

once these functions are recognized and fully developed we shall have a coherent and consistent vision of MLT that serves to illustrate once again Chaucer's superb artistry.

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Mr. Bloomfield replies:

Mr. Hughes's main objection to my article (*PMLA* 87, 1972, 384–90) is that it ignores the teller who alone provides the key to the Man of Law's Tale (MLT). Furthermore it assumes that Chaucer is a bad artist inasmuch as I report the widely accepted view that MLT is duller than most of the other tales. On the contrary, those elements "which Bloomfield finds . . . negative may be seen as positive components of a coherent, consistent, superbly constructed work of art."

Inasmuch as I was reporting at the beginning of my article what readers usually think (which Hughes admits) and not my opinions at all, I find the statement that I find these elements negative and Chaucer guilty of "careless art" surprising to say the least. The whole point of my article was to show that although readers tend to find MLT dull, it is not dull but makes an important medieval point in a medieval as well as a universal way. It is therefore astonishing to find after having written such an article to be told that I have made Chaucer guilty of "careless art." It is reassuring to know that Mr. Hughes and his nameless colleague have saved Chaucer from my slur on his honor.

As for Mr. Hughes's own interpretation, I find it too psychological. I believe that Chaucer's *Tales* can stand by themselves. The addition of the teller and his psychology is a further complexity which may increase the richness of perspective in a Canterbury tale but it cannot by itself explain a tale. If a tale cannot be self-sustaining on its primary level, then it suffers from a serious deficiency. In other words, I do not believe that the sole purpose of the *Tales*, as Kittredge argued, is to recall and explain the character of the tellers. Hughes's attempt to save Chaucer's artistry from what he regards as my denigration of it does not seem to me to be satisfactory on general grounds. In general, modern criticism is moving away from purely psychological interpretations, and I think that this movement is a step forward, especially when it allows us to study narrative structure.

In particular, even ignoring the general weakness of purely psychological interpretations, I find Hughes's interpretation unconvincing in its own terms. I find the Man of Law's assumed conversion in the very telling of his tale especially hard to believe. It rests upon an assumption of insincerity in the Christianity of the first part of the tale and the sincerity of the Christian refer-

ences in the second part. The evidence Hughes and his colleague offer for this transformation reveals a basic ignorance of medieval Christianity and a forced reading of texts. As an example of the former I may take the astounding assumption that Chaucer takes a modern liberal Protestant point of view about poverty (i.e., that it is an unmitigated evil) and of the latter the interpretation of l. 389 that "thou [Satan] madest Eva bring us in servage" necessarily denies freedom of the will to humans. Astrology was widely believed in by good Christians in the later Middle Ages and Renaissance and such a belief did not imply complete determinism. No Christian can believe in an all knowing and good God and believe in absolute and unconditional free will. In one sense Satan did make [it possible] for Eve to "brynge us in servage." The presentation of the opportunity to sin is not a denial of human freedom to choose. He who tempts us successfully makes us in some sense to sin.

A final point. When a writer does not wish to get into extraneous issues he may use "or" in the nonexcluding sense of "vel" not "aut"—and/or. I did not wish to get into a discussion of the relations between author and persona in my paper, an important point but nonetheless irrelevant to my particular argument. I therefore wrote "author or persona" (take your choice or both).

MORTON W. BLOOMFIELD
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Robert Burton's Tricks of Memory

To the Editor:

In his study, "Robert Burton's Tricks of Memory" (*PMLA*, 87, May 1972, 391–96), David Renaker is puzzled by Burton's method of using sources. He finds significant changes in the numbers quoted, "fusions of names," "fusions of concepts and events," additions and interpolations ("imaginative embroidery"). These phenomena can be ascribed, in his opinion, to slips of memory or sketchy notes. Yet this is hardly true, since the author has retained all these "deficiencies" in the six editions which appeared while he was alive. Renaker suggests another solution: "We must conclude that he was both aware of his quirks of memory and indifferent to them; unless, perhaps, he actually valued them for the peculiar charm they lent to his work" (p. 391). However, he does not show why we "must" reach this conclusion, and the "perhaps" certainly does not satisfy the curiosity of the reader. I would like, therefore, to offer a different solution.

Renaker is looking at the problem from the standpoint of modern standards of accuracy in using material borrowed from others. This problem is very old,

and the standards have changed radically since the late eighteenth century. Such debate existed even in ancient Greece and in Rome and again during the Middle Ages, but it became particularly acute during the Renaissance, engaging all leading literary figures of the time. In essence, the seventeenth century leaned on the Romans (Cicero, Horace, Seneca) when dealing in theory with *imitatio*, and their practice followed the norms which the Renaissance had derived from that theory. (For a starter, I suggest Hermann Gmelin, "Das Prinzip der Imitatio in den romanischen Literaturen der Renaissance," *Romanische Forschungen*, 46, 1932, 85–360.)

The theory in nuce is as follows: as he wrote, the author (or the poet, for that matter) was to gather his material (*res*) from the best sources ("imitandi non nisi optimi"), make it his own ("digest" it, as it were), and produce something entirely new and better (Petraarch's "aliud et melius"). The image used in this connection was that of the bee (normally quoting from Seneca's Epistle "Ad Lucilium," 84), "Apes debemus imitari"; the tradition of this quotation was discussed by Jürgen von Stackelberg, "Das Bienengleichnis," *Romanische Forschungen*, 68, 1956, 271–93.

In practice this meant that the subject matter was taken over from the sources, while the order (*dispositio*) and the formulation (*elocutio*) were the author's own. In melting these items, the writer was particularly concerned with disguising his dependence on sources. This operation, called *dissimulatio*, was broken down into several steps, such as augmenting, shortening, transposing, and combining, each of which was identified by a technical term. The fusion of several sources was particularly important. The discrepancies between the original and the author's version were precisely his way of taking possession of them. Most of Renaker's difficulties can easily be explained in this perspective. There are no tricks of memory involved here, but rather a very elaborate system with intricate technical procedures. The details of that system, however, cannot be discussed here.

Furthermore, this short sketch may also help to explain those quotations used by Renaker and many other passages in the "Democritus Junior to the Reader" which Renaker calls "obscure." In them Burton discusses *imitatio* (including the bee image!) in the terms I have just outlined: "We say nothing but what hath been said; the composition and the method is ours only and shows a Scholar." (I am quoting from the Dell and Jordan-Smith edition, New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1927, p. 20.) Similarly, the quotations used by Renaker at the beginning of his article appear in the Democritus section and can be easily understood in the light of the above discussion, for example: "No news here, that which I have is stolen from others";

"The matter is theirs [i.e., of the authors] most part and yet mine"; Seneca's words, quoted by Burton: "Apparet unde sumptum sit, aliud tamen quam unde sumptum sit apparet," and so forth.

Renaker's study retains its value for bringing this issue to the attention of the scholarly world and for presenting a significant collection of material. Some aspects of the problem of *imitatio* are discussed in my study "Opitz' Sonett an die Bienen" (shortly to appear in *Europäische Tradition und Deutsche Barockliteratur*, ed. Gerhard Hoffmeister, Berne: Francke). A fuller treatment, however, is reserved for a monograph on the bee, presently nearing completion.

FREDERICK M. RENER

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Mr. Renaker replies:

I cannot approach Mr. Rener's comment in the spirit of an adversary. His thesis appears so similar to mine that the detail in which the two differ approaches invisibility: Rener thinks that Burton consciously planned to melt Prema and Pertunda together and form Premunda, basing this procedure on a well-known rhetorical tradition; I think that Burton did so inadvertently and then condoned what he had done after the fact, basing himself on that same rhetorical tradition.

Yet I daresay that the evidence supports my thesis better than it does Rener's. Often, Burton does not transform a given source or set of sources only once, but several times, and gives several versions in what may be termed various stages of digestion. He quotes Tycho's estimate of the size of the universe accurately, and then on the next page he quotes it inaccurately. According to Rener's theory, the second version is, by the *imitatio* principle, the better one; but then, there is no motive for the inclusion of the first, which should, according to this same principle, be a discarded sketch. Or consider the three versions of the story of Cleombrotus, each more exaggerated than the last. If Burton had been the calculating wielder of the *imitatio* principle that Rener paints him, the two earlier ones should similarly have been discarded sketches. The obvious explanation of this phenomenon is an accidental misquotation or rather, series of misquotations, deliberately left in the final version of the book in conformity with the *imitatio* principle. In tribute to Rener's German scholarship I shall call this the "sanctioned inadvertency theory" (*Bestätigtenachlässigkeittheorie*). I would like, by the way, to hear Petraarch's comment on the idea that a story with a number in it is made "better" (*melius*) simply by changing the number.

In calling attention to the *imitatio* principle, Rener performs a service which I thought I had already per-