

codes) or in psychological-neurological systems (the interpretation of dreams and neurotic symptoms). It remains a structuralist-scientific enterprise, as defined by Seamon.

The whole enterprise of poetics can now be seen to occupy two separable fields. First, literary scholars working within the methodologies of linguistics can enrich that discipline's power to describe the production of meaning by including literary texts in the linguistic database. Second, the issue of what the categorization *literary* entails within a specific context becomes the object of study for pragmatics as a part of semantics and perhaps for other human sciences, such as history. There is some sign that this is indeed what is happening. The recent study of metaphor may be considered an example of the first; feminist and new historical criticism offer examples of the second.

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To the Editor:

I was appalled by Roger Seamon's essay in the May issue and surprised that his blatant sexism went unnoticed. Seamon pretends to discuss contemporary theory yet makes no mention of feminism. Is he willfully ignorant? Perhaps only such ignorance could enable him to make sweeping generalizations about all current theory. Or did he choose to ignore material that might contradict his claims? A little reading of Barbara Johnson, Annette Kolodny, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Catharine Stimpson, to name only a few, would expose the silliness of his assertion that poststructuralist theory precludes the interpretation of individual works.

Seamon inexcusably ignores not only feminist theory but also women critics almost entirely. Of the thirty-three authors cited only two are women, and one is relegated to an endnote and the other to coauthorship. Does he honestly believe that women have not contributed to contemporary theory? Perhaps Seamon's interpretive enterprise works only when it excludes any form of otherness that threatens the patriarchal privilege of white males.

It also comes as no surprise the Seamon cannot engage Bakhtinian and cultural critical theory, which are concerned not only with interpretation but also with the conditions of interpretation. Isn't it ironic that Seamon's own essay self-destructs by revealing through absence and silence that which it cannot engage and still speak in universals? Poststructuralists can interpret individual texts, such as Seamon's essay. This one reads there the

trace of a sexism that reveals a fundamental contradiction at the center, an inability to engage the Other in dialogue because such dialogue destroys the illusion of patriarchy's monological claim to universality. The issue is not whether to interpret but whose interests are served when specific interpretations are generated.

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To the Editor:

In "Poetics against Itself: On the Self-Destruction of Modern Scientific Criticism" Roger Seamon tells an engaging story of how modern poetics, embarked on a scientific mission to rescue literary study from antiquarian hermeneutics, instead keeps spinning off "interpretive methods," undone finally by the "subversive secret at its center—interpretation" (304). Seamon implies that the project of scientific poetics might have succeeded had it resisted the hermeneutic urges welling up within it. Perhaps to make this script plausible, he stresses the "continuity and coherence" (299) of the project in its various guises. Despite his article's title, Seamon does not acknowledge until near the end, almost as an epilogue, that the project's failure might be due in part to its own flawed premises. Until then he is content to lay out the project's "foundational" assumptions without challenging or justifying them. Seamon is doubtless aware that some of these assumptions strain credulity. In his account, for example, poetics adopts the "persistent belief" since Plato that "poetry is nonrational." Seamon makes no bones about the implications: "that those who write and interpret poems do not understand what they do, while scientific critics understand what they are doing and thus 'speak' in a way that neither poets nor interpreters can" (296). This would at least explain why poets and interpreters are often poorly paid. It is ironic that Seamon chooses the first line of MacLeish's "Ars Poetica," which argues that poems should be "palpable and mute," to state the claim of scientific poetics that poetry is nonrational. If poems are intrinsically nonrational, how can MacLeish's thesis, framed in what is indisputably a poem, be rational enough to be taken as an axiom of modern poetics? The frequency of such self-theorizing (or metaliterary) discourse in literary texts should immediately dispel the notion—attributed by Seamon to poetics—of a hermetic boundary separating literature's irrational "inside" (works and interpretations) from an enlightened "outside" commanded by scientific theory (296). Seamon hints at the futility of the scientific program when he speaks of its repeated