
Proceedings of MLA Special Session 550:

"The Language of Criticism"

News and Notices

SCE REPORTS #2

CONTENTS

Editor's Note	2
I. PROCEEDINGS OF MLA SPECIAL SESSION 550: "The Language of Criticism"	
Responses to Papers:	
Edward Tomarken (Miami University) "The Audience of Critical Theory".	7
Matthew Marino (University of Alabama) "Theories and Models".	10
Replies:	
Robert J. Matthews (Rutgers University)	15
Jerome J. McGann (Johns Hopkins).	19
Paul Miers (Rutgers University)	23
Jeffrey Mehlman (Johns Hopkins)	26
Questions and Discussion:	28
"Postscript" Leroy Searle (Rochester)	40
II. NEWS AND NOTICES	46

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EDITOR'S NOTE

SCE Reports # 2 is primarily devoted to the proceedings of MLA Special Session 550: "The Language of Criticism," held on December 28, 1976, in New York City. The seminar was sponsored by the Society for Critical Exchange, Inc., in cooperation with the Modern Language Association. Organizers and discussion leaders were Leroy Searle and James Sosnoski.

The pages that follow are a virtually complete transcription of tape recordings made during the session. In the cases of the principal speakers, the text which appears here has been corrected or emended by its author. Questions from the floor appear substantially as they were asked. Ellipses indicate omissions of repetitions, redundancies, or inaudible passages on the tape. Brackets enclose an editorial guess at the direction of an incompletely articulated thought.

The papers under discussion by Professors McGann, Miers, and Matthews were printed in SCE Reports # 1. Professor Jeffrey Mehlman's paper, "Cataract: Diderot's Discursive Politics 1749-1751," was distributed prior to the seminar as SCE Reports Supplement # 1. Mr. Mehlman has requested that we publish the portion of his essay on Diderot (forthcoming in Glyph) from which his seminar remarks were derived rather than our transcript of them. Regrettably, Mr. Mehlman's text arrived after lay-out for this issue was completed. We are therefore reprinting SCE Reports Supplement # 1, with the addition of Mr. Mehlman's "postscript, à la Diderot," a copy of which is enclosed with this issue.

Copies of all papers are available (in limited quantities). If you desire extra copies of SCE Reports # 1, with Supplement, please send \$1.00 to cover printing and postage to SCE Reports, 220 South Beech Street, Oxford, Ohio 45056.

At the beginning of the seminar, the audience was asked by the organizers to address the question whether genuine exchange occurred. At the end, one member of the audience remarked that "we got a lot of stuff on the table--in a heap, but on the table."

It would certainly appear that the several discourses are discontinuous. Nevertheless, issues have emerged, and something near consensus was achieved on two interrelated points. No speaker was willing to countenance the dissociation of theory and praxis; most were skeptical about attempts to find a "metatheory," to articulate, in Alarik Skarstrom's words, "the ground of all grounds upon which we have always stood." Edward Tomarken's invocation of Ralph Cohen's argument that literary theory is a genre implies a reciprocal relationship between theory and praxis. Matthew Marino's "nervousness" about attempts to generalize upon "the wide range of activities" that is criticism, and Jerome McGann's insistence that the exigencies of the classroom not be ignored are similarly motivated by concern with praxis. From another philosophical and linguistic perspective, comes Jeffrey Mehlman's cryptic refusal to risk "idealism" or "hollowness of discourse" by separating his model ("if indeed the word model can be used") from Diderot's Tales (if indeed the word "Diderot's" can be used). Robert Matthews warns that the quest for an integrated critical perspective may, for no "good reason . . . constrain the domain of literary works." Paul Miers cheerfully concedes that "any closure has to be understood as fictive," and offers his procedure in the classroom as evidence that a "poetics of consciousness" need not be dogmatically imposed.

We would hope that this narrow area of agreement about the practical demands of literary criticism could serve as a ground on which exchange among these six critics might take place. Mr. Tomarken urged that "the Society for Critical Exchange must

begin by considering its beginning." Having done that, we are encouraged.

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Beginning with this issue of SCE Reports, we will announce publishing opportunities, conferences, calls for papers, the formation of research groups, and other professional events of interest to members of the Society, in a NEWS AND NOTICES section.

Please send such information--a poster or announcement will do--to SCE Reports, 220 South Beech Street, Oxford, Ohio 45056.

In this issue, please consult the NEWS AND NOTICES section for more detailed information concerning MLA Special Sessions for 1977, conferences, new journals and special issues, etc. We take special notice here of Reader: A Newsletter of Reader-Oriented Criticism and Teaching, published by Robert Crossman, 28 Cushing Street, Providence, Rhode Island 02906. We thank Mr. Crossman for his generous announcement of the formation of the Society for Critical Exchange, and happily respond in kind.

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Institutional assistance in the publication of this issue of SCE Reports was provided by the Departments of English at Miami University and the University of Rochester. We are especially grateful to Mary Alice Grassmick of Miami who generously, cheerfully, and accurately typed the copy for this issue.

Patricia Sosnoski
Managing Editor
SCE Reports

PROCEEDINGS: MLA SPECIAL SESSION 550:

"The Language of Criticism" December 28, 1976

PROCEEDINGS: MLA SPECIAL SESSION 550:
"The Language of Criticism" 12-28-77

The session was convened by Professor James Sosnoski of Miami University and Professor Leroy Searle of the University of Rochester. Following preliminary remarks by Professor Searle, briefly explaining the purposes of The Society for Critical Exchange in sponsoring projects that facilitate the extension of discussion in criticism, the session was opened by Professor Sosnoski, as moderator.

The following pages are a transcribed report, beginning with Professor Sosnoski's opening observations.

Mr. Sosnoski

We're going to begin with the respondents, and we've asked them to address themselves to the written positions of the authors of the papers. . . . After the respondents, each author will then comment on the underlying issues as he perceives them, and on the responses that have been given to him. Let me add one prenote: each of these six persons speaking tonight will speak with a different set of terms. . . . If I could borrow Ronald Crane's expression, they will each use a different critical language. Now the question which we hope that everyone here in this room today will address . . . is the following: if a genuine exchange occurs here tonight, under what conditions did it occur? What made it possible? On the other hand, if a genuine exchange does not occur, what prevented it? . . . First, Professor Tomarken.

THE AUDIENCE OF CRITICAL THEORY

Edward Tomarken
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Jerome McGann begins by asking us to consider the audience/reader of theoretical criticism: I regard this as a crucial question, a turning point in the history of theory and shall return to it. For McGann, the modern theorists, unlike their classical counterparts, speak only to one another, essentializing their interests. He urges that instead of debating about how a poem means we should consider why it is meaningful and what is the point of the analysis, thereby speaking to the interests of our audience. Surely a number of us would agree with McGann in his questioning of the assumption of "intrinsic" criticism, namely, that the practical critic explicates the text and the metacritic clarifies the principles of explication. Literary analysis must have to do with more than literature if the student in the classroom is not to waste his time and money. But the alternative offered by Professor McGann strikes me as a questionable bargain. The values and skills of criticism, we are told, are better acquired by studying imaginative texts which are organized according "to laws which the poet's own analytical act of composition institutes." Here I sense the ghost of formalism--presumably buried with the "intrinsic" school--and feel that the reader of this theory must ask how "public skills" are to be derived from the private imaginative worlds of "the unacknowledged legislators." The initial attempt to open the critical act to its audience has resulted in our encapsulation within a larger form--the dilemma of post-formalism.

Here I find Robert Matthews' clarification of the critical procedure helpful. So long as we insist that the commentator's task is to articulate meaning, the realms of life and art are separated by a chasm which cannot be crossed lest we commit the affective, genetic or intentional fallacies. Matthews persuasively argues that interpretation involves a context larger than meaning: the critic discerns a proposition which must entail a postulated individuated utterance. The art-work is seen as a speech-act. This notion demystifies interpretation and helps bridge the gap between literary language and ordinary language. In interpreting everyday speech we assume that the words are not a random melange but the utterance of a sane person or persons; the same assumption operates in interpreting art. But now, having gained entrance to the realm of art, the reader might ask Professor Matthews how we are to return to reality, that is, how is the content of an imaginative speech-act related to the content of an ordinary speech-act. The chasm of formalism has been spanned in one direction only. We are left to struggle back by way of our beliefs, predilections, preconceptions, all that mental clutter which if it were ever orderly and consistent would be a model, in the terminology of Paul Miers. Our various critical models are not, as the pluralist led us to hope, pointing up different facets of the art-work but are in conflict with one another, a sign of "intellectual crisis." Professor Miers suggests that Anthony Wilden's system theory, derived from Jacques Lacan, will enable us to understand how critical models complement rather than simply contradict one another: the crisis thus is a healthy one that will lead us toward a "poetics of consciousness." While the distinction between analog and digital is a subtle one, enabling us to understand for instance that Freudianism and structuralism are different orders of logic, a system of

systems must be all-inclusive. How does this system account for its own rise, for its own history? If it cannot then Wilden's critique of structuralism can be applied to his own system, namely that it is a methodology which implicitly becomes an ontology. To return to the audience of critical theory, we have been transported in Lacanian fashion across the chasm to human consciousness to be told we never left in the first place--we have been travelling within our own psyches. Such a notion turns its back upon its audience and upon the history of theory which has since its inception implicitly or explicitly made some gesture to its responders.

I would suggest that such a choice is solipsistic and offer the following alternative for your consideration. Ralph Cohen has proposed that "literary theory is a genre" (Centrum III, [Spring 1975], 45-64): "By considering literary theory as a genre, I mean to eliminate the following as redundant or meaningless questions: Is literary theory nonhistorical? Is literary theory cumulative? Is literary theory modeled upon scientific theory? Is a literary theory verifiable? Is literary theory possible?" (p. 45). We cannot begin to give Professor McGann's student his money's worth until we account for how the question has been answered, evaded, misunderstood in the past, how our formulations of the problem involving the audience for literary theory is related to and distinguishable from past formulations. To assert that art-theory is logical and need not be concerned with its past is to turn our backs on ourselves. We can never communicate successfully with our audience without first accounting for ourselves. The Society for Critical Exchange must begin by considering its beginning. Why do we have a Byron scholar, a follower of Lacan and an ordinary language philosopher confronting each other here today?

MODELS AND THEORIES

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I apologize for not addressing the papers directly; I address them in a general way. I suppose I can be excused because I am a linguist and not a critic.

When a paper deals with a text, it appears to have a locus. However, when literary critics do not use texts, the linguist must work by analogy with points of reference in linguistics. Since I am already nervous about theory in linguistics, I project an analogous nervousness about the language of criticism.

The thought that one might deal with theories of literature just as one might deal with theories of language seems to be supported by the vocabulary and argument of Mr. McGann's paper, but as I read through the other papers, they seemed to be suggesting theories of criticism, which would be equivalent to theories of linguistics. A theory of linguistics is not a usable idea. Linguistics is just too many activities to allow itself to be encompassed by anything but a trivial theory of linguistics, but the situation can be partially remedied by talking about a linguistic theory just as Mr. Matthews closes by talking about a critical theory. Such a difference is not a mere rhetorical trick; it points out that one may theorize about a wide range of activities, but may not be able to create a theory that comprehends a wide range of activities.

Still, the seminar's touchstone concept of integrated critical activity suggests that we should consider a theory of criticism. After all, doing criticism may be a more unified activity than doing linguistics. One starts with a simple question: "What is a theory of criticism a theory of?" By the end of the papers the question must be slightly

modified to include three operant terms: "What is an adequate theory of criticism a theory of?"

Now levels of adequacy are something linguists have concerned themselves with. A hierarchical set of levels of adequacy, from observational through descriptive to explanatory have supplied the rhetorical device that opened a lot of linguistic papers. The ideas were rarely used to close papers where one would think that they would be most useful as evaluatory criteria to be applied to the material disclosed. The main reason why the levels of adequacy are now evoked less in linguistics and were hardly ever applied earnestly is tied to one of those nagging questions again: "Adequate to what?" As a linguistic activity stimulated what seemed to be explanatory activity, the observational and descriptive adequacies seem to be less possible. The upper levels did not entail the lower levels, and the type of adequacy seemed to depend very much on the intentions of the linguist. So unless one took adequate to mean comprehensive, one would have to ask the nature of the linguistic activity before one could begin to determine if there were adequacy. If one takes adequate to mean comprehensive, our what in "Adequate to what?" would seem to be everything.

On the other hand, the problem of the concept of theory suffers not from the lack of a place to reside, but in the problem of too many places. Mr. McGann speaks of the law of gravity to illustrate that it is merely conventional. It is a demonstration that is dear to me because it recurs in most of my courses; and even though the pedagogical value of the example is so great that I will not give it up, I do feel guilty about squandering the difference between a law of gravitation and permission to go to the boys' room. I think that the range of meanings for the term theory sometimes squanders differences that would be useful. I would like to characterize three uses of the term

theory in the contexts of natural sciences, linguistics, and literary criticism--knowing full well that the simplifications are so gross that they might be called caricatures.

The characterizations must be preceded by the separation of two terms which have a tendency to converge: theory and model. There is a difference between a theoretician and a model maker. A model is one of perhaps many calculuses for a theory to manifest itself in. A particular model makes a theory capable of operations and perhaps capable of some sort of secondary verification.

The first case in point is the use of the term theory in the natural sciences: a theory of gravitation might manifest itself in a law of gravitation. All things being equal a counter-example to the operations of a law of gravitation would do away with the law and strongly call the theory of gravitation into question. My use of Mr. Miers' terms would be that the law is digital or syntactic, while the theory is analogic or semantic. The first case both illustrates how to distinguish models from theories, and how one sense of theory is manifested as laws in natural science.

The common brand of linguistic activity today supplies the case of the use of theory as manifest in a model which is an operational calculus that conventional terminology calls rules. The model generates a series of algorithmic manifestations which may be compared in some way to sentences. The rules can be weakly verified by such a comparison. Simple violations of the rules do not necessarily call the model into question--indeed natural language and literature are replete with such violations. The violations call for alternative strategies of interpretation, or rejection of the sentences; but the rules can survive the violations. If the speech community were to systematically violate the rules, the rules would change; but the model would only change to that extent.

The theory, if it were useful, might well stay intact. Even as Geoffrey Sampson suggests, on the one hand, that one strategy for the use of linguistic rules is to treat them like laws, we are now getting, on the other hand, more and more expository, nonalgorithmic rules in certain types of linguistics that suggest an opposite strategy for the treatment of rules.

While one can refer to Sampson's suggestion as rules qua laws, what can one call the rules that move in the other direction? The unnamed phenomenon does lead to the use of the term theory in much of literary criticism. The concept of theory is there; but it is unlabelled. The law of gravitation yielded to strong verification procedures, the rules of language yielded to an obvious but weaker verification procedure, but what kind of calculus, with what kind of verification, does a model from a theory in literary criticism indicate? Critics can certainly create models that act like law-governed or rule-governed calculuses, but there seems to be a constant seeking after models that do not lend themselves either to these stronger or weaker verification procedures. I still don't know what to call the third level equivalents to laws and rules; but whatever they are, they don't invite obvious means of verification.

Most things that are perceived as critical theories manifest themselves as local modelling strategies which create a circumscribed area for the critic to work on. In much the same way that linguists create algorithmic models called grammars to work on, most critics seem to cut off doable chunks. I intuit that the closure of linguistic models is reasonably motivated by the structures of language; I don't clearly see that literary critical choices of models are as well-motivated, but I suspect that they might be.

I suspect that the same kind of empiricism that

rushes back against a model of gravitation and flows back against a model of language, seeps back against a model of literary theory. But the source of the empirical data is almost unmentionable in some critical circles. The values of the critics are the empirical data that verify the nameless equivalents of laws and rules. The data are weak because they are predicated on internal values of single critics, and they are often unexamined--but they are none-the-less real.

Having shown that I am not sure what adequacy and theory are, we are back to the original question: "What is an adequate theory of criticism a theory of?" There is an answer on the basis of experience in linguistics: it would be a theory of human behavior. Since it has neither been demonstrated nor even weakly suggested that a theory can circumscribe human behavior, one must remain content with partial theories that help to inform the limited areas that they do circumscribe.

RESPONSES FROM AUTHORS

Robert J. Matthews
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What impressed me most about the three published contributions and the discussion here tonight is how well we all avoided the issues raised by Searle and Sosnoski. Such avoidance-behavior is significant; some consideration should be given as to why this happened.

Perhaps the best thing I could do at this point is to give a very brief summary of some of the highlights of my paper and then spend the rest of the time discussing my notion of theory and praxis. Various notions of theory seem to be floating around; I have the impression that all of us have something quite different in mind when we talk about a theory of criticism.

In my paper I suggested that we are not prepared to undertake the task of determining the relevant criteria for evaluating critical concepts and terms

because we have not yet settled the question of the goals and purposes of criticism. The crux of my argument was that received critical theory is hopelessly flawed by its choice of the wrong sort of abstract entity as the primitive element of critical analysis. My claim is that critics are concerned with propositions rather than meanings--or to put it in terms of modern linguistic theory, with pragmatics, rather than with semantics. The essential difference between propositions and meanings is this: propositions, unlike meanings, are not inherent in sentences or texts, since the proposition expressed by a sentence in a context is a function of relevant aspects of that context of expression. In other words, propositions are properties of pairs--of sentences and contexts, i.e., of texts and contexts.

Because the proposition expressed by a sentence is an explicit function of the context of expression, a critical theory that takes propositions as primitive will accord an explicit theoretical role to the art-institutional context within which texts express literary works. I take it to be a singular defect of received critical theory that it accords no explicit theoretical role to that context. The replacement of meanings by propositions would have a profound impact on our conception of literature, and derivately, on our conception of literary criticism. For if, as seems likely, the art-institutional context within which a text expresses a particular work of art, is not determined solely by the artist producing that text, but is partly determined by the contextualizing labor of critics, then critical praxis is productive. The precise way in which critical praxis modifies this context would be a central problem for a propositional theory of criticism. But I am not worried about those details here.

Well, if the labor of critics is productive, then Sosnoski and Searle's proposal that we seek an

integrated perspective would have to be construed as a proposal to constrain the domain of literary works. I think there may be good reasons for constraining this domain; however, simply promoting effective communication among critics does not seem to be one of them. For that reason I am skeptical about the implicit assumptions underlying the seminar.

My argument for the replacement of meanings by propositions seemingly blurs an important distinction between critical theory and literary theory, for in effect I argue that because literary works are objects of a certain sort, criticism must itself be of a certain sort. But I think that this is entirely in order; one should expect that one's theory of criticism would be shaped by one's theory of the objects of criticism, though perhaps what is less expected is that literary theory would in turn be shaped by critical theory. But indeed it is. It was the impracticability of received critical theory that led me to conclude that received literary theory is untenable. It is a significant fact about the critical theories put forward by both critics and philosophers that, whatever the theory is a theory of, it's not a theory of critical practice. This is a fact that should be of concern to people engaged in these metacritical endeavors.

The source of this problem can be traced both to inattention to the actual practice of criticism as well as a failure to recognize the mutual dependency of critical theory and literary theory. Such a dependence is precisely what a propositional account would predict, for I am essentially arguing works of art can only be understood in terms of total art-institutional context in which both artist and critic are co-productive.

Finally, I would like to mention the distinction between theory and praxis. This distinction is quite important, but it's generally confused. The reason it is confused is that actually when critics

talk about "theory," they often have at least two different types of theories in mind. They have in mind what might be called a justificational theory, which is part of critical praxis. This sort of theory constitutes the basis for the statements that a critic will make when he is called upon to justify some aspect of his praxis. Now, justificational theory is part of critical praxis in the same way as reasons for performing a certain act are a part of human action. We give these reasons when we're called upon to justify our action.

Justificational theory is part of critical praxis; however, there is a different sort of theory, which I would call a descriptive theory, which is separate from the praxis--independent of it in the sense that you can have an ongoing critical praxis without an associated descriptive theory. It was a descriptive theory that I was articulating in my own paper: namely, a theory that would be concerned with giving some account of the praxis of criticism, the total praxis, including what I'm calling its justificational theory.

Having drawn this distinction between justificational and descriptive theories, one sees immediately that these two types of theories have different goals. Justificational theories are concerned with justifying the praxis to other people engaged in the praxis, whereas descriptive theories are concerned with giving a descriptive account of what is going on. But once one sees this difference in purpose, then a lot of the cross-discussion in the papers contributed to this seminar may be resolved. For example, I don't think that a descriptive theory would necessarily result in an improved critical praxis. I think the only thing you can say about a descriptive theory is that it aims to understand that praxis, but understanding a praxis does not entail that the praxis will be improved. In fact such understanding sometimes undermines the praxis.

Jerome J. McGann
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I came to this seminar because the title was "The Language of Criticism" and not "The Theory of Criticism." I have to lay my cards on the table: I'm relatively uninterested in theory. But I am very concerned about praxis and there has been a great deal of talk about praxis. I did think the papers were rather good. Now, I say this because when I wrote the paper that I did write, my concern in the paper was to deal with the subject of the language of criticism in terms of what the language is directed toward, that is, in terms of a classroom situation. When I talk about the audience, I'm really talking about students; I'm not talking about us. And my whole interest in this subject really began in the late sixties, when I saw in Chicago a rather serious breakdown in the functional ability of a great many people I admired in their use of language, and in the way they analyzed other situations, and in the way they fell on their faces. So then, after that, I began to think about (this is a very old question) how one was to teach people to read and write better and also how to analyze certain kinds of complex human situations a little better. So that my interest really is in not setting up a model of a theory, but in a model of a procedure for operating in a classroom. And, as I saw, the principal interest, the thing I was trying to talk about in this essay, is writing and reading at more or less complex levels.

Now I'll get to that in a minute. First I want to defend myself against an attack made upon something I wrote in my paper. A caveat was brought to the "alternative offered by Professor McGann" as a questionable bargain, and specifically to the quotation raising "the ghost of formalism." "'The values and skills of criticism,' we are told, are better acquired by studying imaginative texts which are organized according to 'laws which the poet's own analytical act of composition institutes'." There's a further piece to that sentence: "but which it does not comprehend." I won't go into that now but it makes a great deal of difference to add those further words.

Now, I want to come on to something that Mr. Matthews raised when he talks about propositions and meaning and context. This is a subject of great interest to me and I am much in sympathy with his interest in restoring one's sense that meaning is profoundly involved in context. But I have to say that I'm not at all sure what his idea about context is. When I'm talking about context what I do--and I will raise the ghost of formalism--is see context as a literarily introduced material. That is to say, context resides in, or at least is defined by, the contours of whatever text you have in front of you. But what Mr. Matthews says seems to imply that context really is criticism; that it is criticism which gives the context to a work of art or a poem or something. And while that's true, that extends context at least beyond what I would initially be interested in talking about.

Secondly, in relation to this, I don't really understand how--and I would stand with Sidney on this--literary works can make propositions. They affirm nothing and deny nothing. They are fictive worlds, it seems to me, and the propositional status of them has to come into being, I think, only in a classroom or in a contextualized situation of discussion of sorts. That really is an

important question, thrown out for some comment later on.

Now, finally, to a more articulate description of why I'm interested in or how I'm interested in literary criticism, in terms of classroom use. What I try to do in my classroom, is to develop methodologies for dealing with different kinds of contexts and for trying to explain or help the students to understand how the context impinges on every aspect of meaning that they encounter, from the most primitive situations. Let me give you an example: in a course I taught at Chicago for ten years, a humanities course, I taught Pride and Prejudice once, and the paper that was assigned was for the students to write Darcy's letter to his aunt. Now that seems a ghost of perhaps high school papers, but the more you think about the nature of that paper, the more problematic it becomes. Also, there's an incredibly useful sort of exercise--there are a lot of exercises of this sort that we employ--at primitive levels of reading and writing and analyzing to help students be able to manipulate language in perspicuous ways, also to analyze how to be perspicuous about the use of language. But there are other kinds of things and another sort of problem. I think that students in classrooms are not presented often enough with problem-solving situations. For example, in another classroom we were reading Don Juan, and in the first canto, as you all know, Juan gets into a bedroom situation with the wife of Don Alfonso. It comes apart, explodes, when Don Alfonso finds Juan's shoes under his wife's bed. He knows that Juan is there but he can't find him. And so he sort of goes away and figures he's getting old or he's been duped in some strange way or whatever. In any case, his eye then catches the shoes just before he goes out of the room. Now, the question is, how did the shoes get there? Well, that's a very very complicated critical problem. It's not

the sort of problem that we ordinarily deal with when we talk about meaning in terms of poems and novels and so forth but, in order to solve that problem, you have to deal with an enormous complex of contexts that impinge on that one little scene there, how the shoes got there. Also, in fact in another way, you could raise the problem of how Alfonso even saw the shoes. Or, similarly, write the end of "Christabel," or at least outline the end of "Christabel." This is a practical problem for a student to encounter but it requires a rather complex act of analysis in order to perceive it.

I just want to say, in closing, that I raise these examples because, as I said at the beginning, my interest in criticism is in developing, in students, at all levels, greater skills in writing and reading competence, and thereby the larger matter, analytic competence. We find that, even at the most advanced levels, that is to say, among graduate students, the incompetence in the handling of language is enormous. For me, literary criticism has to face this primitive question first, before it gets on to other matters.

Paul Miers
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I want to say first of all, in response to Professor Tomarken, that I am not now nor have I ever been a follower of Jacques Lacan. And, what I tried to present in my paper is not necessarily advocating Wilden's version of systems theory as the conclusive model or the language to be used in critical praxis, or the language that will solve all of our problems. My first interest in writing this paper is . . . really very simple, I think, beyond all the theoretical considerations of what a theory is and what a model is--simply a way of communication, or exchange, in terms of the topic of this seminar. of the vast amount of information, knowledge, that's being brought to bear on literature from a huge number of what we would have once considered to be extrinsic disciplines. It seems to me that, up until the past ten, twenty years, there was a fairly clearly received tradition based on, first of all, classical rhetoric, which Professor McGann talks about. In this century with formalism/New Criticism, also largely intrinsic to literature, we felt that we had, out of Brooks and Warren, some fairly specific and intelligible ways to talk about how we're going to read and how the literary text functions. In the past twenty years, there has been what I term the explosion of . . . extradisciplinary theories, models and information being brought to bear on literature: speech act theories, phenomenology, more and more psychoanalysis, structuralism, semiotics, you can go down the list. It's gotten very difficult for us to talk about what is common among these kinds of systems. Is there some way that we can see, despite the fact

that you don't want to buy into the whole ideology of Freud, Lacan, structuralism, whatever it is, some new tactics for critical practice? We can take certain insights, certain understandings from the work of people in other fields and use them in certain ways because they are saying something significant and important about the way language operates, particularly the language used in a literary-imaginative sense, whatever that is.

Now the particular thing that interests me in my paper is what I refer to from Paul de Man's Blindness and Insight. What fascinates me in talking about literary critics, is to understand the ways in which critics seem almost, as de Man says, at the point of their greatest blindness to have their most significant insights. And I was trying to find some way to account for that. Now I used the example of Freud several times throughout the paper because I think Freud and psychoanalysis is a very interesting phenomenon. You can see through Freud's development that he's continually formulating new models to account for what he was trying to understand about the workings of the unconscious. But when you start reading Freud closely, and this is the great value of the "French Freud" and Derrida, you begin to see the most interesting, significant part of Freud is where Freud is working closely with the particular text, the discourse of the patient. Freud's insights are arrived at not despite this sometimes confused and crazy and, to many people, reductive methodology, but almost because of it. He reaches certain points where he's forced to make certain leaps, and find new ways of interpretation. This is what fascinates me in trying to understand the underlying models which I think are not always completely articulated in Freud. What Freud says are his models at certain times are not necessarily what he's working with.

And to go back to the point Professor McGann was raising, I think there is also a problem in the

classroom. As I said, I don't consider myself a psychoanalytic critic; I find an immense amount of things in Freud and in psychoanalytic theory to be very useful in talking about literary works. What's the nature of fantasy? How are these fantasies working? But there is a problem in presenting this to a class, because you continually get the usual reaction against Freudian ideology, against buying wholesale the Oedipal myth. Students say, "Oh, I really love my father," and claim that you're reading in the phallic imagery in the text. I continually say, "No, I'm not interested in converting you to Freud; I'm not necessarily maintaining that the Freudian model of literature works." If you look at the text, if you look at its discourse, if you look at the linguistic transformations that go on in the text, there are, to use Freud's famous phrase, uncanny things happening in the text. And it seems to me that Freud is the person who discovered this.

Now I do agree with what Professor Tomarken said: any methodology has, hidden in it, a certain kind of ontology. Certainly the crisis and confusion that's been created recently, by the whole movement of what we call deconstruction or poststructuralism, is exactly, particularly with Derrida, this exposure of the hidden ontology, the logocentrism in Western thought. Methodologies, models, have built into them certain kinds of ontologies; Newton's theory of gravitation also had built into it certain kinds of ideologies, the kind of ideology that we talk about when we speak of a Newtonian world view. But if we can understand what models are describing (and I think I have a way of doing that) whether or not you want to accept the ideology, it's possible to see, in psychoanalysis, phenomenology, speech act theory, whatever you're talking about, some important insights about the nature of language. So the thing I am most concerned with is what I would call a notion of complementarity. I realize there's a problem in

taking metaphors from science, but we do need to find ways to communicate without getting into these ideological debates, and learn something about the different kinds of insights that different people are getting using their various methodologies and theories.

Jeffrey Mehlman
The Johns Hopkins University
Baltimore, Maryland 21218

QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION

My apologies for departing somewhat from the format of the standard response. But I think that there are many points of intersection between what I am going to say . . . and many of the papers given.

To choose one point of intersection, my own paper, I suppose, might be regarded as an effort to dismantle what seems to me too easily homogeneous (in Jerome McGann's phrase on page 4) "a discipline of mind and hand or clarity of thought and style." In fact, I might claim that the whole lesson of Diderot's work . . . might be interpreted as a demonstration of the proposition that hands can have nothing but a fictive or metaphorical relation to clarity. . . .

[Note: Mr. Mehlman's remarks, deriving from his postscript, à la Diderot, are omitted here. The complete postscript is printed in SCE Reports # 1 Supplement, See Editor's Note above, p. 2.]

QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION

Britton J. Harwood
Miami University
Oxford, Ohio 45056

I have a question for Professor McGann. You write towards the end of your paper--as it happens, the sentence has already come up--and I don't think the part that's left off however, is crucial to my question. You write, "the paradoxical fact about imaginative form is that it organizes its data according to laws which the poet's own analytic act of composition institutes." Now what strikes me about this sentence is that these laws are exactly institutive, that is, constitutive, to take a popular term. That is, they are laws which, in some sense, enable, make possible, the activity which conforms to the laws. Now, as against that, you write earlier, "theory does not anticipate practice, it follows practice." Now there's no doubt that the art work precedes criticism of the art work and therefore, in some sense, the art work ipso facto comes before critical theory. But it is not at all clear to me that critical theory in fact follows practice rather than anticipates practice. . . . It's true that with gases, we'll say, which exert certain pressures at certain temperatures, that the activity of gases precedes any theory of gases, and it's true that speaking English, among non-English teachers, is an activity which precedes linguistics, but I'm not at all clear that criticism is an activity which precedes critical theory. That is, my question is what makes you think that critical theory is not constitutive, like the rules of chess--or, in a way, etiquette? It's true people eat, have been eating for a long while, . . . as, we'll say, there are book reviews in newspapers, critical praxis in that sense, for a long while, then etiquette comes in and makes

possible certain forms of eating--a well-known example, actually, in speech act theory. Now, my question is, what makes you think that critical theory is not a rule or a law in the constitutive sense, that is, making possible the activity which conforms to it, as the rules of chess make chess possible, or etiquette makes a certain form of eating possible?

Mr. McGann

Two answers to that. My reason for saying that is that it seems to be the case in most instances. If literary theory is an exception to this rather general appearance of things, then it's an exception. I don't think it's an exception. It is true, for example, that literary theory as it is practised now is influencing literary criticism, but we come back to that business of literary theory being a genre in itself. And it has become, in fact, a practical operation, with language, as much as the writing of poetry or something else. (First answer.)

The second answer comes back to the proposition the act of composition institutes, but does not comprehend. The distinction is between institutive, as it were, law, or case law. There is a moment when law is instituted; and then there is a great history in which case law develops, or in which the law is interpreted. And that's . . . essentially my point, which is really Shelley's point. What I thought I was doing there was just paraphrasing Shelley's argument in the Defense. It institutes in that sense, but it does not constitute it, because there is the whole history of case law yet to be developed.

Richard Palmer
MacMurray College
Jacksonville, Illinois 62650

I'd like just to continue that point, with maybe an example that when the critic understands his interpretive act in a certain way, he goes about his activity in the classroom [in a corresponding way.] Say, for instance, you mentioned that theory influences criticism, but in your talk here, you refer to your activity in the classroom which is not necessarily criticism. It might be something a little more encompassing, that is, a kind of mediation and fostering and a lot of other things which you do that are related to what you think the transaction with literature is.

Mr. McGann

Well, it's criticism in the larger sense.

Mr. Palmer

Well, I would prefer to use the word interpretation rather than criticism because criticism . . . has a narrower connotation, so I prefer the broader term interpretation and I also prefer the broader term philosophy to theory. And if I had ten pages I could make a defense of the greater advantages of the term philosophy of literary interpretation, rather than theory of literary criticism, critical theory, or theory of this or that.

In fact, I think that many of the problems that were raised today could be handled through a different kind of conceptuality. In fact, I'd like to raise the question of the extent to which many of the descriptions here use the vocabulary of natural science in order to understand what it is that

we're doing when we have transactions with literary texts. I'd like just to raise that general question: to what extent are we using the vocabulary and the thought forms of the natural scientist in order to reflect on our interpretive activity within a text? In other words, that is, I think, something to think about.

Mr. Matthews

Well, I don't really see that we're trying to model our account of criticism after the natural sciences. In my own case at least, my proposal is to treat criticism as a type of institutional praxis, like religious behavior. Critical theorizing is modeled after the natural sciences only to the extent that the same thing might be said of the other social sciences. I'm not sure that the latter claim can be sustained.

Mr. Palmer

I think that . . . the problems that you encountered or raised about sticking with the topic of the seminar and the issue you raised at the end of your paper on the question of pluralism--why is it necessary that we . . . overcome pluralism?--I think that this is part of the scientific demand for a unitary theory that every little part agree.

Mr. Matthews

Yes, I agree. I think that the assumption that we need an integrated perspective does underlie the seminar. As I suggested in my paper, I disagree with the idea that there should be a single perspective, a single sort of justificational theory

that would regulate the behavior of critics. But I don't think that my position is incompatible with the quest for a descriptive theory. What our theory may show us, in fact, is that there are no essential features about criticism that can be so characterized.

Bill Rueckert
SUNY
Geneseo, New York 14454

I have two questions: I have one for Jeffrey Mehlman and one for Paul Miers. I wonder if Jeffrey Mehlman could describe the model that he is working from without reference to Diderot and I wonder if Paul Miers can apply his model to any text. I'm not asking that ironically; those are my two questions.

Mr. Mehlman

Well, I'm not sure it would interest me, really.

Mr. Rueckert

In other words, are you willing to separate the application of the model, in other words, working within the model, from the tremendous textual specificity of your discourse?

Mr. Mehlman

Well, it seems to me that, if I'm right what I'm dealing with is simultaneously an application of the model and the genealogy of the model, if indeed the word model can be used. My thought is that, I

suppose I don't have very much faith in these metalinguistic distinctions between theory on the one hand, practice on the other, critical practice on the other, and literary text on the third.

Mr. Rueckert

But you're working from a very sophisticated theory and model, very sophisticated.

Mr. Mehlman

Right. I suppose so. But what I'm doing simultaneously is offering an open application of the model and a genealogy of it. But to describe things in the abstract seems to me to be, well, the road to a certain hollowness of discourse, and probably a certain idealism, and that's why I'd prefer not to.

Mr. Miers

Well, I have two answers to your question. First of all, I don't have a single model; the purpose of my paper was not to propose systems theory as the model, as a model to account for everything in the text.

The other move that I would make is to say that in the paper, in a very shorthand form, if you want to treat Freud, Northrop Frye, whoever, as texts, I tried to show some things I wanted to say about their texts. To give you an example of what I'm interested in doing, I'll bring up something I was just working with in a course on the eighteenth-century novel. Jane Austen's Northanger Abbey, supposedly a parody of the Gothic Novel--there are, in that text, some things that I see as psychoana-

lytic transformations of the Oedipal scene. There is also what I would loosely call a phenomenology of the self, the way in which Catherine Morland learns to gain her identity as other people perceive her. The text is also interesting because . . . it was written during what semiotics would call a "code switch" in literary periods. Yet we read Austen as looking back to the eighteenth century. The whole ideology, social conventions and everything that Austen seems to valorize in that text are not the ones of Romanticism, of what we would call Romanticism. So I'm interested in that problem of literary history. And the kinds of mediations I want to get between these systems are ways to bring to bear a lot of sophisticated understanding in terms of literary history, phenomenology, psychoanalysis, reader theory, etc. I want to identify how the text transforms its readers and how the heuristic structure of the education of a woman affects this transformation. We have to bring to bear all these things to understand the complexity of what Austen is doing in something like Northanger Abbey.

Mr. Rueckert

Could I ask just one more question, finish my question? Then you would hold to your final statement here about trying to develop a poetics of consciousness, in other words, working from the models to the texts toward a poetics of consciousness?

Mr. Miers

Yes.

Alarik Skarstrom
E. 78th Street
New York City

I no longer understand my own question because it became very complicated as things went on. So, I have a very simple question. I found Mr. Miers' paper very impressive and I know I have to read it again to sort it out. But what I wanted to do is ask if he could explain to me precisely what he meant when, on page 16, he twice refers to human language and literature as natural systems. Because there is possibly a mysterious answer to that, which would in turn generate a whole lot of other questions that would come around and finally bring us . . . to a notion of a poetics of consciousness.

Mr. Miers

I mean that first of all in a very simple way as opposed to an artificial system of language. Semiotics would talk about traffic signals as a language. Barthes is trying to identify the code of fashion as a language. I mean that's a problem. Culler identifies that problem: can we call all those things languages? So I use natural language to mean human language as the one global phenomenon characteristic to all human exchange.

Mr. Skarstrom

Specifically what you mean then is that language is natural to man, but that language per se is not something that exists, as it were, in a state of nature?

Mr. Miers

Well, that seems to me to be one of the questions, particularly a question that semiotics is raising. Are we talking about some underlying structure, whatever you want to call it, that governs human language and any other kind of communication system? Or is natural language in some way privileged and unique and other systems are metaphors and extensions and models from human language? I'm not prepared right now to give an answer to that question. That's partly what I mean in terms of poetics as a way to understand how consciousness works. When Derrida talks about a glyphic system or some kind of proto-writing, it seems to me it's related to this question, and I think it's a very complicated question.

Mr. Skarstrom

I will forge madly ahead. It seems to me that there must be a close connection, inside, a subterranean connection, within your paper, between the notion of a natural language and a poetics of consciousness and it has something to do with this: what is so impressive about your model, or models, is also what makes me nervous. It's so efficient; it's so symmetrical. In fact, when you distinguish between logical and conceptual, it almost takes on a chiasmic form; this is a powerful model of models and it seems to be driving toward what all meta-theories, or whatever you wish to call them, seek, and that is an a priori of some kind, a ground for all the grounds upon which we have always stood. That kind of quest for the a priori . . . is itself a recursive pattern. It involves making the kind of leaps which you earlier speak of as generating paradox, I believe that's in reference to Wilden's citing the ecologist Bateson. But now it seems to

me that at the end of your paper, you make the same kind of leap, almost as if, without quite saying it, you announce your willingness to stand upon the paradoxes that are generated by that leap until finally you reach a point where language becomes natural and all of these things converge in a kind of quasi-mystical unity of the world. That is the quest for unity which I take it is also what's behind this conference. The quest for an integrated critical vision is also the quest for the ground of all grounds.

Mr. Miers

You certainly detected my historical groundings in Romanticism, and there's a kind of Shelleyan quest there. But I would say it's true, and what I would stand by . . . is the thing I brought up about Blindness and Insight. I think any time a system tries to close itself, the closure has to be understood as fictive. This relates to the problem Jeffrey Mehlman was raising about clarity. The clarity I get in this paper is the clarity of simplifying and reducing this to a short essay. And the paradoxes, what de Man means by blindness and insight are exactly those points where the most profound insights come, where we have shifts, what Angus Fletcher calls liminal stages. Yes, behind my paper is this idealistic, utopian dream for a poetics of consciousness, which I think is not something that is going to happen before the millennium. But that is the driving force behind it.

J. Mark Heumann
SUNY
Stony Brook, New York 11794

The mentions that have been made of the relationship between scientific theory and critical theory are all very well and good. But I don't see that anyone has mentioned the relationship between scientific praxis and critical praxis. Peter Medawar, in the Jayne lectures of a few years ago, argued that scientific discovery proceeds, not by Baconian induction but by trained intuition, and the Baconian paradigm is the form for presenting the discovery process (which is, of course, wholly other). We, many of us, heard René Girard yesterday criticize Lévi-Strauss and the structuralists for being so enamoured of the machine that they miss the internal dynamic, the drama, of the work. What is the place of intuition in the critical theories you gentlemen address yourselves to?

Mr. Matthews

Well, I don't see theory as a discovery tool; I don't see it as something that critics use, any more than, say, linguistic theory is something that we language users use when we're speaking. Theory is not an instrument by which one comes to write the criticism that one does. Nor does it necessarily improve one's criticism.

As to your other comment, speaking from my own work in philosophy of science, I think that the account that is given of discovery in science is in equally bad shape--the Baconian method is not a very good account, nor is the hypothetico-deductive one, and my own feeling is that philosophers of science could probably learn much by looking at some of the interpretive techniques that are used in criticism, rather than vice versa.

So I really don't think that the theories are going to give you an account of how people write criticism, nor am I very hopeful that you're going to get handbooks that will make better critics. That is not what theories are for. Theories provide understanding. They don't replace the praxis.

POSTSCRIPT

Leroy Searle
University of Rochester
Rochester, New York 14627

I avail myself of the opportunity for hindsight and reflection in this brief postscript cum preface, to identify and clarify what seem to me fundamental issues and problems that surface, and sometimes drift, in the foregoing remarks, observations and questions.

After the fact, two points show through rather clearly, both with a direct bearing on the announced topic for this session, "Critical Language and Theory Choice: Prospects for an Integrated Critical Perspective." Mr. Matthews was quite right in pointing out how successfully the papers evaded this topic, and quite right in his suspicion, I think, that such evasion is significant. The first point I would mention, he identified in remarking that "various notions of theory seem to be floating around." This may qualify as a profound understatement; but what he characterizes as "cross discussion" in these proceedings does not obscure a common current. I will return to a few observations about its possible direction and force, but the fact of a common current is the substance of the second point, identified in the private mode by Mr. Miers: the absence of a "received tradition," in the midst of a flood of options, concepts, approaches, "models," and "theories."

These two issues--an evident uncertainty or possible confusion over the notion of "theory"; and the perceived absence of a "received tradition" which can even make a pretense to "adequacy" in the light of critical praxis--form a discernible horizon for this discussion. Not incidentally, they are also the issues which motivated the designation of the topic for the session. There is a sense in which the papers and discussion did not so much evade the topic as arrive at it, from different directions. Matthews, for instance, in his efforts to clarify the notion of "theory"--on the explicit assumption that "received theory" is "untenable"--at least sketches out the prospects for one critical perspective, to be integrated one presumes by a more specific articulation of critical praxis, differentiating justification and description.

Mr. McGann, expressing a major concern in the praxis of most criticism by concentrating on pragmatic considerations of pedagogy, politics, and society, made at least the comparative gesture of contrasting contemporary "theory" with the tradition of classical rhetoric--though, it seems to me, it would be worse than what Mr. Tomarken calls a "questionable bargain" if one were to seriously take classical rhetorical handbooks as paradigms of "theoretical performance." The salient point of the comparison, however, is that competent theoretical performance, including at least adequate hypothesis formation, cannot be restricted to the relation between the thoughtful reader and the text. Here, McGann calls attention to the fact that the intellectual "geography of literature as such"--and the geography of "the literary critic's literature"--includes a larger context in which the critic's praxis "socializes his literary object." One should add that it also historicizes and politicizes it as well. The historical dimension lies implicit in Mr. Tomarken's endorsement of the sug-

gestion of Ralph Cohen that literary theory is a genre, though as Mr. Tomarken presents the matter, the alternative is another "questionable bargain." The strategy may displace the "ghost of formalism" (in part by using it as "host"), and avoid the "dilemma of post-formalism," but only by deferring the very issue that made formalism (somewhat prematurely, I think) a "ghost": the encompassing dilemma of "theory." The notion of an historical "genre" is at least as problematic as concepts of literary form, structure, or "meaning"; but once again, the salient point is that critical "theory" must extend at least far enough to address generic and historical considerations.

This brings us to the converging point of these two issues, in this "cross discussion," well articulated in Mr. Marino's demanding question: "What is an adequate theory a theory of?" This question is implicit everywhere in the "geography" of the designated topic--and the "topography" of these proceedings. Here, the evasions are rather more revealing.

Mr. Matthews makes the observation both in his paper and his remarks that the proposal to seek an integrated critical perspective "would have to be construed as a proposal to constrain the domain of literary works"; and finds, in the light of his own proposal, that such a search would be at least premature in that "received theory" selects the wrong sort of "abstract entities" as the focus of critical praxis. Here, it appears, Matthews assumes (as we did not, in designating the topic) that "received theory" is in fact "received." The point is that it is not; and the entire session is a vivid illustration of a negative consensus: what has passed for "theory" is untenable on many grounds.

It is almost transparent--though not quite, for there is an anterior question of communication here--that any choice of primitives--whether "meanings" or "propositions" or "genres" or "x"--as the focus of

critical activity constitutes a constraint on a domain by constituting a "domain" as such. The use of the qualifier "literary" itself does as much; and any proposal that bids us to consider its claims as a "theory" does so by virtue of the discriminations it authorizes. Otherwise, it would not be a "theory" of anything; and hence, not a "theory" at all. That is not quite Matthews' point, however, for in suggesting that criticism is "productive," entailing a distinction between the "art work" and the "text" that expresses it, his comparison between critical praxis and religious behavior must be addressed directly. Before one decides to pay devotion at the Propositional Church, so to say, it is not unreasonable to ask for a little bit of "justification" in the form of actual descriptions of critical praxis to show what it produces, from what materials, on what warrant. As Marino notes, axiological considerations are inherent in these issues; and the choice appears to be whether one is willing to be accountable for one's values or not. In this respect, the point at issue cannot be decided in the terms Matthews provides; and (as he has lucidly observed elsewhere)* a choice between two functionally equivalent proposals in criticism commonly waits upon the force of polemical argument. The irony here is that if there are "literary" propositions, their critical discrimination depends upon an integrated perspective; the question is, on what basis will that integration be articulated?

McGann's resistance, for instance, to the suggestion that literary texts express propositions, following Sidney's remark that poetry neither affirms nor denies, goes narrowly wide of Matthews' point that literary critics are really interested in "propositions," not "meanings." Yet the near miss shows the intractable quality of the problem: how does one derive either "meaning" or "propositions" from literary texts? Assuming a propositional basis, what kind of "propositions" do critics either seek or find,

* Cf. Robert J. Matthews, "Interpretation and Understanding: An Essay in Philosophical Metacriticism," Diss., Cornell, 1974.

such that it is sensible to call them "literary" critics, or to lead anyone to either justify or describe any critical praxis which attends with care to such "propositions?" (Parenthetically, it may be noted here that McGann and Matthews are closer than it may first appear, for the inadequacy of our descriptions of critical praxis is the primary concern for both, McGann in calling attention to the social, historical/political, and rhetorical dimensions of praxis; and Matthews arguing that criticism is "productive" in the "art-institutional context.") I would suggest that the force of Matthews' proposal may be located less in the claims made for the proposition (a claim made, on different justificational grounds by Yvor Winters, among others)* than in his insistence on the rich notion of praxis.

Yet if we are to say perspicuously what kind of propositions critics are interested in, and how they are derived from literary texts, it is not enough to distinguish justification from description, but to specify the relation between these aspects of theorizing. That, I submit, raises a broad issue of explanatory adequacy that must, as Marino suggests, take questions of value into account; and that, in turn, points toward a "leap," whether of faith or sufficient reason, in the direction of a "poetics of consciousness" to which Paul Miers alludes.

Here, the stubborn perplexities of speculative criticism come, in Jeffrey Mehlman's / Diderot's metaphor, as a "cataract," at the edge of the horizon of this discussion. For how should, or could, or would one actually justify or describe the practice of an actual critic--Jeffrey Mehlman, for example, who, à la Bartleby, prefers not to do either, in a stronger preference for the practice itself? This is a question that everyone, starting with we as organizers of the session, has endeavored to duck. Any effort to articulate a "descriptive theory" in Matthews' terms, or to find the measure of cognitive/performative complementarity in a "poetics of conscious-

* See for example, Gerald Graff, Poetic Statement and Critical Dogma (Northwestern, 1970).

ness," in Miers' phrase, returns one relentlessly, if not ruthlessly, to the difficult, important question raised by Marino. Whether critics or philosophers use "theories" to justify or describe, they are, in I. A. Richards' expression, "speculative instruments" that are never neutral; and in returning, as this session suggests we will and must, to that central question, "What is an adequate theory a theory of?" the range of considerations expressed and implied in these proceedings is a good index of factors that cannot be overlooked or slighted, but must be, willy-nilly if we so choose, integrated as the very condition of having any on perspective on these difficult questions.

In Alarik Skarstrom's fine phrase, we "forge madly ahead," though perhaps, not so madly after all. In retrospect, there is more order in the "heap" of things that did find their way onto the table at the session than, to use Ahab's metaphor, the "heaping" emotion so readily induced by MLA Conventions might lead us to conclude. Within the horizon of this discussion, and at its margin, lies an expansive piece of "geography" awaiting more careful exploration. So much, here, for the preface in this "postscript."

The postscript is simply this: the issues that did surface in these papers and discussions are all open issues, locating perhaps an over-rich context for more patiently considered exchange. Having considered, as Mr. Tomarken urges, the beginning, the prospect for pursuing these issues farther--and the need to do precisely that-- seems relatively clear. Speaking on behalf of the Society for Critical Exchange, we solicit your suggestions for continuing the inquiry that this inaugural project has, thus tentatively, identified.

NEWS AND NOTICES

MLA SPECIAL SESSIONS

"THE FUNCTION OF CONTROVERSY" (Organized by SCE)

Discussion Leaders: James Sosnoski, Miami Univ.
Leroy Searle, Univ. of Washington

Panel: Wallace Martin, University of Toledo
N. W. Visser, Univ. of Wisconsin & Rhodes
University (South Africa)

Note: Papers by Professors Martin and Visser will be published in SCE Reports # 3, together with prepared response and commentary. SCE Reports will be distributed to SCE members; MLA members who plan to attend the session should write for copies of the papers and discussion. This year, we propose to leave a good deal more time for open discussion of the issues.

For further information, contact:

Professor James Sosnoski
Department of English
Miami University
Oxford, Ohio 45056

MLA SPECIAL SESSIONS

"LITERARY THEORY AND THE CRITICAL QUARTERLY IN AMERICA"

Discussion Leader: Ihab Hassan

Panel: Sheldon Sacks, Critical Inquiry
Ralph Cohen, New Literary History
Philip E. Lewis, Diacritics

For further information, contact:

Professor Ihab Hassan
Department of English
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53201

THE NATURE OF LITERARY EXPERIENCE

Topic: "Experience, Language, and the Making of Fictions: The Paradigm of Voyeurism"

Discussion Leaders: Mike Frank, University of Chicago
Brigette Frase, Roosevelt Univ.

Note: This session is designed to address the suggestion that "no human act or event can be comprehended as an experience--that is, experienced--until it has been distanced and made 'other,' converted into a text, so to speak[.]" If this is valid, "may we then assume that 'voyeurism' is paradigmatic of all human experience?"

FORMAT: There will be no formal reading of papers at this session. Three panelists will be asked to present 5 to 7 minute statements, with three discussants to consider the issues raised.

For further information, contact:

Professor Mike Frank
Collegiate Division of the Humanities
University of Chicago
5811 So. Ellis Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60637

"WINDOWS AND MIRRORS IN THE HOUSE OF FICTION:
VOYEURISM, NARCISSISM, AND HENRY JAMES"

Discussion Leader: Mike Frank

Note: This session, in conjunction with the more general topic above, will concentrate on the same issues as they apply to a reading of the work of Henry James.

Format: Papers (10-15 minutes each) will be read.

For further information, contact:

Professor Mike Frank
Collegiate Division of the Humanities
University of Chicago
5811 So. Ellis Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60637

MLA FORUM: "SEMIOTICS AND CRITICISM"

Organizer: Jeffrey Plank

Panel: Jonathan Culler
Robert Scholes
Sol Worth

Note: This Forum, as in previous years, will be supplemented by at least two Workshops. One of the Workshops will concentrate on critical uses of semiotics (with Scholes and Culler); the other, with conceptual limitations or problems (with Sol Worth). It is possible, though not yet confirmed, that Umberto Eco may be a participant in the Forum and/or Workshops.

For further information, contact:

Jeffrey Plank
Center for the Humanities
303 Doheny Memorial Library
University of Southern California
Los Angeles, California 90007

(See also: Conferences and New Journals)

FORTHCOMING CONFERENCES

"TOWARDS A POST-MODERNIST THEORY OF THE HUMANITIES"

University of Southern California

NOVEMBER 17-19, 1977

Conference speakers and participants will include (among others) Ralph Cohen, Sol Worth, Susan Sontag, Richard Poirier.

For more information, contact:

Jeffrey Plank
Center for the Humanities
303 Doheny Memorial Library
University of Southern California
Los Angeles, California 90007

 CALLS FOR PAPERS

The Higginson Journal of Poetry invites submissions for a special 1978 issue on:

"Jung and Literature"

Articles are invited which show the relevance of recent analytical psychology to the understanding of literary texts. The articles may deal with literary theory in general, or with specific texts and authors; specialized terminology should be explained clearly and concisely within the article itself. Submissions will be refereed both by scholars familiar with archetypal criticism and by specialists in the relevant areas of literature. Essays must be received by Oct. 15, 1977, and should not exceed 4000 wds. Send manuscripts, queries, etc., to:

Prof. Martin Bickman, Guest Editor
 "Jung and Literature"
 Department of English
 University of Colorado
 Boulder, Colorado 80309

 CALL FOR PAPERS : "Closure in the 19th Century Novel"

Nineteenth Century Fiction announces a special issue on the literary and cultural significance of closure in the 19th century novel. Papers should be submitted by September 15, 1977.

Send submissions to:

Alexander Welsh, Editor
19th Century Fiction
 3336 Rolfe Hall
 University of California
 Los Angeles, California 90024

 NEW JOURNALS

Reader: A Newsletter of Reader-Oriented Criticism and Teaching

Editor and Publisher:

Robert Crossman
 28 Cushing Street
 Providence, Rhode Island 02906

Subscriptions: \$1.00 per year.

Reader began early this year, as a response in part to the "Reader Response" forum and workshops at the 1976 MLA Convention. It contains news, correspondence, and bibliography of interest to critics and teachers (and readers) of the wide range of "reader response" criticism that has emerged in recent years. For information, contact Mr. Crossman.

The Humanities in Society (projected to begin publication in 1978)

For information, contact:

Jeffrey Plank
 Center for the Humanities
 303 Doheny Memorial Library
 University of Southern California
 Los Angeles, California 90007

Of particular interest is the design of the journal. It will be published on a quarterly basis, with two issues devoted to translations of articles, placing issues in the Humanities in an international, comparative perspective; one issue devoted to a specific topic or theme; and one issue, devoted to "Reviews," in an expanded sense, to encompass current research, articles, inter-disciplinary activities, etc.

Speculative Letters (published as a project of SCE)

For information, contact:

Leroy Searle, Managing Editor
c/o Department of English GN-30
University of Washington
Seattle, Washington 98195

Speculative Letters will not publish articles in the conventional sense. Rather, each issue will focus on a single proposal, addressing a specific problem in criticism. Each such proposal will be sent to scholars in other fields for comment, response, etc., in the form of letters. Each proposal and responding letters will be published as a set. Also included will be bibliographies and bibliographic essays, designed to introduce critics to classic and current research in a wide range of fields that impinge in critical inquiry. The first issue, on the topic of "Critical Problems and Protocols of Exchange" is scheduled to appear in the Spring of 1978. Subsequent topics are (tentatively):

- #2 Winter, 1978: "The Concept of Theoretical Explanation in Criticism"
- #3 Spring, 1979: "Criticism and Linguistic Theory"
- #4 Winter, 1979: "History and Epistemology"

Note: All members of SCE will receive Speculative Letters. Members for the first year of the Society (1977) will receive the first two issues (1978) as published.

***** NOTE *****

Closing date for NEWS AND NOTICES for SCE Reports # 3 is September 15, 1977.

If you have an announcement concerning inquiry in criticism, please send information to:

Patricia Sosnoski, Managing Editor
SCE Reports
220 South Beech Street
Oxford, Ohio 45056

For west coast members, send information to:

Leroy Searle
English Department GN-30
University of Washington
Seattle, Washington 98195

THE SOCIETY FOR CRITICAL EXCHANGE, Inc.

SCE was organized as a not-for-profit corporation in 1976, for the purposes of fostering and advancing 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.

Current projects of the Society include SCE Reports, in conjunction with special sessions held under the auspices of the Modern Language Association; Speculative Letters: A Journal of Continuing Inquiry in Criticism, scheduled to begin publication on a twice-yearly basis starting in the spring of 1978. We are presently negotiating for a series of conferences, each to center on a particular controversy in criticism.

We recognize that specific needs and the availability of special resources or talents differ from place to place. If you have suggestions, observations, or particular problems concerning criticism; or if you would like more detailed information about the Society for Critical Exchange, please write to:

Professor Leroy Searle
Secretary, SCE
c/o English Department GN-30
University of Washington
Seattle, Washington 98195

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

(name)

(address)

(areas of interest)

