

SCE REPORTS 9

SUMMER, 1981

CONTENTS

Editor's Notes 2

Critical Responses

"Playing Around"
WALLACE MARTIN 3

"Making Sense of Poststructuralism"
JEFFREY PLANK 11

"Toward a General Theory of Narrative"
DON H. BIALOSTOSKY 24

Letter, DICK HIGGINS 44

News and Notices 45

is published by The Society
Exchange, a not-for-profit
organized to encourage co-
research in criticism and theory.
in *SCE Reports* is copy-
Society, with rights re-assign-
upon publication. For informa-

by Searle, Secretary
Society for Critical Exchange
19th Avenue N.E.
Seattle, Washington 98115

Editor's Notes

Included in this (belated) issue of SCE Reports 9 are essays and notes that reflect a decision to use SCE Reports, as its title suggests, more directly to report on critical exchange as well as to extend it.

Wallace Martin's incisive essay, "Playing Around," was occasioned by SCE Reports 8 "Deconstructive Criticism: Directions," and the MLA session of last December devoted to that subject. Dick Higgins' letter was provoked by the essays alone. A few copies of SCE Reports 8 are still available (cost: \$4.00 each).

Two other essays in this issue, by Jeffrey Plank and Don Bialostosky respectively examine recent exchanges at associated SCE meetings at the SAMLA conference, and the jointly sponsored conference on "Theories of Narrative," held last October at Indiana University. We owe special thanks to the College of Arts and Science, the English Department, and especially David Bleich at Indiana for extraordinary labor and hospitality; and to James and Patricia Sosnoski for their efforts on behalf of SCE. A second conference on "Theories of Reading" is being held at Indiana on September 28-30.

The next issue of SCE Reports will address the topic, "The Return of the Text," with special emphasis on the politics and economics of criticism.

Press deadline for that issue is October 30, 1981. If you wish to have notices, reports, or other information circulated to SCE members, please mail it to:

SCE REPORTS
6273 19th Ave. N.E.
Seattle, WA. 98115

Wallace Martin
English Department
University of Toledo

PLAYING AROUND

Just when it appears that we may be getting somewhere--as in SCE Reports 8, which displays the differences between Johnsonian deconstruction and its Heideggerian, Lacanian, and Derridean (Riddelian) others--just when we settle down at an MLA session to discuss where we might go from here, we are surprised by otherness: someone stands up and says, "What is this thing called deconstruction?" Barbara Johnson must cultivate her ignorance; west of New Haven, it grows wild. The farcical underside of our seriousness is that critics may be condemned to repeat, year after year, synoptic accounts of deconstruction, only to be asked immediately thereafter--what is it?

Johnson's paper is addressed to an audience that might ask this question; perhaps she would have written differently if addressing only Riddels. Having thought in the past that I understood and appreciated her subtleties, I was surprised to discover that the seemingly simple conclusion of her SCE paper left me feeling a west-of-New-Haven, uncultivated incomprehension. Never has she been more provocative. Not being able to figure out why, I suspect that she may be playing with our affections, perhaps to tease us out of thought. Her conclusions provoked the commentators on her paper into thought, and while agreeing with most of what they say, I obtusely want to justify my inability to understand her by interpreting her figures in two or three ways and showing how difficult it is to reduce them to meaning.

When she "lay[s] bare" the "gap" in her "knowledge" and solicits the intrusion of a "vital, subversive power" capable of changing her "very nature" (p. 15), Johnson keeps her head about her, despite her declared desire to

forget, to open her ignorance "again and again" as if always for the first time. This "transgressing" and "indulging" (no wonder it has "fallen into disrepute") will remain "judicious time-wasting," in her view. Surprised by otherness as by sin, her spontaneity seems almost perverse: it is "a new form of ignorance," one she didn't know she had, that is "activated" when she forgets "what we know how to do."

In giving us this glimpse behind the curtains and revealing what goes on between her and texts before a deconstructive reading is staged--a glimpse of an "encounter in the moment" that appears to be a scene of seduction--she proffers her readers several possible roles. Most of us are excluded as seducers (no "vital power" I, just one of her fans, not being a producer of fecundative texts, and feeling somewhat unmanned as a result). If as a consequence of her confession we set ourselves up as analysts, making her our analysand, we may be entangled by the lure of what seems a proffered transference. If we are caught off guard being voyeurs (I didn't intend to peep into her fantasy life), we can excuse ourselves by accusing her of exhibitionism, but only at the cost of realizing that the scopical drive involved in seeing and being seen is paradigmatic of the reversals of deconstruction, as she describes it. What's going on here? Does she reveal that she wants to play around with texts in order to elicit a response from us? To remain silent, in these circumstances, would be to play the role of the psychoanalyst. And thus the imperative prompting interpretation of her paper is to show that one is not putting oneself in that role--thereby rejecting one position in critical exchange only to be thrust into another.

Feminist, vulgar Marxist, and morally earnest misreadings of Johnson's playfulness can be set aside. Derridean feminist readings are suggested when she reverses and remarks the macho image of truth as a "fantasy of the will to power," oxymoronically associating it with a passively feminine fantasy of sexuality and procreating: "A reading is strong, I would therefore submit, [rather than

'assert'], to the extent that it encounters and propagates [sic] the surprise of otherness" (p. 14; this thesis is followed by the figural scene of seduction). A vulgar Marxist reading was proposed at the MLA session. As Riddel says, Johnson "doesn't want to offend the critical left" (p. 20) and in fact she opens herself to Marxist critiques by implying they may be called for (p. 12). A moralistic reading, in the Babbitt-Winters-Graff tradition, might argue that a desire "to be surprised by otherness . . . again and again" descends to her from Romanticism and from the hedonism of Pater and Stevens, which seeks new sensations to stave off boredom.

A more interesting reading can be extrapolated from the essays by Riddel and Hogle in *SCE Reports* 8. Both call attention to the ways in which she implies that deconstruction is in fact a method (how else could its results be predictable?). At the present juncture of critical discourse, I assume that most readers would agree with them, classifying her as a domesticator of deconstruction. Once it has become a method, deconstruction is no longer true to its origins; and that is why Johnson is compelled to produce an anti-method, in her concluding comments, that will reverse and re-mark deconstruction itself, recuperating its alterity. Paradoxically, however, as Hogle points out, this repetition, this negation of a negation, this supplement to deconstruction, effaces the difference it would restore and in fact "seems a return to [logocentric] origins (the impossible gesture of metaphysics)" (p. 71). What justifies his audacious claim?

Consider the metaphors of her concluding paragraph ("vital, subversive power," "very nature," "lay bare," "moment"), energized by verbs appealing to the nature/culture opposition, such as "transgressing," "indulging," and "is suddenly activated" (the passive construction making natural pulsions the unspoken subject). We seem to be back where we started before deconstruction: as Riddel says, the vital, mysterious "other" that Johnson wants to encounter "is precisely what we have always

thought our discourse dealt with" (p. 17).

But of course I cannot deconstruct her in this fashion because she knows what she's doing. The gap of her willful ignorance is turned toward texts; she exposes the seamless body of her knowledge to readers of her essays, who know, as a result, that she doesn't miss a trick where there are concerned. No wonder, then, that Jerry Aline Flieger, who seems less bothered by the concluding paragraph of Johnson's essay than the men who contribute to the discussion, turns to psychoanalysis in attempting to read it. When Flieger says that "the laying bare of ignorance" is "fecund" (p. 65), she may be following the natural course of Johnson's thought in an unselfconscious fashion from which anxiety-ridden males are by nature excluded. Back, then, to psychoanalysis.

Flieger shows that the processes of opposition, reversal, and reinscription in Johnson's account of deconstruction have much in common with certain passages in Freud, citing, among other sources, the 1915 essay "The Unconscious." Another of the metapsychological papers written that year, "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes," provides even closer parallels between deconstruction and psychoanalysis. An instinct, according to Freud, is subject to four mutations: reversal into its opposite, turning round upon the subject's own self, repression, and sublimation. "Reversal of an instinct into its opposite resolves on closer examination into two different processes: a change from activity to passivity, and a reversal of its content" (Standard Edition, 14, 127). Deconstruction, as described by Johnson, "both opposes and redefines; it both reverses an opposition and reworks the terms" (p. 10). The similarities in the procedures involved in these two passages are striking, but by no means uncanny; they can be explained.

Flieger's carefully-constructed argument that the "other" logic of deconstruction is the logic of the unconscious seems convincing. What she reveals but does not comment on in comparing the two is that the leading

exemplars of deconstruction have always made conscious use of "unconscious" eruptions in discourse--both their own and that which they analyze. As analysts, they cultivate a willed forgetfulness of the (so-called) conscious self so that they can enter the unconscious of the other (Freudian reversals of the active-passive and self-other oppositions are crucial to the process). This is one reason that their interpretations are so subtle and so powerful. In addition, as their own analysts, deconstructionists let their own unconscious surface in their discourse, conducting a kind of double psychoanalytic session, in which they and the texts they analyze both lie on the couch and sit behind the desk taking notes. The most obvious evidence of this procedure is their discourse itself: we are given to understand, if we so desire, that linguistic play, or if you will their stylistic eccentricity to the point of incomprehensibility, is no mere decor for the staging of narcissism or the will to power; it is a laying bare of everything clothed in the decorum of conscious thought. Including the gaps.

Thus where Flieger sees a "confluence" of deconstruction and psychoanalysis, and projects the latter into deconstruction's potential future, others may conclude that psychoanalysis has always already been there, and may even suspect that Derrida's imperative has been: there, where psychoanalysis was, shall deconstruction be. Past and future may have been reversed in America by the mere chronology of reception. Derrida's influence in this country antedates that of Lacan (by and large). But when was it that Derrida began attending Lacan's seminar? What would it be like to read Of Grammatology after becoming familiar with Lacan? Aside from his general interest in Freud, is there anything in particular that has impelled Derrida to undertake an elaborate (and some might say strained) reading of the passage in Freud that serves as a cornerstone of Lacanian theory (that concerning the Fort-Da game)?

But Barbara Johnson knows all this. She associates the "other logic" of deconstruction not with the unconscious, but with the death instinct, which Freud pinned in place

as the tertium quid of psychoanalysis in the very text so crucial to Lacan and Derrida--Beyond the Pleasure Principle. It was of course the compulsion to repeat, dissociated from pleasure or fulfillment of a repressed wish, that compelled Freud to posit the death instinct. In this light, how are we to understand Barbara Johnson's compulsion to repeat, "again and again," her ignorance? She sets up a scene of pleasure, but then denies that her ignorance is a "gap" (béance, cut, erotogenic site). Is this denial intended to reveal to us its unconscious opposite, as I assumed in my first reading of the passage? Not a gap; her ignorance is "an imperative. . . suddenly activated," an instinct or pulsion that recurs from without/within, (we set ourselves up and wait for the scene that will trigger it). Is then this "deconstructive impulse," this "vital, subversive power," the death instinct?

I am unable to understand the passage; my ignorance is not willful, and the nexus of meanings that seem to be at stake is unpleasant and disturbing. If it were not contradictory to think so, I would infer that in this instance (if it is in fact the death instinct that is involved), death is no longer present as an unconscious drive, but as a consciously solicited frisson that serves as the only evidence that one is alive (one deliberately seeks the return of this vital, deconstructive power when one no longer experiences it naturally--when one is neither living nor dead). There is in fact a demonic logic within deconstruction that heads in this direction: as Jonathan Arac implies in a forthcoming issue of Boundary 2, the rigor of de Man's deconstruction leads overtly to rigor mortis.

There are at least two strong readings of Johnson that would enable us to evade a melancholy, inconclusive, weak reading. The first would argue, following Lacan, that it is precisely the Real that returns, again and again, always misrecognized, to Barbara Johnson and to us. If this were the case, we might hope to modify our endless, issueless, specular, imaginary encounters

with the fascinating "other" through a better understanding of the Symbolic. This method of displacing purely imaginary exchanges does not entail a naive commitment to referentiality; it does however involve a somewhat less apologetic attitude towards truth (Johnson is willing to commit herself only to "the role of truth," as one among others in the *dramatis personae*).

Another sort of strong reading would depart from Lacan and Freud in a direction indicated, but not pursued, by Derrida. In their intense scrutiny of Freud's analysis of the Fort-Da game, neither Lacan nor Derrida has emphasized that Freud's most overt objective in undertaking the analysis is to exclude the play instinct as discussed by German aestheticians, and more generally the concept of imitation, from psychoanalysis. Derrida has on occasion used Freud to expose logocentric assumptions, but despite Derrida and Lacan, it is evident that Freud remains profoundly logocentric, and that he found it necessary to exclude language and representation as such from scientific psychology. (As such: for Freud, language and representation were epiphenomena through which he could discover the psychic and/or material truth; they possessed no irreducible causal efficacy in and of themselves.) Lacking the knowledge requisite for a strong reading of Freud, I can only suggest that the death of the play instinct proved essential for the life of the death instinct, and urge rereading of the last paragraph of Beyond the Pleasure Principle, chapter 2 (p. 11 in the Norton edition). Freud insists not only on the priority of psychology over aesthetics; he goes on to insist that an aesthetics which recognizes the hegemony of psychology is "of no use for our purposes."

Other readings and misreadings of Johnson's paper are possible, but one potential misunderstanding should be precluded. When she refers to "the logic of binary opposition," "some 'other' logic," and "an incompatibility of logics" (p. 11), some readers might infer that she is using the word "logic" literally. Insofar as it is possible to distinguish literal from metaphorical usage, one must assume

that these phrases, like J. Hillis Miller's reference to "two simultaneous, incompatible logical systems," are primarily metaphorical. Likewise, one should do her the courtesy of assuming that when she (like Miller, and de Man) refer to the law of identity ("A is A"), they know that this "law" was discarded by philosophers and logicians at the turn of the century. Presumably they know the differences between traditional, symbolic, modal, many-valued, and non-truth-functional deviant logics; presumably they know about the snares involved in attempts to move from uninterpreted formalisms to formal semantics and ordinary language; presumably they understand the relevance of Derrida's work to these problems (cf. Susan Haack, *Philosophy of Logics*, p. 189). Whatever else it is, American deconstruction is not primarily philosophical. Its most productive future, like the conclusion to Johnson's paper, may lie in exploration of play and representation, in the interstices between psychoanalysis, philosophy, and literature.

If Barbara Johnson and New Haven deconstruction can be pried loose from their apparent fixation on the death instinct as the tertium quid and ultimate other of their critical lives--if they can grant that the role of death is no more privileged than the role of truth--deconstruction may have a future. This is not to deny that we willfully forget that we are already dead, living proxy lives in our symbolic resurrection in the Symbolic order. Nor is it to assert that we are not alive, dying proxy deaths in the Imaginary. This is not to deny that the play of meaning across the borders of repetition and difference/innovation ("surprised . . . again and again") must always be staged to remind us of the truths of deconstruction. But it is to request that the strip-tease of deconstructionist revaluation thematize itself, as well as being repeatedly staged for others. It is to suggest that the theological parallels to this staging of death-in-life, Western and Eastern, now deserve attention.

Perhaps I take Barbara Johnson too seriously. If so, it is because I don't think that she's really playing around.

Jeffrey Plank
Georgia Institute of Technology

Making Sense of Poststructuralism:
Remarks on the 1980 SCE-SAMLA Session on "Poststructuralism:
Assessment and New Directions"

Should the description or assessment of a theoretical position present any special problems? Philosophers have taught us that ideas or concepts--like poststructuralism--live in statements, and statements, in texts.¹ And, if generic conventions control textual meaning, then making sense of a theoretical position or text depends on assigning it to a genre.² However, if one sees genres as mixed or interrelated, then identification of a text becomes complicated: genre description may necessarily involve explanations of change. Ralph Cohen, for example, argues that literary theory "has generic continuity while undergoing changes in its parts and functions. It is interrelated with other genres in terms of parts and methods, and it is analyzable with them as a member of a group, movement, or period." In two essays--"On the Interrelation of Forms in Eighteenth-Century Literature" (1974) and "Historical Knowledge and Literary Understanding" (1979)--Cohen has argued that within literary periods writers vary normative procedures as they extend them from genre to genre to treat different topics and problems. Eventually, says Cohen, the norm values are called into question as the problems they originally solved disappear.³ On this view, changes within and among genres are normative within a period. Problems in generic identification should arise between stable periods. This is precisely the difficulty John Leavey (University of Florida, Gainesville), James Thompson (Georgia Institute of Technology), and Victor Kramer (Georgia State University) called to our attention during the 1980 SCE-SAMLA meeting.

In a paper that mixed internalized dialogue, etymology, short story, and legal analogies, John Leavey raised questions about the

possibility of describing and assessing poststructuralism altogether. Using George Steiner's conclusion to In Bluebeard's Castle as his starting point, Leavey dispensed with the methods for description outlined above. This opening gambit accounts for the unconventional form of his essay--unconventional, at least, for the literary essay. "By what right do we begin?" functions as Leavey's central question since Steiner has concluded that "It is no rhetorical move to insist that we stand at a point where models of previous culture and event are of little help."⁴ According to James Thompson, Leavey substituted an example of poststructuralism for an evaluation and put the burden of assessment on his commentators. "Are there," asks Thompson, "two discourses, the traditional and the poststructural, or the Logocentric and the deconstructive? Are these mutually exclusive?" These are questions about generic continuity. Victor Kramer saw in Leavey's presentation an example of intergeneric continuity. "Could it be," begins Kramer, "that today's critic (assessor) is slowly coming to a view which is related to that which poets as diverse as Wordsworth, Hopkins, Rilke, and Valery long ago reached? Could it be that the critic, so recently hopeful that he could explain, explicate (even explate), is slowly coming around to the view that he is foremost a mediator of the fact of the impossibility of complete mediation? Could this be why much of contemporary criticism sounds like parody?"

Both sets of questions imply the need for explanations of historical change, and so does Leavey's use of Steiner. In fact, Steiner admits that his 1971 position regarding cultural history resembles Judith's position in Bartok's 1911 opera. But when Steiner says that "We seem to stand, in regard to a theory of culture, where Bartok's Judith stands when she asks to open the last door on the night" or that "We open the successive doors in Bluebeard's castle because 'they are there,' because each leads to the next by a logic of intensification which is that of the mind's own awareness of being," does he make developmental psychology a model for explaining historical change?⁵ Is personal crisis a goal for Judith? How far is Judith from Wordsworth in Book VI of The Prelude where he confronts "the mind's abyss" (1850, l. 544)? How far is Steiner from Hartman's view of

Wordsworth's early poetry? Hartman, we recall, was interested in Wordsworth's early poetry because there Wordsworth deals with "self-consciousness," development, the growth of the mind, and inner conflict. "What interested me," writes Hartman, "is Wordsworth's anxious self-scrutiny," his "growth into self-consciousness." Wordsworth's later poetry fails to interest Hartman because there Wordsworth retreats from the "abyss":

It might not seem possible that the later poetry could be beset by even more scruples, but this is what happens. Wordsworth's attitude toward his mind's "exercise of its powers" suffers a further restraint. He begins to watch on two fronts: to be deluded that "the mighty Deep / Was even the gentlest of all gentle Things" is as dangerous as to gaze into the bottomless abyss. . . .

Under the pressure of these many restraints, Wordsworth's mind has little chance to fall in love with or explore its own impressions. Self-discovery, which informs the meditative lyrics (the act of recall there is never a passive thing but verges on new and often disturbing intuitions) almost disappears. And, by a curious irony, the unpublished Prelude, which is his greatest testimony to the living mind, now discourages further self-exploration.⁶

Hartman sees Wordsworth's lonely confrontation of the "abyss" as a strength in his early poetry. Wordsworth, Hartman concludes, is "the most isolated figure among the great English poets." In grouping Bartok with Steiner and Wordsworth with Hartman, I want to suggest that contemporary critics may extend the developmental model to explain discontinuous historical change, or, in Hartman's case, genre choice.

For those who study historical change, crisis is normal: "crisis," says the sociologist Anthony Smith,

"is the ubiquitous symbol of historical change."⁷ If crisis is normal, then dwelling on it might be fatuous. Steiner himself hedges:

We feel ourselves tangled in a constant, lashing web of crisis.

Whether this feeling is entirely legitimate remains a fair question. There have been previous stages of extreme pressure on and within Western Civilization. It is only now, in the provisional light of currently fashionable "archaeologies of consciousness," that we are beginning to gauge what must have been the climate of nerve during the known approach and blaze of pestilence in late medieval and seventeenth-century Europe. What, one wonders, were the mechanics of hope, indeed of the future tense itself, during the Hunnish invasions? Read Michelet's narrative of life in Paris in 1420. Who, in the closing phases of the Thirty Years' War, when, as chroniclers put it, there were only wolves for wolves to feed on in the empty towns, foresaw the near upsurge of cultural energies and the counterbalancing strength of the Americas? It may be that our framework of apocalypse, even where it is low-keyed and ironic, is dangerously inflationary.⁸

Is crisis normal? Steiner says it is a fair question. Walter Jackson Bate believes that our predicament parallels that of the eighteenth century:

We may feel less naked, less prey to existential Angst and helplessness, if we know that we have not been condemned by history to be the first to face this frightful challenge, unique though it is, in scale, to the modern world. There may be some comfort to our feeling of historical loneliness--not only comfort but some spur to both our courage and potentialities

for good sense--to know we have a predecessor in the eighteenth century, a century that serves as the essential crossroad between all that we imply when we use the word "Renaissance" and much of what we mean when we speak of the "modern."⁹

Bate's own interest in the period has changed since he wrote From Classic to Romantic. Comparing his new and old interests will, I think, be instructive. In 1945, Bate wrote that he was drawn to the transition because "Many of the assumptions which had underlain ideas of art in classical antiquity and in the Renaissance were gradually supplanted at this time by more individualistic and psychological conceptions of art and taste; and these conceptions, under various names, have largely dominated our thinking about art to the present day."¹⁰ In 1945 Bate wanted to get at the origins of stable norms. Now that he sees his own period as transitional Bate wants to get behind origins to study the eighteenth century as a period of crisis and transition.

Forced to acknowledge the reality of change in our own period, we may well turn with new interests and new questions to both stable and transitional periods. Perhaps we now know little about transitional periods--hence Steiner's reservations--because the New Critical and Formalist view that texts and genres are autonomous wholes does not account for literary change and continuity.

Thus, when Leavey cites Steiner, he avoids the problem of explaining historical change in order to register or articulate the anxiety that attends crisis. If Leavey does not consider available methods for describing and assessing because he takes discontinuity seriously, his mixing of forms nevertheless suggests that historiographical and generic issues cannot be escaped. Consider, for example, Leavey's opening paragraphs:

By what right do we begin?

There are at least three ghosts in this short story of the trial. But the record begins with two statements from George Steiner.

By what right does one ever begin?

Particularly with two statements from Bluebeard's Castle (sic)?

The record reads:

In that 1970-71 text, Steiner assesses our position. . . .

The internalized dialogue orders Leavey's essay: the self-questioning and use of question as answer chart the speaker's rising self-consciousness. The ghost story substitutes for historical explanation. Leavey uses it to formalize the relation of past to present. In Leavey's ghost story, concepts become characters so that history is psychologized.

Leavey also substitutes etymological considerations for historical explanation:

The first ghost appears. In a word. In assessment. The ghost of history.

What constitutes assessment--that begins our story.

As an old Latin word, according to OED, assess is "to sit by (e.g. as an assessor or assistant-judge)." Or, as Webster's says, "to sit beside, assist in the office of a judge."

The judge, the second ghost, the ghost of the law, appears.

Our history continues.

In classical Latin assessor, assessoris is "an assistant-judge." OED goes on to define an assessor, the one who makes an assessment, first as "One who sits beside; hence, one who shares another's position, rank, or dignity." Then as "One who sits as an assistant or advisor to a judge or magistrate; esp. a skilled assistant competent to advise on technical points of law, commercial usage, navigation, etc. (The earliest sense in Eng.)" Historically, an assessor sits beside, shares another's position, rank, or dignity.

Leavey uses the "original"--nonmetaphorical, nonextended--meaning of the word to erect a framework for proceeding. Etymology provides the legal superstructure and in that superstructure Leavey finds his task: "As assessors, the job at hand, we are particularly skilled assistants preparing the evidence, sifting through the remains, making deals, arranging the docket, and writing the decisions." Again, "The trial begins. The assessors call the court to order. The defendant is poststructuralism. The forum of justice is the Society for Critical Exchange." Leavey can now proceed by reading from the "record"; history has become mere chronology. Leavey cites from the 1979 International Colloquium on Genre Bulletin, from Harari, and from Derrida. Leavey concludes that poststructuralism contains three ghosts: history, law, and structuralism. Insofar as ghosts are fantastic, Leavey's conclusions reveal a deep skepticism about our ability to know the past or to know how it lives on in the present.

Is Leavey's adherence to discontinuity simply a belief or a moral commitment? The French theorists have used or discussed the internalized dialogue, law, ghost story and etymology--all the formal procedures Leavey combines. For Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, the internalized dialogue is a high literary form dating from the origins of Romanticism: "The essentially fragmentary nature of the dialogue has at least

one consequence (among others which we cannot discuss here): the dialogue, no more than the fragment, does not properly constitute a genre. That is the reason why, in fact, the dialogue is a privileged battlefield for the question of genre as such."¹¹ In his essay on Henry James' ghost stories, Tzvetan Todorov writes:

This author grants no importance to the raw event but concentrates all his attention on the relation between the character and the event. Further, the core of a story will often be an absence (the hidden, the dead, the work of art) and its quest will be the only possible presence. Absence is an ideal and intangible goal; the prosaic presence is all we have to work with. Objects, "things," do not exist (or if they exist, they do not interest James); what intrigues him is the experience his characters can have of objects. There is no "reality" except a psychic one; the material and physical fact is normally absent, and we never know anything about it except the way in which various persons can experience it. The fantastic narrative is necessarily centered upon a perception, and as such it serves Henry James, especially since the object of perception always has a phantasmal existence for him. But what interests James is the exploration of this "Psychic reality," the scrutiny of every variety of possible relations between subject and object.¹²

Like James, Leavey is interested in the psychic reality involved in responding to an event or text. Etymology, too, is a characteristic feature of poststructuralist writing. Post-structuralists use past meanings of words to bypass disciplinary, conventional, or genre-bound uses of words. In "The Law of Genre," for example, Derrida seeks to expand and Gallicize "genre" by drawing on paradoxical but etymologically

suggestive relationships: "But this law, as law of genre, is not exclusively binding on the genre *qua* category art and literature. But, paradoxically, and just as impressively, this law of genre has a controlling influence and is binding on that which draws the genre into engendering, generations, genealogy, and degeneration. . . . (In) French the sematic scale of *genre* is much larger and more expansive than in English, and there always includes within its reach the gender."¹³ Here Derrida wants to refashion the concept of genre on the basis of new structural relationships. He wants to investigate works and historical periods during which works resist genre because, if one can go beyond genre to the unsaid, then one can confront one's mind. In this sense, post-structuralism is a species of "philosophical discourse" (Derrida) that deals with meaning, especially meaning more than can be said, and with the speaker's achievement of that consciousness.¹⁴

Does going beyond genres constitute an inevitably private activity? Francis Cairns has argued that genres originated from actual social discourse. Todorov has argued that "There has never been a literature without genres; it is a system in continual transformation, and the question of origins cannot be disassociated, historically, from the field of genres themselves." Like Cairns, Todorov argues that genres originate in speech acts and that "It is because genres exist as an institution that they function as 'horizons of expectations' for readers, and as models of writing for authors."¹⁵ Mixing genres--as Leavey does--need not be a private enterprise. In fact, intergeneric experimentation may be the hallmark of literary change. During a period of intergeneric experimentation, we might well expect the speaker's and reader's role to be problematic. When he asks, "Could Mr. Leavey have presented his argument in such a way that it would be apprehensible to this audience?" James Thompson calls attention to the role for readers implied by poststructuralist conventions. Thompson wants the reader addressed. In the Romantic

lyric and dramatic monologue, the reader conventionally overhears the poet or speaker. Given the Romantic speaker's subjective or heuristic conception of teaching, the reader can be led to plumb his own depths as the speaker plumbs his. Victor Kramer endorses the view that literary criticism should promote this kind of self-development: "In my view, as poststructuralism becomes more clearly defined, criticism may come to be perceived far less as a contestable end in itself, but rather as a way of moving (in that main road with others) forward--toward--we know not what, but a movement toward wherein we worry less about who violated the law, and who most values our judgment. This would be a movement where we are concerned more with each individual's journey, and perhaps less with fashion." To ask for a change in the speaker-reader relation in the literary essay--as Thompson does--implies the need for new functions as well as new combinations of formal features.

But to cry discontinuity and avoid historiographical issues may, as Quentin Skinner argues, be a moral error: "To demand from the history of thought a solution to our own immediate problems is thus to commit not merely a methodological fallacy, but something like a moral error. But to learn from the past--and we cannot otherwise learn it at all--the distinction between what is necessary and what is the product merely of our own contingent arrangements, is to learn the key to self-awareness itself."¹⁶ The historical kind of awareness Skinner argues for differs from the intuitive awareness that comes from self-confrontation, but does not exclude it. The developmental model for explaining personal change may itself be one of "our own contingent arrangements." Do the poststructuralists have a moral imperative to confront the "abyss"? If it could be demonstrated that, as philosophers, the post-structuralists repeat the poets--and, in the case of Wordsworth, just the early part of his career--would we alter our view of the significance of that imperative? Is innovation in contemporary philosophy a variation of Romantic poetic procedures? If we begin with a description

of poststructuralism in terms of formal features, parts, and functions it shares in a particular historical order with other genres, would we have had to change our views about the subject matter for literary theory, about the reader-speaker relationship, and about self-consciousness?

Notes

1. Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," History and Theory 3 (1969), 3-53.
2. E. D. Hirsch, Validity in Interpretation (New Haven and London), pp. 76ff.
3. "Literary Theory as a Genre," Centrum 3 (1975), 45; "On the Interrelation of Forms in the Eighteenth Century," New Approaches to Eighteenth-Century Literature, ed. Phillip Harth (New York and London, 1974), pp. 33-77; "Historical Knowledge and Literary Understanding," PLL 14 (1978), 227-48.
4. In Bluebeard's Castle: Some Notes Towards the Re-definition of Culture (New Haven and London, 1971), p. 147.
5. Steiner, Castle, epigraph, p. 136.
6. Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814 (1964; rpt. New Haven and London, 1971), pp. 330, 338.
7. The Concept of Social Change (London and Boston, 1973), p. 162.
8. Steiner, Castle, pp. 97-98.
9. The Burden of the Past and the English Poet (Cambridge, 1970), p. 12.
10. From Classic to Romantic (New York, 1946), p. vii.
11. "Genre," GLYPH 7 (1980), 3.

12. The Poetics of Prose, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca, 1977), pp. 184-85.
13. "The Law of Genre," GLYPH 7 (1980), 223. Derrida treats the concept of generic purity with no little irony (pp. 202-08).
14. Cf. Todorov, "The Origin of Genres," New Literary History 8 (1976): "There is no abyss between literature and that which is not literature; . . . literary genres have their origins, quite simply, in human discourse" (169). Cf. also Michel Beaujour, "Genus Universum," GLYPH 7 (1980), 15-17, 20-21.
15. Cairns, Generic Composition in Greek and Roman Poetry (Edinburgh, 1972); Todorov, "Origin," 163, 161.
16. Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding," 52-53.

Don H. Bialostosky
University of Washington

Toward a General Theory of Narrative: a Response
to the Conference on Theories of Narrative, Indiana
University, October 24-26, 1980

The pluralist presupposition of the SCE Conference on Theories of Narrative was borne out in the event. Those in attendance heard panelists representing structuralism, speech-act theory, Chomskian linguistics, Bakhtinian semiotics, DeManian deconstruction, Aristotelian rhetoric and poetics, and themselves bring their wits and their intellectual traditions to bear on the topic of narrative. The characteristic differences of the eight panelists, who shared the platform in four different combinations, were more sharply marked than the differences among the questions they addressed, and the development of the conference over two days was not so much toward the resolution of an intellectual agenda as toward the recognition of who was who. The conference most naturally organizes itself in my mind around the revealed identities of the panelists and the differences they sharpened among themselves, not immediately around recognition of what the problem of narrative involves and what more might be said about it.

The plurality of pluralism is finally of interest, however, not merely for the sake of dramatic diversity, but for the good of an inquiry which otherwise might rashly exclude views that could contribute to its progress. But if a fruitful

inquiry can impose no absolute prior test of what might be relevant to its work, it must be all the more diligent to examine offerings retrospectively in light of an emerging conversation to which they may be taken to contribute.

In the two sections of this paper I will attempt first to reconstruct the panelists' characteristic positions and then to construct the beginnings of a theoretical framework for the discussion of narrative in which their views can be made to criticize one another and to advance a common inquiry. I am not sure which procedure takes the greater liberty with these living authors' words and purposes, for the first presumes upon the right of the spectator at a public event to represent the persons he saw and heard as objects of interest in themselves and the second presumes upon the right of a colleague in an intellectual enterprise to use what colleagues have said for the sake of advancing his conception of their common inquiry. I suspect that the former will be felt more presumptuous since in it I take what we ordinarily call "secondary sources" as if they were primary, keeping my own standing as secondary; while in the latter I subordinate myself and those I write about to the same secondary status before a common object, even if I presume to define that object. I will take the liberty of the first part, however, because the privilege of the platform, as it gives special opportunity to shape discussion, also puts him or her who exercises it before the objectifying eye, not like the colleague who speaks to me and to whom I speak in return but like the heroes whom we speak about.

Certainly the sense of "them" before "us" was strong at the conference, even in the discussion sessions where panelists' contributions took special prominence, and it would be false to a memorable occasion not to portray them, just as it would be false to a continuing critical exchange not to restore them to us and our common inquiry.

The Panelists and Their Theories

In this section, with only my notes to go on, I will draw from the panelists' remarks in the several panels what I take to be their characteristic questions and motives to show where they were coming from, what they brought from there, and what they made of "narrative" with it. Since they spoke in different orders and variously interacted, I will present them alphabetically with notice only of some of their most prominent responses to one another.

Jonathan Arac

"Why should it be that now 'narrative' is what we want to call everything?" With questions like this one Jonathan Arac probed the topic by probing the motives of the critical community which determined it. The theorist's theorizing appeared in his vision as motivated by desires or needs, and its main problem was to become aware of those motives. The same theoretical terms might serve to delimit a region for the French to transcend, while

attracting Americans as a way to define previously unde termined objects, and this difference in why the terms might be used seemed for Arac to be more important than the relations of the terms to one another, to other sets of terms or to their objects. "Why," he characteristically asked, "when the theory of rhetoric abandons dualism does the theory of narrative go in for it?"

The same concern with self-consciousness that focussed his attitudes toward theorizing appeared in his account of narrative as well. In discussing Paul DeMan's attempt to write the history of Romanticism, Arac called attention to DeMan's discovery from Lukacs that "the narrative elements pollute the narrated ones" and his recognition that in narrating literary history the narrator-historian "commits himself to a position of which the author is unaware" and so assumes a power not just to "pollute" but to make his primary objects. The historian-narrator of course puts himself in a position to be undone or redone in his turn; the power he discovers in himself to make his authors is the power which those who come after will have over him. The more aware the writer is of his own motives and the motives he discloses in others which they did not themselves recognize, the more helplessly he anticipates that others will make of him what he cannot make of himself. Not the anxiety of influence but the certainty of undefinable retribution haunts the narrator who has represented the thoughts and motives of another. Though the self-conscious historian-narrator imagines an author-subject who cannot talk back, he also anticipates another like himself who will have a later if not the last word.

Ralph Cohen

"Which are the narrative, which the non-narrative elements?" Ralph Cohen's reiteration of this question showed his impatience with the assumptions held by most of the other panelists, that "narrative" designates either a literary kind or a natural activity. He insisted that "narrative" does not name a kind of text but a part of a text of the same order as description, digression, or analysis, while he also acknowledged that what we choose to call "narrative" in a given time depends not on human nature but on who we are and what we are trying to do, on our temporary and conventional agreements. He combined an awareness of the conventionality of our institutions with a clear preference for one set of conventions over another and resisted the recent attempts to generalize "narrative" to include all literature as expressions of a "human need to tell stories." Pointing to relative as opposed to such absolute definitions, he appealed for discrimination among the various definitions customary in various communities but preferred himself a definition appropriate to his vision of our professional function.

Thus he chose the conventions of rhetorical analysis on the basis of his view of the proper task of the profession of literary history and criticism, which, as a discipline distinct from anthropology or psychology, has the duty of distinguishing literary conventions, forms, and kinds and describing their changes from place to place and time to time. Were the practitioners of this discipline to allow their unease with the relativity of its objects to move them to shift their

attention to the nature of "narrative" and the nature of man, they would no longer, he implied, be doing their specific duty for their students and the community as a whole. "What," he asked, "does 'narrative' have to do with the works we teach?"

Jonathan Culler

"How do we account for how stories seem to us? Why would a story seem incomplete? Why would we be uncertain about who is speaking? Does the theory group narratives which seem or feel similar to us?" Jonathan Culler's generation of this family of questions might appear at first to place him close to the self-consciousness of Jonathan Arac's position, for the questions are all formulated in terms of how and why things (especially narratives) appear to us as they do, but Culler's emphasis in these questions did not fall where Arac's would fall. For Culler, how narratives seem to us is not to be examined as evidence of how we individually constitute the objects of our experience to satisfy our needs but as data of how we collectively exercise the conventions which, in a sense, constitute "us." His questions took "us" as given and took the problem that interests us as the problem of producing an explicit model of our competences, in effect, of our qualifications to be included in the community of readers of literature. Like the linguist's model of language on which it is based, his model of literature is intended to codify given practices in terms of "units and the rules by which they combine." Like the prescriptive grammarian who knows the "rules" and knows how to recognize others who

use them, he was not averse to discriminating between the qualified and unqualified members of the community, between the competent and the incompetent, between those who read as he does and those who do not.

But while he aimed for explicitness in formulating the rules by which his given community does its literary business, he resisted explicitness about that community's place in and responsibility to any other or more comprehensive community. Calling for "axioms of the middle range" and fearing the dangers of introducing larger contexts and questions, he was willing to examine what "we" do with literary works but not who or where "we" are.

For Culler what "we" do with narrative can best be accounted for in terms of a dualistic model which begins from the distinction between the story and the telling, a division of the domain of literature into drama (all story, no telling), lyric (all telling, no story), and narrative (both telling and story), and an acknowledgment of "two logics" deriving from the two terms (either event determines meaning or meaning determines event). But within this array of possibilities, he, like most structuralists and Aristotelians, places the greater weight on events, drama, and narrative, holding that "events basically are the thing that determines meaning." Understood in this unqualified proposition we may properly imagine "for us."

Wladyslaw Godzich

"What is the responsibility of the theory?" With this question, which provoked Jonathan Culler's warning about the "larger contexts," Wladyslaw

Godzich reformulated the proposed question, "Why choose one narrative theory over another?" At first one may find no connection between the two questions, as if Godzich had evaded the topic, and one may be struck by the odd personification of "theory" to the position of responsible agent. But one familiar with Bakhtin may see in these anomalies a familiar move. "Theory" which is the object of another's choice in the proposed topic becomes an agent in Godzich's reformulation; objectified in the program and treated as a means to "results" beyond itself, "theory" becomes in Godzich's question a person with its own ends and its own objects. Not a tool to be included or left out of the tool kit but a way of seeing with consequences for the thing seen (the text or "signifying practice") and for those invited to share it (students and colleagues) and therefore with responsibilities to both, "theory" in Godzich's reformulation recovers its etymological sense of an "act of seeing" and its archaic sense of "an imaginative contemplation of reality," and with these its agent of seeing, the seer or contemplator, and his relations to those he speaks to as well as those he speaks about. Godzich here reformulated the question in a way which, in terms he later used, rejected the scientific pretension of the original question ("science has no requirement that the referent be competent") for what Bakhtin would call a dialogical (and Godzich himself a "critical semiotic") approach to the question, one in which teller, listener, and referent-hero are all conceived as persons capable of speaking in their turns, of correcting an earlier speaker's mistaken impressions, complaining against injuries and misrepresentations, developing previously unstated implications, committing misunderstandings and receiving corrections in their turns.

Again this position may sound in a way like the self-consciousness Jonathan Arac attributed to DeMan, for the scenario of the speaker's becoming in time the object of another's discourse, who in his turn becomes the object of another's, does involve one transposition of the relations in Godzich's and Bakhtin's model. But that transposition, conditioned as it is by an unquestioned faith in human mortality, is a one-way series in which each becomes a speaker in his turn, but none can ever check on what he has heard or correct how he himself is heard. The text imposes the dead letter between the dead and the living who will themselves soon be dead. In Godzich's model however (as I am embroidering it from Bakhtin), the living speak about the living to the living. An author from the past is not barred from speaking up from his page and correcting our re-creations of him any more than our written words will be helpless before readers we will never meet, before or after our deaths. A theory which has been abstracted from its source and objectified into an object of choice may revive its author and reassert its own relation to his personal vision, or a listener, who has before stood silently by and heard the theory so treated, may enter the conversation and bring it back to responsible life. No one could collect life insurance on a dead author, if his death warrant had to be certified by a Bakhtinian physician.

Paul Hernadi

"We still need to ask what is it or what is what." This call for categorical determinations in the midst of a licensed indulgence of speculations on what might be considered as narratives revealed the Aristotelian

bent of Paul Hernadi's thinking. His own call to move "beyond genre" into a more comprehensive formal designations like "narrative" (in a full scheme involving "lyric" and "drama" as well) showed a limited Platonic impulse toward higher unity, reined however by a persistent Aristotelian desire to preserve clear distinctions and definitions even at that higher level. Plato's distinctions of three kinds of diction -- diegesis (recitation), mimesis (imitation), and a mixture of the two--may be used for Aristotle's formal purposes rather than for the political and pedagogical purpose they serve in Plato's context in the *Republic* III, and so Hernadi appeared to use them in his "triadistic" theory which starts from Aristotle's distinctions of means, object, and manner of imitation but substitutes Plato's distinction of diction for Aristotle's dual distinction of narrative and dramatic manner. The only speaker to take repeated recourse to classical poetics, Hernadi was the one to remark that some of the panelists made no distinction between poetic and rhetorical conceptions of narrative.

Mary Louise Pratt

"What direction should our theorizing activity take?" With this question Mary Louise Pratt, like Wladyslaw Godzich, offered a substitute for the question, "Why choose one narrative theory over another?" Her insistence with this substitution that theory is not a thing to be chosen but a project to be undertaken paralleled her view of narratives not as objects but as acts, "a range of social practices." With this pragmatic emphasis, she, more than any of the other panelists, made a point of opposing "sterile formalism" and its iso-

lation of narrative objects from their functions in "all kinds of social meaning-making projects" conducted under the influence of "specific group interests and power relations." Pratt's emphasis in terms of the "speech-act theory" with which her work is associated was on the "act."

This emphasis appeared strikingly in both her definition of narrative and her exemplars of it. Defining narrative as "an act of representing events, such that the overall representation of events follows the order of events," she located her criterion in the conformity of the representation of the event to what happened or what was done, rather than in the manner in which the event is depicted. In her examples of narrative and non-narrative reports from a newspaper, those "stories" which reported a sequence of happenings qualified as narratives while those which reported official announcements or statements did not. Such speech-acts did not strike the intuition to which she appealed as sufficiently eventful, perhaps because nothing was reported to eventuate from them. Consistent with her orientation to the future direction of theoretical activity rather than to existing given options, she left the concept of "event" implied in these judgments (along with the concepts of "the linguistic correlates of events, of representation, and of before and after" needed to flesh out her definition) for future discussion.

Gerald Prince

"How do we explain the universal ability to produce and process narrative?" With this question Gerald Prince defined the field of phenomena to which a theory of narrative should address itself. He

betrayed no uneasiness with the question "Why choose One Narrative Theory Over Another?" but proposed that one should choose a theory because it is "more explicit, more complete, more revealing, and more plausible." Though he asked questions on occasion in the same form as Jonathan Culler did, e.g., "What makes us able to call versions versions of the same narrative?" he did not rely to the same extent on the explicit or implied "us." He presented himself as oriented not to the profession or society or some taken for granted community of practice but, as he said, "to truth and human nature." The inquiry into these matters was not, he thought, "at a pre-theoretical stage," but he presumed his audience's familiarity with the available theory and did not elaborate.

Eric Rabkin

First speaker of the first panel but last on my alphabetical program, Eric Rabkin opened the discussion with the rhetorical question, "Why not take a given thing to be a narrative?" adding that as far as he was concerned "anything can be." He himself detected narrative "when I feel my beliefs manipulated" and professed the need for narrative theory "to avoid manipulation by others." The combination of his announced claim to treat anything he wanted as "narrative" and his open wish to avoid being taken in by anything anyone else might want to make of it identifies the theme which he exemplified individually and explicated for the human species as a whole, the theme of self-preservation. At once exercising the art of determining the meaning of signs to his own satisfaction and avoiding the exercise of that art on himself, he asserted a self and conserved it from violation.

Generalizing in the last panel discussion to the activity of the species as a whole, he postulated the same species-function for the exchanges of reports he defined as narratives, the function of assuring social and thereby human survival. Paul Hernadi recognized Rabkin's individual concern to manipulate and avoid manipulation as the classical concern of the art of rhetoric, though Rabkin did not profess this art. Rabkin himself identified the species-level examination of the same behavior as the object of a science of "semiobiology."

"narrative" in both cases encompassed any signifying behavior directed to the survival function. Further, Rabkin doubted the pretensions of scientific and aesthetic discourse to stand outside this function and the exchanges it entails, for though science aims at "the report per se" abstracted from the self of its reporter, Rabkin unmasked that abstraction as "a rhetorical manoeuvre," and though aesthetic exchanges are purportedly designed for the feelings they give and not for some ulterior purpose, Rabkin recognized them as "gift exchanges or maybe power exchanges," functional in cementing social bonds and asserting social hierarchies. In this way he included all signifying behavior under the heading of "narrative," making good his claim that he could do it, if he wanted.

Toward a General Theory of Narrative

The careful listener trying to speak after this array of panelists and in relation to what they said might well suffer the frustration we all sometimes feel after a search through the MLA Bibliography. Our tendencies in response to this frustration to

caricature and dispose of others' contributions or to ignore them and risk claiming attention entirely on the basis of our own relation to our subject may give us the openings we need to launch another article, but they also underlie our nagging sense that our own work contributes to no developing inquiry but only to our own professional survival. We may understand this situation in Eric Rabkin's terms as the way of the world (or perhaps even as a law of nature) and cheerfully acknowledge that we act out the imperative to maintain ourselves, even at the expense of others. Or we might understand it in a version of the view I have attributed to Jonathan Arac's account of De-Man, that we anticipate the meaninglessness of our own work in the meaninglessness we find in the work of others--as we read so shall we be read. But our survival as professionals depends not merely on our capacity to exploit an existing forum but on our capacity to clarify and defend the purposes of that forum, and our readings of our fellows (among whom I include both our authors and our colleagues) may supplement their work without exposing them or ourselves to an unbearable recognition scene. We will contribute to a significant intellectual enterprise to the extent that we can discover one in our colleagues' work and articulate its ground in a model which relates our interests to theirs and makes possible both further work and further discussion of the model.

The study of narrative has come to have identity as a branch of inquiry largely through the work of a community which has organized itself around a model called "dualist" at the conference and associated primarily with Gerald Prince and Jonathan Culler among the panelists and with Seymour Chatman among the authors whose theories came under discussion in the small groups. Culler's and Prince's

occasional displays of impatience with the proceedings stemmed in part, I suspect, from their sense that the conference's questions and the other panelists did not share their involvement in a project which is already under way and their acceptance of a model of narrative which sets certain questions aside and permits others to be more sharply formulated and answered. I believe that their impatience was justified to the extent that any argument which purports to be a contribution to narrative theory must at the present time be responsible for showing where it stands with respect to the dualist model, but I am not satisfied that this model, as they presented it or as I am familiar with it in Chatman (or Genette, whom we did not discuss at the conference), is sufficient to the problem or to our purposes.

I believe Culler was on the right track in situating narrative between lyric and drama as a form of discourse that combines what the other forms treat separately, but I question his assertion that what is combined is two distinct kinds of things--telling and story--each with its own "logic." In the Platonic distinction from which Paul Hernadi recognized the lyric-narrative-drama distinction to derive, "story" does not figure at all. What makes the distinction is whether the poet speaks without imitating the speech of another (lyric), whether he presents others speaking through speaking agents (drama) or whether he both speaks and imitates with his speaking voice the speech of others (narrative). It is Aristotle's revision of this distinction into a distinction of narrative versus dramatic manners of imitation (with lyric left out of consideration) which introduces the idea of an object of imitation, an action or plot or story, upon which Culler (and Chatman and Genette) bases his understanding of the Platonic genres, but this

revision has serious consequences. Both distinctions make narrative "dualistic," but the one makes the narrating and the narrated things of the same kind--speech--while the other makes them things of different kinds--speech and action, discourse and story, subject and object, signifier and signified, person and event. With this supposition of two kinds of things comes, as a necessary consequence, the introduction of different terms of analysis for the different planes of narrative, distinctions of person for the discourse plane and of tense for the story plane, for example, and with it also comes, at least as a characteristic tendency of those who think in these terms and perhaps as a necessary consequence, a subordination of subject to object, person to event, discourse to story. Thus the narrator will be seen as a means to the telling of a given story and he will be analyzed in terms of whether he is in first- or second- or third-person relation to figures in the story, while the story will be analyzed as a sequence of events variously rearranged in their narration and constitutive of an action.

I believe, however, that this model of narrative substitutes a specific determination of the relation between the narrating and the narrated for a complete account of the possible relations between them. In fact the remarks of a number of the other panelists can be construed in these terms not as rejections of the "dual" character of narrative but as corrections of the categorical distinction between the two planes involved. Thus the deconstructionist observations presented by Jonathan Arac can be seen as calling attention to the story as a construction of the discoursing person, not as an independent object, and to the discoursing person as a figure in a story which he can never finally tell himself. The category of time which structuralist dualisms like Chatman's

and Genette's associate with the analysis of the events on the story plane is introduced by deconstruction into the consciousness of the speakers on the discourse plane as a condition limiting their efforts to control their own meaning. Narrative irony turns on itself and becomes a habit of self-objectification, when temporality escapes its confines in the story and becomes a recognized condition of the discoursing subject. Not "two logics" but a single and rather unforgiving logic is here made to apply to both terms in the narrative duality.

Wladyslaw Godzich's critical semiotics also insists upon a single logic for these terms, but one which, instead of objectifying the narrating subject, personifies the narrated object. The narrator in this view endows the object with his own voice as he imitates the voice of the object, sensing its independent life and competence as he endows it with his own life by virtue of his own competences. The transformation of "object" or "topic" into "hero" carries the category of "person" from the discourse to the story plane, just as the deconstructionists carry "tense" and "object" the other way. Both moves get their radical edge from their violation of the recognized segregation of predicates for subject and object or story and discourse, producing subject and subject, object and object, story and story, discourse and discourse.

Along similar lines, we may understand Pratt's and Rabkin's treatments of narration as action, for both transferred the category of action from the object represented to the speaker representing. Both treated speech as a kind of action toward a listener, though Pratt retained as a special category narrative speech which represents events in overall conformity to their chronological occurrence while Rabkin made narrative the equivalent

of all speech aimed at a listener with no criterion governing what it reports. Both of them called attention to narrative as acting on a listener who was imagined not as either the potential objectifier of the speaker or as the necessary reviver of the speaker's words but as the more or less resistant object of political or personal manipulation. In effect, the more the listener is like the speaker and aware of what the speaker is doing to him, the less he permits it to be done. No one is persuaded in a world of rhetoricians, or only the weak are persuaded. From the perspective of these critics, Culler's project of discovering the conventions by which competent readers of narrative read appears as an attempt to codify the norms which a powerful group has managed to impose on those less powerful. The unexamined "we" of competence theory for them carries the tone of a royal "we."

Though these rhetorical perspectives counter the dualism of speaker and object of speech with the dualism of speaker and listener, allowing the object no convincing force in itself or denying the listener any independent access to it, I think it is more fruitful to treat this model and the others we have considered as a particular determination of the relations among speaker, object of discourse, and listener rather than as a two-termed alternative to that three-termed relation. Here the object is deprived of independent standing and made a function of the speaker, just as in Culler's model the listener is in effect held constant while the distinctions and relations between the speaker and the object are explored. (It is striking in this regard that when Prince's concept of "narratee" enters into structuralist discussions like Chatman's it is absorbed under the heading of "discourse" and does not receive attention as a necessary third perspective. Narratees are listeners imagined as functions of narrators). Each of these views, and those of Arac and Godzich as well, determines its relation

of speaker to object or speaker to listener on the basis of some supposition about the third term in the relation.

A complete theory of narrative, I believe, should not allow itself to accept one such supposition and follow out its implications but should explore the field of possible determinations of the relations among all these terms and the field of works and problems which they jointly subtend. If we define narrative in general as "representing discourse" and literary narratives as "representations of representing discourse," several possibilities will open to us. First, we will be able to distinguish narrative discourse from both discourse in general and representation in general--a version of the Platonic distinction of the "mixed" diction from both pure diegesis and pure mimesis. Second, we will be able to explore all of the relations proposed by the panelists among the representer, the represented, and the representee, without improperly presuming which relations must hold in any given case or how any given term must be determined. The representer need not be a manipulator, the represented need not be an action or event or story, the representee need not be the nemesis or the echo of the representer, but what any one is taken to be must have consequences for how the other two are determined--consequences critical inquiry can formulate and judge. Finally, we will be able to describe and explore in these terms the ways in which critical discourse and narrative discourse are like and unlike one another, for much critical discourse is representing discourse which determines a consequential relation among the three terms in question and some critical discourse aspires to the condition of literary narrative, the condition of objectified or represented representing discourse. The problems of our own community of discourse, of our defining our objects, our colleagues,

and ourselves, are problems we can make more explicit and perhaps move toward resolving in the terms of such a theory of narrative. To recognize the contingent and therefore chosen character of the ways we have learned to imagine our relations to our authors and to one another may lead us to envision and to act toward the creation of a community in which we are read better than we have read. The great satisfaction of membership in a professional community of discourse is to write in this hope.

December 27, 1980

Secretary, SCE

Something that I am concerned about with the SCE is that it seems, through the concept of being "in the dialogue," to enshrine academic fashions structurally, instead of, as I think should be done, looking for alternate models of critical theory. "Deconstructive Criticism" is no more a definitive model than any other. Its limitation is that it takes all materials of art language as inherently equal rather than justifying or explaining the unique contribution of one or another kind of art language. Especially it seems to break down when it is applied, as a body of critical theory underlying practical criticism, when it is applied to language "experiments" (or whatever one wants to call unconventional uses of language) which are already, in themselves, deconstructions--the kinds of neo-modernisms that diverge from so-called post-modernism of the 1940's to the 1960's. Thus to treat it as any more true than older modes of theory is at least debatable. The system that I devised in my Dialectic of Centuries (New York: Printed Editions, 1978), and which I have since developed by writing a teleology which I will present at Stephen Foster's conference at Iowa on the avant-garde, is an example of an alternate model which is oriented specifically towards neo-modernism. But of course others, many others, are possible.

At this point I think it would be helpful to cease attempting to enrich critical theory by the use of linguistic models and concepts, and to seek out other sources such as set theory, phenomenological psychology and such like inputs. Academic inertia and fashion simply are not helpful any more if, indeed, they ever were.

Very cordially,

Dick Higgins
P.O. Box 27
Barrytown, NY 12507

NEWS & NOTICES

SCE Associated Meeting, MMLA

November 5-7, 1981
Olympic Resort and Spa
Oconomowoc, Wisconsin

Session I: Community vs. Dissemination

Chair: Patricia Harkin Sosnoski

Papers: "Community as a Critical Concept"

Charles Altieri, Univ. of Washington
"--ismes / feminins"

Verena Conley, Iowa State University

Respondents: Mary Wiseman, Humanities Institute,
Brooklyn College; and Donald Marshall,
University of Iowa

Session II: Community vs. Dissemination

Chair: James J. Sosnoski

Papers: "Righting Communal Discourse: Graff,
Hassan, Lyotard"

Timothy Murray, Cornell University

"Meaning and the Law"

Daniel Brewer, Cornell University

"Literature Against Itself in Social
Perspective"

Britton Harwood, Miami University

Respondents: Gerald Graff, Northwestern University,
and Evan Watkins, Michigan State University.

SCE Associated Meeting, SAMLA

for information, contact:

Gregory Ulmer
Department of English
University of Florida
Gainesville, FL 32611

SCE Associated Meeting, SCMLA

for information, contact:

Julie Ann Lepick
English Department
Texas A & M University
College Station, TX 77843

Note: A separate mailing concerning these
meetings will be sent shortly.

SCE Associated Meetings, NEMLA Convention

Hunter College, New York,
April 3-5, 1982

1. CALL FOR PANELISTS: SCE Workshop on the concepts of production and reception.

Panelists will formulate the questions they believe need to be raised about these concepts at this time. The discussion in the workshop will focus on the reasons for formulating these questions in the terms chosen by the panelists. Our aim is to generate a series of exchanges on these issues.

Prospective panelists (who must be or be willing to become NEMLA members) should respond to the following questions, and return their responses by the first week in October to:

Susan M. Elliott
19 Sorrento Street
Worcester, MA 01602

1. What questions do you feel we need to ask ourselves at present about the concepts of production and reception in the theory and practice of literary study?
2. What problematic critical situations would you identify as the origin of your questions?
3. What works would help us in understanding why you have formulated the questions above in the terms you have chosen, or would illustrate the problematic critical situations you have identified.

II. WORKSHOP ON THE WORK OF FREDERIC JAMESON

Please send proposals and abstracts of papers to Susan M. Elliott at the address above. Materials for both of these workshops will be available at cost prior to the meeting.

SCE ASSOCIATED MEETINGS, MLA, New York, 1981

1. Session 145: "The Return of the Text,"
December 28, 1981
10:15-11:30 Room 524-6, Hilton

Chair: Wallace Martin, Univ. of Toledo

Papers: "The Economics of the Imagination,"
Kurt Heinzelman, Univ. of Texas
"Reading as Writing"
Cynthia Chase, Cornell University
"Death, Perversion, Grace: Rousseau's
Confessions, Book II"
Felicity Baker, University College, London

Respondents: Michel Pierssens, Univ. of Michigan and
Patricia Lawlor, Tufts University.

Papers for this session will be published in SCE Reports 10.
For copies, write to: SCE, 6273 19th N.E., Seattle, WA.
98115.

2. Session 593: Teaching Courses in Criticism: Criticism
as a Genre.
December 29, 1981
9:00-10:15 PM, Gibson, Hilton

Moderator: Leroy Searle, University of Washington

Panelists: Jeffrey Plank, Georgia Inst. of Technology,
James Davidson, Washington State University,
Jeffrey Peck, University of Washington.

This session will be a workshop on course design. For
materials, write to: SCE, 6273 19th N.E., Seattle, WA.
98115.

3. Session 532: Open Business Meeting, 5:15-6:30 PM,
Clinton, Hilton, December 29, 1981.

Other meetings of interest:

MLA Convention, 1981:

Session 558: "THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION
OF THE NEW CRITICISM,"
29 December, 1981, 7:15-8:30 PM, Room 543,
Hilton

Moderator: Evan Watkins, Michigan State University

Panelists: Paul Bové, Univ. of Pittsburgh
William Cain, Wellesley College
Roger Meiners, Michigan State University

Response: Gerald Graff, Northwestern University.

For copies of papers, send \$2.00 by December 20,
to:

Evan Watkins
English Department
Morrill Hall
Michigan State University
East Lansing, MI 48824

THE SOCIETY FOR CRITICAL EXCHANGE, INC.

SCE was organized as a not-for-profit corporation in 1976, to encourage cooperative inquiry in criticism.

The Society operates through a flexible structure of coordinated projects, on the premise that sound research and teaching in literary criticism demands careful attention to the process of inquiry, and depends upon conditions of open intellectual exchange.

For more information, write to:

The Society for Critical Exchange, Inc.
6273 19th Ave. N.E.
Seattle, Washington 98115

Please enroll me as a member of SCE. Enclosed is my contribution for \$7.00 (Students: \$5.00).

(name): _____

(address):

(areas of interest) _____