson and the dialectic of rage is linked with Michael

Ferber's on Blake's idea of brotherhood because both take a philosophical, one might even say religious, approach to literature. Cameron provides a provocative analysis of some of Dickinson's most difficult poems and, in so doing, develops useful theories about the nature of lyric poetry. Ferber, in what one specialist reader called a "brilliant, humane, and lucidly written essay," carefully leads us through a number of works in an effort to clarify Blake's vision of universal brotherhood. Behind both essays, I feel, lurks Arnold's claim that poetry teaches us how to live, and that too may indicate a new preoccupation (or a new old one) in contemporary criticism.

The last two articles are concerned, respectively, although by no means exclusively, with psychoanalytic and reader criticism. Albert Hutter combines traditional literary and historical methods with a mastery of psychoanalytic theory to trace the political and generational conflicts (nation and generation) in *A Tale of Two Cities*; his article, which should help to revive interest in the novel, also tells us a good deal about Dickens and the Victorian age. Finally, in his discussion of the "ideal reader," Robert DeMaria raises some important questions about reader criticism as he examines the ideal readers "created" by Dryden, Johnson, Coleridge, and Fry and shows how such readers reflect their creators' concepts of literary criticism.

There are increasing indications that this decade is an important one in the development of literary criticism. I am not at all sure where we are going, but, if *PMLA* is in fact a mirror held along our roadway, it appears that we are moving in exciting new directions.

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Milton and His Two Daughters

George Romney, in *The Poetical Works of John Milton, with a Life of the Author* by William Hayley, 1 (London, 1794), cxii.