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**Narrative, Ideology, and the Reconstruction of American Literary History**

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Before I present a more detailed analysis of narrative forms, ideology, and American literary history, I should say something about the coordinates of this essay. I think that we have reached a point in literary studies where it is no longer fruitful, nor even accurate, for us to assume that we can go directly to a text without first considering the critical presuppositions that we bring to our reading of a text. This is as true for noncanonic texts as for those of the established canon.

It is especially true, I believe, in the case of Chicano literature and its literary criticism as it produces texts that have been systematically excluded from the traditional framework of American literature. Works by Mexican-American authors are absent from the American literary histories, the anthologies of American literature, and from the syllabi of courses on American literature. Spanish departments in American universities have also participated in this strategy of exclusion. This exclusion is by no means innocent. Its effect has been very similar to that of the exclusion from the American canon of African-American art, where as Henry Louis Gates, Jr., describes it "logocentrism and ethnocentrism marched together in an attempt to deprive the black human being of even the potential to create art, to imagine a world and to figure it" II984, 71.

I wish to suggest a method of interpretation that will provide a ground for the development of a way of reading Chicano literary texts as a group of works that intentionally exploit their peripheral status to and exclusion from the body of works that we might call majority literature. This method of reading obliges us to make connections between the findings of narrative analysis and traditional as well as modern approaches to ideology. Such critical dialectical awareness is crucial in the case of a developing literature like contemporary Chicano literature where literary historians are still (11) involved primarily in the process of establishing the texts in

the tradition and resolving questions concerning the issue of canon formation. This work is crucial as a reflection on the primary texts that constitute a tradition, for the dialectical analysis of which I speak both defines the tradition and helps to shape the direction of an art that is, to paraphrase Gates, in the process of "imagining" and "figuring" a world.

## Narrative and Dialectics

I begin with the first of my three topics, narrative itself. The problem of narrative structure and of its relationship to the thematic aspects of texts is currently one of the most vital areas of analysis in literary theory. Much contemporary narrative analysis reveals the dialogical nature of meaning.

In *Figural Language in the Novel* (1984) I argued that with its care for authenticating detail and its passion for credibility and intelligibility, the novel especially among narrative forms expresses a continuing desire for types, for monological readings, for an anachronistic mythos of common understanding and a shared universe of meaning. And yet, in the same breath, the novel never ceases to express the conceptual maneuvering that we all must perform in order to conceive reality, indeed to shape reality, in ways that will make sense to the human mind. The novel allows us to seek, to absorb, and to understand new experiences by discovering new forms and rhythms, "grasping and reconstructing the stuff of social change in the living substance of perceptions and relationships" (Eagleton 1976, 34). This conflict between the contrary tendencies toward monological unifications, single voices on the one hand and polyphonic diversity, what Mikhail Bakhtin has called a choir of voices, on the other, all this makes the novel a particularly important Chicano literary genre.

As narrative productions, socially symbolic acts, and not mere reflections of the ideological formations within which they arise, Chicano novels put ideology to work, exposing the framing limits of what we take as self-evident truths, as common sense (Eagleton 1976, ISSI). These narrative fictions represent that what appears "natural" in the ways individuals live their lives in society is the result of identifiable cultural matrices. These cultural matrices, the truths that we hold to be

self-evident, use the signifier to create truths and set them as norms, as coercive texts for meaning, that claim universality. Dialectical readings can point out the reification of these truths from the constructed domains of a specific history and a particular culture. They allow us to see the production of ideology not as a system of formalized ideas, but as ordinary ways of thinking, as common sense. E. P. Thompson puts it very sensibly in these terms. He says that: (12)

Very rarely in history—and then only for short intervals—does any ruling class exercise authority by direct and unmediated military or even economic force. People are born into a society whose forms and relations seem as fixed and immutable as the overarching sky. The "common sense" of the time is saturated with the deafening propaganda of the status quo; but the strongest element in this propaganda is simply the fact that what exists exists. II978, 254J

As narrative representations, these productive processes are necessarily figurative and cannot be abolished because they allow social formations to persist, but they can be articulated and analyzed. That articulation would have as its object what Jameson has called ideological analysis II98I, I2), namely a critical exposition of cultural texts that amounts to a rewriting of the text so that it is seen itself as a rewriting of a prior historical and ideological subtext that is no longer present as such {I98I, 8I).

Narratives, in sum, are preeminently and rigorously dialectical. Like the ideologies that they articulate, narratives both figure and are determined by their social context ;Jameson I97I, 4-IO). Read dialectically, narratives indicate that language and discourse do affect human life in determining ways, ways that are themselves shaped by social history. Giving rise to questions concerning language itself, the sovereignty of our identity, and the laws that govern our behavior, narratives reveal the heterogeneous systems that resist the formation of a unitary base of truth.

## Ideology and Narrative

Turning now to the second item of my title, the notion of ideology itself, I follow Jameson's claim that narratives in general instantiate ideology as the substance of

our collective thinking and collective fantasies about history and reality.

It is sufficient initially, I think, to understand ideology as the ways a culture links social action with fundamental beliefs, a collective identity with the course of history. Basically, ideology functions as a unifying social force (Higham 1974, IO-18). It is, according to Sacvan Bercovitch, "the system of interlinked ideas, symbols, and beliefs by which a culture . . . seeks to justify and perpetuate itself; the web of rhetoric, ritual, and assumption through which society coerces, persuades, and coheres" (Bercovitch 1986, 8). In an essay on American literary history Bercovitch argues that the network of ideas through which the culture justifies itself is internalized rather than imposed, and embraced by society at large as a system of belief (Bercovitch 1986, 9). The beauty of the hegemonic power (13) of what Bercovitch calls "the American ideological consensus" (1981, 20) is that it has already built into itself a way of dealing with, and neutralizing, "alternative and oppositional forms" of social formation (1986, 91).

In literary and historical terms this American ideological consensus has involved "the legitimation of a certain canon," a canon based on the works of the Puritan forefathers. It has also involved consensus about "the meaning of the term history that was legitimated by a certain vision of America" (Bercovitch, ea., 1986, vii), America as a land of men of independent mind and independent means, developing through "initiative, individualism, self-reliance, and demands for freedom" (Bercovitch 1986, 31). Bercovitch, again, puts it this way:

An ideology . . . arises out of historical circumstances, and then represents these, symbolically and conceptually, as though they were natural, universal, and right; as if the ideals promulgated by a certain group or class (individualism, mobility, self-reliance, free enterprise) were not the product of history but the expression of self-evident truth. The act of re-presentation thus serves to consecrate a set of cultural limitations, to recast a particular society as Society, a particular way of life as the pursuit of happiness. (Bercovitch 1986, IO)

An ideology as such is not necessarily either good or evil, true or false. We can set

aside crude notions of "false consciousness." But an ideology is a system of ideas underlying a certain social order. That is to say, ideology connects what we say and believe with the power structure and power relations of the society we live in (Eagleton 1983, 141. Ideology is thus much more than the unconscious beliefs a people may hold; it is more particularly "those modes of feeling, valuing, perceiving, and believing which have some kind of relation to the maintenance and reproduction of social power" (Eagleton 1983, IS). An ideology will thus repress alternative or oppositional forms when these arise. The ideology of the Puritan colonies, for example, did not simply exclude Native Americans from the colonists' consensus about the new world being fashioned from the wilderness. The native inhabitants were seen as the very embodiments of the evils most threatening to the creation of the new Jerusalem. This ideology of exclusion remained central to the American creed throughout the nineteenth century. And we see its effects in other historical and literary moments.

While I will employ these general senses of "ideology," I begin with Althusser's provisional definition of the ideological as "a representation of the Imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (Althusser 1971, 1621.

For our purposes we need to retain but two features from this somewhat (14) cryptic definition. First, ideology must always be necessarily narrative in its structure because it involves a mapping of the real. That is, it underwrites the stories about what we conceive of as real. Ideology also involves the essentially narrative, or fabulous, attempt of the subject to inscribe a place for itself in a collective and historical process that excludes the subject and that is basically nonnarratable. But as Paul Hirst reminds us, these relations exhibit no necessary homogeneity. This means that the "mapping" of the real cannot exhibit a singular "ideological instance.~ It must insist on the "heterogeneity of ideological social relations and their effects" (Hirst 1979, 21. Ideology thus refers to "a non-unitary complex of social practices and systems of representations which have political significances and consequences" (Hirst 1979, 54~. For Chicano literature this "imaginary relationship" of political sign)ficances and consequences is not limited to issues of class ideology. Questions concerning race and gender, for example, are no less important and will not allow us to subordinate them to one single structure. No single map will suffice

for an understanding of the "Real, " and its features cannot be predicated in advance.

Second, we also need to retain the notion that the "Real" is an outer limit that the subject approaches in the anxiety of moments of truth— moments of personal crisis, of the loss of identity, or of the agonizing political polarizations of revolutionary situations such as those suffered by the characters in much of contemporary Chicano fiction. The makoup of "history" as such, then, is not so much the empirical events of the world as the self-inscription and symbolization in texts of those events and in our thinking about them. In other words our approach to the "Real" must always pass through its textualization, or what Jameson calls its "narrativization in the political unconscious" (I98I,351.

Althusser's notions of ideology offer "a representational structure tthat] allows the individual subject to conceive or imagine his or her lived relationship to transpersonal realities, such as the social structure, or the collective logic of History" (Jameson I98I, 30~. In this sense the "Real" is not to be considered as a knowable thing in itself. Nor is it a string of facts that one can know directly in the positive form of some "true" representation of consciousness. It is instead a cultural-historical and subjective invention, projected by an ideologically riddled consciousness. The "real" is what "resists symbolization absolutely" (Jameson I98I, 3s~. According to Terry Eagleton, "The text takes as its object, not the real, but certain sign)fications by which the real lives itself—sign)fications which are themselves the product of its partial abolition" (1976, 721. This narrativized real is not a reproduction, a reflection, or a mirroring of the historical real. Rather than conceiving it as an imaginary transposition or concretization of (15) the historical real, Althusser argues that the textual real is the product of signifying practices whose source is history itself (I97I, ~-ls) What all this means basically is that reality can be known in experience only if it is first imagined as a formed product of the subjects who recognize it or misrecognize it and express it in symbolic forms. The "imaginary" is thus both an image and a spectral reality through the recognition of which the subject becomes a subject IHirst 1979, 57). As Paul de Man argues, ideology, like metaphysics, may be conceived preeminently as a precritical stage of knowledge | I 9 8 4, I 3 ~ )

And yet, the narrative apparatus that informs ideological representations is not mere

"false consciousness." Ideology is much more than that. It is an authentic way of grappling with a Real that must always transcend it, a Real into which the subject seeks to enter, all the while painfully learning the lesson of its own ideological closure and of history's resistance to the fantasy-structures in which it is itself locked. A text can be said to refer not to concrete situations so much as to the ideological formations that concrete situations have produced.

For those of us involved in literary studies, one particularly important result of this way of conceiving the work of ideology is that it allows us to understand the radical "decentering" of the subject, and the consequent emphasis on the collective and the political, that occurs in a contemporary literature like Chicano literature. There are no given, constitutive subjects with an experience of the real. "Subjects are not essential but are constituted" (Hirst 1979, 41). Or, in Althusser's words, "Ideology interpellates individuals as subjects" (Althusser 1971, 170). Appropriating Jacques Lacan's concept of the "mirror phase" (Lacan 1968) as a "speculary, i.e. a mirror-structure" phenomenon (Althusser 1971, 180, 195-219), Althusser argues that the subject exists as a mirror reflection of an other subject and becomes a subject itself in its recognition and reflection of and in the other (Hirst 1979, 57). Individuals are always "subjected" to and by certain principles and directives of ideology, so that they will be "happy, useful, and safe subjects, in the political sense of the term" (Lentricchia 1983, 1). To conceive of a text as ideology is thus to focus on the way that it affects the formation and transformation of human subjectivity (Therborn 1980, 2). Ideology is socially conditioned consciousness, allowing men and women to live what Clifford Geertz has called "lives of patterned desperation" (Geertz 1973, 204). From this perspective human thought thus comes to be seen as a public and not fundamentally a private activity.

To be sure no culture is ideology-free. Chicano narrative fiction presents subjects acting according to variant and competing ideologies, ideologies in opposition to the existing material apparatus of American society. These (16) narratives thus produce clashes or textual aporias that demarcate the limits of ideology itself. Chicano narrative carries out a counterhegemonic resistance to the dominant ideology at the level of various symbolic languages, attempting to figure what we might call, echoing Goran Therborn, an "alterideology" (Therborn 1980, 28). It is worth

repeating that the work of this "alterideology" is conflictual and oppositional rather than consensual or integrative. The great ethnographic work of Americo Paredes (1958) on turn-of-the-century border ballads can serve as a model for understanding Chicano literature as just such an "alter-ideological" oppositional formation.

From this oppositional perspective the utopian vision of a moment when the individual subject would be completely aware of his or her determination by class ideology, and would be able to step outside of this determination by sheer lucidity and clarity of thought, is a myth (Jameson 1981, 2831). But it is precisely at this point that the value of art emerges. If men's and women's conditions of existence cannot be present to them as experience, and if in consequence they live their relation to these conditions in an imaginary mode as if they were given, then art, with its ability to produce the individual's imaginary relationship to conditions of existence, is a vital element of ideological analysis. Great art distances ideology by the way in which, endowing ideology with figurative and narrative articulations, the text frees its ideological content to demonstrate the contradictions within which ideologies are created. Great art is thus speculative in the most fundamental of senses: it allows us to see.

This is not to say that art itself is therefore ideology-free. On the contrary, as Jameson suggests, "ideology is not something that informs or invests symbolic production; rather the aesthetic act is itself ideological, and the production of aesthetic or narrative form is to be seen as an ideological act in its own right, with the function of inventing imaginary or formal 'solutions' to unresolvable social contradictions" (1981, 79). Resorting for the sake of exposition to a Hegelian formulation, we might argue that one rationale for studying "ethnic" literatures as part and parcel of the general problematic of American literature as a whole (rather than seeing them as merely "regional" or "marginal" phenomena of interest only to a specialized literary fringe) is that the masterworks of the dominant literary culture are the dialogical negations of the marginal texts not sanctioned by the hegemonic culture. As the silenced voices of opposition, these other marginal texts serve to highlight the ideological background of the traditional canon, to bring to the surface that repressed formation that Jameson has called the "political unconscious." This is the reason, I think, for the sudden interest on the part of some mainstream scholars

in AfricanAmerican literature, as well as ethnic and feminist literatures in general.  
(17)

The difficulty of textual interpretation, as of dream interpretation, lies as Jameson claims "in detecting the traces of that uninterrupted narrative of class struggle and oppression], in restoring to the surface of the text the repressed and buried reality of this fundamental history.... The assertion of a political unconscious proposes that we undertake just such a final analysis and explore the multiple paths that lead to the unmasking of cultural artifacts as socially symbolic acts" (1981, 20~. Pierre Macherey describes this "unconscious" level as the very site of ideological work. In his own words:

[T]he ideological background, which constitutes the real support of all forms of expression and all ideological manifestations, is fundamentally silent—one might say unconscious. But it must be emphasized that this unconscious is not a silent knowledge, but a total misrecognition of itself. If it is silent, it is silent on that about which it has nothing to say. We should therefore preserve the expression in all its ambiguity: it refers to that ideological horizon which conceals only because it is interminable, because there is always something more, but it refers also to that abyss over which ideology is built. Like a planet revolving round an absent sun, an ideology is made of what it does not mention; it exists because there are things which must not be spoken of.  
(1978, 131—321)

What I have in some of my earlier work (1979) called the "difference" of Chicano narrative fiction is precisely a function of its relation to ideology. Ideological analysis of its forms necessarily involves confronting the political consequences of particular social relations and representations. In articulating the space of that "ideological horizon" and the "abyss over which ideology is built," Chicano prose fiction begins to illuminate the gaps and silences that are the limits of the ideological consensus of American literary history.

### Reconstructing American Literary History

I conclude with a few words about the third element of my title: the reconstruction

of American literary history. This work is being undertaken by a whole new group of Americanists in forthcoming works such as the new edition of the Cambridge History of American Literature and in revisionary volumes, such as Bercovitch's recently published *Reconstructing American Literary History* (Bercovitch, ea., 1986) and Werner Sollors's *Beyond Ethnicity* (1986a). Against the power of the old American ideological consensus concerning which texts could be considered literary and (18) historical, this new group of scholars will, according to Bercovitch, make "a virtue of dissensus" (Bercovitch, ea., 1986, viii). This dissensus, a dialogue of "conflicting views and interests" (Bercovitch 1986, 5), will serve as the revisionary model for the new American literary history. Against the old consensus, the new dissensus is integrative: not "eclectic, synthetic, or indeterminate" but rather "dialogic" (Bercovitch, ea., 1986, ix).

Werner Sollors's enterprise "to look at American culture anew" (1986a, 6) by focusing on the notions of consent and descent as terms which allow us "to approach and question the whole maze of American ethnicity and culture" (1986a, 6) follows very much in the reforming spirit of the new literary history. The conflict in American literature between consent and consensus on the one hand and descent and legitimacy on the other hand, Sollors claims, "can tell us much about the creation of an American culture out of diverse pre-American pasts" (1986a, 6; my emphasis).

This sounds wonderful, perhaps even after we notice that both Bercovitch's and Sollors's key words—"consensus" and "consent," "dissensus" and "dissent," "integrative" and "integration," "legitimacy" and "privilege"—themselves ring with the unmistakable clarity of their origins in the liberal-democratic bourgeois political theories that form the foundations of the hegemonic American ideological consensus.

The crucial factor here is that, often, these terms refer to consensus and dissent among the ruling groups themselves and to their legitimacy as members of the state apparatus (Therborn 1980, 109~). That is, consensus and dissensus do not apply to those outside the ruling group or the state apparatus: working-class people, people of color, women.

In short, even this new integrative model can in practice turn out to be a counterhegemonic move to renew, defend, and modify, not to undo, the earlier forms of dominance (Williams 1977, II3-14~. We might well ask, therefore, how the voices of those traditionally excluded from American literary history are to be "integrated" into that history.

The American ideological consensus that I have referred to takes on a very different quality when we take into account the ways that class origins and racial and gender differences affect literary and social history. At the very least, people of different classes, races, and gender will feel the effects of that consensus and its hegemony differently. And if Jameson's notion of expressive causality is to be taken seriously as a way of regarding history as the "absent cause" accessible to us only through its "narrativization in the political unconscious," then we must not easily dismiss the real power of difference to resist the reifying tendencies of studies such as Sollors's with their presumptuous claims to move "beyond ethnicity" toward the formation of a unitary American culture. (19)

It might be well to notice that one of the things that is usually omitted from such unitary models of an American culture or an American ideological consensus arising from a Puritan, New England, middle-class perspective of the origins of American literary history is the literary tradition of the Southwest. It is a story that tells of the extermination of Native Americans, the enslavement of African-Americans, the subjugation of the MexicanAmerican people, the oppression of the working class, and the enforcement of the patriarchy.

Because of the decisive connections that are always being made in the writings of Chicano men and women between historical and aesthetic concerns, interest in this marginal group of literary texts is by no means unjustifiable. It is certainly the case that the critical project of many MexicanAmerican authors has been to offer a different perspective on the volatile configurations of literary and social history that crystallize in twentiethcentury American society, in order that we may better understand the workings of that developing postmodern world. This critical understanding takes the form of what I call "the dialectics of difference."

F. O. Matthiessen's great book, *American Renaissance*, set the terms for the study of American literature: according to Matthiessen, his authors "felt that it was incumbent upon their generation to give fulfillment to the potentialities freed by the Revolution, to provide a culture commensurate with America's political opportunity" (1941, Preface). The oppositional literature of twentieth-century Mexican- American men and women is a direct resistance to the ideas inherent in "America's political opportunity," an opportunity that rationalized the colonized oppression of the native people of the Southwest and the exclusion of their writings from the canon of American literature.

An oppositional reconstruction of American literary history would recapture those stories and use them to construct a dialogical system to help us understand both the canonical master works that were sanctioned by the American ideological consensus and the antagonistic works that were not. By placing the masterworks in a framework that includes the voices to which the master texts were covertly opposed, voices that were silenced by the hegemonic culture, we might indeed begin to formulate a truly integrated American literary history. (20)