

SCE Reports 4

PROCEEDINGS: SPECIAL SESSION 624

"THE FUNCTION OF CONTROVERSY"

MLA Convention, December, 1977

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EDITOR'S NOTES

SCE Reports 4 is devoted to transcriptions of Special Session 624, "The Function of Controversy," sponsored by the Society for Critical Exchange at the annual meeting of the Modern Language Association in December, 1977. Our procedure in taping is to attempt to insure a complete transcript by using two tape recorders. Unfortunately, however, the second machine failed to operate this year. The reader of SCE Reports will therefore encounter lacunae at intervals of approximately thirty minutes. In these cases, square brackets enclose an editorial guess at the direction of an unrecorded utterance. Ellipses indicate an inaudible or unintelligible word or two. With these exceptions, the critical discourse in this issue appears exactly as it was recorded.

The 1977 exchange was, we think, coherent, clear, and more precisely focused than that of the previous year. The speakers' careful critical attention to one another's discourse and their willingness to attempt the arduous process of exchanging critical languages was gratifying. Moreover, we have carried away from Chicago with us some useful terms: Mr. Visser's "discussion," and the professional ethic it implies, is useful language for describing--but not constraining--our enterprise. The audience enthusiastically endorsed Mr. Visser's insistence on the necessity for thoughtful scholarship in keeping up with the state of the discussion. Mr. Bialostosky and Mr. McFadden emphasized the necessity for this preparedness among younger scholars and among practical critics of contemporary literature; Mr. Harwood called for more rigor in naming the "discussion," describing its current state, and distinguishing it from others. Mr. Martin, in

his hierarchical description of controversy and in his analog computer programmed never to say "not" or "no," provided metaphors for open-mindedness in the discussion.

But there were those who, in spite of Mr. Martin's disclaimer, thought that his hierarchy--and indeed the very notion of "discussion"--were gestures toward ideological dominance, "however genially imposed." Mr. Leitch, espousing perhaps the assumptions of the "Paris-New Haven-Baltimore" discussion, implied in his comments that the Society for Critical Exchange is more or less dominated by proponents of the "Anglo-Saxon analytic" discussion. Perhaps the very idea of exchange delimits the free play of language to an extent too great for most Derridistes and many Derrideans. Such a situation is indeed problematic, for it suggests once again that the Society is perceived as seeking some master meta-critical language. In spite of the fact that such questors may indeed belong to the Society, or attend its professional events, it is important to stipulate that the Society for Critical Exchange advances no particular critical position. It is not a community of logicians. (Nor is it a community of men.)

Mr. McFadden observed that the speakers gave little attention to praxis. His suggestion that the discussion would have been improved by attention to actual current controversies, especially the split within the group of deconstructionists, was timely and appropriate.

Mr. Visser wishes to stipulate that he is a member of the faculty of the Department of English, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa, and to thank that institution for its generosity in releasing him from teaching duties during his stay at the Institute for Research in the Humanities at the University of Wisconsin.

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 Washington; we are especially grateful to Donna E. Shackelford, who generously, cheerfully and accurately typed the copy for this issue.

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WALLACE MARTIN
UNIVERSITY OF TOLEDO

The other two papers I found so persuasive that they were difficult to disagree with. But since agreement would end criticism as I know it, I'm going to emphasize such disagreements as can be identified in what we have to say. I will summarize my paper very briefly and supplement it with an analysis of different types of controversy, and finally, identify the differences between my views and those that I impute . . . to them. The history of controversy shows that it tends to evolve from serious confrontation to dramatic performance. This development is illustrated in the case of the second sophistic, developing in the first and second centuries A.D. I analysed that in my paper. And then, seeing the same thing as true of current criticism, I say, "We are now entering a stage which might be called the third sophistic in which 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 becomes the hallmark of the successful critic." And, in support of that assertion I cite a number of examples: . . . the ways that controversies are now conducted in critical journals serve as a form of encouragement and incitement to disagree, also, a certain kind of confrontation that has been staged at conferences, including the MLA. And, after doing that, I list a series of premises that are popular in current criticism which in effect make it impossible to resolve any issue rationally.

My differentiation of stages of controversy involves the cultural and ontological status of debates as they move from confrontation to performance. This distinction between stages applies to a variety of phenomena in culture and nature. For example, it can be used to explain how combat becomes institution-

alized as game, or animal fights become a form of play or mating ritual. I posit an evolution of controversy only for heuristic purposes. The development may move in the opposite direction-- from a playful tussle to a serious fight. The point is that we must be aware of the distinction between ritual and genuine combat, though they're often both present in individual cases. And we must be careful not to make mistakes in cases in which confrontation slips across the boundary between combat and entertainment. My paper is, in a sense, mimetic. The development of the argument turns on antitheses such as real-unreal, genuine-artificial, and on the ambiguity of words such as stage, (historical vs. theatrical stage) and act (what we do and what we pretend) scene, and the like. The question posed at the end of the first part of the paper is, "if the thesis and antithesis in critical argument synthesize in the concept of controversy itself, how can meaningful discussion take place?" Can we find a concept opposed to controversy that might lead to critical progress?

Now, Nick Visser's paper seems to propose consensus as the opposite of controversy. We differ on this point in large part, I think, because we use different conceptual frameworks. Therefore, I want to articulate a set of distinctions that may help show the relationship between his approach to the problem and my own. My concern is with the cultural and ontological status of controversy. Visser, and to some extent, Searle, are concerned with its social, logical, and epistemological status. I see controversies as being of three distinct logical types, or levels, which can be seen as involving a hierarchic structure.

Type one, level one, is pragmatic controversy: argument about the facts of a case, about how a situation should be understood, an investigation pursued, or a state of affairs interpreted.

Examples of this would be different, conflicting interpretations of a poem.

Type two: theoretical controversy; Not about particular cases, but about different kinds of explanation. Particular cases are members of set ABC. Controversy of type two is about these sets, not about their members. It's a matter of controversy about how the sets are constituted. When we refer to literary controversy we are usually thinking of this type--for example, the relevance of intentional explanation, the autonomy of texts, the usefulness of considering texts a formal system, the relevance of intellectual history to interpretation.

Type three: a controversy about different conceptions of understanding. This is no longer a literary controversy. Different kinds of theory and explanation are the members of the sets discussed. And argument involves the boundary conditions of meaning, existence, rationality, discourse, reality.

My paper concerns disagreements at level three. Visser's paper, as I understand it, concerns the ways in which type three can be used to explain type two. In other words, he discusses the ways in which type two controversies in theory can be explained, and comes to the conclusion that we have to look at the factors underlying the critical commitment in order to understand that. I see him as treating what in the German tradition is called the sociology of knowledge. Recent German critics have discussed this subject, for example, Mecklenburg and Müller (Erkenntnisinteresse und Literaturwissenschaft). And there are significant critiques of this sort of analysis of criticism in Götner's Logik der Interpretation and an article by Pasternak in the Schiller Jahrbuch, 1975. These are critiques of this kind of analysis of criticism.

On level three, other analyses of level two, or of the factors underlying theoretical commitment

are possible. For example, you can develop a Derridian analysis [wherein] type two can be explained as involving the conditions of the logocentric tradition, a Lacanian analysis, a Foucaultian analysis, of differences of type two. Visser steps up to level three and surveys level two. His paper, as I see it, becomes controversial if and when it confronts another kind of level three analysis.

The problems, as I see them, that are left over:

Visser asserts that arguments produced in the course of controversy are the result of attempts to justify prior personal and ideological commitments. And controversy as a result is full of postfacto bad arguments, simply trying to justify a position. I think many French critics would agree with this conclusion. And then they would go on to say that any attempt to attain consensus in criticism can only be a manifestation of the will to power or of ideological tyranny, no matter how genially it's proposed. So I think they would agree with him on this. And my question then is how can consensus be achieved? By eliciting in our culture ideological unanimity? Is this possible?

Second problem: There are two ways to determine whether or not literary study can be similar in method and theory to scientific study. The first would involve taking concrete literary questions and trying to answer them through the use of explanatory models similar to those used in science. The second way of determining whether or not literary study is similar to scientific study would be to look at literary and scientific communities and see if they operate with the same sort of methods of clarification and validation, that is, communal agreement. I think that the problem of the relationship between scientific

and literary theory will be resolved if it ever is by approaching concrete problems rather than by ideological analysis.

And finally, serious questions remain regarding the placement of the subject--the I--whoever utters it in relation to the critical field. Is it possible, theoretically or rhetorically, to step outside of a personal position and provide a disinterested view of the controversies and commitments within criticism? Could any audience be convinced that this is possible? Would they believe you if you said there was nothing personal at stake? I can't answer these questions for others, but, as written, my paper presupposes that one always has a position. Usually it is one of combative commitment, as in the last part of my paper. The end of the paper proposes a sacrifice of the personal and ideological commitments that articulate the critical field. What this means in personal terms, what it would involve, is a loss of the self, turning oneself into an analog computer or an unconscious that's incapable of saying not and no. And if one did that, then every critical position would make perfectly good sense for a time. It would all be entirely reasonable, understandable. If somebody replies that that non-position is idiotic, I can't disagree with him but I can't see any other way to escape the kinds of antitheses that have always plagued criticism and resulted in pointless controversy.

N. W. VISSER
INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH IN THE HUMANITIES
THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

Having had to compress a discussion of enormously complex issues into ten pages (I cheated, Mr. Martin abided by the rules), I now have ten minutes--or the equivalent of about five pages--in which to recapitulate or expand on my paper, clearly a daunting task.

Instead of doing that I want, without cheating this time, to focus on a single issue which emerged in different ways in each of the three offerings before you: the question of theoretical consensus, which, if some of the discussion at this and other sessions at last year's Convention is anything to go by, is one of the more unsettling and, appropriately, controversial issues facing the discipline.

What is at stake is clear enough. We are humanists; we value diversity, individuality. Any effort to arrive at a consensus regarding the aims and methods of literary studies must be, we were told by so many people at so many sessions last year, an attempt to limit the range of inquiry and even to "constrain the domain of literature." Many in the profession, perhaps even a majority, are suspicious of the very activity of theorizing about literature. Even some academics who have made literary theory their principal area of inquiry have expressed the fear that theory--and even critical analysis--will inevitably blunt one's response to literary works. I believe these worries to be unfounded, and I think the tenet that knowledge undermines response is pernicious.

Perhaps I can best convey my own position by citing a couple of case studies drawn from other disciplines. Several years ago a German professor of philosophy who had been invited to spend a year as a visiting professor at an American university published a report on his experience in an American philosophical journal. In that more or less open letter, he confessed that for the first several months of his sojourn he was confused about the way philosophers behaved in their professional activity in America and was uncertain of the causes of his confusion. Eventually he realized that it was the way philosophical inquiry was conducted that perplexed him. His observation was that there was no visible movement or direction in the field. People didn't build on what others had said or

written; instead, if a topic interested one, one simply did a bit of reading on it and submitted an article. Arguments got continually recycled, and all topics and methodologies were equal. What especially puzzled him was that people bothered to publish at all, since there was no evidence that others would necessarily bother to take into account --or indeed even to read--what one had said. Every publication was a discrete entity, and remained so even if gathered into an eclectic anthology devoted to the topic in question.

I think these observations apply, perhaps with even greater cogency, to literary studies in America. What this visitor found lacking in America can be identified by a German phrase which has no traditional equivalent in American humanistic endeavors: such and such a person is or is not in the discussion. I heard a German professor who teaches in an American university use the phrase recently after he had returned from a visit to Germany. He noted that Hans Robert Jauss was no longer very much in the discussion, but Wolfgang Iser, who had just published two new books, was. Here is the kind (or degree) of consensus I am interested in. We have a state of affairs in which academic inquiry is seen as a discussion. One is expected as a matter of course to know the current state of the discussion and to see one's work as contributing to it. Let me try to bring home the distinction I am making by way of an example: Wayne C. Booth's Rhetoric of Fiction, with very slight changes: a few additions to the bibliography, a few footnotes, taking into account some more recent work, with changes only in incidentals, could be published this year. On the other hand, Franz Stanzel's German equivalent which has been translated as Narrative Situations in the Novel, could not be published this year. Its concerns, and methodological preferences are simply no longer central to the discussion, as

it is carried on in Germany, which is not to say that it is not of value. Indeed it helped clear the way for the discussion to reach its present state. It has already been taken into account and built upon.

A second illustration, this time from scientific inquiry. I hesitate to refer to science because of the superstitions that humanists tend to have about the field, but if for the moment we can disabuse ourselves of the notions that science is all truth and fact and proof, and accept instead that consensus in science is by no means unanimity or uniformity, all will be well. A number of years ago an American graduate student in physics decided to examine once again the argument between the great majority of physicists who hold the statistical probability interpretation of quantum theory and those few who, following Einstein's belief that God doesn't play dice with the universe, uphold the hidden variable interpretation. The student decided to bypass both positions. He published a paper based on a model of a continually splitting universe in which, on one side of the split, x occurred, while on the other it did not. (This obviously is to simplify his discussion to the point of misrepresentation, but it will suffice for present purposes.) The paper was carefully argued, logically as flawless as scientific arguments can be; it satisfied, depending on one's interpretation of such things, all the criteria to which scientific theories are customarily submitted: accuracy, consistency, breadth, simplicity, fruitfulness, and so forth. It was published, read with interest, commented on, and, perhaps most surprisingly, did not raise a furor in the scientific community. It didn't gain a faction of dedicated adherents, didn't provoke enraged polemics, didn't seem a serious threat to the predominant orientation in the field.

Michael Polanyi, the British scientist and philosopher who is probably familiar to most of you, cites a similar case of a letter published many years

ago in the journal Nature. The author of this letter noted that the average gestation period throughout the animal kingdom (including man) was an integer multiple of π . Again the author cited a good deal of evidence; there was in fact a high degree of correlation. However, the letter was published as a joke and was accepted as such. No scientist, including the author of the letter, would bother seriously to entertain such a hypothesis.

What would be the effect--and I could rephrase that to say what has been the effect--of equivalent contributions in literary studies? Generally speaking, extreme consternation. I recently listened to a very senior professor of literary theory spend an hour or more attempting to rebut an idiosyncratic and even perverse interpretation of one of Wordsworth's Lucy poems. The interpretation, which I later had a look at, was a carefully argued, sustained analysis which cited much supporting "evidence." Several things about the original essay and the effort at refutation seem to me to be revealing about our discipline. The first is simply that someone found the effort involved in making such an interpretation worthwhile. The second is that the interpretation was seen to invite and even require entirely serious consideration by other scholars. And the last is what the senior professor saw to be at stake, for he believed that if he could overturn this particular interpretation of this single eight-line poem he could demonstrate certainty in critical interpretation and thus fend off the depredations of deconstructionists and their relativistic ilk. And a final curious note: this same professor argued that if he were to find a diary entry or similar bit of documentation by Wordsworth attesting that the original intention of the poem conformed to the outrageous interpretation, the professor would accept it without further question (he just wouldn't like the poem so much anymore). Thus do the arguments get recycled.

It was clear from the tenor of the professor's remarks that the interpretation seemed to him to pose a genuine threat to the conduct of literary studies. Admit it--the interpretation--even tentatively or provisionally, and anarchy is upon us. I hope the paradox has become clear. Those same humanists who (quite inaccurately) deprecate science for its uniformity and dull devotion to fact and exalt their own calling for its tolerance and even encouragement of diversity and individualism, in fact demand a degree of conformity that scientists would find intolerable, if not positively bizarre.

What is amiss in our discipline is not that idiosyncratic interpretations can be fashioned, not even that our reactions to them often have a taint of hypocrisy. What is amiss is that such interpretations are taken as seriously relevant in the first place. In Germany the interpretation, because it dealt with such a narrowly restricted field of inquiry (a single eight-line lyric poem), and, more importantly, because it showed a total lack of awareness of recent methodologies, the application of which might have altered the findings utterly, simply could not have entered the discussion. Indeed it is extremely unlikely that it could have been published.

The degree of consensus I believe we require in literary studies in the English-speaking world is precisely the degree suggested by the term "discussion." The time has come, I feel, for us to enter into a shared, serious, long-range, unself-dramatizing endeavor to arrive at a stage in our profession that Northrop Frye insisted upon almost exactly twenty years ago and which Wayne Shumaker modestly proposed in greater detail in an article in Contemporary Literature in 1968: that is the academic study of literature as an intellectual discipline with its own distinctive concerns and methods. Such an endeavor will require that we enter into a discussion, which will shape our

inquiry quite as much as our inquiry will shape it. If this be constraint, well then by all means let's make the most of it.

LEROY SEARLE
UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

Instead of summarizing my commentary on these papers, I would like to enter this discussion by extending it in a couple of directions. Wallace Martin's distinction between three levels of controversy is an important clarification; it should help, in many cases, to keep us from being confused about what it is we disagree about. But I would like to introduce another axis of a simple, commonplace kind, that cuts through all three levels. I believe there are controversies we see and controversies we don't see. It seems to me that the ones we don't see are the ones that cause the most grief and interfere with the progress of any reasonable discussion.

There are many reasons we may not see controversies: it may be that we are not paying attention; but the most interesting cases of unseen controversy are those that occur at level three. These we don't see, we encounter. We run into them, and when we do we don't even know how to discuss them. We find ourselves confronted by positions that leave us non-plussed: we vacillate, we strike out, we make moves that appear to make us look good without ever having identified the basis on which something appears to us as controversial, or cannot locate the source of the controversy. In my response to the two papers (printed in SCE Reports 3), part of my pleasure in replying was that the two papers seemed to me to provide a way of seeing those controversies we usually do not see but encounter. For the purposes of discussion to follow, I would like to re-introduce Martin's seven premises--which, if accepted, will convert discussion

into performance, putting the critic on the stage. These premises are evident in encounters familiar at these conventions—not just this year or last, but for the past five or six years. When any of these premises are accepted, the result is only an encounter, not a discussion. The first is that criticism is literature; the second, that there are no "meta-languages and all writing is literature and vice-versa. Third is that any appeal to canons of argument is an act of political repression or an act of psychological domination. The fourth premise is that it is no valid objection to a theory that it is poorly formed or self-contradictory—as for instance, Northrop Frye's assertion in defense that his view of criticism "works; it's teachable." The fifth (which Martin parenthetically says is everywhere practised, nowhere confessed), that hamartia is a superior form of marksmanship, leaving the impression that your opponent doesn't know where to aim; and the sixth is the premise that "it is impossible to deconstruct my position on logical or ideological grounds because I've already done it myself." The seventh is that some audiences require slogans, or simplifications, so the critic must journalize his own views.

When we encounter critical discourse conducted on these premises and our response is peculiar, in that we don't quite know how to argue against such positions, the responses we're most immediately inclined to make—striking out or going on a polemical binge—turn out to be ineffective because these premises can be turned back upon such outraged replies. At this point, those controversies we don't see pose some questions for which Nick Visser's paper provides an interesting set of ambiguous terms that I think we can disambiguate. The terms are "diversity" and "commitment."

If we pose the question in the following way, considering for ourselves, "how did we all, individually, get hooked? Why are we doing what we're doing?" there

is diversity in our commitments. That diversity has a number of sources which seem to me to suggest that we cannot really expect to stand in a position at level three in controversies and explicate level two controversies, largely because the nature of our commitments is emergent, in the process of studying literature itself. For instance, we may decide to study literature because we did a little bit of writing—there are many closet Miltons in English Departments. We know the experience and value it; but then, we persist for other reasons. It may be that we discover the profound intellectual excitement of speculative thought about literature—and this, I would assert, is an excitement that does not diminish. It increases; it feeds itself because literary texts raise the most intricately reticulated and difficult intellectual questions that I think will ever be discovered. We may turn to literary study because we had a good teacher; we may turn to it because we had a bad teacher, or because we flunked out of physics. It may simply be that we couldn't think of anything else to do. Some may say that they turned to literary study because they loved literature; and, for a reason about which I want to be very clear, this last makes me a little suspicious.

I think that the nature of the love of literature that comes from the study of it is a cumulative event. It is something that does not begin at the outset in the same shape or take the same manifestations. It may very well be true, but it seems to me that when people say "I study literature because I love literature," it can easily become a way of ducking the questions that literary study imposes on us, to defend instead a kind of pedantry. If we examine the diversity of our commitments, I don't think, as Nick suggests in his paper, that we can expect to have social or political forces explain our commitments; nor can we expect to find ideologies that exist already formed to explain why it is that certain people subscribe to certain ideological positions.

Something more important is involved, I think; something that goes much more directly to the conclusion of Wallace Martin's remarks today. As we look at literary texts and begin the serious concentrated study of those texts, on a concrete level, in the engagement with the texts themselves, we discover patterns that have a compelling force. You see in those texts implications that are intrinsic to the texts themselves. You go in directions where it becomes a matter of personal commitment which deepens as you proceed, because literary study forces us to consider those controversies we do not see in both intimate and public terms, and to recognize that our commitments come from what we understand. For instance, understanding Wordsworth's Prelude, Blake's Jerusalem, Stevens' "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction," Williams' Paterson, Dickens' Bleak House, Melville's Moby Dick--the list could go on and on--carries with it a definite commitment that every subsequent reading will deepen. If we put those commitments based on understanding, as it develops in the engaged study of the literary text, aside to pursue a particular set of questions that are collateral to those texts, I believe we put ourselves, our students, and our enterprise in jeopardy. To find the kind of consensus that Nick Visser characterizes as being "in the discussion" seems to me to require a return, with the most rigorous intellectual acuity we can bring to bear, to clarify in full respect for our indebtedness to them, our commitment to these strange and marvelous things we study.

In my original remarks, I suggested that one function of controversy is to test the limits of consensus; and that the phenomenon of criticism turning into performance reveals a profound truth: the grounds of consensus are imaginative. They are always imaginative. If we return now to those three levels of controversy and imagine that other axis of controversies that we see or do not see, we can see that literary texts and the problems

they pose run through all three levels. They continually bring us face to face with the most pervasive questions about how we as individual people will be in the world. And if being in the discussion requires us to confirm the nature of our commitments to literary study itself, I think we have a basis on which we can make the discussion into something which is not only an intellectual experience to have, but a way to be in the world.

QUESTIONS

DON BIALOSTOSKY
UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

I feel very grateful to the panelists for these impassioned and, I think, incisive statements, and I would like to introduce one more axis--I don't know in what direction relative to the others. But I think it might shed some light on the nature of the issues before us.

It seems to me that one question that has not been asked is "what are the controversies we are engaged in trying to resolve?" What are we trying to determine by controversies? I recur, in trying to answer that question, to the text that I know best that tries to answer it, namely, Aristotle's Rhetoric. I notice when I do that all of the panelists, especially Leroy Searle and Wallace Martin, seem to be concerned about one kind of controversy among the three sorts of controversies Aristotle is interested in--what he calls epideictic controversy, the kind that is involved in praise or blame, in trying to determine what it is we ought

to be. Interestingly enough, this is the kind of controversy, as Aristotle himself notices, that turns into performance easily--ceremonial oratory or display, he calls it. One reason it easily turns into performance, I think, is related to the nature of the problem Leroy reveals--namely, that in trying to determine what it is we ought to be, the rhetorician may either choose to address himself to the praise of something outside of himself or he may try to exemplify in himself as an object for imitation--what it is we ought to be. That is a very easy turn-about, one that is constantly possible on that axis.

I think where Leroy's point leads us in this connection is that people are trying to settle the question of what to be in a simple-minded and immediate way--I think of what Nick says about graduate students being the people who are most likely to jump on the newest bandwagon--it seems to indicate that those who are looking for an identity and may try to pick it up by imitation rather than by engagement with the matters that really seriously concern us. But I think we need to remember that there are two other sorts of controversies, two other sorts of things that controversies determine that aren't subject to the same transformation. There are controversies over what to do when we are deliberating about the activities we engage in and the methods that we will use toward the ends on which we have already agreed, in which case controversy may be fruitful and we may all have a stake in the resolution of them. There are also the oldest-fashioned controversies, which Aristotle would call forensic--controversies about what we know of the things we are talking about, where the canons of evidence are, I think, perhaps best established and where the controversies continue in perhaps the least fashionable meetings at the MLA--but they do go on. I can attest to it; I attend an occasional unfashionable meeting. Those are the questions about what is the nature of this particular thing that we are all interested in talking about,

and stating the nature of it as clearly as possible. I think these two domains of controversy--the deliberative and the forensic--are guaranteed to be healthier by the nature of the issue, and that we may get some fruitful clarification in recognizing that our problem is really premature identification or the wish to be a full-fledged professional before we have done the work that is required to make us enter into the materials that we care to enter into.

MR. SEARLE

I think Don's comments are a very apt way of pointing out a kind of homologous relation that pertains between classical rhetoric and Wally Martin's three levels of controversy, for instance. But in this particular case, there may be good reason to approach the question not only in terms of rhetoric, but in terms of a model for organizing a theory: that is, forensic questions in the study of literature have a predominantly observational character; the deliberative have a predominantly descriptive character, and the epideictic have a predominantly explanatory character. Now, I think it is evident from saying just that much that it would require another discussion, or another axis, to see what the advantages of one formulation or the other would be. But insofar as the first two are generally less problematic, less liable to fall into vitiating controversy, I would question whether it is the case that they are so protected in literary study because of the curious ontological and epistemological status of the literary text. We are dealing with strange and peculiar objects; and in this light, how are we to know what it means to "observe"--how do we determine what the "facts" about a literary text are, and what "facts" are relevant to our inquiries? If we follow the direction of examining how a theory is organized, we may, for example, get a stronger reticulation

with collateral disciplines.

MR. VISSER

A very quick clarification. . . the point about graduate students does include or imply something about jumping on a bandwagon but I don't mean it to mean only or primarily that. I think we should remember that most of the major influential theoretical orientations of the twentieth century were in fact created by groups of graduate students and young teachers. This was true of the Nashville group in New Criticism; the Russian Formalists came out of a series of graduate seminars; the same was largely true of French structuralism and of British new criticism. The contribution that graduate students have made towards revitalizing literary studies far outweighs . . .

MR. BIALOSTOSKY

Well, it's one thing to build a bandwagon and another to jump on one.

MR. VISSER

Yeah. It's the epigones versus the creators, fair enough.

BRITTON J. HARWOOD
MIAMI UNIVERSITY

I have a question which will sound polemical but comes out of genuine puzzlement. I do not subscribe to the premise that there are no languages about languages. I believe in metalanguages. And this symposium, by raising the question "what is the function of controversy in the language of critical exchange" poses obviously a metacritical question, that is the question is what is the function of

controversy in criticism, and therefore the question itself is metacritical. Now, Jim, you on the second page [called for] a disciplined discussion. And so my question is, what discipline? That is, how would one describe metacriticism as a discipline? Now, Professor Visser rightly speaks of the necessity of knowing the current state of affairs. And so, I would like you in a way to tip your hands by describing how you understand the current state of affairs with respect to metacriticism so that I have some way of identifying the discipline in which the question was posed. So, the question is what is the function of controversy in criticism; I can think of several disciplined answers which you may not have in mind. I could think of a psychological answer, possibly, in terms of something like aggression. I could think of, there might be what I call sociological answers; there might be historical answers. Don proposed, I think, a rhetorical context. One could say the function of controversy in this instance is encomiastic, something like that. What I'm interested in is how the panel understands the discipline of metacriticism and would look in their answers for descriptions of their understanding of the current state of affairs.

MR. SOSNOSKI

Before I turn to a member of the panel I would absolve them of any responsibility for the question, which was mine. And I'll tip my hand. It first occurred to me while rereading Morris Weitz's Hamlet and the Philosophy of Criticism. And Weitz, after reviewing in some detail Hamlet criticism, wondered about the function of controversy and concluded that it was very useful and I found this puzzling, yet interesting, because I instinctively react restlessly to controversy. And so my own thinking turned to Stephen Toulmin and The Uses of Argument and so my metacritical hand is, I'd say, Toulmin's,

largely, more so than Weitz's. But that's me--and I raised the question. However, each panelist has understood the question in his own way and so let me turn it over to them.

MR. MARTIN

Well, Monroe Beardsley's answer to the question how does one describe metacriticism as a discipline is "through meta-metacriticism." Wittgenstein's implicit answer is in Philosophical Investigations number 121, which runs roughly as follows: "Some might think because philosophy uses the word

philosophy there is a second order philosophy, but that is not the case. It is rather like the case of orthography which examines the word "orthography" among other words. I think that the use of the word "meta" has been very loose and misleading in criticism. Very briefly, I think it's the case because it results from a confusion between hierarchic relationships, which I tried to outline in my levels--that's a hierarchic relationship--it confuses that with something else, which is, statements about things, such as, "three is a number," you know, in quotation marks. And while not having time to go fully into those distinctions, I'll be happy to supply you with three pages which happen to be written by myself that I think solve the problem completely. But I think that there are great dangers and difficulties here surrounding the concept of metacriticism that can lead to all kinds of quagmires, that's all I can say about it.

MR. SEARLE:

I want to just underscore that point. The regressive nature of the notion I think is quite clear because as far as the importation of that

concept from Carnap, it's obvious that criticism is already a metalanguage in respect to its primary language, to its object language, literary texts. And here one, I think, could resolve that question. If you want, I've got three pages . . . The distinction I suggested to Don just a moment ago will take care of most of those questions very effectively. If we discriminate between and among contexts of discourse within the enterprise of criticism [then] most of what we call "metacritical questions" are in fact questions of explanation. And in that light, I think, that we might even make Martin's seven premises eight by saying, as a lemma to the one that says there is no metalanguages; [that] there is a metacriticism the effect of which is to involve us in that regression while avoiding what I think is the central issue. That is, if we look at the primary demands that are implicit within the texts we study, we're confronted with a question whether or not we are willing to trust imagination. If we're willing to trust the imagination, as William Carlos Williams says, "I decided to let imagination have its own way to see if it could save itself. Something very definite came of it. I began then and there to revalue experience." That's the risk, I think, of criticism. Not to look for a privileged, metacritical position, but to trust those steps. Then if we can explain them we'll answer those metacritical questions.

MR. VISSER:

I'll just say I think you must be aware by now that there's something like a dodge going on. I don't imagine you feel your question has been answered and I'm not going to pretend that I can answer---I don't even have three pages.

I think two things have happened and you've brought one out and I feel very guilty about it. I don't like going to conferences and attending sessions on a particular topic and finding that in fact the people have written about something completely different. And that's almost happened here. We were asked to write about the function of controversy, and instead we have written about its nature, its history, its place in the current state of affairs in academic and professional institutional life and so on. And we have not gone, precisely, to those psychological and sociological and professional functions that it might have. You can build a career today on controversy, after all. Some people have done it quite successfully. And, going on to the other part of your question, you ask at one point if it were possible to describe the current state of the discussion. Well, because I have argued that in Anglo-American world it's precisely a discussion we lack, I think it's impossible to describe the current state of affairs without falling into unfortunate words like chaos, anarchy, even silence, which we hear about, over and over again. Only when we do get a discussion; a genuine continuing, serious coming together in terms of a discussion, will questions like yours be answerable.

VINCE LEITCH
MERCER UNIVERSITY

I think, one of the interesting things about all of the papers and really all of the discussion, is that we have accidentally, and some of us on purpose, set up, I think, a fairly useful description, I would say, a genre description, of what controversy is; the way Aristotle saw it, the way the Sophists saw it, the way it's somehow transformed and evolved into something like what it is today. Anyway, we've been discussing the genre called controversy. Now, what I find interesting about that is that everyone has agreed somehow that the purpose of controversy--no one has questioned this so I assume that they agree --the purpose of controversy is to reach consensus, or rational resolution, that we are somehow involved thereby in progress, that we've discussed facts, that we discuss interpretations, as though all these things are unproblematic. Suppose I say there are no facts; there are only interpretations. Suppose I say there are never resolutions, only impasses. It seems to me that all the values, I would say ethical values, that you have implied somehow are involved in the implicit nature of controversy, need themselves to be questioned. And I'm not suggesting that we should throw controversy out; I'm

saying that we ought to redefine it, rethink it, maybe throw it out. But let's discuss what the purpose of it is. Is it indeed to reach consensus? Are we in reality dealing with facts? Is objectivity a goal? Is rational resolution what we're ultimately after? I think we ought to address ourselves to those more important questions, than particular controversies.

MR. MARTIN

I think that the answer lies lurking somewhere in one of the points that Nick didn't repeat here, and that is the imperative in literary studies to find new things to say. That is, I think, one of the purposes--covert, perhaps--of controversy. So far as the question of presupposition, I immediately want to put that as a level three controversy, you see, between different positions there. And, myself, I wanted to hold an antithetical position in relation to the other two but you see me--I'm so genial, I cave in and agree with people but, now with your encouragement, I'd like to agree with you and say, "precisely!" All of those aims and ends are in question at level three and I don't know of a level four, hierarchically speaking, where they can be discussed. I can't conceive it. I drew the levels --sort of--from Gregory Bateson and his use of Russell's theory of logical types in a hierarchy. He goes up to about three and then he gets lost, and says, "I don't know what lies beyond there" and talks about Zen or something like that but he's otherwise a very reasonable person. I just don't know at that point. I can't answer it from the outside, is what I mean, you know.

MR. LEITCH:

Let me say one thing about the three step hierarchy which Leroy quickly added a supplement to. And I think which Don wanted to sort of revise. The point about that three step hierarchy is that--without being offensive and aggressive--

MR. MARTIN:

Be offensive.

MR. LEITCH:

. . . that it's patently ridiculous and, for example, the first level somehow deals with "facts," as if we can settle those easier, somehow. The last level deals with hermeneutics, I think, hermeneutic boundaries. The problem is that on every level of the heirarchy you presented and with Leroy's modification and with Don's adjustment, we're still always in the domain of interpretation.

MR. MARTIN:

That's right.

MR. LEITCH:

You want to somehow make gradation of interpretations.

MR. MARTIN:

No. They're all working at the same time.

MR. LEITCH:

Yes.

MR. MARTIN:

And I don't say that you're getting agreement. What happens is, you disagree about facts. Then someone says, "Why are we disagreeing about facts?" And somebody else says, "It's because you have different theories. And the problem is this." And he tries to identify it that way. Then it gets to be at the level of theoretical discussion. And then, that can't be agreed so someone says, "You know why these guys have these different theoretical positions? Because, they use these fundamental assumptions." And, you see, those fundamental assumptions are a group. They're the logocentric tradition and there is another position possible. So I didn't mean to say they could be disentangled, that they could be resolved. They're in flux; you can't fix them and you can't settle anything.

MR. LEITCH:

Well then, let me modify your model for you to suit . . .

MR. MARTIN:

Fine.

MR. LEITCH:

. . . what we've agreed on. Instead of saying that there are three stages of controversy, in

hierarchy, let us say that there are three stages of controversy on a wheel, that one isn't somehow higher or lower than the other. They're different. You know, I mean, that's a crucial, crucial point. And I think you agree with that.

MR. MARTIN:

Yeah.

MR. LEITCH:

Because what you've done is made something more important than something else. And I don't think you want to do that.

MR. MARTIN:

Yeah. That bothered me in Bateson. But he says at the end of his essay what's wrong--and he's right. But I don't know that I can get beyond it.

MR. BIALOSTOSKY:

I just want to ask Vince what criteria he envisions using to answer the questions that he wants us to take seriously before taking seriously the other sorts of questions, in that, it seems to me, controversy has not been escaped, and the martialling of whatever available reasons there are has not been escaped. We're simply asking a different sort of question which itself, if anything, is more controversial and demands the same activity from us and the same commitment to some mode of resolution or a decision to stop talking. That question always

involves that direction as one way of going and then, say, the enterprise is closed because there is no longer a discussion into which to enter because we can't talk.

MR. SEARLE:

I just want a point of clarification about the way I was imagining that other axis. It is going through the hierarchy so that at every stage of it, the difficulties we encounter in literary interpretation are already present. There's a great deal of mystification goes on when we reify a scheme. And instead, perhaps, of making a circle, I think its probably something that resembles a logical lattice with a mean and an extreme, a meet and a join.

MR. LEITCH:

I would go with that image if that lattice is horizontal.

MR. SEARLE:

Well, that seems to me to be a matter of

MR. LEITCH:

If it's fallen.

MR. SEARLE:

. . . . of convention. But, I think this is a crucial issue that we shouldn't dodge. And it's connected, I believe, to Brit's question.

MR. LEITCH:

Absolutely. He provoked my question, originally.

MR. SEARLE

If we do as you suggest (and I think it is something premised in these papers), calling controversy into question, we do have to confront, at that third level in the hierarchical metaphor, what may be at the fourth. I'd want to claim that there is where we would find imaginative works of literature. In that respect, what your question bodes is at least calling into fundamental doubt traditional concepts of rationality that we have worked with. It is to say, those concepts which we have trusted as "rational" are in fact deeply irrational. Now, as we've already seen, that does not rule out coming to agreements after going through a discussion. It is to say that we've got another question, calling for another discussion. How will we deal with the question of "irrationality"?

MR. LEITCH:

There's an important fissure at this point in our discussion. You assume that any question of the traditional ways of thinking about controversy will somehow lead us to affirming that the tradition is irrational. I think we may--I mean, it's conceivable--that we may reconsider and question each of the propositions that I laid out to begin with, and reconfirm them, accept them. I think, I simply think we ought to question them. I don't really think that we ought to assume that they're going to be somehow forever destroyed or declared irrational.

MR. SEARLE:

Again, I have to clarify: it's not that the tradition would be irrational but that traditional concepts of rationality are insufficient for that kind of question.

MR. LEITCH:

You see, you're guessing that if we took the time to question each one, that's what we would conclude. I'm not sure that that's so. But what you display is an emotion of anxiety at the moment at which I said, "let's question whether progress is the goal of controversy; let's question whether rational consensus is the goal of controversy." You then become nervous, worried. Maybe it isn't.

MR. HARWOOD:

I think--I'm not sure--that wherever the term "theory" is used in a significant way, there has always been a prior theory. That may be a truism. But I think to envision a theoryless state is like envisioning nature on what I understand is the Marxist view, that is, it is a fiction. Now, if you have a theory about the function of controversy in critical exchange, my question is what is the theory anterior to yours? That is, what theory does yours respond to? For instance, if it were gravity, one could name Gallileo, and so on and there was a theory of gravity anterior to Galilleo's. There is always anterior theory. And so, as an insidious way of coming back to my earlier question, since you did not like the vertical attack, let me try a horizontal one. That is, if you have a theory about the nature of controversy, the function of controversy,

in critical exchange, what do you conceive the anterior theory as being, that is, the theory to which yours responds.

MR. VISSER:

The trouble with these sessions is that you have to work off the top of your head. And before answering you, I'd like to question the question--which is supposed to make us very anxious. I must confess I'm not convinced that every theory has an anterior theory. One comes upon sets of phenomena that were previously concealed, overlooked, that simply didn't enter into the ken for one reason or another. And one, in attempting to account for these phenomena, develops a conceptual account which you could call a model or theory and there was no anterior theory because no one had identified those phenomena. I don't know enough about pre-Galilean scientific history to guess what the anterior theory of gravity was but I wonder if it is something that we could even call a theory of gravity.

MR. HARWOOD:

It was Augustine's notion of pondus.

MR. VISSER:

And what was anterior to that?

MR. HARWOOD:

. . . the appearance of the phenomena may be the occasion for the adjustment of theory, [but]

I don't take it that the appearance of a primary group of phenomena is the occasion for the appearance of a theory. But I'm not an historian of theory, a student of theory, I'm interested in finding a context in which you people are operating, in approaching this question. I think one way to do it is to ask what prior theory does your own respond to.

MR. MARTIN:

I do not have a theory of critical controversy because what I understand as a reasonably generative, useful concept of theory requires the satisfaction of conditions that I can't meet. I think that the word theory--this is going to sound a little like the same answer--but you'll notice certain words and page numbers have been substituted. But I think that it may have been a mistake to use the word theory in connection with literary discussion, drawing upon the model of the concept of scientific theory--that it is possible to date the origin of the use of the word theory in connection with criticism and see it as a product of historical epoch. And I have forty pages trying to demonstrate that.

MR. SEARLE:

Brit, just a way of responding to that--I also would question whether there really is an anterior theory to every theory unless the word theory is being used intuitively. The point of such a question, I take to be, there is no condition under which you can get to unmediated knowledge, no state at which you are prior to interpretation. Paul Feyerabend has a nice discussion in Against Method where he talks about "natural interpretation" as being those things we regard as given which turn out to be among the most complex and mediated events

that can be accounted in any number of ways. But we're never in a condition where we have unmediated knowledge; there's no place where we're free of interpretation. And that, I think would go back to the point that Vince was making earlier. I think we could get a reasonably good operative non-psychoanalytic definition of anxiety by calling it the inability to interpret effectively. And we find ourselves, even with the most resolute questioning of questioning we can do, coming to agreements. We find ourselves resolving issues, even if its only for a momentary state, because the process of interpreting is the way we construe a world. And, if we completely--well, even if we attempted--to get to a state where we are no longer construing it, we wouldn't be quite the automatons --that is, incapable of saying yes and no, we'd probably cease to exist. And that, I think, is at least one way of settling the matter of what it is we're responding to. We're responding to some things' becoming imperatives. We may not be able to discuss them with any satisfaction, but we end up performing it again and again.

GEORGE MCFADDEN
TEMPLE UNIVERSITY

To change the subject abruptly, and if I am doing that, I'll shut up--and shut me up--but I am losing the thread of the connection to controversy. What suggests itself to me is "are there any controversies that are in progress at this meeting?*" It seems I can detect two at least. First, there's the continuing effort of the Marxists to introduce the topic of history, and to argue that the speaker has failed to introduce the concerns of history into his or her presentation. And, I think that this is a genuine controversy, and that the various preconceptions and actual performance of

*[Professor McFadden refers here to the convention at large. ed.]

the previous speaker did indeed depart from issues that were brought up by the problem of history. And it's an important question. Another one, I think, was exhibited very well indeed at the meeting this afternoon when Barbara Johnson discussed S/Z and, while not at all controverting Derrida, made the point that, using his own technique against Barthes and Barthes' examination of the Balzac story, "Sarrasine," she was able, it seems to me, to show that Barthes had been inadequate to the possibilities that the occasion presented and she showed it might have been done better. And in the process she defended Balzac against his critic, it seemed to me, rather delicately. Now this, you might say, is not controversy, and yet, what she was using, what Derrida seems to have created, is a way of thought, what was called a logic but I know there's a big difference, in which controversy is implicit, a kind of dialectic . . . where strife is part of the progression toward--what would you call it, you could call it truth, at least a progression of thinking. And so, it seems to me that there you have a genuine controversy with which we're all familiar--the Marxist side--and another, which is a new form of the controversy which builds controversy into the process of thinking, where the group, the community in perfect concord, you might say, like the Tel Quel group [inaudible, Ed.] yet they claim to have built in this principle, call it self-criticism and say it's a mere shallow defence, a hoax. But, actually, it doesn't seem to be. And I think we got an exhibition of that fact today. So, what I think might be sought by such a group is the plight of ascertaining those bases upon which successful controversy does depart, in circumstances like ours. . . . Because, it is well known that, going back into the traditions of philosophy, Bloomfield told a group like this last year that literary theory has to be a proportionate part of philosophy, a very minor part. But I think

that not only is that true, but that we are constantly dealing as critics, with authors, living, writing authors, who are influenced, get their ideas from philosophy. We have to respond to them, if not directly to the philosophy, to respond to the writers we have to learn the philosophy. And, I think, another thing is happening, these writers of today, these dramatists and poets, and fiction writers, are responding to critics, not to American critics, but to people like Barthes. So that we have to get in on that little part of the situation. Now, this sort of thing has little to do with controversy; it's a question of the homework. But that lets them in for a very heavy load. You have to read Heidegger, you have to read Derrida, you have to read Barthes, and he has somehow made this very difficult to do. So that in order to enter into the controversy, and carry your part as a professional person, you have a lot of work to do, a lot of preparatory work. I think that this is one of the constant difficulties with a genuine controversy--that people partake in it without ever having really paid their way. But I do think that, in some well-known controversies, you do have a basis. We could point to the acquisition of a certain degree of philosophical sophistication in order to play a role in the controversy; this I think can be critical. Another thing, I would say, is a controversial matter although it doesn't seem to become controversial. . . . [inaudible, Ed.] is the question of whether all of these responses can be termed, in some social way, as part of the kind of self-serving that a professional person is more or less compelled to go into as part of his role. And it seems to me that that should invite immediate controversy, as to whether there isn't a better reason why people should go through these performances.

MR. MARTIN:

I agree completely. And I think that what you said is related to what Nick Visser said: "if you want to be in the discussion, you have to know what's happening in criticism," and I think that most people here are in the discussion. That's one reason why, at the end of my paper, I say that there is little evidence that criticism is being carefully read and assimilated today. And I think that if criticism were read more carefully and assimilated, then it would contribute to the kind of process and brilliant results that we saw this afternoon in the session on deconstructive criticism. But at the same time, again returning to the end of the paper, I think that entering that process may require a sacrifice of personal commitment, ideology, belief, so that one can leave oneself open to the conflicting imperatives of different theories and then, within the person, the process of generation, with the conflict being mediated internally, rather than its' manifesting itself as opposition to others, in some egotistical sense, will be made possible.

MR. SEARLE

I'd like to add just a brief comment to another aspect of your remarks. The way in which the papers that were circulated and our discussion tonight have treated controversy may resemble the epic in a certain respect---starting in medias res. And we were dealing with some taxonomies of controversy, looking at controversy partly by virtue of Wallace Martin's very nice treatment of the stages of controversy, but I believe that we may have another basis on which we could characterize the kinds of phenomena to which you are referring. If we saw, for instance, a concern to eliminate or go beyond controversy as

an artificial performance, we do not by that imply that we would eliminate conflicts. And the conflicts are over things that I think allow for clarification of issues. Wally's paper also has another very nice remark, that in some circumstances controversy showed the greatest insightfulness and incapacity that critics are capable of. But it's preserving a sense of conflict which can be put into a discussion where it's fruitful to be, and I think that that's something we have to preserve, but that's slightly different from the taxonomic characterization of controversy as an artificialized form. So, in addition to paying one's dues, by knowing the traditions, the history of discussions, before one enters into it, I don't think we have to assume that the only alternative to artificial controversy is ameliorative and non-combative or without conflict. Because the conflicts then can become something that are generative.

MR. BIALOSTOSKY:

I'd like to attempt a summary of what I'd think the three chief areas of--I wouldn't say debate but really examination have been tonight, maybe as a prelude to concluding. I will attempt that gesture anyway, though. It seems to me that there are three questions, that have been primarily on the floor, one of which has been ignored more than the others and I think it involves something that we will need to take up again. The first is "what is being determined in controversy" and that's the point that I referred to in my first remarks and I won't elaborate on it but it seems to me a distinction in that regard is crucial to knowing what the forum is and what is before it and what kind of determination is being made with respect to it.

The second question, and this is the one that I think has been ignored and is extraordinarily interesting is "what are the sources from which we draw whatever it is that's going to be the basis of our consensus about this." My quick suggestion was really in the rhetorical line again that we will go to the places where there are reasons available and find them and mobilize them. The point that has been most ignored is Leroy's remark in his piece that imagination is the source, that vision rather than available reason is finally the source, that in a sense poetry rather than rhetorical organization of experience is the source. That's a topic that I think we have not addressed ourselves to thoroughly. And the third question which has been lately before us is the question of who may enter the discussion. Who may speak? And what qualifies the speaker in a given forum? [This question] I think, is conditioned by our judgment of the other two questions but also has to do with our conception of what the profession is that we're engaged in. I think that covers a good deal of it, though I think it leaves Vince's question out of account, partly cause I don't know how to handle that one.

MR. SOSNOSKI:

I think it was appropriate, that movement toward closure, but there was one other question.

BARRY CHABOT:

I have a question for Leroy Searle. It's not so much a question as a quandary. It has to do with your use of the word imagination. . . . When I first read your paper, one of the things that surprised me, part way through, was the sense, at one point--I can't remember the page, but I can find it--you seem

to be suggesting that what's necessary is to build what used to be called an intrinsic theory of literary criticism, or an intrinsic theory for literature and for the study of literature. And it seems to me that that's coming around again, tonight, in another kind of way, when you're saying that the grounds for consensus for the debate or the discussion, are imaginary, somehow being lifted up, in an interesting kind of way, and I assume that that's related to the insistence upon literary, in the paper. And one of the things that worries me about that is what is "imaginary"? And is imaginary being held out against something called "reason"? Is that reason that it's being held out against something akin to what's called "reason" in the German tradition? And which made me think, in another way, (something I thought of when I was reading Nick Visser's paper) of Habermas. I was thinking of him all through the discussion. Especially of his more recent work, where he's trying to discuss, or to develop, an understanding of what it is people do when they engage in a discussion, pure, simple, everyday discussion, something quite different than a literary interpretation, something that may serve in another kind of way to ground it. And I think that is implicit in your discussion, Leroy, in the paper, when twice you put in quotes the word "decency." The word "ethical" creeps in in another way. And for Habermas, those words, "consensus" and "the ethical" [are virtually synonymous.]

MR. SEARLE:

The term I used was imaginative, not imaginary; the sense of imagination I wanted to incorporate, by the rhetorical strategy of my remarks, is to emphasize the constitutive nature of the cognitive. As far as Habermas is concerned, I don't know him very well; I just got his books quite recently. It strikes me as

extremely interesting because it is a convergence phenomenon of an important sort. Similar positions are emerging in other traditions, using other terms. And the nature of the position--we could discuss this more appropriately in another context--is that my reason for emphasizing a return to the specifically literary is motivated by a number of complex considerations. One of which is my own sense of what is necessary to construct a usable theory. Theories that purport to be general theories covering . . . what-have-you seem to me not very credible as speculative instruments. And the conjunction of consensus and ethical in my own discourse, however it works in Habermas, derives from a sense that I certainly could not fully defend or justify, but which I'd be delighted to discuss, that if we were able to articulate a coherent and strong theory of literature, which identified literary specificity, that my expectation is we would discover within that, a paradigm case, that instead of treating literature as something that is alien or odd, that it is the norm. And it would provide, I think, a way of looking at literary texts as having very specific properties, as having very specific conditions of appropriateness for literary investigation that would allow us to see criticism as an exemplary kind of explanation. Now, there is an argument that--again I can't go into this at any great length, by a very interesting philosopher named Jesse Kalin, at Vassar, on Kant's problems with ethics; and Kalin's argument, again to abbreviate it to the point of misrepresentation, is that the structure of a literary text provides a basis for ethical discussion that is unequalled by anything; that in the examination of literary texts, one may be able to articulate a position having ethical import, if not exactly an ethics, that would overcome some of the classic problems in ethical speculation about what do you do with an example in relation to a moral law. But you

see, these things are so tentative, that it seems to me that's a horizon question, that's something to move toward.

ON THE FUNCTION OF CONTROVERSY:
A BRIEF ANNOTATED CHECKLIST OF FURTHER READINGS

JOSEPH SHINN

This checklist is limited to works suggested by the participants in the preceding discussion. I have organized these suggestions into five groups: theorists concerned with (1) argument, (2) critical frameworks, (3) paradigms, (4) metacriticism, and (5) literary controversies.

I

Controversies are, of course, arguments. Stephen Toulmin's The Uses of Argument (Cambridge: The University Press, 1958), and Chiam Perelman's The New Rhetoric (Notre Dame, Ind.: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1969), are two influential analyses of argument.

In the introduction to The Uses of Argument, Stephen Toulmin questions how far "logic can hope to be a formal science, and yet retain the possibility of being applied to the critical assessment of arguments." The discussion begins with an examination of the "Fields of Argument," in which Toulmin suggests that arguments belong to the same "field" when the data and conclusions of two positions come from the same logical type; two arguments belong to different "fields" when the backing and conclusions are not of the same logical type. This is followed by a discussion of "Probability," and its function in argumentation. In the chapter "The Layout of Arguments," Toulmin analyzes the traditional syllogism and provides a model of an argument based on an informal logic, which he connects with legal argument. Siegfried Schmidt, turning to Toulmin's theory of argumentation in "Literary Science as a Science of Argument" (NLH, 7: 467-482), contends that literary criticism must

strive to become a more critically argumentative science. Schmidt asserts that because Toulmin's model of an argument was proposed for the concerns of practical arguments, and is methodologically viable, it is well suited to "literary science." See also Schmidt's Literaturwissenschaft als argumentierende Wissenschaft (Munich: Fink, 1975). For further discussions of Toulmin, see Wayne Brockriede and Douglas Ehninger, "Toulmin on Argument: An Interpretation and Application" (QJS, 46: 44-53); also, Glen Mills, Reason in Controversy: An Introduction to General Argumentation (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1964).

An equally important analysis of argumentation is provided by Chaim Perelman in The New Rhetoric. Perelman systematically examines and discusses "The Framework of Argumentation," "The Starting Point of Argumentation," "The Techniques of Argumentation," "The Dissociation of Concepts," and "The Interaction of Arguments," of which the latter is especially relevant to our interests. He suggests that the endless discussions and controversies that mark the history of philosophical thought are due to the nature of the undertaking itself. According to Perelman, the rhetorical basis of philosophical arguments is crucial. Like Toulmin, he is interested in legal argument and turns to a legal model in his approach to argumentation. For a discussion of the development of Perelman's ideas, see Ray Dearin, "The Philosophical Basis of Chaim Perelman's Theory of Rhetoric" (QJS, 55: 213-224), and Henry Johnstone, Philosophy, Rhetoric, and Argumentation (University Park: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1965). Johnstone analyzes Perelman's theory of argumentation and includes Perelman's "Reply."

In "The Nature of Controversial Statements" (Philosophy and Rhetoric, 8: 137-58), p. 139, Arthur Kruger asks "why do some statements tend to be controversial while others do not?" and answers, "it seems safe to say that two factors are responsible:

1) the problem of meaning and 2) the problem of confirmation." He suggests that the confusion of empirical and definitional statements lead to unnecessary disputes. Kruger provides a classification of types of controversial statements, contending that one must recognize different kinds of statements in order to establish his own claims and refute his adversary's.

II

In the conduct of arguments, literary critics agree and disagree with each other, which allows one to speak of "critical schools of thought." As a self-conscious school of controversialists, the Chicago critics have explained controversy in terms of the plurality of critical frameworks.

Ronald Crane's chapter "The Multiplicity of Critical Languages," in The Languages of Criticism and the Structure of Poetry (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1953), assumes a collection of "distinct and more or less incommensurable frameworks," wherein answers are correlative to questions. The result is a pluralistic account of criticism. For an examination of Crane's methodological pluralism, see Leroy Searle's "Basic Concepts in Literary Criticism: Some Controversial Instances" (DAI 31: 4794A [Iowa]). Searle examines Crane's division of criticism into "abstract" and "matter of fact" methods representing incommensurable "frameworks" and questions the validity of his method.

Crane argues that we can decide among the most effective critical arguments by testing the validity of their claims. He recommends the use of concept probability, discussed by E. D. Hirsch in Validity in Interpretation (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1967), for the testing of hypotheses in literary interpretation. In the chapter "On Hypotheses in

Historical Criticism," in The Idea of the Humanities (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2 vols., 1967), Crane discusses Karl Popper's notion of falsification, asserting that it applies not only to empirical investigations, but to literary ones as well. (Popper outlines and explains the "criterion of falsifiability" in The Logic of Scientific Discovery [London: Hutchinson, 1959], and in Conjectures and Refutations [New York: Basic Books, 1962].)

In Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent (Notre Dame, Ind.: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1974), p. 103, Wayne Booth also discusses the concept of falsification. Booth questions the feasibility of Popper's theory, offering two qualifications; he doubts that the "criterion of falsifiability" can be "put in falsifiable terms according to its own dictum," and suggests that the concept has little bearing on our "practical lives." Booth prefers Michael Polanyi's account of validation. See Personal Knowledge (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1958), especially, "The Logic of Affirmation," "The Critique of Doubt," and "Scientific Controversy."

III

In his section on "Scientific Controversy," p. 159, Polanyi writes:

. . . let me make it quite clear what I have urged here. I have said that intellectual passions have an affirmative content; in science they affirm the scientific interest and value of certain facts, as against any lack of such interest and value in others. This selective function--in the absence of which science could not be defined at all--is closely linked to another function of the same passions in which their cognitive content is supplemented by a conative component. This is their heuristic function. The heuristic

impulse links our appreciation of scientific value to a vision of reality, which serves as a guide to inquiry. Heuristic passion is also the mainspring of originality--the force which impels us to abandon an accepted framework of interpretation and commit ourselves, by the crossing of a logical gap, to the use of a new framework. Finally, heuristic passion will often turn (and have to turn) into persuasive passion, the mainspring of all fundamental controversy.

In the context of "persuasive passion," an expression which suggests a connection between our first and second sections, let us now consider a possible connection between the study of scientific controversy and the study of literary controversy. In The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1962), Thomas Kuhn suggests that "anomalies, or violations of expectation," upset traditional conceptual "paradigms," his term for common theoretical orientations, and result in crises, which lead eventually to scientific revolutions. Literary theorists, like their scientific counterparts, tend to group according to common theoretical orientations; as a result, Kuhn's concepts of "paradigms" and "crises" provide useful analytical tools for examining controversies in literary criticism. The chapters "Anomaly and the Emergence of Scientific Discoveries," "Crisis and the Emergence of Scientific Theories," "The Response to Crisis," and "The Nature and Necessity of Scientific Revolutions," are particularly relevant to the study of literary controversies. For critiques of Kuhn's theory, see Imre Lakatos and A. Musgrave, eds., Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge (Cambridge: The University Press, 1970), and Stephen Toulmin, Human Understanding (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1972).

For a general study of argument and controversy, one should consider Glyn Adey and David Frisby, translators, The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1976). This collection of essays, concerning the positivist controversy in the social sciences, contains contributions by Adorno, Popper, Habermas, Dahrendorf, and Albert. The editors suggest that the issues presented are relevant not only to sociology but to other areas as well, having direct implications for recent controversies in other disciplines.

IV

Ralph Cohen, Morris Weitz, and Paul DeMan study actual literary controversies. In The Art of Discrimination (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964), Cohen is preoccupied with the grounds of refutation used by critics of Thomson's The Seasons. After examining various critical responses to The Seasons, dating from 1750-1950, Cohen ends with a discussion of the relationship between "Criticism and Discrimination." For Cohen, "discrimination" is a task central to critical activity and directly related to the possibility of refuting another's critical claim.

In Hamlet and the Philosophy of Criticism (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1964), Morris Weitz concludes that "Poetics" are logically indefensible because they attempt to "define the indefinable." Therefore critical controversies are unavoidable because there can be no pure or absolute poetics. Disputes are necessary, according to Weitz, because they force critics to scrutinize the criteria that function as "guides in the enrichment of our understanding of art." An interesting companion piece to Weitz is A. J. Waldock's book on the Milton controversy, Paradise Lost and its Critics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1947).

Paul DeMan's Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971), is a text relevant to any discussion of controversy. In the introduction, DeMan contends that crisis and controversy are closely linked, "so much so that one could say that all true criticism occurs in the mode of crisis."

v

Finally, there are a number of recent essays which focus on the problem of literary controversies. Let me remind you, first and most obviously, of Wallace Martin's "The Stages of Controversy" (SCE Reports, 3: 4-13), and Nicholas Visser's "Commitment and Diversity in Literary Studies" (SCE Reports, 3: 14-26). After outlining the historical development of controversy, Martin suggests that the renewed interest in controversy is due in part to the emergence of "dramatic" criticism, where critical exercises have become "performances." He concludes that, because controversies are no longer substantive, or even rhetorical, we can no longer view these critical "performances" as we have in the past. In his essay, Visser questions whether differences among competing theoretical orientations can be resolved, and concludes that logical criteria play only a limited role in the resolution of these debates. Referring to Thomas Kuhn's concept of "paradigms," in his discussion of varying critical orientations, Visser presents an incisive view of literary controversy.

For an interesting application of a structuralist theory of reading to critical disputes, see James Sosnoski's essay, "Reading Acts and Reading Warrants: Some Implications for Readers Responding to Joyce's Portrait of Stephen," forthcoming in a special issue of the James Joyce Quarterly devoted to "Structuralist" and "Reader Response" criticism. Sosnoski attempts to account for the various critical

differences centering in the text of the Portrait by describing them as differing reading acts.

From quite another and much more personalized perspective, Cary Nelson, in "The Paradox of Critical Language: A Polemical Speculation" (MLN, 89: 1003-16), discusses the pluralities of critical language and analyzes critical presumptions and their inherent paradoxes. The discussion covers such writers as Frye, Burke, Hartman, Sontag, Barthes, and Foucault.

Although this checklist is highly selective and does not account for many relevant treatments of controversy, I hope it will help to identify what Professor Visser has called "the discussion."

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Postscript: It seems relevant that in the most recent issue of Poétique a connection between the analysis of discourse and the analysis of argumentation is made in Oswald Ducrot's bibliography, section 6, accompanying "Structuralisme, énonciation et sémantique" (Poétique, 33: 107-128), he lists J. C. Anscombe and O. Ducrot, "L'argumentation dans la langue" (Langages, 42: 5-27), and G. Vignaux, L'Argumentation: essais d'une logique discursive (Geneva & Paris: Droz, 1976).

NEWS AND NOTICES

The pages of SCE Reports are always available for announcing publishing opportunities, calls for papers, conferences, the formation of research groups, and any other information of interest to members of the society. Please send such information --a poster or announcement will do--to SCE Reports, 220 South Beech Street, Oxford, Ohio 45056.

Nick Visser suggests that the Society might help to relieve the sense of isolation that comes to many of its members as they work alone on projects in which their colleagues--if they have colleagues--have no interest. His idea is that the Society could provide a "Readers' Exchange." Members would announce in SCE Reports their willingness to read, or need to find readers for papers--published or not--on a given topic. Thereafter, the paper-work and administration would become the task of the individual readers. Announcements should come to the editor.

MMLA WORKSHOPS, 1978

The Society for Critical Exchange will sponsor two workshops at the MMLA Convention at the Leamington Hotel in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on November 2-4, 1978.

I

THE CONCEPT OF THE TEXT

SCE members, guests and friends will meet together in a workshop format to discuss the ways in which changes in the conception of the text effect the practice of criticism. As a focus for the discussion, we will take James Joyce's "Araby."

Panel: Fred Carlisle, Michigan State University
Robert Deming, SUNY-Fredonia
Wladislaw Godzich, University of Minnesota
Britton Harwood, Miami University
Steven Mailloux, Temple University
James Sosnoski, chair, Miami University

Note: Although we will begin the workshop with a discussion among the panelists, we intend this meeting as an occasion in which SCE members can exchange their ideas with each other.

A future issue of SCE Reports will publish "The Concept of the Text: A Selected & Annotated Checklist," which is now in the process of being compiled by James J. Sosnoski. The Checklist will contain annotations by the panelists and many other scholars who are at work on text-theory.

II

THE WORK OF HAROLD BLOOM: The Influence of the Influence Poetics

Discussion Leader: Patricia H. Sosnoski

Panel: Jonathan Arac, Princeton University
Wladislaw Godzich, University of Minnesota,
Minneapolis

Note: Papers by Professors Arac and Godzich will be available from The Midwest Modern Language Association, through the office of Paul Hernadi, to registrants of the conference.

MLA SPECIAL SESSIONS 1978

"IF 'USES OF CRITICISM,' THEN 'MISUSES OF CRITICISM'?"
(Organized by SCE)

Discussion Leader: James J. Sosnoski, Miami University

Panelist: Charles Altieri, University of Washington

Respondents: Wladislaw Godzich, University of
Minnesota
William Ruckert, SUNY-Geneseo

Note: Professor Altieri's paper, "The Propriety of
Critical Acts," together with prepared responses by
Professors Godzich and Ruckert, will be published in
SCE Reports #5.

For further information, contact:

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

MLA SPECIAL SESSIONS 1978

SPEECH-ACT THEORY AND LITERARY CRITICISM

Discussion Leader: Britton Harwood, Miami University

Panel: Michael Hancher, University of Minnesota/
Twin Cities
Joseph Margolis, Temple University
Mary Louise Pratt, Stanford University
Martha Woodmansee, Northwestern University

Note: Papers will be available 15 November 1978 and
may be obtained by writing

Professor Britton J. Harwood
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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.

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