

expect to find in literary criticism of the past for extensive use of measure and symmetry. Hart's account of the Golden Section in the *Ars Poetica* serves to illustrate the problems. A division (on the basis of manifest content) at line 294 is reasonable, but none of the explanations for the .618 seems very convincing: it can scarcely be accidental, yet can we suppose it part of a long tradition of which *no trace* remains? Is it a secret code echoing some harmony of the cosmos? Is it a way of deliberately denying bilateral symmetry (concentricity)? If we claim that such effects are intentional (a claim not usually made for the results of modern methods of analysis), then we should find evidence of that intention.

Hence my interest in Heninger's book, with its "comprehensive" (p. 371) search for evidence. Although the difference between us is small, it is highlighted by the contrast between Sidney and the passage from *Campion* to which both Heninger and I refer. What I am looking for is explicit warrant for number symbolism and pattern. There is no doubt that the poet is creator of "another nature" and that many works seem to reflect harmonies and symmetries existing in the cosmos. But Sidney refers only to the former, nowhere saying that he expects the poet to organize his poetic world by these means. Indeed, on the basis of what Sidney says before, literal imitation of cosmic harmonies is the task of astronomers, geometers, etc.—but not of the poet, "freely ranging onely within the Zodiack of his owne wit." We can substantiate the presence of number and symmetry by pointing to various works in which we find them, but it is *we* (and not Sidney or any other Renaissance critic) who are providing the substantiation. That is why I isolated *Campion's* explicit reference to a connection between universal harmony and poetic meter: this is historical substantiation. While both Heninger and I can easily accept in poetry "the simple patterns evident in nature," I see nothing in Sidney on the basis of which we can accept, as Heninger does, these simple patterns and at the same time reject more complex and arcane but equally natural ones, like the oscillation of the planet Venus.

The very comprehensiveness of *Touches of Sweet Harmony* suggests how little we have to go on. Perhaps I can illustrate by offering in contrast Sidney's discussion of the unities. It is full, specific, and detailed; and when we encounter the unities, when we attempt to write their history, we have ample warrant in Sidney and others. But when we talk about measure and symmetry, how can we answer accusations of sheer inventiveness or overelaboration? Part of the answer is in stipulating definitions to sharpen the limits of the subject and in a careful methodology, including both intellectual history and "formal clues" to authorial

intention; the rest, in separating, if possible, what lies within the Zodiack of the poet's wit from what lies buried in his human instinct.

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Victorian Thinking

"The Formal Nature of Victorian Thinking" by Gerald L. Bruns (*PMLA*, 90, 1975, 904–18) responds to David DeLaura's observation that "we need to know much more about the Victorians" (*Victorian Prose: A Guide to Research*) if we are to understand their art. The article establishes the thesis that the formal nature of Victorian thinking is characterized by "historical habits of mind," "the specialized form of thought of . . . the historian," "the belief that ideas, to be fully intelligible, must possess a historical . . . mode of existence" (p. 905). Bruns's applications of the thesis to Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy*, and Ruskin's *Modern Painters* make these works meaningful to students of Victorian writing as examples of "historical habits of mind." Yet, his perceptive and useful study raises a historical problem of its own: Is this form of Victorian thought original or unique?

For example, in the study, Bruns opposes Victorian to Romantic (Ruskinian to Shelleyan) thinking: "The interpretation . . . requires therefore an act of historical imagination; the transcendental imagination of the Romantics will no longer suffice" (p. 916). But are the Romantic imagination and the Victorian sage mutually exclusive? If we expand the scope of the epoch, at what point does "a diachronic world of processes and events" (p. 905) appear? Such expansion has been meaningful for others: Burton Feldman and Robert D. Richardson, *The Rise of Modern Mythology, 1680–1860*; Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society, 1780–1950*; Harold Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society, 1780–1880*.

Mircea Eliade defines technological man as "consciously and voluntarily historical" (*Cosmos and History*); José Argüelles views "the period from around 1750 to the present as *the age of history*" (*The Transformative Vision*). The development of historicism in the eighteenth century establishes the authority of the historical habit of mind, which authority was needed to explain convincingly such concepts as the wealth of nations, the rights of man, the principle of population, the origin of species, the communist manifesto. As students of literature, however, let us return to Shelley.

Although Shelley's *Defence of Poetry* opens with a Romantic distinction between reason and imagination, he develops the essay historically, establishing the ideas of poetry and poet (the way Arnold defines the idea of culture in *Culture and Anarchy*) as "historical."

His "act of historical interpretation" at the conclusion of the *Defence* extends (as Bruns says of Ruskin's and Pater's thinking) "beyond history into the realm of value and personal vision": "Poets are . . . the trumpets which sing to battle, and feel not what they inspire; the influence which is moved not, but moves."

The concluding passage of Shelley's *Defence* was lifted essentially without change from his unfinished and unpublished *A Philosophical View of Reform*, written in 1819. In that work, the passage composes the bulk of the next-to-last paragraph of Chapter i, which traces the history of European despotism from the decline and fall of the Roman Empire to the French Revolution with glances at the Americas, India, and the Turkish Near East. In this work the famous passage which closes the *Defence* is firmly and obviously tied to history.

I am mindful of Wendell Harris' appropriately questioning "the authority to be given to unpublished material and thus the limits of its legitimate use" (*Modern Philology*, 1970). Shelley wrote to Hunt, 26 May 1820: "Do you know any bookseller who would publish for me an octavo volume entitled *A Philosophical View of Reform*?"

More significantly, Shelley uses history repeatedly in his dramatic and narrative poetry. In *Queen Mab*, "Ianthé's Soul" is rewarded with a historical review—"the past shall rise"—and profits from the experience: "I know / The past, and thence I will essay to glean / A warning for the future, so that man / May profit by his errors, and derive / Experience from his folly." In *The Revolt of Islam*, the "Woman," in explaining the fight between the eagle and the serpent, begins with "the earliest dweller of the world." She knows "the dark tale which history doth unfold." Better known are the two historical spectacles used to torture Prometheus in Act I: the crucified Christ and France after the Revolution ("the disenchanting nation"). From the early *Queen Mab* to the late and incomplete *The Triumph of Life*, Shelley characteristically uses historical imagination both in his search for meaning—"what is life?"—and in his validation of meaning—"Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world." The major thrust of Shelley's thinking is characterized by "movement, process, and transformation." Like Arnold's, his concern "is a study of perfection, and of harmonious perfection, general perfection, and perfection which consists in becoming something rather than in having something" (*Culture and Anarchy*). And like Ruskin in *Modern Painters*, Shelley finds meaning and intelligibility in what has been, the web ordered by time. His writing "requires therefore an act of historical imagination."

I encourage Bruns to extend his article to book

length, exploring the formal nature of English thinking from 1750.

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Pleberio's World

To the Editor:

Peter N. Dunn, in his "Pleberio's World" (*PMLA*, 1976, 406–19), employs an unsporting negative feint usually excluded from the traditional repertoire of academic karate. Referring to my *The Spain of Fernando de Rojas*, he demands your readers' gratitude for sparing them "an account of the selective readings, manipulations of context, and mistranslation that mar pp. 377–78" (p. 418). The truth is, I would suggest, that he has spared himself the trouble of reading carefully the chapter he criticizes. For his assertion that Pleberio's pathetic sentence "Agora perderé contigo, mi desdichada hija, los miedos e temores que cada día me espavorecían: sola tu muerte me haze seguro de sospecha" is "never" (p. 416) mentioned by critics does not take into account my discussion of the Petrarchist origin of the passage (*The Spain of Fernando de Rojas*, p. 369).

This oversight, although it may seem unimportant, indicates the inherent fallacy of Dunn's interpretation of Pleberio and his "World." I would not expect him—as a staunch representative of British opposition to Américo Castro's views on Spain in its history—to accept the notion that Pleberio's closing soliloquy expresses "converso" resentment and pessimism with a concealed denunciation of God's ways to man. But how can he, as a professional supposedly still committed to historical comprehension, contrive to overlook the pervasive neo-Stoicism of the speech? *La Celestina*—we have all proclaimed—is a work characterized by its "originalidad," but, like all such experiments, it operates from tradition. And in this particular act, as almost all critics have hitherto recognized, tradition and originality take the form of "planctus" (the proper medieval way of concluding tragedies), infiltrated with the new Petrarchist "tema de aquel tiempo." It is this elementary lesson in literary history that Dunn's article almost mischievously is dedicated to skirting or ignoring.

What is the technique of evasion? Basically, as I understand it, it amounts to equating the way Rojas handles commonplaces in his dialogue (as a means of betraying the reactions and hidden intentions of the speakers) and the way they are used in the closing public oration. This will not do. Referring only to the example cited (Pleberio's "relief" at his new "security" after the death of his daughter), if we divest it of its