

Pursuing Critical Exchange

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I joined the Society for Critical Exchange when it began in 1975-76. As a "charter member," I attended its first annual meeting at the MLA Convention, in the Palmer House, in Chicago, on 27 Dec. 1977, many subsequent annual SCE-MLA Convention Special Sessions and convention parties, other SCE conferences convened at Indiana University at Bloomington and at Miami University, in Oxford, Ohio, and served as its Northeast Representative and Ad Hoc member of its Board of Directors from 1978 to 1984. From 1975 to 1988, my involvement in activities sponsored by the Society for Critical Exchange coincided with and deeply affected my critical, pedagogical, and professional development.

The SCE's 1977 "Announcement" of its first "Annual Meeting" listed 36 members.¹ In it I am listed as "Susan M[erritt] Elliott" (my name from 1969 to 1984), with the "interests" that I provided (in 1975) as: "Psychology of Criticism; Psychological approaches; Modern drama; fantasy; 18th Century," reflecting my then-current teaching and research concerns. For some relative perspective: at that time Jim Sosnoski listed his interests as "Criticism, history & theory; Medieval literature" and Patty (Harkin) Sosnoski listed her interests as "Criticism; Romanticism." Only two members listed their interests as "reader centered criticism" (Rob Crosman) and "reader-response criticism" (Steve Mailloux).

At that time, however, I had already been developing a specialty in reader-oriented criticism, theory, and pedagogy. My psychoanalytic perspective had been initiated in the late 1960s and early 1970s through my research and writing of my doctoral dissertation, directed by David Bleich at Indiana University at Bloomington. After I served as Bleich's graduate intern at Indiana in 1968, he had asked me what I was planning for the subject of my PhD dissertation, and, in 1969, he became its director (Cf. *Pinter in Play* xviii, 256-59). In the summer of 1971, I moved from Bloomington to Worcester, Massachusetts, when my first husband (another graduate student in the English department whom I had married in the summer of 1969) got a tenure-track position at Clark University. While teaching there and in my first tenure-track position at the University of Hartford, which I accepted by the end of that first year, I completed my dissertation, entitled "Fantasy behind Play: A Psychoanalytic Study of Emotional Responses to Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party*, *The Caretaker* and

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The Homecoming," in the summer of 1973, defended it in Bloomington that Fall, was awarded my PhD in October 1973, and promoted to Assistant Professor of English.

Bleich strongly influenced and affected my teaching, my research and writing, and my professional development. After I joined the SCE, he joined it too; later he organized or co-organized (with Jim Sosnoski) the SCE conferences convened at Indiana University at Bloomington; and, concurrently, he served on its Board of Directors (1984-87). During this period, Bleich published his 1975 NCTE monograph *Readings and Feelings: An Introduction to Subjective Criticism*, and his 1978 book *Subjective Criticism*, in which he cites my reference to my first-time responses to seeing Pinter's play *Old Times* on stage in my dissertation. At the invitation of its editor, my University of Hartford colleague Leonard Manheim (founding editor of *Literature and Psychology*), I reviewed *Readings and Feelings* for a 1975 issue of *Hartford Studies in Literature* in "A New Critical Epistemology." By then my 1973 "psychoanalytic" reader-response dissertation, perhaps one of the first in the United States, became identifiable as part of that new burgeoning sub-field of literary theory and criticism—"reader-response theory and criticism"—which received much support from the Society for Critical Exchange.

With Robert Crosman I co-chaired the Forum Workshop on How Readers Make Meaning: The Issue of Subjectivity in Criticism for the 1976 MLA Convention, in New York. Our jointly-compiled "Reader-Oriented Criticism: A Bibliography" appeared in the inaugural issue of *Reader: A Newsletter of Reader-Oriented Criticism and Teaching* (1 [Jan. 1977]: 7-10), which Crosman established as a "response in part to the 'Reader Response' forum and workshops at the 1976 MLA Convention" (*SCE Reports* 2 [May 1977]: 53). The subject of our modest four-page bibliographical checklist grew into an ongoing category "Reader-Response Theory and Criticism" in volume 4 of the *MLA International Bibliography: General Literature, Humanities, Teaching of Literature, and Rhetoric and Composition*. (Throughout the 1980s and parts of the 90s, publications in that field burgeoned; they have diminished in number to only a handful of entries in the 2004 printed volume.) Also for the 1976 MLA Convention David Bleich invited me to serve as a co-discussion leader with him for a Special Session on Epistemological Problems in Language and Literature. I discussed Bleich's *Readings and Feelings* in "The Reader as a Person," published in *Reader* (3 [July 1977]: 5-7), and also considered his book *Subjective Criticism* in my article "Teaching Literature through Readers" in the next issue of *Reader* (4 [May 1978]: 7-10).

I taught in the English department at the University of Hartford (UH) from Fall 1972 through Spring 1979. After I joined the Society for Critical Exchange in 1975-76, my professional focus began to expand to include a greater variety of literary critical theories and strategies. In 1977-78, midway through my tenure review, I applied for and was accepted to participate as a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellow in Ralph Cohen's third NEH Summer Seminar for College Teachers New Directions in Literary Study at the University of Virginia, in Charlottesville, Virginia, in the summer of 1978. That postdoctoral educational experience nourished and was nourished

by my growing involvement with the SCE. I have already defined some of these contexts in the third part of my book *Pinter in Play: Critical Strategies and the Plays of Harold Pinter*, "Social Relations of Critical and Cultural Change" (213-75), which includes the book's conclusion, Chapter 10, "The Case of Pinter: Toward Theory as Practice in Critical and Cultural Change" (245-75). "Critical Change: My Own Case" (255-62) parallels biographical sections of the book based on interviews conducted with Pinter scholars, critics, and theater professionals. I describe my experience in Cohen's 1978 NEH Summer Seminar as a welcome and crucial opportunity for both personal and professional change:

Like Bleich, though in different ways, Cohen is a powerful presence in the classroom, and my experience in his seminar exerted a decisive influence not only on my understanding of critical methodologies but on me personally too. Relevant to Cohen's impression on me and my work was the timing of the seminar—the summer before my "terminal year" at the University of Hartford [where no one in any department had been tenured in 1977-78]. I had plunged into this new work with great zest, in search of a meaningful alternative to my recent past rejection. (260)

After becoming the Northeast Regional Representative for the SCE and an "Ad Hoc member" of its Board of Directors and after participating in New Directions in Literary Study during the summer of 1978, I organized and moderated the SCE Forum on The Reader of Literature for the annual convention of the Northeast Modern Language Association (NEMLA) in Hartford, Connecticut, in Spring 1979 (my last semester at UH). Relating to that Forum, Rob Crosman and I co-edited an issue of *Reader* "made up of responses to David Bleich's *Subjective Criticism*," with separate contributions by Crosman and me, followed by "Resymbolizing Subjective Criticism," by Jim Sosnoski, an untitled piece by Jeanne Murray Walker, and "Authorizing Authority in Subjective Pedagogy," by Wendy Deutelbaum, and then by David Bleich's replies to each of us. I also served as Guest Editor for a special issue of *Reader* (7 [Jan. 1980]: 1-56) devoted to *Applications of Theories of Reading to Literature and Composition Pedagogy*, to which I contributed a preface (1-2), and my essays entitled "Fantasy in Fiction: Studying Literature through Readers" (22-27), based on a course that I had developed and taught at the University of Hartford, "Some Issues Relating to Reader-Oriented Teaching" (28-39), and my "Report on the 1979 NEMLA Forum on The Reader of Literature" (48-51).² Other contributions to that issue included: "Reading Reading in Literature," by William W. Stowe (Wesleyan U); "Teaching Reading," by William E. Cain (Wellesley Coll.); "Reading Aloud and the Composing Process," by Leone Scanlon (Clark U); "Report from Indiana: On Two Courses," by David Bleich (Indiana U at Bloomington); and "Report from France," by Vicki Mistacco (Wellesley Coll.).

For the SCE Special Session on Jonathan Culler's essay "Beyond Interpretation," at the 1979 MLA Convention in San Francisco, also

announced in "News and Notices" of *SCE Reports* (5 [July 1979]: 95), I had served as a "contributor" from the audience. The panel included Ihab Hassan (U of Wisconsin-Milwaukee), Paul Hernadi (U of Iowa), and Barbara Herrnstein Smith (U of Pennsylvania). As Jim Sosnoski announced the session, it would "center around statements made by Jonathan Culler about the need for interpretation in literary criticism" in "Beyond Interpretation: The Prospects of Contemporary Criticism," adding, "although he does not believe it likely he will be able to attend the MLA Convention[,] he will contribute an essay to the discussion which will be published in *SCE Reports* prior to the session." In the special issue on "Beyond Interpretation," edited by Patricia Harkin Sosnoski (Miami U), in *SCE Reports* 6 (Fall 1979), two papers, "Towards the Practice of Theory," by Barbara Herrnstein Smith (U of Pennsylvania), and "A Case for Interpretation," by Eugene Goodheart (Boston U) are followed by a section called "Commentaries and Responses," including my essay "Beyond? Interpretation," along with others by Alvin Sullivan (Southern Illinois U at Edwardsville)—who had been a participant in the first of Ralph Cohen's NEH Summer Seminars in New Directions in Literary Study, in 1973; Lawrence W. Hyman (Brooklyn College); Paul Hernadi (U of Iowa); and Ihab Hassan (U of Wisconsin-Milwaukee). The issue does indeed conclude with the promised essay by Jonathan Culler, which he entitled "The Critical Assumption" (77-85), followed by an "Afterword," by Jim Sosnoski, attempting an integrative "dialogue" (86-101).

Referring to the aforementioned "commentaries" on his response—"with the signal exception of Barbara Smith's, whose argument I heartily endorse"—Culler posits that "when Johnson, Coleridge, and Carlyle write about literature[,] they do not spend their time attempting to work out the meaning of particular works. Their powerful observations or arguments can, of course, be used in interpretations, but interpretation is not the *raison d'être* of their writings" (77). In contrast, he considers these writings by his contemporary colleagues "a sad commentary on a state of affairs I had thought might be changing." In reading/(mis)reading (i.e., *interpreting*) and describing his colleagues' "comments," Culler observes that "instead of considering the possibility of alternatives to interpretation[,] they spend their time discussing what kind of interpretation is best, coming out for or against deconstructive readings, 'appropriative' readings, New Critical readings." In my marginalia made at the time, I have written next to that sentence: "I don't see this at all." (So much for moving "beyond interpretation!") As Culler says in his next sentences: "Indeed, the argument they propose is that we cannot get away from interpretation since to read is to interpret. Here we stand; we can do no other." "Yes, of course we interpret all the time," he begins his next paragraph; "perception is already interpretation" (77-78). After several more pages, regretting his overly "optimistic" notion that "stress on intertextuality—the work's dependence on prior texts, codes, and discursive practices—would lead to analysis of these codes and practices," when "instead it has provided more grist for the mill of interpretation, as Eugene Goodheart points out," and deploying "the case of Harold Bloom" and "the other case" of "deconstruction," with each resulting in "another method of interpretation" (80-81), he offers a counterpro-

posal that the American “process of assimilation” of deconstruction (its “taming”) “would in itself be a fascinating subject of investigation.” That subject “shows the power of the critical assumption,” Culler asserts, since it “would be hard to claim that Derrida’s own writing consists of interpretations of particular works,” and to claim thus would be “inappropriate because the [Derridean] project is not to identify the thematic unity and distinctive meaning of some text but rather to describe a general process through which texts undermine or reveal the rhetorical nature of the philosophical system to which they adhere” (81). He concludes his essay citing an “exhortation” by E. D. Hirsh (backed by reference to Smith) to focus on academic literary studies on “things” other than “interpretation” (84).

Subsequently, I was invited to contribute another essay on my response to the SCE MLA Special Session on Culler’s “Beyond Interpretation,” which I entitled “Beyond the Academy” (*SCE Reports* 7 [Summer 1980]: 17-22).³ Generalizing from my own recent experience in Cohen’s 1978 NEH Summer Seminar for College Teachers, I observe:

When we can show how our theoretical investigations are of importance to more practical concerns with teaching and learning, we will feel freer in the classroom, not “boxed into” it. Addressing such issues will fortunately not move us “out of the classroom”; but it may move us “beyond the academy.”

[. . .] Our more experienced mentors (also still students themselves as well as teachers) need to guide us carefully so that we can develop our talents in practical ways, moving beyond the academy without landing entirely outside of it.

Hassan observes the “theoretical concerns latent in every interpretation.” Similarly, teaching is a practical application of theory. The goal of programs like the NEH Summer Seminars for College Teachers and the NEH year-long Seminars in Residence is to give senior professors opportunities to demonstrate the relation between theory and practice for those who will be teaching primarily undergraduates. When senior professors who share this goal take part in such programs, they inspire others to emulation. (20-22)

In his “Prefatory Note” (2-3), Searle observes that

The papers (and note) published in this issue of *SCE Reports* [represent] a somewhat fragmentary response to the MLA Session, ‘Beyond Interpretation,’ that provoked them. The issues raised at that session were indeed provocative, as are the responses published here. It seems quite clear that the exchange on this topic is by no means over. (2)

Indeed, decades after electronic communications emerged in the mid-1980s, frequently-heated exchanges on this topic and “theories of interpretation” are still thriving throughout academic classrooms, electronic discussion lists and message boards, Wikis, and the blogosphere.

After my participation in Ralph Cohen's 1978 NEH Summer Seminar, as part of my and my colleagues' "emulation" of Professor Cohen, I launched *New Directions in Literary Study: A Newsletter for Critics and Teachers of Literature (NDLS)*, which I announced in *SCE Reports* 5 (July 1979). I intended to keep the 36 NEH Summer Seminar's participants of Cohen's informed about current developments in our mutual research and teaching. For a few years, the *NDLS Newsletter* enabled us to get to know one another and to keep in touch about future research, teaching, and professional developments in the field of literary theory, criticism, and pedagogy, to become a larger collaborative community. It was also a mechanism for a series of MLA Special Sessions that we were proposing and coordinating. The first issue included a report on the "1978 MLA Special Session in New Directions in Literary Study: The Idea of Unity in Marxist and Phenomenological Criticism" and announced "Literary Worlds and Actual Worlds: The Problem of Reference as the topic of the 1979 *NDLS*-MLA Special Session," for which I served as the respondent ("News and Notices," *SCE Reports* 5: n. pag.). The second issue of the *NDLS Newsletter* (2 [Feb. 1980]) published my own commentary for that session, entitled "Poetic and Interpretive Truth: Dwelling in the Authenticity of Metaphor" (10-13), which anticipated my discussion of the function of metaphor "as truth" in critical writing in *Pinter in Play* (Chap. 1: "'Progress' and 'Fashion' in Pinter Studies" 3-24).

For the 1980 MLA annual convention, in Houston, I proposed, organized, and chaired the Special Session on New Directions in Literary Study: Political and Social Implications of Institutionalizing Literature through Textbooks. My selection of panelists was aided by the *NDLS Newsletter*, where I had initially solicited proposals for papers; I announced the final program in *SCE Reports* 7, offering copies of the papers in advance of the convention. The papers (in order of presentation) included: "Why Are Introductory Texts to Literature Untheoretical?" by James J. Sosnoski (Miami U in Oxford, Ohio); "Contemporary Poetry in the Classroom," by Evan Watkins (Michigan State U); "Setting Standards for Socialization through Fairy Tales: Charles Perrault and His Followers," by Jack Zipes (U of Wisconsin-Milwaukee); and "Shelley and the Myth of Linear Narrative," by Stewart Peterfreund (Northeastern U). As I described the session in *SCE Reports* (7 [Summer 1980]: 35), it focused "on the consequences of using textbooks in presenting literature in academic institutions," aiming "to define ways in which the use of textbooks in classroom teaching controls and shapes the reading and teaching of books, and even the formation of political attitudes" and, particularly, "to answer the question 'How do textbooks which make use of literature affect responses to it?'"⁴

I consulted Ralph Cohen directly about whom I might invite for another *NDLS*-MLA Special Session on The Cultural Institutionalization and Validation of Literature, which I organized for the 1981 MLA annual convention in New York City. The papers by the invited participants were: "Hegemony and the Value of Literature: Class, Economics, and Fiction," by Richard Ohmann (Wesleyan U); "The Exile of Evaluation," by Barbara Herrnstein Smith (U of Pennsylvania);

and "True, Truer, Truest: Observations on the Truth-Status of Literature," by Earl Miner (Princeton U).⁵ For the 1982 MLA annual convention in Los Angeles, I helped coordinate two paired Special Sessions focusing on the work of Ralph Cohen—Literary Change and Critical Change I and II—and chaired Literary Change and Critical Change I. The invited panelists responded to Cohen's "A Propaedeutic on Literary Change," which was published initially prior to the MLA sessions in the final issue of *SCE Reports*, a special issue on *Literary Change/Critical Change* (12 [Spring 1982]: 1-25). *SCE Reports* was re-titled *Critical Exchange* (beginning with issue 13 for continuity), with Cohen's "Propeudeutic" re-published in that inaugural issue for Spring 1983 (1-81), and both issues also included my short "Guest Editor's Preface" (ii), following Jim Sosnoski's "General Editor's Preface" (i). My essay "Theoretical Writing as a Kind of Change" serves in *Critical Exchange* 13 (ii-ix) as an introduction to the other essays commenting on Cohen's "Propaedeutic" by the panelists participating in the coordinated MLA sessions along with Ralph Cohen, Jim Sosnoski, and me: "A Comment on Professor Cohen's 'Propaedeutic for Literary Change,'" by Hayden White (U of California, Santa Cruz); "Literary Change and Literariness," by Michael Riffaterre (Columbia U); "Changing the Terms: Identity Crisis in the Literary Process," by Jerry Anne Flieger (Rutgers U); "The Generic Basis of Narrative History of Literary Change," by James E. Ford (U of Nebraska, Lincoln); "Genre and the Problem of Character in Literary Change," by Patricia Harkin (Denison U); "Genre and Literary Change," by Gregory S. Jay (U of Alabama); and "Literary Change in Literary History: An Overview," by Takis Poulakos (Miami U in Oxford, Ohio).

I was an Honorary Fellow at Clark University in 1979-80 and taught at Assumption College while working on the NEH Fellowship proposal for *Pinter in Play* in 1980-81. While awaiting its outcome I was a participant in HERS at Wellesley in 1981-82. During that period, I served on the panel of the SCE-MMLA Convention Special Session "Workshop" on The Concept of Literary Competence, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in November 1980, along with David Bleich (Indiana U at Bloomington), Richard Bjornson (Ohio State U), John Brenkman (U of Wisconsin), Wladyslaw Godzich (U of Minnesota), and Tom Lewis (U of Iowa). The topic as described by Jim Sosnoski in *SCE Reports* 7 (Summer 1980), who chaired the session, was: "Is the concept of 'literary competence' as delineated by Jonathan Culler in *Structuralist Poetics* heuristic?" (38); I allude to Culler's concept of "literary competence" in "Beyond the Academy" (19). I also organized, moderated, and served on panels for SCE-NEMLA Convention programs on The Concept of the Reader, in North Dartmouth, Massachusetts, in April 1980, and on The Concept of Creativity, in Québec, in April 1981.⁶

During this period, I invited Patty Harkin, who, at that time, was focusing on Wolfgang Iser's critical approach to reading, in his 1978 book *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, to participate in the program on Reader-Response Criticism and the Teaching of Literature and Composition, which I had organized and chaired for the 1981 annual convention of the College English Association, in Cherry Hill, New Jersey.⁷ On that occasion, we had lunch and became better acquainted. Subsequently, I would often encounter Patty

and Jim Sosnoski at annual MLA Convention events, as the SCE, which would become an Allied Organization of the MLA, explored our related interests in critical theory and pedagogy pertaining to readers and reading. SCE members published articles in *Reader: Essays in Reader-Oriented Theory, Criticism, and Pedagogy*, as edited by a variety of editors, including Wendy Deutelbaum (then at U of Iowa), who took over the *Newsletter* after co-editing it briefly with Robert Crosman, and Elizabeth A. Flynn (of Michigan Tech U), who founded *Reader* as a semi-annual journal (1982-2000; co-editing it with John Clifford beginning in 1991). Beth Flynn also co-edited the 1986 volume *Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers, Texts, and Contexts* with Patrocínio (Patsy) Schweickart. By the late 1990s the academic currency of reader-oriented theory began to wane first in departments of literature and then in departments of composition and rhetoric, despite the still urgent need to devise effective strategies for teaching undergraduates critical skills grounded in more sophisticated understanding and articulating of cognitive and other psychological processes of various kinds of readers engaging in reading and interpretation.⁸ In 1982, I coordinated the paired SCE-NEMLA Convention programs on “The Work of Fredric Jameson and The Concepts of Production and Reception” in New York City, and served as a panelist as well in the latter program.⁹

A financial aspect of my 1982-83 NEH Fellowship for College Teachers led to an important critical epiphany for me:

The announcement that the NEH would support travel for research and consultation with other scholars led to a “brainstorm” (my own “Aha!” experience) that eventually became a core of this project: the consultations would be personal interviews with scholars and other critics (including several journalists and some actors and directors) to improve my understanding of why others interpreted Pinter’s work as they did. The NEH travel funds presented the opportunity for a “new” methodology related to reader-response criticism and teaching but different from it. (*Pinter in Play* 261)

As a reader-response-oriented teacher, “I had kept a response journal, written response essays and critical interpretations, and analyzed these texts of responses to literature by myself and others in doing the dissertation directed by Bleich and in eight years of teaching” (261). My own critical work paralleled my concurrently-developing pedagogical interest in the varied personal, educational, social, cultural, and political contexts of literary learning. In “Critical Change: My Own Case,” I observe that, after receiving the NEH Fellowship, “I traveled to the critics themselves and directly asked them questions about their experiences of writing on Pinter’s plays” (261). Those interviews—based on a questionnaire that I devised querying them in advance about each of those contexts—and my assiduous reading of their “critical works” (academic philosopher Teddy’s phrase in Pinter’s play *The Homecoming*)—were in part my attempt to resolve the issues stimulated by my conversation with distinguished Clark University Psychology Professor Bernard Kaplan several years earlier,

which led me, in conjunction with Ralph Cohen's 1978 NEH Seminar New Directions in Literary Study, to conceive of the project leading to the 1982-83 NEH Fellowship and the publication of *Pinter in Play* in 1990.¹⁰

Extending my "broader perspective" initially stimulated by a question Bernie Kaplan asked me several years earlier which "led me to wonder whether I could indeed differentiate between emotional responses to fantasies and intellectual defenses against such responses—a crucial aspect of my dissertation approach adapted from Bleich's revision of Holland" (*Pinter in Play* 260), I traveled throughout the United States and Europe to meet with Pinter scholars and journalists and other interpreters of Pinter's work on stage. "Through the interviews with Pinter scholars," for example, "I learned from them firsthand the contexts for their publications, finding out what *they* thought were the sources of their own critical choices and changes, much as a journalist, a biographer, or an ethnographer would do" (261), in the process of making "Pinter criticism a case study, a vehicle for a larger inquiry, an ethnography of criticism" (xviii).

In describing my own "critical change," I observe further that "Aside from this critical 'angle,' the conjunction of the NEH seminar with Cohen and the subsequent yearlong NEH fellowship opportunity (and the depressed market for college teachers throughout the eighties—Who predicted then that it would continue still into the twenty-first century?)—led me to persevere: to relate what I already knew about Pinter criticism and other responses to his work to some of the theoretical questions on which Cohen had centered the seminar—[W]hat is literature? [W]hat is criticism? [W]hat are the social relationships between literature and criticism?" (261). These three questions directed my inquiry in *Pinter in Play*. I noticed other contexts for my work, too:

Even the political situation of the NEH at the time that I applied in 1981 was a factor in my own critical change, for, unlike more recently [1988-89], the agency was receptive to projects dealing with critical theory. Though Congress was threatening both National Endowments with severe cuts, announcing a possible rescission of awarded funds, these did not actually materialize, and my project was funded as well as approved. I began work in June 1982. (261)

The year of my NEH Fellowship for College Teachers, 1982-83, coincided with other kinds of "changes in my personal and professional situation—a marital separation leading to an eventual divorce (1984) and various new environments and affiliations (1983 to the present [1988])—that furthered my interest in change" (261).

After my 1982-83 NEH Fellowship year, I accepted a new tenure-track position as Assistant Professor of English at Keuka College, then a women's college of about 450 students, for 1983-84, and moved from Worcester, where I had been living, writing, and teaching from 1979 to 1983, to that very small rural community located in the Finger Lakes region of central upstate New York. Unfortunately, during my first semester there, the program in dramatic literature and criticism

for which I had been hired never materialized; the College faced imminent bankruptcy, the trustees fired its president and her husband, who was its vice-president, and hired a new president, Arthur F. Kirk, Jr., who arrived in January 1984, with a new PhD in “how to save small colleges” in hand.¹¹ Immediately, he announced that, for reasons of financial exigency, he would be cutting 20 percent of the faculty of 40 (the eight most recently hired, which included me) and making the College coeducational to increase enrollment revenue, as the already-small endowment had been depleted by the previous administration. (I returned to teach at Keuka College for a few semesters in 1989 and 1993, and I worked there as a development officer and grantswriter in 1991-92; within the decade from 1983 to 1993, Kirk had doubled the College’s enrollment.)

Prior to those events, while still teaching at Keuka College during fall 1983, I chaired the SCE-NEMLA program on Authority in the Profession of Literary Study: What Are the Issues? in Erie, Pennsylvania., and I coordinated the SCE-NEMLA Convention program on Professional Women as Readers, inviting Patty Harkin to participate as a panelist, along with Beth Flynn (Michigan Tech U), and Laura Menides (Worcester Polytechnic Institute), in Philadelphia, in late March 1984.¹²

Throughout the 1980s, my involvement in various other professional development activities, as well as those sponsored by the Society for Critical Exchange, led me to examine the subject of “change” in both personal and professional terms, “significantly alter[ing] my attitudes toward change and my understanding of the sorts of risks and responsibilities involved in producing it”:

Insights about the risks and rewards involved in such change metaphorically informed my introduction to an issue of *Critical Exchange* that I guest edited, including Ralph Cohen’s invited position paper “A Propaedeutic on Literary Change” and several responses—the papers for two linked special sessions on Literary and Critical Change that, as a member of the Society for Critical Exchange, I had initiated and coordinated for the 1982 MLA Convention. (262)

During the 1980s, David Bleich organized and hosted several SCE conferences at Indiana University, in Bloomington, while he was still a faculty member there, prior to his leaving for his current position at the University of Rochester, and he served as a member of the Board of Directors, from January 1984 through December 1987. Generously, throughout that decade, he invited me to take on participatory roles in some of those conference programs that he organized or co-organized with Jim Sosnoski for the SCE on campus in Bloomington. The first of these was a Conference on Theories of Narrative in October 1980, during which he asked me to lead a workshop on the subject How Are Narrative Theories Socially and Professionally Authorized by the Character of University Curricula?¹³ I recall that one being a particularly difficult workshop to prepare for, especially since my specialties include dramatic theory and criticism, not narrative theories. In preparation, I consulted many English and

comparative literature departments' curricula in their university catalogues, which, in those days, were really only available in printed formats, not in electronic formats online, as they are now; using mostly library or departmental copies of such catalogues, as well as my large backlog of catalogues accrued through job applications and on-campus interviews, I compiled numerous note cards comparing those curricula in order to develop an introduction for the workshop.

I led another workshop for SCE/IU Conference on Theories of Reading convened in Bloomington, in September 1981, on the subject How Do Classrooms, Professional Meetings, Privacy and Other Contexts Affect Reading? The very nature of that topic led to a far different kind of preparation, for I "brainstormed" and devised a list of potential probable or possible "contexts" based on my own experiences teaching and learning in classrooms, attending professional meetings, reading privately, and so on. After that brainstorming experience and the workshop itself, the whole concept of "contexts" of criticism and pedagogy strongly affected my perspective in writing *Pinter in Play* in the rest of the 1980s, and I draw and play upon interrelated concepts of "contextuality," "intercontextuality," and "intertextuality" throughout the book.

The joint SCE/IU conferences self-consciously foregrounded their collaborative process and formats. Specific measures for recording notes during workshops and panel discussions attempted to build "consensus" to use the multiple small group "caucuses" after those discussions to deconstruct their presentations, and to reassemble the larger group of conferees, during which each of the caucus recorders would present his or her account of their discussion and address caucus questions to the panelists, aiming to develop further "exchange." Striving to achieve some kind of "rapprochement" in this process of defining various issues and conflicts, "summing up" what the conference may have achieved or failed to achieve at the end sometimes deteriorated into "gripe sessions" when conferees expressed their dissatisfaction. As I recall the emotional tenor of the Theories of Reading conference, some conferees may have left somewhat prematurely, after expressing or hearing expressed feelings of deep divisiveness rather than the intended "feel good"—or, at least "feel better"—collaborative spirit of inquiry. But this was the decade of the 80s. Perhaps we were reflecting the "mood" of the entire country, as those currently clamoring for "change" ("Yes we can" [Obama] v. "Yes we will" [Clinton]) in the 2007-2008 Democratic primary elections and caucuses appear to be doing.¹⁴

Further documenting some of the tension felt during the Conference on Theories of Reading, Jim Sosnoski reproduced publicly a "Letter to the [General] Editor" addressed to him from Barbara Herrnstein Smith (dated 6 Jan. 1983) at the end of the inaugural issue of *Critical Exchange* (13 [Spring 1983]), on *Literary Change/Critical Change*, which I had guest edited. Smith takes exception to Rick Barney's review of the Conference on Theories of Reading published in *SCE Reports* 11 (Spring 1982). She says that Barney *misattributes* to her and Professor Peter Brooks (Yale U) a "view that studying students [is] not necessarily important for developing a theory of reading" (1). She objects to Barney's account of "The underlying political nature

of the discussion," which, he says, "repeatedly singled out" Peter Brooks and her "especially as it bore on the economics of the profession." By way of correction, she reiterates four points that she made, one of which is that "whatever pedagogic or self-revelatory value the production of such protocols [as written "responses" for classes] might have for individual teachers and students, they were of limited general interest in the development of what might be properly considered a theory of reading," because such readers in classroom contexts are confined to "the literary academy" and not representative of all contexts of reading. She concludes: "There is much that needs saying about the political and economic dynamics of the practices of the literary academy, but that project was not much advanced at the Conference on Theories of Reading[,] which, whatever its achievements, did not, I think, unmask the power structure either of theories of reading or of anything else" (2).¹⁵

In 1984, I attended the jointly-sponsored SCE/IU Conference on Teaching Theory, although I did not lead any workshops for it. For me it was a "learning experience" affecting how I would subsequently teach introductory courses in expository writing, literature, and criticism (e.g., at Hobart and William Smith Colleges and Marist College). I focused on a greater variety of practical "critical approaches," on defining similarities and differences among such "critical strategies," and more on their theoretical bases or underpinnings than I had before attending that conference and before finishing the writing of *Pinter in Play* (in 1988-89).

In August 1984, I became a visiting scholar in the English department at Cornell University, moved to a small town near Ithaca, resumed work on *Pinter in Play*, and, in January 1985, attended faculty inter-session workshops on how to use computers. I taught a course at Hobart and William Smith Colleges in the Spring of 1985 and spent the salary (approx. \$2,500) on my first computer, an IBM-XT, which I began using for word-processing in writing *Pinter in Play* and for electronic mail (a technological innovation) accessed through Cornell servers and AOL (the "shmerritt" account I still use today).

In 1984, I changed my name back to Susan Hollis Merritt, and, keeping it, in 1985, I married a professor of natural sciences (chemistry and physics) at Keuka College. He took a leave of absence to resume collaborative research as a visiting professor at Oregon State University, in Corvallis, where I became a visiting scholar in the English department from 1985 to 1987, the period when I wrote most of *Pinter in Play* on my new IBM-XT. I wrote Chapter 4: "Pinter's 'Semantic Uncertainty' and Critically 'Inescapable' Certainties," which ends the first section of *Pinter in Play*, "Perspectives on Pinter's Critical Evolution" (66-86); it was published initially by invitation of the editor, John Gronbeck(-Tedesco) in the inaugural issue of the *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* in fall 1986.¹⁶

While I was in Oregon, David Bleich also invited me to lead another SCE/IU conference workshop for the 1986 IU/SCE Conference on Empiricism and Hermeneutics: The Invention of Facts in the Study of Literature. The subject of that workshop (quite a mouthful) was "How Do Political Gender Considerations Change the Idea of the Individual Subject? How Does Such a Change Affect Our Understanding of

How We Use Language?" My preparation for and participation in such SCE workshops, along with my earlier work with both Bleich and Cohen, strongly influenced *Pinter in Play*. Chapter 7: "Some Other Language Games: Linguistic Parlays and Parleys" (137-70) includes sections entitled "A Subtext of the 'Subtext'" (142-45), and, pertaining to "[Austin E.] Quigley's *Pinter Problem* [Martin] Esslin's Review" (145-51), "The 'Subjectivity'/Objectivity' of Book Reviews and Authors' Responses" (151-53) and "The Reception of *The Pinter Problem*: Beyond Esslin" (153-57); "From Structuralist Moves to Semiotic Conventions (Signals to Signposts)" (164); "Discourse Analysis: Deirdre Burton" (164-66); "Semiotics of Performance: Susan Melrose" (166-68); and, informed by Wittgenstein (one of Quigley's key influences in pursuing "the philosophy of language" and linguistic analysis), "Cultural Implications and Limitations of 'Language Games'" (168-70). The so-called "theory wars" also informed Chapter 8: "Cultural Politics" (170-209), containing what now still seem to me rather prescient sections on criticism of Harold Pinter's work, "Pinter and Politics" (171-86) and "Pinter's Future as a Political Dramatist" (186-89), followed by "Sociological Role-Playing and Class Consciousness in Pinter: Ewald Mengel" (189-94); "Pinter and Sex" (194-96); "Elizabeth Sakellaridou's Feminist Ploys: Toward a Balance of Sexual Power" (196-204); and "Relations of Gender and Personal Concerns in Criticism" (204-09).¹⁷ Work by Barbara Herrnstein Smith and Stanley Fish—along with Ralph Cohen, as presented earlier in the book—structure Chapter 9: "Contingencies of Literary Value Judgments of Pinter's Plays" (213-44) and Chapter 10: "The Case of Pinter: Toward Theory as Practice in Critical and Cultural Change" (245-75), respectively.

The Society for Critical Exchange enabled me to participate in an integrated community amidst what for many others appeared to be a myriad of conflicting critical perspectives and theories prevalent in academe. In 1985-87, while I was sharing an office with Lisa Ede at Oregon State University and deeply involved in attending and participating in SCE conference programs at annual MLA conventions and jointly-held SCE/IU conferences, I would continue to "pursue critical exchange" with Lisa and my other OSU colleagues in the English department who embraced interdisciplinarity in their fields of inquiry. My conversations with Lisa about her longstanding and ongoing collaborative work with Andrea Lunsford (then at the other OSU—Ohio State University; now at Stanford University) on "collaborative writing" in Composition and Rhetoric (then still an emerging sub-field of English studies) stimulated another epiphany ("Aha! experience") that led to my conclusion for *Pinter in Play*. I realized that for decades after earning my PhD in English language and literature at IU in 1973, I had already been participating in "collaborative criticism."

At the end of the second chapter of *Pinter in Play*, entitled "Aims, Kinds, and Contexts of Criticism" (25-48), I coin a term "concentric criticism," in a section called "Concentric/Consensus Criticism," in which I attempt "to suggest a resolution to the dramatic rhetorical struggle" represented by Paul Hernadi's essay collection *What Is Criticism?* (45-48). I propose that "to speculate what we might do if we wanted such resolution at least implies that we possess some force to do it"

(45-46). Congruent with Gerald Graff's 1987 book *Professing Literature: An Institutional History*—and anticipating his imperative to “teach the conflicts” in his subsequent publications such as his 1992 book *Beyond the Culture Wars: How Teaching the Conflicts Can Revitalize American Education*—I offer the following perspective:

To offset divisive rivalries for predominance among competing individuals and “schools” of critical practice, we can construct and participate in mutually collaborative projects. Such projects will enable us to develop increasingly larger interactive critical networks—*concentric circles* bridged by broader and more culturally encompassing objectives. We can replace “excentric criticism” with “concentric criticism” and “strange” or “antagonistic” texts with more “friendly” ones. Critics must reconstruct their “game” as a more collaborative and consensus-governed enterprise. How this reconstruction might enhance the ethics of criticism is a matter for later speculation (see chap. 10). My next chapter, “Criticism as Strategy” considers extensions of this metaphor to criticism and some of its implications for Pinter criticism. (47-48; cf. 269)

In my conclusion to *Pinter in Play* (Chap. 10), following my section on “Critical Collaboration as a Means of Cultural Change” (268-79), citing Graff's *Professing Literature* (269), and my section on “The Point of Change” (270-72), raising Fish's question “what's the point?”—of change (270)—from my integrative perspective, I set forth “Some Guidelines for Critical and Cultural Change” (272-75). In devising them, I extrapolated from my own experiences “pursuing critical exchange.”

The 10 Guidelines address matters such as: how to determine which projects to undertake and the criteria for evaluating them; how to identify and to utilize opportunities for announcing and attracting like-minded colleagues to participate in such collaborative projects and how to avoid lopsided power relations in developing them; how to affiliate those involved in the project with appropriate professional organizations and how to use such organizational affiliations effectively; how to publicize and to further the goals of the projects through collaboratively-authored publications identifying and crediting each individual member for his or her contributions; how to deal with resistance encountered from both inside and outside the collaborative enterprise; when and how to persist in the face of any such resistance through a process of group consensus building without diluting its purposes, aims, goals, and principles; and how to remain flexible enough to adjust to the possibility of abandoning projects whose viability or feasibility become, by consensus of the group, no longer warranted. I devised these Guidelines in large part from my own experiences participating in or observing SCE projects in the 70s and 80s.

For example, at the MLA annual convention in Chicago in 1985, I served on an MLA Special Session panel concerning a project that the SCE had sponsored led by Ralph Cohen, then president of the

SCE, called The Vocabularies of Criticism and Theory (VOCAT), about which we convened a meeting at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, in January 1986. That project was going to produce “an ambitious reference work,” an *Encyclopedic Dictionary* of “modern criticism and theory,” to be published by Oxford University Press. The project was defined and discussed in a special issue of *Critical Exchange* (20 [Winter 1986]: 1-53), which included a transcript of “An Interview with Ralph Cohen on the Aims of the VOCAT Project,” conducted by Jim Sosnoski, Stephen Nimis, R. L. Wadsworth Jr., and Edward Tomarken prior to the conference, which began with Sosnoski introducing and welcoming Ralph Cohen also as the newly-elected President of the Society for Critical Exchange (1-18), prefaced by an “Introduction” (i-iv), by Stephen Nimis, and followed by essays contributed by others who had participated in the Miami University conference.¹⁸ That project ended prematurely when it did not receive funding from NEH.¹⁹ After 1986, several other “encyclopedic dictionaries” (on a smaller scale) and anthologies of essays on theory and criticism have been published, some by individuals and some by collaborative authors and editors.²⁰

In subsequent years, I have tried to follow my own “Guidelines for Critical and Cultural Change” in developing and becoming involved in new projects involving collaboration with other scholars and arranging external funding from scholarly organizations and foundations supporting such work (e.g., the NEH, IREX, and CIES). In 1988-89, as I was readying *Pinter in Play* for publication and making revisions to Chapter 8 (“Cultural Politics”), in which I discuss the work of Václav Havel in relation to that of Harold Pinter, major political changes in Eastern Europe captured my attention and significantly altered the direction of my work (xiii-xiv).

When the Harold Pinter Society was founded in 1986, knowing that I was working on a book on Pinter criticism, Frank Gillen and Steve Gale, who became the co-editors of *The Pinter Review* (1987-), asked me to serve on its Editorial Board specifically as its Bibliographical Editor, which I have been doing for the past two decades. Since 1987, I have compiled a “Harold Pinter Bibliography” and written many performance and book reviews and essays for each volume of the journal, which is now published in both paperback and hardback editions as a volume of *Collected Essays*. The length of the “Harold Pinter Bibliography” has increased about tenfold since it began (to 109 pages in typescript currently in press), so that compiling it has become a far more rigorous task that it was in 1986-87. Many of the MLA Special Sessions and other conference programs that I have proposed, coordinated, and participated in since 1987-88 were sponsored by the Pinter Society, which I helped to found and to become an Allied Organization of the MLA on the models of the SCE and the Beckett Society (Cf. *Pinter in Play* 265-68).

By 1995, when *Pinter in Play* was published in paperback (xi-xv), I had segued from Pinter (meta)critical studies to a broader project, currently entitled “The Global Politics of Contemporary Drama and the Media,” which incorporates both my subsequent research on Czech productions of contemporary British, American, and Irish plays and more recent research on phenomena relating to “virtual

literary communities" and cultural media. From 1993 through 2000, much of my time was taken up with learning Czech while a Visiting Fellow in the Institute for European Studies at Cornell and traveling and doing research in Prague, as well as with continuing to compile the "Harold Pinter Bibliography" for *The Pinter Review* and updating my archival research at the British Library ("The Harold Pinter Archive in the British Library"). I made frequent trips to London and Prague, applied for new teaching positions and a Fulbright Award, interviewed (at which time I informed the dean that I had been short-listed for the Fulbright), received the offer, and accepted a new tenure-track position as Associate Professor of English and Theatre Arts at Marist College. When I was indeed awarded a Senior Fulbright Scholar Award for the Spring of 1997, after teaching at Marist College in Fall 1996, I was granted a leave of absence for Spring 1997, so that I could live in Prague for four months (Mar.-June 1997) while I was doing research at my host institution, the Theatre Institute, jointly affiliated with the Charles University (which gave me Internet and library borrowing privileges in exchange for my presenting a guest seminar on responses to Pinter's plays). From 1996 to 2000, I engaged in annual household moves and frequent international travel every summer, going back and forth between my apartments in Poughkeepsie and my house in Bluff Point and Bluff Point and London and Prague (and other European cities for theater conferences and literary festivals while abroad).

Since 1988 (the closing of this SCE "phase"), I have incorporated some of what I have learned about collaboration and cross-cultural interdisciplinarity in my own subsequent work. In my last two years teaching at Marist College (1998-2000), teaming up with a colleague, Professor Mar Peter-Raoul, who chaired the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, I developed a new course called Human Rights and the Literature of Conscience, inventing that title. Together, we "team-taught" the course to a class composed half of English majors and half of Philosophy/Religious Studies majors. We met all the classes together and shared in constructing the syllabus, assignments, and quizzes and in evaluating and grading the students. (I also used Blackboard.com to develop an electronic version of the course, as I was doing with all my courses in 1999-2000.) We incorporated into the course Mar's Praxis Program requirements that students serve a minimum number of hours in community service, and integrate that service component in the final term paper, and we had the students keep a journal or log of that experience from which to draw material for their final papers (which both of us read and commented upon, but we evaluated [graded] only those of the students in our respective departments). I contributed an initial brief presentation and moderated discussions (with Mar in the class) for each of the plays that I had suggested for the course texts; she did the same with texts that she had selected; we each presented cross-disciplinary documentary films; sometimes we alternated back and forth in presenting at the same meeting. Our perspectives were complementary, and we were very compatible as collaborators, while our contrasting temperaments and teaching styles and the course content made classes interesting for both us and our students.

After I left my teaching position at Marist College in 2000, I became interested in and explored a phenomenon that I call “virtual literary communities” through my own involvement as a “participant-observer” in “fan communities” emerging from such television programs as *La Femme Nikita* and *24* (produced by the same Emmy-award-winning team), which led me to develop, propose, coordinate, and chair a Special Session at the 2003 MLA Convention, in San Diego, on Virtual Literary Communities: *La Femme Nikita*, *24*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and Related Fandemonia. In that session I presented a paper entitled “*La Femme Nikita*’s Virtual Literary Communities: From Proximity to Philanthropy to Social and Political Activism,” based on interviewing members of such fan communities (who communicated initially via the Internet) and attending and observing their interaction at fan conventions and related fund-raising charity events in Toronto and Montréal, Canada. The international (“global”) popularity of *La Femme Nikita* on television—its broadcast in over 60 countries, including the Czech Republic, and its vast Internet-based “fandom”—including Czech fan communities, added another “critical connection” among my various research topics.²¹

But old habits die hard. The 2005 Nobel Prize in Literature diverted my attention from more recent parts of that project back to Harold Pinter. I traveled to Stockholm to attend Nobel Week in December 2005 at Pinter’s invitation and that of the Nobel Foundation and the Swedish Academy. I flew to London in October 2006, to see Pinter perform Krapp in Samuel Beckett’s *Krapp’s Last Tape* and to do some more research in the Harold Pinter Archive in the British Library. In Stockholm, for the Europe Theatre Prize awarded to Pinter in March 2006, Michael Billington (Pinter’s official biographer) invited me to participate in and to help with organizing a symposium on Pinter: Passion, Poetry, Politics, as part of the Cultural Programme of the XX Winter Olympic Games, in the city of Torino (Turin), Italy, which was funding the Europe Theatre Prize. I traveled to Turin that March to attend the various events and to present my own paper entitled “(Anti-)Global Pinter: Living and Working in the Theater—Outside/Inside Global Politics (An Intersubjective, Inter[con]textual Reading of Harold Pinter’s Nobel Lecture ‘Art, Truth & Politics’).” It refocused and updated a paper on both Pinter and Havel that I had given at the annual MMLA convention, held in Milwaukee, in November 2005. In April 2007 I was a plenary speaker for the conference Artist and Citizen: 50 Years of Performing Pinter, at the University of Leeds, in England, where I presented “Pursuing Pinter: From Stage to Screen and Page, from Page to Stage and Screen—and Back and Forth Again.”²² Back and forth again—indeed!

Both “pursuing Pinter” and “pursuing critical exchange”—my joint pursuits of the past four decades—inform and reform each other as they resound throughout my own “works and days,” playing off, playing upon, playing to, and, at times, playing against each other.²³

NOTES

¹ Among the 36 “current SCE members” listed in the SCE’s 1977 “Announcement” of its first “Annual Meeting,” are colleagues whom I recall from those early days. Several have made their mark on the profession since 1977 (if they had not already done so) and some moved to one or more institutions different from their original academic affiliations or addresses listed then (updated as possible): for example, Charles Altieri (U of Washington; U of California, Berkeley; emer.); Jonathan Arac (Princeton U; Columbia U; U of Pittsburgh); Don H. Bialostosky (U of Washington; U of Pittsburgh); Ralph Cohen (U of Virginia); Robert Crosman (Providence, RI; U of Alaska at Anchorage); Mike Frank (U of Chicago; Bentley College); Gerald Graff (Northwestern U; U of Chicago; U of Illinois at Chicago); Lawrence Grossberg (U of Illinois at Urbana; U of North Carolina, Chapel Hill); Ihab Hassan (U of Wisconsin-Milwaukee); Paul Hernadi (U of Iowa; U of California, Santa Barbara); Vincent B. Leitch (Mercer U; Purdue U; U of Oklahoma); Robert Magiola (Purdue U; National U of Taiwan and Abac Assumption U, Thailand; ret.); Steven Mailloux (Temple U; U of California, Irvine); Wallace Martin (U of Toledo; emer.); Jeffrey Plank (U of Southern California; U of Virginia); Leroy Searle (U of Washington); James Sosnoski (Miami U in Oxford, Ohio; U of Illinois at Chicago); Patricia (Harkin) Sosnoski (Miami U in Oxford, Ohio; U of Akron; Denison U; Purdue U; U of Illinois at Chicago); and Barbara Herrnstein Smith (U of Pennsylvania; both Brown U and Duke U). Of those initial members listed in 1977, three later served as presidents of the SCE—Ralph Cohen (founding ed. of *New Literary History* and the SCE’s president from 1983-86); Barbara Herrnstein Smith (1986-89); and Gerald Graff (2004-2007). Other SCE presidents have been Richard Ohmann, Edward Said, Stanley Fish and Jane Tompkins (co-presidents), Nancy Armstrong, Susan Stewart, and Jerome McCann. Two SCE charter members and former SCE presidents, Smith and Graff, have become presidents of the MLA, beginning their tenure in 1988 and 2008, respectively. As the SCE’s old Web site points out (in “About the SCE”), such members have given prestige as well as direction to the Society for Critical Exchange and enhanced its professional reputation.

² In my own composition and literature pedagogy, I depart from David Bleich’s use of anonymity, avoiding it both in the classroom and in my publications. My students use their actual names on all work submitted for my evaluation and distributed for classroom discussion, following the syllabus’s caveat explained in class that they should only share private responses if they feel comfortable enough to do so publicly. Otherwise, they can withhold their responses both from me and the class and simply note in their journals that they had done so, keeping such pages for their own private use. My concern with developing a personally-comfortable collaborative classroom trumps purposes of its being the subject of my own research study. Extending “Guideline” 4 in *Pinter in Play* (272-73), I also instituted and received signed permission forms from students whose written class work I cited and credited to them by name in my

own publications, as I do in citing taped and transcribed interviews with academic scholars, critics, and media professionals.

³ *SCE Reports 7* (Summer 1980) also includes: "A Prefatory Note," by Leroy Searle (U of Washington) (2-3); "Response to other papers on Interpretation," by Eugene Goodheart (Boston U; now Edythe Macy Professor of Humanities Emeritus at Brandeis U) (5-10); "Beyond Jonathan Culler" (11-16), by Michael Finney (Youngstown State U); and "'Interpretation beyond Interpretation: Semiotic Chain as Hermeneutic Spiral': Outline of article in progress," by Paul Hernadi (U of Iowa; now Professor Emeritus of English and Comparative Literature at the U of California, Santa Barbara) (23-24).

⁴ My report on the session was published in the *NDLS Newsletter* 4 (Oct. 1981): 2. Cf. *Pinter in Play* 262; 297n16.

⁵ My announcement of the 1981 NDLS-MLA Special Session on The Cultural Institutionalization and Validation of Literature and the authors' abstracts for that session appeared in the *NDLS Newsletter* 4 (Oct. 1981): 3-4.

⁶ "News and Notices" in *SCE Reports 7* (Summer 1980) features my "Note" stating that I had "begun negotiations for affiliation of SCE with NEMLA," and that there might "be a special session sponsored by the Society at the 1981 NEMLA convention in Quebec, to be held April 9-11, under the sponsorship of L'University Laval at le Chateau Frontenac" (35-36). The SCE affiliation and the session did indeed occur at the 1981 NEMLA convention in Québec. Though still "open" when I wrote that note, the topic became The Concept of Creativity, patterned on Jim Sosnoski's MMLA Special Session "Workshop" on The Concept of Literary Competence and mine on The Concept of the Reader, all examining these theoretical constructions.

⁷ In 1980 Inge Crosman (now professor emerita of French studies,, Brown U.) and Susan Suleiman (now C. Douglas Dillon Professor of the Civilization of France and a professor of comparative literature at Harvard U) co-edited *The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation*, and Jane Tompkins (then Temple U; later: Duke U; U of Illinois at Chicago; ret.) edited *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Structuralism*, both also featuring work by other SCE members.

⁸ See Harkin, "The Reception of Reader-Response Theory" for her "historical explanation for the place of reader-response theory in English studies" (Abstract) and subsequent developments.

⁹ Steve Nimis guest edited a special issue of *Critical Exchange* 14 (Fall 1983) on The Work of Fredric Jameson which gathered papers from the 1982 SCE-MMLA "series of special events centered around" Jameson's work sponsored by Miami U and its language departments (iii).

¹⁰ It took me seven years to write *Pinter in Play* but only a few minutes at the MLA Convention publishers' exhibits to interest Joanne Ferguson, then editor-in-chief of Duke University Press, in publishing it on the basis of my presentation of my prospectus and the first chapter. In those intervening years, Duke University had added theory and criticism to its publishing program: I was in the right place at the right time.

¹¹ Kirk is currently the president of St. Leo's University, in Tampa, Florida, where some former Keuka College faculty members began

migrating in the 1980s, when it was still St. Leo's College. The drama professor whom I replaced at Keuka had left for St. Leo's College in 1983.

¹² Listed in the pre-conference SCE announcement is one of my Keuka College colleagues whom I had also invited to participate and who had originally accepted but later withdrew. She would not have been able to attend anyway, as it turned out, since an unexpected late March blizzard closed the New York State Thruway, preventing me from driving to the NEMLA conference in Philadelphia, as I had originally planned. Responding to my telephone request, Laura Menides ably chaired the session in my absence.

¹³ The program is reproduced in *SCE Reports* 7 (Summer 1980): 25-32.

¹⁴ In far greater detail than I currently remember, Patty Harkin describes and discusses the 1981 SCE/IU Conference on Theories of Reading as an example of the SCE conference "process" in her working paper, "Remembering the Early Days of SCE" (7-9).

¹⁵ Jim Sosnoski describes his own "vivid memory of an SCE conference David Bleich organized at Indiana University that demonstrates" how "changing the structure of critical forums did not change the critical protocols" (8). His own theoretical point is not "that the format of an exchange is irrelevant to the exchange but that the context of the exchange is relevant to its format"; he concludes that "The relation between protocols and forums is not dependent on the structure of the forum but upon the disposition of the critics entering it" (8). From "such experiments," Sosnoski says that he "learned . . . that for an efficacious critical exchange one had to work with persons who were already committed to an issue and willing to collaborate[,] which requires a disposition to listen to colleagues and to modify one's views" (9).

¹⁶ Chapter 4 of *Pinter in Play* serves as the foundation for my introduction to a collection of paired essays on *The Dumb Waiter* edited by Mary Brewer (forthcoming from Rodopi in 2009).

¹⁷ A section of Chapter 8, "Pinter and Politics" (171-86), was published simultaneously in Lois Gordon's *Harold Pinter: A Casebook* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990); reprinted in *Pinter at 70: A Casebook* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

¹⁸ Those essays include: "The VOCAT Data Bases" (19-22), by R. L. Wadsworth Jr. (Miami U); "The (Dis)Position of Foreign Terms in the VOCAT *Encyclopedic Dictionary*" (23-35), by Richard Spuler; "Provisional Format and Contents for the VOCAT *Encyclopedic Dictionary*" (36-47), by David Vander Meulen (U of Virginia), with an "APPENDIX" on "The VOCAT Procedures for the Definitions of Terms" (44-47); and "Bibliographical Considerations in the VOCAT *Encyclopedic Dictionary*" (48-54), by David Nordloh (Indiana U).

¹⁹ In his contribution, David Vander Meulen alludes to plans to apply for grants to support the VOCAT Project. According to "About the SCE: History of the Society for Critical Exchange," the VOCAT Project was "only partially successful"; its "initial work . . . was funded by an Ohio Challenge Grant (\$25,000) and by the Online Computer Library Center (\$5,000)," but it "came to a halt, when, although recommended at each stage of review, a grant application

to the NEH for \$1,200,000 to complete the project was not approved." Nevertheless, "some of the work" of the VOCAT Project did come "to fruition in *The New Literary History Bibliography of Literary Theory and Criticism* edited by Ralph Cohen, Jeffrey Peck, Christopher Camuto, and Charlotte Bowen which Johns Hopkins UP published in 1988" <<http://www.case.edu/affil/sce/old/History.html>>.

²⁰ Some early examples are: *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, ed. Chris Baldick (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990); *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1990); *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, ed. J. A. Cuddon, 3rd ed. (New York: Penguin, 1991); and *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1994). The most ambitious and sophisticated more recent collection of essays on theory and criticism is *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, whose general editor is Vincent B. Leitch. (See Vince Leitch's contribution in this issue of *Works and Days* and his references to that project in "Statement 1: 'Theory Futures'").

²¹ James Traub's "The Celebrity Solution" (in *The Money Issue*) concerns celebrity-related phenomena that I consider in my project in preparation entitled "Reaching for the Stars." In my paper "*La Femme Nikita's* Virtual Literary Communities: From Proximity to Philanthropy to Social and Political Activism," presented in my 2003 MLA Special Session on *La Femme Nikita*, 24, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and Related Fandemonia, I describe how celebrity stars of those television shows enlist their fans in philanthropic charity events held during fan "conventions" and "conferences," raising money for the actors' chosen social and political causes. The lure for such fans is the opportunity to engage personally with the fantasized object of their desire (*l'objet de désir*): to imagine and to feel "closer" (in greater "proximity") to the stars in "real life" than they are when engaged merely in "virtual reality" technologically enhanced by mass media (television, movies, and the Internet), while contributing to important social or political causes.

²² My account "Nobel Week 2005—The Experience of a Lifetime: Homage to Harold Pinter," my article based on my Turin talk, "(Anti-)Global Pinter," my review-article on *Harold Pinter: A Bibliographical History*, and my "Harold Pinter Bibliography: 2002-2005 with a Special Supplement on the 2005 Nobel Prize in Literature: October 2005-May 2006" will all appear in *The Pinter Review: Collected Essays: 2005 and 2006* (forthcoming in 2008).

²³ In addition to David Bleich and Ralph Cohen, I thank those who participated in MLA Special Sessions and other programs that I organized or chaired or who invited me to participate in their programs; the founders of the Society for Critical Exchange—Leroy and Annie Searle, Jim Sosnoksi, and Patty Harkin, for their intellectual vision, passion, support, and friendship; Vince Leitch, for being such an interesting and appreciative MLA Convention dinner companion, friend, and supporter; Barbara Herrnstein Smith, Jonathan Culler, Stanley Fish and Jane Tompkins, Richard Ohmann, and Gerald Graff, for their intellectual leadership and major contributions to the SCE; and Martha Woodmansee and her colleagues at Case Western Reserve University, for their brilliant projects, energetic entrepreneurial spirit, and generous hospitality.

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Special Issue
Gerald Graff

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