country of origin, was to be encountered all over European Latin literature, whether in poetry or in prose.

Frederic Amory
University of San Francisco

Reply:

I suppose my work and Frederic Amory's, too, will soon be dismissed as "detritus" by a new and more robust generation of scholars—though I hope not. It is enough to disagree with our elders without carting them off to the town dump.

I do not provide Egil's poem as evidence that the Old English poet was familiar with Old Norse verse. I make it quite clear that the two poems are unrelated and that Old Norse is irrelevant to the discussion. But the "Rhyming Poem" is probably a tenth-century production, and the poet's acquaintance with Old Norse poetics would hardly be surprising. After all, Egil's poem was composed and presented at York in 948.

As for the hisperic/hermeneutic *débat*, the two terms are interchangeable and do not signify two different poetic traditions. I choose *hisperic* and define it for the occasion. Though the style in question does have more than just Greek roots, *hermeneutic* refers specifically to the Greek vocabulary, the *Hermeneumata*. That is one of several reasons I disown the term. In any case, an essay that begins "Michael Lapidge" can hardly be thought to abuse that scholar's heroism, even if it disagrees with his terminology.

But if for Amory the term *hisperic* revolves with a hollow sound like the gritty remains of old cement, and so on, I am content to let him think me an ordinary decipherer with some novelties of interpretation; and I am happy to have afforded him the occasion for that memorable simile.

James W. Earl
University of Oregon

Reading Joyce

To the Editor:

The test of an explication of a famous literary work is how decisively it affects our understanding of that work. In "Narration under a Blindfold: Reading Joyce's 'Clay'" (102 [1987]: 206–15), Norris's reading, which is useful but not decisive, cries for correction. In reading *Dubliners*, we had best look to Joyce for guidance. Joyce was a person on whom nothing was lost, and the moral history of *Dubliners* raises consciousness and creates conscience by demanding our full attention. We must see how irony is played off against sentiment. It may be true, as Norris asserts, that some critics have a "need to create significance out of pointlessness" (206), but such a need is mandatory for readers of *Dubliners*. That which seems insignificant or odd is an appeal to our attention and understanding. The "religious" examples of what I mean are easy and everywhere: the boy in "Araby" bears his "chalice safely through a throng of foes"; Lenehan in "Two Gallants" is called Corley's disciple; a publican in "Counterparts" is twice called a curate; Emily Sinico in "A Painful Case" is referred to as Mr. Duffy's confessor.

Like Warren Beck, Norris is excellent in discussing Maria's place of work. *Dublin by Lamplight*, the name of that laundry-brothel-nunnery-prison, is a declaration of Joyce's intention: nothing in the story can be taken at face value. This is, I think, the essence of Norris's admirable insight. We feel and then see and then revise. Dublin is presented to us in microcosm, and it is presented not as we would ordinarily see it, in the light of day, but at night, by lamplight. We may see and mistake shadow for substance, one thing for another: "How easy is a bush supposed a bear."

The narrator's voice in "Clay" is so informal that the clues to intention and meaning may pass unnoticed. But with a little ingenuity we see the title, "Clay," as a reference to Maria: like clay, she is malleable, tractable, adaptable. The story, too, is like clay: it, too, can be shaped, as Norris says, by "the gullible narratee, the skeptical critic, the self-reflexive metareader" (208). If we simply accept the title as a guide to character and intention, we have little trouble in seeing two other guides in the first paragraph. First, the copper boilers: "The cook said you could see yourself in the copper boilers." Maria is like the copper boilers: we can see ourselves in Maria's handiwork. Or the story itself is like a copper boiler, a bronze mirror. Second, the four barmbracks. They, too, are like Maria or the story: they, too, seem to be all of a piece, yet they have been cut so precisely by Maria that the slices, although there, are unperceived until distributed: "Every woman got her four slices." And if it is true, as Beck suggests, that the ring would be in one of the barmbracks, shouldn't we suppose that the four barmbracks and the four slices relate to the four choices Maria is given by the children? Every woman will get her four slices: ring, water, prayer book, clay.

In any event, the four barmbracks and the four slices prompt us to see four separable Marias. They universalize and ironize Maria. Maria is an old maid. Physically and emotionally she is like a child. Norris objects to those critics who see Maria as Witch. But then Joyce insists on that identification: it is Halloween; we are soon told that Maria has a very long nose and a very long chin; three times thereafter she laughs and "the tip of her nose nearly met the tip of her chin." Her name is Maria: Mary, the Virgin. Norris objects to this reading too. But a legitimate response could be that Maria is not just Mary: she is old maid–child–Witch–Mary. She is a composite of these types or roles.

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With a book like *Dubliners* and a writer like Joyce, we expect one chapter of this moral history to resemble others: one chapter or story enables us to understand another. For example, the song Maria sings at the end of "Clay" is from *The Bohemian Girl*, the opera Frank had taken Eveline to in "Eveline." A story of Dublin adolescence becomes a story of Dublin maturity: Maria is an older Eveline. "Eveline" may even be seen as a chapter from Maria's past. At the end of her story, Eveline will go back to care for two children; Maria cared for Joe and Alphy. At the end of her story, Eveline rejects water (the voyage to Buenos Aires) and the ring (marriage to Frank) for the prayer book (celibacy) and clay (death).

Moreover, we expect a close resemblance among stories that seem to be in a series: Hugh Kenner groups "A Little Cloud," "Counterparts," "Clay," and "A Painful Case" together. The resemblance of Chandler in "A Little Cloud" and Farrington in "Counterparts" is apparent: after each clerk leaves work, he spends a night on the town and returns home. Maria follows a comparable pattern of action. Like Chandler, the little boy in "Counterparts" is named Tom or Tommy. "Clay" also resembles "Counterparts" in that, like Farrington, Joe is proud of having made a smart remark to the manager of his office. I think it instructive that, whereas Farrington has no Christian name, Maria is called Maria forty-two times in "Clay." But the main point is that the end of "Counterparts" reinforces the identification of Mary with Maria in the next story, "Clay": "I'll say a *Hail Mary* for you. . . . I'll say a *Hail Mary* for you, pa, if you don't beat me. . . . I'll say a *Hail Mary*. . . ."

The emphasis on Chandler as a little child (he is called Little Chandler thirty-eight times) reinforces the emphasis on Maria as a little child. And in the penultimate episode of each story that child confronts death. Norris objects to her students' contention that clay signifies death. But reading "A Little Cloud" as a guide to "Clay" makes that equation unmistakable. The Bunn song Maria sings may be said to replace the Byron poem begun by Little Chandler and then aborted:

> Within this narrow cell reclines her clay,
> That clay where once. . . .

William B. Bache
Purdue University

To the Editor:

Margot Norris's exegesis is thought-provoking—more so, I cannot at times help but fear, than "Clay" itself. Norris's premise—that the narrative voice is so close to the perceptual stream of Maria herself as to be blind to any objective view of her habitual self-deception, while containing a more or less sufficiently consistent warp to be "read"—is compelling, a premise nicely deduced from the blindfold game described later in the story and echoed still later in Joe's "blinding" by tears.

Yet—though I must first swallow thrice (O mystic triad!)—I yearn to challenge the story itself. Supplying Maria with a long nose and chin on Halloween may be enough, intellectually, to stir witchery in the reader's semiconsciousness, just as a game of blindman is enough to sound recognitions that vision and the lack thereof must be an issue here. This we learned from Sophocles—the blind see while the sighted who do *not* see end by poking out their symbolic orbs.

Fine symbols, but where are the living organs to feed them blood? How much of interest can actually be discerned in the 3,000-odd words of "Clay"? We are presented with a rather vague depiction of Maria's situation in the laundry, a vague account of her tram odyssey after cakes, a filmy presentation of the party she attends at the home of a man the still-maiden Maria had "nursed" as a child.

Using twice as many words as the story itself, Norris skillfully suggests that very vagueness to be the substance here: it leads us to see how Maria *wishes* to see herself and, by extension, how she wishes *not* to see herself; and finally, this "due degree of heaven-bestowed" vagueness, if you will, forces readers to encounter their role in the story, metafictionally speaking, their own "objective" perceptions of Maria as an undesirable person, compelling them to complete the dotted line and holler "Witch! Old maid!"

I suspect that Norris's estimation of "Clay" as a dramatization of "the powerful workings of desire in human discourse" (206) is powerfully kind to the author of a story whose composition, in my opinion, leaves something to be desired. Compared to other pieces in *Dubliners*—"The Dead," say, or "Counterparts"—"Clay" seems consistently vague in its presentations and encounters, but can one legitimately elevate this vagueness to virtue by calling it a reflection of Maria's character, of the inability to "see," to perceive, to engage, that has left her an old maid? Which is it, Maria's lack of engagement or the too few inches of her height and few too many centimeters of her nose and chin that force readers to identify the poor old woman as unwanted and in so doing to confront their own lack of compassion and empathy?

I fear that "Clay" leaves too many questions unsupplied with substance to allow for a satisfactory encounter with the story itself, which, in my opinion, lacks sufficient engagement. Where do we find the living organisms of, say, "Counterparts" or "The Dead"? Where are the "dirty eyes," the concrete humiliations, the poor dead boys, the children who offer prayers to their fathers to avoid beatings, the specificities and particulars that create a story full enough to be fully engaged? In "Clay" we have vague reference to reformed prostitutes, to faceless, nameless children, to a conflict between Joe and his brother, to a "break-up" in the home where Maria has

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