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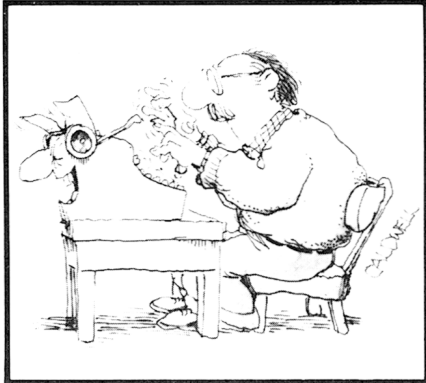
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NE 4 Summer 1979

May 1979

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American Literature



Edited by Sarah Blacher Cohen.

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Literature, Art, and Scholarship



Edited by Michael S. Harper and Robert B. Stepto. Foreword by John Hope

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Abstract. The figure of Sordello, who appears in *Purgatorio* vi and guides Dante and Vergil to the valley of the princes, has long puzzled critics, since his stature in the *Comedy* seems greater than his historical achievements warrant. He is noted chiefly for a *planh* with political overtones, the lament for Blacatz. Of the *Comedy's* lyric poets, the other known especially for political poetry is Bertran de Born, among the "sowers of scandal and of schism" in *Inferno* xxviii. By comparing Dante's treatment of these two "political poets," we see that they are used within the poem in a way that necessarily transcends their historical identities: they have become emblematic, respectively, of the good and bad uses to which poets can put their verse in the service of the state. (TB)

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Abstract. Through her name and position at court Hélène de Surgères brings to Ronsard's last collection of sonnets two conflicting referential systems: a literary tradition in which, beginning with the *Iliad*, Helen is a figure of love and war and a more or less realistic imitation of events in French society and the court of Charles IX. Ronsard adopts a local court convention in which love for Hélène allows successful evasion of the miseries of the civil wars, but he criticizes the convention by displacing its allegorical intent—transcendence of mundane and temporal difference—with an irony that internalizes and preserves that difference. Thus the irony, in aiming to avoid the referential contexts, actually marks them as ineradicable. Instead of presenting a platonizing view of the lady, the *Sonnets pour Hélène* reveal in her an inescapable contradiction that also is within the poems' *je* and its constructions. (AFN)

Nietzsche's Idea of Myth: The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Eighteenth-Century Aesthetics. BENJAMIN BENNETT	420
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Abstract. In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche holds that conscious art, in which symbols of truth are deliberately created, does not supersede myth but functions, rather, as its destiny and revealed essence. At its later stages, where it becomes fully itself, myth is closely related to artistic illusion in an eighteenth-century sense, illusion to which we submit while recognizing its illusoriness; myth is a constantly renewed creative effort by which we protect ourselves against the unacceptable truth of the utter emptiness of existence, a truth we also tacitly ac-

knowledge precisely by striving against it. Only on this basis is it possible to understand both the reciprocity of Apollonian and Dionysian and Nietzsche's conception of the role of his own work in the historical development of Socratic culture. (BB)

The Meaning of "Grace" in Pope's Aesthetic.

RONALD L. BOGUE 434

Abstract. Pope's "*Grace beyond the Reach of Art*" is not an irrational, inexplicable poetic effect, as critics often assume, but an essential, vitalizing illusion: a seemingly incomprehensible deviation from a norm of expectation that proves harmonious and coherent in the context of a work's overall design. Poetry imitates Nature, and rules are "*Nature methodiz'd*," but rules are incomplete formalizations of Nature's order that gain systematic coherence only in relation to the ends of specific poems. Thus, grace breaks rules yet conforms to Nature; its aberrance is a function of the limitations that readers necessarily have before they arrive at aesthetic comprehension. Analyses of Pope's "Preface to the *Iliad*," *Epistle to Burlington*, and *Essay on Man* show that the movement from initial confusion to final understanding that informs grace is also central to his perception of Homer's art, his theory of landscape design, and his conception of cosmic order. (RLB)

"How to load and . . . bend": Syntax and Interpretation in Keats's

To Autumn. ANNABEL M. PATTERSON 449

Abstract. Keats's *To Autumn* is now generally accepted as a stable poem in praise of maturity, process, and the natural condition. Can new techniques of interpretation ever be objectively applied to such a poem, when its meaning is so well "known"? This question is germane to two recent attempts to apply syntactical analysis to *To Autumn*. Donald Freeman uses Chomskyan transformational procedures on the first stanza and endorses the conventional reading; Geoffrey Hartman discovers in the poem's grammar signs of its status as a poem of the antislublime, or "Hesperian," mood. Both readings are shown to depend on pre-understanding of the poem. Its grammar can equally be shown to support a quite opposite reading, one that undermines the traditional ideology of Autumn and presents the analogy between Autumn and human maturing as a cruel delusion. (AMP)

Notes toward a Theory of the Referent. THOMAS E. LEWIS

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Abstract. Questions concerning textual referentiality figure among the most controversial in literary theory. The complementarity of semiotic and marxist notions of the literary referent suggests a new understanding of the referent based on the concept of "cultural unit." The similarity in the relations that marxist epistemology (as defined by Althusser) posits between thought and the real and that semiotics (as defined by Eco) posits between language and the real warrants this reformulation. A discussion of the semiotic and marxist concepts necessary for a theory of the literary referent leads to its definition as a cultural ideological unit that, by virtue of its necessary but unrepresented relation to other, nonidentical cultural units, furnishes in the mode of a dialectical absence the materials requisite for an understanding both of certain textual properties and of the structure of the historical reality to which the text alludes. (TEL)

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