

Implicitness in Narrative Fiction

Robert Champigny's "Implicitness in Narrative Fiction" [*PMLA*, Oct. 1970, pp. 988–91] does not account, it appears, for two types of implicitness which play an important role in fiction. His notion of implicitness in the last resort implies a referring to verifiable facts. The inferences he talks about are in tune with the most elementary logic, a logic of "things." But are the objects we encounter in any text, historical or fictional, "things"? What a text presents to us are what a phenomenologist would call intentional objects, objects created solely by the meaning of the text. As such they are schematized, they have what Ingarden calls "Leerstellen" (gaps). As Champigny correctly remarks, a historical text is always incomplete whereas a fictional one is complete. But the possibility of adding to a historical text has little to do with the "implicit definitions" of the words used in that text. It is due to the possibility of turning from the text to the nonverbal reality it refers to, and making further assertions about that reality, thus eliminating a few more of the gaps of the intentional objects. If Champigny's examples suggest otherwise, it is due to their high degree of probability: in all of them one can safely draw the inference without having to take the risk that it will be falsified by the facts.

But is this type of inference really used in "the way we furnish the historical field with appropriate details"? Will the historical field not rather confront us with inferences of low probability? Of these implications of low probability one would have to say: what is implied is not more than a possibility which cannot be developed into explicit descriptions of events except by referring to data or documents. This implicitness is, in other words, the spur for further research; it provides the historian with hypotheses that have to be substantiated. If they can be substantiated, they will indeed change the cognitive content of the text. The inferences on the other hand that are possible in Champigny's examples would not change that of the historical piece: they are not worth making. And they would indeed "hardly change the cognitive content of the narrative piece." But what about those low probability inferences in a fictional text? I suggest that just being aware of them does change the cognitive content of the narrative fundamentally. In fact, is not narrative tension built on them, the play with blind motives, with foreshadowings? And is not the solution of the narrative tension in a novel often brought about by the author finally providing the reader with some informa-

tion that he could not obtain himself, since, as Champigny correctly remarks, "the statements of a novel are . . . complete," i.e., since he himself is in no position to make any verifiable assertions about the world of the novel that might fill out the gaps.

Champigny's verdict that "esthetically, such either-or imperatives are impertinent" only applies to inferences that are impertinent cognitively both in fictional and historical narratives. There are other either-or inferences that are cognitively pertinent in a historical narrative. Those, I think, are both esthetically and cognitively relevant in the fictional mode: they are largely responsible for a certain type of progression of the narrative.

My second point concerns those implications that cannot be verified empirically but are rather conditioned culturally. The "semantic aura" of a word that displays this type of implicitness is not circumscribed once and for all by "natural laws," by what is. Instead, it has a history, it can expand, can even get lost. That means, we must include in an account of implicitness in fiction the implications a word gains when it is used as a trope, either by a whole culture (cf. the Cross) or by an individual author (cf. bird and tree in Yeats). Public and private iconographies would thus come under the heading of implicitness.

Turning to Champigny's conclusion that the "semantic status of implicitness changes when we turn from history to fiction," we realize that it is not applicable to the type of implicitness we are dealing with here. The use of this kind of implicitness does not differ in the least whether it is used in a fictional or a historical narrative. In both it calls for explication. True, there is a difference in the distribution of private and public tropes: historical narration will contain public iconography almost exclusively if it wants to escape the charge of obscurity. But there is no reason why a private trope should not become common property and wander out of fiction and into historical writing, or why a universally understood trope should not occur in fiction, either modified in its range of implications by context, or not. The tree in Champigny's example "neither blossomed nor did not blossom" since the author of the piece of fiction chose not to mention the blossoming. But if the same author had identified this tree by his context as the tree of life, and if that tree were further identified, as is imaginable, as, e.g., the Cross of Golgotha, the same word could have, as a trope, several coexisting sets of literary implications. The task of the commentator would then not be,

as Champigny demands, to avoid the positing of the implications as event, but to demonstrate how the event that is implicated by this particular use of the tree can be integrated into the other events explicitly mentioned by the text. The whole problem of a piece of fiction proceeding on several levels comes in sight here, as well as the interconnection of those levels.

The importance of this addition to Champigny's concept of implicitness will become clear if we consider the impact of culturally conditioned implications on a given text. Whereas Champigny's concept of implicitness, as we suggested earlier, comprised only implications that are not subject to historical change, i.e., implications which we can explicate on the basis of our knowledge of the laws of nature, the implicitness of tropes is characterized by its historicalness. Consequently, I would argue against the neat distinction between the historical and fictional modes and for a closer proximity of the cognitive and esthetic perspectives than Champigny would admit.

Champigny observes that "while a historical narration necessarily includes, explicitly or not, the historian and the reader in the field of events, a fictional narrative can very well do without a fictional narrator, or rememberer, or forecaster. All that is needed is an observer to carry the point of view." If we keep in mind that the culturally conditioned implicitness of the tropes drags historicalness into the fictional mode, we have to add to this account, that due to, among other things, this historicalness of the tropes, that point of view is itself part of a historical field, namely that of the text, and that the "carrying of the point of view" is an event that takes place in a different historical field, namely that of the reader. The "all that is needed" thus turns out to be a most difficult task both to accomplish and to understand: the fusing of the horizons of the two fields.

The point could be made that my objections are peripheral to Champigny's intention in his essay. But since "implicitness" is not yet a concept that has been pre-empted by truth-functional analysis, we should not voluntarily hand it over to that field of research unless we are willing to accept a meaning of "implicitness" that can only occur in scientific discourse. There may be some merit in locating the specific difference of literature by opposing it to scientific discourse, as the New Criticism has demonstrated. But there is also a danger, as Champigny's essay shows: we end up defining literature *ex negativo*, concealing at the same time issues that are much more central to an understanding of literature than, for example, the opposition of a truth-functional concept of implicitness to literature.

BERNHARD F. SCHOLZ
Wabash College

Mr. Champigny replies:

I thank Bernhard Scholz for his critical interest. I have the impression that the divergences go deep: they involve different ways of classifying and ordering modes of existence and meaning. Thus, for me, to interpret a narrative as fiction is, *ipso facto*, to adopt a non-cognitive perspective. Bernhard Scholz must favor another classification, one which allows him to say: "cognitively relevant in the fictional mode." He seems to consider "natural laws" as something which is ontologically basic ("what is"). To me, they are tools of human knowledge and their uses may vary historically. I suspect that he and I would articulate epistemology and ontology differently.

He brings historical considerations into the interpretation of a narrative as fiction in two ways.

Regarding the moment of writing, he adopts the perspective of historical philology. Any text may serve as material for this perspective. But, to this extent, it is not read as narrative fiction (or, say, philosophy). No doubt, to make sense of the words, I may have to draw upon the results of historical inquiry. But determining that a word was used in a certain sense at the time of writing is one thing; accepting the word in this sense, another. A philosopher may even specify that he is using an English word in a "Platonic sense." The uttering of a Greek word by Plato in a Platonic (or non-Platonic) sense is a historical event; but not a Platonic sense, a Victorian (type of) style, a Mallarméan pun.

Regarding the moment of reading, Bernhard Scholz says that the "carrying of the point of view" is an event that takes place in a different historical field (moment?), namely, that of the reader. The point of view I was talking about is internal to the fictional world: it is signified by the text interpreted as narrative fiction. Bernhard Scholz's formulation threatens to reduce to one perspective what, to me, involves at least three:

1. A historicizing perspective: I objectify myself as a historical individual with a copy of a text in his hands at a certain time in a certain place.

2. A non-temporalizing perspective: to the extent that I understand, I coincide with the signifying text (not the copy; not what is signified). To this extent, I am not a spatio-temporal entity, either historical or fictional.

3. A temporalizing perspective, in the fictional mode: the text signifies fictional events and processes and among these processes there is a character signified as carrying the point of view. (If I interpreted the narrative as historical, I would introduce myself and the author of the text, man or machine, as historical entities implicitly signified by the text, so that perspectives one and three would be the same.)

Such perspectives may be confused in experience: if they never were, there would be no point in trying to make theoretical distinctions, in the way I proposed or in some other way. The spectator who shot at an entity which was neither an actor, nor Othello, and yet both, dragged “historicalness into the fictional mode” with a vengeance. The perspective of interpretation of one narrative may hover between false, true, and fictional. Texts labeled “novels” (not to mention “historical novels”) often favor a confusion between an interpretation as history and an interpretation as fiction. This confused perspective may be called the perspective of legend. If I assume Sherlock Holmes to be fictional, I cannot let him roam the streets of the historical London sixty years or so before I did. I interpret “London” as the name of a fictional city similar to the historical city to the extent that topographical details consonant with my concept of the historical London are explicitly given; and the rest of my concept functions as atmospheric background. But the accumulation of details of this sort tends to let the principle of the identity of indiscernibles assert itself over the semantic distinction. Both the city and the character are thus turned into legendary entities.

Bernhard Scholz is quite right in stressing that the types of implicitness I dealt with are far from covering the whole semantic range. I was concerned only with two types of implicitness involved in interpreting a narrative as such, that is to say, as describing events and processes in one spatio-temporal field (*the* historical field, or one fictional field). The preceding paragraph suggests that the examination could extend to other cases of a shift in the status of implicitness as one turns from an interpretation of a narrative as cognitive to an interpretation as fiction. On the other hand, the types of implicitness which Bernhard Scholz mentions (others could be added) do not appear to me to concern narratives specifically.

Whether such considerations are deemed central or peripheral to an understanding of literature depends, of course, on how each of us is pleased to define the term “literature.” Personally, I see nothing wrong with a variety of approaches, hence of definitions, as long as we can tell one from another.

ROBERT CHAMPIGNY
Indiana University

A Misuse of Statistics in Studying Intellectual History

To the Editor:

The spreading use of statistics in humanistic studies is reflected in Earl Miner’s “Patterns of Stoicism in Thought and Prose Styles, 1530–1700” (*PMLA*, Oct. 1970, pp. 1023–34). On the basis of statistical counts of

certain books, Mr. Miner suggests that “Stoic” writings were neglected in England between 1580 and 1630, but regained popularity after the Restoration. These conclusions, if correct, would force extensive revisions of accepted views of the history of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English thought and prose styles. Mr. Miner says that his statistical “evidence is technically simple,” replaces “surmise” with “fact,” and can be disproved only by “the strongest contrary evidence.” Once some errors in Mr. Miner’s data and methodology are corrected, however, his own compilations will provide the strong “contrary evidence” whose existence he doubts.

A statistical study of the course of Stoic influences in England between 1530 and 1700 can hardly be valid or clear unless its author consistently uses for comparative purposes one well-chosen base period. Since Mr. Miner principally challenges the common belief “that Stoicism in various guises reached the height of its influence in the period from about 1580 to 1630,” his comparisons of the numbers of Stoic publications between 1530 and 1700 should be measured against the single base period 1580–1630. Of the sixteen tables in Mr. Miner’s article, however, only one shows the period 1580–1630 separately, and all sixteen place their main chronological divisions at 1600 and 1660. Furthermore, in discussing individual writers, Mr. Miner often uses additional base periods. In dealing with Seneca’s plays, for example, he uses the periods “1539 to 1585” and “between 1586 and 1659,” which are arbitrary and are based on erroneous dates. The earliest “English *Seneca*” was published in 1559 (*STC* 22227) or, if one admits pseudo-Senecan works, in 1516 (*STC* 17498), but in no case in 1539. The dates 1585 and 1586 are arbitrary and wrong; they are based on misdating *STC* 22217 (*Tragoediae*, 1589) in 1585. Mr. Miner omits from his lists of English Seneca numerous Senecan and pseudo-Senecan works which belong in a study of English Stoicism, including *STC* 17498–502, 18155, and 22229, Aggas’ Senecan selections of ca. 1577, Gager’s additions to *Hippolytus* (*STC* 11515), and lost and unpublished plays translated from Seneca. In addition, Mr. Miner takes little account of allusions, imitations, and other well-known and substantial evidences of Seneca’s influence, nor does he allow for the bibliographical significance of variant imprints and books imported from the Continent. Similar errors appear in Mr. Miner’s treatment of authors other than Seneca; for example, he places the 1594 Lipsius in 1589 and the 1556 Boethius in 1593. One also senses an anachronism in his citation of Sidney against the view that the plays of Kyd and Chapman (all of which can be dated after Sidney’s death) are markedly Senecan. (Sidney’s sister was, in any case, largely responsible for bringing “French Seneca” into England.)