

Abstracts

414 **Terrell Scott Herring**, Frank O'Hara's Open Closet

This essay explores the relays of publicity and privacy structuring Frank O'Hara's "Personism: A Manifesto" and his personal poetry. Though these works have recently been celebrated for their candid expression of homosexual desire during a cultural moment set on silencing queer voices, I argue the inverse. Focusing on O'Hara's ambivalent relation to a calcified poetics of impersonality promoted by New Critics and confessional poets, I suggest that O'Hara does not simply reject the New Critical creed of public poetry. He instead reformats New Critical tenets to create a fantastic space of closeted openness that successfully depersonalizes himself and his audience. Apparent in poems such as "Poem" ("Lana Turner has collapsed!") and "Personal Poem," this project enables the poet to fashion an intimately imagined queer community that facilitates impersonal identifications. Through personism, that is, O'Hara fabricates an alternative public sphere in which public individuals paradoxically become visibly invisible. (TSH)

433 **Denise Gigante**, The Monster in the Rainbow: Keats and the Science of Life

The aesthetic definition of monstrosity underwent a change in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, from a concept of deformity to a notion of monstrosity as too much life. Scientific discourse between 1780 and 1830 was preoccupied with the idea of a living principle that could distinguish living matter from nonliving, and the physiologist John Hunter posited an even more speculative "principle of monstrosity" as an extension of the formative capacity. Such monstrosity did not remain on the level of theory but became the motivating force for a new kind of monster in the literature of the Romantic period. Keats's *Lamia* emerges here as the consummate Romantic monster—a vision of life conceived beyond the material fact of organization. Viewed in this light, *Lamia*, no mere narrative swerve from Keats's epic ambitions, is a brilliant if tragic response to the question of what it means to "[d]ie into life." (DG)

449 **Barri J. Gold**, The Consolation of Physics: Tennyson's Thermodynamic Solution

Tennyson's *In Memoriam* suggests that poetic knowledge may precede and shape scientific knowledge. Struggling with the implications and possibilities of Victorian energy physics even as that science came into being, Tennyson anticipates not only the laws of thermodynamics but also many of the ways these ideas suffuse Victorian thought, from widespread anxieties regarding the death of the sun through religious invocations of the conservation of energy. *In Memoriam* at once evokes the roots of physical theory in Romantic elegy and suggests the elegiac structure and function of Victorian physical discourse; like *In Memoriam*, the laws of thermodynamics effect a reconciliation between the dissipation we observe and

the conservation we crave. Moreover, as Tennyson reconceives waste as transformation in the natural world, *In Memoriam* also reveals a surprising relation between energy physics and another emergent science, evolutionary biology. (BJG)

465 **Christine Ferguson**, *Decadence as Scientific Fulfillment*

This essay challenges two established critical assumptions about late Victorian literary decadence: first, that decadence represented a sterile and ultimately failed attempt to defy social and cultural norms and, second, that the movement was antithetical to the scientific culture of the nineteenth century. Decadence is instead shown to be the logical consequence of a scientific spirit that, by the end of the century, increasingly ignored the demands of utilitarianism and fixated on the pursuit of experimental knowledge for its own sake, regardless of the consequences. Thus, the “failures” of the subject that so frequently mark the end of accounts of decadence such as Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Collins’s *Heart and Science*, and Machen’s *The Great God Pan* represent the triumph of a historically specific experimental ethos that valued the transcendence of conventional epistemology over the discovery of useful knowledge. (CF)