Response to
"On Narration and Theory"

HOWARD MANCING

¡*Válame Dios*!, *cervantista ilustre (o quier plebeyo)*, how eagerly you must be looking forward to this response, expecting to find in it revenge, argument, and vituperation against the author of "On Narration and Theory" (ONaT hereafter), a commentary on my "Cervantes as Narrator of *Don Quijote*" (CaN hereafter)! Perhaps you hope I will call him misguided, thin-skinned, egocentric, imperceptive, and/or retrograde, but the author of the CaN will do no such thing, for the person involved is no anonymous and envious rival from Tordesillas but a long-time friend from Riverside, California. I have known Jim Parr for many years and we have shared drinks, food, companionship, games of pool, and long hours of conversation on numerous occasions. He is one of the finest *cervantistas* of our generation. His book Don Quixote*: An Anatomy of Subversive Discourse* (1988) is, as he proudly and correctly shows in ONaT, one of the most important books on Cervantes' novel in the last quarter of a century. But I think he missed the point of my CaN.

I. Theoretical context.
    In the opening paragraph of ONaT, Jim makes an observation

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that could not be more accurate: that I attempted in CaN to up-
date and provide new justification for a position I have main-
tained for many years. As far back as 1981, in an essay published
in the first issue of this journal, I made much the same point,
treating Cervantes as editor of Cide Hamete Benengeli's history,
but without discussing the theoretical underpinnings of the idea
to any significant degree. That essay was a chapter extracted from
my book *The Chivalric World of Don Quijote* (1982), then in produc-
tion. Interestingly, Elias L. Rivers wrote a brief response to my
1981 essay, making many of the points that Jim makes, insisting
on a necessary ontological distinction between Cervantes the
man of flesh and blood and the narrative voice of the text. So, Jim
is right that I have for decades been proposing the scheme I reit-
erated in CaN.

At the very end of ONaT, Jim wonders why it took me fifteen
years to offer my critique of the schema he proposed in 1988.[1]
The answer to this has two parts. First, CaN was by no means
intended as a criticism solely, or even primarily, of Jim's book and
his approach to narrators in *Don Quijote*. I explicitly intended my
remarks to address the positions of Fernández Mosquera, Flores,
Haley, Lathrop, López Navia, Martín Morán, Parr, Paz Gago,
Presburg, and Weiger, among many others.[2] The reason I refer
often to Jim Parr is that I consider his book to be perhaps the sin-
gle most important statement written on the subject. So, I was
not writing specifically to criticize Jim Parr alone, but to address
dominant trends in scholarly approaches to the question of the
narrator(s) in Cervantes' novel.

Second, it took me fifteen years to write what I did because it

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[1] Jim also laments that I cited only his 1988 book and none of the 17 other
works of his (not all of which I have read; at least two of which are not yet in
print) listed in his bibliography of ONaT that deal with aspects of narrative in Cer-
vantes. The reason I did so was because, in the interests of brevity and generality,
I chose not to include in CaN an exhaustive bibliography on the subject; his later
studies thus join dozens, if not hundreds, of essays, articles, and books that I did
not cite directly. No slight intended.

[2] In order to avoid redundancy, I do not include in my list of Works Cited
here names of those scholars to whom I merely refer and whose work is listed in
the bibliography of my CaN and/or Jim Parr's ONaT.

took me that long to figure out how to articulate my position with enough conviction to commit it to print. As I indicate in the final note to CaN, I have been trying out versions of my approach in papers read on various occasions since 1991. For just over a decade now, I have been working toward what I want to consider a conceptual and theoretical position that is more sophisticated and defensible than what I originally wrote in my 1982 book and what I was able to say in the early 1990s. I think I have found a theoretical framework that now allows me to write about fictional versions of historical selves. That theoretical framework is grounded, above all, in contemporary cognitive science.

In his ONaT, Jim defends his original 1988 stance and criticizes mine in CaN by citing the likes of Booth, Derrida, Frye, Genette, and Prince, all formalists, structuralists, and poststructuralists whose work dates from the 1960s and 1970s. I feel a certain nostalgia for the days when we could look upon such scholars as "cutting edge," the latest and best there was, the days when we actually thought that linguistic messages were simply encoded and sent by one subject and received and decoded by another: the classic "conduit metaphor" or "telementation theory" of communication that now looks so quaint and primitive and that is absolutely unacceptable as a meaningful model of human communication (see Reddy, Lakoff "Contemporary Theory," and Harris). As Jim himself notes, referring to the book by Herman Rapaport, "theory today is not a pretty sight,"[3] yet he continues to ground his work in what he calls "high theory." Well, I don't. I was never comfortable with French-based theory, especially as centered around the work of Saussure, Barthes, Derrida, Foucault, Lacan, Althusser, and others. Until I started reading extensively in the areas of post-Chomskyan linguistics, contemporary cognitive science, and biological (and evolutionary) theory, I didn't have much in the way of grounds to consider an alternative to what neoconservative high-church poststructuralist theory had to offer. Now I do. I have for the last few years been attempting to

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[3] 121; see also Cameron, Graham, Harland, Holland, Jackson, Tallis, among others, for further significant critiques of contemporary literary theory.

organize into a coherent statement what I believe to be the relationships between embodied cognitive science and literary theory, and I hope to publish something on the subject before too long. In the interim, I have published a kind of précis of that work in an article entitled "Rastier Revisited: Paradigms in Conflict"; in addition, two recent essays published in this journal ("Against Dualisms" and "Prototypes of Genre") have the same theoretical grounding. I refer readers to those essays for an alternative to French-based literary theory.[4]

Since CaN is an essay on the subject of narrative voice, I wanted to employ the discourse of narrative theory as much as possible, in order not to extend the piece's length too much or to distract the reader from my main points. For this reason, I relied crucially on Susan Lanser's *The Narrative Act* (1981), a book I still consider more useful than Genette's classic work,[5] and a book which Jim also praises, even if primarily for aspects of it other than those I most like.

But in addition to Lanser and a few other more traditional studies of narrative theory, I specifically appeal in CaN to three sources of conceptual and theoretical support that are much more recent than the old-timers Jim relies on: 1) M. M. Bakhtin (I know, he started writing in the 1920s and died in 1975, but he is the most contemporary of all theorists; see below, Section III), 2) a few contemporary cognitive scientists (Bruner, Freeman, Kosko, Tavris, and Turner), all writing in the 1990s, and 3) some narrative theorists and others (Burke, Close, Herman, Hix, Keefer, and Stanley) whose work on narration, self, autobiography, and reading are also from the 1990s. It is interesting that Jim Parr refers to none of them (except in a brief, passing remark about the dangers of importing concepts from other fields—horrors, that we should dare to look beyond our own narrow scholarly specialization!—

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[4] A list of 500 books relevant to these issues is posted on the Internet page entitled "The Cognitive Paradigm: An Introductory Reading List" (<http://www.sla.purdue.edu/academic/fll/cogtheory/CogLit_biblio.html>, 30 September 2003).

[5] As Jim notes (121–22), Genette's approach to narratology is grounded in his study of Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*, a novel whose narrative scheme is far simpler than that of *Don Quijote*.

and a similarly brief one on Bakhtin, which I will cite later). It is as though he wants to go over the same old ground, where he feels comfortable, again and again, and not consider a newer alternative, mistakenly referring to my approach to narrative voice instead as old-fashioned and traditional. He doesn't seem to get it. He simply has nothing to say about my suggestion that we often fictionalize ourselves in real life and can easily do the same in what we write, fictional or otherwise; about the way the "I" functions in life and in written or spoken autobiographical discourse; about the ontological status of Cervantes' prologues; about the very persuasive statements by Toolan and Bakhtin about masks and life; about the fact that (along with a number of other scholars whom I cite) I don't find the concept of implied (or inferred) author coherent or of any conceptual value; or about the binary trap common to much of what Bakhtin calls "theoreticism." I will not defend my work in terms of prolepsis, metalepsis, the disnarrated, inferred authors, and all the rest of the antiquated formalist and structuralist jargon. I want to use a newer, more sophisticated terminology drawn from our contemporary understanding of the human animal and human cognitive processes, and not the outmoded and no longer useful discourse of semiotics, structuralism, narratology, and poststructuralism. So, since Jim did not offer the slightest critique of my theoretical stance, I can do no more than reiterate it. I invite the reader to go back and read my essay for my (so far unrefuted) approach.

II. Specific points.

Jim writes that he is not comfortable with my "conflation of history and poetry" (120). Talk about old-time theory: Aristotle, no less, and a classical binary opposition at that. Let me simply refer readers to Richard J. Gerrig's *Experiencing Narrative Worlds*, a superb presentation of how real human beings actually read and respond to narrative works of literature, based on some of the latest and best evidence from cognitive psychology. No one who is interested in narrative theory or theories of reading should fail to take this book into consideration. A basic assumption made by Gerrig is that "we continually draw inferences and exhibit partici-

patory responses in everyday life. In some respects, our real world is as much constructed as any narrative world" (26). In contrast to many traditional literary scholars and philosophers, Gerrig (201–07) does not make any essential distinction between fiction and reality. This stands in opposition to a distinction that is crucial to Jim Parr and the theorists on whom he relies: the poetry/history (literature/life, fiction/nonfiction) binary. Gerrig specifically cites John Searle's classic essay of this sort on "The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse" (1975), where an attempt is made to distinguish between the mutually exclusive ways in which people read texts they believe to be either fiction or nonfiction. Gerrig rejects all such approaches. Rather, he says, we do not throw a mental toggle-switch to convert our minds from fiction to nonfiction. When we read fiction, we accept it all as true (though not necessarily as factual), with reference to the real world as we know it, except when we have reason to do otherwise. When a text is inconsistent with our world-view, our experience, our beliefs, we have the options of either modifying our view of the world or reading the text as fictional (to a greater or lesser extent). This is a process that is so easy and so natural that everyone who can read is able do it, and in fact everyone does it all the time—both while reading texts and in all other aspects of life. Belief modification, also known as learning, is something that goes on constantly. Fiction and fact are not two mutually exclusive categories, but two poles on a continuum between which we place things in life, including what we read in texts.

Jim wryly notes my use of the word *discrete* and takes it to stand as "a telling emblem" (121) for my argument. I would simply see it as a spelling or typographical error. (Cide Hamete Eisenberg reports that he cannot believe that I would have misused such a word and leaves it to the judgment of the prudent reader to determine what must have happened, for he can do no more, even though it is considered certain that some say that they believe that on my deathbed I will retract that spelling and admit that I was wrong. But, in the meantime, he dutifully publishes the essay as he received it, without changing an atom of the text.)

Jim points out (120, 125–26) that apparently he and I do not

read Lanser's term "private narrator" in the same way. He seems to use the term solely for someone who tells his or her own story, as do, for example, Cardenio, Dorotea, Ruy Pérez de Viedma, and Eugenio, among others, in *Don Quijote* I; in his view, Cide Hamete is not a private narrator. I, on the other hand, take Lanser to mean by that term any narrator whose narrative is embedded within the primary or frame narrative, the one closest to the reader, the "public narrator." In the sense I understand it, Cide Hamete is not a private narrator like Cardenio or Dorotea, but he, like them, is a private narrator (of a different sort), and the narrating characters' narration is embedded within his, which is embedded within that of Cervantes.

It is, by the way, interesting that Jim is, and always has been, so insistent on withholding from Cide Hamete the status of a narrator. If narrator means "the person who tells/writes a narrative," as I think it does, then the Muslim historian is indeed a narrator. It is just that his narration is translated and edited, and therefore mediated and not directly accessible to us. Dorotea, for example, told her tale in Spanish, Cide Hamete wrote it in Arabic, the translator converted it back to Spanish (the *morisco* is no Pierre Menard, so there is no reason to believe that his version reproduces Dorotea's original discourse verbatim, nor did he have a text of that narrative for comparison), and Cervantes edited it for us to read. Dorotea tells the story of her seduction by Don Fernando; Cide Hamete tells that story, several others originally told by other characters, and the story of the events in the life of Don Quijote and Sancho: both Dorotea and Cide Hamete are narrators, both are hierarchically subordinate to the public text of Miguel de Cervantes. Cervantes is narrator as well as editor, since he tells us the stories that Dorotea, Cide Hamete, and others previously narrated. Take out those parts of the story originally written—narrated—by Cide Hamete and there isn't much left.

Jim modestly cites the more recent narratological work of Martín Morán, Paz Gago, and Stoopen—"today's preeminent Cervantine narratologists" (126)—as confirming his own (but with some very significant areas of disagreement). Although Jim describes the work of these scholars as having "offered more

elaborate and sophisticated expositions on these matters that I was capable of doing in 1988" (131), I suggest that none of them has surpassed his work. I have already explained why I don't find any of this supposedly "preeminent" work particularly original or sophisticated. I cited the first two, but not the third, in my CaN, because I did not know María Stoopen's work until April of 2003, when Jim introduced me to her at a Cervantes conference on his home territory at the University of California, Riverside. She is a charming individual who graciously gave me a copy of her recent book. That book is a superb example of narratological analysis, and it is filled with insights in areas not directly related to narrative theory. But it also exemplifies some the problems with the narratological approach, not the least of which is the uncontrolled proliferation of terminology. For example, in her relatively brief chapter on "La autoría y la instancia narradora del texto definitivo" (269–96), Stoopen uses the following terms: *autor, autor de todo el libro, autor del prólogo, autor empírico, autor explícito, autor explícito del prólogo, autor ficcionalizado, autor ficticio, autor histórico, autor imaginado, autor implícito, autor inicial de la historia, autor inicial de los primeros ocho capítulos, autor intermediario, autor liminal, autor manifiesto del prólogo y la obra, autor manifiesto original, autor narrador inicial, autor narrador-protagonista, autor no declarado, autor o compilador, autor real, autor virtual, ego Miguel de Cervantes autor del prólogo y de la narrativa que introduce, segundo autor,* and *supuesto autor del manuscrito*.[6] Try as I might, I just can't keep them all straight all the time. I don't think the matter should be that complicated and confusing.[7]

Jim takes offense at my noting that Cervantes—or, as he preferred to write in 1988, the "extra-textual *historical author*" (*Subversive Discourse* 31)—receives less attention than any other voice or presence in his eleven-level scheme of the narrative structure of

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[6] There are many more kinds of authors (and readers and narrators) in the remainder of her fairly long book. But Stoopen is not alone in this, as Martín Morán, Paz Gago, Parr, and many others are more or less guilty of the same proliferation of terms.

[7] [Ed. note: see the review article of Stoopen by Polchen, published in this issue of *Cervantes*.]

Don Quijote. It is true that later in the book, Jim identifies Cervantes as the real "hero" of the work and, for him, much more interesting in his creative achievement than is Don Quijote the character. Jim's anti-Unamuno, and very quixotic, defense of Cervantes in the sense of "author" in the traditional meaning of the word is one of the greatest achievements of his book. But that is a separate issue from the matter of the identity of textual narrators, and it in no way negates the fact that, in his view, Cervantes as such (and in the sense in which I use the name) has no significant role in the narrative structure of the novel. Furthermore, when I wrote that passage I was thinking of several other scholars at least as much as, if not more than, I was of Jim.

In a major point of disagreement between us, Jim argues that there are indeed "textual markers" (Lanser's term, which we both accept) that makes clear the distinction between the "first author," the "second author" and the "supernarrator" (129). According to him, such markers or signals "seem to me quite clear." Ah, but there's the rub. I believe (and I understand Lanser to mean) that the textual marker must be *explicit*. Let me cite Lancer's words again:

> Ordinarily, the unmarked case of narration for public narrators is that the narrating voice is equated with the textual author (the extrafictional voice or "implied author") unless a different case is *marked—signaled*—by the text. In other words, in the absence of *direct markings* which separate the public narrator from the extrafictional voice, so long as it is possible to give meaning to the text within the equation author = narrator, readers will conventionally make this equation. (151; emphasis added.)

It *seems clear* to Jim that such signals are present. Nothing of the sort seems clear to me. He detects a change in tone and attitude (how one reads the mind of a textual structure is another matter) between that of the second author and that of the supernarrator. I perceive no such change in tone. With Lanser, I insist that the textual marker must be explicit and not something that

some readers seem to see while others do not. After all, to a rabid anti-abortionist, it *seems quite clear* that all abortion is murder; it *seems quite clear* to George W. Bush that the recent (and, as of this writing, ongoing) war in Iraq is fully justified; to take a literary example, it *seems quite clear* to Dom Casmurro (protagonist of Machado de Assis's brilliant 1899 novel of that title) that his wife is an adulteress and that he is not the father of the child he had thought was his. But all of these are what cognitive linguist George Lakoff calls *contested concepts*: "concepts for which everybody seems to have a different idea of what the concept is" ("Neurocognitive Self" 223). What seems clear to one person is not necessarily clear to another. You can't have a stop sign that seems clear to some drivers but is invisible to others; a stop sign must be manifest to all if it is to have any function as a traffic signal. In a fictional narrative the textual marker for a change of narrator must be explicit, and in the case of *Don Quijote* it simply is not.

The closest Jim comes to identifying something he takes as an explicit textual marker is the famous passage found at the end of *Don Quijote* I, 8, where, as he notes, the editorial voice switches from first-person to third-person:

> The change of voice here, from the implicit narrator, the first author, is fairly obvious. Some commentators collapse this voice into that of the second author, however. If it is the second author, it is the only time in the two volumes—if memory serves—when a narrator speaks of himself in third person. It would be a rather conspicuous anomaly. I feel that patterning takes precedence over eccentricity. Narrators in the *Quixote* sometimes refer to themselves in first, person, but never in third person. That is the established pattern. (129–30)

I submit, however, that speakers and writers often refer to themselves in the third person in the context of first-person discourse. A classic example can be found in *Lazarillo de Tormes*, Tratado I, when the *ciego* smashes the wine jug into Lazarillo's face: "le dejó caer sobre mi boca, …de manera que el pobre Lázaro…

estaba descuidado y gozoso, verdaderamente me pareció que el cielo…" (101).[8] All of us have heard politicians speak of themselves in the third person: "You won't have Nixon to kick around any more because, gentlemen, this is my last press conference," or "People have got to know whether or not their President is a crook. Well, I'm not a crook."[9] Most of us have used the same technique in the classroom: "No; the professor in this course will not cancel the final exam; I will administer the exam as scheduled on…." And ten narratological bonus points to all readers who noticed the same technique in the very first paragraph of this essay and immediately said to themselves, "Aha!, the text here refers to Mancing in the third person; therefore, someone else must have written these words" (and one narratological bonus point to me for every reader who did not make that exclamation).

To my way of thinking, the shift from first to third person has no status whatsoever as a textual marker identifying a new narrator. Furthermore, people can and often do shift the tone of their discourse from one moment to the next. I have seen Jim Parr be serious and professorial at one moment, jocular and laughing at the next, and pensive and meditative just after that. A perceived change in tone does not in any way necessarily equate to a change in the identity of the person (or textual voice) involved. If so, I have to wonder which was the "real" (or is it the "inferred"?) Jim Parr I was with and which the "second Parr," the "super-Parr," and so forth. Maybe Jim needs to write an essay entitled "Jim Parr y yo" (or, better: "Todos los Jim Parrs y yo," because there are clearly many more than the two selves Borges had to deal with). I reiterate my statement about the principle of parsimony: "I believe that a simple consistent answer is superior to a

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[8] Editor Alberto Blecua comments in a note: "El cambio a la tercera persona no es, por descontado, un descuido del autor. Se trata de un medio más con que cuenta para lograr la evidencia de la escena" (101 n. 77).

[9] Richard Nixon's speeches provide a treasure-trove of such discourse; see the Internet page entitled *Speeches by and about Richard Nixon*, especially the 1973 "Second Watergate Speech" and the 1974 "Release of Watergate Tapes" speech (<http://www.watergate.info/nixon/speeches.shtml>, 30 September 2003). The earlier quote from Nixon is from his 1962 concession speech after he lost the race for governor of California.

complex consistent answer. It is simpler—and perfectly consistent with the other evidence of the text—to read this passage [i.e., the passage at the end of I, 8] as another reference to the public narrator Cervantes and his playful metafictional search for sources" (CaN, 130).

III. Bakhtin.

Finally, let me comment briefly on where I think Bakhtin fits into narrative theory. Jim states that he agrees with Bakhtin about some of the excesses of "theoreticism" but then, in what could be read as a snide tone (does this indicate a shift in the identity of the writer?), remarks: "Likely he refers to theories other than his own" (122). But it is precisely here that Bakhtin differs most fundamentally from all the consecrated high priests of literary theory. The latter propose a theory—the arbitrariness of the sign, there is nothing outside the text, discourses of power, the mirror stage, interpellation, and so forth—and read everything—text, world, history, psyche—exclusively in terms of that wonderful theory, and let text, world, history, and psyche be damned if they don't conform. So the theorists force them to conform—by misrepresenting them, if necessary. This is what Bakhtin means by "theoreticism."

The earliest of all Bakhtin's writings—and the last to be published and least known—is *Towards a Philosophy of the Act*, written about 1920, not published in Russian until 1986 and in English until 1993. It is crucial to any real understanding of Bakhtin's work. Right from the very beginning, Bakhtin argues against theoreticism and refuses to surrender his own personal agency and responsibility: "Any kind of practical orientation of my life within the theoretical world is impossible: it is impossible to live in it, impossible to perform answerable deeds. In that world I am unnecessary; I am essentially and fundamentally non-existent in it" (9). As opposed to any sort of depersonalized "Other," Bakhtin contextualizes and particularizes human relationships: "Man-in-general does not exist; *I* exist and a particular concrete *other* exists" (47). Furthermore, we are answerable for what we do and say: "Every thought of mine, along with its content, is an act or

deed that I perform—my own individually answerable act or 'deed'" (3). As he will continue to do throughout all his later writings, Bakhtin insists on the contextualized individual: "I occupy a place in once-occurrent Being that is unique and never-repeatable, a place that cannot be taken by anyone else and is impenetrable for anyone else. In the given once-occurrent point where I am now located, no one else has ever been located in the once-occurrent time and once-occurrent space of once-occurrent Being…. Any universally valid value becomes *actually* valid only in an individual *context*" (40, 36).

Bakhtin and his colleagues of the so-called Bakhtin Circle of the 1920s, particularly V. N. Voloshinov and P. N. Medvedev, wrote stinging critiques (still largely valid today) of Russian formalism, Saussurean linguistics, and Freudian psychoanalytic theory in precisely these terms. Bakhtin's own "theories" (if one can call them that) are entirely different. The single most consistent theme that runs through Bakhtin's work on aesthetics, moral theory, cultural theory, linguistics, psychology, and literature is that of *context*. Nothing means (or signifies) in and of itself; something has meaning only in context, in a concrete, once-occurrent, ethical-social-historical-linguistic-emotional-volitional situation. Throughout his writings, Bakhtin continually circled back around on his own concepts—answerability, excess of seeing, chronotope, heteroglossia, dialogism, carnival, metalinguistics, polyphony, and more—modifying and clarifying them, always contextualizing them. This is one of the reasons his work has so often been appropriated (usually misappropriated) by formalists, Marxists, semioticians, structuralists, deconstructionists, and others. However, Bakhtin's concepts are more consistent with the contemporary cognitive science paradigm mentioned earlier than it is with any brand of theory popular in literary studies from the mid-twentieth century to the present.[10]

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[10] Compare, for example, Bakhtin's statement on agency at the end of the previous paragraph ("I occupy a place in once-occurrent Being") with the same point as articulated by cognitive psychologist Ulric Neisser: "Every person's possibilities for perceiving and acting are entirely unique, because no one else occupies exactly his position in the world or has had exactly his history" (53). See also my essay in

Bakhtin never endorses anything that resembles a narratological approach to literary texts. Bakhtin stresses the communicative utterance rather than the linguistic word or sentence, the nonlinguistic aspects of communication (especially intonation in spoken speech), and the impossibility of studying communication outside of real-world contexts lead him to reject as inadequate the traditional study of "linguistics" in favor of a more-embracing and more-explanatory concept he calls "metalinguistics" (*Problems* 181, 202). All of this makes him the most important precursor—he would be called the founder if his work had been more widely known and influential—of what has become known as pragmatics: the study of linguistic communication in actual practice (see, for example, Clark, Gibbs, Levinson, and Sperber and Wilson). The Bakhtin, Voloshinov, and Medvedev texts on language written in the 1920s consistently stress the need to understand language in a specific context, or situation, in order to understand it at all: "To understand an utterance means to understand it in its contemporary context and our own, if they do not coincide. It is necessary to understand the meaning of the utterance, the content of the act, and its historical reality, and to do so, moreover, in their concrete inner unity" (*Formal Method* 121–22). Bakhtin's distinction between code and context, written in 1970–71, could have come from any of today's cognitive linguists: "Context and code. A context is potentially unfinalized; a code must be finalized. A code is only a technical means of transmitting information but it also has cognitive, creative significance. A code is a deliberately established, killed context" (*Speech Genres* 147). The very last thing Bakhtin wrote—in 1974, shortly before his death the following year—was a series of notes entitled "Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences" (*Speech Genres* 159–70); it is essentially an essay on context.

For Bakhtin, meaning does not exist already *in* an utterance or *in* a text, waiting to be discovered by a listener or a reader; rather, meaning—or understanding—must be actively constructed by the listener or the reader. The co-creative role of the

Semiotica for further argument of this point.

listener or reader, the active nature of understanding or mean-ing-construction, and the dialogic relationships that exist among all participants in communicative situations, are all consistent with today's cognitive approach to linguistics and the reading process (in addition to Gerrig, mentioned earlier, see, for exam-ple, the work of Crawford and Chapin, Flower, Holland, Olson, Smith, and Turner). According to Bakhtin, all true understanding is "sympathetic" (*Art and Answerability* 102–03) and "creative" (*Speech Genres* 7):

> In the actual life of speech, every concrete act of understand-ing is active: it assimilates the world to be understood into its own conceptual system filled with specific objects and emo-tional expressions, and is indissolubly merged with the re-sponse, with a motivated agreement or disagreement. *To some extent, primacy belongs to the response, as the activating principle*: it creates the ground for understanding, it prepares the ground for an active and engaged understanding. Under-standing comes to fruition only in the response. Understand-ing and response are dialectically merged and mutually con-dition each other; one is impossible without the other. (*Dialo-gic Imagina*tion 282; emphasis added.)

For Bakhtin, understanding is never a passive process, as it is conceived in Saussurean linguistics: "A passive understanding of linguistic meaning is no understanding at all" (*Dialogic Imagina-tion* 281).

Just as there is no essential or abstract meaning in an act or a text, so there is no essential or abstract perceiver and understand-er of meaning. Rather, for Bakhtin, as for today's cognitive psy-chologist, it is always the absolutely unique historically and cul-turally situated individual who understands.[11] My once-occurrent Being-as-event means that I am responsible, answerable, for my

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[11] A complement to Bakhtin's understanding of the reading process, and contemporary to some of his earlier work (dating from the 1930s), is the work of Louise M. Rosenblatt, a pioneer in embodied and contextualized reading theory, whose work has been largely ignored by subsequent literary theorists.

active, creative understanding of acts and deeds, utterances and texts. No one can understand or experience a written text for me. I, as the active, cognizing agent, am solely responsible for what a text can mean to me. But my understanding is always dialogic, always constructed in implicit active dialogue with the text's author, with others in my social and historical context, and with the past and future connotations of the words and phrases in the text. There is no final, complete, and absolute understanding: "There is neither a first nor a last word and there are no limits to the dialogic context (it extends into the boundless past and the boundless future)" (*Speech Genres* 170).

Bakhtin specifically rejects the concepts of the implied reader and the implied author:

> Contemporary literary scholars (the majority of them Structuralists) usually define a listener who is immanent in the work as an all-understanding, ideal listener. Precisely this kind of listener is postulated in the work. This, of course, is neither an *empirical* listener nor a psychological idea, an image of the listener in the soul of the author. It is an abstract ideological formulation. Counterpoised to it is the same kind of abstract ideal author. In this understanding the ideal listener is essentially a mirror image of the author who replicates him. He cannot introduce anything of his own, anything new, into the ideally understood work or into the ideally complete plan of the author…. There can be no interaction between the author and this kind of listener, no active dramatic relations, for these are not voices but abstract concepts that are equal to themselves and to one another. Only mechanistic or mathematical, empty tautological abstractions are possible here. There is not a bit of personification. (*Speech Genres* 165.)

And Bakhtin conceives of everything as *personified* in the text-based human sciences: "we can always hear voices (even while reading silently to ourselves)…. The text as such never appears as a dead thing; beginning with any text…we always arrive, in the

final analysis, at the human voice, which is to say we come up against the human being" (*Dialogic Imagination* 252–53). Where others see complex structures and abstract schemes, Bakhtin perceives *people* in dialogue: "but I hear *voices* in everything and dialogic relations among them" (*Speech Genres* 169).

I rest my case with Bakhtin. I, too, hear the voices of contextualized human beings, and in *Don Quijote* I hear above all the voice of Miguel de Cervantes. It has been my great good fortune for the last four decades to construct my own sympathetic understanding of that voice and others (including that of my good friend Jim Parr) and to engage in ongoing creative dialogue with them.[12]

Dept. of Foreign Languages and
    Literatures
Purdue University
West Lafayette, IN 49707
mancing@purdue.edu

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[12] As this response was going to press I came across the essay of Kania, that makes much the same point I do here. Kania summarizes his thesis as follows: "I have argued, then, that the best account of our engagement with literary narratives does not entail our always positing a fictional narrator—an agency at the fictional level that is credited with presenting the fictional world to us. Of course, since these are stories, there must be someone telling them, but unless there is some particular reason for thinking otherwise, I see no problem with the intuitive view that the person telling the story is the one who made it up—the author." (53).

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