

would seem to provide a provisional “yes, these different groups of signs refer to the same ‘person.’”

To Robert W. Witt’s queries, I can only answer the following: (1) Though other characters propose the prologues and explanations for the Mechanicals’ play, it is Bottom who sponsors them most vehemently, and who acts out for us most extensively the consequences of such sponsorship. (2) Snout and Quince are indeed victimized when they run in terror from the metamorphosed Bottom, and Quince also suffers an inability to get past the literal, step-by-step sequence of words in his reading of his prologue. As for Theseus and Hippolyta, they can see the play of Pyramus and Thisbe as nothing “but shadows,” and if “imagination” is to “amend them,” then as Hippolyta says, “It must be your imagination then, and not theirs.” An imagination, I might add, that they are most unwilling to bring to bear. Theseus, far from being “the one who is most willing to accept the story of the lovers, as well as the play, as metaphor,” in this passage actually discounts the play, reducing it to its literal dimension as mere “shadows.” In short, Theseus’ and Hippolyta’s literalism condemns them to suffer the complacent fiction of their one-dimensional sense of self: their inability to participate either in the preceding night’s dreams or in the doggerel before them.

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Measure and Symmetry in Literature

To the Editor:

I am writing to commend R. G. Peterson’s article, “Critical Calculations: Measure and Symmetry in Literature” (*PMLA*, 91, 1976, 367–75). It is a broad yet cogent survey of what has rapidly become a major industry in our profession. However, since Peterson misappropriates my recent book, *Touches of Sweet Harmony*, which he cites on page 371, I wish to modify the impression he gives of it.

Peterson says that in my study “there is offered no more direct a justification for large-scale use of number and pattern in literature than Thomas Campion (in 1602) making ‘the point that a poem must reiterate the universal harmony by means of poetic meter.’” I feel aggrieved by such a reductive conclusion. The last hundred pages of my book are largely an elaboration of a passage in Sidney’s *Defence of Poesie* (1595), which I must quote here for the sake of explicitness. Early in that most seminal of Elizabethan critical treatises, Sidney defines “poet” in terms of its etymology from the Greek word ποιειν and designates him “a maker.” Then shortly after comes this loaded assertion:

Give right honor to the heavenly maker of that maker, who having made man to his owne likenes, set him beyond and over all the workes of that second nature [i.e., the creation], which in nothing he sheweth so much as in Poetry; when with the force of a divine breath, he bringeth things fourth surpassing her [nature’s] doings. (C1)

Sidney’s meaning, it seems to me, is unequivocal. God created man in His likeness and made him lord of creation; and nowhere does man demonstrate this doctrine more directly than in the composition of poetry, when he imitates the method and contents of God’s creation.

We need only recall the ubiquitous sentence, a commonplace in both the theology and science of the period, that God created the universe according to number, weight, and measure, and we have an unmistakable poetics which expects a poem to reflect the patterned order of a divinely ordained cosmos. We then can substantiate this poetics by pointing to Spenser’s *Shepherdes Calender* and *Epithalamion* as obvious examples. Of course, Sidney is not suggesting that the poet employ complicated and arcane number symbolism, but merely that he repeat the simple patterns evident in nature, such as the two-part system of day-night, the four-part system of the seasons, the twelve-part system of the year, or the eight-part system of the diapason (which obtains in the music of the spheres, even though we cannot hear it).

Since my book is not likely to have come into Peterson’s hands until his article was completed, or nearly so, his vagary can be assigned to nothing more sinister than a lack of time for assimilating my argument. I do think it imperative, though, to keep clearly in view the theoretical basis for any analysis of design in literature, and therefore I want to rectify Peterson’s comment and reaffirm my findings.

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To the Editor:

By attempting to assume a middle position on the highly controversial topic of numerical composition, R. G. Peterson’s cautiously worded article risks wrath from partisans on both sides. Since I am in accord with what I understand to be Peterson’s moderate position, my disagreements are meant to be constructive and ultimately supportive.

At issue are five of the theses Peterson treats: (1) There is compelling evidence that some major poets in our (Western) literary heritage used numerical patterns as one way of ordering the parts of their poems; these often involve concentric symmetry. (2) No specific theoretical treatments of this aspect of literary structure have come down to us, but surviving texts touching numerical structure and symmetry may