

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The concluding passage of Shelley's *Defence* was lifted essentially without change from his unfinished and unpublished *A Philosophical View of Reform*, written in 1819.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I am mindful of Wendell Harris' appropriately questioning "the authority to be given to unpublished material and thus the limits of its legitimate use" (*Modern Philology*, 1970).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

doctrinal message (“Ratio’s” recommendation that we get rid of all hostages to Fortune, daughters included), it does appear to support the rather cynical profit-and-loss interpretation that constitutes Dunn’s final lance-thrust into poor Pleberio’s ribs. However, it is professionally unethical to torture masterpieces only in order to confound their commentators. What Rojas and Pleberio (like the future mothers of *Bodas de sangre* and *Riders to the Sea*) are really trying to make us realize is the pathetic insufficiency of the doctrine of consolation when confronted with the reality of the loss. And it was this—in so saying I feel like I am about to charge the British Square!—that Rojas must have felt when his father was “condenado por judayzante año de 88.”

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Mr. Dunn replies:

Gad, Sir, I’m unmasked as an imposter and as a cad who cheats at karate (is that possible?) and who mutilates defenseless little old men with his lance. Although as a British square I’m manifestly unqualified to discuss literature, there are aspects of Gilman’s letter that invite comment.

When in *The Spain of Fernando de Rojas* Gilman takes one rhetorical question of Pleberio’s out of a ragged sequence of almost forty (and a large number of apostrophes) and presses it to yield a mystery, the reader may well call this selective reading. Put back in its context, the phrase does not have that pregnancy which it acquires when conjured in isolation. But the mystery (“Who gave you [love] so much power”) in Act XXI was resolved, Gilman tells us, by (of all people) Sempronio in Act I (which may not have been written by Rojas). Sempronio’s “correct reply” was: “Oh sovereign God, how deep are your mysteries! You gave as much force as is necessary for the undoing of the lover” (*The Spain*, p. 376). Here Gilman has mistranslated “Quánta premia pusiste en el amor, que es necessaria turbación en el amante” (“so much force that the lover’s mind is disturbed”). Not only is “undoing” too extreme a word for *turbación* (Gilman wants Sempronio to agree with him that love is irremediable), an indicative clause of consequence (“so much that”) has become one of intention (“so much as is necessary,” which would require a subjunctive in Spanish). This has the further result that Sempronio’s idle rhetorical exclamation “Great God” is transmogrified into daring speculation on theodicy. The end of Sempronio’s short speech (which is not cited whole by Gilman) shows men, even “los sabios, los santos, profetas,” abandoning God for worldly love. If we

speculate on that with Gilman’s kind of intensity, we must surely conclude that God is not merely indifferent, or malicious (*The Spain*, p. 377); he is a masochist. I offer this interesting new insight to Stephen Gilman. Never mind that, in context, Pleberio’s question needs no answer, or that Sempronio’s words, a world away in context, are part of this lackey’s supercilious sneer: it is *other* people who fall in love and make fools of themselves. Was it so unsporting of me to prefer to let this kind of thing pass with an allusion rather than give a recital?

I regret not having recalled Gilman’s citation (in English, again) of Pleberio’s “pathetic sentence” on page 369 of the book, where he calls it a “clear echo of Petrarch’s ‘Ratio.’” It is part of his argument that Pleberio has “disarmed” himself, in the Stoic sense, “sagely” planning his daughter’s marriage, accumulating wealth “without really caring for it.” We are asked to believe in a serene, clear-minded old man who is “vulnerable to the one thing he loves beyond all reason: Melibea.” The evidence, as I see it, is all to the contrary, and Gilman brings no argument against my contention that, whatever the quality of Pleberio’s *love* for his daughter, he *values* her as the instrument for preserving the future integrity of his property.

On the same page of the book we are informed that Pleberio’s lament is “derived less from medieval *plancti* [sic] . . . than from certain cases debated in Petrarch’s *De Remediis*.” Yet, in his letter, Gilman rebukes me for not recognizing the importance of the *planctus* as a generic model, as if an artist might revere such models with a complete disregard for the coherence of his work.

My commitment to historical comprehension is not strengthened by a definition of *planctus* as “the proper medieval way to conclude tragedies,” nor by the suggestion that “neo-Stoicism” is the vehicle for a “concealed denunciation of God’s ways to man,” nor by the admonition that I should take this as an elementary lesson in literary history when the whole cast of characters in *La Celestina* derives from the repertory of comedy.

I had expected that Gilman would have something to say about my essay: I’m sorry his letter is it. My critical premises are set out in full view, but he chooses not to discuss them or the coherence of my reading of the drama. In fact, he appears to object to coherence, the tracing of continuity through to the end, as a “technique of evasion.” Since I was attempting to show that the “doctrinal message” is incompatible with artistic coherence and with the integrity of the text, I suppose I must accept the doctrinal incoherence of Gilman’s letter as a form of poetic justice. Or, perhaps, I should be flattered that Rojas and I are both