

Closing Remarks

I am grateful to Professors Dimić and Reynolds for their thoughtful comments on my paper. I am grateful not only for the questions they raise and the specific historical examples they adduce, but also for their help in identifying aspects of my paper which can use clarification.

David Reynolds opens his discussion by alluding to a divisive bifurcation in American literary studies. He closes with a plea for reconciliation. As he knows, the division is not limited to criticism of American literature. One can hope that in time the spirit of his plea will prevail. One purpose of my own paper was to suggest a skeletal theoretical position that would accommodate both allegedly antithetical schools. It may be worth pointing out that a movement self-named 'The New Historicism,' originating in English Renaissance studies but beginning to push beyond them, has been producing interesting versions of the reconciliation Reynolds calls for.

Milan Dimić raises two pertinent 'difficulties' inherent in the project Professor Balakian asked me to take on, and here clearly some clarifications are in order. The first has to do with the relation of my 'definition' to other definitions or descriptions of the category of the literary. I have not yet acquired the presumption of assuming a unique authority on such a subject. My contribution, if it has any value at all, can only be useful as an addition to an endless – and properly endless, debate. No definition clearly can be preemptive and no definition will fail to be 'the product of a moment and a place.' It would doubtless be useful for all critics who believe in the existence of 'literature' to formulate individually a description for themselves. It would be both unthinkable and regrettable were they to coincide.

Both Professors Dimić and Reynolds point to the existence of para-literary and sub-literary texts, and have interesting things to say about their relation to canonical ones. Reynolds offers a typology which appears to fit well the writing of ante-bellum America. Even if the rubrics within this typology might have to be redefined when applied to other cultures, they suggest ways of thinking about this vast and important domain. Dimić wonders if my account of the literary isn't likely to discriminate against the humbler, eccentric, less sophisticated, even un-

written texts in favor of an elite canon. I hope not and I think not. In the rehauling of the canon which ought to go on continuously, I would expect many heretofore marginal works to match my description. Dimić himself may undervalue oral literature and folk literature when he speaks of 'a certain laxity of language, a transparency and lack of density.' I remember W.K. Wimsatt saying, 'There are no simple poems; there are only poems that look simple.' One thinks of the extraordinary economy and tightness of much 'folk' poetry and narrative. If a text is really transparent, if it really lacks the compacted energy of the truly literary, then it should not be so regarded. But this distinction has little to do with social or cultural origins.

Our mutual discussion, however modest, has had the virtue of perpetuating an investigation which is proper and endemic to our jobs. This microcosm of an immense, millennial process is in itself salutary. I hope that in various forums like this one it will continue and will flourish, and that the mystery we all live with will continue to unfold itself.

Thomas M. Greene