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Author(s): V. Tejera

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Peirce's Semeiotic, and the Aesthetics of Literature

(i) *The Axiological Matrix of Logic as Semeiotic*

For Peirce the terms "practical science" and "art" are synonymous, as in notes 2.198 and 2.199, where like Aristotle he applies them to ethics and aesthetics (which latter Peirce spells "esthetics"). "The fundamental problem of ethics" for Peirce is not the essentialist question, "What is right?" It is rather, the functionalist question,

What am I prepared deliberately to accept as the statement of what I want to do, what am I to aim at, what am I after? To what is the force of my will to be directed? . . . It is Ethics which defines th[e] end [of life]. It is, therefore, impossible to be thoroughly and rationally logical except upon an ethical basis. (2.198)

The categories of right and wrong, Peirce is saying in this paragraph, *cannot* be established *prior* to a teleological reflection upon the life of practice. So in saying that "logic is a study of the means of attaining the end of thought," Peirce was implying that students of logic cannot exempt themselves from becoming clear about the ends of life *and* thought if they are to be secure and clear about the discipline of logic itself. Moreover, since "thinking is . . . an active operation" (1.573),

the control of thinking with a view to its conformity to a standard. . . is a special case of the control of action to make it conform to a standard. . . the theory of the former must be a special determination of the theory of the latter.

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The control of action, *practics* or *antethics*, is the "mid-normative" science between the other two normative sciences of aesthetics and logic: it is "the theory of the conformity of action to an ideal." But ethics is more than practics "because ethics involves the theory of the ideal itself, the nature of the *summum bonum*." Peirce then notes that so far as "ethics" has [only] studied the conformity of conduct to an ideal, it has always been limited to a particular ideal

which. . . is in fact nothing but a sort of composite photograph of the conscience of the members of the community. . . it is nothing but a traditional standard accepted. . . wisely without radical criticism, but with a silly pretense of critical examination. (1.573)

As *antethics*, "the science of morality, virtuous conduct, right-living," then, cannot claim to be a *heuristic*, or discovering, science. Distinguishing between a *motive*—that by which any action is preceded—and an *ideal* of conduct, Peirce then says,

If conduct is to be thoroughly deliberate, the ideal must be a habit of feeling which has grown up under the influence of a course of self-criticism and hetero-criticisms; and the theory of the deliberate formation of such habits of feeling is what ought to be meant by esthetics. (1.574)¹

Now Peirce had said at 5.130 that, while approval itself may not be a voluntary act, "the act of [an] inference, which we approve," is "voluntary." I.e., "if we did not approve, we should not infer." So, since "the approval of a voluntary act is a moral approval," and "*Ethics is the study of what ends of action we are deliberately prepared to adopt*," it follows that logic (here *critic*) is a part of ethics. That the logical reasoner "exercises great self-control in his intellectual operations," shows that "the logically good is simply a particular species of the morally good" (5.130).

But in reminding his reader that ethics "is the normative science *par excellence*, because an *end*. . . is germane to a voluntary act in primary way in which it is germane to nothing else," Peirce allows himself "some lingering doubt" about "there being any true normative science of the beautiful."—We guess that this is because deliberation is not the *initiating* phase of the perception of the beautiful.—He then retracts the doubt by saying that, since an "end of action *deliberately* adopted. . . must be a state of things that reasonably recommends itself in itself," then it must also be "an *admirable ideal*, having the only kind of goodness that such an ideal *can* have; namely, esthetic goodness." He concludes, "from this point of view the morally good appears as a particular species of the esthetically good." Finally, while all the signs or representamens must possess some degree of esthetic goodness or expressiveness (5.140), only propositions (seconds) and arguments (thirds) may possess moral goodness or veracity: an "inference must possess some degree of veracity" (5.141).

Note 5.132 tentatively expands on (really, limits) Peirce's notion of "the esthetically good" as follows:

In the light of the doctrine of categories. . . an object, to be esthetically good, must have a multitude of parts so related to one another as to impart a positive. . . immediate quality to their totality; and whatever does this is, in so far, esthetically good, no matter what the particular quality of the total may be.²

And if this is correct, it follows that:

there is no such thing as positive esthetic badness; and since by goodness we chiefly. . . mean merely the absence of badness, or faultlessness, there will be no such thing as esthetic goodness. All there will be will be various esthetic qualities. . . . I am seriously inclined to doubt there being any distinction of pure esthetic betterness and worseness. My notion would be that there are innumerable varieties of esthetic quality, but no purely esthetic grade of excellence.

For this not to lead to the paradox that no work-of-art can be greater than another, as art, we have to understand Peirce to be speaking of the aesthetic or purely *responsive* dimension of stimuli or works, not of their *artistic* virtuosity or compositional integrity. Qualities are various, but all present themselves with the immediacy and felt unity that is precisely what makes them qualitative. A first presents itself as a first whether it is a sheer possibility such as a nearly contextless color, or the first of a third, such as the sheen on a fashionable code-word.³

We now have all the background we need to accept and understand Peirce's statement at 1.191 that "ethics. . . must appeal to esthetics for aid in determining the *summum bonum*. . . ." and that "logic. . . must appeal to ethics for its principles."

Normative science has three widely separated divisions: i. Esthetics; ii. Ethics; iii. Logic. Esthetics is the science. . . of that which is objectively admirable without any ulterior reason. . . it ought to repose on phenomenology. Ethics, or the science of right and wrong must appeal to Esthetics. . . in determining the *summum bonum*. It is the theory of self-controlled or deliberate conduct. Logic is the theory of self-controlled, or deliberate, thought; and, as such, must appeal to Ethics for its principles. It also depends upon phenomenology and. . . mathematics. *All thought being performed by means of signs, logic may be regarded as the science of the general laws of signs.*

But now, just as importantly, Peirce is also defining logic, in all three of its branches, as *semeiotic*, his term for the general theory of signs. These branches are

- 1, speculative grammar. . . the general theory of the nature and meaning of signs, whether they be icons, indices, or symbols;
- 2, Critic, which classifies arguments and determines the validity and degree of force of each kind;
- 3, Methodeutic [or speculative rhetoric] which studies

the methods that ought to be pursued in the investigation. . . exposition, and. . . application of truth. Each division depends on that which precedes it. (1.191)

What we call "logic" today is, then, Peirce's "Critic" as just defined, and, as part of semeiotic, it depends on "speculative grammar", the study of the nature and meaning of signs. Finally, the uses and applications of critic, what we call logic, will be studied and regulated by speculative rhetoric or methodeutic.

(ii) *The Relations between Aesthetics and Semeiotic*

But since methodeutic "is the doctrine of the general conditions of the reference of Symbols and other Signs to the Interpretants which they aim to determine" (2.93), we must next clarify and make more explicit the relations between aesthetics and semeiotics, whether these be relations of dependence, overlap, co-application, or co-operation. That such clarification is necessary and that it needs to be quite detailed will be gathered from the fact that Critic, or logic, may not be applied to the literary and other arts because logical analysis of the media of these arts will necessarily be *reductive* or *denaturing* of the verbal, acoustic, plastic, or kinetic texture of their expressive media. Logic in the sense of Critic will only apply legitimately to assertions or arguments *about* works of art, but not to the works themselves. This means that if semeiotics is to be of help to aesthetics, it will be so as either speculative grammar or as speculative rhetoric or methodeutic. (Peirce also calls the latter "transuasional logic" here at 2.93). Speculative grammar analyzes the pivotal elements or phases of sign-functioning; speculative rhetoric or methodeutic, as just stated, studies the conditions under which all the kinds of sign effectuate their reference to the *interpretants* which they determine.

What is important to realize here is the Peircean semeiotic opens a door, for literary criticism and theory, by passing through which text-interpretation is enabled to distinguish *internal* literary *constraints* upon the meaning of a work from econo-

mistic, psychoanalytic and other *external* collateral *interests* not germane to the construction or poetic effect of the complex sign which is the literary work. This door is just the enabling conception of the interpretant—for lack of which binarist semiologies must insert a Cartesian "subject" into their account of semeiosis, a subject no more or less amenable to constraint than *any* individual ever is about *anything*, and in just as arbitrary a relation to the semeiosis as the neopositivists' "interpreter." In a free society people—interpreters—may respond in any way they like to a work of literary art, but if what they say about it is to be about the work and not something else, then they must speak according to the interpretants determined by the design of the work. These interpretants arise in the interaction or transaction between the reader's literary competence and the composed work. When different readers assent to a proposed interpretation it is because they share interpretants with its propounder; their responses or interpretations will be differential and not verbalized in quite the same way.

Let us review Peirce's words about the rôle of the interpretant in sign-functioning. At 2.228 he says,

A *sign*, or *representamen*, is something which stands *to* somebody *for* something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, it creates in . . . that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates *I* call the *interpretant* of the first sign. The sign stands for something, its *object*. It stands *for* that object, not in all respects, but in reference to . . . the *ground* of the representamen.

The interpretant not only mediates between the sign and its object, it also mediates or determines the perception of the sign as the sign of a given object by different people. At 1.555 Peirce had understood "quality" to be "reference to a ground;" "'relation' reference to a correlate," and "'representation' reference to an interpretant." And at 1.552 he says,

we can know a quality only by means of its contrast with or similarity to another. By contrast and agreement a thing is referred to a correlate. . . . The occasion of the introduction of the conception of reference to a ground is the reference to a correlate. . .[as] the next conception in order.

The ground, then, is the qualitative respect with reference to which a sign is a sign of its object; it is what the maker interpretively abstracts from, in the constructing of his sign.

"By. . . accumulation of instances," Peirce continues at 5.553,

it would be found that every comparison requires, besides the related thing, the ground, and the correlate, also, a *mediating representation* which represents the relate to be a representation of the same correlate which this mediating representation itself represents. Such a mediating representation may be termed an *interpretant*.

Peirce notes that while "reference to an interpretant cannot be prescindend from reference to a correlate. . .the latter can be prescindend from the former." In another way of looking at the sign Peirce says at 1.541,

A Representamen is a subject of a triadic relation TO a second, called its Object, FOR a third, called its Interpretant, this triadic relation being such that the Representamen determines its interpretant to stand in the same triadic relation to the same object for some interpretant.

It is clear that Peircean semeiotic deals with the behavior of signs among themselves—the relation of signs to each other, not with the relation of signs to individual "interpreters." This is reinforced by the perception that "when we think, then, we ourselves, as we are at that moment, appear as a sign" (5.283).⁴

—For semiologists or *sémanalystes* it may be helpful to suggest, here, that Kristeva's "subject in process/on trial (*en procès*) can be

seen to be on the way to Peirce's interpretant if it is taken to be *totally* in process or non-substantial, and as long as "its" interrogative potential does not cancel its power of determining the object of the sign. Insofar as Kristeva has *posited* her "subject" as mediating between the "system of language" (*language*) which "it" (theoretically) presupposes in the practice of speech (*parole*), Kristeva's "subject" is a linguistic (and therefore semeiotic rather than anthropological) positum. This, however, goes beyond Kristeva's understanding that her "subject" is also "translinguistic" (RPL 23), if by translinguistic she means it is an extra-semeiotic or *non-significate* object.

(iii) *Phaneroscopy and Semeiotics*

Now Peirce's speculative grammar, with which we are seeking to enrich our conception of aesthetics, draws on his "phaneroscopy" or "phenomenology" for some of its principles. Phaneroscopy, the discipline of correctly categorizing whatever can be present to waking consciousness, greatly clarifies and deepens our understanding of the traidic nature of the sign process. Phaneroscopy or "phenomenology," says Peirce at 2.197,

can hardly be said to involve reasoning; for reasoning reaches a conclusion, and asserts it to be true. . .while in Phenomenology there is no assertion except that there are certain seemings; and even these are not, and cannot be asserted, because they cannot be described. Phenomenology can only tell the reader which way to look and to see what he shall see.

The focus must be upon the phaneron's pervasive or generic traits. These are the traits that are "logically indecomposable, or indecomposable to direct inspection" (1.288), because attempts to analyze them into simpler constituents fail. Phaneroscopy makes the required distinctions in its subject-matter on the basis of the "structure of [the element's] possible compounds" (1.289). Finally, Peirce finds it necessary to demonstrate—and does so rig-

ously—that in the case of the observables of phaneroscopic query "no element can have a higher valency than three" (1.292). He says,

In the present application a medad must mean an indecomposable idea. . . severed logically from every other; a monad will mean an element which, except that it is thought as applying to some subject, has no other characters than those which are complete in it without reference to anything else; a dyad will be an elementary idea of something that would possess such characters as it does. . . relatively to something else but regardless of any third object of any category; a triad would be an elementary idea of something which should be such as it were relatively to two others in different ways, but regardless of any fourth; and so on. . . . It can further be said. . . as a necessary deduction from the fact that there are signs, that there must be an elementary triad. For were every element of the phaneron a monad, or a dyad, without the relative of teridentity (which is, of course, a triad), it is evident that no triad could ever be built up. Now the relation of every sign to its object is plainly a triad. A triad might be built up of pentads or . . . higher perissad elements in many ways. (But it can be proved. . . that no element can have a higher valency than three. (1.292)⁵

Each of the categories, says Peirce, have "to justify themselves by an inductive examination which will result in assigning to it only a limited or approximate validity" (1.301). Intangible as they are, "these categories [or] conceptions. . . are rather tones or tints upon [the] conceptions" with which they are associated and from which they are distinguished (1.353).

Firstness is the mode of being of that which is such as it is, positively and without reference to anything else. *Secondness* is the mode of being of that which is such as it is, with respect to a second but regardless of any third.

Thirdness is the mode of being of that which is such as it is, in bringing a second and third into relation to each other. (8.328)

Firstness, secondness, and thirdness are distinguishable factors in human responsiveness. But as dianoetic, as "*thought*," firsts, seconds, and thirds "are all three of the nature of thirds" (1.537).

The *first* is thought in its capacity as mere possibility; that is, mere mind capable of thinking, or a mere vague idea. The *second* is thought playing the role of a Secondness, or *event*. That is, it is of the general nature of *experience* or information. The *third* is thought in its role as governing secondness. It brings the information into the mind, or determines the idea and gives it body. It is informing thought, or cognition. But take away the psychological or accidental human element, and in this genuine Thirdness we see *the operation of a sign*. (1.537, my emphases)

When we think of the sign as a sort of first, or the object as a sort of second, and the interpretant as a sort of third, we must not forget that they are respectively firsts, seconds, and thirds of thirds; so that sign, object and interpretant are not correlates in different modes of being. The object, as a second third, is "experience" or "information" in the broad cybernetic sense; and it is because it is an existential determinant of the semeiosis that the object is a sort of second. The thirdness of interpretants corresponds to the fact that interpretation always requires interpretants which are "generals."⁶ Furthermore, one meaning of firstness is the state of being a potentiality for determination. So a sign is vaguer than its interpretant, because the latter is a development of the significance of the sign.

We can then say, with Greenlee (PCS 43f.), about the sign as a "first third,"

The vagueness of a sign is a property of its relation to its interpretants and consists in the range. . .of possible interpretants appropriate to the sign. The actual determination of an interpretant means preemption of one of these possibilities and its embodiment in another sign, which is its interpretant. Thus the critic construing a poem or the commentator explicating a text is settling on an interpretant, or is. . .making explicit alternatives of interpretation, either case being a determining of significance.

Complexity and some degree of indistinctness, then, belong to signs by nature. Buchler makes this very point, in pointing out that many other things than "directly manipulatable. . .qualitative configurations" are signs (TGT 35).

The purview of a sign may be restricted and precisely defined, especially where the sign is introduced by convention or resolution. . . . But it may also be indefinite and *undelimited*: the sign may be of a *protracted* character.

In other words, even those cases of communication where the sign is of a relatively *indeterminate* or *protracted* nature, it is still a sign because it is determining an interpretant. In parallel with this, as Greenlee also recognized (PCS 46), there will be many cases in which no limit can be set upon what may serve as an interpretant of some protracted signs. The relevance of all of this to aesthetics and criticism comes from the fact that many icons, indices, and symbols are of an undelimited nature and that the experience of literary and musical works can be monumentally or lingeringly protracted.

Put as sharply as possible, our project is to see in what ways the semeiotic analysis of a work, taken *as a representamen*, either helps with the literary- or art-critical analysis of it *as art* or else provides a theoretical framework and control for the aesthetics implied or presupposed by the criticism. Of course, semeiotics such as Barthes' "semiology," which see themselves as a branch or

application of linguistics to literature, will be reductionist in discussing literature in terms of linguistics instead of poetics—even when the semiologist, by exception, succeeds in identifying with the premisses of the work he is analyzing. This will be because the semiologist's binarist understanding of meaning too easily allows of articulating the work on the basis of structures not endogenous to the work but imposed upon it.⁷

Where the triadic understanding of semeiosis easily spots the arbitrariness of externalist interpretations, because these are seen to derive from middle terms that are not *interpretants* of the work, the binarist view of meaning has to bring in structures of mediation which—if they are to make the articulation interesting—must appeal to the interests of the reader and critic. And it will be only by accident that these will be identical with the interest of the work itself. But criticism based on interpretants internal to the semeiotic processes of the work will necessarily be an articulation of the interest of the work. There is, in addition, the drawback that the binarist approach to semeiosis automatically decontextualizes the meaningfulness or expressiveness of works to which a certain amount of collateral information is constitutively relevant. All meanings are partly determined by context; and this determinant enters the semeiosis either via the *interpretant* when we are experiencing or reconstructing the *object* of the sign, or via the *ground* from which the sign-maker abstracts his sign when constructing it. Nor are all works so great or so universal as to be self-validating at all times in all cultures, and in any translation. Few works succeed in imposing the human condition in some absolute sense as the *only* context of their meaningfulness. Like the meaning of individual words or legisigns, literary works must be read in their proper contexts for their full expressiveness to emerge.

(iv) Toward a Semeiotics and Aesthetics of Reader Response

The reading of a book or poem generates a succession of reciprocally interactive *interpretants* of the complex literary *sign*.⁸ Reading involves the reader in an encounter with the *object(s)* of

the sign which will be the aesthetic experience of the literary work when the reader accedes to the cues *in* the work that lead to the *interpretant* understanding and appreciation of it. The aesthetic experience is the proximate interpretant of the work. Subsequent, or verbalised, articulations of the experience of the work may be called the critical or categoremic interpretants of it: "categoremic" because they are *about* the aesthetic experience or reconstruction of it in the *assertive* mode of judgment.

These interpretants are reflective, consummatory (or consummation-oriented) experiences "determined" (Peirce's term) by the complex literary sign. They generate interpretive inferences within the experiential continuum or discursive universe of the work. Aesthetic experiences are of course vicarious; but they are virtual, or imaged, experience *of* human relationships, characters, events, places, destinies, achievements, misery or happiness, and the interrelations among these. Technically, they are *possibilities* or *qualities* actualized in the medium or order of literary art. They are constructed Firsts of Thirds.

The *ground* of these aesthetic objects, or experiences, and of the author's creation is that which, in his or her interaction with the world, has motivated him/her to reconstruct his subject-matter into a work; the ground is also that from which he interpretively abstracts and develops the themes, characters, relations, etc. that go to make up the crafted sign. The work is, thus, the resultant or *product* of a transaction between factors "within" the artist and factors and determinants "in" his world. And we remember, with Peirce, that the world itself is already—to begin with—a significate object.

The composition and its components are charged abstractions from, engaging reconstructions of, what the artist is observing and feeling. What the product is charged with is, as Empson so sharply made clear (STA, SCW), affectivity-and-intellection.⁹ The finished composition as such is, in addition, charged with the *suspense* that the author has built into his or her construction in order to hold the reader's attention. We call the sign which is deter-

minative of the author's object(s) and the reader's responses an "exhibitive" construction, because the new determinacies which the work has created were not constituted by any series of assertions or truth-claims (assertive judgments) or any set of actions (active judgments). As Buchler has pointed out in *The Main of Light*, though the literary work is not assertive, it nonetheless, as an informed experience and as something lived through, provides cognitive gain; it has added to our knowledge or brought something into our ken in a non-explicit or exhibitive way.

The reader's contribution to the process is the equipment, the curiosity or openness, and the set of predispositions with which he approaches the work. The reader's literary equipment is most often improvable and is, in fact, often improved in the very encounter with the poem novel or drama s/he is attending to. His or her predispositions are also sometimes revised by the reading experience just completed. But, as continuous with the reader's disposition and equipment, what Peirce calls his *collateral experience* is both brought to bear upon the work and enlarged by it. Since on the author's side his/her collateral experience has partly determined the interpretive abstractions out of which he has made the literary sign-complex, and this experience is different from the reader's, the work-as-received (namely, the object of the literary sign) will not coincide exactly with the work-as-composed (namely, the object held-in-view and in-the-making by the sign maker).

Now, the interpretants which constitute the initial reading are that part of the semeiosis which Peirce calls the *immediate object* of the proffered sign. We have also noted that

the sign. . .creates in. . .that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. . . . The sign stands for. . . its object. . . .it stands for that object, not in all respects but in reference to. . .the ground of the representamen.
(2.228)

Moreover, the interpretant is called by Peirce a "mediating representation" (5.553):

a mediating representation. . .represents the relate to be a representation of the same correlate which this mediating representation itself represent. Such a mediating representation may be termed an interpretant. . . . (1.553)

Since it is the case that "every comparison requires, besides the related thing, the ground, and the correlate, also, a mediating representation," it is obvious that the reader's experiential object is mediated by the author's literary construction as accessed through the material, written or acoustic, sign (sign_M). The author can be seen to have shared *his* productive—more exactly, his poetic—experience of the subject-matter with the reader by means of the objective embodiment of it in his work. The author has *communicated* what he felt was significant about it to the reader through his literary sign—a complex, rhematic symbol subsuming its dicent and argumental components into an integral exhibitivive whole.

We see, however, that the author's "signified" simply cannot be entirely the same as the reader's. This is because the mediations that determine the reader's interpretation of the literary work are not all of them in the control of the author. And this is a Peircean way of explaining why the work-of-art, as an objective configuration, conveys meanings beyond the control of its maker.

(v) The Semeiotic Aesthetics of Criticism

The reader who goes on from the aesthetic experience of the literary object to the verbalizing and sharing of a response that is already dianoetic, will have moved out of the aesthetic mode of involvement with an exhibitivive product into a verbal articulation of his experience in the assertive mode. Metamorphosed into a critic, the reader will now be obligated to discuss the means or techniques by which the author achieved his effects or carried through this construction. But because "we can know quality only by means of its contrast or similarity to an other" (1.552), and "quality" is "reference to a ground" (1.555), it follows that *quali-*

tative evaluation of a literary work must begin with references to the author's ground as compared to the critic's. As Peirce says in a previous paragraph,

by contrast and agreement a thing is referred to a correlate. . . . The occasion of the introduction of the conception of reference-to-a-ground is the reference to a correlate. (1.552)

The correlates here are, first, that which has motivated the author to take up his subject-matter in just the way he has and as it is reflected in the sign he has constructed, and, secondly, the critic's responsiveness to said subject-matter both before and after his encounter with the literary work.

Now, if we consult the list of Peirce's ten classes of signs, we find that literary works fits the eighth class, namely, they have the properties of *rhetic symbols*:¹⁰ as unified constructions they are rhematic, and, as presuming conventions, they are symbolic. There is no problem in Peirce about conceptualizing a whole book as a term (2.292). And we take care to notice that, as a symbol rather than an assertion, a work of literary art effects its judgments in the *exhibitive* mode. When a literary work quickens its readers into near-instant action, it can be seen to have also functioned as *indexical*; it has become, like *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, an existential condition of actions related to the object (the phenomena of slavery) of the sign and its ground. The interpretant of a rhematic symbol is

a sign. . . of qualitative possibility, that is, is understood as representing such and such a kind of possible Object. . . . [it]. . . is understood to represent its object in its characters merely. (2.250, 2.252)

The articulated criticism of the work by the reader-turned-critic would belong in the ninth class of signs, namely, it would be a *dicent symbol*. This is because it is "propositional," or assertive. And it

is a sign connected with its object by an association of general ideas. . . its intended interpretant represents the

dicent Symbol as being really affected by its Object, so that the existence of law which it calls to mind must be actually connected with the indicated Object. . . (2.262)

We should note that if the interpretive critical essay is couched in hypothetical terms, then its assertiveness will not be categorical. It will not be unconditionally assertive, but only conditionally so. More, the interpretant of the critical essay or dicent symbol, will be "a sign which is understood to represent its object in respect to actual existence." And this means that it is the actual particular work before the critic that must be referred to, not its genre or the work the critic might have written had he been the author. 2.265 gives the following, as an example of a dicent indexical legisign: "if one is asked, 'Whose statue is this' the answer may be, 'It is Farragut.' The meaning of this answer is a Dicent Indexical Legisign." A symbol is, of course, always already a legisign.

Should the critic develop, or adduce, a *theory* of literature in connection with his verbally articulated response to the work, that theory will be an *argumental symbol* or symbolic argument in Peirce's sense. This is the tenth class of signs. The difference between the eighth, ninth, and tenth kinds of sign-activity lies in the "mode of meaning" of each (2.252):

and to say this is to say that [the sign's] peculiarity lies in its relation to its interpretant. The proposition [dicent] professes to be really affected by the actual existent or real law to which it refers. The argument [theory] makes the same pretension, but that is not the principal pretension of the argument. The rheme makes no such pretension.

The principle pretension of the "argument," if I read Peirce correctly, is its claim to validity on the grounds that it "belong[s] to a general class of analogous arguments" (2.266). More, while "It is this law [that it is valid because it belongs to a general class of arguments], in some shape, which the argument urges" (2.253), it is also the case that "the proposition need not be asserted. . . .

It may be contemplated as a sign capable of being asserted or denied. This sign itself retains its full meaning whether. . . actually asserted or not" (2.252).

Since he also says that an Argument is "understood to represent its Object in its character as a Sign" (2.252), we see that for Peirce a *theory* about literature or about a particular work is not only something hypothetical. As long as it is a complex judgment which is not asserted, it has to be either an exhibitivite or an active judgment: part of an *active* strategy, say, to acquire power in the literary bureaucracy or, perhaps, a syncretic or extrapolative *contrivance* invented either to satisfy the critic's craving for comprehensive unity, or to provide credibility to the theorist's critical practice.

Since also an argument is "a symbol. . . whose Object is a General Law or Type" (2.253), the reader of a critic's theorizing must remain aware that it refers to the work-of-art *only* in a generic way, as a possible example of a *genre*. The actual, individual work under *theoretical* discussion is touched only by a critic's qualitative or technical judgments of *it*; or by his statement of the conventions the work is implicitly relying on. And these judgments, as we saw, are symbolic dicents. They deal with the work in its aspect as a First and a Second (of a Third), as an encounter with existence so managed as to generate for the reader the experience of qualitative possibilities as virtual or aesthetic *actualities*. Depending as it does on linguistic and literary conventions, the work is of course symbolic, namely, it partakes of thirdness. But it generates an affective interpretant that has the mode of being of a First; so that, in his *explicitizing* rehearsal of this for the reader, the critic's discourse falls into the mode of being of a Second, of encounter: of an encounter with the work, and of the work as an encounter with existence.

Criticism, then, is properly addressed to existence: to that of the work-of-art in its actuality, and to the existential matters realized by the work and put on exhibit by it. To get at the work criticism must function as a dicent symbol. Should the work, by

exception, function as more than exhibitiv judgment to precipitate undelayed action, i.e., if it acts indexically to produce energetic as well as emotional interpretants, then the critic's articulation of it will have to take that into account and also become indexical as well as dicent. Of course; works with an indexical dimension that has become historical, call only for recognition of their past indexicality. Usually, however—and speaking of works that achieve the full status of art as rhematic symbols addressing the human condition in a meaningful way—the critic's discourse will remain assertive in addressing the exhibitiv construction under discussion. Because works-of-art succeed in capturing the human interest, even if only by antithesis or indirectly, there is nothing to prevent the critic's discourse from becoming hortatory in sharing the work's perspective. But what the work has done *as art*, and in the exhibitiv mode, will be difficult to match in the assertive mode. The reason the music had to be invented, the painting painted, or the poem composed is, precisely, that the determinacies which the artist wished to achieve could not be expressed, or expressed so well, in a series of statements.

(vi) On the Context and Autonomy of Criticism

D. Bleich's idea about "interpretation" as "motivated resymbolization" is not incorrect,¹¹ but it (i) fails to distinguish between the mode of judgment operative in the discourse of criticism and that of the work-of-art. It also fails (ii) to distinguish between the verbalized critical interpretation of a work and the responsive interpretants, the aesthetic experience of the work. In the verbalized articulation of the reader-critic's response, the literary work will have been reconceptualized to some degree or other of conceptualistic rather than expressive abstraction. It will, perhaps, have been approached as "summarizable" or, better, as "describable." In the former case, the critic will have implicitly committed (for good reasons) the heresy of paraphrase, as well as bypassed or short-circuited the experience of the work. In the latter, he will be offering "explanations" of the work in terms only

of its genesis, or its context, or its allusiveness, etc. Whether his explanations will be putatively nomothetic-deductive, rather than narrative, explanations is up to the critic. If they tend to be the former, we will be getting natural science types of explanation. But the critic may also devise a narrative order in which to locate the work, such that something about it is explained in another sense of "explain."¹²

The fundamental question here is, has the verbalized response remained pervaded, "motivated" by and grounded in, the immediate interpretant or aesthetic experience of the work? The literary sign, after all, "determines" the complex object with which the reader-critic is engaged and which "determines" the latter's interpretants. So it is the interaction with the work, the experience of it, that must be the ground of the reader-critic's final, verbalized interpretation. As a Firstness, the aesthetically experienced artwork is rhematically iconic. But because any literary work tacitly relies on conventions, it is also a Third. It is a Third effectuating a qualitative experience of possibilities. As *affecting* (like music) the reader's actual existence, it has to be indexical: a Second. But in its particularity it is also a *sinsign*.

In relation to the ordinary reader's interpretants of the work, the critic's discourse will be anaplastic: that is, it may reshape, redirect, clarify or intensify the reader's appreciation of the work. But it would have to be a second-rate, or else merely formulaic, work before a critic's discursive surgery could be said to "improve" it artistically. On the other hand, criticism that is not irrelevant cannot avoid being anaphytic of the work: it must take its rise in, be an offshoot of the work. A critical discourse that uses the work only to get started, may properly be said to be epiphytic: namely, not dependent upon the work in the sense of getting nourishment from it, but therefore irrelevant to it as criticism—much as an orchid, and what we like or dislike about, is irrelevant to the tree or branch that it attaches to. When such criticism is also spoliative of the integrity of the work in its references to or use of it, we should rather call it anaplerotic, on the grounds that

it is defacing the work or inflicting wounds upon it.

In short, because criticism does not produce in its reader an aesthetic experience of the work, in providing him with conceptual understandings of it, it is a discourse in the mode of Thirdness. But in directing the attention of the reader the critic's discourse is a decision and, therefore, also a Second. In the fact that it is neither exhibitiv judgment nor an experience of Firstness, lies the gap between criticism and its object the work-of-art. But we see that it is when criticism provides an experience of encounter parallel to, or reduplicative of, the existential dimensions of the aesthetic experience, that it most succeeds in bridging the gap between itself and the work.

In recent times, too much Deconstructive criticism has been of the kind that does not bridge the gap between the critic and the work. Such, for example, is Derrida's *anti-dialogical* critique of Plato's *Phaedrus* dialogue.¹³ So too, at an earlier date, much "structuralist" criticism was—if not anaplerotic, at least anaplastic—of its literary objects. Barthes' analysis of Balzac's *Sarrasine*, for example, imposes an alien structure upon this carefully crafted novella that does not at all correspond to its narrative shape.¹⁴ As theoretical, the discourse of these critics is only weakly relevant—if at all—to the integrity of their literary objects. And if it is, it is so only very generically. In abstraction from the quality of the theorizing in these discourses, Derrida's simply shows what can happen when you treat a dialogue as a non-dialogue; while Barthes transforms a novella into a semiological object without literary qualities but with social, psychological and historical ramifications. It turns *Sarrasine* into an example of ("semiological" or binarist) semeiosis within an exercise in a sort of intellectual history. And neither critic even attempts to validate their assessments of the literary object by reference to qualities of the aesthetic object, as the ground of their judgment. All in all, they block, inhibit, or misdirect reception of the work—either because they have been unable to share the aesthetic experience of it, or unable to ground their criticism in their aesthetic experience (if they had one) of it.

In either case, the discourse in which they claim to address the work-of-art is invalidated as criticism, however suggestive some of it might be as *theory*. Theories, we have seen, function as symbolic arguments (Peirce's tenth class of signs) that don't make contact with the effectiveness of the literary work as creative or in its individuality. And though they may speak of how a work ought to be understood or classified in some conceptualist sense, theories are not interpretants of the work itself, but only at most of the kind of thing the work is.

It emerges as a sort of paradox within Peirce's terminology, that non-expressive conceptualist interpretants of works-of-art do not entail practical consequences for the literary work as art. Purely conceptualist interpretants are, in this respect, like the arts (such as music) that have *only* emotional interpretants. But theoretical interpretants abstract from the emotional, if not also the energetic, interpretants of the work in question. Since theories asserted prescriptively or as matters-of-fact tend to become *symbolic dicents*, it is worth noting that they lead *away* from the work supposedly being addressed. This is because what they seem to call for is the work that the theorist would have written, were he the author or, else, the work that the author would have written had he understood the critic-theorist's theory. And neither of these is the work under consideration. The appearance of paradox is seen to come from the theoreticist assumption that any theory must somehow be relevant to the practice of literary art. It is a hybridic mistake to believe that *exogenic* secondary elaborations that refer to, or make use of, the work-of-art can be relevant to its integrity or to the complex judgment it has enacted.

What makes criticism important is its success in reinforcing the effectiveness of the work-of-art which is its object. The sense in which good criticism has an importance which is not spoliative, is that in which it must be articulated in a different mode of judgment from the work. It is fresh articulation in the assertive mode of the complex judgment enacted by the work in the exhibitiv mode. To the degree that critical discourse reinstates the aesthet-

ic experience of the work, it will also have captured for the reader the qualities (of Firstness) of the work. And it will itself be an *indexical dicent* in having both affected the reader and recovered existential aspects of the literary work. But if a non-spoliative interpretive criticism of the work-of-art is given the form of another work-of-art, it will, again and as such, have an autonomy of its own. We see that good readings are *strongly relevant*¹⁵ to the integrity of literary works, because they are a *condition* of this integrity. But we also see that critiques or interpretations that quite miss the work's integrity, can still be weakly relevant to the work because, in affecting its reception, they affect its *scope* or relatedness. And this "weak" relevance is a serious matter if the mistaken interpretation is persuasive or influential for the wrong reasons, as has happened in the reception-history of Plato's dialogues as non-dialogues.

Thus, a reader's "literary competence" is strongly relevant to a work's integrity. If a work fails to evoke or exploit that competence, it will fail to achieve its integrity for that reader. In the case of a work which (in its full integrity) is capable of achieving more than the reader's competence can handle, the scope of that work will again be diminished. It will have achieved an integrity such as that which we grant, for example, to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* when we fall short of seeing it as the work-of-art which it is, and call it propaganda, because we also know that it was most effective in having had political effects. That it is easy to be misled by the (non-literary) humanitarian appeal of its tacked-on last chapter, into taking it as primarily a work of propaganda, is precisely what the good reader of the book will perceive the more he realizes the artistic integrity of the preceding narrative.

That criticism can be badly written, yet still illuminate its aesthetic target, shows the extreme of discontinuity that can exist between a literary work and its criticism. We have seen that criticism and theory of criticism can, in fact, entirely neglect to address the aesthetic dimensions of what they believe to be their object. Or, that it may *not have* its object in view at all while yet working

with it in some alien, non-aesthetic context or putting it to some ideological purpose that operatively denies the literary nature of the work. The history of the practice of criticism, however, is also replete with examples of criticism that have brilliantly illuminated and enriched appreciation of literary works and also explained them technically, or in their effectiveness.

I will not here repeat the case that can be made for taking what I call "poetic responsiveness"—in its informed openness, "its sense of prevalence," and its state of what Peirce called "infinite determinableness"—as a normative model of what valid readings are and should be like.¹⁶ I will conclude by saying that literary criticism is best envisaged, in parallel with the poetic response or approach to reading, as a phase of literary creation capable of an institutional autonomy that is ever at risk of divorcing its interests from those of the art of literature. We've seen that it ceases to be literary criticism the moment its subject-matter becomes something other than the work of literary art in its integrity, or other than the relatedness of this integrity to aspects of the human condition that don't have to do with the need for expression—the drive that both fuels literature, and works to alleviate the human situation. I don't mean to deny that the institutional autonomy of criticism—reflecting as it does the distinct starting-points of criticism as a discipline—has helped refine the art of criticism. The development of criticism as a special skill is in fact the proper response to the beauties and complexities of art: the need that we have for it, and the fact that difficult beauty can be so rewarding. Art criticism and literary criticism, departmentalized as they properly are, however, are not exempt from invasion by the ancillary disciplines—such as sociology, history, or epistemology—that they sometimes turn to for clarification and help in understanding the *non-literary* contexts of literature.

State University of New York at Stony Brook

NOTES

1. In his correspondence with Victoria Welby, Peirce was to call the argument in 1.573 a "proof that logic must be founded upon ethics, of which it is a higher development." He adds that he went on "to see that ethics rests in the same manner on a foundations of esthetics" (8.255).

2. I omit the adjective "simple" here because Peirce is talking about the *achieved* unity of qualities in works-of-art: compositional unity is only simple in the respect that it is *felt* as simple, or integral, but is in every other respect complex. Similarly, achieved qualities can be highly *mediated* qualities, but they are *felt with immediacy*.

3. Having started this essay by invoking note 2.198, the reader must know that I omit note 2.199 not just as purely exploratory and obscure but as, in effect, justifying the dismissal of the idea of aesthetics as only a superficial and fragmentary inquiry when *its subject-matter is only* the superficial and undeveloped notion of *beauty* current in Peirce's day—a notion so undeveloped that we have no trouble, Peirce says, in noting that many "unbeautiful" things are nonetheless felt to have beauty.

4. Whenever we think says Peirce, "we have present to the consciousness some feeling, image, conception, or other representation, which serves as a sign" (5.283). And, for Peirce, "everything which is present to us is a phenomenal manifestation of ourselves. This does not prevent its being a phenomenon of something without us, just as a rainbow is at once a manifestation both of the sun and of the rain. When we think, then, we ourselves, as we are at that moment, appear as a sign."

5. Peirce no doubt derived the term *medad* from a form of the Greek for "no," *mé*.

6. That Peirce also allows for interpretants that are "particular," reminds us of the point which Aristotle, Dewey, Buchler also make that there are no generals apart from some particular embodiment and no particulars without some general association—otherwise induction would be impossible or totally arbitrary. "Perceptual judgments," says

Peirce, "contain general elements" (5.181).

7. See Chapters IX and X of my *Semiotics From Peirce to Barthes* for a fuller account of Barthes' binarism, and his externalist critique of Balzac's *Sarrasine*.

8. One can, if one wishes to use Derrida's terminology, see this succession as a series of "supplementations." Also, should it be necessary to make the distinction, we could call the graphic sign, the printed material thing, the sign_M in distinction from the sign whose object or objects we are encountering.

9. While it is Empson who has been most original and convincing about the polysemy of words, it needed the rediscovery of Bakhtin to remind us that the polysemy is *dialogical*. It is therefore relevant that Peirce, like Buber, Mead, and Buchler after him, already perceived that all thinking and discourse are dialogical; see 4.551: "It is not merely a fact of human psychology, but a necessity of logic, that every logical evolution of thought should be dialogical."

10. See Peirce, CP 2.243-2.265; and my SFPB Chapter 1 and 2. We list these classes for readers' convenience: 1. rhematic iconic qualisign; 2. iconic sinsign; 3. rhematic indexical sinsign; 4. dicent sinsign; 5. iconic legisign; 6. indexical legisign; 7. dicent indexical legisign; 8. rhematic symbol; 9. dicent symbol; 10. argumental symbol. A helpful elementary example of a rhematic symbol is a chess piece.

11. Epistemological Assumptions in the Study of Response," in *Reader Response Criticism* ed. J. Tompkins (Hopkins U.P. 1980).

12. See my *History as a Human Science* (Lanham: U.P.A. 1984); Chapter 2, "Nomology and Narrative."

13. In *Disseminations* 1972 (Chicago U.P. 1981). Cf. the author's "Derrida's Poetics: a Report to the Muses," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, Winter 1988.

14. As already noted above; Chapter X of my *Semiotics From Peirce to Barthes*, especially the section on "Barthes' Model Analysis of a Text (Balzac's *Sarrasine*)," (Leiden: Brill 1988).

15. Buchler's term, TGT, NJ, MNC, and ML.

16. I make the case in *Literature, Criticism, and the Theory of Signs* (in press). The "sense of prevalence" is Buchler's term, and is ex-

plained in Ch. VI of *The Main of Light*: "Ontological Parity and the Sense of Prevalence." The state of "infinite determinableness" is said by Peirce to be the effect of beauty upon the human mind—"so that it can turn in any direction and is in perfect freedom"—in a note of March 26, 1857 on the sense of beauty (*Writings of C.S. Peirce*, Chronological Edition, Vol. I) p. 10-12. I take leave here to also quote as relevant what Peirce says about poetry at 1.676: "The generalization of sentiment can take place on different sides. Poetry is one sort of generalization of sentiment, and in so far is the regenerative metamorphosis of sentiment. But poetry remains on one side ungeneralized, and to that is due its emptiness. The complete generalization, the complete regeneration of sentiment is religion, which is poetry, but poetry completed." By "completed," here, Peirce means "with energetic or final interpretants" in addition to emotional interpretants.

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