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Reviewed Work: Directions for Criticism: Structuralism and Its Alternatives by L. S. Dembo, Murray Krieger

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theory of narration," or the view that all narrative must be understood as the discourse of a (fictional) narrator. Like van Dijk, Kuroda makes a strong case for the distinctive character of literary texts, in this case prose fictions, though he is rejecting the treatment of them in terms of a "communicational theory of linguistic performance." On this theory, the sentences of a narrative are held to be prefaced, in their deep structure, by a performative expression that is deleted from the surface structure: "I assert, tell, etc. to you that . . ." (p. 108). Kuroda marshals linguistic counter-evidence from the work of Käthe Hamburger and Ann Banfield, and from his own studies of certain Japanese verb forms (pp. 110ff). For example, representations, in free indirect style, of characters' thoughts do not fit the analysis, except by forcing the theorist to supply the dubious concept of an "omniscient narrator" (pp. 114, 133). Instead, Kuroda identifies a "meaning-realizing act" at the center of linguistic performance: the "objective function" of a sentence (underlying its communicative function, when it has one) is to evoke an intentional object in the reader's mind (pp. 130ff); a propositional content is presented, without a supposed mental act of judging that has to be attributed to a narrator. The whole approach strikes me as promising, though I don't yet see how it can explain the continuity within a single text between those sentences that clearly are and those that are not (on Kuroda's view) narrated.

In his stimulating essay on "What Kind of Speech Act a Poem Is," Samuel R. Levin proposes that the topmost sentence in the deep structure of every poem (nearly always deleted from the surface structure) is "I imagine myself in and invite you to conceive a world in which . . ." (p. 150). Levin makes some attractive arguments for the view that the worlds of lyric poems are fictional, imaginary, even when real-world entities are imported into them; and his thesis would gain further strength from the work on make-believe that Kendall Walton has been doing. My chief uneasiness is about his treatment of metaphorical sentences, which he somehow takes to be literally true of poetic worlds (p. 159); it's an interesting idea that in poetic contexts "metaphors arrange phenomena into appearances that they never assume in our world" (p. 155). But it seems to me clearly false to say that "No one speaks daggers in our world, the fog does not creep on little cat feet in our world"; this amounts to saying that there are no metaphors, and all sentences are literal.

Siegfried J. Schmidt's "Towards a Pragmatic Interpretation of 'Fictionality'" again argues the special nature of literary artworks, but in the context of an institutional view of art in general. Fictionality is not, he holds, a set of semantic or syntactic features of texts; it is a "special system of pragmatic rules which prescribe how readers have to treat the possible relations" of the world of a work to the world of common experience. Two rules, or pragmatic conventions, are formulated—rather roughly—and amount to saying that a "literary" text is to be considered as building an autonomous world, which is to be compared with the worlds of other texts and judged how interesting, exciting, new, etc. (pp. 171-72, 174-75). "Thus literary communication proves to be an institution like a museum: it is a special context with strict rules of evaluation. Anything that enters this special context of 'art' (in the widest sense) loses all attributes and functions it normally possesses"—the way "stones lose their existence as stones" in sculpture, or a snowshovel is transformed in a Duchamp "ready-made" (p. 176).

Thus Schmidt, however briefly, connects his institutional view of fiction with larger aesthetic concerns. His attempt to articulate the nature of the pragmatic conventions that define the practice of fictional "communication" is very preliminary, and his rather casual suggestions of evaluative criteria to be derived from the nature of the fiction-institution are surely open to many serious questions. Yet, like others in this significant volume, he has contributed usefully to the main enterprise here: the development of a reasonably rigorous pragmatics of literature.

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DEMBO, L. S., AND MURRAY KRIEGER, eds. *Directions for Criticism: Structuralism and Its Alternatives*. The University of Wisconsin Press, 1977, xiii + 168 pp., \$4.95.

There is, I suppose, an iconic significance to the fact that these comments review a book of literary theory which is introduced by a description of the five articles that follow and that these five articles in their turn review six anthologies containing their own introductions which survey the subsequent essays which as a whole exemplify contemporary literary criticism and theory. Such reflexivity permeates the current critical scene. In fact, Murray Krieger's

excellent introduction to *Directions for Criticism* underlines this recent tendency to view "criticism as a reflective act that becomes its own object as well as . . . being a subject with another work as its object." Krieger notes how all of the essays that follow "are concerned with the loss of privilege suffered by the literary work in this reflexive dimension accorded criticism" (p. 31). Hazard Adams's complaint seems typical: "Criticism, increasingly aware of its situation, tends in our own time to find its own predicament as interesting as—sometimes more interesting than—poetry itself" (p. 69). Indeed, all the contributors to *Directions for Criticism* (with the notable exception of Edward Said) reject any attempt to raise criticism out of its subordinate relationship to literature.

The essays here take as their common starting point six anthologies of contemporary criticism and theory. The result is a unanimous dissatisfaction with dominant critical movements, especially structuralism. In "The Absurdist Moment in Contemporary Literary Theory," Hayden White presents a broad history of recent criticism but does not propose specific remedies for the critical impasse he sees in the Absurdist criticism of Barthes, Foucault, and Derrida. On the other hand, Ralph Freedman takes up a very specific issue in contemporary critical theory in his article, "Intentionality and the Literary Object," but makes only passing comments on the state of criticism in general. I will therefore limit my comments to the essays by Said, Adams, and René Girard which critique the dominant trends in current literary theory and also formulate specific alternatives to those trends.

In "Roads Taken and Not Taken in Contemporary Criticism," Edward Said describes the dominant critical attitude as "functionalist": most contemporary critics talk "about what a text does, how it works, how it has been put together in order to do certain things, how the text is a wholly integrated and equilibrated system, and so forth." While he admits that this functionalism "has made it possible for critics to talk seriously and technically and precisely about the text" (p. 38), Said emphasizes the "unfortunate limitations" of functionalist criticism (phenomenology, structuralism, post-structuralism, and other approaches). He complains that in the functionalist attitude "the text becomes idealized, essentialized, instead of remaining as the very special kind of cultural object which it really is, with a causation, persistence, durability, and social presence quite its own" (p. 43). Criticism itself also becomes abstracted from its worldly circumstances. Said

argues for the road not taken by the dominant modes of criticism and theory, for an examination of "the text's situation in the world" (p. 46) and a view of criticism "as an intellectual phenomenon in a historical, social setting" (pp. 44-45).

Said's essay is extremely persuasive. It seems to me, however, that it is disguised in a curious way. That is, the rhetoric of his argument covers over some of the interpretive assumptions that make that argument problematic but in the end even more persuasive. Take for example the passage quoted above referring to the text as the cultural object "which it really is." Compare the following claim: "criticism creates its subject matter—there are no problems lying about to be dealt with" (p. 49). Such a comparison underlines the problematic nature of Said's argument: current criticism unfortunately neglects the text as cultural object; but the "text as cultural object" is a creation of Said's interpretive assumptions in the same way that the "text as function" is a result of other critics' assumptions. Why choose one view rather than another? The answer to such a question moves us from hermeneutics to axiology, from the controversy over interpretive assumptions to the hierarchy of values in which that controversy is embedded. And here we can bring back Said's argument undisguised. Only an approach such as his avoids the "ideological and evaluational silence" of contemporary criticism (p. 54). Only such a view of criticism in the world can attempt to answer the question why critics should choose one set of interpretive assumptions over another. Thus, the force of Said's argument comes both from a persuasive appeal to take a road neglected by current criticism and from an approach that can resolve problems disguised in that appeal.

The interpretive problematic disguised in Said's article becomes an explicit issue in Hazard Adams's essay, "Contemporary Ideas of Literature: Terrible Beauty or Rough Beast?" Arguing that language in general is creative rather than imitative, "formative of thought" rather than "representative of it," Adams claims that there is a continuum of language, "an unmeasurable one running from a poetic center, with all the priority that implies, outward through the zone of ordinary language, if it exists, . . . to mathematical symbolism, which marks the outer circumference of symbolic creativity" (p. 64). For Adams, "this whole continuum is radically creative" (p. 68); that is, language creates its meaning, and all concepts are created "by, in, and as language" rather

than being copied or represented (p. 61). However, only at the center of the continuum, in poetry, is this creativity self-consciously realized; only there does language declare "its meaning to be itself" (p. 73). Out from the poetic center, language gives a separate existence to concepts and "fictionalizes an apartness for them." Adams calls this process "the creation of 'antimyth'—the fictive projection to an 'outside' of something language really has inside itself, followed by the fiction that the outside preceded its containing substance" (p. 61).

Adams places poetry at the center of his language continuum while claiming that criticism "projects itself farther out on the radius than any poem it treats" (p. 69). At this point in Adams's argument a contradiction arises. Though he believes in the creativity of all language functions, Adams encourages the critic to "look at literature from its own point of view" (p. 58). Though he admits that criticism is, "like all symbolic forms, a *making* of its own," he reminds critics not to forget that literature has a point of view that should be respected (pp. 66, 70). The assumption is that literature's "point of view" exists *prior* to critical discourse about it. Adams seems to believe that poetry can (at least partially) speak itself in criticism, that it can express its own point of view, that the poetic function of language can manifest itself purely without interpretation. Literature then becomes the one object of language that can be the source of a representation and not just a fiction created by discourse. My point here is that Adams's belief in the priority and independence of literature contradicts his assumption about all language (including critical discourse) being creative and not imitative. According to Adams's own assumptions, literature cannot be imitated (in the sense of being described) because it cannot be prior to the language describing it. Literature's point of view can never be adopted neutrally by criticism; the critical act can never be even partially innocent of language's radical creativity.

In criticizing structuralists and phenomenologists for not looking at literature from its own point of view, Adams ignores the fact that literature's point of view is a consequence of his own powerfully persuasive interpretation of language. Adams does not seem to realize that like all other critics and theorists he has filled in the category of literature with his own interpretive assumptions. Though Adams convincingly argues that "the real is something we *proceed to make* rather than *refer back or out-*

ward toward" (p. 67), he does not apply this insight to criticism's relation to literature. That is, he does not acknowledge what his theory of language suggests: that literature (as a part of "the real") is not *inherently* anything, that it is an empty category filled in by interpretive conventions. The interpretive problematic that we saw disguised in Said's argument emerges once again in Adams's essay, less disguised but more troublesome for the essay as a whole.

Like Said and Adams, René Girard presents a critique of the theoretical assumptions of structuralism in his essay, "Differentiation and Undifferentiation in Lévi-Strauss and Current Critical Theory." However, what is most interesting about his critique is the counter-proposal he makes and his interpretive use of that counter-proposal. Starting from an examination of myth and ritual, Girard argues that the "spontaneous scapegoat victim" is the original symbol and that therefore the "origin and true nature of symbolicity" is collective victimage (pp. 134-35). A result of some presymbolic crisis of difference, this collective victimage is an arbitrary, communal act, but the "reconciled community" forgets the arbitrariness of its deed. Instead, the victim in retrospect acquires "all the features which are ascribed to the ambiguous mediators of mythology. In the eyes of the community, that victim will appear responsible both for the violence that raged when it was alive and for the peace that is restored by its death" (p. 122). This anthropological hypothesis thus provides a built-in way of answering objections to it: lack of evidence supporting the hypothesis does not contradict it, because the hypothesis itself predicts that such evidence will be lacking, since the arbitrary nature of collective victimage is always forgotten (p. 124).

But it is not this failsafe device in the proposal that I find most intriguing. Rather, it is the way Girard uses the hypothesis as a multi-purpose *interpretive strategy*: to answer the anthropological question about the origin of ritual, primitive religion, and symbolicity (pp. 123-24); to interpret a text of Lévi-Strauss (pp. 126-28); to account for change in academic disciplines, including literary criticism (p. 131); and to replace (what Girard sees as) the current debilitating view of language with a new perspective (pp. 133-36). In other words, Girard's essay becomes a more general example of the interpretive problematic disguised in Said's essay and foregrounded in Adams's. Not only do the interpretive assumptions of criticism fill the category of literature; but in all acts of

description, explication, and explanation, interpretive strategies constitute the object under discussion. The power of Girard's interpretive hypothesis illustrates the interpretive problematic in its most general form: facts do not determine interpretations, interpretations determine facts. In Girard's essay, the hypothesis of collective victimage determines the facts of the anthropological origin of ritual, the critical blind spot of Lévi-Strauss, the source of critical revolutions in the expulsion of previous masters, and, finally, the true nature of language and literature.

My consideration of the essays in *Directions for Criticism* has carried me back to where I began: what this collection demonstrates is that a certain kind of critical reflexivity is unavoidable. Critics are *always* talking about their own interpretations of literature. This is not to defend the obliteration of literature by critical narcissism. It is simply to recognize that the act of critical interpretation always constitutes what we know of literature as a community. In light of this assumption (another interpretation asking for your assent), *Directions for Criticism* serves as a useful survey of recent critical theory and as a series of counter-proposals to current interpretive conventions. For the issues it raises, for the alternatives it presents, for its demonstration of the interpretive problematic, *Directions for Criticism* is a welcome addition to contemporary literary theory.

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SAID, EDWARD. *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, N.Y.: Basic Books, 1975, 432 pp., \$15.95.

Beginnings has been already the subject of much critical discussion, including a special issue of *Diacritics* (Fall, 1976) with reviews by J. Hillis Miller, Hayden White, Joseph Riddel, and Eugenio Donato, and a long interview with Said. In part, this is because one important conceptual argument of the book has become increasingly familiar: a recognition of the idea of "origin" as only a myth of explanation, a false claim to reduce a bewildering multiplicity of relationships to a single source. Alternatively, Said will discuss "beginnings" as "beginning intentions" of meaning, where "the continuities and methods developing from it are generally orders of dispersion, of adjacency, and of complementarity" (p. 373), rather than a linear

progression or a dynastic hierarchy of value. "Dispersion," "adjacency," and "complementarity," like Foucault's "archeology" and Derrida's "deconstruction," emphasize meaning as diacritical rather than a set of stable norms arising from a single and determinate source. Yet it is useful to remember that a critique of "origin" has a certain history, for Said's meditation on beginnings differs in important ways from other Anglo-American criticism which relies on the work of these French thinkers.

In their own way, the New Critics were suspicious of the idea of origin, at least of its explanatory power for literary studies. To the extent a work is autonomous, it is "self-begun" rather than born from an author's biography, a cultural matrix of society, or an historical context. Marxist critics in particular were quick to object to this kind of analysis as a fetishism of the aesthetic object, and the reply, from a critic like Blackmur, was that he had no intention of denying the relevance of any context that could be brought to bear on literature. What he refused was the ultimate explanatory power of a given context as, precisely, an origin, a source which could comprehend the literary work as its result. Thus politically, in Anglo-American criticism at least, the critique of origin begins in a way which is aligned *against* "left" criticism, specifically the historical and class analysis of literature associated with Marxist thought. This political alignment helps to explain why the terms of a contemporary critique seem like a recent invention. For as Said rightly points out, "deconstructive" criticism poses as a politically "left" alternative to traditional scholarship, the remnants of New Critical thought, and to other formalisms. Whatever continuity may exist between Blackmur's refusal to explain the operation of literary works on the basis of a privileged context, a privileged origin, and more recent work influenced by the French is quickly dispelled by this overwhelming difference in political aim as much as by the emphasis on a particular conception of language in the latter.

Yet the curious quality of "deconstruction" is that, similar to much New Critical thinking, the distrust of "origin" works to detach critical analysis from those very social and historical factors which had been urged against the New Criticism and which have always been the driving force of "left" political thought. Somehow, even ruling-class bias or cultural hegemony is too trivial a target, at least by comparison with the metaphysical desire for "presence" which marks all of Western history. Thus the result