

Abstracts

- 264 **Rachel Sagner Burma and Laura Heffernan**, *The Classroom in the Canon: T. S. Eliot's Modern English Literature Extension Course for Working People and *The Sacred Wood**
 Literary critics have long imagined that T. S. Eliot's *The Sacred Wood* (1920) shaped the canon and methods of countless twentieth-century classrooms. This essay turns instead to the classroom that made *The Sacred Wood*: the Modern English Literature extension school tutorial that Eliot taught to working-class adults between 1916 and 1919. Contextualizing Eliot's tutorial within the extension school movement shows how the ethos and practices of the Workers' Educational Association shaped his teaching. Over the course of three years, Eliot and his students reimagined canonical literature as writing by working poets for working people—a model of literary history that fully informed his canon reformation in *The Sacred Wood*. This example demonstrates how attention to teaching changes the history of English literary study. It further reveals how all kinds of institutions, not just elite universities, have shaped the discipline's methods and canons. (RSB and LH)
- 282 **Kara Gaston**, *Forms and Celestial Motion in Chaucer's *Complaint of Mars**
 Recent discussions of form have argued that literary forms exist whether or not we pay attention to them. However, formalist criticism often begins with close reading. This essay uses medieval astronomy to consider the relation between form and perception. Chaucer's short poem *The Complaint of Mars* (c. 1385) presents a conjunction between the planets Mars and Venus as if it were a love affair. This celestial arrangement, wherein two planets seem to move toward each other before parting, reflects the way that celestial motion seems to an observer within a brief period of time. The arrangement disappears when integrated into a fuller account of the regular motion of the planets. *Mars* generates a similar excess in its literary language. Impressions of form that emerge in the process of reading dissolve against the background of larger, more stable forms when the poem is seen as a whole. These perceived, illusory forms reveal an interdependency between certain kinds of form and the time of reading. (KG)
- 296 **Ricardo Matthews**, *Song in Reverse: The Medieval Prosimetrum and Lyric Theory*
 Studying the medieval prosimetrum, a genre that mixes narrative with lyric, could have important ramifications for the general study of poetics. By disrupting transhistorical theories of the lyric, which proceed from a presumed continuity between ancient Greece and modernity, the prosimetrum situates the Middle Ages at the center of our understanding of modern lyric poetry. Instead of beginning with a late-eighteenth-century understanding of lyric poetry as a self-expressive voice, which scholars must then localize in a poem's historical conditions, language, and genres, the prosimetrum begins with a

conventional, rhetorical poem in a variety of stated genres and then, by including a narrative frame, stages that poem as a heartfelt song sung by lovesick knights or clerks. In the prosimetrum, the playful game of conventional art, which defines the medieval love lyric in isolation, suddenly becomes a way to imagine fictional subjectivities. (RM)

314 **Karen Hadley, Blake's *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* and the Biopolitical Unconscious**

Alan Bewell identifies a newly globalized, consumerist nature in the Romantic period, one aspect of a larger context in which Michel Foucault observed the "dawn of biopolitics." This historical context, along with Erasmus Darwin's best-selling poem *The Loves of the Plants* (1789), is brought to bear here on William Blake's *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* and on traditional readings of it that manifest nostalgia for an idealized past, a past predating enclosure's separation of population and environment, of human being and nature. Correcting the prevalent misidentification of the marigold that Oothoon plucks in *Visions*, my reading newly envisions an Oothoon whose relation to the life-forms around her replicates the modes of domination and exploitation inherent in capitalist ideology. What have seemed to be anomalies in Oothoon, her curious connections to Bromion and her offer to procure girls for Theotormon, instead reflect central character traits. In the end, a reaccounting of the historicity of Blake's poetic text yields a heroine and a reading population struggling to view themselves as at the center of a reflexive system that governs and exploits the mutual relations of natural and social surroundings but that also is governed and exploited by the same biopolitical apparatus. (KH)

329 **Michael Tondre, The Impassive Novel: "Brain-Building" in Walter Pater's *Marius the Epicurean***

Walter Pater's writings advance an affective historicism: an embodied experience of the past that Pater conceived in dialogue with Victorian neuroscience. Pater theorized art's freedom from the present by drawing on insights into reaction time, the subject of influential scientific studies in nineteenth-century culture. His slow-moving prose lifts readers out of the now, while simultaneously binding them to material realities. These tendencies fueled charges of sexual deviance against *The Renaissance* (1873) insofar as medical and religious writers understood belated reactions as a symptom of effeminate ennui. But in *Marius the Epicurean* (1885), Pater reinscribes religious sentiments in terms of postponement. Its hero's sensory education, set in late classical culture, aligns the feeling of postponement with nascent doctrines of resurrection and temporal returns. After elaborating this account, the essay revises Georg Lukács's observations on weak secular heroes, extending queer scholarship to show how, through the feltness of the past, Pater's hero learns to resist incorporation into modern social forms. (MT)

347 **Julia Elsky, Rethinking Ionesco's Absurd: *The Bald Soprano* in the Interlingual Context of Vichy and Postwar France**

Rereading Eugène Ionesco's postwar play *La cantatrice chauve* (*The Bald Soprano*) in the light of the original, wartime Romanian version alongside archival materials concerning his political activity in Vichy France allows us to reconsider his role in the theater of the absurd. Instead of staging the emptiness of language in a conformist world, the Romanian play dramatizes how language and language exchange created meaning but also upheld state violence during the Second World War. Although the French version of the play adapts this theme to the postwar context, traces of state power over language remain. This new approach to a central text of the theater of the absurd invites us to reexamine the politics of language and language learning in wartime and postwar France. (JE)