

## Forum

Members of the Association are invited to submit letters, typed and double-spaced, commenting on articles published in *PMLA* or on matters of general scholarly or critical interest. Footnotes are discouraged, and letters of more than one thousand words will not be considered. Decision to publish and the right to edit are reserved to the Editor, and the authors of the articles discussed will be invited to reply.

### Yeats's Sources

To the Editor:

John R. O'Connor ("Flaubert: *Trois Contes* and the Figure of the Double Cone," *PMLA*, 95 [1980], 812–26) has overlooked the most likely source of Yeats's knowledge of Flaubert's "La Spirale." As Daphne Fullwood suggested some years ago, Yeats probably heard of the story through his close friend T. Sturge Moore, who refers to Eduard-Wilhelm Fischer's *Etudes sur Flaubert inédit* in one of the appendixes to *Art and Life* (London: Methuen, 1910), a copy of which is preserved in Yeats's library. Fullwood's suggestion first appears in print in a note in A. Norman Jeffares' *The Circus Animals: Essays on W. B. Yeats* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press, 1970), p. 103, n. 3. (I owe the reference to *A Critical Edition of A Vision* (1925), ed. George Mills Harper and Walter Kelly Hood [London: Macmillan, 1978], Notes, p. 31.) To Fullwood's suggestion might be added the coincidence that when, on 29 December 1921, Sturge Moore published a long letter in *TLS* attacking an anonymous leading article on Flaubert, he might well have been staying in Oxford with Yeats, who was then deeply involved in working on *A Vision*. On 4 November, Yeats had written Moore "if you are up in London any time after Christmas extend your journey a little and come and stay with us" (*W. B. Yeats and T. Sturge Moore: Their Correspondence, 1901–1937*, ed. Ursula Bridge [London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953], p. 45).

I might also note that Yeats refers to "La Spirale" not only in both the 1925 and 1937 editions of *A Vision* but also in his Introduction to *Selections from the Poems of Dorothy Wellesley* (London: Macmillan, 1936), pp. xiv–xv: "Flaubert talked of writing a story called 'L'Aspirail' [sic] about a man who dreamed more and more magnificently as his daily circumstance declined, and at last, when that circumstance reached abject poverty, celebrated asleep his marriage to a princess."

RICHARD J. FINNERAN  
*Newcomb College, Tulane University*

*Mr. O'Connor replies:*

Richard J. Finneran's interesting note but further corroborates my speculation as to the specifically secondhand nature of Yeats's knowledge of "La Spirale," a circumstance that permitted Yeats, untroubled by Flaubert's notes for the story, the better to invent its truth.

JOHN R. O'CONNOR  
*University of Michigan, Ann Arbor*

### Eliot's "Journey of the Magi"

To the Editor:

In Daniel A. Harris' "Language, History, and Text in Eliot's 'Journey of the Magi'" (*PMLA*, 95 [1980], 838–56) there are several serious misreadings of text, contradictions of argument, and errors of interpretation that distort both the meaning of the poem with which Harris deals as well as Eliot's religious position. At the outset, Harris is uncertain, first, of the nature of the Magus' religious experience and, in turn, of the reader's experience of the poem. If the Magus has "no idea of divine teleology" (p. 840) and is "ignorant of . . . eschatology" and "denied" "[k]nowledge of Christ's ministry, the Death and Resurrection" (p. 843), how is it that he knows more than the reader (p. 841), "reads correctly the divine paradox in the central sign, the Birth," and "understands that Christ's nature . . . invites ascetic renunciation" (p. 843)? Furthermore, how can the Magus have acquired so rational and precise a knowledge of Christian dogma from his witness of the Incarnation if he has undergone a "baffled consciousness of mystery" (p. 841), having experienced only a "confusion upon seeing Christ" (p. 851)? These are contradictions of critical argument, not the divine paradoxes of Christian theology or the elucidation of aesthetic subtleties. Harris also has difficulties when he considers what the functions of religious texts are for Eliot and for readers of Eliot's poetry. How can Eliot believe "that Christian literature undermines the faith it was meant to foster" (p. 842), that it has "the capacity . . . to