

with Fabrice's withdrawal at the end of the novel as a symbolic castration—the Abelard and Héloïse bit. A few incidents such as this Saint Jerome episode are offered as evidence of Stephens' thesis, but only halfheartedly, for we learn that Fabrice's "turn toward serious religious belief and later retirement is only occasionally hinted at, and then, ambiguously" (p. 277). A footnote to this evasive comment refers us lamely to an opinion of Margaret R. B. Shaw, who wrote the introduction to the Penguin translation of *La Chartreuse*. Significantly, there is no reference anywhere in the critical apparatus to Bardèche, Brombert, Hemmings, Levin, Prévost et al., or to any Stendhal critic at all.

There is no *fin amors*, no courtly love, no *virgin* becoming the *Virgin* for Fabrice del Dongo. Fabrice does experience a passionate and "sublime" love, does discover his identity through that love, does find immense relief in knowing that the *luoghi ameni*, the earthly paradises, exist for him, too. Certainly there is a good measure of Romantic angelism in Stendhal's depiction of love; certainly the spirit of *La Chartreuse* is ethical, but that spirit is resolutely secular.

STIRLING HAIG

*University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill*

### Measuring Language Patterns

To the Editor:

Though I am sympathetic with the views on perception of Boomsliter, Creel, and Hastings ("Perception and English Poetic Meter," *PMLA*, 88, 1973, 200–08), I am troubled by a number of points in their provocative article. First: I am skeptical about the validity of their experiment in unled choral reading upon which everything else depends. They believe that in such reading "each speaker must use the pattern that he *expects* the others to impose. Dramatic variations in timing are inhibited; faithfulness to basic timing patterns is increased" (p. 201). But how can anyone know that this is the motive for the results obtained? May we not with equal plausibility assume that the tendency toward equal timing is a result of group behavior—that each member of the group, trying to "keep together" with the others, instinctively hits on regular timing as the only way in which this can be achieved? Even if only one or a few of the group does this, would not he (or they) tend to lead the less confident of the group, either emphatically or subliminally? Once the tendency toward equal timing has begun, it would of course continue. Indeed, would not the authors' speaking "the first two or three words to get everyone together" (p. 201) have the same effect?

Even assuming the validity of the experiment, I do not think the right inferences have been drawn from it. What we have are "objective measurements" which are supposed to reveal subjective processes. But are such processes unequivocally thus indicated? I doubt it.

The accent blocks tend toward equivalence, but they are clearly more unequal than equal. I do not see that we can infer much from this. In order to make inferences about what the readers are "doing" to the verbal material, we would first have to know precisely the degree of objective *disorder* in that material. But we do not know this; we only know the ways in which various readers might construe it. There is, therefore, no objective standard against which to measure the performance of the choral readers. Furthermore, the fact that the accent blocks are mostly not equal is quite as significant as the fact that some are, or that there is an approach to equivalence.

I think that the authors have fallen into the trap of using objective, "scientific" timing for a psychological phenomenon—for an esthetic process that occurs in virtual, not real, time, and for which real time is irrelevant. We have, alas (or, perhaps, hooray!) no objective means for getting at truly subjective processes. There is only introspection.

I should say, finally, that the authors do not seem to make a clear enough distinction between meter and rhythm—a distinction that is, to my mind, crucial for understanding the process of "double audition" and the way in which rhythm arises. This is perhaps why they draw the wrong inference from a few of my own remarks (p. 205). My references to Platonic Ideas and to meter as an "ideal norm" do not imply that a sing-song child's reading is better than that of a skilled reader. "Ideas" and "ideal" are used descriptively, not evaluatively. Any reading that comes close to mechanical equivalence will virtually destroy a poem's rhythm. It is precisely the *departures* from the norm which make for significant rhythm. These departures cannot be precisely measured. Getting them right depends upon one's rhythmic sense, a faculty that human beings (and bears) seem to possess. It is a special sort of sensibility that enables poets to make rhythm out of metered language and enables readers to respond to it.

ELIAS SCHWARTZ

*State University of New York, Binghamton*

*Messrs. Boomsliter, Creel, and Hastings reply:*

We wish to thank Schwartz for clarifying his use of the term "ideal norm." His explanation places us firmly on the same ground.

The questions he raises in his letter reflect a view