

SCE Reports 5

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EDITOR'S NOTES

SCE Reports 5 is devoted to the proceedings of the MLA special session, "If 'Uses,' then 'Misuses of Criticism'?" sponsored by the Society for Critical Exchange. Participants were Charles Altieri, whose essay, "The Propriety of Critical Acts," was circulated in a special convention issue last December (and is reprinted here); William Rueckert; and Wladislaw Godzich. This issue includes a transcription of the meeting, together with Altieri's original paper and his written response to Mr. Rueckert.

In addition, James Sosnoski has written a retrospective on the Society's first four MLA sessions.

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Patricia Sosnoski  
Managing Editor

IN RETROSPECT

James J. Sosnoski  
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For the Society for Critical Exchange this spring marks the beginning of its fourth year. This spring also marks the beginning of the end of a cycle of MLA special sessions that emerged from conversations in the spring and summer of 1976. We shared one commitment then, best articulated in the statement, "SCE was organized as a not-for-profit corporation in 1976 to encourage cooperative inquiry in criticism," found in every description of SCE from the by-laws to the advertisements in SCE Reports. Instead of devising a "masterplan," at Leroy's urging, we decided to try to formulate the problems we felt to be crucial in the conduct of criticism. Later would be time enough to look back to see if there was any continuity in the developing exchanges.

Now that the first cycle of MLA sessions is coming to a close, it seems a good time to "look back." Next year we will begin a new cycle of sessions organized by a special committee with a rotating chairperson given the task of formulating an issue in the light of his or her understanding of the present state of criticism. This task falls to Vince Leitch in 1980 and to Hugh Ormsby-Lennon in 1981. I will turn my attention to the possibility of organizing a research group on the history of 20th century American criticism.

Looking back (from my point of view), it no longer seems an accident that SCE was founded at a conference on the communalities between Science and the Humanities organized by Brit Harwood (who later joined SCE). During the conference discussions

often took as their starting point the views of Popper, Kuhn, Lakatos, Toulmin, etc. about the character of scientific disciplines. At the time I was working on a paper on the relationship between the changing uses of the word, "text," and changing concepts of the subject matter of literary studies. This spring, while rereading Steven Toulmin's Human Understanding: The Collective Use and Evolution of Concepts prior to his recent visit to Miami University, I began to realize that what was "bothering me" in 1976 has informed all of my activity in SCE. I wanted then, and still want to understand whether or not literary criticism has the character of a discipline; and, if so, how it differs from scientific disciplines.

For Toulmin the contrast between professions organized around a communal goal and professions directed at individual ends defines the boundary between disciplines and non-disciplines (p. 399). Literary critics, like the artists they study, seem to work toward individual ends. Their research, though dependent to some extent on previous research, is conducted individually, if not idiosyncratically. On the other hand, the history of criticism gives evidence of "schools of thought" and "professional networks," some of which suggest "research groups." Is collective inquiry intrinsically inimical to literary studies or the underlying structure of literary studies? Toulmin's description of a discipline gives us a set of criteria by which we can make this vague, general question much more specific.

A collective human enterprise takes the form of a rationally developing "discipline," in those cases where men's shared commitment to a sufficiently agreed set of ideals leads to the development of an isolable and self-defining repertory of procedures; and where those procedures are open to further modification, so as to deal with problems arising from the incomplete fulfilment of those

disciplinary ideals. The representative set of concepts or procedures which constitutes the current content of any enterprise develops in a disciplined manner--on this account--not because the collective aims of the enterprise by themselves provide a criterion of 'truth,' or impose a single, uniquely 'correct' system of concepts. It does so, rather, because the disciplinary ideals determine an agreed direction of conceptual and procedural change, and so the criteria of selecting 'acceptable' variants. (p. 359).

Can it be said that literary criticism manifests a "shared commitment to a sufficiently agreed set of ideals" which provide "an agreed direction of conceptual and procedural change" and "the criteria of selecting 'acceptable' variants" from the existing "repertory" of old and new "concepts" and "procedures"? Among my friends in 1976, the prevailing view was that critical activity was, at best, "pluralistic," that there were several ideals, several directions and several repertoires.

Looking back, it is obvious why we entitled our first MLA session "The Language of Criticism," alluding to R. S. Crane's notion of "the multiplicity of critical languages." In the "Announcement and Call for Papers" Leroy wrote: "This seminar will address problems in relating the language of criticism to the conceptual frameworks which serve to organize it. We are particularly concerned with the bases on which critics choose to adopt (or reject) specific critical terms, concepts, and orientations. A major premise for this seminar is that the rapid proliferation of theoretical and speculative proposals in recent criticism has created serious problems in the conduct of professional dialogue. In the most direct terms, it has become questionable whether critics from different traditions, even when they employ the same

vocabulary, can sustain communication beyond the superficial level of approximations. The purpose of this seminar is to initiate open but disciplined discussion of the underlying conceptual structures which shape the language of criticism. More particularly, it will be concerned to examine the implications of critical 'pluralism' for effective communication among critics." Since criticism is what critics do, we invited critics who seemed to be doing criticism in the contexts of recent developments in critical theory. Jeffrey Mehlman, Jerome McGann, Paul Miers, Robert Matthews, Matt Marino and Ed Tomarken, each seemed to present a different but quite recent critical point of view. We began the session by asking the audience to consider whether or not they were witnessing a "genuine exchange" of views. "At the end," Patty wrote in her "Editor's Notes" to SCE-Reports 2, "one member of the audience remarked that 'we got a lot of stuff on the table--in a heap, but on the table.' It would certainly appear that the several discourses are discontinuous. Nonetheless, issues have emerged, and something near consensus was achieved on two interrelated points. No speaker was willing to countenance the dissociation of theory and praxis; most were skeptical about attempts to find a 'metatheory' to articulate, in Alarik Skarstrom's words, 'the ground of all grounds upon which we have always stood'." This conclusion to our first session led to the question, "how then do we resolve controversies in criticism?" which was the issue in our second session, "The Function of Controversy."

In retrospect, by focusing the second session on controversy, we asked, in Toulmin's terms, "what is our criterion for selecting 'acceptable' conceptual and procedural variants in the conduct of critical activity?" Wally Martin argued that "a series of premises that are popular in current criticism . . . make it impossible to resolve any

issue rationally." Mick Visser, somewhat more optimistic about the possibility of "collective inquiry," argued that in Europe, though not in America, there was "a state of affairs in which academic inquiry is seen as a discussion," which has disciplinary characteristics.

Even before our second session took place, I had formulated four other questions. "Can and/or should we attempt to identify inappropriate uses of criticism?; and, if so, what constitutes a misuse of criticism?" (for 1978). "Should interpretation be the goal of criticism; and, if not, what (if any) goal should a critic entertain?" (for 1979). The last two questions are directly related to Toulmin's contrast between professions organized around a common goal and those directed at individual ends. The first two questions, which are the subject of this issue of SCE Reports are related to the criteria by which a discipline, in Toulmin's view, selects or rejects concepts and procedures. Let me end these remarks by giving you an account of the context in which this issue arose.

In April of 1976, E. D. Hirsch gave a lecture at Miami in which he attacked "the Yale school" (principally Harold Bloom) for various critical "abuses." Hirsch was shortly followed by Monroe K. Spears who also attacked "the Yale school." I could not agree with these attacks because it seemed to me that in order to speak about "abuse" one had first to speak about "use." At the same time, it seemed very clear to me that the concepts of "use" and "abuse" were not related logically in this case. In my own thinking, "use" and "abuse" are intelligible only in historical terms, and then only in the context of historical decisions about the usefulness of concepts in the light of disciplinary ideals and goals. The polemicists of my acquaintance all spoke of "the abuse of criticism" without justifying their assumptions

about "the uses of criticism." I decided to formulate the issue logically (if use, then abuse?) in order to raise the question, "how are the concepts related?" (Leroy disagreed with my tactic.)

Thinking back over our discussion of this issue in New York, like Wally Martin's computer, I cannot say "no" to Vlad, Bill or Charlie. I agree, with Vlad, that this is not a logical issue. I agree, with Bill, that Burkean thought experiments demonstrate that it is not a logical issue. And yet, I agree, with Charlie, that literary criticism is nonetheless a rational enterprise. As Toulmin points out, "logic" and "reason" are not synonyms.

Hoping that the various ways in which my personal preoccupations with literary criticism as a discipline have made me blind have nonetheless been insightful, I now look forward to the issues Vince and Hugh envision.

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#### The Propriety of Critical Acts

I want here to trace a line of thinking I consider necessary if we are even to pose adequately the question of defining the uses of criticism in a way which makes it possible to identify inappropriate uses. The fundamental issue is whether or not we can establish criteria enabling us to posit a rough consensus that criticism is responsible to something beyond its self-enclosed performative qualities. I am not very certain of the answers I shall propose--they will be essentially gestures testing whether consensus is possible--but I am certain that any statements that there are no criteria are merely logical consequences of an ungrounded scepticism unless they can handle the kinds of arguments I shall raise.

There are two basic kinds of criteria we can posit as determining misuses of criticism--one internal and the other external. The internal criteria arise from what I take to be an obvious procedural consideration: any mode of discourse which is to be assessable at all must be responsible to the loose rules for relatedness implicit in a given approach. Thus if the critic claims to proceed argumentatively, he is bound to common assumptions about the logical coherence of arguments and to assessment of the perspicuousness of the details he chooses as relevant instances for general explanatory statements themselves judgeable in terms of their power to illuminate problematic details or to extend a given method of analysis. For example, a new psychoanalytic reading of "The

Merchant of Venice" is clearly responsible for explaining its relation to a Freudian grammar and for giving a reading more complex or more adjusted to stated psychoanalytic assumptions than is Freud's. And even a criticism posing itself as performance is responsible to our expectations about performance. It must be interesting and perspicuous either as illumination of features of an object text not disclosable by other methods or as dramatization of a significant personal attitude towards the text.

Even these internal criteria have no ontological foundation. We are bound by rules and expectations, not by commandments. Thus the only punishment is loss of respect by a community one presumably wants to honor and to heed his work. And because the appeals are to expectations, there are no hard and fast rules for misuse. There are loose expectations about value defining what moves count as worth attending to, and, within limits, some rules can be broken if there is compensatory value, say in the depth of insight. But even raising issues about internal misuse makes it clear that there are for any discourse audiences--real or perhaps ideal--which the author implicitly invokes as capable of determining whether a critical act is inadequate, or trivial, or wrong, or confused, etc. Indeed there may be a variant of Kant's moral absolute applicable here: any author is bound to those internal rules of procedure implicit or explicit in his own evaluative comments, both positive and negative, on the work of others.

I begin with the easier case in order to point to the loose set of procedural expectations within the community one addresses as the general grounds where we must locate criteria for use and misuse. We shall need these grounds to turn to the more difficult question of determining whether there is any hierarchy of uses (from pure abuse to some sense of necessary questions any critical discourse about

a text must answer) among critical arguments that are internally coherent and faithful to methods of assessing evidence within a given tradition of inquiry. But first we must distinguish questions of the use and abuse of criticism from a related issue, the usefulness of any discourse. Roland Barthes argues that boredom is always a reflection on the failure of the subject rather than on the object because an inventive mind should be able to find a perspective by which to make any object interesting. The same principle holds for usefulness: even the most absurd critical text can be useful as an example, say, of silliness or of where certain kinds of training or of assumptions can lead. In terms of the question proposed for this session, however, we must consider use and misuse not as functions of what an observer can make of a critical text but of how well the text as intentional structure of argument or performance itself contributes arguments clarifying the nature and significance of the problems it addresses. The first criterion then of criticism useful by external standards is that it convinces us that there is a problem important to solve and that the problem has relevance to concerns more general than those of an individual critic.

Were it not for the absurdity of so much that passes as professional work while only spelling out in great detail what we already know on any level that matters for most humanistic inquiry, this first criterion would seem not worth mentioning (would seem itself academic exercise). Yet it does enable us to make what I take to be that crucial step for deciding on external criteria for the use and abuse of literary criticism. The uses of criticism are inseparable from the uses of literature. What makes a critical act useful as description or explanation is its capacity to identify and to classify some significant way in which a literary text or body of texts can relate significantly to

some set of existential predicates. However other-worldly, or now possible worldly, the modality of a text as self-referential work, the utility of criticism resides in the capacity of a discourse to connect this modality to existential probability conditions, to ways literature might have a use. This need not entail denying the status of text as possible world. It means only that one must see how the conditions of possibility clarify existential conditions of origin or of utility for understanding the dramatic conditions of some possibly actual state of mind held by the actors in a text or by its implicit author.

It does not seem at first a very useful theoretical act to equate the uses of criticism with the uses of literature. After all we hardly have explicit consensus on the uses of literature. I think it possible, however, that there is considerable agreement about these uses--we tend to quarrel about the relative value of different uses but not about the possible legitimacy of specific uses for specific purposes. And, more important, by relating the two sets of uses we do invoke one further criterion, albeit one whose terms are not yet very clear. If the uses of criticism are to clarify specific possible uses of literature, then it is at least arguable that any use of literature which denies all or most properties that distinguish the text as a literary one is to that extent a misuse of criticism--at least, unless it explicitly justifies such a procedure. This is, of course, simply another way of inveighing against reductionism, but it has the advantage of provisionally establishing what a reduction is.

Now let us see whether the claim that legitimate uses of criticism require some fidelity to the distinguishing general properties of a literary text can do any work, even though there is not explicit consensus on any specific properties as necessary features of literariness. There may still be

sufficient consensus on necessary groups of properties, not necessarily in the same proportions or relations, on the analogue of "family resemblances." After all my propositions could be generalized to other modes of discourse where the same problems reside. One could say that a legitimate use of a philosophical text entails recognizing its properties as philosophical discourse, even if one then makes non-philosophical use of it. For example most of us, I think, would quarrel with Quentin Skinner's insistence on the necessity of limiting philosophical meanings to the context in which they originate and in which their illocutionary properties have the intended force because philosophical discourse seems of necessity to make claims independent of historical positivities.

One easy way to see how this principle works is to see what is entailed in a critical act a clear majority in any literate culture we can imagine (I say this as provision against too historicist a definition of competence communities) would take as irrelevant or reductive or distorted or useless (except as example of the useless or of criteria for the useless). Imagine our response to a criticism that reduced Dante's *Commedia* to an elaborate fantasy of reunion with the mother or insisted on dismissing Dante's value because his implicit truth claims are indefensible or claimed that Dante's text is product of neurological patterns common to a certain genetic type. I state these cases as travesties in order to bring out what they travesty. What they lack is any respect for the nature and qualities of the productive energies which distinguish the *Commedia* as a significant human act honored as such over time. They ignore plausible human intentions implicit in the text and in generations of readers and do not attend to the presumably distinctive qualities which have earned it its cultural place.

Actual critical disputes about the uses of criticism are not so easy to resolve. But here we



want principles for discussion, not rules or specific evaluations, and the parodic case suggests, insofar as we grant it is parody, some very general shared assumptions about the criteria of explanation we require. These assumptions, I think, have to do with our sense of the humanity in humane acts of discourse. Given sufficient time, I would try to argue, with E. D. Hirsch, that any criticism that does not address probably implicit intentions to perform a specific act in a text is at least ethically, if not conceptually, a misuse of criticism. It is a misuse in the sense that it cannot ground itself on an adequate concrete basis from which to generalize. This does not mean that the critic must devote himself to specifying the intention in all its complexity. He may wish to interpret the intention itself in cultural or historical terms--or he may wish to show how the intention fails to overcome the power of the codes and the structures it tries to manipulate. We need here, however, only a more limited claim. Whatever the status of an author's specific performative intentions, the travesties of Dante I mentioned indicate that criticism must respect (if it wants to be respected) the general intention in the discourse to be taken as a specific kind of act entailing in the responder specific hermeneutic responsibilities before he can either evaluate it or relate it to other texts and contexts in a general argument. This intention to present a specific kind of act requires attention to mode (e.g., how literariness or philosophicalness may have been construed), to genre, and probably to some audience context (not necessarily a specific historical one). Without this kind of attention, the critic has no object to interpret. He is logically committed to indeterminacy--both with respect to the text and to criteria for assessing his act. He places himself in a position where logic precludes all testing of claims, rather like a biologist who theorizes about life without granting there are specific features of life he must explain.

Within these general constraints to honor modes of discourse, we can distinguish two general categories of the uses of literature which dictate specific external criteria for acts of criticism. Literary texts can be treated in a variety of ways as what Max Weber called monuments and they can be treated as sources of wisdom. Both approaches to texts provide a kind of knowledge, but because each entails different procedural expectation for their proper use, it is helpful to distinguish these approaches in terms of the kind of knowledge sought. Borrowing from De Quincy, we might distinguish the approaches as uses which seek specific knowledge from a text and those which try to find in them a kind of power.

When we treat a text as monument, we are concerned primarily with what a text or group of texts can be seen as expression of. These expressions in turn can be subdivided into at least three general classes: texts can be considered as expressions of cultural and historical forces, as expressions of personal conditions, or as instances of specific laws or tendencies in kinds of discourse defined either historically or analytically. (Marx, Freud, and Foucault give pure versions of each type.) In each of these approaches two sets of loose rule-governed behavior must be observed, each dependent on one of the two intentional structures involved in the critical encounter. Thus the critic must try to account for the intentional status of the text, as mode of discourse and as specific speech act; even if he ultimately denies the authority of intention, and he must accept the obligation of evidence created by his intentional stance as critic within a specific set of questions. If the critic is eclectic or pluralist, he still must give some sense of what might falsify his various claims if the claims are to have any use. Falsification need not be purely empirical or analytic, but there must be some sense in which the critic presents himself as answering questions and thus of perhaps being wrong.

If there are no coherent questions, there can be no hope of useful answers. And if there are questions, there are loose rules of evidence, that is, possibilities for arguing about the relative superiority of answers. Finally, there is probably a triviality condition in any use of literature as monument. The critic must show not only that the text expresses what he claims but also that the expression reveals something significant for his case that is not simply logically entailed in his approach. Many deconstructions fail this condition because the multiple contradictory meanings they generate express nothing but the logical consequences of refusing to take a text as determinable speech act. When one treats a text simply as an instance of langue, of potentials for meaning not yet organized as a single utterance, he discovers nothing when he concludes that this level of discourse organization is subject to endless variation. When, on the other hand, the critic can show how a specific purposive speech act fails to carry its purposes through the complex codes in his utterance (as Kenneth Burke does), he contextualizes deconstruction and poses specific reasons for it which enable us to see the text as expression of a crucial cultural, personal, or philosophic problem.

The second basic category of use, the inquiry into what powers a text can provide, looks forward rather than backward. Here, as Gadamer argues in his discussion of tradition, the texts are significant less as expressions of certain forces and principles than as a potential grammar enabling people to make or understand expressions in the present or in some future existential condition. Here the text is less monument than modal operator. The text is seen not as expression of existing conditions but as performance of an exemplary act of mind in a possible world which its readers can use to clarify their own experience or to project goals for experience. As monuments, texts clarify conditions of origin, as exemplary performances they constitute a grammar

of complex predicate sets to be tested as clarifications of present and future expressions. Humanist and idealist theorists provide different illustrations of this exemplary power. In Arnold, the power of clarification is largely a capacity to console and to compose the spirit. Thus, contra Huxley, Sophocles' "for an enduring heart have the destinies appointed the children of men" evokes an attitude of tragic calm to be adapted to the dehumanizing conclusions of modern science. Croce's organicism insists on more complex exemplary attitudes: it is crucial not to see a work like Don Quixote as simply a collection of conventional types because the work as a whole provides a unique image of behavior that, once constituted, becomes a fresh predicate we can use to place or to interpret possible experiences.

These exemplary attitudes can be seen as the performance of certain stances projected as adequate means for responding to imagined existential conditions. Thus it is perhaps inevitable that critics should come to take their own work as primarily performance. But they must recognize that traditionally criticism allows different kinds of performances, each with their own attendant criteria. There is no logical or historical constraint against the critic defining the power of literature as its capacity to elicit in him an exemplary performance more interesting as illustration of how the text can be used by an individual than as description of its representative qualities as an example. But then, like Pater on the "Mona Lisa," he binds himself to offering qualities of attention, interpretation, and stylistic sophistication that can compete with artists' claims for the same status. If, on the other hand, the critic envisions his performance primarily as means for eliciting non-discursive qualitative features of a text easily distorted by logical argument, he incurs two sets of obligations. Insofar as the work is criticism at all it is responsible to the same sense of intentional structures as is the treatment of text

as monument. And second it is responsible to a very different kind of significance condition. It must show that the text and the critical predicates used for it can make claims not only on our historical interests but also on our existential concerns. It must show why the text as exemplary performance of a way of relating to the world has possible relevance in clarifying or extending the audience's powers to reflect on their lives. This kind of criticism is free of the systematic obligations incurred by treatments of the text as monument, but this freedom brings with it the difficult task of being faithful to the philosophical, psychological and sociological frameworks we actually use in defining and evaluating our own experiences.

Most critical works are not assessed primarily in terms of true-false judgments. There are preliminary questions relating to parts of critical acts. The act as a whole then invites oppositions like trivial-profound, insensitive-sensitive, superficial-perspicuous, partial-complex, etc. In the criticism of monuments, these assessment terms depend largely on our sense of the validity of interpretive procedures which are not inherently literary, even when we grant the literariness of the text. In evaluating critical acts devoted to the text as source of power and exemplary knowledge, on the other hand, our assessments derive less from formal hermeneutic procedures than from our total cultural framework for understanding how descriptions might apply to specific human actions. I cannot pretend here to offer a formula for the variety of cultural predicates that at once go into such assessments and are dialectically extended by these acts of judgment. I want instead to propose an exemplary set of questions which I think basic to our cultural assessment of the cognitive value or power of literary texts. For the critic interested in the humane relevance of his object text must ultimately be tested by how fully and how seriously he makes us

take the work of literature as what Burke called "equipment for living." The critic must show how a text provides terms, structures, and qualitative perceptions enabling us to represent features of our own lives--real and potential--to ourselves in such a way that we can feel ourselves possessed of new powers of apprehension and especially a new or renewed sense of our nature as human beings. This knowledge takes two forms: it can be seen as self-knowledge and as the recognition of the conditions of others we need to understand in order to treat them with the same kind of seriousness with which we treat ourselves. This knowledge also can take form as a grammar for describing past and present experiences or as a grammar for projecting certain ideal terms shaping the direction of future behavior and forms we use to assess that behavior. In other words, a literary text or criticism of it is useful as an exploration of cognitive powers to the degree that we can say from it either "Now I understand this feature of my or another's behavior and can see why it matters" or "Now I can appreciate certain qualities of behavior and their importance which I will strive to make real in my life." Finally, the institution of criticism concerned with cognitive powers has the value and probably the obligation of creating for us a sense of the communal standards we invoke when we distinguish degrees of value and seriousness in the kinds of representations of ourselves to ourselves we take as adequate measures of our claims for the value of our lives. The ultimate use of criticism is helping to establish the sense of ideal community where the standards of seriousness can be located, defined and discussed.

PROCEEDINGS  
MLA Special Session  
December, 1978

#### INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

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Instead of summarizing my paper, I will try to state what I take in retrospect to be the central points which need discussion. (Much of this retrospect was required by Bill Rueckert's comments.) First, the topic of discussion entails locating possible constraints on criticism and establishing the grounds for such constraints in a way that avoids positing any essentialist terms which readily invite deconstruction. Constraints must be grounded socially. And the only way social constraints make sense is to locate and define the possibility of an inquiry being dependent upon procedures established by a community. Since communities in criticism obviously manifest more differences than similarities, at least in their explicit allegiances, one must try to distinguish between levels of community, or between general communities and sub-communities. Are there shared standards implicit in critical sub-communities which underly the differences and allow the possibility of common judgments despite specific disputes? If one grants differences in canon-formation-for literature and for criticism, do there remain some shared standards about what any canon must share, say Shakespeare or Frye, and can one establish in social terms what expectations these works satisfy?

My retrospective solution to this problem would be to develop the metaphor of "fit," which I derive from Wittgenstein and from Chaim Perelman's descriptions of universal and limited audiences. "Fit," first of all, allows a pluralist account of use and misuse that still preserves some sense of criteria.

Criticism is properly used when it satisfies the expectations of coherence, conceptual transition, and perspicuousness held by the sub-community it addresses. These are no easy matters to establish, since they are largely implicit, but the grounds for establishing them are reasonably clear because each sub-community, by footnotes and dependence on certain concepts, indicates the models it imitates and extends. And while few critics want to address only a small community, we can use the motion of imitated models to establish loosely the related standards taken from various critical positions. But precisely because criticism tends to have a dual audience--a critical sub-community and a general communal sense of the texts or issues discussed--one can extend the notion to fit to a second, more normative level. Here (partially following Eliot on Bradley) one can suggest a hierarchy of fits dependent upon the utility of a piece of criticism. It is probably a relative misuse of criticism when the range of questions asked and the model of coherence for conceptual transitions in an argument appeals either only to fairly minor aspects of a text or problem or only to audiences whose standards of coherence are somewhat reductive or "strange." One must be careful here because there are forms of technical work which appeal only to small audiences, but whose logic and scope can legitimately claim the attention of a large audience if the audience were to learn the appropriate tools. But if we keep this exception in mind, the notion of narrow fit helps indicate what is wrong with forms of scholarship that neither ask large questions nor provide editorial materials needed to ask those questions. And it clearly points to the difficulties in dogmatic Freudian or Marxist readings or in "performative" criticism that fails to make the performed sensibility representative of larger concerns. The "fit" criterion can work if we grant that it is not itself a discovery procedure but a

way of focusing evaluative discourse. The notion of "fit" does not provide an easy binary distinction between use and misuse, but rather tries to suggest how these terms allow relative hierarchic distinctions. "Fit" is not a formula but a possible index of what is at stake in particular evaluative discussions which must define and apply specific terms.

My essay tries to establish some general lines of inquiry by which we can identify the kinds of criteria that may be adapted in specific evaluative discourse about critical work. The basis of these distinctions is one I did not make clear in the essay, as Bill Rueckert's comments indicate. He assumes that my desire for evaluative criteria entails making judgments about the content of critical approaches. Certainly most evaluation boils down to prejudices about content, and in practice my work is probably no exception. But in theory it remains possible, and probably useful, to insist on a distinction between content criteria for evaluation and qualitative criteria. The latter can apply to any content, making the critic's activity through his specific beliefs more significant than the beliefs themselves. In my paper I prepare the ground for this pluralistic qualitative model by trying to link the uses of criticism with the uses of literature. Clearly our normal assessment of literary texts acknowledges the place of a wide variety of contents and conflicting truth claims because we attend primarily to dimensions of assessment related to qualities like subtlety of attention, awareness of irony and complexity, capacity to understand and deepen an affective grasp of situations, and the power to register and discriminate intellectual and affective contexts elicited by the content or situation. I think that we make essentially the same judgments of critical acts, although often with the important difference that we grant critics less various modes of coherence and transition than we do artists because their typical mode is discursive language.

The need to define modes of coherence across the differences between artistic and critical discourses is a major source of our difficulties in defining and assessing critical acts, but surely the matter is one of quality of relations, not of content in any narrow sense.

My specific distinctions in the essay can be seen as attempts to establish what criteria we can employ in assessing the modes of coherence and the attendant qualities displayed by critical texts. I list three here, all of which again are general and demand tact and further distinctions when employed in particular cases. First one must distinguish between performative criticism or what Geoffrey Hartman calls criticism as essay, the indefinite article, and criticism that accepts received standards for descriptive and interpretive hypothesis testing. Each mode, then, in different ways, implicates internal and external criteria, and external criteria involve two kinds of standards--those inherent in making knowledge claims, and those used for making claims about the power of a text as significant in general existential terms. Internal criteria are those which define the coherence of a particular discourse. A critic is responsible at least for honoring those modes of coherence he criticizes others for lacking, and those inherent in any methodology he employs. How these fit performative criticism is a very difficult question. Because this criticism tends, like a good deal of literature, to suspend normal models of coherence, I have little to say about it except that it puts special demands on itself to satisfy the terms for power and representativeness I describe in my paper. This kind of criticism is rarely judged by truth standards: usually we take it as constituting certain insights which others will use as hypotheses, so that its value depends simply on whether it can be used or tends to be ignored.

With external descriptive criteria as normally invoked to determine the criticism we admire, it is

important to keep straight differences involved in describing texts as historical or behavioral monuments and as providing the reader with certain powers not limited to a specific historical or interpretive context. The latter mode of criticism treats a text as an enduring attitude providing for one who internalizes it a distinctive access to certain kinds of experience. I propose as a rough formula for distinguishing between these two critical orientations concepts of text as "expression of" and texts as "expressions as." When we take a text as "expression of," we view it as a locus defining and exemplifying some force external to it. The force can be biographical, historical in a variety of ways (conceptual, sociological, economic) or behavioral (as in any form of psychological inquiry). The text considered as expression as, on the other hand, demands that the critic explore its internal ways of defining the significance of its elements and that he represent the text as a coherent act affording its audience an exemplary attitude towards recurrent features of human experience. In both cases I suspect that one needs to be concerned with questions of intention and literariness (albeit in different degrees of complexity). Otherwise one simply has no expressive object, historical or projective, but only a loose set of possibilities of a langue never become a parole. The one constant misuse of criticism must be reductionism because it denies the distinctiveness of its specific object, and distinctiveness of the object is a basic procedural assumption with respect to all aesthetic objects. This does not mean that a critic cannot consciously reduce the object once he has pointed its claims to distinctness, just as it does not require fidelity to the author's intention once the intention has been posited. Texts fail or complicate intentions, but we only know this after we describe the probable intention and the aesthetic procedures it chooses to constitute its expression.

## SCE REPORTS

Once we can define the object and the critical intention, it is fairly easy to describe the different external conditions of significance that measure the relative value of critical acts concerned with expression of or expression as. The former involve criteria of fidelity to methodological assumptions and of perspicuousness within the range of questions posed. Analyses of "expression as" involve general humanistic criteria of representativeness and seriousness which I begin analyzing in my paper. But now, in order to avoid the solipsism that tends to be another common misuse of critical discourse, let me relinquish the floor to other voices.

## THE POWERS OF THE CRITICAL WORD

--Exploring the proposition: If Uses, then Misuses  
of criticism

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### TOPICAL OUTLINE OF PAPER

0. Explanatory Note.
1. Altieri's priorities.
2. False logic and true values.
3. The Entelechy of Misuse,
4. Creation, Criticism, and Culture.
5. Nature, words, and the Word.
6. Beyond Irony and Logocentricity.

### 0. Explanatory Note

This paper was written in response to Charles Altieri's position paper, "The Proprieties of Critical Acts." The topic all of us were asked to address was the proposition "If uses, then misuses of criticism." I have attempted to address (perhaps confront is more accurate) this proposition by way of Altieri's main conclusions. I have tried to avoid silly and distracting doctrinal differences, arguments with Altieri, and have tried to keep my essay focused upon two central issues: how one can even approach this apparently simple but truly almost impossible topic; and, once having figured out an approach, what are the implications and ramifications of that approach. If the paper is elliptical at times--especially in the last parts--it is because of the need to compress arguments in order to follow out the ramifications of the approach

I finally took. As a friend wryly commented when I told him what I was struggling with, "but that topic is global." YES. And rather than get lost in the metaphor, I will not try to say just where I got in my explorations but will simply acknowledge my own awareness of the size and complexity of the topic.

#### 1. Altieri's Priorities

We have most of us been raised up--critically, that is--on the rather simple forward assumption that the propriety of critical acts is located in the responsibilities they have to the literary texts which sustain them and justify their existence. And most of us who practice this trade--literary criticism, that is--would be inclined to say that if there is something we can call an "inappropriate" critical act, a misuse of criticism, a deviated critical action, it will have something to do with the absence or perversion of this text-centeredness, text-consciousness, and text conscience. Literary criticism, our naive articles of faith tell us, should have something to do with literature as such and should heighten or increase both our text-consciousness and text conscience. On these simple straightforward grounds, then, it seems that one would (should) say YES to the if/then binary opposition which is our topic: If Use, Then Misuse of Criticism. One has only to spell out the proper uses of criticism to predicate the misuses by generating a series of binary opposites from the proper uses. Altieri has hit upon this exactly in entitling his paper "The Propriety of Critical Acts," for if one can establish these proprieties--that is, normative conceptions of what literature is and is doing and what critical acts are and should be doing--then the deviations from these norms are self-defining and one can deal with them almost by ignoring them. Altieri does not really talk about

the misuse of criticism at all. He had devoted most of his paper to the exemplary uses of literary criticism and left the questions of misuse like buried assumptions (or binary read-outs) in what he has said literature is and criticism does. He clearly believes that there are misuses of criticism and these would consist of failures to conform to the proprieties he had laid out for us.

Altieri has tied all of the issues up into a tight proprietary knot by saying that the uses of criticism are inseparable from the uses of literature. After some preliminary talk about what critical manners are and what normative expectations must be met in critical and literary discourse (both of which are functions of his category--laden thought processes in this paper), he turns to the substantive manner of what the uses of literature are. He begins this at p. 6, where he first discusses texts as "monuments" and "sources of wisdom and power." The rest of the paper briefly works out this theory of literature which, by Altieri's logic, is also a theory of criticism. The paper comes to its conclusion with these resonating, propriety-filled sentences:

Finally, the institution of criticism concerned with the cognitive powers has the value and probably the obligation of creating for us a sense of the communal standards we invoke when we distinguish the degrees of value and seriousness in the kinds of representations of ourselves to ourselves we take as adequate measures of our claims for the values of our lives. The ultimate use of criticism is helping to establish the sense of ideal community where the standards of seriousness can be located, defined, and discussed.

(my emphasis to stress propriety words)

Altieri's main point is that the true and essential human proprieties--the standards of seriousness by



means of which we define and sustain the human community--are present in literature and made manifest by our critical acts in and out of the classroom. The proper use of criticism is to identify and sustain these fundamental human proprieties by the very nature of the critical endeavor itself.

This is both a noble conception of literature and of critical acts, in the finest, most serious traditions of Anglo-American criticism. We can hear Arnold and Frye, Coleridge and Burke every where in this short paper exhorting us, through Altieri, to the high purposes of our endangered calling as teachers and critics of literature. I do not want to quarrel with Altieri on these points, for I share his commitments both to the idea of community and to Burke's idea that literature is equipment for living which should help guide us towards a better life. So where does this leave me in relation to a response to Altieri and to the extremely complex problems inherent in the "If Uses, Then Misuses" question which we are asked to address. I will take up the use-misuse question first and return to Altieri at the end.

## 2. False Logic and True Values

The topic, as set, is cast as an if/then binary opposition. If/thens need not be cast in this form, but can consist of causal sequences in which there are no opposites at all. The topic, however, says that if there are uses (implying, surely, proper uses) for literary criticism, then there must be mis- or improper uses, which would constitute a binary opposition: At best, the logic here is suppositional: we are not dealing with a law of nature but with what seems to be a pseudo-logical proposition, the intent of which is to clarify the if part by forcing one

into the impossible task of dealing adequately with the then part (that is, trying to demonstrate that the proposition is true). There must be a term in formal logic for this, but here we can speak of it simply as the "straw man" or "decoy" technique.

Let us try to proceed in an honest fashion with the topic to demonstrate why this is true. Let's assume the validity--in good faith--of the binary opposition as formulated. The If Uses part requires that we generate the uses of literary criticism before we go on to the misuses, since the second is tied to the first as a condition of its being. Generating the uses of criticism is not really such a difficult task until one realizes that a purely descriptive procedure is hopeless. In the first place, there would be no end to a descriptive listing of the uses of criticism, any more than there could be an end to a similar listing of the uses of literature. Literature and criticism have been used for almost every known or imaginable human purpose. For example, we might begin with a basic function, the bathroom/outhouse use of either facilitating the purgative process or of entertaining the mind while one waits for the miracle of purgation to happen. As Kenneth Burke has pointed out, verbal and fecal motives have always been closely related; and Burke himself has built a whole theory of literature and criticism around the idea of catharsis. From this rather homely example we can shoot all the way up to the high, noble moral head--uses Altieri ascribes to literature and criticism at the end of his paper. The bottom and the top, so to speak, do not cancel each other out; and neither is a misuse of criticism, any more than would other in between organ-related uses of literature and criticism--such as heart and genitalia centered erotic uses. The point of all this is that if one is to make sense and order out of the "If Uses" part of this proposition, one has to make some value judgments, as Altieri did, and deal in both hierarchies and proprieties, or in

idealized uses and paradigms. Otherwise the catalogue of uses will be entirely empirically based and, in the end, a kind of theoretical absurdity, for if one can think of it one will discover that criticism and literature have both been used for it, especially if, as Burke and such critics as Cary Nelson have taught us to do, we move from the public to the personal-private motives. A purely empirical, descriptive treatment of this topic is impossible. One must take it into the realm of theory, one must move out of the indicative and into the optative as soon as possible. Even here, as Altieri well knows, there are a lot of bear traps and one must go cautiously the whole way.

The most obvious thing about this procedure is that one is not going to trivialize either criticism or literature, and one is not liable to commit either to a purely aesthetic function. Criticism can be about itself or it can be about literature, or it can be about both at the same time. It is always about culture, whatever its specific subject matter. Motives beyond pleasure and beauty are going to have to figure in this theoretical, essentially optative discussion of the uses of criticism. There is going to be a heavy emphasis upon instruction, upon the powers (beyond pleasure and beauty) intrinsic to literature, and upon such things as creativity, energy transfers, the community and culture of the word, and the creative imagination. The tendency in this procedure will be prescriptive and categorical--as the whole history of criticism makes quite clear. The main defenses are rhapsodic, as Altieri is; they are often (as in Sidney), and they attempt to call, or recall, literature and criticism to their high purposes. Think, only, of Frye's ANATOMY in this context. This whole procedure will make extensive use of moral imperatives and categories of right and wrong ways of doing things; normative categories and thought processes must guide the whole discussion.

I have simply been pursuing the theoretical implications of one way of trying to deal with this

topic. It is the way Altieri chose to follow and he has done very nicely in working out the perfect or ideal uses of criticism in relation to a set of high and noble functions of literature itself--functions which, by the way, have been with us in the history of criticism since Plato and Aristotle. But, there are real problems here, because; first of all, the question of misuse is entirely relative, and it does not follow at all that if there are uses then there must be misuses of literary criticism, except as they can be defined in relation to one specific set of uses. We can eliminate some possibilities here before going on. Not to be text centered surely cannot constitute a misuse of criticism. It is perfectly legitimate and useful to focus on the creative process rather than the finished process, or on larger than text questions--such as genre; or on smaller than text questions, such as the creator; or as Burke often does, upon the effects of the text. These are not misuses. All acknowledge Altieri's values and speak to them in one way or another. Nor is it a misuse to be wrong about a text or an author and to attack a text for being inferior or irrelevant. The use of criticism to subversive ends does not constitute a misuse for such criticism merely affirms some texts while denying others to necessary revolutionary ends which may in fact serve the very ends Altieri speaks of in his closing pages. Nor does the use of criticism to doctrinal ends constitute a misuse: we all use criticism to doctrinal ends, it is just that the doctrines vary. And Altieri urges us to use criticism to doctrinal ends, and his doctrines can be as easily identified as mine, or almost anybody else's for that matter. Misuse cannot be found in any of these cases, for all affirm the value or values of literature in different ways and it is a function of civilized human beings --the human community Altieri speaks of--to recognize,

legitimize, and accommodate differences without destroying the whole community. No, we must seek out an extreme form, go down into the pits, to find a pure example of misuse. The history of literary criticism makes it perfectly clear that criticism can be written in any form, including the form of literature itself, or in the radical forms of the experimental criticism of, say, Hassan, N. O. Brown, or Charles Olson. The form in which the criticism is written cannot constitute a misuse. And the history of criticism also makes it clear that the uses of criticism are at least as various and diverse as the uses of literature, and cannot be subject to prescriptive legislation. Criticism, like literature, has served revolutionary as well as conservative ends, disruptive, disorienting, even destructive, as well as ordering, communal, and constructive ends. None of these is necessarily a misuse of criticism unless one has frozen into history the fixed categories of a particular doctrine and is compelled to ignore the idea that "the morality of an act is a function of the state of the system (any system) at the time the act is performed." (Hardin, 134). It is only doctrinal criticism (whether religious, political, social, or aesthetic) which finds it easy to differentiate between use and misuse, since misuse can always be established in relation to the doctrine. The classic examples here would be hard party line communist literary criticism or the prescriptive criticism which was dominant during the Enlightenment. If, as Altieri argues, the uses of criticism are inseparable from the uses of literature, then it also seems impossible to me to say that there are misuses of criticism in the absolute sense. There could only be better and worse uses of criticism (as of literature), not the "correct" use and incorrect use of. The very concept of misuse here as implied is a specious

binary component of the concept of use and seems to be a function of the western mind's habit of binary, polarized, dialectical thinking.

### 3. The Entelechy of Misuse

But of course the topic cannot be dismissed or resolved simply by demonstrating that we have been asked to deal with what is apparently a false binary opposition. True or false, the question of misuse persists and we must confront it. To do that, I am going to employ a Burkean device and see what happens when one subjects the *If Uses, Then Misuses of Criticism to Burke's entelechial mode of analysis*. Burke often takes a concept and works it out to the end of its line of possibilities. He calls this the entelechial mode of thought, or, more descriptively, *to-the-end-of-the-line thinking*. His argument is that everything has its entelechy or perfect complete form, even negative things and concepts. In other words, it should be possible to take the idea of the misuse of criticism to the end of the line and come up with the perfection of it. The perfection of misuse is in itself something of a novel idea, but this should not be allowed to deter us. We could perhaps think of this as the devil (not devil's advocate) function of criticism, and whether it exists or not, it might give us a way to think intelligently and constructively about this vexing problem.

If, as Altieri argues, and as seems readily apparent to anyone thinking about this question, the function of criticism is to confirm and affirm the nature and power of literature and in so doing to affirm the capacity of both literature and criticism to build and sustain the culture (the community) of the word, then it would seem that the most perfect misuse of criticism would be to deny these powers to literature and attack, with the intent to kill off, the very creative and constructive actions which

sustain criticism and the culture of the word. Simply put, a literary criticism whose object was to destroy literature--not just one kind of literature, but literature in general--would seem to be the perfect example of the misuse of criticism. It is also a rather perverse example for one can hardly even imagine serious literary critics who would undertake such self-contradictory actions.

It is hard even to imagine the motives which would operate: self-aggrandizement? The displacement of literature by criticism? A hatred for creative, constructive actions? Pure malignancy? I am trying here to imagine a perfect negative example, one in which the whole force of the critical action undertaken is negative and destructive. I am not here talking about deconstructive criticism, for that is another matter altogether. Perhaps I should call this de-creative or simply destructive criticism, for its object would be to destroy literature, not to deconstruct it so that one can come to an awareness of how it was constructed, and why, in the first place.

The perfect misuse of criticism--the most "inappropriate" use imaginable--then, would be this self contradictory action in which the critical act villified and/or destroyed the creative acts which are both its objects of attention and its reason for being. Instead of privileging the text, one would destroy it, as if criticism were a revolutionary action directed against the text itself. Criticism is first born out of literature. Later, it is also born of itself in the incestuous manner of all creation myths. I suppose one could push my example one step further and say that the most perfect misuse of criticism would be critical acts which attempt to destroy both literature and the critical endeavor itself. These would be self-consuming actions, as with some Dantesque creature which fed on and eventually ate itself up; or, differently conceived, they would be the actions

of a person who's motives were purely negative and destructive, as with the Devil, or Iago. Does any such criticism exist? Can one even imagine it existing? Can one conceive of writing a whole book of such criticism, including the dialectics of it. How would one go about destroying THE DIVINE COMEDY, KING LEAR, the poems of Keats, Hopkins or Dylan Thomas, HOBY DICK--to no other end than just to destroy them? Is it even useful to try to think about the topic in this way? Surely this would not be literary criticism as we understand it, but a kind of anti-criticism, undertaken in the name of literary criticism, perhaps, and even using many of the most sophisticated resources of critical analysis.

Some people have seen deconstructive criticism as a form of anti-criticism, but this seems to be a mistaken or angry view of that whole endeavor. Deconstructive criticism does not set out to destroy literature; it seems mostly to affirm the fact that we create at the edge of the void, the edge being the point at which language arises and creation begins; and that what we create is merely a creation, a construction, which can be deconstructed back to the edge of the void. We do it because it is all we can do. A criticism which demonstrates this is not a misuse of criticism; it is yet another example of a doctrinal bias centered in a theory of language and the nature of human creations. It is the reduction of reality to a dialectic of constructive and deconstructive processes.

The example of misuse which I have invented is much more fundamental because it denies both the function and value of literature and all the functions and values of criticism except a purely negative and destructive one. It denies itself in enacting itself and tends toward a purposelessness because it destroys what supports it and leaves a vacuum behind, since it does not replace what it destroys with itself, and it offers no alternatives. It reduces Altieri's proprieties of critical acts to an absurdity.

Protracted, as if one were writing a satire, this entelchy of misuse would give us a future in which criticism (critics?) would destroy creative acts (poets?) as soon as they appeared in a kind of 1984 world of demonic culture. Ultimately, as in that novel, the creative motive would be attached and destroyed at its source, at which point, only this devilish criticism would be left to keep a malign vigil lest the creative motive recrudescence. Literary and other kinds of analogies suggest themselves. Iago criticism, Claggart criticism, devil criticism, mysterious stranger criticism, confidence man criticism.

An ecological analogy also suggests itself, for the kind of criticism that I have been describing would be like the deliberate pollution destruction and exhausting of vital resources with no attempt to renew, recycle, or replace them. Some ecologists see this as the basis of the environmental crisis and identify it as the suicidal motive intrinsic to the present course of human civilization. The misuse of criticism which I have been describing would be similarly suicidal. So far as I can tell, we have here a principle which does in fact constitute misuse for, as in a disturbed ecosystem, so in a human ecosystem, the interconnections and interdependences upon which the health and capacity for self renewal of the ecosystem depend would be broken, and eventually the ecosystem would lose its capacity to sustain life.

#### 4. Creation, Criticism, and Culture

But, one can ask, is it even useful to think in these reversed, inverted terms. Yes, one must answer (as Altieri does), for they force us back, always, to the uses of criticism. There seems to be a curious reversing dialectic at work in this

if/then proposition, for having arrived at this monstrous entelechy of misuse, where can we go but back to the uses of criticism, taking the principle of perfect misuse with us to see what it can tell us about the creative powers of the critical word. So, with this principle of misuse in mind, let us come round again to Altieri, the propriety of critical acts, and the question of use and misuse of criticism. First of all, the two main (and some would say, legitimate) subjects of criticism are itself and literature. Even when the subject is itself, criticism is always in a mediating position for ultimately culture (the nature and health of it) is its real subject and the point upon which the three c's (creativity, criticism, culture) converge. Some might argue that criticism taking itself for a subject constitutes a misuse, but this can hardly be true, for criticism is as fundamental a human and symbolic action as creation and worthy of study for its own sake if we are interested in understanding the nature of man as a symbol-using animal. In fact, many would (and have) argued that it is criticism which keeps both culture and creation healthy and that the three are only separable at great risk. The three have language--symbol-using--in common and ultimately all the central issues and questions raised by this topic involve us in the most fundamental way with language and the culture of the word, in particular the culture of the written word. I suppose that is why this topic is truly global in nature, for it raises all the fundamental questions in its first half (If Uses of Criticism) and then raises them yet again in its second half (Then Misuses). We confront here all the basic questions of our profession as teachers and practioneers of literature and criticism, just as we do, if we are thoughtful and self conscious, every time we re-enact the drama of the classroom or undertake either or both critical or creative actions. As Altieri says, criticism is an act, albeit a symbolic act, and both propriety and choice are

intrinsic to the very nature of action. Kenneth Burke has argued for years that the basic distinction between the human and the non-human is language, symbol-using; and that a distinction must be made between non-symbolic motion and symbolic action. Language is what makes action possible because it frees one (to various degrees) from the necessities of pure matter and motion by making available the whole range of human choices that exist in the symbolic realm man creates above and beyond nature. And language--or the more inclusive activity--symbol using is also continuously generative because with it man constantly generates new choices. Criticism and creation are forms of symbolic action. To misuse either, one must make deliberate choices. It hardly seems possible--in terms being used here--to misuse either by accident. I'm not sure it is possible to ever misuse literature in any way. Imagine a transposition of this topic to literature: If Uses, Then Misuses of Literature. Doctrinal differences can never constitute true misuse, though they are probably the greatest single cause for misuse charges--as in obscenity, pornography, and party-line cases. Even the most "obscene" poem or novel imaginable--one which broke all kinds of proprieties, including formal and verbal as well as rational, moral, and social ones--would not really constitute a misuse of literature. As Burke, Frye, Bachelard and many others have argued, it is in the very nature of the creative imagination to be free, to engage in boundary-breaking, to be radical, innovative, outrageous, even obscene, to deliberately break the proprieties, to defy the norms and the established categories, to be creative in the pure and absolute sense of this term by working on the borders of the known and the unknown. This is one of the main reasons--at least in our time--why many of us value the works of the creative imagination so much.

We come here to a fundamental question: is all of this true of criticism? Are the uses of criticism in fact inseparable from the uses of literature, as Altieri argues? Are the proprieties of critical acts the same as the proprieties of creative acts? We come here to a truly central question, for some criticism in our time has seemed more creative than the literature it discusses and some has used the occasion of the critical act to outcreate the creator. In fact there is a whole school of criticism which argues that the critic-reader must in fact complete the work of creation begun by the author before any work of the creative imagination can come into full being. Even so, it does not seem possible that criticism could ever be as free as literature, even in a pure theoretical mode; and it seems inevitable that criticism will always have (be bound by) more proprieties than literature, even in its most radical experimental forms.

The proprieties of critical acts are not the same as the proprieties of creative acts, though the proprieties of language are common to both. Concrete poetry is a case in point here, for no criticism which did to the proprieties of language what concrete poetry has done to them could continue to be functional as criticism. Even in its purest, theoretical form, criticism is always discursive and mediative. That is why the perfect misuse of it would consist of a completely negative and destructive action which attempted to destroy both the creative motive and creative act, thus cancelling the mediative function of the critical act itself. The larger implications of this entelechy of misuse are truly frightening, especially if one thinks of the teaching of literature at all levels as a continuous critical action: to attack and destroy the creative principle in human actions as it is manifested in the symbolic acts of literature is to attack one of the bases of human culture itself and, in the large sense, the capacity of culture for

self-renewal and health. Here it is the culture of the written word that is at issue, but things would not be so different if it were art we were discussing. Literary criticism mediates between and contributes to the culture of the written word. It is creative as well as mediative in the sense that it generates new theories of literature and the word and thus continuously creates (or generates) new readings of the great verbal acts of the creative imagination. It also regenerates its function in others--especially through teaching--and as a body of written texts, is itself part of the culture of the written word. In all of its actions, criticism clearly helps to clear and prepare new ground for new creative acts.

#### 5. Nature, Words, and the Critical Word

After nature, language (a symbol-system) is our most basic community and, with nature, is the common ground of our human existence. For many these days, language and symbol systems generally are a more common ground than nature. Either way, we all grow and develop in and out of these nurturing communities. We learn many of our proprieties from them, for nature, as well as language, has its proprieties. In addition to these two basic environments--the natural one and the manmade one (which is not only made possible because of language and symbol-systems in general, but is completely dominated by them)--man has a third environment, which he also creates, which we can think of as the community of the WORD. I take this use of the term WORD from Kenneth Burke and use it without specific religious content, for many human disciplines besides theology provide us with conceptions and analogues of the WORD--among them, philosophy, literature, criticism, political science, history, all forms of moral-ethical discourse, and the law. According to Burke, the WORD is what you arrive at if you keep moving to the higher and higher levels of discourse made

possible by words and man's capacity for symbolic discourse. At the top you come to a God-term or a set of God-terms or a coherent vision in terms of which humans think, respond, and act. Altieri's standards, values, and ideal community are all examples of the WORD. In moving from nature to man and words to the WORD one moves through the circuit of man's homes.

What does all of this have to do with the If, Then Misuses of Criticism? Well, considerable, for the uses of criticism will always have something to do with man and his communities. This is nowhere clearer than in the poetics of Aristotle, in the tharsis-centered poetics of Kenneth Burke, or in the imagination-centered poetics of Northrop Frye. Criticism has something to do with creating and maintaining all three of these communal homes. Nature preceded language and symbol systems. It cannot be created though it can be destroyed, maintained, manipulated, exploited, and, we flatter ourselves, improved upon. Man, it would now seem, has the choice of either continuing to pollute and destroy our most basic of all homes or of learning how to maintain it--and us--in a state of equilibrium and health. However remote it may seem, criticism does have a role in all this (footnote, see my literature and ecology, Iowa Review), and I only mention it here because Altieri writes as if there were no community but the human one, and this is like trying to deal with man as if he has nothing but a human history and had created himself out of nothing. The concept of community is larger than nature and the uses (and misuses) of criticism must be extended to include these other communities. Nature created his human environments (and all his culture) out of nature, language, other symbol systems, and the technology made possible by the first two. If we are to discuss the uses and misuses of criticism in a large--perhaps even global--context, we must surely realize, as Altieri makes

clear, that the culture we create and attempt to perpetuate is a function of our values, and that both literature and criticism deal in the most fundamental ways with value formation. It is the range and inclusiveness (or exclusiveness) of these values that I am concerned with here, and the possibility that the concept of misuse may be broadened to include both omission and exclusion. The contraction of our concerns as critics upon the purely human might in fact constitute the worst misuse of all; just as, for example, a critic's inability or refusal to see a connection between nature and the WORD might constitute a misuse. More obviously, though, the uses of criticism can never be purely or solely aesthetic. Literature is always more serious than this and criticism can never just function as an aesthetic facilitator. The nature and quality of the human environment, and its relation to the natural environment, are (or should be) matters of concern to us all these days as creators, critics, and teachers of literature. The uses of criticism must include diagnostic and therapeutic concern with the health of all our communities.

Man's third environment, the community of the WORD, the one that he has created atop the more visible and material human communities in which he leads his daily life, is the one which has given us supernature, heavens, hells, intermediate purgatorial zones, the LAW, utopias, purely imaginative and imaginary worlds, complex and enormously varied families of imagined alternative worlds and selves, fictions, abstractions, symbol-systems, God, gods, and mythologies--to name a few of its creations. This third environment and we all live in it and depend upon it as surely and absolutely as we do the other two--is the one that is the more purely created, the most clearly a function of man's creative capacity for beyonding,

for transcending nature by mind-leaping into another purely human realm. It is often spoken of as the movement from necessity to freedom. Elsewhere, I called it the fifth dimension. Would not the purest misuse of criticism consist in the denial of this unique third environment man has created for himself, and of the ways in which it can function to help keep all three environments interrelated, in balance and health?

Only nature is really a given, though it seems now as if language is also. Everything else is man made and added to nature. Man's history consists quite literally in the humanization or transformation of nature to human ends. The distances and contradictions between the first and third environments are immense. Nature can deny nothing and affirms only itself. Man, thanks to the symbolic realm--the realm of the WORD--can deny and affirm almost anything. Nature and history are the kingdoms of necessity. It is the WORD that gives us access to the realm of freedom. Somewhere in between Nature and the WORD is a middle realm, or what I have called the second environment, the realm of words. It is our earth-bound visible and material culture, most perfectly embodied, perhaps, in our great cities. It is where the bulk of our life is lived. If we are going to talk about the uses (or misuses) of criticism, we will have to address ourselves to the application of criticism to life in this second environment, for it is only here that one can actually act, and it is here, and in Nature, that the consequences of all our actions are felt. We may live in three environments and have three homes, but we can only act in the first two; it is the power and freedom to act which comes from the third, the symbolic realm, the realm of the WORD and, of course, the realm of both the creative and the critical Word.

For most of us, mediation and action are the central problems. The WORD is not accessible to everybody and must usually be mediated. Perhaps



only the true creators ever experience the unmediated WORD, and it could be argued that it is their function --in all fields--to provide us with the WORD. Mediation is essential because of the need to keep the three environments connected, to keep open the possibility of interchanges between the three environments. Just as there must be a way up, so there must be a way back down, for if the WORD is detached from NATURE, surely all is lost, including and especially, Altieri's sense of the, or his actual ideal community.

Criticism mediates the WORD--by which I mean, any great text, or body of texts, as, for example, SONG OF MYSELF or the major novels of Faulkner. Criticism does not often create the WORD. Mediation is its creative function. This does not subordinate criticism to literature so much as it recognizes their different functions, and the interdependence of the one on the other. Occasionally, criticism also creates the WORD, as for example, in the work of Frye, Burke, Bachelard, Barthes, Derrida, and Foucault; and then other criticism also mediates this WORD that criticism itself has given us. Words can be generative in all modes, I don't want to obfuscate my own main points right near the end, but it seems important to break out of our categories for a moment, for they are not absolute, and hopefully, never will be. Words are most creative when they give us the WORD, and maintain the vitality and health of the third environment. The WORD requires mediation. It is only the young (of whatever age) who think that they can get along without help. Not even nature can get along without help these days, and it probably needs the enlightening curative, purgative WORD more than ever before. If there is such a thing as the misuse of criticism, then, it would consist of the cancelation of this mediative function of criticism, the destruction of this way of keeping the three environments connected, an impairment of the ways in which we have access to the WORD, a denial of the existence, function, and value of both the mediator

and the third realm itself--the symbolic realm, the high culture of the written word.

We have, then, the community of nature, the community of words, and the community of the WORD. The ideal community which can result from the interrelationships between the three is a community of the whole, more or less as the ecologists have described it, in which everything is related to everything else and only at our peril do we try to disconnect one community from the other, or radically subordinate any one of them to the others. If there is an ultimate use of criticism and the critical faculties, it must be located right here in its commitment to some concept of this ideal community of the whole and the human values--or should I say, the community values--necessary to affirm and maintain it. We must not be misled by the word "ideal" here, for certain earthy, natural, and ecological realities should always remind us that human values formed and affirmed without reference to the community of nature are both anti-historical (historically, man derives from the pre or non verbal) and unnatural. Man and his communities are completely dependent upon nature. Man cannot derive his communal paradigms solely from the logic of words or the logic of the word, his anthropocentricity or his logocentricity. Whole other systems --the ecosystems of the ecosphere--which nothing whatsoever to do with man or words govern human life in the most fundamental way. Man is in fact logo-centric, but the community of the whole is not, nor can it ever be, in spite of man's technological genius and technocratic dreams.

Part of Kenneth Burke's great genius has been to keep reminding us that man cannot live by words alone. There is an outhouse in all our pasts and whatever it represents had better be there in all our futures. Altieri sometimes writes as if the anthropocentric and logo-centric delusions from which western man has suffered for so long were

really true, as if we could talk about the ideal human community without reference to the non-human grounds upon which it has, of necessity, been built. If I have a quarrel with Altieri, it is upon this point and upon the lack of comic perspective in his view of both community and value. His paper suffers from a kind of seriousness-flaw, as if he had forgotten how to laugh at himself and had forgotten about the extent to which the genius of logocentricity lies in its capacity for irony and comedy.

#### 6. Beyond Irony and Logocentricity

Logos is the aegis under which both literature and criticism exist. Logos, so far as we can tell, came into the world with man, who has shaped his whole history and reshaped much of nature with it. We will continue to do both. We have no choices in this matter. But we do have other choices and I want to think about them as a way of bringing this discussion to an end.

Hayden White has said that our task as critics these days is to move beyond irony and dialectic, which does not mean that we should abandon either, or their companion, comedy, but only that the conceptual model which we now need must be based on more than the mind's capacity for dialectical analysis, ironic self awareness, and neo-stoical resignation. This is another way of saying that man must develop something more than a purely logo-centric vision, even though words are man's only means of generating and implementing any kind of vision. Hayden White has also said that the main task facing humanists today is to locate or generate a common ground upon which discourse among the disciplines can take place. Presumably it is from this common ground that a vision beyond irony and logocentricity could be generated.

Precisely what form this vision would take is quite another matter, and that is the question I want to explore in the last part of this paper. If criticism is anything these days, it is discourse among the disciplines. In fact, criticism these days is often not even concerned with so-called literary texts at all--but just with texts, and has developed a whole theory of texts. Let us see where this is taking us.

One of the most notable achievements of criticism in our time is to have detached itself from the constraints of the New Criticism without ever sluffing off the invaluable things it taught us about text-centered analysis. These constraints were largely formal, aesthetic, and discriminatory. They consisted of a kind of critical racism in which literature was separated from other kinds of activities, elevated above them, made the vehicle of special secret experience and knowledge, and constantly defended against attacks and approaches from without which might contaminate it--especially attacks from science and the democratic polis. Insulated and protected against contact with the larger world, literature, was decontextualized and rendered almost helpless as a generative force in a democratic culture. Special techniques were needed to penetrate its mysteries and a particular mode of critical discourse was developed and perfected to provide access to them. These mysteries often--too often--turned out to be purely logocentric and had very little to do with anything beyond themselves and the language of literature itself--that is, for example, irony, metaphor, paradox, synecdoche, and the like. As such, these were not of much use in helping to establish the sense of an ideal community, or a community of the whole, or the common grounds upon which discourse among disciplines could take place. This is all well known, now, so I won't labor it.

The heirs of the new critics and New Criticism and their heirs, have had quite different aspirations

and goals. To begin with, they have developed a critical technology, including theories of language, language use, the mind, and the imagination, and modes of critical and verbal analysis, as sophisticated in their own way as the techniques, technologies, and new theories of the micro-biologists and high energy physicists. These new techniques and theories have been developed for essentially the same reasons in all fields: the physicists are after the secrets of matter (the structure of the atom itself, which is the basic element of matter); the micro-biologists are after the secret of life itself in their recombinant DNA research and experiments, and the "critics" are after the secrets of language and language-use. All have in common the use of techniques of micro-analysis which enable them to penetrate to and "see" what was never seen before. These new techniques are always developed in conjunction with theorizing so abstract, elegant, and refined that only the most brilliant minds can undertake it and only a few specialists can understand and apply it. This is as true in literary criticism as in micro-biology. Lacan is a case in point. With the new theories of mind, imagination, language, and language-use, the critics (of all nationalities, since we are talking about an international undertaking here, as in the sciences) have produced micro- and macro-readings of texts so brilliant and astounding in what they reveal to us about the verbal, literary, and human content of texts that we hardly know what to do with the results. This includes those who have produced these readings, since the capacity to read texts in this way often precedes an adequate knowledge of what to do with the reading itself. Mastery of the technique often precedes the ability to develop or borrow a larger vision which would direct the application of critical techniques beyond their own ends.

This has produced a dazzling, if somewhat bewildering criticism in our time, and a series of ostensibly critical texts which seem clearly to have assumed the status of literature since they are not read for what they tell us about another text, but for their own sake and the vision they embody. There has probably never been a time when more could be learned from a text (whether literary or, in our still confused terminology, non-literary), and criticism has also begun to turn its theories and techniques upon itself, with equally astounding results. The criticism which we have to use now is so resourceful for any practitioner who wants to master even parts of it that, as in micro-biology, high energy physics, and chemistry (think of the Princeton students who made an atom bomb) the very range of its theoretical and technical capabilities raises profound questions about uses and misuses. Witness what might be called the deconstructionists issue, in which one of the most formidable critical technologies developed in our time is often attacked as a misuse of criticism because of what some take to be the ironic and cynical postulates about human actions and values which seem to support it.

Our topic is global (as most significant topics are these days) because we are clearly reaching the point where an individual practitioner can no longer simply pursue his own ambitions by using the enormous resources of criticism to his own ends. Self indulgence these days should perhaps be relegated to our sexual and private lives. In our professional and public lives, no one can afford it anymore. If I have been able to arrive at any conclusions in thinking and writing about this topic--off and on for more than a year--it is that the answer to both halves of it are exceedingly difficult and complex, and that whatever quarrels I may have with Altieri, he is more right than wrong. The direction in which we must move is

clearly toward some concept of the community of the whole, some concept which enables us to use criticism to keep our three environments and communities in touch and in generative relationships to each other.

This means that criticism can no longer just serve texts--that is words--but must move beyond them to the communities (nature, language, the WORD) from which all texts come and to which, if they are to survive, and us with them, we must attend. Attending to them means that we must be mindful of their health, for sickness in any part will affect the community of the whole. Neither irony, nor dialectic, nor stoical-self resignation can sustain or cure the community of the whole, for all are actionless acts of the mind which derive from our very logocentricity. Words about words, Burke said, just more words about words. The very problem that I have posed here has plagued him all of his writing life, as it plagues us still. Beyond irony and logocentricity to what?

To put matters in this way addresses but does not answer the question with which we began: If Uses, Then Misuses of Criticism. I'm not sure any individual can do much more, for it is, almost uniquely, a question which the community of critics must meditate on if they are to understand their own work as critics and teachers in its larger contexts and hear the extent to which their own individual words reverberate through the community of the word--and beyond.

Response to Rueckert

Mr. Altieri

Here, let me just spend two minutes responding to why you can't avoid propriety words, even if the use requires a certain sense of irony or at least an awareness that Frere Jacques sits above that word and makes us think about it. The reason why I don't think we can avoid it is one of the grounds on which Bill and I agree--that if we talk about the nature of criticism we're not talking about empirical practice. We're not defining the best criticism as that which the majority of people practice, and we are not going on to do various kinds of content analysis about what we do. Once we admit that difference, it seems to me, once we admit the difference between a kind of empirical study and some other, the only other is either some pure indeterminacy because it's not empirical, or some form of end-oriented behavior. And as soon as you have an end, you have certain approaches to that end which are more or less successful. Again, I don't think we have to be talking, necessarily, in binary oppositions. Irving Feldman, one time, after a poetry reading responded to my question what he thought of the poet by saying, "He's a poet of his class." And I think that this was a use of the concept of propriety in a way that I, after having thought about Bill Rueckert's paper, am coming to see as probably the most fruitful way. That is that the poet had successfully performed certain qualities or degrees of competence. But there are other degrees, which, in terms of a literary tradition and in terms of certain internalized versions of a community allow us also to see the gulf between him and "richer"

performances. Other poets implicate larger ranges of existential concerns either in terms of what the work is an expression of or what it is an expression as. To put this in another sense, once we have the realm of ideals, once we separate from the empirical, we have Coleridge. We have the coleridgean notion of the idea and the notion of fitting which goes hand in hand with that. The proper is what fits in a certain kind of way in relation to a certain ideal. And, again, it seems to me that our crucial job, as theorists, is not so much to keep debating this endless question of whether we do or do not have ends, as it is trying to find what kinds of agreements we do have about assessment dimensions, that is, what kinds of qualities we think matter. Again I think--my paper was not clear on where I was coming from--I think Bill was right to attack me for being doctrinal. But I think I would defend that doctrinal on the notion of qualities, especially because quality allows hierarching in ways that content doesn't. One of the disasters of being an ideological critic, is that you say "if it doesn't have this content it is excluded." Quality allows realms of fit: this fits certain kinds of uses in certain kinds of communities and it doesn't fit other kinds of demands in other kinds of dimensions. And, why I think it's crucial is if we can start thinking about where we agree we can develop the actual terms we employ in making judgments about criticism. True-false, for example, seems to me an opposition that is employed with respect to specific claims in critical arguments, but not for the whole. The kind of holistic hypothesis that makes a whole a whole in a literary argument invites other kinds of assessment

dimensions--trivial-profound, incisive-dull--you can run up the whole series, but I think that's enormously philosophically significant. It goes hand-in-hand with the idea that we're usually not doing empirical study. And it means, the fact that we make those kinds of discriminations, that we have a whole tradition, actually overlapping traditions, of values. Ironically the theorist's ideal here is something that no one would ever want to put into explicit practice. Every epigraph ought to be something like "I imagine the audience for this paper to be: Coleridge, Carlyle, Frye." And this in some sense generates the community I'm addressing. And it would be a misuse of criticism if I would either put these guys to sleep or in some sense make them feel bad. Actually one should also include the author of the text he is writing on. Let's not be so provincial, let's make the audience Coleridge, Carlyle, Frye, and maybe Yeats. But let me save everything else to address specific issues that matter to the audience; you can read the more general case. --Let me say one other thing. I think it's important that, again, Bill Rueckert clarifies a logical gap in my argument, that he is right you can only have a misuse if there is some agreed upon sense of use. But I think, again trying to push this quality dimension, we have quite clear, agreed-upon senses of uses on some levels. On other levels we don't. And that's the kind of specification that needs to be done rather than continuing to generalize abstractly.

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The Critical Community: Problems of Policing

A respondent to Professor Altieri's paper who would venture to disagree with him would clearly be in trouble, for, to quote what an obviously irresponsible critic would call "inflammatory remarks," such a respondent would be, at the very least, engaging in an "ethical, if not conceptual, misuse of criticism"; he would signal that he does not "want to be respected"; he would invite dishonor upon himself since he has no capacity for "showing honor" to others' modes of discourse. I am therefore forced, at the outset of my discussion, to beg my audience's forgiveness for failing to display the respondent's expected animosity toward the paper under consideration. Let it be noted, then, that, in what may well pass as an act of cowardice, I agree with Professor Altieri. Wholeheartedly.

Now, that this is settled, and my honor as critic--if perhaps not as respondent, is safe, let me try to explain what it is that I have just agreed with, and then we will see if Professor Altieri agrees with it (?) with me (?) with himself (?) (there appears to be a problem of grammar here). Agreement is, of course, crucial for it would signal the ordinary act of the establishment of a critical community, ethical and responsible. Failure to agree, which in this instance, means

failure to agree upon a grammar in the Burkean sense which Professor Altieri gives to this term, failure to agree, then, will require either the acknowledgment of rampant anarchy in the field of criticism--an option precluded by Professor Altieri's paper--or an act of exclusion in which the grammatical antecedent of the pronoun in the sentence whose grammar gave me difficulty, would be formally expelled from the critical community. The antecedent could be me, my paper, Professor Altieri, his paper, or whatever else the grammar may hide. Such an act of exclusion, signalled by the double failure of grammar (in the linguistic and the Burkean sense) would represent a resort to power and would bring to the fore the policing function implied in the notion of a critical community. The fact that such policing would be handled rhetorically, for, as we know from Burke, rhetoric is the handmaiden of grammar and insures that grammar does not fail, ought to be reassuring, especially since we have seen grammar, if not fail, at least not display the decisiveness we expect from it, so that the intervention of rhetoric might have to be scheduled somewhat sooner than expected.

Professor Altieri begins by distinguishing between "two basic kinds of criteria" by which we can determine misuses of criticism: "one internal and the other external." The internal one, he recognizes, has a certain obviousness about it: "any mode of discourse which is to be accessible at all must be responsible to the loose rules for relatedness implicit in a given approach." It is important that we assent to this principle, for without it we cannot proceed, and it is clear that the real stakes of the question lie elsewhere, on

the level of the external criteria. This distinction of internal versus external criteria requires some examination however, before we proceed, for, although it too may have a certain obviousness about it, that obviousness would depend upon the assent of the very critical community whose establishment is the goal of the entire paper. At this early stage in Professor Altieri's argument, it is therefore premature to call upon critical consensus or expressions of collective assent; rather, we ought to remain within the logic of the question, or more precisely the enthymemum which gives its name to the session.

For we ought indeed to note that our entire discussion today has been placed under severe and rigorous constraints: nothing less than the full formal power of logic forces us to recognize that "if uses of criticism, then misuses of criticism." The logic of this logical statement does not, however, lead to internal or external criteria. It requires rather that we pay rigorous attention to its formulation and that we proceed cautiously before we commit ourselves. We ought thus to take a short logical excursus.

The statement, "if uses of criticism, then misuses of criticism," is an if...then proposition, that is, an implication. Implications have truth value provided, and only provided, that certain conditions are respected, the first of which has to do with the identification of the kind of implication that we have. The first type of implication is material implication in which  $p$  implies  $q$ , means that there is an identifiable  $p$ , which we know. In terms of what concerns us here, a

specific type of criticism having the capacity to be used in a certain way, implies the possibility of its being misused. We recognize here some of Professor Altieri's internal criteria. The difference between the logician's formulation and his, is in terms of scope: whereas he would like to extend his statement to any mode of discourse, the logical framework in which we operate requires a somewhat less sweeping reach: material implication has to do with existentials. There is a given specific single identifiable use of criticism which implies a misuse. Material implication is clearly not very interesting since it does not give much power to the slogan under which we have gathered here today. It is even more restrictive than the obvious internal criteria which Professor Altieri introduced.

Let us examine then the second type of implication or formal implication. The algorithmic formulation of formal implication would read  $F. (X) X G(X)$ . What that means is that formal implication requires the presupposition of a certain domain of individuals, and this domain must be a) well defined, and b) non empty. What does this mean for the question which concerns us? It means that if the statement "if uses of criticism, then misuses of criticism" holds true, it is true when and only when we will have established a domain or set of criticisms to which we will then apply the implication. In other words, we first have to identify the types and kinds of criticism and their uses, before we can claim there are misuses. Formal implication does allow us to make a more sweeping claim than material implication but at a certain price: we must first identify the main uses before we can claim any misuses. The correlate of this statement, which is very explicit

in every textbook of logic, is that, and I quote: "different possible choices of the domain of individuals lead to different interpretations of the calculus." The correlate is obviously quite distressing to us: we have turned to the rigid form of implication in order to obtain iron-clad guarantees of truth for our statement; instead we find that we are merely pushing the whole problem back one notch. Yes, we do have iron-clad guarantees of misuse, once we have defined 'use'. In other words, we will be forced to agree on misuse if and only if we agree on use, and if we all define criticism in the same way. We begin to see that the critical community called for by Professor Altieri is not a gratuitous addition but rather a necessary component of the edifice, for it is here to bolster the statement of implication at precisely the point where it is weak. In many ways, it is analogous in its role to the function played by rhetoric when grammar fails.

There is a third type of implication, more recently developed, called strict implication, which has been invented by mathematicians primarily to deal with the vexing problem of irreversibility, since, counter-intuitively, it can be shown that just because  $p$  implies  $q$  does not mean that  $q$  implies  $p$ . The strict implication calculus was elaborated in order to deal with this difficulty, so that indeed the fact that there are uses of criticism implies misuse of criticism as well as its converse, that there are misuses of criticism implies that there are uses. The main advantage of strict implication is that it makes possible calculi

in which  $M_p$  or  $p$  stands for  $p$ . Clearly, this is the most powerful of the implications, since it allows claims for possible uses of criticism. It exceeds material implication which allowed us to speak of only one specific use of criticism; it has greater extension than formal implication which required us to first constitute a defined, non-empty domain of uses. With strict implication, we can address the problem of any uses. There is a caveat, however, and it is that the implication carries out only over to a bound variable, so that all that strict implication will guarantee for us as true is that any use which is violated in its operational rules is, indeed, an instance of misuse. In other words, what strict implication does give us is what Professor Altieri has called his "internal criteria." The logical statement does not, in fact, give us the right to move beyond these internal criteria, and, as we all agree, there is something quite obvious about them. To move beyond the internal criteria, though, is not obvious at all, and, it should be stated at the outset, represents venturing beyond the truth claims of the implication. We are then on our own and the statements we make are just that: statements and the statements we make on our own.

To stress this point more fully, the title of Professor Altieri's paper is "The Propriety of Critical Acts." Propriety, as we all know, refers to a set of rules, norms, matters of taste or regulation. The implication of the title of our section conveys that regulatory spirit quite well, and, to that extent, it does cover the question



of the propriety of critical acts, as long as what we talk about is internal criteria. But when we venture beyond, when we start speaking about external criteria, the role-giving aspect of the implication is exceeded and we must then recognize that the meaning of "the propriety of critical acts" has changed to the property of critical acts. We are on our own; it is we who guarantee what we say.

What Professor Altieri would like to see though, for he does perceive this danger, although not explicitly, is to prevent any and every one of us from owning critical acts. In a certain way he calls for nothing less than a social compact in which we will all join and in which we will all be ruled by a constitution (which, a la Burke, we will call grammar). Hence the entire vocabulary of "consensus", "community", "responsibility", concern more general than an individual critic," etc. And, as we have seen at the beginning of my remarks, such a social compact would be enforced, with all sorts of measures, all the way to excommunication. This may strike quite a few of us as extreme in some sense, but before we reject it, we ought to ask ourselves what has prompted Professor Altieri to call for such a social compact for the critical community.

There has now been abroad in the air a strong feeling that we are, in criticism, overly committed to theoretical pursuits, that each and every first-comer is theorizing and getting away with it, that we no longer have any criteria by which to evaluate, and that extravagant claims are made without offering any possibility of verification. Most of

us will recognize that much of this is true. To some extent, the organizers of this session are a bit more desperate than many of us. They have wanted to force the issue by posing the problem in such a way that we either have to assent: yes, indeed, criticism is misused, and then we can start an index of misuses, a witch hunt, a cleaning-up--what you call it, will label you rather than you, it. Professor Altieri has given himself over to this, and his paper attempts to lay the framework from which the clean-up may proceed.

As a reader and discussant of this paper, my sympathies are wholly with it. I do agree whole-heartedly. But, I must in all honesty say, we owe it to ourselves first, not to misuse, by internal criteria, our own mode of discourse. We owe it to ourselves, as we venture out in this way, to recognize that all we can do with any sort of logically attested truth-value is to enforce internal criteria in others, and, despite their obviousness, they are frequently violated, even by ourselves. To move beyond that, to start talking about external criteria, is a sheer act of power, and should be labeled as such. The means which we will deploy there, to obtain and then force a critical compact, have little if anything to do with truth; they are not within the realm of grammar, they are of rhetoric. And, there, wisdom calls for silence, for it can be interpreted equally as assent or dissent, at least until oaths of loyalty are asked for.

Mr. Altieri

I wish I had more powers of enforcement, at this point, than I have. But I think that the first and most obvious question that gets raised by Wlad's comments is the status of my kind of discourse, his kind of discourse, and the status of logic itself. One of the bases for the hesitant mode which I would like to develop is that I have the sense that as soon as you start to impose strict standards of either logic or truth on areas which are not empirical, you immediately end up with their other which is some form of chaos or indeterminacy. So that it seems to me that the kind of argument that I was making was not based on any kind of strict logic, but was based on certain kinds of loose warrant procedures which are developed by people like Stephen Toulmin, and by Perelman. (I'm glad to be able to cite them because I would have a good deal of trouble specifying the particulars.) Nonetheless I will get to some of the particulars that are involved in making this distinction between a kind of strict logic and therefore notions of a kind of entailment and certain looser forms of implication. I think that Wlad picks up exactly the point. I need community as my form of implication because I haven't got logical entailment. However, I think that it's fundamental to literary theory that we're never going to get logic of entailment by the very nature of the discourse that we have and of the kind of ends it serves and of the kinds of constitutive principles that work in terms of it. Now, one way to put this is to take Godzich's formulation, "We guarantee what we say by what we own." I suppose that what I'm trying to say is that owning

equals a certain kind of owning up. In other words, owning is not merely a condition of--again empirical possession. But it's a question of qualitative possession. And the criteria for qualitative possession are what you can own up to, which therefore again involves in some sense being aware of the history of the discourses which make possible an owning on any kind of qualitative standard, where you want to pronounce your owning, instead of concealing our owning as most of us do with lots of other things. And this involves the question of enforcement, and it involves the question of enforcement vis-a-vis the very difficult issue of the status of rhetoric because, again, enforcement without rigorous truth standards is going to be, in one way or another, a sense of what can be affirmed or appreciated and what can't. And that question of what can be affirmed, on non-logical grounds, treads a very delicate borderline between power and constitutive possibility. That is, rhetoric itself is understood by great writers, Shakespeare is the clearest example, as at one extreme, going toward the pure masking of desire and power; at the other extreme, going toward the pure fantasy of imaginative worlds which are totally constituted. Now, it seems to me we're talking about a realm of productive activity like literature--and I suggest like most philosophy which is not itself faithful to twentieth century philosophical standards. We're dealing with a realm of the constitution of modes of discourse which are realms of possibility. They have forms of power built into them. Insofar as their principles of constitution are explicit, the forms of power are no longer perverse. The forms of power are based again in the fact that you accept a certain form of constitution. I can give you a very

simple example of this. Let's take something like-- I suppose the games rugby and cricket would be good examples. Simply choosing to play the game immediately involves one in a determinate range of values and expectations which the game itself constitutes. Once you accept the game, you accept a whole series of enforcement procedures which are not anybody's enforcement procedures; they're intrinsic to the very process of what those constitutive acts generated. Now, a literary tradition works in much more diverse and much more flexible ways than strict game rules, but it has a lot of analogies to that as a model of rhetorical constitution. Now, another way to state this is to state that, again, when we're asked this question, "If 'uses of criticism,' then 'misuses of criticism'?" what we're asked to do in effect is to constitute the domain that Godzich tries to establish logically. But it seems to me what I was trying to do in the paper and what I'm trying to do again now is to constitute that domain historically rather than logically, and to constitute it by asking two things: 1) Are there certain questions which themselves constitute domains--that would be my basis for internal criteria--are there questions which therefore involve the possibility of assessing answers--if you can't define the questions, again, to my sense, you can't have a discourse. You can have various forms of performance which involve different forms of constitutive activity. A clear example of this is when Derrida talks about Aristotle, he accepts initially the constraint of accounting for Aristotle's language. I mean he is not the pure, free deconstructor that one might insist upon from too literal a reading of his most radical pronouncements. There's some fundamental irony behind this which one has to

acknowledge but it's crucial for him, to win an audience, that his presentation of Aristotle at least recognize the historical parameters of certain kinds of coherence. He can't make "the proper" mean anything that he wants to make, and he plays within and upon logical operations because he is self-consciously parasitical upon a logical and a speculative tradition in philosophy. I mean if he were to pronounce his audience, it would be something like probably the two voices of Hegel, analytic and synthetic, which consistently play against one another. What I'm trying to say then is that we are involved in domain constitution, and that involves, first, for internal criteria, the issue, "are there specific questions with specific constraints?" then, for a more general level, "are there certain questions about questions which clarify constraints?" Let's say that the first level is a matter of why various things are happening. I think there's another level of question which we can take as a question about how we can say that various kinds of things are happening. And the question I was trying to raise with my paper is "are there certain kinds of qualitative 'hows' inherent in the questions that literary critics raise, which then create a domain in which these kinds of questions about a hierarchy of uses become possible. Now one last remark on this which is not completely connected but I think involves again the question of the kinds of constraints we work under. And that involves the grammatical game about the reference of pronouns with which Professor Godzich began. (You notice as I get more confident I move from the first name, which is a gesture of appeal, to the last name which is a gesture of confrontation.) It seems to me that taken as fixed and examined logically the grammatical ambiguities he

cites as possible could provide problems. But as soon as we take the problem as provisional, and agree that we have to have a discourse, it seems to me a simple matter to agree that we will take our grammatical object to be the paper submitted for this session. In other words we can dissolve logical questions by procedural operations. If we could agree on the procedure, decide what question matters, then in a way we've constituted a certain kind of domain which is not attackable metaphysically. And this despite the fact that this event of discussing a paper (which few have read) in a meeting, invites a version of Derridean operations. There's an original paper of mine, in which there's an original me in a certain sense. They're both displaced into these other responding texts, which displace not only the original paper but the original me, who's now not only a performer but a self-defender, who therefore is then distributing other realms of discourse. But all of these things are finally the kinds of things that one entertains himself with and can very easily, I think, dismiss by asking what are the overt constituents of what I'm saying. That is, whether or not I succeed in the various supplements of the original me who's been displaced in these things doesn't depend on metaphysics at all but it depends on how well I can maintain the realms of discourse which we all have some kind of shared, qualitative criteria for. Though again there are going to be levels and there are going to be communities of sharedness on each level. That's one of the reasons why these things are enormously difficult to approach with any theoretical operation.

Mr. Godzich

Let me make a very brief response to your response. We'll add the supplement before we can let

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people read their own texts. I think that the note on which you ended is the important one. You have completely rejected the theoretical; you're saying essentially: "Why do we need to be all that explicit? Why do we need to proceed logically?" And at that point, one should observe that the term, "loose", occurs quite frequently in your paper. It is this looseness against which I have argued by bringing in the logical organization. And I think this is very important because this is the point where you will not let even the internal criteria apply to what you are saying. What you are proposing then is free, even from the internal criteria, because it is no longer verifiable in this way. Let me add one more thing. The real question here is "Why do we need a community?" This is an assumption which has been made by you. But the question is never addressed as to why we need a community. There is nothing obvious about that question. We seem to need a community because we need some kind of formal organization which is going to be its grammar. But we know the grammar not to be self-sufficient. We will be sliding back and forth between a community which is somehow there, which constitutes itself loosely, and then we will, through various means of enforcement, stratify it somewhat more, and we are going to constitute strata and formal forms of organization, and we will muddle through. We'll muddle through by excluding some people. And I think that that is the very organization you are proposing at this point. I'd like you to address specifically that question.

Mr. Altieri

I think that is a very deep and penetrating remark and it gets at the basis of my own ambivalence

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toward philosophy which comes from Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein keeps saying, in the most elegant philosophical ways, that philosophy is a disease, and we don't need it. In fact, it does us more harm than good, but we have it. And therefore we had better find certain ways of freeing ourselves from it. Now, what I want to say is certainly not to attack theory, at all, but to say that the first job of literary theory is to find out what kind of responsible discourses are possible about literary criticism and about literary texts? What I'm suggesting is that logical forms of entailment and implication are probably not the form of proceeding that can generate other kinds of criteria within literary proceedings. And my example of that would be, to come back to the grammar question that we had, I would not want to say that there are not criteria for whether or not we can resolve that question of grammar. What I would want to say is that the criteria inhere in the forms of discourse that are operating and not in some kind of external notion of formal languages or formal procedures. Following this tradition in which I work, which I would want to claim is somewhere between rhetoric and philosophy, I would claim that one can theoretically clarify literary practice, but the activity will probably always be uneasy because, in a certain sense, all of our operations are circular. That is, we can imagine empirical goods to imply a universal community. Health seems clearly a universal good: if you make an argument against health, you somehow dismiss yourself from the universal, because it is universally shared. Once you get into certain kinds of areas of value which depend on mastering certain kinds of internal criteria--let's take lyric poetry as a kind of extreme form--

that has a much more reduced audience precisely because you have to already know what it is before you can start to talk about it. That is, there's a certain kind of circularity at the very base--this is what drove Matthew Arnold crazy--he knew he could only convert those who were already converted. He had only the terms which already required literary understanding to make sense. This was my transition to community on two levels. One is that it's not as if I wanted to create a community--the problem is that we already have one. We have a community in which goods are distributed, in which students are educated, in which certain kinds of literary choices are continually taking place. Now it seems to me that because this community does have a certain degree of power, more intellectual than financial, one wants to try to make that community as aware of what it can stand for as possible and to try to get a kind of explicitness within that community about what kind of standards it holds and for what reason. Again it seems to me that the use-misuse question is enormously complicated because--let's take a critic like Harold Bloom, for example. You couldn't say that Harold Bloom's work is a misuse of criticism, although there are a lot of moods in which one would want to say that. But because he has effects on reading, that would be a narrow and silly claim. The point is that Harold Bloom has certain uses and not other kinds of uses because he makes certain kinds of questions possible and doesn't address other kinds of questions which are central. Now it seems to me one of the roles of the kind of community we have is to clarify that kind of thing so we know how we can use and define how we can get trapped by someone like Harold Bloom. The second aspect is that we need community because the

individual mind, the empirical I, is an incredibly limited proceeding. I mean--it's pompous but it's true, nonetheless, to invoke people like Kant and Hegel as avatars of this question. They looked and saw this disintegrating world and said "why do we need this kind of community?" And what they came up with was: community preserves multiplicities of discourse. And it distributes the "I" in certain ways that the I can then recover. We need community because it's the only way in which the mind can come to terms with its multiplicity and come to terms with certain criteria for using that multiplicity. We need community for all the reasons Wittgenstein raises in talking about the limits of a private language. One more Bloomian comment to end this. Harold Bloom is trying to write a criticism without community, I think, in lots of ways. And he misuses the notion of competition. Competition is simply useless unless there are rules. If you don't have certain rules in tennis you can't win the game and you can't establish yourself. And community enlarges you by giving you the possibilities of certain criteria that you have to meet as you act and that enable you to judge and be judged. In other words we have a kind of enforcement dimension of community and a constitutive dimension of community. We're back to rhetoric. Community and rhetoric involve essentially the same questions.

## QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION

Leroy Searle  
University of Washington, Seattle

There is a very interesting series of relations in this discourse, in that a principal concern seems to be a question of "enforcement"--as if the notion of a community somehow entails a police force. There is a metaphorical undercurrent in Professor Godzich's impressive logical presentation which we may recover, to ask whether or not that assumption is in any way warranted, given the nature of the constitutive possibilities under which both "literature" and "criticism" are possible. That is, if we suppose ourselves to exist as biological creatures who already share a language; and that we learn it by the age of two--and a great deal of that learning is, in ways we don't understand, "wired in,"--then we stand to pose, I think, a lot of misleading questions to ourselves when we engage in the kind of metaphorical play whereby we can use such things as logic as themselves power moves, plays for a kind of domination, which do not, in fact, address what a community based on language, used by biological creatures, entails. Perhaps I could illustrate this by an analogy, just to explore whether or not all these uneasy power relations are really implied by asking about a "community." I recall reading a report in the New York Times about some strange meteorological event that occurred, in which the reporter said, "It appears in this instance that the laws of nature were broken." This suggests a curious notion of what a "law of nature" would be, because if we have a concept of a "law of nature," it addresses certain processes, which if they are law, proceed in such

a way that it is impossible that they would be "broken." The only point of this analogy is that we are, are we not, engaged in an enterprise where the "community" constituted depends on discourse as we constitute it, from a language we are already speaking. The very condition under which we could even ask the question, "Can we do without a community? can we eliminate a community?" might in fact be the ultimate abuse that Bill Rueckert found so difficult to imagine. That is, we would then be in a position where we would say, "I am going to deny and attack the very power, which is a natural power, of constitutive linguistic activity, in which we see ourselves and in which we express some intentions we have relative to the world. On your last point is the cutting edge of my question, because, in your own remarks, if you wish, on the one hand, to say about Altieri's paper, that there are internal criteria, having shown it by logical means; and then to say that we have no way to make the step from internal to external criteria, what I point to in my initial comment on your metaphorical play with the "policing" aspect of "power" relations, is just that you already were allowing my "community," which could in certain respects be described, while attempting to make your own logical assessment persuasive on external grounds. So your objection to Altieri could then be, in that way, applied to your own discourse. I think that simply indicates that we cannot do without community; and any time we've imagined that we can, we're merely deceiving ourselves, if we suppose that there is any way to evade this matter. Because we would then simply remove the bare possibility of our discourse.

Mr. Godzich

The notion of a natural power of linguistic activity which is undermined by my statements-- which you justify by having recourse to the biological conditions of language is an assumption which we should argue rather than merely accept. I think it better not to get into that right now. Your point, and, to some extent, Altieri's point, depends on the notion of an underlying nature, an underlying natural existence of some sort which would provide some form of organization, which we would then try to reproduce in a critical sense through some form of social compact. Now this is an assumption which one can certainly discuss. I would not want to be put in a position to assent to it at this point. My recourse to logic was not meant to suggest that all critical discourse be regulated by logical laws. It was meant to show how, in Altieri's paper, although there was a logical umbrella, the thrust of the paper was not covered by that logical umbrella. And furthermore that the thrust of the paper was operated as a power game and did not in fact accord with the language of truth, truth values. Now to the question of community, and the question of enforcement within the community: communities, insofar as they exist, are constituted by certain hypotheses, by the fact that one can represent oneself as identical in some way or another to other members-- family resemblances is a metaphor that has been used by Altieri in order to indicate the nature of community there. In other words, there is something shared. There is, as in family resemblances, something that is reproducible from individual to individual. And if an individual fails to reproduce-- reproduce that which ought to be present in order to be in that community, then he is out of the community. Now, at some point, the question will be asked, "Is he within the community, or not?" And, he will be

designated as being without the community. That is what I meant by the policing aspect of the constitution of a community. The problem here in many ways, is the problem of the articulation of grammar and rhetoric, which is fundamental to Burke. The entire paper, in many ways, is a Burkean paper which tries to resolve that question in Burke. Burke has grappled with this question for the past thirty years. And whenever he has tried to formulate a notion of grammar which would give us a form of regulation which we could then use to predict events he has always been forced to rely on rhetoric to cover up the holes in the grammar. The grammar does not hold up as such. The distinction between grammar and rhetoric in Burke has not held up and I contend that it does not hold up here. To a great extent, I agree with Altieri; you do not get a purely formal apparatus which does not somewhere imply persuasion, imply rhetoric, imply force, and that generally implies, then, the kind of community which is willing to do the enforcement.

The crucial question is not whether discourse can exist by itself but what are the reasons for which we need a community. That is the crucial question. In Altieri's paper, the grounds, and he repeated them in his summary, for that community are quite explicit. We must believe in intention, for example, and an oath of loyalty is called for on this issue. That is clearly and explicitly stated in his paper and he repeated it in his summary. Unless we believe in literary intention, or authorial intention, we simply are not doing criticism. . .

Lawrence Hyman  
Brooklyn College  
CUNY

Both Mr. Altieri and Mr. Rueckert seem to feel that the best use of criticism--leaving out the

misuse--is to make literature function as the creative, good part of society. The great sin is to deny the text, or to deny the intention, using that word in the larger sense, of literature or art. And I wonder if they could be a little clearer. It seems to me what they were trying to leave out of this community is deconstruction, or criticism of that kind, criticism which would deny the intention, which would deny the logocentric meaning. I wonder if they could be a little more specific, explain just what it is they are trying to protect us from.

Mr. Rueckert

. . . Let me answer your question by speaking to Leroy's question. I will agree with Leroy that the ultimate misuse of criticism would be to deny the creative and communal function of discourse, in other words, of language--and language conceived of as rooted, to use Leroy's terms, in the body, in other words, biologically or naturally grounded in some way. And to come back to your point, I would say that deconstructive criticism is not what I would consider to be negative criticism at all. In fact, deconstructive criticism is very communally oriented, to tell you the truth, because it constantly reaffirms the individual and communal function of the creative powers of discourse, by deconstructing them to show how it's constructed. If you want me to be more specific. . . I wouldn't rule any kind of criticism out except a criticism that was entirely negative from beginning to end.

Mr. Hyman

Could you give an example?



Mr. Rueckert

No, I invented that as a hypothetical possibility. There's a part in my paper where I imagined what it would be like to try to destroy the Divine Comedy; I entertained myself by trying to think of ways to destroy Moby Dick.

Mr. Hyman

I think earlier, Mr. Sosnoski mentioned that in a way the whole purpose of the formation of the society was that we felt that a good deal of criticism was in some way beyond the pale--was so badly written, so illogical, that perhaps we need to think carefully about criticism. And for me the whole purpose of this discussion, "If 'Uses of Criticism,' then 'Misuses of Criticism'?"--this to Mr. Rueckert--if there is no misuse of criticism, it the only examples are hypothetical ones--then why are we discussing this at all?

Mr. Altieri

Since I seem to be the enforcer of the group--my Italian heritage--I think that one really has to distinguish between a deconstruction aware of the complexities of language and the ambivalence of desire and the way in which these things overlap and a deconstruction which is a certain kind of programmatic, tautological development of certain themes by making certain kinds of assumptions. I mean insofar as I would have enforcement powers, I would support the first and attack the second. But actually the more important--I mean to me, the more enduring enemy to good criticism...is academism rather than deconstruction.

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I mean by that a couple of things. On a qualitative level, I mean simply several forms of dullness and triviality and I think that there are two basic courses of this dullness and triviality: one is not recognizing what a community already knows--it doesn't need spelling out--the other part of it is not formulating questions intelligently, is simply assuming, is sort of pouring over critics to find fairly small points which can be the genesis of an essay instead of trying to generate certain kinds of questions which immediately involve substantial issues and the answering of which is going to demand the kind of things that I've been trying "loosely" to describe as qualities. The one other thing that I think that clearly one wants to rule out is reduction. We have to have a definition of the reduction of any discourse. In my paper I used the example of Quentin Skinner on philosophers because I think that his position is almost inherently reductive--to insist that the truth-seeking desire of philosophy can be interpreted solely with respect to historical positivities. There are clear analogies in literature which we can all fill in. Enforcements against these depend upon "family," or, in academic terms, the community. And I would define community largely out of Frye: a humanistic scholarly community would be the people who are conscious of describing and interpreting a history of what man has made out of nature and of the possible kinds of significances of what man has made out of nature--that is of preserving what is available to us out of the creative efforts of historical agents in various kinds and directions. I think a lot of that involves actually destroying historicism, but it has to begin with a strong awareness that it is history which we inherit. That's not very precise but that's the direction I would go in.

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(Name inaudible)

This is a general observation. Up perhaps to Eliot, it seems to me that the community of critics, at least in the English-speaking world, consisted largely of writers who used criticism in a variety of ways--to sort out their own thinking, exchange recipes, and so on. Looking back, to the forties anyway, I was struck as you talked that if you shifted the question to that of Arnold's essay, "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time," then asked the question, "The Malfunctions of Criticism," it might avoid some of the quarrels that you got into. But. . . in candor, I felt a little bit of frustration in listening to the panel; I'm not sure why still. . . Interesting things came up but. . . I thought, instead of talking about the malfunction of present criticism, we ought to talk about the professionalization of criticism: schools of criticism being dependent upon the publication of magazines for promotion and tenure. Let us talk at least candidly about one of the problems we are talking about. If we speak of triviality, if we speak of dullness, we all know that there are many instances of things that let's say our colleagues have written, or we have written ourselves that are tied to that scheme. I think the number of people who were here at the beginning of the period is witness to the fact that there is a real community still existing. And I would suggest. . . the notion of the concrete as a useful fiction. I only mean what has brought a lot of people into the teaching of literature--English, American, French, German--I don't care what. Still, it's a useful one; it has some truth to it. Excuse the ranting but it's late in the afternoon. I think perhaps we ought to be talking about the real power that has unfortunately generated varied means for such a panel in the first place.

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Mr. Altieri

"The Text of a never delivered reply to the only reply to my paper delivered to me before the Convention"

I once was invited to defend a paper I had written setting Frye against what I claimed were the reductionist aspects of Freudian readings. My respondent was a very bright psychoanalyst critic. To my paper and my work of intense reading and preparing philosophical critiques of Freud, my respondent posed an irrefutable claim: "I detect in this paper," he said, "the mind of a nineteenth century Anglican clergyman." His shifting to discourse from philosophical to psychological contexts left me only one reply--"Please at least let me be a nineteenth century German clergyman to acknowledge the philosophical nature of my piety." He probably correctly, refused even this concession. Bill Rueckert is by no means so narrow, or so irrefutable, but before he develops the considerable grounds of agreement between us, he has a tendency to reduce me to my pieties--a punishment I perhaps deserve as a person but a slight disservice to the possibilities of dialogue at this meeting. Reduction to one's pieties largely ignores the qualitative aspects of the arguments invoked to support one's position. And as a consequence, the level of discourse invited by such a strategy tends to remain too general and it keeps us talking about ultimate grounds of criteria instead of the looser more varied sets of distinction that might locate and rationalize what we admire and desire in critical practice.

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There is, actually, as Rueckert says, very little actual disagreement between us (even on our pieties). We both stress the mediator function of criticism and define its proper uses in terms of authorial acts and their possible relevance to communities. What differences there are between us, except for differences of vocabulary and consequent emphasis, stem largely from a lack of clarity and development in my paper. Rueckert summarizes his quarrels with me under two heads--my lack of humor and of respect for the comic, and my ignoring the claims of nature in order to concentrate purely on the Word (43-4; 48). To these I would add two more significant critiques of my position that occur in Rueckert's paper--the nature of doctrinal criticism or the status of my value terms, and the problem of defining criticism in relation to literary practice in a manner that can help focus subsequent discussion here.

Rueckert's two explicit objections seem to me caused by my failure to clarify some consequences of my position. Despite the painful Arnoldian quality of some of my rhetoric, there is no theoretical reason why many forms of the comic and the ironic are any less "serious" forms of self-representation than tragic or moral attitudes. My major point, to which I will return, is not to exclude any content in criticism or in literature--but rather to suggest some loose criteria by which we make qualitative judgments about the handling of content. (These judgments, by the way, I argued establish hierarchies not binary oppositions.) Thus it is not the nature but the depth or precision of the comedy, and criticism of it (as with any set of contents), which

a seriousness criterion addresses. Rabelais or Beckett are, to most people, greater comic writers than Wilde, for reasons I have suggested. But it is also quite possible for some criticism of Wilde to be a good deal more valuable than a critical piece on Rabelais--although such an essay will probably not be essentially aesthetic analysis.

On nature, I did not make clear the idealist basis of the moral position underlying my remarks. I would, of course, like any good liberal, backtrack to cover my bad ecological conscience, but here that is not necessary. I take it that nature makes no claims on man in itself, but only through arguments and images. That is, one's stance towards nature is as much a function of the attitudes he assumes and defends in essentially reflective contexts as is one's stance towards politics, or sexuality, or literary criticism. How we relate to the non-human depends on the attitudes we assume on the powers of mind we have cultivated, and on the communities whose respect we desire: these relations derive from the essentially verbal and critical models of discourse I describe because all ethical stances, all stances Frye attributes to the myth of concern, derive from linguistic acts but are not reducible to them. Similarly, poems like Gary Snyder's are not directly ecological acts, as planting trees can be, but are instruments effecting the quality of our attention, and the ways we represent ourselves to ourselves with respect to nature.

There are matters where I simply did not extend my original remarks sufficiently. The subsequent two issues are much broader. They involve large conceptual distinctions where problems basic to my

position arise. Rueckert insists that my position is doctrinal, and I must admit that there are no purely empirical means for distinguishing among uses of criticism, one must be doctrinal so long as he can identify the Colridgean idea warranting the doctrine. One must state the value-grounds on which he locates a hierarchy. (Rueckert's value grounds, by the way, differ from mine in depending on the abstract [categorical?] formulation of three areas of action, while mine depend on loose senses of procedure and tradition, that is on norms derived from rules and standards for respect.) But, to echo my opening remarks, the point is not whether or not one is doctrinal, but the level on which the doctrine shapes criteria and the variety of distinctions and qualitative dimensions that level of doctrine allows one to make. Indeed, one reason for linking criticism and literary tradition is to defend a pluralism of questions and procedures. But plural methods do not logically entail lawlessness or indeterminacy (as Walter Davis shows) so long as one's sense of methodological requirements is sufficiently abstract (without being vacuous).

The basis of Rueckert's charge is bluntly stated on pp. 40-41 of his paper. However if we look at the issue somewhat differently we can say that of course there are misuses of literature with respect to the critic's task of mediating it for a community. Aesthetically, if not ethically, it is a misuse of literature to be dull, stupid, incapable of significant discriminations, unconsciously contradictory, or purely derivative while one celebrates his or her originality. In so far as bad literature fails the proprieties of literature, that is, is not faithful to a sense

of the essence or idea of the form one employs to address an audience one can respect, it seems fair to say such work misuses what it uses. My point, of course, is not to rewrite Peri Bathous. I want by this example to suggest that Rueckert simply equates doctrinal with judgments about content. Clearly, denials of literary value in terms of content would be a misuse of criticism--for precisely the reasons I give with respect to communal standards, respect for intention, and seriousness criteria. But it is quite possible to preserve pluralism about content and still have substantial doctrinal standards with respect to the qualities by which content is rendered--both in literature and in criticism. The point here is important because it reveals a frequent misuse of critical thinking--the tendency to attack on the level of content discriminations which make a good deal of sense on the abstract level of qualities where they apply to diverse content. At the risk of parodying both Rueckert and myself, I want to point out that Henry James made a version of this mistake when he attacked Madame Bovary for the impoverished world represented without attending to the universalizable attributes of Flaubert's complex structure of attitudes.

The largest problem Rueckert raises is the need to define "criticism" before we begin speaking of its uses and misuses. I confess to not seeing the difficulty in my paper. But now what can be done about it. There are at least two issues here: we need to be clear on different basic forms of criticism, and we need to see if there are any common criteria to which the various modes are responsible. Rueckert rightly argues that for there

to be misuses of criteria, there must be "defined in relation to one specific set of uses" (6). But the deeper question is whether there are general common expectations about uses which warrant--within their provenance--significant and generally applicable claims about misuses. My paper tried to argue that there are such communal expectations, but I did not sufficiently address the fundamental grounds for my criteria. The question of general uses demands two caveats. First, as I did argue but Rueckert ignores, critical theory can dismiss as irrelevant many of the possible uses of criticism--e.g., as examples of misuse or as most bathroom uses--by assuming that in using criticism in any appropriate sense we must respect as part of the meaning probably the intention of the critic and certainly the area of discourse which he or she commits himself or herself to. Second, largely for heuristic reasons, we must consider the audience for whom this discussion is intended. Criterium in general would include any discursive act of appreciation, but it seems plausible here to confine ourselves to what those academically or professionally do or think they are doing when they self-consciously perform critical acts.

I assumed, somewhat naively, that criticism means the interpretation of texts either as monuments or as symbolic acts in a loose wisdom tradition. Rueckert's essay makes it clear on the contrary, that we must consider, within these parameters, at least three types of criticism, some of which, as he describes them, prove my arguments still hold, even though they are text-centered, or, as I prefer to put it, text-based. That is, while

criticism need not be close-reading, it must rely on readings of texts on some level of generality. If criticism does not in some way use texts as evidence, it can have no explanatory function and very little use--rather like literature that is only linguistic exercise, in no way implicating existential concerns.

Rueckert's first counter proposal is the possibility of criticism devoted to the creative process. In my view such criticism is responsible to at least two sets of constraints, which I describe in my discussions of treating texts as monuments or expressions of certain properties. Obviously if the critic's questions concern the creation of literary texts, his initial obligation is to describe adequately the object created before he can speculate on its creation. And this entails honoring matters of what Quentin Skinner calls "intention in" the object. Then hypotheses about texts as creation must deal with standards for evidence in whatever discipline invoked to explain the creative properties the text can be seen as expression of. Rueckert's second example, criticism of other criticism is similarly distributed between textual analysis and supplementary disciplines. In so far as one analyzes other criticism as theory, one is responsible to philosophical procedures and to those inherent in the specific conceptual approach--e.g., psychoanalysis, sociology, etc. And in so far as one makes theoretical claims about literature, he is responsible to texts, and hence intentional meanings considered either as monuments or representative acts of mind. (Acts of mind, I should add, include feeling.) The same conditions hold a fortiori if the criticism is of critics speaking on

particular texts. I should also add that even critical accounts of pleasure or of beauty are responsible to specific literary criteria if the use of the key terms are to be anything more than vacuous impressionism. For beauty and pleasure are less distinctive properties than functions of reader's engagement in specific procedures and features of a text. Pleasure and beauty are probably properties attendant upon careful reading and not reducible to metaphysical or physical attributes.

Rueckert's case is most difficult for me with respect to a third area of criticism which he calls creative and I prefer to conceive as constitutive. Rueckert gives three types of examples--criticism which is wrong and yet liberating or revolutionary (p. 34), experimental criticism like Brown's, Bloom's, or Olson's that refuses ordinary criteria for evidence (p. 35), and criticism that generates new theories and "helps to clear and prepare new ground for new creative acts" (p. 42). In all three, the major distinguishing trait is that the critical work does not accept established paradigms and procedures and yet is clearly useful, even if, unlike science, it refuses to point specific rules of evidence to which it is responsible. That is, by my standards most of what has most mattered to practicing critics would be an abuse of criticism--not a comfortable dilemma for someone who in no way considers himself revolutionary. One easy, and relevant way out, is to categorize these forms of criticism as essentially artistic performances, responsible as I have said not to evidence but to the kinds of criteria for representative acts of mind that we employ in judging literary texts. There is no reason why criticism

can't be suggestive literature, just as say Sartre's or Heidegger's bad philosophy remain suggestive images for specific attitudes of mind that inform our understanding of certain kinds of behavior. One piece of evidence for this is that "prophetic" criticism like Brown's or Bloom's becomes useful to the extent that it can be incorporated into rationalized practice as an element in our descriptions of intentional meanings in texts. Theory in general, we must remember, is not criticism per se: it is usually either philosophy of criticism or conceptual argument for the uses of criticism which must be reabsorbed within critical practice. This can be true of both "prophetic" work or of less pretentious critical work which accepts old paradigms but stresses different values or modes of relationship within works or between work and world. The line from Eliot to the New Criticism would be a case in point.

While revolutionary criticism can be adapted to my by now voracious categories, there remains a serious problem I am evading. The problem attends upon all self-consciously revolutionary stances. What kind of authority do they have? Does the authority derive primarily from strength of will and of rhetoric, as Nietzsche and Said would have it, or does it derive from shifting levels of community, as Frye would have it, so that what is rejected is shown to be merely a limited historical positivity that reduces the actual principles it claims justify it. In the first case criteria are themselves only functions of a will to power subject to stronger wills. In the second case, wills to power are themselves subject to criteria, to historically grounded expectations if not absolute standards. Wordsworth's

revolution, for example, seems a clear case of the second: he attacks his predecessors not because of his personal authority but because they fail to capture the essential properties manifest in great poems. Freud's case is more problematic, but one could argue that his revolution is dogged precisely by his need to preserve for his work the general authority of science. I do not claim here that the agent actually subordinates his will to some higher truth. We are speaking of evaluation or reception of claims, not their production. So whatever the genesis, wills to power usually seek public acceptance by adapting their criticisms of accepted criteria to some higher standard to which the society pays some kind of honor. To the extent that this is the case, revolutionary criticism works within procedures while positing the significance of an underlying authority misappropriated by the dominant methods. Because literary criticism and theory are dependent less on rules than on loosely grounded images of practice and historical expectations, there are always competing principles of authority. This, indeed, is why I insist on qualities rather than contexts as the basic criteria for use and misuse. The qualities too can in principle be subject to re-evaluation, but I do not see people lining up to defend being wrong, or stupid, or insensitive, or irrelevant (even though I can imagine many who belong in the line).

I wish to make one final point on the definition of criticism which relates to this distinction between doctrinal contents and doctrinal assertion of qualities and which will allow me to suggest lines

for discussion. I think that my presentation led Rueckert to a serious misreading when he equates my linking the uses of criticism and of literature with an assertion that they have the "same proprieties" (p. 42). I did not mean to conflate "inseparable uses" with "the same proprieties." Proprieties can be distinct, while uses remain inseparable because inseparability does not entail equality. Knowing Robert's Rules of Order may be inseparable from being effective in a political body but is not the same thing as effectiveness. The point is important for reasons analogous to the questions of authority just discussed. For criticism to have ends inseparable from those of literature does not entail criticism competing with literature. On the contrary, this inseparability is what enables criticism to accept a subordinate, mediating role and at the same time to maintain a rich sense (the pious me wants to say "noble sense") of the ends its mediations can serve. In other words, by insisting that criticism serve literary ends as mediation rather than creation, one shows how it can accept criteria while not being reduced to merely professional activity absorbed into the sociological or even the scholarly proprieties of an academic profession.

In coming around to criticism as mediation, I end, as Rueckert did, by stressing our general agreements. In one sense, then, our whole debate has been a misuse of your, and our, time. But there are procedural messages here, perhaps even theoretical ones. Rueckert and I have made the all too natural professional mistake of stressing differences rather than agreements--less because of wills to power I think than because differences are what produces

discourse, as we are now only too aware. But in stressing differences, we sought the all too-easy realm of meta-theory, of challenging one another's formulation of general assumptions, only to discover that we essentially agreed on their nature if not their specific articulation. We accept the same authority of literature, even of Burke, and pretty much the same humane standards for critical discourse. I propose, then, that in our MLA session we eschew general agreement about the grounds of criticism and try to clarify specific differences on how we might formulate that agreement. In other words, not without a strong trace of the will to power, I would like to see us concentrate on the specific arguments in my tentative position paper. I propose the following topics:

1) Does the distinction between internal and external criteria make sense as formulated? Can and should we distinguish criteria related to argumentative procedure and criteria involved in the uses to which arguments may be put, where the mediating function of literary qualities is central? How else could this distinction be made?

2) Is the most important use of criticism relating literary acts to existential seriousness conditions? How can these conditions be specified better than I do in the last two pages of my paper?

3) Will the equation of reduction with misuse hold up (p. 4)? And are my two implicit criteria for judging reduction--distinguishing literary properties and "intention in" the work--accurate or significant?

4) Am I right in my logical case against pure deconstruction as tautologically requiring indeterminacy because denying intention gives no way of

moving from langue to parole.

5) Is it right or useful to distinguish different external criteria appropriate to treating literature as monument or expression of and treating it as a form of power, that is as the means for internalizing and reflecting upon attitudes? And do I define the right criteria in each case?

6) Can one get by arguing as I have for criteria which are not based on formal discovery procedures but on loose, historically grounded senses of common interests and assumptions about what makes one answer superior to others or what constitutes assessment dimensions for any non-scientific discourse about human acts?

7) What other ways are there for talking about what I have called variously "performative" and "constitutive" criticism (e.g., p. 9) and criteria for assessing them?



NEWS AND NOTICES

MLA SPECIAL SESSION

"BEYOND INTERPRETATION" (Organized by SCE)

Discussion leader: James Sosnoski, Miami Univ.

Panel: Ihab Hassan, Univ. of Wisconsin  
Paul Hernadi, Univ. of Iowa  
Barbara Herrnstein Smith, Univ. of  
Pennsylvania

Note: This session will center around statements made by Jonathan Culler about the need for interpretation in literary criticism ("Beyond Interpretation: The Prospects of Contemporary Criticism," Comparative Literature 28, 1976), and although he does not believe it likely he will be able to attend the MLA Convention; he will contribute an essay to the discussion which will be published in SCE Reports prior to the session. MLA members who plan to attend this session should write for copies of the papers.

For further information, contact:

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

MLA SPECIAL SESSIONS: "TEACHING CRITICISM"

As part of a larger project, SCE will sponsor two MLA special sessions on the subject of "Teaching Criticism."

We propose to publish a volume of essays, course descriptions, and bibliographies; if you are interested in submitting material for the volume, please contact: Leroy Searle, English Department, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington, 98195.

At MLA, the two sessions will be as follows:

I. "Teaching Criticism I: Criticism and the Literature Curriculum."

Papers by Hazard Adams, University of Washington; and Richard Macksey, Johns Hopkins.  
Discussion Leader: N. W. Visser

II. "Teaching Criticism II: Problems in Critical Theory."

Papers by Ralph Cohen, University of Virginia; and Leroy Searle, University of Washington.  
Discussion Leader: Vincent Leitch

SUBMISSIONS FOR THE PROPOSED VOLUME should be sent to Leroy Searle no later than April 15, 1980.

MLA SPECIAL SESSIONS

Indianapolis, Indiana Hyatt Regency Hotel

NOVEMBER 8-10, 1979

"ANALYSIS OF DISCOURSE IN FICTIONAL NARRATION"

Discussion leader: Harold F. Mosher, Jr., Northern Illinois University.

Note: The Literary Criticism and Theory section of MMLA will be considering Structuralist and Formalist treatments of narration in fiction, including proposed topics of new and old concepts of narrative discourse, the implied author or narrator, time in narration, types of characterization, and levels of narration.

For further information, contact:

Harold F. Mosher, Jr.  
Department of English  
Northern Illinois Univ.  
De Kalb, Illinois 60115

"LITERARY NONFICTION PROSE"

Discussion leader: Michael Lennon

Note: This session of the Modern Literature section of MLA will include brief summaries of papers followed by discussion on proposed topics of biography and autobiography, the new journalism, the nonfiction novel, letters, essays, and journals as examples of twentieth-century nonfiction prose.

For further information, contact:

Michael Lennon  
Literature Program  
Sangamon State Univ.  
Springfield, Illinois 62708

"REFRIED FRYE" (Organized by SCE)

Discussion leader: Patricia Harkin Sosnoski,  
Miami Univ.

Panel: Robert Denham, Emory and Henry College  
Marshall Grossman, Blackburn College, IL  
Julie Lepick, Texas A & M Univ.

Note: This session will examine the extent to which elements of An Anatomy of Criticism (especially its taxonomic impulse) are explicitly employed by postmodern and less systematic critics such as Frederic Jameson, Hayden White, and Harold Bloom.

For further information, contact:

Patricia Harkin Sosnoski  
Department of English  
Miami Univ.  
Oxford, Ohio 45056

"WORKSHOP ON LITERARY THEORY: THE RELATIONSHIP  
BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE" (Organized by SCE)

Discussion leader: James Sosnoski, Miami Univ.

Note: The aim of this session will be to generate a series of exchanges about questions concerning the relationship between theory and practice in literary studies, and how these questions should be formulated. No papers will be presented at the session, and the audience will be invited to challenge the formulations proposed.

For more information, contact:

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

FORTHCOMING CONFERENCES

Interface '79, The third annual Humanities and  
Technological Conference

Southern Technical Institute (Georgia  
Institute of Technology)

OCTOBER 25-27, 1979

Note: Sponsored by the Department of English  
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For more information, contact:

Robert D. Gates, or George E. Kennedy II  
Department of English and History  
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NEW DIRECTIONS IN LITERARY STUDY:  
A Newsletter for Critics and Teachers of Literature

This newsletter is a cooperative venture being established by members of Professor Ralph Cohen's NEH Summer Seminars for College Teachers (1973, 1975, 1978). It will serve to exchange information about the current research and teaching projects growing out of past work in these seminars.

The first issue will include a report on the 1978 MLA Special Session in New Directions in Literary Study: The Idea of Unity in Marxist and Phenomenological Criticism. Descriptions of mutual interest will also be included. Future issues will deal with topics proposed by the members, such as "Literary Worlds and Actual Worlds: The Problem of Reference," which is the topic of the 1979 MLA-NDLS Special Session.

If you are interested in receiving information about New Directions in Literary Study, please send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to:

Susan M. Elliott  
New Directions in Literary Study  
660 East Middle Turnpike  
Manchester, CT 06040

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