

Abstracts

- 236 **Julianne Werlin, Francis Bacon and the Art of Misinterpretation**
Recent research has shown how Francis Bacon drew on Renaissance practices of reading and writing to propose a new method for understanding nature. Yet Bacon was well aware that such techniques were vulnerable to error, miscommunication, and failure. Instances of misinterpretation in his utopian fantasy *New Atlantis* reveal that his dream of a legible world accounts for the possibility of misreading. Bacon's characters and his audience are invited to interpret the text's symbols, but they are denied the basis for adequate interpretation. The paradoxes that arise from this strange position affirm the utility of Bacon's method and expose some of its limits. (JW)
- 252 **Sarah Van der Laan, Songs of Experience: Confessions, Penitence, and the Value of Error in Tasso and Spenser**
As the Reformation and Counter-Reformation swept Europe in the sixteenth century, penance (or its rejection) became a cornerstone of individual and confessional identities. Extending a post-Tridentine view of sacramental penance as consolation, Torquato Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata* suggests that penance offers a means to recover and even to benefit from the experience of error—and to incorporate romance error into epic action and ethics. Through extensive intertextual dialogue, Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* engages this view to explore the fears produced in some lay people by the English Reformers' rejection of penance. Book 2 interrogates the possibilities for epic heroism in a fictional environment lacking any visible means to recover from error and therefore profoundly skeptical of experience and the errors to which it might lead. Spenser's virtuoso act of cultural translation reforms Tasso's penance-based ethics, exposes the shortcomings of one approach to reformation, and affirms the educational value of human error. (SV)
- 269 **Saikat Majumdar, The Provincial Polymath: The Curious Cosmopolitanism of Nirad C. Chaudhuri**
Is a humanist intellectual with a popular audience more likely to be a credentialed expert or an autodidact at odds with the established norms of scholarship? Is such an intellectual, to use Marjorie Garber's terms, a professional or an amateur? This essay considers these questions in the light of the institutionalization of a humanist curriculum in late colonial Britain and its overseas empire in order to examine the controversial figure of Nirad C. Chaudhuri, a Bengali intellectual whose popular and provocative appeal derives from his position as an amateur and an autodidact. Such an intellectual identity is at odds with colonial education's ideological enterprise: to create a certain kind of professional subject. Though Chaudhuri is popularly perceived to be an Anglophile, his amateur identity not only provides the secret of his appeal but also departs from the institutionalization of humanist education that characterized the British Empire. (SM)

- 284 **Christopher Findeisen**, *Injuries of Class: Mass Education and the American Campus Novel*
 Although many believe that “mass higher education” increased opportunity and egalitarianism in postwar American society, the reality has been quite different. While a greater proportion of students are enrolled in higher-educational institutions now than at any other point in history, economic inequality is at an all-time high. Postwar American campus novels largely misunderstand this historical development. While the genre represents the university as an institution that combats social inequality by expanding enrollment, these novels simultaneously obscure the social inequality that the university cannot combat and instead helps to legitimate. The symbolic work of American campus novels has thus been to imagine a system that stages social conflicts between the deserving and the elite when in fact the postwar meritocracy has made the two categories functionally indistinguishable. (CF)
- 299 **Christine Hoffmann**, *Folly 2012! The Campaign for Foolishness in Twenty-First-Century Politics*
 By examining twenty-first-century negative political advertisements alongside Shakespearean fools and Erasmian folly, we can read attack ads not as barren clichés but as parables about the slippages—between subject and object, villain and hero, insider and outsider—that make possible more-generous appraisals of folly and that offer glimpses of a humanist program based on folly’s benevolence. When we read such ads as Erasmian gestures—more than that, when we recognize our entanglements in the foolish maneuverings of our political leaders—we confront the possibility that giving in to the incongruities of folly is more productive than insisting on a knowing, superior sufficiency. To recognize the incapacitating, unconventional properties of folly is to affirm what is alluring, even precious, about rhetorical philosophies that favor not orderly, intelligible communities but profoundly, dramatically—laughably—indistinct ones. (CH)
- 315 **Scott Pound**, *Kenneth Goldsmith and the Poetics of Information*
 Kenneth Goldsmith, a sculptor turned writer who now refers to himself as a “word processor,” makes mundane yet strangely enthralling poetry out of transcribed speech. Rather than stake claims to originality and value, Goldsmith extols “uncreativity” and “being boring” as new benchmarks of literary achievement. So far, critics have abjured these claims in favor of close readings of the texts. This essay aims to take the critical conversation in a new direction by arguing that what deserves critical examination is Goldsmith’s attempt to conceptualize and practice poetry as information management. Information culture provides Goldsmith with a new understanding of language, a new view of the literary, and a new take on authorship, and the methods of text production that result from these resources travesty literary culture as we know it, which is exactly the point. Goldsmith’s indifference to literary culture yields a method for generating texts that is as instructive as it is shocking because it requires us to face the strange prospect of a literature that chooses information culture over literary culture as its ground. (SP)