
THE FUNCTION OF CONTROVERSY

MLA CONVENTION

SPECIAL SESSION 624

**Thursday, December 29, 1977
9:00-10:15 p.m., Room 733
Palmer House Hotel**

SCE REPORTS #3

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"The Function of Controversy
 in the Language of Critical Exchange"

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MLA SPECIAL SESSION 624: "The Function of Controversy in the Language of Critical Exchange."

Discussion Leader: James J. Sosnoski, Miami University (Ohio).
Panelists: Wallace Martin, University of Toledo;
N. W. Visser, Univ. of Wisconsin
Respondent: Leroy Searle, Univ. of Washington

INTRODUCTION

James J. Sosnoski
Miami University (Ohio)

The purpose of this seminar is to initiate an open but disciplined discussion of the role controversy plays in critical discourse. Papers selected for the session raise interesting questions as to the nature of commitments and motives reflected in critical controversies; and the effect of contemporary controversies as rhetorical, dramatic "performances." In examining these and related issues at the session, we would like to conceive our discussion as part of a larger exchange.

The critical exchange we envision begins with this issue of SCE Reports, publishing position papers from the three participants. The second phase will be the meeting in Chicago at the MLA Convention.

At the seminar session itself, the papers will not be read. Discussion will begin with the panelists and respondent, each having 10 minutes to examine issues and questions raised in the published papers. Then, I will open the floor for general discussion, which will be recorded on tape.

The exchange will be extended with SCE Reports # 4 which will publish an edited transcript of the tapes,

an annotated bibliography of selected materials related to the topic, and correspondence we have received about the exchange at the MLA seminar (deadline: February 1, 1978).

In a larger context, this exchange may serve to identify ways in which recent theoretical work in criticism can be integrated with the traditions of criticism itself; and may help to identify promising lines of inquiry and existing communities of interest, within which cooperative research can be sustained.

SPECIAL NOTICE: FUTURE MLA SESSIONS

The Society for Critical Exchange, Inc., plans to sponsor special sessions at the MLA Conventions in 1978 (New York) and 1979 (San Francisco), concentrating on topics related to previous sessions in 1976 ("Critical Language and Theory Choice") and 1977 ("The Function of Controversy"). We invite you to submit papers for these future sessions.

The topic for 1978 is: "The 'Uses of Criticism'--or The 'Misuses of Criticism?'" At this session, we plan to address these questions: "Can and/or should we attempt to identify inappropriate uses of criticism?"; and, if so, "What constitutes a misuse of criticism?" William Rueckert and one other critic will be the respondents; two papers will be selected by a committee of SCE members.

The topic for 1979 will be: "Beyond Interpretation." At this session, we will examine these questions: "Should interpretation be the goal of criticism?"; and if not, "What (if any) goal should a critic entertain?" Ihab Hassan and Paul Hernadi will be the respondents; two papers will be selected by a committee of SCE members.

For both years, papers accepted will be published under the extended discussion format of SCE Reports.
DEADLINES FOR PAPERS: April 1, 1978; and April 1, 1979.
Submit papers (abstracts in advance would be useful) in duplicate; 10 pages, typed, maximum.
For information contact: James J. Sosnoski, 338 Upham Hall, Miami University, Oxford, Ohio 45056.

THE STAGES OF CONTROVERSY

Wallace Martin

By the end of the first century B.C., the oratorical forms that originated in discussions involving matters of life and death in law courts and assemblies had become the subject of classroom exercises. One of the most popular of these was the controversia, which was performed in public by both pupils and professional orators. Seneca the Elder recorded examples of the problems posed for controversia in his time: "A Vestal Virgin has been hurled from the Tarpeian rock for unchastity. She survives. Is she to be thrown down again?" "The punishment for rape is that the woman may demand the man's death or make him marry her. A man rapes two women in one night. The first wants him executed. The second wants to marry him. What is to be done?" Three developmental tendencies are illustrated by the progress of rhetoric during Seneca's lifetime, and confirmed by the rise of the second Sophistic in the following century. Controversies arising from genuine conflicts, if they do not lead to combat, tend to be assimilated and ameliorated by being accorded institutional forms. Once institutionalized, they take on a different cultural meaning--in the case in question, they become forms of display and entertainment. And finally, the new form and function lead to a new content--in this case, to increasingly artificial subjects of discussion.

The history of criticism as we know it is in large part constituted as a history of controversies--in the form of dialogues (Plato, Dryden, Oscar Wilde), in replies to opponents since forgotten (Sidney, Shelley, Arnold, Henry James), in group conflicts involving issues that are not purely literary (ancients and moderns, the humanist debate of the late 1920's). In the past thirty years, controversies have played an increasingly important part in the development of critical theory. Nowhere have fundamental issues been more sharply defined, and

nowhere have critics revealed so much insight and incapacity as they have under the pressure of confrontation with antithetical adversaries. The fact that systematically distorted communication has been part of such exchanges, far from lessening their value, makes them amenable to analyses that might identify the unstated assumptions which precluded resolution of the issues discussed.

Granting the importance of lessons we can learn from the past, I shall attempt to show that the formal conditions of controversy have recently changed and that we are now entering a stage that might be called the third Sophistic, in which (as in the case of the second Sophistic) the prestige of rhetoricians reaches new heights, controversy is institutionalized in their public appearances, and an ability to discover and defend a startling point of view (rather than to discover generally acceptable solutions to problems) becomes the hallmark of the successful critic. We know that debates in the humanities are never won or lost; they are superseded, or forgotten, or adherents of one position simply disappear through attrition and exhaustion. The thesis and antithesis of the genuine conflicts of the past have reached their synthesis not in a meaningful resolution, but in the concept of "controversy" itself. Once recognized as a recurrent form, "controversy" takes on a value: henceforth, the only criticism worth reading or writing will be controversial. Just as the epic becomes the mock epic, and in modern art it became traditional for works to be based on gestures of rupture from the past, so in criticism, a mode of expression has become a convention. What is the antithesis of controversial criticism? Obviously, that which is uncombative, ameliorative, methodologically unproblematic, generally accepted. Controversy today has an irresistible attractiveness; not to participate in it is to declare oneself otiose or unimaginative.

MARTIN

The substantive proposals of this paper concern the strategies whereby controversy, the reigning thesis, can be brought into significant relation with its antithesis. The problem is perhaps insoluble because it is difficult to envisage something opposed to a concept that appears to include all forms of opposition within itself. But an importunate *Zeitgeist* forces us to contemplate the problem, and an inclination to do so is quickened by the sense that institutionalized controversy deserves a genuine challenge if it is not to exhaust its resources in mock battles. Before exploring solutions, however, it is necessary to show that a problem exists--that critical debate (or the "critical performance," as it has recently been called) has become a rhetorical or dramatic form without substantive consequence for literary study, and that it is shaped in part by a hope to postpone its own dénouement through perpetuation of an atmosphere of crisis.

The publication in 1972 of The Structuralist Controversy, edited by Macksey and Donato, can be seen as an early manifestation of the journalistic process through which critical discussion has been transformed into institutionalized confrontation. Before its publication in paperback, the volume had appeared under the title The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man (1970). The contributors might have written very differently if they had known they were engaged in a controversy about structuralism; many of the papers had nothing to do with that theme, and the passages of discussion reproduced in the volume record confusion and occasional disagreement rather than confrontation. The patterns of interaction there evident, and their deployment under a title intended to excite interest, have proved to be characteristic of the subsequent development of critical debate.

Today, the participants in controversies are notified in advance about the debate they are enter-

ing, and as a result their writings and remarks are shaped by the imperatives of polemics. When he knows that the author of a book will be invited to reply to his review, can a reviewer in Diacritics help but choose a stance or posture relative to that reply? The choice of reviewers by canny editors sets the stage for dramatic performance. A book that has not been attacked is scarcely worth reading. At one time, the dangers of controversy and the desire to avoid confrontation required anonymous reviewing, as in the Times Literary Supplement until recently; today, the threat of serious dispute is so small that critics appear to seek sources of disagreement with colleagues. Critical Inquiry followed the successful lead of Diacritics by inviting responses to articles; while the commentaries that conclude every issue of New Literary History are less directly polemical, they do provide occasion for sharp exchanges.

Recent conferences and MLA conventions have increasingly attempted to stage confrontations. These can become "performances" in a quite literal sense, as when well-known antagonists speak impromptu, following a pattern established during the period of the second Sophistic. The content of such debates is based upon previous critical performances; they can be followed only by coterie acquainted with books and periodicals that cannot be identified with any traditional segment of literary study.

Controversy could not, however, have become a popular rhetorical form in criticism without a change in its content and consequences. In the past, there were good reasons for avoiding it; one's ideas and oneself were at stake in the sense that it was possible to lose an argument; debates were consequential in that they formed opinion in the profession as a whole, in accordance with generally accepted (if ill defined) canons of reason and evidence. To say that in the past no party ever won a controversy is different from saying that at present, no participant

can lose one. Strategies for avoiding loss, which can be understood through reference to psychological experiments involving conflict and reward, have developed in proportion to the increase in staged (stimulating, simulated) debate. The following list of assumptions that have been employed in recent criticism is the basis of my argument that controversies are no longer substantive or even (in the older meaning of the term) rhetorical, but rather dramatic, and that in this sense they must be viewed differently than they were in the past. The assumptions are listed in no particular order; acceptance of any one of them is sufficient to change a disagreement into a scene, a hypothesis into a dramatic possibility, and a critic into a character on a certain stage in critical history.

1. Criticism is literature. To append a list of subscribers to this position is probably superfluous. Since the critic, like Sidney's poet, nothing affirmeth, it is absurd to grapple with his Protean troping in the hope of getting a definite answer regarding where we go from here. Those who hold this position offer evidence that the thesis of this paper is hardly new; to controvert them is to participate in stylized exchange, to write a reply to "Come live with me and be my love."

2. There are no metalanguages; all writing is literature and/or vice versa. After Critique et Vérité (1966), Barthes advanced to this position; Mehlman, Miller and others state it in one form or another. It seems intended to insure that no discipline will be accorded truth-claims stronger than, or different from, those available to literature/criticism--in which case an appeal to evidence or canons of argument outside of literature would lose its force. References by literary critics to "metalanguage" are at best puzzling; a Quellenforschung concerning the powers ascribed to this mythical antagonist since his migration from mathematics might be revealing.

3. An appeal to accepted canons of argument, or an attempt to establish such canons, is essentially a political act involving a repressive psychology of domination. This assumption is more common in France than in the United States, but it has been imported (see, for example, the comments by Michel Pierssens in Sub-Stance, 10 [1974], 1-2). Structuralism and semiotics are likely targets for this charge, as they are for the preceding two. German critics who are attempting to identify a set of assumptions for the conduct of critical argument--in particular Siegfried Schmidt and Heide Göttner--are thus outflanked.

4. To say that a theory is poorly formed or self-contradictory is not a significant objection to it, since it may be useful in practical criticism. Northrop Frye suggested this in replying to papers about his work read at the English Institute, and Harold Bloom made the same point explicitly in The Anxiety of Influence. One is reminded of Matthew Arnold's reference to a member of Parliament who remarked: "That a thing is an anomaly, I consider to be no objection to it whatever." Today, however, the buskin is on the other foot: the spirit of the age has moved with Emerson and Bloom.

5. Hamartia is a superior form of marksmanship (nowhere stated, but everywhere assumed). One does not reply directly to one's critics; by aiming elsewhere, one implies that they are shooting at the wrong target. Their comments are seen within a larger context, or in relation to their origin, or an idea or phrase that they contain is taken as the subject of an extended meditation on meaning and filiation. J. Hillis Miller's response to M. H. Abrams at the 1976 MLA Convention, which appears in a recent issue of Critical Inquiry, is a perfect illustration of this "assay of bias" in recent controversy, showing how one can "by indirection find direction out."

6. It is impossible to deconstruct my criticism through logical or ideological analysis because I have already done that myself (often through use of assumptions 1-3). This defense, which was originally developed by the Tel Quel group to allay its understandable anxieties when it was deconstructing everyone else, has now crossed the Atlantic. It is doubtful that Jonathan Culler's astute comments on the difficulties it involves (in New Literary History, IV, 471-82) will impede its dissemination.

7. Critical controversy must sometimes be performed before audiences that require slogans and simplifications; in such cases, exactness and rigor are not necessary. This assumption seems to be a necessary inference from the articles by J. Hillis Miller, Murray Krieger, and Hazard Adams that appeared in The New Republic, The Georgia Review, and Contemporary Literature during 1976. That critics should themselves be compelled to journalize their own positions is an interesting phenomenon. But in this instance, the secondary debate involves simple antitheses such as emptiness vs. plenitude, and cleverness vs. super-cleverness; the audience is apparently solicited to participate by choosing a side on the basis of its attitudes and beliefs. One is led to fear that, once genuine and complex controversy have been revalorized as dramatic performance, a much cruder form of debate must be created to serve functions that have been abandoned in the realm of choice and action.

Assumptions such as these have the following consequences: no one is exposed to a serious threat of loss in critical controversy, and only a clumsy debater need worry about losing particular points. Logical or empirical defeat can be turned into rhetorical victory. One can, however, be backwards in not realizing the argumentative possibilities afforded by the foregoing assumptions; as a result, he will suffer exposure for not being sophisticated. There

is no need--indeed, no possibility--to resolve an issue in such circumstances. Hence--perpetual crisis made possible by assumptions that insure there can be no dénouement. The end of controversy is in fact a form of defeat for everyone involved: it reveals a lack of imagination, of creative proliferation in thought and activity--a lack of "force," which was the accusation that Derrida brought against structuralism in one of his earliest essays (1963). Force is not only strength, perhaps involving violence and a desire for confrontation; it is vigor, life, and sexual potency. It is indicative of character, of an ability not just to think, but to act--for example to act, at the present stage, on the critical scene.

Those who are capable of believing in such critical acts can simply perform them. If they also believe there is a "crisis" in criticism but that the dramatic and medical metaphor ends there, their work may become part of the body of criticism that is characteristic of our time. Those who seek to be the antibodies of criticism must pursue another course, one difficult to envision, but one that in some sense can be antithetical to the concept of controversy itself.

The end of man and the death of literature necessitate a new maieutics.

It might involve, first of all, observance of a rule that Wittgenstein passed on to his pupils: never argue with a philosopher (in this case, a critic). Amid the contemporary currents of criticism, controversy is a short-circuit that precludes the possibility of understanding. There is little evidence that current criticism is being read carefully. By accepting all of a critic's assumptions, tracing his arguments sympathetically and meticulously to their end, and then moving beyond them in the same spirit (understanding the author better than he understood himself, as Schleiermacher said), one might escape the illusion of stalemate. Those not interested in taking current

criticism seriously are not interested in the kind of remedy here proposed. On the other hand, anyone who finds this criticism infectious may lose the ability to discriminate between vaccination and inoculation.

Evidence in favor of what appear to be anti-rational assumptions in contemporary criticism can be found in works that set higher standards of rationality than those commonly found in structuralism and semiotics. Ideas in Quine and the later Wittgenstein have worked their way into the philosophy of science and anthropology, as recent works by von Wright, Mary Hesse, and Mary Douglas show. The question of whether the transcendental hermeneutic and universal pragmatic of Apel and Habermas can lead to solutions not available in the Anglo-American tradition remains unanswered (even--unasked), but they have at least gone beyond antitheses with which French and American criticism still seem plagued. To disregard such significant critiques of traditional assumptions is to accede to the oscillation of pro and con.

Or the remedy may be homeopathic. Criticism that claims to be literature deserves analysis as literature; criticism that has found a thread leading to endless spinning cannot meet its Atropos until someone identifies its filaments within the text making such claims; assertions involving the anxiety of influence demand that they be understood as resulting from the anxiety of influence. The most insidious non-controversialist in recent criticism is Cary Nelson, who is genuinely interested in the critics he writes about. And they find him interesting. He assimilates them, digests them; they prove good hosts.

Movement beyond controversy involves moving beyond contraries: "If the pharmakon [remedy; drug; narcotic; poison] is 'ambivalent,' it is so in order to constitute the medium in which opposites become opposed, to constitute the movement and game that relate them to one another, invert them and make them pass into one another. . . ." But such remedies are not unproblem-

atic: "The efficaciousness of the pharmakon can reverse itself--aggravate the disease rather than curing it." (Derrida, La dissémination, p. 145; p. 110.)

Alternatively, one is free to view controversies as the dramatic performances they claim in large part to be, and to seek a self-chosen antagonist--a method that makes it possible to distinguish what counts as a solution from a mistake. The belief that we can find methods capable of satisfying this requirement and producing non-trivial results may be a greater delusion than any of those induced by alternative assumptions. If so, it is a worthy antagonist.

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COMMITMENT AND DIVERSITY
IN LITERARY STUDIES

N. W. Visser

In dealing with controversy in literary studies (taking that intentionally vague term to cover, for present purposes, those areas in our discipline concerned with analytical and theoretical undertakings rather than with, say, textual and bibliographical matters), I want to focus primarily on two things: the factors underlying commitment to a particular theoretical orientation, and the reasons for the diversity of orientations available. Such a focus involves posing--though hardly answering--several related questions: Can disagreements among adherents of competing theoretical orientations be resolved? What role do logic and conceptual analysis play in theoretical controversy? Is the diversity of orientations--which some would embrace wholesale and valorize as "wise eclecticism"--somehow intrinsic to literary studies? How does a new orientation gain acceptance and what constraints are there on the extent of that acceptance? And finally, is it possible for literary studies to reach the degree of unanimity regarding premises and procedures characteristic of modern scientific inquiry?

These are the questions, but to approach them I must begin with a statement, and it is one that will itself seem polemical to many and therefore a further contribution to controversy rather than an effort to examine it. In fact I make the assertion not because I wish to incite heated debate but because I believe it to be a point that must be made before we can begin to make sense of controversy, whether in our discipline or any other. Without the platform or foundation the assertion provides, I doubt that productive discussion of

controversy can get underway.

Theories, whatever else they may be, are positions that people hold. They are not innocent, and they are not without consequence. It is comforting to believe that the methods and approaches with which we confront literature, whether they be tacit or explicit, can be compared, measured as to adequacy, and have their differences resolved or at least clarified according to purely logical criteria, but such is not the case. Moreover, with some qualification this holds true in scientific inquiry quite as much as it does in humanistic disciplines. A physicist's adherence to the hidden variable theory of quantum mechanics in the face of the predominant orientation in his field towards the theory to statistical probability, or the literary scholar's impassioned defense of conventional historical approaches to literature and his abhorrence at the irreverent barbarism of post-structuralist approaches cannot be understood apart from personal, social, and doubtless (though several theorists have denied it) ideological factors.

Before tracing in general terms some of the agencies that influence one's commitment to a theoretical perspective, I want to look briefly at two of the best known controversies in literary studies in this century in order to illustrate the limited role of logical criteria in resolving theoretical debate. A careful reading of the polemics generated by the intentional fallacy reveals several curious things. If we return to Wimsatt and Beardsley's initial statements or to Wimsatt's more carefully formulated recapitulation, "Genesis: A Fallacy Revisited,"¹ after reading some of the rebuttals they have occasioned, we are likely to be surprised at how limited, how unsweeping,

their discussion of the intentional fallacy actually is. They do not say, as their opponents allege, that an author is innocent of any intention or that if he has one it is unimportant; they do not say it is pointless to know anything of a writer's biography; they do not say that an author's explicit statement of intention must be altogether ruled out of court; and they do not say that an author's works cannot be used to reconstruct his attitudes and beliefs. Virtually every rebuttal of the intentional fallacy (E.D. Hirsh's treatment of the issue in Validity in Interpretation² is an interesting exception) is directed against things that are not in fact stated or even implied by its proponents.

Much of the inaccuracy and logical irrelevance of the rebuttals can be attributed simply to careless reading and lack of theoretical sophistication, but clearly something else is involved here, something far more important, at least for the participants, than analytical precision. Those who oppose the notion do so for the most part not because they have logic on their side, which in fact they rarely do; they oppose it because of what they see to be the unacceptable consequences of approbation. Although there is no necessary connection between the two, the intentional fallacy has been seen by many as an integral part of the argument for the autonomy of the literary work of art--yet another much misunderstood and misrepresented concept. Critics who have a prior commitment to a belief in an intimate relation between art and life find in the intentional fallacy a serious threat to a position which draws upon their deepest convictions. That threat has to be met with whatever comes to hand, and if logic will not serve, other persuasive devices might.

A similar controversy, involving some of the same antagonists, has surrounded the problem of

evaluation, and here the ideological consequences attending shifts in position are somewhat more easily glimpsed. On one side we find the argument that since there is no logically valid way of moving from descriptive to evaluative statements, and since evaluative statements are inherently subjective, they have no place in critical discourse. The other argues that in literature itself as well as in literary studies values are paramount and therefore it is the critic's duty to evaluate the works he deals with. Even leaving aside any internal inadequacies or inconsistencies within either of the positions, several things about the controversy invite comment. First, it is an instance of the general "is-ought" controversy so familiar to philosophers in ethics and aesthetics. Secondly, there is no necessary incompatibility between a position which holds that values are supremely important and one that holds that they defy logical formulation. And finally, we should note that this controversy, like the one over intention, has been attended by countless irrelevancies and misrepresentations. Again, what is at stake is not the niceties of logical consistency, not the recognition of the true state of affairs, but the fundamental premises on which many academics build, and according to which they justify, their roles as teachers and scholars. To surrender values or to qualify them by admitting to some form of aesthetic relativism is unacceptable, and it becomes far more important to defend one's position than to submit to the dictates of logic. If logic will help the cause, well and good; if it fails, maintain its appearance but by all means abandon it.

These controversies and the many egregious assertions and rebuttals that have attended them are interesting when viewed from the standpoint of conceptual analysis, but to view them solely in this way distorts their import. We must instead look to

the strategies critics have used in the effort to defend their deeply felt beliefs, we must attempt to isolate and formalize those beliefs, and finally we must try to discover the social and ideological forces which both create and reinforce commitment, remembering as we do so that when a critic abandons one theoretical persuasion for another he often pays a certain social cost insofar as he usually leaves behind some of his closest colleagues and friends.

Brief sketches of two controversies in literary theory can hardly enable us to infer that all controversies are like them; however, I believe these examples are symptomatic of controversy in the field generally, and if I am correct it follows that an intrinsic study of competing theories, though an important undertaking itself, can reveal little about the dynamics of controversy in literary studies. One way of gaining insight into the peculiarities of controversy in our discipline would be to compare it with the phenomenon in other areas, and the most useful comparison might be with the mature sciences since the sharp differences between that discipline and our own highlight some of the features peculiar to controversy in literary theory.³

Although humanistic and scientific disciplines do differ sharply, their differences, and for that matter their similarities, are not the ones commonly advanced. Even the lay belief that the mature sciences have the built-in advantage that their theories can be verified, or at least falsified, by experimentation must be qualified. The experimental examination of a theory or assertion cannot in itself constitute proof of truthfulness or validity. We approach truthfulness or validity through a discourse among people, and experimentation is part of that discourse; its results do not in themselves conclude the discourse since they still have to be

discussed. If we do away with the assumption that "science" is a categorical notion which can be defined in terms of some essential property, and focus instead on science as an activity in which people engage, it becomes easier to locate the basic or typifying differences between the disciplines in question.

Among the characteristic features of the activity of scientific inquiry two stand out. The first, identified by Thomas Kuhn, is a shared commitment to puzzle-solving; in choosing between competing theories "the demonstrated ability to set up and solve puzzles presented by its nature . . . is the dominant criterion for most members of the scientific group."⁴ The second has to do with what we might call the imperative of compatibility. Scientists by and large agree on a self-regulating definition of what constitutes scientific activity. A physicist, for example, cannot depart from certain basic postulates--the conservation of energy for instance--without ceasing to be a physicist. What he does must be compatible with these basic postulates, which are revised or abandoned with the greatest reluctance. The imperative of compatibility places agreed, determinate (though by no means either self-evident or permanent) boundary conditions on scientific activity.

Scientists have little difficulty agreeing on the descriptions of the phenomena with which they deal for the very reason that these phenomena, unlike literary texts, are simple to the point of being primitive. What these phenomena mean is much more complex, and where scientists will disagree is over the usefulness of the concepts used to analyse a particular set of phenomena. On the other hand scientists agree on the method to be used in testing their concepts, and they agree on the criterion by which the efficacy of the concepts can be judged. The method is basically conceptual analysis supported

where possible by mathematics, and the criterion of efficacy is whether or not the concepts lead to predictions. If they only describe what exists, they are, though of some slight interest, insufficiently productive; that is, they fail to set up interesting puzzles to solve.

At this point we can draw some useful comparisons between the activity of scientific inquiry and literary studies. The following table sets out some of the more important differences.

<u>Scientific Inquiry</u>	<u>Literary Studies</u>
Simple Phenomena -----	Complex Phenomena
Agreed Boundary Conditions -----	Disagreement over Basic Premises
Self-Regulating Definition of Field -----	Divergent Definitions of Field
Basic Ends or Goals Not in Question -----	Ends or Goals at Center of Disagreement
Method: Mathematics and Conceptual Analysis -----	Method: Conceptual Analysis
Puzzle-Solving -----	New Things to Say
* * *	
Diversity Constrained -----	Diversity Open-Ended

This tabulation attributes a characteristic to literary studies that has not as yet received comment: the need for new things to say. While not a precise equivalent to the commitment to

puzzle-solving (though both of course have to do with fruitfulness), this need accounts to some extent for the failure or success of an innovatory critical or theoretical perspective. The demise of New Criticism and the simultaneous emergence of alternative critical methods is only partly the consequence of theoretical flaws in New Criticism. More crucial was that New Criticism provided a limited number of things that could be said about a literary text. Once its principles and procedures had been applied to the important works in the canon, there was little left to do, and hence the liberating effect of post-New Critical methods. In general, literary studies readily accommodates any new analytical method that makes it possible to say new things about literary texts. However, while the general field of literary studies will accommodate new orientations, adherents of an existing approach are unlikely to be converted to them.

The differences between scientific inquiry and literary studies underscore two salient features of such controversies as those concerning intention and evaluation. Divergent definitions, disagreement over basic premises and over the goals of literary studies result in a seriously weakened commitment to the method--conceptual analysis--by which we test the concepts put forward by a theory. What is more, debates over these concepts are actually debates over basic premises, definitions of the field, and the goals to be pursued by members of the discipline. Since such debates are not resolvable by the application of purely logical criteria, conversion to a particular theoretical orientation will depend on a prior susceptibility on the part of the convert.

The open-endedness of diversity in literary studies raises some interesting questions. The humanistic valorizing of diversity--an interesting

case of turning a difficult problem into a putative virtue--cannot on its own account for the manifest presence of diversity in approaches to literary studies. Attributing value to diversity tends more often to be lip-service to a conveniently imprecise and unexamined ideal than genuine commitment to its pursuit. Everyone from the undergraduate who is told that a poem cannot mean whatever he thinks it to mean, to the theorist who unaccountably finds himself attacked by a professed pluralist has suspected that the conventional humanistic valuing of diversity, quite apart from whatever logical inconsistencies it might mask, is a self-serving strategy. On close inspection, the pluralist manifesto is found to require the preliminary acceptance of a set of postulates so comprehensive that it seriously constrains the range of diversity tolerated. And the postulates, far from being the agreed premises on which the discipline is based, are precisely those most at issue.

It is the inability to agree on basic premises and goals that accounts for the open-endedness of diversity in literary studies, and here a curious puzzle arises. The absence of shared premises and goals should lead to an even more thoroughgoing anarchy in literary studies than we now have, for there is no apparent reason for anyone to agree with anyone else about anything. Why, in the absence of agreed postulates and under a rhetoric of pluralism, should we have signs of, if not theoretical uniformity, at least distinguishable uniformities? Why the identifiable trends, tendencies, movements, and schools, each with its leaders, its adherents, its rebels and prima donnas?

To deal adequately with these questions and others raised in this essay would require far more scope than the present occasion permits. Therefore I shall conclude with a set of assertions which are

offered tentatively as hypotheses that might, if they are pursued, open the way to a fuller understanding of the obstacles which stand in the way of any effort to establish the same degree of theoretical consensus in literary studies that already obtains in scientific inquiry.

1: Differences between scientific inquiry and literary studies with respect to diversity of approaches cannot be accounted for solely, or even largely, on the basis of differences in the contents of the two disciplines or on the basis of the relative simplicity or complexity of the phenomena with which they deal. The presence of shared postulates and goals and agreed boundary conditions in scientific inquiry does not derive automatically from some intrinsic characteristic of the discipline; it is the result of a consensus that has emerged from a discourse among scientists over a long period. The differences between the disciplines derive mainly from different norms held by the participants, and only by attempting to discover the processes through which these norms are inculcated and by attempting to elucidate the rationales which generate them can we clarify the significant differences between the two disciplines.

2: The emergence of identifiable movements and schools within literary theory is equally the product of discourse and consensus. In this case members of a group within the discipline reach agreement among themselves as to basic postulates and goals. In recent times no consensus has spread through the entire discipline, so that while scientists can label a particular field of inquiry unscientific, literary studies has not reached a position whereby it can readily deny legitimacy to a particular approach.

3: A failure to take into consideration the

widely varying goals which literary scholars pursue and the postulates on which they base their undertakings will make it impossible to compare theories or approaches in any productive way. To a large degree, theories are validated according to the ends they are designed to attain and the premises from which they derive. We must, however, avoid the temptation to equate validity (or adequacy) with truth, a persistent error in literary theory. A legitimate claim to the former is not a sufficient basis for a claim to the latter.

4: Understanding how critical schools arise and why adherents of one theory oppose some other theory even when there is no genuine logical incompatibility between the positions requires that we grasp something of the group dynamics (a now sadly debased term) at work among members of the discipline. The literary scholar is enmeshed in a network of social-professional relationships that radiate in two directions: horizontally among his colleagues, and vertically among his students and mentors. Norms are inculcated and reinforced through these relationships, and a new theory need only appear to threaten a group's cherished beliefs for it to mobilize its members against the common enemy. Any hesitancy in taking up the cause will be perceived as an act of betrayal. Tracing the social-professional networks within the discipline and relating them to the rise, spread, and decline of theoretical perspectives would be a difficult task but one that could reveal a great deal about the nature of controversy in literary studies.⁵

5: New theories are most likely to find ready adherents among graduate students and younger members of the profession, who are less committed to an existing orientation and less bound up in an existing social-professional network. Such people have less to lose by taking up a new cause than does someone

who has already fought to gain acceptance for what was once probably a revolutionary position and is now a comfortable and respected orthodoxy. Most of the major theoretical movements of this century--Russian Formalism, New Criticism, French Structuralism among them--have been started by coalitions of advanced students and younger academics, sometimes acting in conjunction with people who were already in some way outsiders.

6: Even more difficult to trace in detail than the social networks within which literary scholars operate are the ideological underpinnings of a critical theory. Nevertheless it is probably accurate to say that the programmatic rationale which accompanies a theoretical orientation, and which is typically made explicit even when the theory itself is not, incorporates a number of generalized assertions that constitute a covert but nonetheless systematic defense of the particular social and economic order with which the critic identifies. One of the peculiar and revealing features of our profession is that such an ideological stance typically pertains less to the actual social and economic position of the literary scholar than to the enhancement of his self-image. To put this another way, one of the ends frequently involved in the formulation of a critical approach is an implicit claim for a uniquely valuable role and status for the literary scholar, a role and status seldom recognized by anyone other than fellow literary scholars. It is worth posing the question whether in the area of literary studies, uniformity of theory depends on a prior uniformity of ideology.⁶

Any attempt to construct a unified theoretical basis for literary studies--and I would argue that such an attempt has to be made--will have to move

beyond debate over concepts and deal instead with the diversity of fundamental postulates and goals. Given the present state of the discipline, any effort to arrive at agreed boundary conditions will be difficult, perhaps for a long time to come even impossible. This is not to attribute value to diversity, nor even to submit to the inevitability of a pluralist doctrine. There is nothing inherent in our discipline that precludes consensus any more than there is something inherent in scientific inquiry which leads automatically to the imperative of compatibility. Moreover, neither the magnitude of the task nor the improbability of its early success permits us to forsake it. The return we get for our efforts, or the consolation for our probable failure, is that we keep the discussion alive. In addition, in the very activity of inquiry we stand to learn a great deal about a great many things, some of them having to do specifically with literature, others with broader issues and concerns. If, on the other hand, we decline the challenge, we will almost certainly learn a good deal less.

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Notes

¹"Genesis: A Fallacy Revisited," in Peter Demetz, et al., eds., The Disciplines of Criticism (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1968). Wimsatt and Beardsley's initial adumbration appeared in Joseph T. Shipley, ed., Dictionary of World Literature (New York: Philosophical Library, 1943). Their most famous statement is the longer essay, "The Intentional Fallacy," first published in 1946 and reprinted in Wimsatt's The Verbal Icon (Lexington: Univ. of Kentucky Press, 1954). "Genesis: A Fallacy Revisited" examines a number of the more important efforts to refute the concept.

²Validity in Interpretation (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1967), especially Chap. 1, "In Defense of the Author."

³At this juncture I must cite Thomas S. Kuhn's The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, particularly the Postscript to the second edition (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1970), since, as some people will already have realized, his examination of the activity of scientific inquiry underlies much of what I have to say.

⁴Kuhn, p. 205.

⁵The kind of study I am advocating here would involve the application of the method of "network analysis," which has been developed by British social scientists as a reaction against the structural-functional school of Radcliffe-Brown. A convenient survey of the method is given in Jeremy Boissevain, Friends of Friends: Networks, Manipulators and Coalitions (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974). Kuhn, who cites one application of the model to a scientific

group (N.C. Mullins, Social Networks among Biological Scientists, Diss. Harvard, 1966), attests the significance of the "community structure of science," and recommends further study of it (pp. 176-78). See also Sal P. Restivo, "Towards a Sociology of Objectivity," Sociological Analysis and Theory, 5, No.2 (1975), 155-83.

⁶The relation of scientific inquiry to ideology is less direct and more subtle than the relation of literary studies to ideology. Jürgen Habermas, using ideas first developed by Marcuse and others, examines the interrelations of science and ideology in "The Scientization of Politics and Public Opinion," and "Technology and Science as 'Ideology,'" Towards a Rational Society, trans. Jeremy J. Schapiro (London: Heinemann, 1971).

DISCUSSION

"DECENT DEBATE"
AND CRITICAL MAIEUTICS

Leroy Searle

In replying to the papers of Professors Martin and Visser, the range of important issues is uncomfortably large. On consideration, however, the convergence of implications is so remarkable as to create an actual occasion for discussion, not merely a stage upon which to perform, or a morass in which to flounder.

Professor Martin makes the important observation that controversy does not simply erupt, it develops historically; and his principal claim is that from oratorical forms bearing upon matters of life and death in antiquity, controversia became, in stages, classroom exercises and public performances, thereby undergoing a change in both form and function. In suggesting that in our day, we appear to be entering a "third Sophistic," in which the critical controversies that may most attract our attention have changed or lost their past function of sharpening issues to become dramatic performances on a "stage," Martin acutely identifies some of the assumptions which do effectively turn critical debate into performance.

Professor Visser, on the other hand, shows that the theoretical (or, we may say, the theoretically interesting) dimensions of controversy reflect sometimes profound commitments which may not be explicitly recognized or articulated, and whose sources and origins are rarely examined. Professor Visser outlines several ways in which the forces which create and reinforce commitment may be identified and formalized, particularly by comparing literary studies to more theoretically

explicit disciplines in the sciences. Implicit in Visser's proposal that we attempt to construct a unified theoretical basis for literary studies (to which I will return) is both a commitment, and a recognition that the significance of a controversy depends upon the consequences of consensus on the issues in dispute.

While these preliminary comments fail to do justice to the rich and interesting architecture of argument in both papers, they do point to a characteristic which both papers have in common. In tone, in mood, and in conduct, these two papers reflect a combination of earnestness and irony that is at once modest and bracing. For all their stylistic and substantive differences, neither of these papers can be read as "performances" for a stage; nor as incitements to controversy, examples of it, flights from it, or clear alternatives to it. Both aim at diagnosis; and, with a forbearance that is remarkable, given the nature of the case, neither is reluctant or aggressive about suggesting possible remedies.

In borrowing these partially medical metaphors from Martin, I do not mean to dwell on the implication that contemporary criticism is sick; but merely to notice that Martin and Visser both recognize that it is not entirely healthy--and exhibit, in different ways, their own concern. There is a common commitment to making sense of a messy situation, in the knowledge that the very attempt has risks--but to decline the attempt would be, in some way, "indecent." I mark that word with quotes, for it is my word, and I am not sure what I mean by it; neither am I confident that it is the apposite word for the very complex state of mind I wish to indicate. I take it as beyond doubt, however, that a state of mind determined by concern is precisely what is at issue in these two papers; and that their commitment to making sense, despite the risks, is an important sign of health. The net effect is to distribute the "function of controversy" in-

to several constituent issues, all of which require us to consider why "controversy" in criticism should matter--or indeed, why "criticism" itself matters to any of us.

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In the generally ironic stance of Martin's paper, there is admirable control which keeps concern from degenerating into outrage. In part, this reflects the very ironic circumstances that lead him to his thesis, in which the transformation of critical dispute to conventionalized rhetorical and dramatic performance renders the very notion of "dispute" inconsequential. That is, the assumptions under which those typically passionate disagreements we usually call "controversies" become performances make it impossible to "lose," except by rhetorical and forensic ineptitude. Yet nevertheless, claims are made, attitudes shaped or incited, attacks and counter-attacks are choreographed, from an apparently "safe" position; and these do have consequences. It is just that the controversialist cum performer declines to answer anyone so apparently obtuse as to think that an "answer" would make any difference.

An important aspect of the control in Martin's paper is the historical scenario that articulates his thesis; whereas the irony in the content of that thesis, applied to contemporary trends, is describable only by looking at the phenomenon in non-temporal, structural terms. The accuracy of the descriptions, brief as they must be, can then only be confirmed by a much more extensive inquiry into the history of particular cases. Such inquiries are at least one way to find out in some detail what difference these ironic contemporary performances make. Here, we may use an aspect of Visser's argument to locate a crucial issue in Martin's paper which remains somewhat unclear. Once clarified, it may point us beyond the irony of Martin's conclusion.

The closest these two papers come to the usual stuff of controversy lies in the domain of the long-term search, repeatedly frustrated, for a critical "method" and "theory" which can distinguish between "solutions" and "mistakes" in a non-trivial way. Martin is ironically sceptical, suspecting this may be a "greater delusion" than any induced by the assumptions of our contemporary critical thespians; Visser is persuaded, on interesting, non-trivial grounds, that the search must be vigorously pursued.

My immediate point here stems from Visser's remarks, which can be confirmed in exhausting detail, on the patent distortions of mutually antagonistic positions that celebrated controversies contain, and the collateral fact that analytical rigor is the first casualty when discussion strikes at one's beliefs and commitments. This in itself is not an analytic remark, but an historical observation. The specific virtue in making such observations is precisely that one can recover, on good evidence, the routes and trajectories of specific controversies, as they undergo the institutional transformations into apparent inconsequence which Martin aptly describes.

This surely does not settle "controversies," past or present. It does, however, locate non-trivial issues that allow one to explain how and why controversies in criticism get re-cycled and transformed without getting resolved; and to perceive more clearly why the apparent dead end, in controversy dramatized, matters a great deal.

Now we may turn the tables, and use Martin on Visser, if you will: the pursuit of a unified theory or non-trivial, determinative method in literary studies cannot proceed without taking into account the content and the puzzling structure of contemporary controversia; for they have come, themselves, precisely as a consequence of the search for unified theory and method, from Aristotle on. Visser's proposals are substantive and interesting partly because they expand the scope of

inquiries necessary to continue the search; but there are compelling reasons for doubt, to which I will shortly turn, that even a very full research program aligned by Visser's suggestions would be sufficient, or perhaps even necessary.

To avoid launching here into an intricate and possibly tedious argument, I would offer the assertion that the central, if not singular, function of controversy is to locate the grounds, and the possible limits of consensus. What makes the modern players on the stage important is not that they are on the stage, nor that controversy has, demonstrably, become a rhetorical-dramatic form; it is, rather, that all conduct arguments, whether poorly or brilliantly choreographed, which decide that historical, epochal question, at once epistemological and ethical, theoretical and practical, by asserting that any grounds for "consensus" are imaginary. The "drama" then becomes a desperate gesture, where we see brilliant pedagogues mount the stage of speculative discourse to become magicians, not magi, whose ultimate "act" is to make dispute, discourse, and finally themselves "disappear." Any who get upon the stage to say no, to point out the machinery of the illusion, to defend their own, possibly increasingly fragile sense of rationality, are sage to think twice or three times before going on the boards, knowing that doing so itself draws them into the illusion. Prospero must have his Caliban; but in this "play," which is which? Is it Shakespeare or Setebos in the wings?

In this light, albeit a little murky, there is no wonder that Martin, concerned to find the "anti-bodies" for the critical ills of our time; or any of us, concerned that something has gone awry, should find it difficult to envision another course for criticism. We have inherited most of what we do as critics, without knowing the covenants and limitations written into the will, as it were; and even if we sense ourselves to be in the audience, not on the

stage, we are still, willy-nilly, deeply involved in the illusion. What may be harder to recognize, given the kinds of educations we, as critics and humanists tend to get, is that science, the first place we are likely to turn for reassuring cues, is deeply involved in it too. And given the kind of educations scientists are liable to get, the possibilities of simply groping past each other in the dark are enormous.

This circumstance, which my figural elicitation misrepresents in some crucial respects, is a potent reason for concern in the mode of ironic watchfulness; but it does not amount to saying (as many of our players would) that all grounds for consensus are equal, so we may play our narcissistic games for all the gain, the applause, the laughter we can get. That is hollow, if not cavernous laughter, waiting to swallow the player when he steps out of the limelight. On the contrary, it is to see, however faintly, in the assertion that all grounds for consensus are imaginary, the lineaments of a profound truth that has been right before us all along.

We may state it more perspicuously in saying that all grounds for consensus are imaginative. Here, I submit, is an authentic common ground for any and all inquiry; and it is not likely to give us any immediate sense of calm. What it suggests is that we have rather badly misread the history of criticism, composed as it is of successively complicated, ever-unresolved controversies; and that we have collectively persisted in a colossal mistake for some 2500 years, supposing that something else besides literature would serve to explain literature.

To be clearer on the point, we must see that it is speculative, not empirical; philosophical, not factual; and no amount of research would either confirm it or exhaust it. Yet that in no way implies that an ignorant imagination or a complacent mind will do just as well as a scrupulous concern for the fruitfulness and vitality of our concepts and the

accuracy of our procedures. It is, rather, to face a difficult epistemological question that is ultimately ethical, once we see that imagination prefigures the whole field of our experience, and shapes all our thoughts and inquiries. An explanation of literature, if we had anything approaching it, would go a long way toward explaining a great deal else.

If we have misread the history of criticism, failing to understand the function of controversies because we only saw the failures of critics to resolve them, then we can only conclude we have misread the history of literature as well, as that which evidently provoked the controversies in the first place. In pursuing the kind of investigation which Visser recommends, we are very likely to recover, in detail, the strength of literary texts in shaping critical commitments; and in this respect, we may find that the "new maieutics" Martin seeks, can only come in an ethical sense of criticism, self-consciously aware of its own history, and willing to accept responsibility for and accountability to its proper subject: literary texts. Here, I suspect we would never find ourselves in danger of running out of "new" things to say, for literature is valuable in large measure because it can be endlessly renewed, as we and the world alter.

So it would appear that if one seeks an "alternative" to the stylized closet drama (even if the "closet" is the Palmer House Hotel, in late December) of contemporary discussion, it does not follow, as Martin assumes, that it must be a way that is "uncombative, ameliorative, methodologically unproblematic, generally accepted"; nor that the alternative demands getting upon the contemporary stage to play a wise fool to a mad Lear. This mistakes a form of critical exchange (or pseudo-exchange), for an authentic function for debate, which does not disappear when the rhetorical conventions of a generation, or even an epoch, have elaborated themselves

into a Chinese Box or an inconsequential rhetorical dead end.

It is neither necessary, nor, to return to the matter, entirely "decent" to take up the role of the antagonist in the contemporary agon, unless we wish to add to the agony. The pivotal objection to be made to the magic show of controversy swallowing itself up, along with all "opponents," is that the resulting drama is profoundly unimaginative, repetitive, and structurally disposed to the suborning of critical bad faith.

In this context, Visser's proposals for seeking a unified critical theory, a venture to which I too am committed, remain very problematic. For example, to assume that we might find, in the sociology of criticism, an explanation for, or condition of, "uniformity of theory" in a prior "uniformity of ideology," while possibly not surprising, it would be totally equivocal at best, and demoralizing at worst. For it would only establish, on evidentiary grounds surely no better than the evidence of the literary text, and probably incompatible with it, that critics as mortals can be as stubborn, blind, wrong-headed, parochial, perverse, and unimaginative as any other class of mortals. So too, the probable finding that "new theories" are more likely to gain adherents among the younger, less established members of the profession, could prove a quite true, utterly mournful demonstration of the obvious, without doing anything to ameliorate circular Oedipal anxieties always running on course; or, in less dramatic terms, it would just insure the perpetual pain of inexperience from failing to see how the resources of history, as close as the preceding generation, could be employed with grace, intelligence, and tact, in being appropriated with and bequeathed in the generosity of imagination.

Demoralization need not follow, of course, from the kind of investigations Visser proposes; for in-

deed, our neglect of these matters is precisely what demoralizes us when, in naivete and ignorance, we misread the signs (of controversy, among other things), and torture our colleagues and ourselves for no good cause. We do need the study Visser recommends; it is just that it will not, in itself, lead to credible theory.

The crux of the matter, which Visser indicates in urging that we "move beyond debate over concepts and deal instead with the diversity of fundamental postulates and goals," is a change of attitude that does not demean our commitments. This we may construe as a "full faith and credit" clause, in which we can disagree with unswerving concern, without impugning the motives or the dignity of our opponents, for just the reason that in no other way can we discover the value and the limits of consensus. I think we would be surprised to find how empty the stance of "pluralism" is, for the very reason that it limits effective discussion by refusing to take these hard theoretical questions seriously.

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Having gotten myself thoroughly worked up, there is business here, which must not be neglected. If it is true--and none of the assertions here, not Martin's nor Visser's, nor mine, are well enough supported to decide anything significantly--that the current mode of critical debate has come to a non-trivial impasse; and if it is possible--and again, we just don't know--to discover the terms and limits of possible consensus; then how may we set about renewed discussion and debate which allows the critical imagination to actually work?

One suggestion I take with gratitude from I. A. Richards. It is to relate the possible grounds of consensus Visser seeks, to reliable "grounds of responsi-

bility." That sounds dreadfully old-fashioned and moralistic, but the question pertains to a rather simple maxim which, not incidentally, goes a long way toward explaining the deep appeal of science, without succumbing to the temptations of scientism. Here is Richards on the matter:

What was new [in the growth of science], what emerged in the second half of the seventeenth century. . . was critical probity as a point of craftsmanship--a moral awareness that to do good work you just MUST not fake your presentation, must not manufacture evidence, must not suppress or slant the news. I'm not saying that everybody suddenly started this admirable behaviour, no. I'm only saying that in certain fields the best workers did set up for themselves and their rivals new and sterner standards. . . . There are plenty of. . . fields--from politics to literary criticism and philosophy--where it doesn't rule, fields where an indecent disregard of fact is still current form.

(Design for Escape [1968], pp. 38-39.)

In these two papers, I submit, a "decent regard" for fact is already present. The puzzling issue is how we can understand rhetorical fact, in the impact of rhetorical form on our very capacity to recognize "fact" as such.

Can we, for instance, see how contemporary rhetorical showmen create illusions only by deeply deluding themselves?

Can we recover the strengths of our critical inheritance, without compromising our intelligence, or merely paralyzing ourselves?

Can we imagine a critical rhetoric which preserves the

discursive focus and potency of the essay, without falling prey to the willfulness inherent in the form in shaping the kinds of topics we write about?

If we can, can we develop the means for disseminating responsible, disciplined discussion and debate that can be sustained over time, without losing its "memory"?

Under what conditions can we make responsible use of models developed for other kinds of inquiry, without utterly deceiving ourselves about the priorities of critical inquiry itself?

If we should find, perhaps to our astonishment, that we actually agree, do we have the means to decide if it is mere adventitiousness of temperament and circumstance, or something which aligns with our fragile and impoverished sense of "fact," but deepens and enriches it?

These questions are a start, perhaps; but hopefully, something more if we pursue them and others to which they lead, imaginatively, and in good faith. We may even be able to decide what "decency" in critical debate would be.

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SPECIAL NOTICE FOR SCE MEMBERS: ANNUAL MEETING

The annual meeting of The Society for Critical Exchange, Inc., will be held on Tuesday, December 27, at 9:00 P.M., in the Palmer House Hotel. Notice of the room number will be provided in a separate mailing. If, for any reason, the notice of the meeting, with the agenda and information for members does not reach you prior to the convention, please contact Leroy Searle at the Palmer House Hotel.

CALL FOR PAPERS: SCE SPONSORED MLA SESSIONS, 1978 (New York); 1979 (San Francisco).

(See page 3 above.) In order to provide reasonable continuity and plausible time for thought, we plan to propose special sessions for 1978 and 1979 in advance. Proposed topics are:

1978: "The 'Uses of Criticism'--or The 'Misuses of Criticism?'" We propose to ask: "Can and/or should we attempt to identify inappropriate uses of criticism?"; and if so, "What constitutes a misuse of criticism?" Two papers will be selected; William Rueckert and one other critic will be respondents.

1979: "Beyond Interpretation." "Should interpretation be the goal of criticism?"; and, if not, "What (if any) goal should a critic entertain?" Ihab Hassan and Paul Hernadi will be respondents; we will select 2 papers.

Contact: James J. Sosnoski, English Dept., Miami Univ. Oxford, Ohio 45056.

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PRELIMINARY ANNOUNCEMENT: New SCE Project

We are interested in suggestions (and submissions) for a collection of papers and documents which address the general subject:

"TEACHING CRITICISM"

We would like to assemble a volume of materials, including reflective essays, papers which identify major problems, reports on pedagogy, course descriptions and reading lists, and related matters pertaining to the teaching of criticism, both to undergraduates and graduates. The volume would be published by SCE, as inexpensively as possible, for distribution at reasonable cost to SCE members and teachers (or students) of criticism generally.

Contact: Leroy Searle
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RECEIVED AND NOTED:

We have received copies of books by SCE Members, which may be of special interest to others:

Gerald Graff, Poetic Statement and Critical Dogma (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1970);
Robert R. Magliola, Phenomenology and Literature: An Introduction (West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue University Press, 1977).

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MLA SPECIAL SESSIONS

For convenience, we call attention here, briefly, to a few of the many MLA sessions on criticism at the convention.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 27:

5. Forum: Technology and the Literary Mind
7:00-8:45 pm; International Ballroom, Hilton; Michael Benamou, moderator; papers by Martin Green, Ihab Hassan, Leo Marx, and Joanna Russ.

Workshops follow:

- 142: Technology & Marxism; Wednesday, Dec. 28, 10:15-11:30 am, Astoria, Conrad Hilton;
192: Technology & Forms of Contemporary Fiction; Wed. 28 Dec., 1:00-2:15 pm, PDR 1, Conrad Hilton;
236: Technology & the American Dream; Wed. 28 Dec., 2:45-4:00pm, PDR 1, Conrad Hilton.

7. Modern Criticism and Nonfictional Prose; Tuesday, 7:00-8:15 pm, Crystal, Palmer House.
18. Roland Barthes's Contribution to the Theory and Practice of Criticism; Tuesday, 7:00-8:15 pm, Room 786 Palmer.
47. Linguistic Approaches to Metaphor; Tuesday, 9:00-10:15 pm, Astoria, Conrad.

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WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 28:

- 87: The Psychology of Criticism; Wed., 8:30-9:45 am, Red Lacquer, Palmer.
98. Experience, Language, and the Making of Fictions: The Paradigm of Voyeurism; Wed., 8:30-9:45 am, Parlor F, Palmer.
101. The Pedagogical Uses of the Myth Approach in Archetypal Criticism; Wed., 8:30-9:45 am, Room 726, Palmer.
132. Contemporary Psychoanalytic Theory and Literary Criticism; Wed., 10:15-11:30 am, PDR 14, Palmer.
- [142: Technology & Marxism; cf. #5]
145. Windows and Mirrors in the House of Fiction: Voyeurism, Narcissism, and Henry James; Wed., 10:15-11:30 am, Parlor F, Palmer; cf. #98.
- 180: Forum: Semiotics and Literary Studies; Wed., 1:00-2:45 pm, Intrn'l Ballroom, North, Conrad Hilton. Moderator, Jeffrey Plank; Papers by Jonathan Culler, Robert Scholes; response by Paul Ziff.
- Workshops follow:
274: Semiotics, Narrative, and the Novel; Wed., 4:30-5:45 pm, PDR 3, Conrad Hilton.
369: Semiotics: Basic Controversies; Thursday, 8:30-9:45 am, PDR 3, Conrad Hilton.
- [192: Technology & Forms of Contemporary Fiction; cf. #5]
193. Deconstructive Criticism; Wed., 1:00-2:15 pm, Monroe, Palmer.

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WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 28:

- 230: A meeting of two worlds: Literature and Science; Wed., 2:45-4:00 pm, PDR 4, Conrad.
- [236: Technology and the American Dream; cf. #5]
- 238: The Work of Kenneth Burke; Wed., 2:45-4:00 pm, PDR 9, Palmer.
- [274: Semiotics, Narrative, and the Novel; cf. 180].
- 325: Literary Theory and the Critical Quarterly in America; Wed., 9:00-10:15 pm, Parlor F, Palmer.
- 332: How to do things with texts: Deconstructive Criticism; 9:00-10:15 pm., Room 738, Palmer.
- THURSDAY, DECEMBER 29:
- 363: Principal Developments in German Literary Theory; Thurs., 8:30-9:45 am, Beverly, Conrad.
- [369: Semiotics: Basic Controversies; cf. #180]
- 420: A Reassessment of Structuralism; Thurs., 10:15-11:30 am, Room 724, Palmer.
- 425: Genre as Knowledge: The Epistemological Status of Generic Distinctions; Thurs., 10:15-11:30 am, Williford A, Conrad.
- 449: Criticism as Deconstruction; Thurs., 1:00-2:15 pm, Red Lacquer, Palmer.
- 483: Teaching the Critical Prose of Wordsworth and Coleridge; Thurs., 1:00-2:15 pm, PDR 9, Palmer.

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THURSDAY, DECEMBER 29:

494: Psychoanalytic Criticism and Women; Thurs.,
2:45-4:00 pm, PDR 14, Palmer.

624: The Function of Controversy in the Language
of Critical Exchange; Thurs., 9:00-10:15 pm,
Room 733, Palmer.

649: Autodeixis: Metatexts and Metaphors; Thurs.,
9:00-10:15 pm, Room 546, Conrad.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 30:

664: The Theory of Description; Fri., 9:00-10:15 am,
Wabash, Palmer.

711: Shakespearean Metadrama; Fri., 11:00-12:15 am,
Room 738, Palmer.

716: Freud as Literary Text?; Fri., 11:00-12:15 am,
PDR 4, Conrad.

734: What If? Rewriting Literary History; Fri.,
11:00-12:15 am, Room 733, Palmer.

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CALL FOR PAPERS: SPECULATIVE LETTERS

Speculative Letters, a project of SCE, Inc., will
examine, in its second issue (Winter, 1978), the
following topic:

THE CONCEPT OF THEORETICAL EXPLANATION IN
CRITICISM.

A single paper will be selected for intensive
discussion and examination, from several different
points of view. Among other considerations, the
papers submitted for this issue should articulate
the problem of theoretical explanation in a well-
identified context--i.e., what should a critical
theory be an explanation of? how does critical
theory differ from theory in other disciplines?
what are reasonable criteria of adequacy for
critical theories?

Papers should not exceed about 30 pages. Send
papers and inquiries to:

Professor Leroy Searle
SPECULATIVE LETTERS
c/o The Department of English GN-30
University of Washington
Seattle, Washington 98195.

Future topics:

#3: Spring, 1979: Criticism and Linguistic
Theory

#4: Winter, 1979: History and Epistemology

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.

Current projects of the Society include SCE Reports, in conjunction with special sessions held at the Modern Language Association convention; Speculative Letters, A Journal of Continuing Inquiry in Criticism, which will commence publication in 1978; with proposed projects for assistance to teachers of criticism, and conferences in cooperation with various universities.

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