

means to reinforce the supposed documentary value of their works; but then, by failing to extend his critique to the documentary claims themselves, Foster misses an opportunity to highlight the difference between the rhetorical voice of this literature and its actual—and most valuable—function as social commentary.

JAMES E. YOUNG  
New York University

*Reply:*

If I understand Young's comments correctly, he faults me for (1) not questioning or investigating the accuracy of the claims to fact by documentary narrative and (2) accepting uncritically the "whitening from view of the shaping hand of their authors' governing mythoi." I would agree that the first assertion is true: I personally have no way of undertaking such an investigation, nor do I believe literary critics must necessarily do so (although they may find it useful to). But I don't believe this is really what Young is suggesting that I should have done. Rather, one ought to call into question the ability of documentary writing to be factual (whatever exactly this term means). I thought I had made it clear that I accept the Hayden White hypothesis that historical writing is rhetorical textualizing. But it is a delicate point whether or not a non-third world critic should trumpet the postulate that all writing pretending to be a valid representation of the facts is indistinguishable from fictive discourse, particularly when the writings at issue deal with personal testimonials of suffering in countries where it is more likely that official discourse is the most creatively fictive.

I find it more difficult to accept the second reservation, since I sought to make as my point that the best of the documentary writing considered—the texts of Walsh and Valdés—is inscribed essentially in terms of the individual writer, identified by his own name (and, in Walsh's case, sought out because of his reputation as a writer), who is engaged in the act of interpretation. Of "literary" interest is nothing less than the fact that explicit rhetorical ploys—narrative strategies one readily associates with fiction—are employed toward this end. I did, however, express some reservation about how Barnett refrains from making clear how much he mediates between his text and his interviewee's speech.

Finally, can one doubt that cultural texts are always read in terms of their social texts? In Argentina, if a novelist had written a fictional text about a seven-year "dirty war" that systematically exterminated tens of thousands of citizens in the midst of one of Latin America's most prosperous and culturally sophisticated societies, the text would have been called gross fantasy or allegory (cf. William Burroughs' *The Wild Boys*). Yet, now that democracy has been restored in Argentina and some of the "facts" may now come to light,

the novelist Ernesto Sabato will sign the final report of the government's Commission on the Disappeared Ones, which he chairs. The facts that Walsh reported in his documentary text became much more than rhetorically artful representation: Rodolfo Walsh himself is one of the disappeared ones.

DAVID WILLIAM FOSTER  
Arizona State University

*To the Lighthouse*

To the Editor:

In his essay "Only Relations: Vision and Achievement in *To the Lighthouse*" (99 [1984]: 212–24), Thomas G. Matro argues that the closing events of Woolf's novel do not signify "a transcendent 'oneness' or a perceptual balance captured in art" (abstract, 152) but rather emphasize "the act of making," Lily's "'attempt at something,'" which is "more important than the 'unity' the painting would achieve" (222). According to Matro, the novel, which everywhere exhibits "unresolved ambivalence" (152), "co-opts every one of the aesthetic and philosophic paradigms that . . . have in fact informed most of the novel's criticism to date, and it does so by dramatizing their enactment within the novel and showing their liabilities and limitations" (222–23).

Matro's rejection of a "transcendent 'oneness'" is well taken; but the fundamental problem of the artist (of Lily, of Woolf) remains stubbornly the achieving of some kind of unity, and Woolf's elaborate symbolic patterns force the reader to see a paradigm that is not co-opted, I submit, by the image of "unresolved ambivalence." The unity that Woolf symbolizes is not "transcendent"; it is a realized unity created by Lily, who imitates the esemplastic creation of Mrs. Ramsay. The lighthouse is a symbol of this unity; it is not just, as Matro claims, "a point around which or through which feelings are organized" (222).

I share some of Matro's uneasiness about existing interpretations of the symbolism; but the problem is not the critics' determination to define Woolf's symbolism, rather it is the tendency to frame definitions with insufficient care, without taking into account the full pattern of oppositions throughout the novel. To understand the unity that Lily sees and that is symbolized in the lighthouse, one must trace Woolf's symbolism to its root in the old distinction between appearance and reality, or between secondary and primary qualities as defined by Locke (whom Mr. Ramsay studies, along with Hume and Berkeley).

The Lockean distinction is made early in *To the Lighthouse*, when Lily, scrutinizing her painting, thinks: "Then beneath the *colour* there was the *shape*" (Har-

vest paperback, 32; my emphasis); and again, she thinks of “the colour burning on a framework of steel” (75). These oppositions are picked up in dozens of passages in which color and beauty are contrasted with bare underlying form (and an underlying “truth” that is often frightening). Mr. Ramsay is concerned only with the bare “angular essences,” the “reality”; Mrs. Ramsay, who is given to lies and exaggerations, creates color and life and love, which are “illusions.” That is, she creates them except when, on occasion, she loses hope; then it is “as if a shade had fallen, and, robbed of colour, she saw things truly. The room . . . was very shabby. There was no beauty anywhere. . . . They all sat separate” (126). The logic is clear: love and unity, created by Mrs. Ramsay (by imagination, by feeling), may not be the reality or the truth. Love may be a lie, a fairy tale. The “truth” may be horrible—a stark, colorless, loveless world in which all people are separate, divided, incapable of love.

Now Lily’s painting, with its color and shape, is obviously a fusion of the feminine and the masculine, warm female imagination and feeling together with cold male logic or intelligence. Each depends on the other. Mrs. Ramsay depends on her husband’s authority or “leans on” her sons, who know “cubes and square roots,” letting them “uphold and sustain her, this admirable fabric of the masculine intelligence, which ran up and down, crossed this way and that, like iron girders spanning the swaying fabric.” By the same token, Mr. Ramsay depends on her, needs her love and compassion to restore him to safety after he has ventured “alone,” a “barer” and “sparer” man who, with ruthless realism, has “thrown away” all female consolations (69). The fusion of male and female is suggested in Lily’s painting of the “triangular purple shape” (81), which weds the “purple” of Mrs. Ramsay and the “angular essences” of Mr. Ramsay. Behind the color is the shape. Behind the female plumage is the male “truth.” To capture the whole of life, the artist must wed “female” imagination and “male” reality.

The wedding of female and male is also represented in the lighthouse. The light-giving dome is associated with Mrs. Ramsay, whom Lily sees as having “an august shape; the shape of a dome.” The dome is supported, however, by the phallic tower, the masculine “framework of steel.” The lighthouse thus is both female and male. Seen from a distance, it is a “silvery, misty looking tower,” with all the romantic and illusory qualities suggested in Mrs. Ramsay. Seen close up, it is the male “tower, stark and straight” (276–77). Female and male, feeling and intelligence, imagination and reality—these make up the whole lighthouse. In going to the lighthouse, the children remember their mother and discover their father: that is, they see him as if through their mother’s eyes. Thus hatred is overcome, and the children are united to him. The unity is real, though it is not, of course, timeless.

As for Lily’s painting, it cannot be completed until she has summoned both female and male, Mrs. Ramsay and Mr. Ramsay, to aid her. And the painting, with “its greens and blues, its lines running up and across,” is, once again, the fusion of female color (greens and blues) and male angular essences (the lines running up and across are like the iron girders “which ran up and down, crossed this way and that”). The painting is not just “an attempt” but a realization, in its fashion, of the vision that animates all Woolf’s art.

Matro’s reluctance to embrace “aesthetic and philosophic paradigms” seems to me ingenuous, for all the elegance and sophistication of his argument. Woolf knew, of course, that her “supreme fiction” must change; it isn’t a permanent possession. But like Wallace Stevens she searched for moments when imagination and reality come together in a satisfying unity. Indeed, Stevens’ definition of poetry might be taken as a fine interpretation of the blending that Woolf sought: “the interdependence of imagination and reality as equals.” The achievement of that interdependence gives the peace and joy that is an escape from “unresolved ambivalence.”

DANIEL J. SCHNEIDER

*University of Tennessee, Knoxville*

*Reply:*

Daniel Schneider says the real problem with criticism of *To the Lighthouse* is the critics’ “tendency to frame definitions with insufficient care, without taking into account the full pattern of oppositions throughout the novel.” But he follows this with a reassertion of the usual definitions of unity and achievement by reference to the much-discussed oppositions in the novel between appearance/color/female/feeling/intuition on the one hand and reality/shape/male/intelligence/logic on the other. These are just the kinds of distinctions that, as I say in my essay, control the sensibilities of the artist Lily and other characters, and they appear as problematic philosophical or aesthetic habits of mind, not as the controlling patterns that can explain Woolf’s own vision, her ultimate concerns, or her achievements. Simply showing once again that they are present tells us nothing about their function, about how Woolf exploits them or has them become meaningful.

By saying that the “problem of the artist (of Lily, of Woolf) remains stubbornly the achieving of some kind of unity,” Schneider neatly skirts the possibility that such an assertion can itself be at issue in the novel, that the point may not be the realization of such unity but whether or not, or just how, such notions of unity have any relevance to human experience. Schneider ignores the significance as well as the irony of the novel’s stylistic patterns, discussed at length in my essay, which leave the opposites or contraries to be unified suspended