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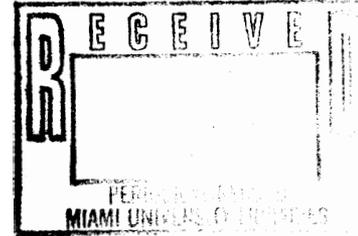
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SCE REPORTS

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FALL, 1982

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GUEST EDITOR'S PREFACE

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GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

James J. Sosnoski

This will be the last issue of SCE Reports. Last December the Board of Directors decided to rename SCE's in-house journal. Starting this Winter, SCE will publish Critical Exchange [CEX]. The first issue will be devoted to this year's MLA session on literary change. It will reprint Professor Cohen's essay and include the commentaries of Professors Riffaterre, Schwartz, White, Flieger, Ford, Harkin and Jay.

Originally intended to be SCE's newsletter, SCE Reports has evolved into an "in-house" journal. The motive for renaming SCE-R is to acknowledge this change. In order to signal that "there remains a continuity" in this change, as Professor Cohen has put it, we will number the first issue of CEX "13." From time to time SCE will publish a newsletter, SCE News & Notices, which will be edited by Barbara Biesecker.

CEX 14 will publish the proceedings of SCE's "A Symposium with Fredric Jameson" which was held this last Fall in Oxford. It will feature Jameson's "The Ideology of Space" and will include commentaries on Jameson's work.

All future correspondence regarding CEX should be directed to:

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For two SCE special sessions at the MLA this year, I have formulated the topic "Literary Change/Critical Change," inviting Professor Ralph Cohen, of the University of Virginia, to present a position paper on this subject. The resulting paper, "A Propaedeutic for Literary Change," follows.

I have invited responses to the paper from Professors Michael Riffaterre, of Columbia University, Murray Schwartz, of the State University of New York at Buffalo, and Hayden White, of the University of California, Santa Cruz, for the first session.

For the second session, I have invited responses and discussion from Professors Jerry Aline Flieger, of Rutgers University, James E. Ford, of the University of Nebraska, Patricia Harkin, of Denison University, and Gregory Jay, of the University of Alabama.

Professor Cohen's paper presents a theoretical conception of change in literary study, giving specific illustrations of his conception from both literature and criticism so as to consider interrelationships between them. At the start of the paper, he observes that he finds no necessity to define "literary" in "literary change" for the purposes of his discussion. The notions of what is "literary" and what "critical," he seem to suggest, are themselves changing conceptions to which his notion of change applies.

I look forward to hearing the responses to Professor Cohen's paper. He will have an opportunity to respond to the responses given in session I, and afterwards there will be a discussion period. I have asked James Sosnoski to chair the second session, in which Professors Flieger, Ford, Harkin, and Jay will give their responses to the paper. Their comments may also include reactions to the remarks made earlier by speakers in the first session. A discussion period will follow this session too.

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A Propaedeutic for Literary Change

Ralph Cohen

I wish in this short paper to touch on three aspects of literary change: (1) the nature of change; (2) the kinds of change; (3) explanations of change. I do not wish to debate the meanings of the term "literary," and I shall, therefore, assume that what is "literary" is what authors, critics, theorists have identified at the same time or at different times as "literary." The fact that such authorities may disagree about the significance of "literary" will in no way affect the inquiry I propose. My aim is to offer a propaedeutic for a study of literary change.

I. The Nature of Literary Change

Any discussion of literary change implies that there is a **stable** entity which can be divisible into parts. If a part of this entity changes, the gestalt can still be recognized; there remains a continuity which is necessary for change to take place. Change is opposed to the concept of changelessness on the one hand and differentness on the other. Changelessness undergoes no alteration of its parts. Differentness (and this applies to at least two events, situations, texts, etc.) refers to unrelated instances. Robert Nisbet puts it this way: "Change is a succession of differences in time in a persisting **identity.**"¹ And he goes on to say that "Only when the succession of differences in time may be seen to relate to some object, entity or being the identity of which persists through all the

successive differences, can change be said to have **occurred.**"² Nisbet is referring to social change, and differences in time are necessary for change in society to take place. But if, for example, one discusses changes in the meaning of the word "**wit**" in the Essay on Criticism, the idea of time is of trivial importance: change of meaning here is not governed by time but by context. Different contexts, different meanings. This steers us at once to further discriminations. Semantic change need not imply change of concept. In fact, it indicates the variations that fall within the range of a single word. It is quite another case to consider period change or style change in which concepts undergo alteration despite the continuity that persists among parts of elements of a period or a "style." To relate literary change to concepts of thought and feeling or to **forms** of authorial and reader consciousness is to realize that literary change is connected with larger frameworks of change in nature and in man. Change is one of the ways in which we describe natural events: a seed "becomes" a seedling, a caterpillar "becomes" a butterfly; water "becomes" (changes into) steam. These are changes of shape with underlying identities. In the first two examples, we have a progress in which the change is seen to be inherent in the seed or in the stages of growth. In the third, the transformation retains the same chemical properties though these have turned from liquid to gas. Thus, the study of change in all these cases involves frameworks from botany or entomology or chemistry.

Consider the problem of identity and form change in mythological stories. Zeus, Hera, and other Greek gods and goddesses are constantly changing shape. Such form change, whatever its aim, is governed by a consciousness of the god's

power and the god's knowledge that whether he becomes a bird or a beast, he can return to his original form. In other words, the language, soul, or spirit retains an identity. In literary texts, transformations of shape that retain identity are common. We can see this clearly in Apuleius' story written in the second century A.D. of Lucius who is transformed into an ass though he continues to think in the language of a human being: "though I was no longer Lucius, and to all appearances a complete ass, a mere beast **of burden**, I still retained my mental **faculties**."³ Or consider the famous twentieth-century story which begins "As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a giant **insect**."⁴ Gregor's shape has changed but he continues to think in human language and to be concerned about his human affairs.

My point is that change can be seen only against continuity, and in literary study, continuity can be studied only against or in contrast to change. The reason for this is that each literary text is always different from all others --no matter how slight the difference. However, the term "text" will not serve me in accounting for the kinds of change that I propose to discuss. What is needed is to redefine every literary "text" as a member of a genre. In doing so, it is possible to find that every text includes some elements from its generic past and others that relate to its synchronic present. Every text thus can be understood as multi-dimensional, possessing elements which constitute it as a member of one or more genres and which relate it to other texts in different genres.

I realize that numerous contemporary critics and theorists consider received generic classifi-

cations discredited, and I share their opinion. But I find no need to identify genre with such received categories (those that Maria Corti identifies) as "abstract, atemporal," didactic, **or** those that are "historic, diachronic, **inductive**."⁵ Maria Corti's semiotic approach is to relate genres to the "universe of senders and addressees" and to concern herself **with** the problems of the transformation of genres. Other theorists, like Tzvetan Todorov and Michel Bakhtin have also redefined "genre" without accepting the older and defunct classifications. After all, terms like "trace," "discourse," "absence" have been redefined, and there is no reason to assume that genre need be excluded from this process, especially **since**, as a critical formulation, it makes accessible an understanding of literary change.

In this new sense, genre can be understood as a family term, constituted by elements or parts such as meter, character, types of rhetoric, and discourse to produce certain effects. These elements can, of course, appear in different genres, each genre being identified by the nature of their combination and the effects produced. It is not surprising that genres differ in comprehensiveness and scale. A proverb can be part of a tragedy or comedy or a book of proverbs; a tragedy that is considered a performance genre by one critic may be considered a poem **by** another. The Pentateuch may be considered a sacred narrative at one time and a secular narrative at another. My point is that "writing" is identified in generic terms and that there exists no such phenomenon as "writing" which escapes forms or genres. This in no way is meant to imply that a text belongs only to one genre. The Essay on Criticism, **e.g.**, is obviously both a didactic poem and a critical text. Even an author may recognize that his text can be **inter-**

puted as belonging to more than one genre. Henry Fielding calls Joseph Andrews "a comic romance," which he defines as a "comic epic poem in prose; differing from comedy, as the serious epic from tragedy: its action being more extended and comprehensive; containing a much larger circle of incidents, and introducing a greater variety of characters."⁶ Relying on epic, comedy, and romance, this definition indicates that for Fielding the work possessed elements from all three genres that were combined in imitation of Don Quixote.

Without proceeding to a theory of genre, it may be appropriate to note that because genre has some continuity of elements and effects, it provides a basis for locating which elements have been changed or added or omitted. The term "genre" indicates the kind of changes it can deal with. The term has its source in the Latin "genus," which refers to "kind" or "sort" or "species" or "class." Its root terms are "genere," "gignere"--to beget and (in the passive) to be born. "Genre" can refer to a member of a class or a whole class; it can refer to how a class is constituted (the varied members); it can refer to a changing process, or to the members of a class as definite and unchanging, a product. It has the same root as "gender" and, in being related to gender, indicates the naturalistic distinctions that are implied. Genres have many elements in common but they do have distinct ends that change according to the historical situation.

If we consider the kind of changes that are generic, we note changes within a genre and changes between genres. Maria Corti puts it this way: "A genre may be transformed by itself from the inside by a change in the function of one of its constitutive elements, following which the

traits that are secondary in one era become primary in another; the genre reproduces like a microsystem those functional variations that generate the very movement of literature" and again "a genre is also transformed by changes in other genres in the literary system, which means that there cannot be a history of a genre in isolation; on the contrary, every phenomenon of correlation and influence must be considered."⁷

Any attempt to discuss change in a genre system, however, cannot avoid explanatory models from history or politics or anthropology or some other field in which change is a factor. But the subject matter of literature complicates the uses of any model. In any period there are texts from the past that are treated as present and living works, there are genres that have been disregarded or are minimally practiced, and there are genres that are dominant and those that are considered minor or short forms. Those that are part of the living literature form a hierarchy. The concepts that govern such a hierarchy will explain both the nature of the hierarchy and the values attributed to it. Thus, every text is an intersection of at least two systems: a diachronic generic system and a synchronic, hierarchical one.

Such systems are constructed by critics to explain continuities and discontinuities in relating particular works or groups of works to the kinds of changes that are posited. Are changes made consciously by authors or formulated by critics? To put the question in this way is to pose a separation that need not be honored. Since every text shares elements with others and introduces new elements, the issue of change is not properly discriminated by such differences.

Changes may be no more than variations of underlying period concepts of organization, philosophy, or language, and there is no necessary relation between a new genre and a new concept. A new genre such as the novel in the eighteenth century may conform to the concepts underlying the received genres, may, indeed, be no more than a variation of them. On the other hand, it is possible for Wordsworth correctly to claim that his rejection of eighteenth-century poetic language and the concepts of modification and epistemology underlying them leads to a new kind of poetic language and artistic vision.

The consciousness of change may apply to the individual writer, but the description of beginnings and endings of periods or movements are formulated after the fact by critics and scholars. These are fictions that depend on the critic's view of what texts constitute a period and why he wishes to divide ongoing time in this particular manner. I shall return to these problems in my discussion of the explanations of change, but it is necessary to note here that the subject matters selected for change--as, for example, changing attitudes to women or the changing role of the father--can be derived from disciplines other than literature. In this sense, some inquiries into change result from knowledge of change developed in other areas such as psychoanalysis or linguistics or history. The pursuit of inquiries into literary change, therefore, has an element of the unpredictable, and, indeed, the multiplicity of instances that would be considered literary changes have yet to be charted.

Since change inevitably involves a relation with continuity, it will follow that discontinuities will entail the persistence of some larger

entity. If there is a change in the diction of poetry, what persists is the relation of diction to thought or to poetic structure or to a speaker. If a particular genre like the sonnet is not written over a period of time, what persists is the relation of this omission to a poetic hierarchy or to the lyric poems that are written. And if a period ends and a new period begins, what persists is a hypothesis (or a theory) about the process of periodization or about the persistence of some elements or the discontinuity of others from one period to another.

The nature of literary change is thus a study of alterations which can only be understood in terms of the persistence of nonaltered elements of frameworks which provide an identity. Literary change is always connected with or characterized by concepts of knowledge, language, and structure that define some changes as variations of these and others as contradicting, rejecting, or overturning them. Change is then a form of adaptation or of "revolution." But it is the nature of literary structures that change and persistence are present together. The kinds of relations between them account for the kinds of changes critics identify.

II. Kinds of Change

The kinds of change mentioned by critics are so varied that it seems difficult to organize them into coherent groups. Indeed, discussions of change occur in almost all texts although there seems little theoretical awareness of the problems involved. I shall focus on changes within a text (an instance of a genre), changes that apply to groups of texts (within one or more genres), and changes that are the result of the impact of non-

literary institutions and actions upon literary texts.

Within a single text we note the changes that take place in its production. This can involve a study of work sheets or revisions in which the changes are examined in terms of certain persistent elements. Such study may serve to reveal the adaptations appropriate to support or supplement or expand concepts governing a genre. Or it may indicate the network of elements from different genres with which a work is being connected. Whether in work sheets or in print, the revisions will be seen as trivial, as adapted to received **concepts**, or as resistant to them.

In this respect a generic theory will make it necessary to provide a revisionary vocabulary of generic change. If satires that are exemplary are seen by **Dryden** as heroic poems, **this** conceptual change is the result of redefining satire by including heroic elements in it. When Meyer Abrams describes the "greater Romantic lyric" as a development of the georgic descriptive poem, he must provide a series of revisionary or developmental **procedures** that can "transform" one kind of poem into another. And this must be a matter of the ratio of **change to persistence** of elements. The kind of change that an individual text undergoes can involve the placement of a sermon, for example, into the text of a novel--as in **Tristram Shandy**. The insertion of one genre into another so that the whole becomes a part implies the comprehensiveness of genres and may indicate the nature of a generic hierarchy. But can one genre be transformed into another? Can a sonnet be transformed into the greater Romantic lyric? Does the epic become transformed into the novel?

The transformation image in botany or chemistry presupposes that change is either an evolution of an identity or the retention of an identity in different form. In order to explain literary transformation as a change, for example, the critic needs to argue that the greater Romantic lyric is inherent in the georgic descriptive poem or that it is a member of the same family of genres. It might be possible to argue, for example, that the ten-line stanza that Keats developed for his odes is a variant of the sonnet form--a quatrain and a sestet instead of two quatrains and a sestet. But then one would have to argue that the sonnet and Keats' odes compose a family that displaces rather than transforms the georgic descriptive poem. Whatever similarities of imagery or rhetorical procedures the genres share, these are connections, not evolutionary developments.

Among the kinds of changes in literature are those that involve parody or burlesque of **noncomic** genres. In such conversions there may be an opposition or an attack upon the values attributed to the original text. But parodies often aim to draw attention to the values of the original by indicating the pleasures that can be taken in it. This is often the case with ballad parodies.

I have suggested that genre study seems to me the most adequate procedure for discussing change, but many of my colleagues prefer to consider texts as composed of words or sentences and consider genres as units resulting from these initial combinations. For such critics literary change becomes a consequence of changes in a linguistic code. **Hayden White**, basing his discussion of change in literary history upon Roman **Jakobson's** sixfold model of the literary field, remarks that

changes in the linguistic code " will in turn be reflected in changes both in the cognitive content of literary works (the messages) and the modes of contact (genres) in which messages are transmitted and **received.**"⁸ In this view the changes in language determine the kind of genres most appropriate for the changed messages: In a given period and place in history, the system of encodation and decodation permits the transmission of certain kinds of messages regarding one context and not others; and it will favor those genres adequate to the establishment of contacts between different points in the whole communication system represented by language in general. Significant periods of literary change will thus be signaled by changes in the linguistic code; changes in the code will in turn be reflected in changes in both the cognitive content of literary works (the messages) and the modes of contact (genres) in which messages are transmitted and received. Changes in the code, finally, can be conceived to be reflective of changes in the **historico-**natural context in which a given language game is being played.

Now this is an important hypothesis regarding the relation of "language" to genre. And it begins with the assumption that since language is a literary component shared by "the context, the audience, the artist, and the work alike," any statements about literary change must be related to "**the** more general field of linguistic **transformation.**"⁹ What we have here is the claim that literary texts are read in language and written in language and that the system of encodation and decodation define the transmission or prohibition of messages.

Such a hypothesis seems to me to misconstrue the relation **between language** and genre. Although genres are language structures, they are not **redu-**

cible to language nor are they merely reflections of changes in the language code. Because every text is an instance of a genre (at least one), genre as a structure always includes features that have continuity with the past--whether these are compositional or metrical or thematic, **etc.--and** features that are innovative. Genre by this definition is constituted by linguistic codes that are inconsistent in their implications; moreover, the reading by scholars of any past work involves the imposition of their own linguistic code upon a one of the past.

But in another sense, **such** a view of change overlooks the control a literary genre exercises upon the codes appropriate to it at any historical moment. The primacy of tragedy and comedy or of kinds of lyric poetry alters the conception of the codes appropriate to each genre. The choice of genre becomes not a linguistic act but a social one which determines the linguistic. If one **takes** a ballad like "The Ballad of Jane Shore" and converts it into a tragedy, the historical situation of the genre dictates that the characters will have to be elevated and the subject related to affairs of state. **When** a novel is converted into a film, it is self-evident that the visual imagery will dictate the possibilities of verbal transformation.

Consider one other valuable analysis of literary change, that of Michael Riffaterre. **He** finds that language forms a descriptive system "built of nouns, adjectives, ready-made **sentences--clichés**; stereotyped figures, arranged around a kernel work that fits a mental model of the reality represented by that word."¹⁰ Such systems function differently in different genres and at different times. Now Michael Riffaterre wishes to stress the language

system current at a particular time, and, indeed, he wisely urges its value in contributing to a more adequate study of historical analysis and change: "Style analysis should contribute to thematology in future by including all descriptive systems in these compilations arranged according to type, indicating their generic and chronological distribution."¹¹

Such a hypothesis of descriptive systems is transgeneric. It may be found in whatever genres are current at a particular time. But can we accept this version of continuity and change of a descriptive system within a genre without knowing its role in the structure of a genre? Do such systems arise exclusive of the genres in which they are found in order to fit some abstract mental model of reality? Does it not seem more likely that such systems would arise culturally as extrapolations from generic explanations? That such systems exist as abstractions providing only some similarities in any specific instance?

In order to describe the kinds of changes that exist among groups of genres, the critic must posit such abstract entities as **norms**, epistemes, periods, individual and period "styles," "modes of writing," etc. With regard to change, these groupings imply a systematic approach to literary study; they aim to locate similarities among diverse individual texts and to explain the changes that--as a group--such texts undergo. (Of course, the identification of texts as "literary" or "**literature**" belongs with inquiries about changes governing the nature of literary study.)

If we wish to discuss changes among "norms" or "**periods**," it will be apparent that the defi-

inition of what these are must precede any analysis of change pertinent to them. When **Mukařovský** defined a norm "as a publicly acknowledged goal with respect to which value is perceived as existing **independently** of an individual and his subjective **decisions**,"¹² he relied on a "so-called collective **awareness**."¹³ He realized there are not only competing **norms**, but that norms are constantly being **undermined**. The relation between norm continuity and discontinuity becomes too elusive to pursue and thus the beginnings and endings of norms, the numbers and kinds of works and elements involved become resistant to systematization. A much simpler procedure for dealing with norm change is offered by Thomas **Kuhn**, the historian of science. **He** tracks the beginning and ending of a scientific paradigm by referring to common institutional procedures used in educating scientists, to a practical institutional "norm."

Any application of Kuhnian "normal science" to literary study has to substitute concepts of generic expectations or **common** problem-solving for institutional practice. But because, in literary study, these are always multiple, the notion of a unified "norm" seems unusable. As for multiple norms, these seem to pose problems about their discontinuance.

Periods no less than **norms** are critical abstractions or fictions, and any attempt to explain period change must do so within a framework of persistence between periods. Does a period consist of "literary" texts written within a particular time span or of literary texts available in a time **span** or of those that writers and readers find valuable? In any time period there are texts composed in earlier times; are these to be considered part of the "period"? It is difficult to avoid the view

that texts which form part of a canon regardless of when they were composed do indeed form part of a period. This means that a period is multi-temporal as well as multi-dimensional; the literary texts of a period so understood will then be governed by concepts of different chronological time. A change of period will thus have to make reference to different rates of change and to different relations among genres.

Because critics introduce period change in order to explain large-scale or revolutionary changes, or changes of literary hierarchies, they tend to neglect the continuities. The strategy is understandable, but it cannot lead to an adequate study of conceptual change. Some literary unit like genre is necessary to include continuity in any discussion of change. Debates over the length of time of periods or over the existence of periods--whether there is an Age of Sensibility or whether it is no more than the concluding thirty years of a neo-classical period or whether we have entered a post-modern period following modernism or are in the concluding phase of modernism--are misplaced because such determinations are not part of any theory of change, only ad hoc claims for evidence that is slanted to support one's hypothesis. They are fictions that function to explain particular changes; they do not explain the need, function, and aim of such changes,

When discussions of periods are displaced by discussions of receptions of literary texts, types of change become primary. But even if we attribute "receptions" to critics who express their views in writing (in contrast to readers about whom the critic can only speculate), the usefulness of such reception depends on the kinds of explanations offered.

III. Explanations of Change

Although I have divided my discussion into "the nature of change," "the kinds of change," and "explanations of change," I have done so merely for strategic purposes: to open different aspects of the question of literary change. It is apparent that I have not hesitated to cross boundaries and move among the three areas despite my emphasis on a particular one. Description and explanation are obviously intertwined even though Michel Foucault in The Order of Things, for example, tries to keep them separate and to resist methodological explanations in the empirical sciences:

The role of instruments, techniques, institutions, events, ideologies, and interests is very much in evidence; but one does not know how an articulation so complex and so diverse in composition actually operates. It seemed to me that it would not be prudent for the moment to force a solution I felt incapable, I admit, of offering: the traditional explanations--spirit of the time, technological or social **changes**, influences of various kinds--struck me for the most part as being more magical than effective. In this work, then, I left the problem of causes to one side; I chose instead to confine myself to describing **the** transformations themselves, thinking that this would be an indispensable step if, one day, a theory of scientific change and epistemological causality **was to be constructed.**¹⁴

He exaggerates his modesty, but his reference to "spirit of the time, technological or social changes, influences of various kinds" seems to be

quite distant from other contemporary explanations of literary change. These explanations begin with concepts of a literary text: a text which **is** a multi-dimensional system will inevitably possess some elements that are changing more rapidly than others. In fact, the changes will be recognized only in terms of continuities. Different **rates of change** will, of course, also apply to membership in a hierarchy of genres. I have offered as an explanation of this the notion that every literary text is inevitably different from any other in the same genre. Let me add here that these differences operate within a series of temporary possibilities.

So too, technological or social changes need not be disregarded. The closing of theaters certainly provides a reason for not writing dramas, just as the insistence by government on the writing of "social realism" threatens punishment to those who disregard this policy. Such social pressures, at the very least, explain the neglect of certain kinds of writing even if they do not explain those that are written. But the notion of "explanation" is at issue here, for if Foucault conceives of **explanation** in terms of causes, he will expect relations that historians will rarely be able to provide. Explanations in literary study are always made in **terms** of the aims of the explainer. To ask why a genre like the novel was introduced in the eighteenth century is to take for granted that the novel is a genre and that its novelty 'is a chance occurrence or the result of a series of writings that are intertextual with it. The term "introduction," therefore, conceals within it evolutionary or developmental categories which involve ratios of continuity and change or randomness or both.

At which point is the "cause" to be dis-

covered? Does **it** not imply an originating moment when the particular originating work is not yet identified? Is it Robinson Crusoe or Moll Flanders or Pamela or Joseph Andrews? If the critic puts aside the notion of "cause" and substitutes probable reasoning or reason giving, he will introduce reasons about generic differentiations, about the relation of such differentiations to social attitudes, about the relation of this genre to a synchronic system, about the shifts in function to the elements that compose the genre.

Sociologists and anthropologists who discuss social change tend to use three explanatory procedures: evolution, revolution, and randomness. Social change thus is the result of certain developmental or evolutionary procedures. Evolution need not mean a movement from a lower to a higher stage but to a series of successive stages not unlike the charting of individual growth by Erik Erikson. Such developments are connected to particular social structures and the kinds of changes are identified as adaptations or adjustments. Those changes which result in reorganizations of the structure are revolutionary changes. As for randomness, it is an attempt to leave open the introductions of unexpected pressures--whether legal, military, **etc.--upon** the structure.

Explanations of literary change are often related to and sometimes dependent upon moral, social, political, and psychological concepts. The most elementary procedure here is to make literature reflective of such changes: a social or **political** change is posited and literature is claimed to mirror it. More sophisticated critics grant that literary language **constitutes** its world and they recognize that what they have to explain is a change in the manner of literary construction.

One of the ways in which this is done is to argue that changes in the external world result in changes in the psyche. **Thus** literary texts by revealing changes in consciousness reveal changes in the external **world**. This is Fredric Jameson's procedure:

An objective fragmentation of the so-called outside world is matched and accompanied by a fragmentation of the psyche which reinforces its effects. Such fragmentation, reification, but also production, of new semi-autonomous objects and activities, **is** clearly the objective precondition for the emergence of genres such as landscape, in which the viewing of an otherwise (or at least a traditionally) meaningless object--nature without people--comes to seem a self-justifying activity.¹⁵

The correlation is not merely reflective, for it involves the production "**of** new semi-autonomous objects and activities." But the difficulty with this type of explanation is that by insisting on **reification** and fragmentation, it becomes the procedure it describes. It neglects the relation of continuity and the concepts that underlie it so that the relation of landscape poetry to pastoral and **georgic** forms from which it comes is suppressed or overlooked. And the role of nature as place as well as the connection **of** place to property and politics is misconstrued.

Since changes are of different kinds, it is obvious that explanations of them will be of different kinds. I mean by this that although all explanations will have to refer to evidence to support their claims and will need to specify the changes to which they refer, some changes are di-

rectly social while others are only remotely so. Some literary change is the result of imposing censorship where none previously existed, or the imposition of an index or a canon that undergoes change as a result of institutional decisions. So, too, the vocabulary of literary criticism becomes social at one time and scientific at another. The social vocabulary of "refinement" and "decorum" and "correctness" is clearly related to social behavior, that of "scientific," "evolutionary," or "developmental" much less so.

What do explanations of literary change explain? Any explanation will describe the kind of change that has taken place and will offer some historical clues for it. But no explanation by a modern critic of a past change avoids distortion. What we can do is to control the distortion by introducing generic elements stipulated by others from earlier times. Such continuities are not so much fused horizons as they are possibilities from which choices are made. But history is sometimes treated as though an element of past **writtpg** is always essentially the same, and the differences in time are trivial. When Paul de Man argues that the language of criticism and literature is permanently "unreliable"--"the most unreliable language in which man names and modifies himself"--he stresses the continuity, the persistent function of language.

If we wish to explain literary change, can we avoid the changing attitudes toward poetic language? And, of course, it will be remarked, can we avoid the changing **attitudes** toward genre. A theory of literary change should be able to explain such changes, but what is needed for such an explanation is a unit of analysis that will **permit** all such inquiries. I think that genre as I have been

using it can serve such a purpose. And it can serve because a genre is a social as well as literary unit; thus it is subject to the acculturating processes of language and of symbolic behavior. If we accept the view that any example of a genre is a combination of elements, then only some of these undergo change; for, otherwise, how would it still retain membership in a class? Therefore, we can argue that every literary text is constituted by elements that are in opposition or tension because they are identified, at the very least, with different time schemes and the intersection of diachronic and synchronic systems.

This phenomenon makes clear why beginnings and endings of periods can only be tentative and uncertain. In fact, the more extensive the change to be explained, the more useful a system which will control the explanation. It is always tempting to posit an essential continuity such as the oedipal conflict between strong poets of different times while minimizing or ignoring other explanatory procedures. But if it is granted that genre exercises control in constituting a text, no explanation can neglect its **fúnc**tion.

The theories of literary changes that I have been discussing fall within the group of related genres called literary history, literary criticism, or literary theory. Those critics who find only differences of degree--and not always these--between the languages of criticism and poetry insist on the fictive constructs of both. For them, explanation is inevitably about themselves because a literary genre theory is as self-reflexive as poetry. If one argues that all writing is genre bound, then a theory of change will deal not only with the nature and kinds of change but with the explanatory functions of each genre.

Theory and criticism are important today in the hierarchy of genres because they function as explanations of other genres and of themselves in a society in which orality is competing with writing. At such a period in the history of culture, efforts are made to consider explanation as forms of pleasure and as instances of fictive construction. Thus, historical, critical, and theoretical genres are seen as being reconstituted by their own processes of explanation. And the boundaries that separated these genres from those that were traditionally constituted as fictions are in process of erosion. A theory of literary change will explain that such a shift in the generic hierarchy and in the reconceptualizing of genres is a form of resistance to and subversion of received assumptions and practices of explanation. But not all are subverted, and I have suggested that generic procedures may well lead us to the consciousness of literary change that we seek.

NOTES

1. "Introduction: The Problem of Social Change," Social Change, ed. R. Nisbet (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), p. 1.
2. Ibid., p. 2.
3. Apuleius, The Transformations of Lucius Otherwise Known as The Golden Ass, tr. Robert Graves (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1951), p. 72.
4. F. Kafka, "The Metamorphosis," The Basic

Kafka, **Introd.** E. Heller (New York: Pocket Books, 1979), p. 1.

5. Maria Corti, **An Introduction to Literary Semiotics**, tr. M. Bogat and A. Mandelbaum (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1978), p. 115.

6. "Author's Preface to **Joseph Andrews**," **Joseph Andrews and Shamela**, ed. Martin Battestin (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961), p. 7.

7. Corti, pp. 133, 134.

8. "The Problem of Change in Literary History," **New Literary History**, 7 (Autumn 1975), 107.

9. **Ibid.**, p. 106.

10. "The Stylistic Approach to Literary History," **New Literary History**, 2 (Autumn 1970), 40.

11. **Ibid.**, p. 52.

12. Jan Mukarovsky, **Aesthetic Function, Norm and Value**, tr. Mark E. Suino (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1970), p. 25.

13. **Idem.**

14. "Foreword to the English Edition," **The Order of Things**, tr. anon. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1970), p. xiii.

15. **The Political Unconscious** (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 229.



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Literary Change and Critical Change I

Tuesday, 28 December

1:45-3:00 p.m., San Gabriel C, Bonaventure

Chair: Susan M. Elliott, Clark Univ.

Speakers: Ralph Cohen, Univ. of Virginia

Hayden White, History of Consciousness Program.

Univ. of California, Santa Cruz

Murray M. Schwartz, State Univ. of New York,
Buffalo

Michael Riffaterre, Columbia Univ.

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Literary Change and Critical Change II

Tuesday, 28 December

3:30-4:45 p.m., San Gabriel C. Bonaventure

Chair: James J. Sosnoski, Miami Univ. (Ohio)

Speakers: Gregory Jay, Univ. of Alabama

Jerry Aline Flieger, Rutgers Univ.

Patricia Harkin, Denison Univ.

James E. Ford, Univ. of Nebraska, Lincoln

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Teaching Criticism: A Workshop in Course Design

Thursday, 30 December

8:30-9:45 a.m., Palos Verdes, Bonaventure

Chair: Leroy Searle, Univ. of Washington

Speakers: Vincent B. Leitch, Mercer Univ.

James Donaldson, Washington State Univ.

For background material, refer to the current issue
of Yale French Studies.

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FORTHCOMING IN CRITICAL EXCHANGE 14

"Special Issue on Fredric Jameson"

edited by

Steve Nimis, Miami University

"The Ideological Analysis of Space"

FREDRIC JAMESON, Yale Univ.

"Imagining the Real: Jameson's Use of Lacan"

MICHAEL CLARK, Univ. of Michigan

"Jameson: Interpretation/Interpellation?"

JOHN BEVERLEY, Univ. of Pittsburgh

"Jameson and the Dialectical Use of Genre Theory"

JUNE HOWARD, Univ. of Michigan

"Marxist Literary Criticism and Marxist Political Writing"

MICHAEL RYAN, Univ. of Virginia

"Jameson's Utopias"

LARYSA MYKYTA, Univ. of Nevada, Reno

"Does Jameson Have Any Use for Allegory?"

CAROL P. JAMES, Roosevelt Univ.

"The Political Unconscious of Jameson's

The Political Unconscious"

JAMES IPFLAND, Boston Univ.

"peaceful Coexistence:

Jameson's Theoretical and Political Strategy"

JAMES KAVANAGH, Princeton Univ.