

PMLA

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of America*

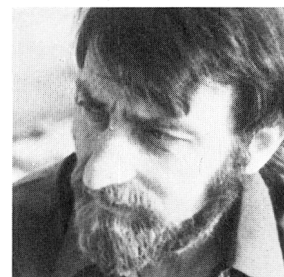
March 1980

Four new collections
in the program
William Peden has called
“one of the most significant
undertakings in contemporary
university publishing.”

ILLINOIS SHORT FICTION 1979

Jonathan Baumbach **THE RETURN OF SERVICE**

This is the first short story collection of Baumbach, one of the founders of the Fiction Collective and co-director of the MFA program in creative writing at Brooklyn College. His novels include *A Man to Conjure With* and *Reruns*, and he has had stories included in both of the annual anthologies of best American stories. “. . . an exceptional writer, one of the best I know—inventive, controlled, witty, sensitive . . . I can think of few authors who could deliver an entire set of stories of such class as these.” —Robert Coover.



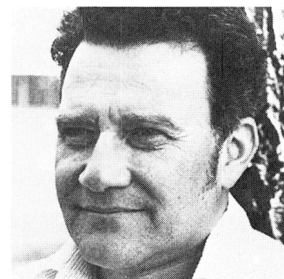
Gladys Swan **ON THE EDGE OF THE DESERT**

“Each of these fine short stories reveals ghosts from the past. Misfits, loners and wanderers in the desolate Southwest—people living at the edges of society—recall the searches and escapes that have brought them to the present.” —*Publishers Weekly*. Swan’s stories have appeared in *Virginia Quarterly Review*, *Colorado Quarterly*, *Maine Review*, *Great Lakes Review*, and *Cumberlands*. This collection was a semifinalist in the award series in short fiction of the Associated Writing Programs. Swan teaches at Franklin College in Indiana.



Barry Targan **SURVIVING ADVERSE SEASONS**

Targan’s first published collection won the Iowa Award for short fiction in 1975. The title story of this second collection appeared in *Best American Short Stories, 1976*. His work has also appeared in *Sewanee Review*, *Esquire*, and other journals. He teaches creative writing at the State University of New York at Binghamton. “Barry Targan is, quite simply, one of the best short story writers we have. And here he is writing at the top of his form.” —Robert Boyers, editor of *Salmagundi*.



Jean Thompson **THE GASOLINE WARS**

“Four talented enough stories, surrounded by six absolutely wonderful ones that are aglint with a naturalness, a humor, and an off-centered instinct for what really matters to people. . . . A sterling debut.” —*Kirkus Reviews*. “With apparent facility, Thompson captures a wonderful range of characters and lifestyles. This is her first collection of stories; one hopes there are many more to come.” —*Publishers Weekly*. Thompson teaches creative writing at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.



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Rich Text/Poor Text: A Kafkan Confusion. RUTH V. GROSS 168

Abstract. Franz Kafka's "Eine alltägliche Verwirrung" 'An Everyday Confusion' is a skeletal, or "poor," text in that one code of reading—the referential—dominates it, while other codes present in a classic, or "rich," text are almost absent. Using a method freely adapted from Roland Barthes's *S/Z*, my article closely examines the referentiality of Kafka's text, juxtaposing the proverbial (or common-language) response evoked by the text with the personal reactions of a single reader. Kafka's theme, the inability of common, proverbial language to make real communication possible, is allegorized in the brief tale of A and B, whose comings and goings are mirrored, and at times interfered with, by the language in which these events occur. (RVG)

Samuel Beckett, Fritz Mauthner, and the Limits of Language.
LINDA BEN-ZVI 183

Abstract. Samuel Beckett, early in his career and on James Joyce's advice, read *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache* 'Contributions toward a Critique of Language,' the three-volume, 2,200-page work written between 1903 and 1923 by the Austrian philosopher of language Fritz Mauthner. Significantly influenced by the work, Beckett gave literary shape to several of Mauthner's ideas: the correlation between thinking and speaking; the denial of any certainties outside language, even certainty about the existence of self; and the impossibility of overcoming the limits of language. Both authors place language at the center of their works, subsume all knowledge under it, and then systematically deny its basic efficacy, thus using language to indict itself. (LB-Z)

The Empirical and the Ideal in Mark Twain. JEFFREY L.
DUNCAN 201

Abstract. As a literary realist Twain was a practicing empiricist; as a humorist he was a practicing philosophical idealist. Often the two intellectual postures existed side by side within the same work—in *A Tramp Abroad*, for instance—but they did not enjoy a peaceful coexistence. As a consequence his career took on a pattern of great significance. In *Huckleberry Finn* he carried commonsense empiricism as far as it could go. In *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, a genuinely pivotal work, he discovered, and contended with, not only empiricism's radical limits but its inherent contradictions as well. Hence he evolved his peculiar (and perverse) form of idealism, of which *The Mysterious Stranger* is the (unfinished) consummation. (JLD)

The Art of Impersonation: A General Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales*. H. MARSHALL LEICESTER, JR. 213

Abstract. "Unimpersonated artistry," the idea that narrators in the *Canterbury Tales* are intermittently replaced by the voice of the poet, is a notion common

in Chaucer criticism. The idea arises from a confusion of voice with presence, and this confusion leads critics to posit preexisting characters and a preexisting poet whose combined traits constrain the meaning of the text. On the contrary, the poem is conspicuously textual, and the voices of the text create the characters and the narrator. Only by treating the pilgrims as the products, rather than the producers, of their tales can we construct their personalities. Similarly, we must construct the poet from his poem. The general narrator is not a naïve “Chaucer the pilgrim” but a complex and sophisticated impersonator who withholds himself and directs us to the roles he plays in order to create himself as fully and complexly as possible in his poem. (HML, Jr)

Boswell’s Johnson, the Hero Made by a Committee. HUGO M. REICHARD 225

Abstract. The life of Boswell’s Johnson, with its manifold successes, is largely decided by others—the interested volunteers who, governing singly or collectively, control most of his conversation, writing, charities, frolics, trips, meals, and encounters. Johnson is a character whom experience befalls and who (between interruptions) is lost in “languor and dejection.” He is aware that “external authority” is his prime mover. His operating unit is himself plus one (or more). This dependence on his associates bears on the pessimism of the protagonist Johnson and perhaps has implications as well for the author Johnson and for his own volumes. Boswell is most original, potent, and subtle in rendering the part that other characters perform in the making of his hero, showing their role to be an ultimately integrating and exalting force both in individual scenes and in Johnson’s career as a whole. (HMR)

Storytelling and the Figure of the Father in *Little Dorrit*. DIANNE F. SADOFF 234

Abstract. *Little Dorrit* is both a narrative about authority and an examination of the authority of narrative. The novel links vocation with sonhood and storytelling with fatherhood and self-generation. *Little Dorrit*, however, tells a double story, of a daughter as well as of a son. If the son’s story relates the search to replace the father and to discover paternal authority, the daughter’s story details the horrors and consolations of incestuous desire and generational collapse. Storytelling that seeks the father as origin reveals paternal deception and inauthenticity; incestuous structures of desire attempt to collapse genealogy on the hero and heroine, making paternal origin unknowable and creating an overdetermined narrative ending. Dickens’ double story, then, identifies yet questions genealogy and the patriarchal family as metaphors for narrative structure. (DFS)

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