tion that recognizing the text's specificity prohibits critical concern with social reality as experienced by those of us who exist outside the text. I live in, as well as read about, society and its facts, and Balzac's representation of the two as mutually constitutive is relevant to societies that his text does not delineate as well as to those that are in Furst's words "created within the parameters of the text and contained in its codes." My argument was that those codes themselves can be productively approached through J. L. Austin's concept of speech acts, and Austin's concern for how words do things was in no sense confined to the things they do in literary texts.

To contend with Austin that truth is a social fabrication does not replace one reified referent with another but focuses attention on the collective dynamics by which ideology produces the referent it pretends to represent. To read Balzac as agreeing with Austin does not assume that the Balzacian text reproduces a frozen past but focuses attention on how that text exposes an ideological presence. Although I agree with Furst that this presence "must be seen as intrinsic to the text," I see no reason why criticism should not interrogate its extrinsic importance as well.

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Hisperic Style

To the Editor:

Roughly half of James Earl's "Hisperic Style in the Old English Rhyming Poem" (102 [1987]: 187–96) is devoted to the connections between the Old English poem and early medieval Latin and Old Norse verse techniques—especially in regard to the use of rhyme—and half to philological conundrums in the text of the Old English poem itself. In both parts of the paper a great deal of the detritus of past scholarship on the poem and on the dark style of early medieval writing generally continues to revolve with a hollow sound, like the gritty remains of old cement in the turning drum of a cement mixer. Some novelties of interpretation stand out (e.g., that of *wilbec*), and Earl is certainly to be congratulated for presenting these faraway Anglo-Saxon things to an academic audience that would not regularly hear about them in *PMLA*, but it seems to me that some dissonances in the secondary literature on the poem and its analogues could have been eliminated from the article or else brought into harmony with the more basic tendencies of present research on the Latin and Germanic literatures of the early Middle Ages.

If Earl chooses to "imagine" that the "Rhyming Poem" author knew something about Old Norse literature and language, he will have to provide other evidence for this hunch than Egill Skallagrímsson's "Höfuðlausn," which is quite exceptional in Skaldic verse for its virtuoso *runhent*, or end rhyming. It is precisely the exceptional artistic quality of this poem that has led scholars since the nineteenth century to cite it over and over again in discussions of the origins and spread of rhyme in Germanic poetry. Earl rightly rejects the rhyming model this poem offered the Anglo-Saxon poet, but what evidence is there in the "Rhyming Poem" that its author could have read "Höfuðlausn" anyway? Such Old Norse cognates as *skreið, skrýða*, and *skrúð* to the mysterious Old English vocable *scrad*? I think it would be wiser to assume that the Anglo-Saxon rhymer knew neither the Old Norse language nor its literature and to have done with this line of argument once and for all. I might mention in passing that Skaldic verse poses its solvable riddles on the basis of a commonly shared "kenning system," for which there is no obvious counterpart underlying the diction of the "Rhyming Poem," which seems removed even from Old English poetic language.

Much more promising for research is Earl's statement that "[t]he 'Rhyming Poem' seems to be a singular case of hisperic or hermeneutic verse experiment carried out in Old English, and it should be read in the context of its Latin cousins in this style" (189). The poem, then, is an anomaly to be explained from early medieval Latin versification practices. So far so good, but for some reason Earl has tried to collect similar Latin instances of rhyme and alliteration in the poem under the heading of hisperic rather than hermeneutic style, though the heroic work of Michael Lapidge on ninth- and tenth-century Latin art poetry would suggest that the techniques that Earl is interested in belong almost exclusively to the hermeneutic style. His excuses for preferring hisperic to hermeneutic are sure to cause confusion, if accepted: "First, the [hisperic] style probably did originate in Ireland. . . . Second, the term *hermeneutic* stresses Grecisms as the essential feature of the style. . . . So I will use *hisperic* here, to refer to playfully erudite poetic obscurantism . . . " (189).

As this professed hispericist must know, these two points are involved in rather warm debate these days. In any case, Greek and pseudo-Greek words were not the only formatives of either hisperic or hermeneutic vocabulary, and on the Continent the seventh-century grammarian of both styles, Vergil of Toulouse, is still holding out (at least since last I looked into the matter) against the determined efforts of Michael Herren to domicile him in Ireland. If we address ourselves, however, to the historical *Hisperica famina* from which Earl has generalized his term, we must see at once that neither rhyme nor even alliteration was a systematic stylistic feature of those poems. So I am afraid that the hispericist will have to become a hermeneuticist if he wishes to carry with him the scholars in these fields; but if he doesn't like that ugly term he can simply remain an ordinary decipherer of the dark style in the post-Carolingian dark ages, when a "playfully erudite poetic obscurantism," wherever its

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country of origin, was to be encountered all over European Latin literature, whether in poetry or in prose.

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Reply:

I suppose my work and Frederic Amory's, too, will soon be dismissed as "detritus" by a new and more robust generation of scholars—though I hope not. It is enough to disagree with our elders without carting them off to the town dump.

I do not provide Egil's poem as evidence that the Old English poet was familiar with Old Norse verse. I make it quite clear that the two poems are unrelated and that Old Norse is irrelevant to the discussion. But the "Rhyming Poem" is probably a tenth-century production, and the poet's acquaintance with Old Norse poetics would hardly be surprising. After all, Egil's poem was composed and presented at York in 948.

As for the hisperic/hermeneutic *débat*, the two terms are interchangeable and do not signify two different poetic traditions. I choose *hisperic* and define it for the occasion. Though the style in question does have more than just Greek roots, *hermeneutic* refers specifically to the Greek vocabulary, the *Hermeneumata*. That is one of several reasons I disown the term. In any case, an essay that begins "MICHAEL LAPIDGE" can hardly be thought to abuse that scholar's heroism, even if it disagrees with his terminology.

But if for Amory the term *hisperic* revolves with a hollow sound like the gritty remains of old cement, and so on, I am content to let him think me an ordinary decipherer with some novelties of interpretation; and I am happy to have afforded him the occasion for that memorable simile.

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Reading Joyce

To the Editor:

The test of an explication of a famous literary work is how decisively it affects our understanding of that work. In "Narration under a Blindfold: Reading Joyce's 'Clay'" (102 [1987]: 206–15), Norris's reading, which is useful but not decisive, cries for correction. In reading *Dubliners*, we had best look to Joyce for guidance. Joyce was a person on whom nothing was lost, and the moral history of *Dubliners* raises consciousness and creates conscience by demanding our full attention. We must see how irony is played off against sentiment. It may be true, as Norris asserts, that some critics have a "need to create significance out of pointlessness" (206), but such a need is mandatory for readers of *Dubliners*. That which seems insignificant or odd is an appeal to our attention and understanding. The "religious" examples of what I mean are easy and everywhere: the boy in "Araby" bears his "chalice safely through a throng of foes"; Lenehan in "Two Gallants" is called Corley's disciple; a publican in "Counterparts" is twice called a curate; Emily Sinico in "A Painful Case" is referred to as Mr. Duffy's confessor.

Like Warren Beck, Norris is excellent in discussing Maria's place of work. *Dublin by Lamplight*, the name of that laundry-brothel-nunnery-prison, is a declaration of Joyce's intention: nothing in the story can be taken at face value. This is, I think, the essence of Norris's admirable insight. We feel and then see and then revise. Dublin is presented to us in microcosm, and it is presented not as we would ordinarily see it, in the light of day, but at night, by lamplight. We may see and mistake shadow for substance, one thing for another: "How easy is a bush supposed a bear."

The narrator's voice in "Clay" is so informal that the clues to intention and meaning may pass unnoticed. But with a little ingenuity we see the title, "Clay," as a reference to Maria: like clay, she is malleable, tractable, adaptable. The story, too, is like clay: it, too, can be shaped, as Norris says, by "the gullible narratee, the skeptical critic, the self-reflexive metareader" (208). If we simply accept the title as a guide to character and intention, we have little trouble in seeing two other guides in the first paragraph. First, the copper boilers: "The cook said you could see yourself in the copper boilers." Maria is like the copper boilers: we can see ourselves in Maria's handiwork. Or the story itself is like a copper boiler, a bronze mirror. Second, the four barmbracks. They, too, are like Maria or the story: they, too, seem to be all of a piece, yet they have been cut so precisely by Maria that the slices, although there, are unperceived until distributed: "Every woman got her four slices." And if it is true, as Beck suggests, that the ring would be in one of the barmbracks, shouldn't we suppose that the four barmbracks and the four slices relate to the four choices Maria is given by the children? Every woman will get her four slices: ring, water, prayer book, clay.

In any event, the four barmbracks and the four slices prompt us to see four separable Marias. They universalize and ironize Maria. Maria is an old maid. Physically and emotionally she is like a child. Norris objects to those critics who see Maria as Witch. But then Joyce insists on that identification: it is Halloween; we are soon told that Maria has a very long nose and a very long chin; three times thereafter she laughs and "the tip of her nose nearly met the tip of her chin." Her name is Maria: Mary, the Virgin. Norris objects to this reading too. But a legitimate response could be that Maria is not just Mary: she is old maid–child–Witch–Mary. She is a composite of these types or roles.

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