Introduction

JOHN J. TEUNISSEN

In 1979, *Mosaic* changed its focus, and consequently its subtitle, from "a journal for the comparative study of literature and ideas" to "a journal for the interdisciplinary study of literature." The Editor and Editorial Board felt that, useful and productive as the initial focus had been for the journal in its formative years, it had also—given the revolutionary developments in literary theory and criticism that were sweeping us all willynilly into the twenty-first century—outworn its usefulness by seeming to encourage the "philosophical" or "psychological" essay associated with the defunct New Criticism. They felt as well that if literary scholarship was to survive the onslaught of the locusts of deconstruction (making their forays from a brand new ivory tower), it would have to do so by asserting once and for all its important, central, place in historical and cultural analysis: it would have to demonstrate that the findings of literary scholarship are useful to those engaged in the "real" scholarship of other disciplines and, concomitantly, that the findings of other disciplines are essential to any meaningful study of literature.

One measure of *Mosaic*'s success in the interdisciplinary venture was the decision in 1986 to sponsor an international conference of literary interdisciplinarians to assert the vitality of such scholarship and to celebrate its continuance with all the appropriate and efficacious rituals. (I might note parenthetically at this point that the first *Mosaic* conference, held in Winnipeg in 1974, was titled "The Crisis of Literature in the University Today," and that at it I chaired a workshop on "Student-Teacher Alienation," and that, perhaps symptomatic of the general atmosphere,

one of our keynoters was Cleanth Brooks. Assertion and celebration seemed far from *Mosaic*'s mind in this first conference.) In daring to announce such a conference (to be titled "CONTEXTS: The Interdisciplinary Study of Literature"), our major concern was that a scattergun approach to theme might not generate much interest in terms of paper proposals or, ultimately, attendance, but we were encouraged by the continuing large volume of submissions to the journal and saw a base for conference interest there. We were not disappointed.

The call for papers, placed as widely in non-literary publications as feasible, elicited more than 220 proposals, the vast majority of which were truly interdisciplinary in orientation and excellent in content. To make the three-day conference manageable, we accepted sixty proposals, forty-eight of which were finally read as thirty-five minute papers, seventeen of which have since been revised and expanded, appearing in the pages which follow. These pages, however, I think of as conference products rather than conference proceedings. In my experience, conference proceedings, with some notable exceptions, of course, generally fall below the standards of acceptability established by the leading scholarly journals. Too often all the papers are published much as presented, with little editorial attention or supervision. In this case, however, right from the call for papers, each potential conference participant knew that a small number of the papers, revised, would be collected for book publication. These revised papers were selected, first, for scholarly excellence, second, for strongly demonstrated interdisciplinary content and methodology and, third, for their representation of the conference itself. At least as many more of the papers read and revised for possible inclusion are of publishable quality, and I know that several have been accepted elsewhere while a number will appear in general issues of *Mosaic*. Watching these pieces develop from one-page proposals through sixteen-page papers into twenty- to twenty-five-page essays has been for me a very gratifying experience.

The success of *Mosaic*'s interdisciplinary endeavors is in no small measure indicated by the presence of so many persons attending the conference (and in these pages) whose homes are in university departments other than modern languages and literatures or who engage in extra-disciplinary activities within those departments. Represented are Cognitive Psychology (Meutsch), Classics (Nielsen), Religion (Resseguie), Medicine (Roy), Fine Arts (Vervoort), Education (Willinsky), and Oral Studies (Sienaert). Such a gathering could not have taken place in these pages ten years ago, and each essay demonstrates how exciting and valuable the cross-fertilization of our disciplines can be. Especially noteworthy for me are Dietrich Meutsch's impassioned plea for more interdisciplinary cooperation in research involving reading cognition; Rosemary Nielsen and Robert Solomon's collaboration to illuminate the ways in which geometry and architecture in poetry help us better to understand culture, ancient and modern; the way James Resseguie uses the theories of Russian Formalism and Reader Response to throw new light upon the sophisticated literary techniques of gospel narrative; the urbanity with which John Roy makes available the latest theories on brain physiology and function to show how, with regard to the "poetry of consolation," the poets seem as usual to have gotten there, if not first, at least at the same time; Patricia Vervoort's

seminal discussion of the ways the popular literature of travel in nineteenth-century Quebec influenced how a famous Canadian painting was described; the vigorous schooling, by way of the example of F.R. Leavis, that John Willinsky provides literary theorists regarding the effects of their theories upon teachers and hence classrooms and public education in general, and their (frequently shirked) responsibilites in this regard; and, not least, Edgard Sienaert's presentation, from the anthropological/literary viewpoint, of Piet Draghoender's moving spontaneous oral lamentation upon being dispossessed of his ancestral land by the government of South Africa.

Also missing ten years ago would have been the grace and style with which the literary specialists handle extra-disciplinary materials and methodologies as they address mostly canonical (with apologies to Heinzelman) authors and works. In an excellent companion-piece to Roy's, Dónald Goellnicht argues, and subtly demonstrates in the development of his essay, that an understanding of Keats's knowledge of the physiology (architecture) of the brain is at least as useful as literary influence and image studies in approaching his "Ode to Psyche." Bruce Clarke and Suzette Henke show us that contemporary psychoanalytic theories aided by economics (Clarke) and feminism (Henke) can throw new light on masterworks of the canon (*The Golden Ass* and *Ulysses*) and can illuminate them with wit and vigor. Stepping up to the cannon's mouth, Susan Heinzelman's feminism, buttressed up by the Law and re-inforced by a certainly unwilling Freud, ranges from eighteenth-century poetry to legal precedents having to do with various kinds of slavery, to argue, controversially, I suspect, that the Gilbert and Gubar canonicals of the *Norton Anthology of Literature by Women* are the same old ones, (m)atriarchal and exclusive. In some ways a mirror-image of Vervoort's, Virginia Tufte's iconographic study, focusing on a classic, shows how the works of seventeenth-, nineteenth- and twentieth-century illustrators of Book 4 of *Paradise Lost* serve not just as indexes of how well the artist understood Milton, but also as commentaries upon his Paradise; and Lorraine York, moving our graphic and visual perceptions into Canadian postmodernism's obsession with photography, compares and contrasts the modernist Margaret Laurence in this respect with Timothy Findley and Michael Ondaatje, in whose work she sees not only obsessional consciousness of photography as a competing medium but also an increasing interrelationship between the camera, the gun and the pen. Addressing the practitioners of Peace Studies as much as students of literature and particularly of science fiction, John Getz argues, using the example of Ursula K. Le Guin, that literary studies should be a more prominent component of Peace Studies and that literary scholars have much to learn from this new (multi)discipline. Marilyn Rose, concerned also with war and the metaphorical rape of the Japanese-Canadians who were deported from the West Coast and dispossessed of their land in 1942, provides new insight into Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* by contrasting the rhetorical strategies of historians and novelists writing about the same historical events. Finally, Daniel Stempel and Mel Seesholtz, the former writing about a major poem of Shelley's, the latter about twentieth-century writers as diverse as Olaf Stapledon, James Joyce, Frank Herbert and Timothy Leary, have this in common: the notion that without an under-

standing of the ways in which contemporary theories of physics—for Stempel, the nineteenth-century concept of the universe as heat engine; for Seesholtz, the twentieth-century concepts of Einstein, Heisbenberg, quantum theory and those quirky quarks—inform the creative imaginations of literary artists, there is little possibility of understanding the works they produce. Without such understanding, Shelley in *Prometheus Unbound* is seen as a rehasher of old myths, Joyce's language in *Finnegans Wake* is heard as mere gibberish.

This, of course, is what Timothy Leary told his fit audience in his keynote address at the conference, "The Post-Literate Cyber-Culture of the Late Twentieth Century": that if we want really to understand in a humanly available way what the various disciplines are discovering about our world and the ways in which those discoveries are changing the picture of that world, we need to approach our writers in an interdisciplinary way. At one point during the remarkable discussion period which followed his performance, Leary became entangled with a member of the audience who accused him of wanting to rewrite Shakespeare on his computer (it was, after all, a public lecture); at another point, he told us, mostly Canadians, that if we wanted to know how computers are changing our world we should read works of cyberpunk science-fictionist William Gibson, a Vancouver writer. Not many in the audience had even heard of, up to that time, let alone read, Gibson's important novel, *Neuromancer*. That many went out to buy a copy, regardless of their reaction to the reading, was only one of the products of the conference.

Mentioning Timothy Leary brings me, not by accident, to the choice of cover illustration for this collection. Truly a Renaissance man, Dr. John Dee published *Monas Hieroglyphica* in 1564. As a fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, he created stage effects there for a performance of Aristophanes's *Peace* that earned him the lifelong reputation of being a magician. He practiced crystallomancy and astrology. He wrote the introduction to the first English translation of Euclid (1570); he published a book on navigation in 1577. He was consulted by the great (Sir Philip Sidney among them) on astrological and other matters. An interdisciplinarian, he was, to quote from the Drabble edition of the *Oxford Companion to English Literature*, "a profoundly learned scholar and hermeticist, but also a sham" (261). There is something here about prophets and honor.