

# SCE REPORTS 6

SUPPLEMENT: ANNOTATED CHECKLIST  
"BEYOND INTERPRETATION"

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BEYOND INTERPRETATION: AN ANNOTATED CHECKLIST

Jonathan Culler, in response to an inquiry for background articles which might elucidate his essay, "Beyond Interpretation," wrote that compiling such a checklist ". . . would be of no help. What I was arguing was that critics have assumed that their task was to interpret literary works. If there were numerous articles that explicitly argued that this was the task of criticism, that would indicate that it wasn't an assumption at all."

I do not wish to quarrel with Professor Culler. His point is well taken and I have used it as a guide. It seems evident, nonetheless, that numerous critics have had their consciences pricked, so to speak, because of his and other challenges to traditional critical assumptions--that many critics are rising to the occasion by defending interpretation. With both these views in mind, I have made the goal of this checklist first, to outline the nature of the assumptions about interpretation, second, to survey the responses of those critics who have attempted to defend interpretation, and third, to present a few of the arguments that view interpretation as secondary. My choice of articles and books has been selective, but, I hope, representative.

The participants in this session have been very helpful with suggestions for the checklist. However, I have not annotated references they supplied where they go beyond the purpose of this checklist. Eugene Goodheart cites Roland Barthes' essay "What is Criticism?", 1963, in Essais Critique, as formative for an "anti-interpretive" outlook. Barbara Herrnstein Smith's suggestions for understanding her use of the term "interpretation" include: Wolfgang Iser, The Act

of Reading (Baltimore: John Hopkins Univ. Press, 1978), Chapter 1; and Morse Peckham, Explanation and Power (New York: The Seabury Press, 1979), Chapters 1 and 2. But a consideration of these works would go beyond the scope of the present discussion.

I have organized the checklist under five headings: (I) Beyond Interpretation; (II) New Critics on Interpretation; (III) Other Theories of Interpretation; (IV) Overviews; and (V) SCE Members on Interpretation.

I. Beyond Interpretation

Critics appear increasingly dissatisfied with the predominance of interpretation in the practice of criticism. Whether their arguments are "against" interpretation, or for going "beyond" it, many critics are calling for a new focus for literary investigations.

Jonathan Culler, in "Beyond Interpretation: The Prospects of Contemporary Criticism," Comparative Literature, 28, No. 3 (1976), 244-56, observes that the New Criticism, with its commitment to the autonomy of the literary text, has benefited the teaching of literature, but he attacks its "most important and insidious legacy," which is the "widespread and unquestioning acceptance of the notion that the critic's job is to interpret literary works" (p. 246). Instead, he maintains that "while the experience of literature may be an experience of interpreting works, in fact the interpretation of individual works is only tangentially related to the understanding of literature. To engage in the study of literature is not to produce yet another interpretation of King Lear, but to advance one's understanding of the conventions and operations of an institution, a mode of discourse" (p. 246).

Literary criticism should focus its attention on a number of unanswered problems: (1) the role

of literature in society or social consciousness; (2) its "historical relation to other forms of discourse through which the world is organized"; (3) a formulation of an "apposite account of the role of literature in the psychological economies" of writers and readers; (4) the effect of fictional discourse; and (5) a "typology of discourse and a theory of the relations (both mimetic and non-mimetic) between literature and other modes of discourse which make up the text of intersubjective experience" (p. 247).

Culler contends that three promising attempts to break away from New Criticism have failed to "combat the notion of interpretation itself" (p. 247). Northrop Frye, in his Anatomy of Criticism, posits the need for a "'coherent and comprehensive theory of literature'," but his proposals ultimately are only used as methods of archetypal interpretation. The second attempt, psychoanalytic criticism, has also failed to resist the tendency to be used merely "as a method of interpretation for texts which contain special oddities" (p. 250). Stanley Fish, using his "affective stylistics," focuses his study on the act of reading, but then attempts to use this approach for a new way to interpret texts (see Fish).

Critics such as Jameson, Hartman, Bloom, and de Man, however, have thrown off the interpretive bent to begin a "reinventing [of] literary history," and "to produce a theory of literature as a conceptual space" (p. 255). Interpretation, especially for de Man, is "in fact literary history," and in this context it "is always necessary error," thus these critics move on to more profitable areas of literary study.

A year earlier, in Structuralist Poetics (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1975), Culler argued that

The type of literary study which structuralism helps one to envisage would not be primarily interpretation. . . . Rather than a criticism which discovers or assigns meanings it would be a poetics which strives to define the conditions of meaning . . . . The study of literature, as opposed to the perusal or discussion of individual works, would become an attempt to understand the conventions which make literature possible (p. 128).

Through an analysis of verbal behavior, Barbara Herrnstein Smith examines the nature of literature, challenging Culler's structuralist assumptions. In her book On the Margins of Discourse: The Relationship of Literature to Language (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1978), she first makes a distinction between "natural" and "fictive" utterances. Natural utterances are verbal acts characterized as "occurrences" that are caused by, and in response to their historical contexts (p. 15); fictive utterances, however, are not historically unique "events", but, governed by their linguistic structures, are representations of natural utterances (p. 24). Thus there are distinct interpretations. A listener interprets a natural utterance by inferring its motivational, temporal, and spatial contexts. For interpreting literature, the reader must draw from the linguistic structure of the text, his "experiences of the world," and acquired knowledge about natural utterances (p. 36-37). The literary work presents the opportunity for the reader to engage in "cognitive play" about its meanings; although he can "never 'finally' understand a poem," he can return to consider its potential meanings (p. 124).

With these assumptions, Smith contends that the "ethics" of scholarly interpretation do not, as E.D. Hirsch maintains (see Hirsch), prescribe that literary critics privilege the ferreting out

of authorial intention, but that they acknowledge that their interpretations are inextricably tied to the critic's cultural setting (p. 151). Thus, both historicist "explications" and individual "readings" contribute to "the pleasure and interest we take in our cognitive engagement" with literature (pp. 152-53; see Hancher).

Turning to the use of linguistics in literary theory, Smith examines the work of "new stylists" such as Donald Freeman and Stanley Fish, and structural studies by Jonathan Culler and John Rutherford. A stylistic analysis, in studying "syntactic strategies," brings the reader into consideration, but in fact it only "attaches a new piece of apparatus [reader response] onto the machine (here an illfitting. . . Russian and Czech Formalism)" (p. 160). A comprehensive theory about readers and language is lacking. Although structuralist methods yield insightful conclusions about texts, they are limited and strained because of the underlying assumptions that literature is a "system of signs" and directly analogous to language usage. These assumptions--for example, about the intuitive ability of readers to understand texts--are incompatible with Chomsky's theories, i.e. that every native speaker has inherent language competence. The attempt to define a theory of literature by using linguistic methods is misleading, because the conventions in literary works are not "shaped by a communicative function, but by an aesthetic one" (p. 193). A re-oriented theory could instead attempt to discover (1) the way in which the process of a narrative elicits the reader's interests and enjoyment (e.g. suspense); (2) how general propositions or themes in a narrative are left unstated and indeterminate, but are construable; and (3) the way in which the act of narration is understood to be the "representation of a telling" (pp. 195-96).

Ihab Hassan also argues for a reassessment of literary criticism's traditional views in "The Critic as Innovator: A Paracritical Strip in X Frames," Chicago Review, 28, No. 3 (Winter 1977), 5-31. He presents a provocative case for the critic's role as both analyst and artist. Using the ideas of Wilde, de Gourmont, and Sartre to enforce his stance, Hassan argues--as do Fiedler and de Man--that the critic, in writing his discourse, is both the perceiver of a literary work, and the creator of his own "artwork" (pp. 11-15). He, as innovator, should recognize his "Freedom" to create in critical discourse (see Hancher). This freedom must also be complemented with "an erotic sense of Style," a feeling for the artistic use of language that is free of jargon, and "an intuition of the New," the ability to look forward to innovation in criticism (pp. 16-17). Hassan points out that art, in this postmodern era emphasizing deconstruction, discontinuity, and fragmentation, has become at best "an occurrence without clear boundaries," demanding a reconsideration of the present restrictiveness in literary criticism. He presents intellectual and moral "concerns" to meet this exigency, proposing five subjects of study to "empower the critic's language to enter history": (1) a general theory of fiction that takes into account current neurological, psychological, philosophical, and linguistic research; (2) "The Politics of the Imagination," i.e. the nature of the imagination's power; (3) "The Future," models of "desire, hope, or dream. . . [that] become concretion of the future"; (4) "Mythology and Technology"--the "convergences between their structures in the deeper structures of postmodern culture"; and (5) "The One and the Many: the emergent role of mind, extended by technology, in mediating between unity and diversity" (pp. 28-29).

Although Susan Sontag is interested in protecting art, not literary study, from interpretation, literary critics are repeatedly citing her views. In her provocative essay, "Against Interpretation," Against Interpretation and Other Essays (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1961), 3-14, Sontag observes that the modern view of art is predicated on the Greek theory of art as mimesis or representation, arguing that this orientation "makes content essential and form accessory" (p. 4). This emphasis on what a text means instead of what is is necessitates interpretation, the "conscious act of the mind which illustrates a certain code" (p. 5). Interpretation, first of all, is the attempt to "reconcile" a text that seems unacceptable to modern expectations by revamping it, disclosing "its true meaning" (p. 6). More contemporary interpretation, however, is all the more "openly aggressive" in its relentless drive to "excavate" meaning, and this impulse is reinforced by the doctrines of Marx and Freud which insist that events are only intelligible through interpretation. Such an exercise of interpretation is "the revenge of the intellect upon art" (p. 7), since it attempts to make comfortable "Real art [which] has the capacity to make us nervous" (p. 8). Interpretation, based on the items of content, indicates a dissatisfaction with a work, making it "an article for use, for arrangement into a mental scheme of categories" (p. 10).

Instead, what is needed is an interpretation that focuses more attention on form, and for this task an extended descriptive vocabulary is essential. Our present idea of form in art is based on spatial concepts, an orientation derived from the Greek metaphors that are predominantly spatial, and critics lack a "poetics of the novel, any clear notion of the forms of narration" (p. 12). More powerful concepts with temporal emphasis are

needed for the study of literature in general. This attention to form will not take the experience of a work of art for granted, as previous interpretation has done, but will capture the "sensuous surface" of a work, cutting back content so "we can see the thing" (pp. 13-14). The function of criticism could thus become the task of showing "how it is what it is, even that it is what it is, rather than to show what it means" (p. 14).

Leonard Meyer, although concerned with musical scholarship, agrees on the need for establishing a comprehensive theory of the general dynamics in the field (in his case, music), before emphasizing a focus on the interpretation of individual works. In the preface of his book, Explaining Music: Essays and Explorations (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1973), Meyer compares the music critic with the literary one: just as the literary critic need not "exhibit the greatness of King Lear," but is content to consider "the ways in which plot and character, setting and diction shape our understanding of and response to literature," the music critic should follow suit. Further on, in the chapter "On the Nature and Limits of Critical Analysis," Meyer endorses the need for intelligent interpretations of specific works, but maintains that a comprehensive theory about the very nature of musical works must precede such interpretations (p. 9). He notes that instead of investigating theory, "many humanists, especially those in music, have tended to follow the well-worn path of safe scholarship, . . . have been those which illuminated a relationship, a work of art, or a past epoch through a bold, encompassing hypothesis" (p. 25).

For another view of extending literary criticism, see Benjamin Hrushovski, "Poetics,

Criticism, Science: Remarks on the Field and Responsibilities of the Study of Literature," PTL: Poetics and Theory of Literature, 1, No. 1 (1976), iii-xxxv.

## II. New Critics on Interpretation

New Criticism, using formalist techniques, has insisted on the need to approach a literary text as "object," the irrelevance of authorial intention, and the value of extracting meaning from literary works. In establishing literary study as a respected discipline, it has enjoyed widespread support, but more recently, New Critics have had to defend their assumptions.

Monroe Beardsley has played a key role in establishing New Critical approaches. In Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1958), he generally defines a critical interpretation as "a statement that purports to declare the 'meaning' of a work of art," and meaning is the "semantical relationship between the work itself and something outside the work" (p. 9). In refining his definition, he calls the "process of determining the theme, or themes, and the thesis, or theses (if any), of a literary work" the act of interpretation (p. 403). He describes theme in conventional terms as the general idea that gives coherence to any set of images or references in a text; it is "something named by an abstract noun or phrase: the futility of war, the mutability of joy; heroism, inhumanity" (p. 403). A thesis, according to Beardsley, is "something about, or in, the work that can be called true or false" (p. 404). Theses are the ideological ingredients in a work that pose social statements, observations about ethics or religion, or philosophical ideas.

In his introductory comments to "Modes of Interpretation," Journal of the History of Ideas,

32 (1971), 143-48, Beardsley reveals his recognition of interpretation's pervasive role: "The twentieth century (like the Patristic Age) is an age of interpretation" (p. 143). He maintains that the reason for this is the widespread "conviction that an adequate theory of interpretation would be the key to many of the mysteries that baffle us," although he considers it unlikely that a general theory of interpretation could apply to all fields (e.g. music, astrology, literature).

In The Possibility of Criticism (Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press, 1970), Beardsley argues at length against E.D. Hirsch's aim of finding authorial intention for "correct" interpretations (see Hirsch). He makes a distinction between "indeterminacy" and "indefiniteness" of meaning, the latter being an ambiguity that can be removed "by supplying further information" about the text itself (p. 30). The text itself determines meaning: "It has a will, or at least a way, of its own" (p. 37). Since the primary purpose of literary interpretation is to help readers find the "goodness" in the text, a critic must create a valid interpretation by carefully formulating "regional" interpretations from small parts of a text, then building these lesser constituents into a "macromeaning" (pp. 44, 58). In regional interpretation, he must pay attention to "suggestions" from syntactic structures and to connotations of key words (pp. 45-47). Beardsley points out, however, that a more systematic theory of the nature of meaning is needed, turning to the work of Alston and Austin. He then uses their proposals for identifying the "illocutionary acts" in a text as guidelines for testing the validity of sample interpretations.

Cleanth Brooks, in his essay "In Defense of 'Interpretation' and 'Literary History'," Mosaic, 8, No. 2 (1974), 1-11, quotes his colleague, René Wellek, that criticism, having abandoned its

central concern--which is the art of literature--now "looks constantly elsewhere, wants to become sociology, politics, philosophy, theology, and even mystical illumination" (p. 1). Thus Brooks sets out to demonstrate some "basic truths" about literature in order to approach it properly. First, literature is "incorrigibly concrete," not only a presentation of valid human experience, but also a process of experience that is inherent in the dramatization of its content. This is not to say that literature is isolated from other areas of human thought, but that if its "dramatic and symbolic qualities" are neglected, "we may fail to gain some of the real insights" that the work reveals. Thus, in the interpretation of poems, for example, with "reference to their metaphors and symbols, their choice of diction, and their tonal qualities, we have not been talking about decorative details--about non-essentials--but about the very structure of their meaning." The critic must be willing to approach a work in its own mode, realizing that literature "gives us its special knowledge of reality only through symbolic and metaphorical representation" (p. 10). The object of criticism is to understand the "special knowledge" that a particular piece of literature presents.

Equally concerned with defending new critical standards, René Wellek, in "The New Criticism: Pro and Contra," Critical Inquiry, 4, No. 4 (1978), 611-24, analyzes four accusations against New Criticism: (1) that it is "esoteric aestheticism," uninterested in human meaning; (2) it is unhistorical (3) that it attempts to make criticism scientific; and (4) that it is a "mere pedagogical device" for explication de texte. Instead, New Criticism insists that "the very nature of words points to the outside world" (p. 617), and the New Critics saw poetry as "the reassertion of particularity of the world against the abstraction of science"--hence

criticism could not be "neutral scientism" (p. 619). The aim of New Criticism is "understanding, [and] 'interpretation'" leading to "discrimination between good and bad" works (p. 620). Wellek says: "It is hard to see how a study of literature can get along without interpretation of individual works and how one can be 'against interpretation', as Susan Sontag entitled her book, or declare 'interpretation' to be 'the real enemy'" (see Sontag, Culler). "The object of literary study is conceived not as an arbitrary construct, but as a structure of norms which prescribes a right response" (p. 620), and interpretation aids in establishing those norms.

### III. Other Theories of Interpretation

As the doctrines of New Criticism fade from prominence, new theories--still supporting interpretation as a primary goal--have surfaced. The most dominant hypotheses have been hermeneutical, subjective, and "affective" ones, each emphasizing distinct departures from New Critical orthodoxy: hermeneutics underscores the element of human vision in the creation and reading of literature; subjective criticism posits an individual, psychologically-based theory of interpretation; and affective stylistics centers interpretation on the reader's response.

Warranting his procedure with a phenomenological stance, Geoffrey Hartman reveals himself as interpreter in "The Interpreter: A Self-Analysis," NLH, 4, No. 2 (1973), 213-27.\* He describes the role of an interpreter as precluding that of a critic. His development as a thinking person required the ability to understand and channel his perception, which "was enough and too much: for interpretation in some cases (p. 214). He had to resist the tendency to submit to the "passion of mimesis" of a work without attempting "representation" of that experience, a process

\* (Reprinted in The Fate of Reading (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1975), 3-19.



whereby the interpreter "'presents' himself together with the work of art." This is a crucial step, since Hartman posits that "There is in an artist, perhaps in everyone, a representation-compulsion inseparable from coming-of-age" (pp. 217-18). In this light, interpretation insists on objectivity of the interpreter, integrity of the text, and the "scrupulous distinctions of functions" (p. 219). Hartman then proceeds to consider different facets of interpretation. First, it can be like "a shadowy double of the work of art." This shadow can be understood "as cast by the individual work onto the interpretive consciousness, or as a 'form' that makes art-understanding possible--that allows us to connect art with other concerns through 'interpretation'" (p. 221). Interpretation can "extend" the "charm or memorability" of a work, as well as "interrupt a spell which has made us too enjoyably passive" (p. 223). Finally, Hartman says that critics, as interpreters, should "set interpretation against hermeneutics," since hermeneutics distinguishes between "primary source and secondary literature, or between a 'Great Original' and its imitations," seeking to reconstruct, or get back to, an origin in the form of sacred text, . . . or authentic story." Interpretation, unlike hermeneutics which views fiction as "lapsed scripture," would approach Biblical scripture as "a mode, among others, of fiction" (p. 225). Thus, interpretation can exist "unbelatedly" beside art, since the fading distinction between primary and secondary texts is "associated with Writing," and "to be conscious is already to be writing" (p. 226).

Robert Magliola examines the philosophical background for hermeneutics in Phenomenology and Literature: An Introduction (Indiana: Purdue Univ. Press, 1977). In Part 1 of his study, he provides a cogent history of phenomenology,

with synoptic analyses of the Geneva School, Anglo-American approaches, Heidegger's theories, and the structuralist controversy. Magliola points out that in Heidegger's hermeneutics interpretation is a necessary activity so that "the authentic meaning of Being, and also those basic structures of Being which Dasein [the 'human existent'] itself possesses, are made known to Dasein's understanding of Being" (p. 62). Because phenomena are not immediately manifest, they demand interpretation.

In part 2, Magliola comments on Ingarden's, Dufrenne's, and Heidegger's theory of meaning, adjusting Heidegger's description to apply to literary works. The first stage of the hermeneutical process, according to Heidegger, begins when the critic is one with the text, when "both belong on the same ontological plane" (p. 174). Then, the critic must extricate himself and interpret his experience in order to describe his understanding. Interpretative activity manifests three functions: the "As-question," the "As-which," and the "As-structure." The "As-question" presents the query that the interpreter asks of the text; the "As-which," provides an answer to the question; and the "As-structure" articulates the resultant understanding. (p. 175). Finally, Magliola opposes Hirsch's insistence on locating authorial intention (see Hirsch), using Heidegger's idea that As-questions derived from modern culture are as valid as ones concerning an author's intention. Magliola concludes that since the author's langue is lost, the significance of interpretation depends on cultural langue; thus, in interpreting a work, the critic draws from and must appeal to his present culture's langue.

Matei Calinescu, in "Hermeneutics or Poetics," The Journal of Religion, 59, No. 1 (1979), 1-17, weighs the validity of phenomenological versus structuralist views. He notes that writers such

as Borges and Bloom have seriously challenged historicism's linear view of time and literary history in their proposal for an "inverse influence," whereby a writer "'creates his own precursors'" by illuminating previously unperceived qualities in preceding texts (p. 2, Borges' quote). With the anteriority/posteriority view of time weakened, other traditional oppositions derived from it, such as the one between "primary" and "secondary" texts used by hermeneutical approaches in interpretation, become suspect: Susan Sontag argues "against" interpretation, and Geoffrey Hartman has suggested that "'we must set interpretation against hermeneutics'" (see Sontag, Hartman).

To the challenge presented in the structuralist proposal that poetics as a "science of literature," not interpretation, be the goal of literary criticism, Calinescu responds that Roland Barthes' method of producing a text's "second set of signifiers" renders meaning void, vacuous, and "sterile" (pp. 6-8). In opposition to the Jakobsonian goal of distinguishing "literariness" from "non-literariness," Calinescu holds that "The writing and reading of literature. . . have certainly not been a result of a mere recognition of difference--literature is distinct from other kinds of discourse--but of the attachment of a certain value to the fictional use of language" (p. 10). He agrees with Gadamer that, as readers of a text, we are ultimately concerned with "'what it says to us'" (p. 11). A second tenet of a structuralist poetics--that an indefinite number of "rich" readings, created without external criteria, are valid--is ambiguous, and equally valuable "extrinsic readings" are excluded (p. 12). Using phenomenological warrants, Calinescu turns to endorse interpretation--first, as "a way of understanding certain revelations" (p. 13), second, as a means for creating

a second text that illustrates the first text's richness, and third, as the way by which the critic breaks "the linearity of historical time" to regain meaning. In this context, a poetics is useful for understanding the complexities and functions of literary works, but hermeneutics, via interpretation, helps us to perceive ourselves, to "decipher. . . the essential book that is in us" (p. 17).

E.D. Hirsch, in the chapter "Three Dimensions of Hermeneutics" in The Aims of Interpretation (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1976), 74-92, distinguishes between two aspects involved in interpretation: the "descriptive" aspect, which concerns the nature of interpretation, and the "normative," which concerns the goals of interpretation that are determined by value preferences. The nature of interpretation is "to construe from a sign system (for short, 'text') something more than its physical presence" (p. 75) in relation to its meaning and its significance. Meaning is the "determinate representation of a text for an interpreter," while significance "embraces a principle of change" (pp. 79-80). Thus interpretation is needed to understand an author's original meaning and its relevance for us as readers. "Interpreters make the best of our historicity not by reconstructing an alien world from our texts, but by interpreting them within our own world and making them speak to us" (p. 81). Hirsch sets out a "fundamental ethical maxim for interpretation": "Unless there is a powerful overriding value in disregarding an author's intention (i.e. original meaning), we who interpret as a vocation should not disregard it" (p. 90). Interpretation, in this light, is the legitimate channel by which we can correctly perceive an author's communication.

In reviewing The Aims of Interpretation, C.B. Chabot, in World Literature Today, 51, No. 4

(1977), 683-84, notes that Hirsch draws upon the European hermeneutical tradition to argue against the concept of the "Intentional Fallacy" and to establish the relevance of authorial intention in determining the meaning of texts. At the same time, however, Hirsch replaces the "famed circle of understanding" with Piaget's schemata for the interpretive process: the reader corrects and refines "formative expectations" in reading a text. As in Validity in Interpretation, he discriminates between meaning, "'the whole verbal meaning of a text'," and significance, "'textual meaning as related to some content. . . beyond itself'" (see Hirsch). Hirsch argues against Heidegger, defending the "proposition of stable meaning" and the possibility of interpretive knowledge. The contribution of Aims, according to Chabot, is that it argues convincingly "against the very possibility of intrinsically literary values, one unique without recourse to political or psychological theories," and secondly, that it recognizes the necessity of making judgements about texts, pointing out the need to examine the grounds for critics' evaluations.

See Validity in Interpretation (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1967) for Hirsch's extended argument for 'determinacy in interpretation.

David Bleich suggests a "subjective" approach to criticism in "The Subjective Paradigm in Science, Psychology, and Criticism, NLH, 7, No. 2 (1976), 313-34, outlining an intellectual shift from a paradigm of objectivity that prevailed in the time of Descartes, to one of subjectivity that started with Einstein, Freud, and I.A. Richards. He argues that all perception takes place through the agency of a paradigmatic set of beliefs about the nature of reality. He then describes the "paradigm of objective truth" held by scientists such as Newton: the world, as an object separate from the observer, is a predictable, fixed system--

it indicates the existence of supreme truth and God (pp. 314, 316). Recent scientific theories, however--including Einstein's, Bohr's, and Heisenberg's--have shown that space, time, and matter are variables of man's perception; the observer's frame of reference is paramount. Writers such as Husserl, Piaget, and Freud have supported this view: perception is validated by interpersonal contact, and subjectivity confers meaning on experience by centering this "knowledge" in man's mental processes, not in "objective reality." In literary studies, I.A. Richards began to use a subjective paradigm with his argument that psychology was vital to understanding human interest in literature, but he retained an objective orientation by maintaining that there was a set standard for judging literary works. Northrop Frye recognizes "experiential knowledge" of literature, but still maintains that the aim of criticism should be objective knowledge (p. 331). Norman Holland also acknowledges a reader's subjective response to literature, but argues that in the act of reading, this response is opposed to and combined with the "objective reality" of a text. Bleich calls for a reevaluation of literary criticism's "objective" assumptions, since in the classroom, the tendency of teachers to favor objective literary interpretation suppresses students' creativity and personal responsibility for their own feelings.

See Bleich's Subjective Criticism (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1978), especially Chapter 3, "The Logic of Interpretation," for his development of interpretation as subjective response.

As a proponent for "affective" stylistics, Stanley Fish, in "Interpreting the Variorum," Critical Inquiry, 2, No. 3 (Spring 1976), 465-85, poses a solution for the various disagreements critics have had in interpreting Milton's poems: to consider the reader of the poems as the central

figure in locating a sound interpretation. He argues that ambiguities in certain lines "are not meant to be solved, but to be experienced," and that the process a reader goes through in making sense of a poem, line by line, is the focus of an interpretational study. Describing the reader's progressive interpretations becomes the critic's interpretation. In this way, Fish places emphasis on the reader as person, avoiding the Formalist position that meaning resides in the text. Instead, he posits the thesis that "the form of the reader's experience," "the formal units" (e.g. the end or beginning of lines), and the "structure of intention," how the reader determines the speaker's intent, come into perspective simultaneously in the process of reading. In answering the objection that such responses must be predicated on some standard "facts"--grammatical, literary, or otherwise--Fish argues that such facts are "the product of a system of differences that must be imposed before it can be recognized" (p. 480). Thus it is the act of reading, with all the expectations, preconceptions, and "interpretive strategies" of the reader as impetus, that produces a particular meaning of a text. Readers, then, who respond similarly to the same text, have similar interpretive strategies, and they potentially comprise an "interpretive community," a group who share interpretive strategies not only for reading, "but for writing texts, for constituting their properties and assigning their intentions" (p. 483). For a full scale account, see Fish's Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth-Century Literature (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1972).

#### IV. Overviews

With the decline of New Criticism's influence and the proliferation of new theories, the role of interpretation in literary studies has changed

and shifted in importance. It becomes, for example, more "personal" in phenomenological approaches, more "scientific"--if not merely peripheral--for structuralist criticism, a question of probabilities for Hirsch, etc. Two scholars, Ralph Cohen and David Fleming, attempt to put such changes in perspective.

In his essay "On a Shift in the Concept of Interpretation," The New Criticism and After, Ed. Thomas Daniel Young, John Crowe Ransom Memorial Lectures, 1975 (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 1976), pp. 61-69, Ralph Cohen begins with the formalist position--represented by Wellek, Warren, Wimsatt, and Brower--that interpretation should describe the internal parts and the external setting of a poem. He notes that this strategy attempted to establish the particularity and individuality of a work as object in order to "make the human values of literature more accessible to a wider audience" (p. 61). This approach, however, excluded works such as Augustine's Confessions since they lacked formal "literariness," and thus reduced the role literature could play for readers. Critics such as Geoffrey Hartman, Harold Bloom, and Stanley Fish have objected to the formalist method and "wish to redefine interpretation as the self-conscious critic's "relating" of the poet's understanding of experience and earlier poets; Bloom argues for criticism based on the study of the "influence" of other works on a writer; and Fish wishes to focus on the "reader's response to the expectations of words, lines, and sentences" (p. 66; see Fish). These alterations produce more valid approaches than do the formalist premises since (1) the previous analysis of meaning in the "objects" of a work did not "confirm how words mean"; (2) the more recent concentration on the reader's dynamic relation to a work establishes the reader as the "valued being"; and (3) now

the historical perspective is more relevant and vital to literary study (p. 69). Further interpretive approaches are posited by Fredric Jameson, who argues that interpretation is "the laying bare, a restoration of the original message" beneath the culturally "censored" language used by a particular writer (p. 70). George Poulet presents a phenomenological view that interpretation should be based on the premise that "the process of reading requires the critic to reconstruct the artist's categories of thought, of space and time" (p. 72). Hans Robert Jauss proposes a distinction between the "text", the author's words, an "interpretation", a particular, single construction of "statements giving coherence to attributes in the text," and the "literary work," which is the sum of interpretations (p. 73).

With these "shifts" in mind, Cohen maintains that "the social aims of criticism continue, that the need to understand the individual work persists" (p. 72). He briefly proposes an "interpretation in terms of functions of literary conventions: (p. 76), an approach that analyzes the adaptations and transformations of previous literary conventions in an individual text. This requires mutual attention to the work itself, the historical context, the author, and the responses of a reader to such changes.

David Fleming, in "Literary Interpretation Today: An Assessment and Reorientation," Southern Humanities Review, 6, No. 4 (1972), 368-80, contends that literary criticism must be based on a sound "philosophy of interpretation," and for this reason New Criticism, "historicism," and "socio-criticism" are inadequate approaches: New Criticism studies texts as "objects," and is unable to show literature's relevance to the "realities of life" (p. 369); "historicism" concerns itself with the data about works, but does not relate texts to the present; and "socio-criticism" falls

into "subservience to a political ideology" (p. 370).

A more satisfactory framework is available from the hermeneutics of thinkers such as Heidegger, Ricoeur, Gadamer, and Ebeling. Fleming outlines ten "axioms" of literary interpretation that emerge from their thought: (1) Interpretation is the task of the literary scholar; it first involves "understanding", the "laying bare [of] the insights, emotions, truths" in a work, and secondly "criticism", the dialogue between a work and the reader's current world--and criticism is essential because "it alone expresses the way in which a work can speak to our existence here and now" (p. 371). (2) A text must be considered in its sociocultural context to be adequately understood. (3) A work must be made meaningful to the present. (4) Literary study is a dialogue between the reader's expectations and questions and what can be learned from the work. (5) This dialogue is a "hermeneutical circle": "We change the work because of our situation and our self-understanding, and the work in turn changes us by broadening our horizons" (p. 373). (6) The "norm of literary study" is to "render explicit the underlying questions and presuppositions that make such a work possible" (p. 374). (7) The history of interpretation is an integral part of a work's present meaning. (8) The values incorporated in medieval biblical interpretation--the historical, allegorical, moral, and anagogical aspects of scriptural meaning--can prove useful in reforming a philosophy of interpretation. (9) Using the "hermeneutical circle" as the model of interpretation for the humanities can lead to more productive interdisciplinary studies. (10) Interdisciplinary work is essential to interpret the multifarious meanings of a given work.

These "axioms" says Fleming, "allows us, precisely as humanists, to go about our tasks with

the conviction that we have something to contribute to our world" (p. 378).

#### V. SCE Members on Interpretation

SCE members have offered their insights on interpretation: Gerald Graff analyzes the development of New Criticism's literary concepts; Michael Hancher proposes an alternative to Hirsch's "scientific" interpretation; and Wallace Martin considers the nature of the "hermeneutical circle."

Gerald Graff, in "What was New Criticism? Literary Interpretation and Scientific Objectivity," Salmagundi, 27 (1974), 72-93, points out that many of the protests against New Criticism's view of the "objective" nature of the literary text maintain a political stance, as Susan Sontag and Richard Poirier do, that such an orientation is a "natural extension of the technological imperialism of American society." Others declare that "detached" analysis of a work presupposes a subject-object dichotomy of scientific empiricism, dehumanizing the experience of reading, as the phenomenological viewpoint holds, exemplified by Richard Palmer. New Criticism, however, held an "impersonal" approach to literature to avoid the "ruthless technological will-to-power," and also condemned a scientific view that brutally utilized abstraction. New critics' ideas of impersonality and objectivity were conceived to refute "hedonistic impressionists," who ignored the seriousness of meaning, moralists or Marxists, who tended to reduce a work to a form of propaganda, and the positivists, who saw little more in literature than an emotive display. The idea of objectivity became ambiguous, however, since these critics had to maintain a position against the "heresy of paraphrase" as well as the assumption that literature is not referential. And as E.D. Hirsch indicates, New Criticism tends toward subjectivity, as does phenomenology, because of their presup-

positions about the "open-ended" nature of textual meaning. Graff also argues that New Criticism recognized the vital function of emotion in respect to reading, thus avoiding a "cold, value-free attitude." Attacks on the New Critical concepts usually presuppose mistaken ideas about the intellectual and literary history that constitutes the movement.

In his article "The Science of Interpretation and the Art of Interpretation," Modern Language Notes, 85 (1970), 791-802, Michael Hancher notes that the distinction between interpretation as art or science begins with Plato, who considered literary criticism to be undisciplined and "cognitively decadent." Hancher argues that since Plato's accusation, the first sustained efforts in English to establish criticism as a disciplined approach arose in reaction to the impressionistic criticism of the late nineteenth century (see Graff). I.A. Richards in particular lent support to New Criticism which attempted to propose a scientifically vigorous approach that could "consistently illuminate a text" (p. 792). But New Criticism failed in establishing an interpretive practice that was "cognitively convincing" since it celebrated ambiguity in texts, and inconsistencies marked its practical application. E.D. Hirsch, in Validity in Interpretation, attempts to avoid such inconsistencies with his proposition that "the end of literary interpretation is to propagate 'knowledge' of the meaning of a text," and this objective knowledge is the meaning that the author intended "in his full consciousness and unconsciousness" (see Hirsch). Hirsch presents the criterion of intentionality to give criticism a systematic approach in determining a "valid" interpretation of a work. But Hancher argues that an interpretation that is invalid by Hirsch's standards may be "valuable" for a "better" reading of a particular text; an "artistic" interpretation

disregarding authorial intention can present a "better poem" than a valid reading, and this interpretation is "better" according to "whatever one's particular criteria of value happen to be" (p. 707). Thus criticism should accommodate scientific interpretations that seek "valid" readings, and artistic interpretations that posit "valuable" readings since this is a "duality that already exists" (p. 802).

Wallace Martin, in "The Hermeneutic Circle and the Art of Interpretation," Comparative Literature, 24, No. 2 (1972), 97-117, contends that the opinion that literary criticism is inextricably bound up in the "hermeneutical circle", that "what the critic ultimately sees and what he would reveal as existing is in fact implicit in his assumptions," makes all interpretations valid and literary theory supererogatory. Martin argues that such assumptions about interpretive circularity, especially those put forth by Spitzer and Starobinski, can be refuted, and that interpretation is currently conceived with erroneous conceptions about literature and literary meaning. The proposal that the whole and parts of a text are mutually determinate is misleading since there are external interpretive "rules" that are "conventions in making meaning possible" (p. 101). Also, the concept of circularity that occurs when analysis attempts to "prove" the validity of an intuition about a work is incomplete, for as Staiger shows, there is interaction between a critic's "feelings" and the results of analyzing a text so that these assumptions are changed. As conceived by Heidegger, the circularity that does exist is more fundamental, affecting human existence and understanding; and understanding, as a part of interpretation, "is the consciousness that discloses being to itself" (see Magliola). The purpose should not be to escape the circle but to "come into it in the right way" (p. 103).

If, however, the attempt were made to make interpretation completely circular, the degree of formalization necessary to create an adequate theory would be unattainable. The "'rules of correspondence' assigning empirical content [of texts] to theoretical terms" would be impossible to construe. Barthes, however, proposes three rules that can provide validity in interpretation: "it must be complete. . . , it must be coherent, rigorously observing the proposed laws of interpretation; and it must transform the language of the work into a language of equivalent symbolic status" (p. 110). Inherent in these proposals are the following concepts: (1) a literary work is a model of rich structures, not specific meanings; and (2) criticism cannot be objective, but must be "anamorphic" in relation to a literary work, thus in "itself a form of literature" (p. 111). Barthes' concepts counter arguments for hermeneutical circularity in demonstrating that: (1) interpretation by necessity yields "a structure of work, not the structure: (p. 113); (2) interpretation, although it cannot be totally "objective," can be "coherent and complete" (p. 113); and (3) interpretation produces a model, not a deductive system.

Martin differs from Barthes in his view of criticism's focus: "in discussing it [literary meaning] we emphasize what we understand rather than how that understanding came about" (p. 117). He points out that "Barthes' attempt to create a purely objective 'science of literature' . . . has little to do with the meaning of literature" (p. 117).

See also Charles Altieri's article, "The Hermeneutics of Literary Indeterminacy: A Dissent from the New Orthodoxy," NLH, 10, No. 1 (Autumn, 1978), 71-99, for a cogent rebuttal of accepted theories of textual indeterminacy, and his proposal for criticism that describes verbal conventions

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and "actions" in a text.

Postscript: Of potential interest to this topic are Stanley Fish's article "How to Stop Worrying and Learn to Love Interpretation: A Reply to John Reichert," and John Reichert's "But That Was Another Ball Park: A Reply to Stanley Fish"--both to appear in the forthcoming Critical Inquiry issue (Vol. 6, No. 1; Autumn, 1979).