

The Act of Reading Literature as Disconfirmation of Theory

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The relation between theory and literature is vexed, to say the least. On the one hand, theory has been framed as the cause of all our woes, as bringing the end of Western Civilization, as causing along the way the death of literature. (I use *framed* here in the American slang sense of a concoction of false evidence that sets someone up for accusation of a criminal act he or she did not commit.) On the other hand, scholars such as Judith Ryan have investigated the more or less positive and productive inherence of theory in many of the most important European and American novels written since 1950. (Ryan) For Ryan, theory does not interpret already existing literature. It instigates the form and themes of new literary works. Other scholars have investigated the presence of high theory in distinguished poets such as John Ashbery. I propose to show by way of an example that theory and literature are inextricably intertwined, but not quite in either of these ways.

The future of literary theory, its whither, depends on the future of literature. Let me explain what I mean by that. Literary theory is a secondary, subordinate discipline, just as is theoretical physics. Literary theory is ancillary. It is a handmaiden to literary study proper, just as theoretical physics depends on the empirical data gathered by physicists proper. Only so long as literature continues to exist and to have importance for societies and for individuals in those societies will people need literary theory. If literature ceases to have great importance in a given society, when new media become dominant, as, it can be argued for at least in the West, is happening today, literary theory will continue to be necessary

to account for literature of the past. We shall need literary theory still, but for more antiquarian purposes, that is, to help understand literature of past centuries. In those past centuries, receding further from us every day, literature still had a central cultural and individual role in the formation of citizens, as Victorian novels, for example, did in Victorian England. Literature will go on being written and read for a good while, but its older function as society-shaper, at least in the West, is being replaced by film, television, popular music, video games, the Internet, and other *teletechnological* prestidigitizing media. What might be called the 'literary' use of words or other signs is migrating to these new media. If Shakespeare were alive today he would, I'll wager, be writing film or television scripts, where the action is, just as he would have written novels if he had been a Victorian, or poetry if he had lived in the Romantic period. Shakespeare was a professional writer who wanted to make money and influence people. You can no longer do much of that today by publishing poems or novels. A hundred times more people living today, I also wager, have seen the film *Pride and Prejudice* than have read the novel.

The theoretical component of cultural studies is a quite different thing from literary theory. Why? This is because its empirical object of study is the totality of culture or social life. Literature proper is an increasingly marginal aspect of what cultural studies examines. Cultural studies is a branch of sociology or of anthropology, as these disciplines have been appropriated by more and more people nominally in the humanities, often in what are still, sometimes misleadingly, called literature departments. Nothing is wrong with this, since these young scholars, as in the case of my hypothetical Shakespeare, are shifting to media more important in Western society, that is, to film, television, popular music, the Internet, video games, etcetera. It is, however, a big mistake to confuse literary theory with cultural theory. The data they are meant to account for are quite distinct.

The relation of literary theory to cultural studies is a complex issue. Much more could be said about it than I have said so far. Here are some brief further indications: Literature is certainly part of culture, just as are films, culinary conventions, clothing habits, popular music, and interior decorating. As a part of culture, literature can certainly be, and is, legitimately studied by cultural studies. Cultural studies, however, tend to see literature as one symptom among many of the makeup of a given culture. For cultural studies, literature is not the main concern, whereas for literary theory and literary studies literature is the main focus of attention. Cultural studies tend to stress the historical and social contexts of literary works. Cultural studies also tend to see literary

works mimetically, that is, as mirrors of the culture in which the works are embedded or which is embedded in them, even though these works are routinely granted power, at least as they functioned in the past, to shape the surrounding culture as well as just reflect it. Attention to the rhetorical, linguistic, or narratological features of literary works tends to be, in cultural studies, subordinated to plot summaries or to descriptions of the characters. These are taken as examples of the way people lived, or are thought to have lived, or were being coached to live, in a given culture. As literature in the old-fashioned sense of novels, poems, and plays comes to have less and less importance in a given culture, for example in that of the United States, literary studies become a less important component of cultural studies, as is happening in the United States. Literature has become no longer a major reflection or determinant of the way people think, feel, and see the world. By contrast to cultural theory, literary theory, like literary studies generally, has as its exclusive focus literary works. Its main business is detailed study of the way literary works work or do their work, that is, those works' structural, rhetorical, and tropological features, as these may be theorized. These features are of relatively little interest to cultural studies.

The function of literary theory is to account for specific bodies of literature (in the old-fashioned sense of printed poems, novels, and plays). Literary theory may also in some institutional or social contexts have a prescriptive as well as a descriptive or interpretative function. Literary theory may, that is, not only attempt to account for already existing literary works, but also attempt to prescribe, with more or less authority and power, what good literature ought to be like. This would be like saying all tragedies ought to be like Sophocles's *Oedipus the King*, as opposed to just developing a theory that would account for *Oedipus the King* and its psychological and social function within the culture for which it was written. No doubt literary theory always has, to one degree or another, this prescriptive or performative dimension. It tends to value certain works above others and to coach its readers into believing that a good literary work ought to be like the ones valued by a given theory. In my own country, the United States, however, this 'speech act' aspect of literary theory has not been conspicuously effective in leading actual writers to write in one way rather than another. Most of our young poets would do anything to avoid being caught just imitating Wallace Stevens, even though they may deeply admire his work.

Literary theory characteristically works by way of formulations that have a quite high degree of generality, as in Aristotle's definition of tragedy as:

a process of imitating an action which has serious implications, is complete, and possesses magnitude; by means of language which has been made sensuously attractive, with each of its varieties found separately in the parts; enacted by the persons themselves and not presented through narrative; through a course of pity and fear completing the purification of tragic acts which have those emotional characteristics. (Aristotle 25)

Another famous example is Paul de Man's apodictic assertion, in "Allegory (Julie)," a chapter in *Allegories of Reading*, that:

The paradigm for all texts consists of a figure (or a system of figures) and its deconstruction. But since this model cannot be closed off by a final reading, it engenders, in its turn, a supplementary figural superposition which narrates the unreadability of the prior narration. As distinguished from primary deconstructive narratives centered on figures and ultimately always on metaphor, we can call such narratives to the second (or the third) degree *allegories*. (de Man 205)

Nevertheless, in spite of the high degree of generalization in such literary theoretical formulations as those Aristotle, de Man, and many other theorists make, literary theory is historically rooted in a single time, place, and culture. Such formulations as literary theorists make assist good reading of specific literary works. Literary theories are an aid to reading, even if that means a discovery of what de Man called "the impossibility of reading." (245) Literary theories have no other legitimate function, attractive as it may be to think of literary theory as an independent, self-enclosed discipline that can, as Edward Said said, "travel." (Said 226-247) from country to country, be translated from language to language, and remain valid, performatively effective in a new culture and in relation to new bodies of literature. (Said) The formulations literary theorists make look universal, but they are in truth tied to the specific body of literature that generated them and for which they were originally intended to give an accounting. The paradigmatic example for the West is that oldest of our great literary theoretical works, Aristotle's *Poetics*. Aristotle's primary goal was to account for a specific body of literature; Attic tragedy: the plays of Sophocles, Euripides, Aeschylus, and others in fifth century B.C. Athens. As Renaissance and subsequent theorists discovered, it is extremely difficult, without much awkward twisting, to make Aristotle's formulations work for the more or less Christian tragedy of sixteenth and seventeenth-century Europe, for example Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1603-4?) or his *King Lear* (1606), or

Racine's *Phèdre* (1677). In a similar way, Paul de Man's immediate goal, in the essay cited above, was to account for Rousseau's *Julie*.

The close relation between a given literary theory and the literary work or works it is meant to account for may be further elucidated. A literary theory, like a scientific hypothesis, is of no use unless it is capable of possibly being proven wrong. If I say the moon is made of green cheese, scientists would want some proof of that, for example a piece of green cheese brought back from a voyage to the moon. If I bring back a moon-rock, not cheese, my hypothesis would need to be revised. At least some of the moon is not green cheese. I have proved my initial hypothesis to be wrong. In a similar way, Aristotle's definition of tragedy is of no use unless it can be shown that it actually fits real Athenian tragedies, though he primarily shows how well it fits Sophocles's *Oedipus the King*. De Man's formulation would take a lot of testing, since he says, "The paradigm for *all* texts ..." (de Man 205, my italics) That covers a lot of ground. Surely there is *one* literary text that does not fit this paradigm? If that can be shown to be the case, de Man's hypothesis has been falsified. De Man's essay at least shows that his theory more or less works for *Julie*. That is not surprising, since the reading generated the theoretical statement in the first place.

Even in these cases, however, that is, in my citations from Aristotle and de Man, as is generally the case for the relation between literary theory and the empirical data it is meant to explain—actual literary texts, the relation between theory and reading is not that of congruence or confirmation, but that of disconfirmation and modification. Close reading may be motivated by theory, but it leads to the modification of theory, often its severe modification.

I want now to give two brief examples of this disjunction between theory and reading, though I shall then end on a somewhat more positive note. My lifelong penchant for empirical study of literary works and for giving examples by way of "close reading" is indicated by my decision to end with scrutiny of two examples. For me, the primary question for any reading is: "What does the text really say?" Any literary theory must be tested out on examples, with procedures in place for its possible disconfirmation.

I begin my case studies with another question: What are the presumed distinguishing features of a postmodern narrative? I take Thomas Pynchon's "The Secret Integration" (1964), from his book of stories, *Slow Learner*, as an exemplary early postmodern narrative.

As a presupposition to answering my first question about postmodern narrative, however, I must ask: What is the postmodern

condition, the condition, presumably, that postmodern narratives reflect or critique by bringing it to light in a story? For Jean-François Lyotard, postmodernism is characterized by the absence or disqualification of any more or less universally accepted grand narrative. (Lyotard 1984, 37-41) David Harvey stresses the political and economic changes from 1972 on, with concomitant changes in our experience of space and time. (Harvey, *passim*) For Fredric Jameson, the postmodern condition is determined by economic factors and by concomitant cultural factors associated with late capitalism, or with what he calls “the world space of multinational capital.” (Jameson 1991, 54) The postmodern condition, as the first sentence of Jameson’s *Postmodernism* stresses, is also fundamentally a forgetting of history, while the “concept of the postmodern” is “an attempt to think the present historically in an age that has forgotten how to think historically in the first place.” (Jameson 1991, ix) That would include, apparently, thinking in architecture, since architecture is, for Jameson, of great importance as an example of the postmodern. For Jameson, the postmodern condition is one thing, Postmodernism as a cultural and intellectual style is another thing. The latter is an attempt to bring the postmodern condition out of hiding, into awareness. It should come to light as a consciousness of history in the present, or as a way of thinking the present historically. This distinction between the postmodern condition and postmodernism as a style of thought or making is an important one. The postmodern condition is a mute and unthinking forgetting of history within global capitalism. Postmodernism, as an intellectual and aesthetic style, is a way of thinking about the postmodern condition or representing it, in the arts, in literature, in philosophy, in theory, and in criticism.

What, then, are the special features of postmodern narratives? I would alter or add to Jameson’s categories in his *Postmodernism* a bit to list the following as the most salient distinctive features of postmodern narrative: pastiche, that is, an incoherent mixture of styles from different periods; parody of previous styles; allusion; mixing of genres; depthlessness; lack of affect (or, I should prefer to say, a shift to that peculiar kind of ironic affect called “cool”); attenuation of the “omniscient narrator,” or, to put it more precisely, use of a telepathic narrator who does not pass judgment or proffer interpretation; discontinuity, that is, narration through short episodes separated by breaks; “preposterous” (in the etymological sense) time shifts by way of *metalepsis*, *prolepsis*, or *analepsis*, flashbacks and flashforwards; use of interpolated stories, usually told by one or another of the characters; abrupt changes or shifts in register or tone, for example, from serious

to farcical; a high degree of indirection, so that the real story is told offstage, as it were, by hints and innuendos, as a story beneath the story; a degree of hallucinatory anti-realism, or “surrealism,” or what has more recently been called “magic realism,” in which impossible, “magic” events are told in a straightforward “realistic” style; or, to put this in a slightly different way, an odd sort of half-ironic, but only half-ironic, persistence of the religious, the superstitious, the magical, the supernatural; an exuberant, hyperbolic use of comedy, farce, or anarchic social explosions; the use of one sort or another of a frame story that both controls, interprets, and at the same time ironically undercuts the story proper; a focus on the experience of outsiders or underdogs, the “wretched of the earth”; a sense of the community as turned against itself, self-sacrificially, or in a suicidal way, in what Jacques Derrida calls a process of auto-immune self-destruction (Derrida 1996, 62, 68-69; Derrida 2002, 82, 87); a problematic sense of what it means to make an ethical decision or to take ethical responsibility; some direct or indirect calling attention to problems of fictionality or virtuality, that is, a turning of the narrative back on itself to raise questions about its mode of existence and its social function.

“The Secret Integration,” as I have elsewhere shown in a detailed reading (Miller, Pynchon’s “The Secret Integration”), exemplifies all the features of postmodern narrative I have identified. “The Secret Integration” has an ironically undercutting frame story. Its narrator does not, except rarely and ambiguously, exercise the right of author’s or narrator’s judgment. The supernatural or phantasmatic plays an essential role in the story. The story is to some degree about its own mode of existence and its own social function. It demands an ethical decision from its readers. The meaning of the story emerges from the juxtaposition of detached episodes presented out of their actual time sequence. The story is a pastiche or parody of several different genres, all somewhat incoherently superimposed. It parodies beat narratives in the story the character called Carl McAfee tells of his life. Pynchon’s introduction mentions the influence of surrealism as he misunderstood it at the time he wrote the story. Several other genres are explicitly alluded to. Several films are mentioned, *Spartacus*, John Wayne’s *Blood Alley*, and an unnamed World War II movie the boys hear as a re-run coming in incoherent (and very funny) bits and pieces from TVs in suburban houses they pass one night: “. . . (splash, comical yell) Oh, sorry, sir, thought you were a Jap infiltrator . . .”; “How can I be a Jap infiltrator when we’re five thousand . . .”; “I’ll wait, Bill, I’ll wait for you as long as . . .”. (Pynchon 168) “The Secret Integration” is a sophisticated

ghost story, like Henry James's "The Turn of the Screw." Pynchon's story is a parody of boys' books, such as the Tom Swift books that are explicitly mentioned. Though "The Secret Integration" appeared in *The Saturday Evening Post*, the story is to some degree a subversive parody of the sorts of stories I remember reading in that magazine as a child. The ones I remember were much more sentimental, much more ideologically conservative, much more straightforwardly dedicated to white middle class "family values," and to a set of ideological values typified by the famous Norman Rockwell paintings that appeared periodically on the covers of the magazine. Pynchon, it may be, put something over on the editors of *The Saturday Evening Post*, or perhaps they knew what they were doing and wanted something in their pages with more than usual bite to it, and more stylistic sophistication. "The Secret Integration" does, finally, as I shall show, confirm my claim that postmodern narrative shows communities as characterized by what Derrida in "Foi et savoir" ("Faith and Knowledge") calls self-destructive auto-immunitary logic. (Derrida 1996, 62, 68-69; Derrida 2002, 82, 87)

If all these features are present in Thomas Pynchon's "The Secret Integration," that would seem to make Pynchon's story an exemplary postmodern narrative. The problem with designating it as distinctively postmodern is what happens when you look at Miguel de Cervantes's "The Dogs' Colloquy" in their light. (Cervantes 247-311) I am not denying that there are thematic and historical differences between the two stories. Each work is in a multitude of ways embedded in its own historical place and time. I am mindful of Jameson's slogan: "Always historicize!" (Jameson 1981, 9) Nevertheless, if form generates meaning, as I think it does, big problems with the concept of "postmodern narrative" arise when you set the two stories side by side. The problem is that exactly the same set of features as characterize "The Secret Integration," no doubt in a somewhat different mix of quite different historical ingredients, but the same set nevertheless, can be found in Cervantes's "exemplary novel." "The Dogs' Colloquy" was published in 1613, three years before Cervantes's death and eight years after *Don Quixote*, Part I, three hundred and fifty years before "The Secret Integration" and long before "postmodernism" was thought of. I have elsewhere shown in detail how "The Dogs' Colloquy" exemplifies in its own way all the features that have been hypothesized as distinctive of postmodern literature. (Miller, "El Coloquio de los Perros") I shall conclude this essay by focusing on just one of those features, the idea that postmodern communities, as represented in literature, exemplify a strange auto-immunitary logic. Just what is that logic?

Jacques Derrida affirms that it is a law of communities in general that they are victims of the disease called “autoimmunity.” The communities’ immune system, developed to keep the community safe and pure, immune from invasion by dangerous outsiders, turns against itself in suicidal self-destruction. Derrida asserts, in “Faith and Knowledge,” that:

the auto-immunitary [*l'auto-immunitaire*] haunts the community and its system of immunitary survival like the hyperbole of its own possibility. Nothing in *common*, nothing immune, safe and sound, *heilig* and holy, nothing unscathed in the most autonomous living present without a risk of auto-immunity. [. . .] Community as *com-mon auto-immunity* [*com-mune auto-immunité*]: no community <is possible> that would not cultivate its own auto-immunity, a principle of sacrificial self-destruction ruining the principle of self-protection (that of maintaining its self-integrity intact), and this in view of some sort of invisible and spectral sur-vival. (Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 82, 87; Derrida, “Foi et savoir,” 62, 69)

This sentence exemplifies what I said earlier about the way theoretical pronouncements tend to be asserted as absolute generalizations. Derrida claims that *all* communities, everywhere and at all times, exhibit auto-immunity. Sure enough, as if to give a supporting example, suicidal auto-immunity exists in two registers in “The Secret Integration.” It exists in a parodic and ultimately harmless form as the relation of the secret community of children to the adult community they plot to deconstruct. It exists in a more deadly serious form as United States racism, inherited from the evil of slavery. This residual racism turns the boys’ parents in hatred against their neighbors and fellow citizens who happen to be black. The boys’ hidden community within the adult community, the story seems to be saying, has escaped this racism. It offers a model of a democracy to come, beyond the auto-immunitary, in the ‘secret integration’ of their brotherly affection for Carl Barrington. Pynchon, in a characteristic play on words, draws an analogy between racial integration and the only meaning of the word ‘integration’ the boy genius, Grover, hero of the story, at first knows. He knows it as a term used in integral calculus for the division of a curve into infinitesimally small parts that can then be manipulated in various calculations. (Pynchon 186-187)

Racial integration, according to this somewhat strange analogy, makes the barrier between blacks and whites permeable, so that black people can always come through that barrier and be integrated, just

as the boys let Carl Barrington (who turns out to be a ghost) become a full-fledged member of their gang, making their Junta a kind of ideal, visionary, utopian, messianic, egalitarian, classless community. Pynchon's message appears to be that we should all be like these boys: "Out of the mouth of babes!" (Psalms 8:2) They have spontaneously made the correct ethical decision by accepting Carl, whereas their elders have acted in a deeply unethical and suicidal auto-immunitary fashion by rejecting the black family that has moved into their community. The community has acted like a body that develops antibodies destroying its own organs or tissues, as in diabetes or rheumatoid arthritis. The figure of the organically unified body, a powerful political metaphor since Plato and Aristotle, as in 'body politic,' comes up in this story when Grover explains to the other boys the meaning of the word 'coordination': "It means your arms and legs and head all work together in gym, and it's the same for us, in this thing, for a gang like ours, as it is for the parts of your body." (Pynchon 154)

Like every other formal and thematic feature of "The Secret Integration," auto-immunitary logic is, however, already present in Cervantes's "The Dogs' Colloquy." The famous episode of the witch Cañizares, in Cervantes's exemplary novel, is the most extravagant example in that story of auto-immunitary communal illogical logic. The witch episode is also the ghost story part, a match for the ghost story aspect of "The Secret Integration." How are these aspects related? I answer that if you happen to believe in witches, the relation between the devil and his servants, wizards, witches, and heretics, on the one hand, and God, with his legions of angels and pious believers worldwide, on the other, is the largest and most inclusive version imaginable of auto-immunitary logic. Cervantes ascribes to Cañizares knowledge of a good bit of sound Christian theological doctrine about the mystery of evil and about the possibility of "to justify the ways of God to man," as Milton puts it (John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book I, line 26), in spite of the inexplicable power of the Devil and of evil generally. Like Gypsies, moors, Jews, and other minorities within the Spanish national community in Cervantes's time, witches are both inside and outside the enormous community made of God's whole creation.

Why has God allowed these antigens into the worldwide body politic, so that they now form part of its intimate tissue? This tissue is made up of the co-presence of God and the devil, along with all their followers on both sides. The answer is that God, in order to be properly, that is, voluntarily, worshipped and obeyed, had to give angels and human beings freedom to obey or not. They had to have freedom

to fall if they chose, while God foresaw that many would fall. Witches are a good example of that cosmic situation. Cañizares says she knows perfectly well that she is doing wrong. She knows that she will most likely be damned for following her master the devil, but she chooses evil anyhow:

The habit of sinning [says Cañizares] becomes a second nature, and being a witch invades a woman's flesh and bloodstream. [. . .] Thus the soul is unstrung and spiritless, and cannot rouse itself to embrace any good thought at all. It lets itself become engulfed in the abyss of its own misery and does not care even to grasp the hand that God in His pity continually holds out to it. I have one of those souls that I have described to you. I see all, and I understand all, but as worldly delights keep my will chained, I have been, and shall always be, bad. (Cervantes 291-292)

Cañizares echoes a famous line in Ovid here: *Video mellora, proboque; deteriora sequor*. (I see the better, and approve of it; I follow the worse.) (Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, VII:7-8) Though the devil is part of the total economy of creation, he is powerless to do any evil or to lead his followers to do evil without God's permission. God remains omniscient and omnipotent. Since He has permitted human beings and the fallen angels to do evil, knowing beforehand that He will punish them with all the agonies of hellfire, one could say the whole creation obeys an auto-immunity logic. God turns against part of His own creation to punish it with damnation, just as antibodies in an autoimmune reaction turn against parts of the body itself to destroy that part. This is the drama of those great Renaissance paintings of the Last Judgment, the division of the saved from the damned, the sheep from the goats. (Matt. 26: 32) Cañizares's theological knowledge on this point is impeccable and entirely orthodox within Christianity, though with a slight ironic tinge in the way it is expressed. The devil, we know, is good at quoting scripture, though he does so with a wry ironic smile. Speaking of the way witches are said to murder little children at the devil's instigation, and the question of why the devil would do that, since the children, being sinless and baptized, will go straight to heaven, Cañizares argues that God in His infinite wisdom and goodness permits sin, knowing beforehand that he must punish it, that is, send to damnation one part of his creation. It is a spectacular example of auto-immunity community logic. Even at the largest scale this logic repeats itself, as though there could be no conception of community without it, as though this illogical logic constrains even God, or at least constrains the most

profound conceptions of God that the Bible and all the best Christian theologians have generated through the centuries.

A theory of the community as self-sacrificially turned against itself is, it turns out when you read both stories, a fundamental feature of both "A Secret Integration" and "The Dogs' Colloquy," though they are separated by three hundred and fifty years.

What conclusions do I now make from my juxtaposition of Pynchon's "The Secret Integration" and Cervantes's "The Dogs' Colloquy"? I draw four conclusions: 1) Definitions of postmodernism in literature by way of thematic, formal, and structural features tend not to be valid, since they can be shown to characterize earlier literary works too. No doubt an adept reader can easily tell, from décor, from place names, and so on, whether he or she is reading Pynchon or Cervantes, but the repertoire of available narrative techniques is remarkably the same in both these "exemplary novels." It follows that the theoretical hypothesis of distinctive formal features in postmodern narratives is disproved by an investigation of actual literary works. 2) It would also follow that the repertoire of narrative techniques used in Western narrative has not changed all that much since Cervantes. One way to define Cervantes's greatness is his mastery of those techniques already, at the beginning of what today we call the history of the novel. 3) I conclude from this that definitions of period styles in literature, and even periodizations in literature generally, are highly problematic. They should always be interrogated and viewed with suspicion. 4) I claim to have shown that the Derridean concept of the community's auto-immunitary logic has wide and provocative relevance for understanding the presentation of communities in works of fiction from Cervantes to Pynchon. Jacques Derrida's hypothesis that every community, including those represented in literature, exemplifies what he calls "auto-immunitary logic" is confirmed by the reading of at least these two exemplary works. Further readings would be necessary to see whether this theoretical hypothesis has general heuristic value, or whether exceptions can be found. Just how many confirming examples would be necessary is another question, perhaps a "theoretically" unanswerable one.

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SUMMARY

Literary theory is ancillary to literature. Its value is its testable ability to account for meaning and form in specific literary texts. Literary theory, like scientific hypotheses, must be capable of disproof. An example is the claim made by many scholars that certain distinctive features characterize postmodern literary works. Juxtaposed readings of Pynchon's "The Secret Integration" and Cervantes's "The Dogs' Colloquy" show that all the features said to be distinctive of postmodern literature are already present in Cervantes's story. This disproves claims that postmodern literature is distinctive in theme and form, at least in the ways proposed.

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